

In the Face of Death

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CHELSEA QUINN YARBRO, of Berkeley, California, is an award-winning fantasist perhaps best known for *The Saint-Germain Chronicles* and other vampire tales, one of which, "Advocates," was co-winner of the prestigious World Horror Award for Best Novelette. "In the Face of Death," tangentially linked to the Saint-Germain series, describes a plausible "period-piece" affair between a fascinating vampire and William Tecumseh Sherman (1820-1891), a West Coast banker who became one of the Civil War's most important Union generals, second only in importance to U. S. Grant. Sherman's military genius was surpassed by his hatred of war; his alleged penchant for bloodiness was a reputation reportedly engineered by his enemies in the South and North. According to Ms. Yarbrow, Sherman's family was indeed absent from the scene during the period in which her story takes place.

I know of no courage greater... than the courage to love in the face of death.

—WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN TO QUEEN VICTORIA

FROM THE JOURNAL of Madelaine de Montalia

San Francisco, 18 May,

At last! And only four days later than anticipated when we left the mountains. Had I been willing to travel on the river from Sacramento, we would have arrived on the date anticipated... My native earth should be in one of the warehouses, waiting for me, which is just as well, as I have got down to less than a single chest of it.

My escorts brought me to a very proper boarding-house on Sacramento Street, and have gone on themselves to find suitable lodgings. A Mrs. Imogene Mullinton, a very respectable widow from Vermont, owns this place and takes only reputable single women. She has given me a suite of three rooms at the top of the house, her best, and for it I am to pay \$75 a month, or any fraction of a month, a very high price for such accommodations, but I have discovered that everything in San Francisco is expensive. The suite will do until I can arrange to rent a house for three or four months...

Tomorrow I will have to pay off my escorts, which will require a trip to the bank to establish my credit here, and to begin making my acquaintance with the city. Doubtless the excellent Mrs. Mullinton can direct me to Lucas and Turner; the documents from their Saint Louis offices should be sufficient bona fides to satisfy them.

At the corner of Jackson and Montgomery, the new Lucas and Turner building was one of the most impressive in the burgeoning city; located near the shore of the bay and the many long wharves that bristled far out into the water, the bank was well situated to sense the thriving financial pulse of San Francisco.

Madelaine, wearing the one good morning dress she had left from her long travels, stepped out of the hackney cab and made her way through the jostling crowds on the wooden sidewalk to the bank itself. As she stepped inside, she felt both relief and regret at once again being back in the world of commerce, progress, and good society. Holding her valise firmly, she avoided the tellers' cages and instead approached the nearest of the desks, saying, "Pardon me, but will you be kind enough to direct me to the senior omcer of the bank."

The man at the desk looked up sharply. "Have you an appointment, ma'am?" he asked, noticing her French accent with faint disapproval, and showing a lack of interest that Made-laine disliked, though she concealed it well enough. He was hardly more than twenty-two or -three and sported a dashing mustache at variance with his sober garments.

"No, I am just arrived in San Francisco," she said, and opened her valise, taking out a sheaf of documents, her manner determined; she did not want to deal with so officious an underling as this fellow. "I am Madelaine de Montalia. As you can see from this—" she offered him one of the folded sheets of paper—"I have a considerable sum on deposit with your Saint Louis bank and I require the attention of your senior officer at his earliest convenience."

The secretary took the letter and read it, his manner turning from indulgent to impressed as he reviewed the figures; he frowned as he read through them a second time, as if he was not convinced of what he saw. Folding the letter with care, he rose and belatedly gave Madelaine a show of respect he had lacked earlier. "Good gracious, Madame de Montalia. It is an unexpected pleasure to welcome you to Lucas and Turner."

"Thank you," said Madelaine with a fine aristocratic nod she had perfected in her childhood. "Now, if you will please show me to the senior officer? You may use those documents to introduce me, if that is necessary."

"Of course, of course," he said, so mellifluously that Madelaine had an urge to box his ears for such obsequiousness. He opened the little gate that separated the desks from the rest of the floor, and stood aside for her as she went through, her head up, the deep-g-reen taffeta of her morning dress rustling as she moved. "If you will allow me to go ahead and..." He made a gesture indicating a smoothing of the way.

She sighed. "Is that necessary?"

He made an apologetic grimace. "Well, you see, there are very few wealthy young women alone in San Francisco. And you were not expected." Again he gestured to express his concern.

"No doubt," she said, and halted in front of a large door of polished oak. While the secretary rapped, Madelaine examined her brooch watch, thinking she would be fortunate to be out of the bank much before noon.

"Come in," came the crisp order from a sharp, husky voice.

The secretary made a slight bow to Madelaine, then stepped into the office, discreetly closing the door behind him, only to emerge a few minutes later, all smiles and half bows, to open the door wide for her in order to usher her into the oak-paneled office of the senior officer of the bank.

The man who rose behind the orderly desk surprised Madelaine a little; he was younger than she expected—no more than his mid-thirties—sharp-featured, wiry and tall, with bright-red hair and steel-colored eyes, and a pinched look about his mouth as if he were in constant discomfort. His dark suit was neat as a uniform, and he greeted her with fastidious correctness. "William T. Sherman, senior officer of Lucas and Taylor in San Francisco, at your service, Madame de Montalia."

She took his hand at once. "A pleasure, Mr. Sherman," she said, liking his decisive manner. "I hope you will be willing to help me establish an account here."

His face did not change, but a glint appeared in his eyes. "Certainly." He signaled to the secretary. "Jenkins, leave us to it. And don't close the door."

Madelaine saw that the secretary was flustered. "But I thought—" he said.

"I will handle the opening of this account. Given the size of this woman's resources, such an account would need my authorization in any case." He came around the end of the desk not only to bring a chair for Madelaine, but to hurry Jenkins out of his office. He carried the Queen Anne chair to a place directly across the desk from his, and held it for Madelaine. "Madame?"

As she sat down, Madelaine smiled up at Sherman. "Thank you," she said and noticed a quick frown flicker across his face.

Taking his place behind the desk once more, Sherman spread out two of the letters in her packet of documents on the wide expanse of leather-edged blotter. "I see you deposited ninety-five thousand pounds sterling in the Saint Louis office of this bank in 1848. The most recent accounting, from a year ago, shows your balance only slightly reduced." He regarded her with curiosity. "That is a considerable fortune, Madame. And odd, that it should be in pounds sterling, not francs."

"I inherited most of it," she said, not quite truthfully, for in the last century she had been able to increase her wealth far beyond what her father had amassed. "And I have lived in London for more than ten years before I came here. Much of my money is in England." She made no mention of funds she had in France, Italy, and Switzerland.

"And you have not squandered it, it would seem. Very prudent. Unusual, you will permit me to say, in a young woman." He looked at her with increasing interest. "What do you want me to do for you? How much were you planning to transfer to this bank? In dollars?"

"I would think that twenty-five thousand would be sufficient," she said. "In dollars."

He coughed once. "Yes; I should think so. More than sufficient Unless you are determined to cut a dash in society, you will find the sum ample. That's five times my annual salary." He confided this with a chuckle and a scowl. "Very well, Madame," he went on affably. "I will put the transaction in order. In the meantime, you will be free to draw upon funds up to... shall we say, five thousand dollars?"

Madelaine nodded. "That would be quite satisfactory, since you are able to contrive to live on it for a year, though prices here are much higher than I anticipated. Still, I should be able to practice good economy."

"You certainly have until now, given the state of your account." He cocked his head, a speculative light in his eyes, his long fingers moving restlessly as if searching for a pencil or a cigar. "Unless these funds have only recently been passed to your control? In that case, I would recommend you seek an able advisor, to guide you in the matters of investment management—"

"Mr. Sherman—" she interrupted, only to be cut off.

"Forgive me. None of my business. But I can't help but wonder how it comes about that you want twenty-five thousand now and have spent less than half of that in the last seven years?" He braced his elbows on the desk and leaned forward, his chin propped on his joined hands.

"My studies did not require it," she answered, determined not to be affronted by his directness.

"Ah. You were at school," he said, his expression lighten-ing. He slapped his hands on the blotter and sat back, his question answered to his satisfaction.

"Something of the sort," she responded, in a manner she thought was almost worthy of Saint-Germain.

San Francisco, 23 May,

Mrs. Mullinton has given me the address of an excellent dressmaker, and the first of my new clothes should be delivered tomorrow. There are six other ensembles on order, to be delivered in three weeks. Once I have settled in, I will need to order more... I suppose it is worth getting back into corsets for the pleasure of wearing silk again.

There is a private concert tomorrow afternoon that Mrs. Mullinton wishes to attend and has asked me to accompany her to. Now that she knows I have money and social position, she is determined to make the most of both of them, convinced I will add to her consequence in the town. If I am to remain here for three or four months, I will need to enlarge my acquaintances or risk speculation and gossip, which would do me no good at all... Perhaps I will find someone who is to my liking, whom I please, who is willing to be very, very discreet. In a place like this, lapses are not easily forgotten by anyone...

My chests are at the Jas. Banner Warehouse near where Columbus and Montgomery Streets converge. I must make arrangements to retrieve them soon, not only because I am low on my native earth, but because the costs for storing the chests are outrageous. I had rather keep them in the safe at Lucas and Turner for such sums...

The house on Jackson Street was a fine, ambitious pile, made of local redwood timber and newly painted a deep-green color, unlike many of its paler neighbors, with the trim of yellow to contrast the white-lace curtains in most of the windows. It faced the street squarely with an Italianate portico of Corinthian columns; it was set back from the roadway and approached by a half-moon drive.

When Mrs. Mullinton alighted from the rented carriage, she fussed with her bonnet before stepping aside for her guest to join her.

Madelaine de Montalia had donned her new dress, an afternoon frock suitable for early suppers and garden parties, and as such, unexceptionable for this concert. It was a soft shade of lavender, with bared shoulders framed by a double row of niched silk. The bodice was fitted and came to a point in the front over a skirt of three tiers of niched silk spread over moderate crinolines. For jewelry, she wore a necklace of pearls and amethysts; her coffee-colored hair was gathered in a knot with two long locks allowed to escape and fall on her shoulders. An embroidered shawl was draped over her arms, and in one hand she held a beaded reticule. As she descended from the carriage, Madelaine silently cursed her enveloping skirts.

A Mexican servant, whose angular features revealed a significant admixture of Indian blood, ushered them into the house and explained in heavily accented English that the host and hostess were in the ballroom to receive their guests, while bowing in the direction they should go.

"We are not the first, are we?" Mrs. Mullinton asked, afraid that she had committed an intolerable gaffe.

"Oh, no. There are others here already," the servant assured the two women with a respectful lowering of his eyes.

"Thank goodness," Mrs. Mullinton said in an undervoice to Madelaine as they went along the corridor to the rear of the house. "It would not do to have it said we came early."

"Whyever not?" asked Madelaine, who had become more punctual as she grew older.

"My dear Madame," said Mrs. Mullinton in shock, "for women to arrive while only the host and hostess are present smacks of impropriety, particularly since you are new in town." Her long, plain face took on

an expression of consternation as she considered this outrage.

"Then it would be better to arrive late?" asked Madelaine, trying to determine what Mrs. Mullinton sought to achieve.

"Heavens, no, for then it would seem that we did not appreciate the invitation," said Mrs. Mullinton. "I am very pleased that we have made our arrival so well." She raised her voice as she stepped into the ballroom antechamber. "You may find our entertainment sadly dull, Madame, after the excitement of London."

"Possibly," said Madelaine. "But as I have not seen London for eight years, I think what you offer here will suit me very well." She smiled at the couple approaching them—he of medium height and bristling grey hair; she a very pretty woman with a deep bosom and fair hair, in a fashionable dull-red afternoon dress that did not entirely become her; she was at least a decade her husband's junior.

"Mrs. Mullinton," said their hostess. "How nice of you to join us." She took Mrs. Mullinton's hand and kissed the air near her right cheek. "This must be your new guest." She turned to Madelaine. "I am Fanny Kent."

"And I am Madelaine de Montalia," she said, curtsying slightly to her hostess before taking her hand, though they made no other move toward each other.

"My husband, the Captain," added Fanny, indicating her partner. "My dear, you know Mrs. Mullinton. And this is Madelaine de Montalia."

Horace Kent bowed over Madelaine's hand. "Enchanted, Madame," he declared, and then shook Mrs. Mullinton's hand in a nominally polite way.

The four other couples in the room were presented, and by that time another pair of guests had arrived, and Madelaine gave herself over to the task of learning the names of the people in the room, hoping she would not confuse any of them as their numbers steadily increased.

"I have already had the pleasure," said the latest arrival, some twenty minutes later. Sherman bowed slightly to Madelaine.

"Yes," said Madelaine, taking refuge in a familiar face. "I met Mr. Sherman on my second day in the city."

"At the bank, I suppose," said the man accompanying him, another foreigner, with a Russian accent. He beamed at Madelaine and continued in French. "It is an honor to meet such a distinguished lady traveling so far from home. We are two strangers on these shores, are we not?"

Sherman looked from one to the other. "Madame, let me present Baron deStoeckl. Baron, Madame de Montalia."

"Delighted, Baron," said Madelaine, and went on, "I had thought that everyone in California except for the Indians were here as strangers, and far from home."

"Touche, Madame." As the Baron kissed her hand, he said, still in French, "I hope you will excuse my friend's curt manner. There is no changing him."

"And remember," said Sherman in rough-accented French, "he understands what you say." With that, he gave Madelaine a polite nod and passed on to greet General Hitchcock, who had just entered the ballroom.

"He misses the army, or so it seems to my eyes," said the Baron to Madelaine. "If you will excuse me?"

She gestured her consent, and a moment later had her attention claimed by her hostess, who wished her to meet Joseph Folsom. "He is one of the most influential men in the city," Fanny confided. "You will be glad to know him."

Madelaine allowed herself to be led away; she saw Mrs. Mullinton deep in conversation with an elderly lady in lavish half-mourning, and thought it best not to interrupt her.

It was almost an hour later, after the string quartet had beguiled them with Mozart and a medley of transcribed themes from *Norma*, that Madelaine once again found herself in Sherman's company. He had just come from the bustle around the punch bowl bearing a single cup when he saw her standing by the window, looking out into the fading day. He strolled to her side, and remarked, "The fog comes in that way throughout the summer."

She turned to him, a bit startled, and said, "So Mrs. Mullinton has warned me, and advised that I carry a wrap no matter how warm the day." She went on, "What do you think of these musicians?"

"More to the point, Madame, what do *you* think of them? Undoubtedly you have more experience of these things than I do." He sipped from his cup and then said, before she could answer his first question. "I would fetch you something, but that would cause idle tongues to wag. With my wife away, I cannot risk giving any cause for gossip that would distress her."

"Certainly not," said Madelaine, regarding Sherman with some surprise. "On occasions such as this—"

"You will forgive me, Madame, for saying that you do not know these sniping cats who have nothing better to do with their conversation than to blacken the reputations of those around them." He bowed slightly and was about to turn away when he looked down at her. "You may find it difficult to move about in society, single as you are. If you were not so beautiful a young woman, Madame, and so vivacious, there would be little to fear, but—" And with that, he was gone.

As Madelaine and Mrs. Mullinton were taking their leave of the Kents at the end of the concert, Fanny Kent drew Madelaine aside, with signs of apprehension about her. She made herself come to the point at once. "I could not but notice that you and Mr. Sherman spoke earlier."

Madelaine knew well enough not to laugh. "Yes, some minor matters about when I could sign certain papers at the bank. Mr Sherman wished to know when I would be available to tend to them. I gather they will be ready earlier than I had been told."

Fanny looked reassured, her rosy cheeks flaming with embarrassment. "Oh, Madame. I am so sorry. I have mistaken the... But as you have just come here, and have not yet learned... I was afraid you were wanting to fix your interest... oh, good gracious."

"Dear Mrs. Kent," Madelaine said pleasantly enough but with grim purpose, "I am aware that Mr. Sherman is a married man."

"Yes, he is," said Fanny Kent flatly. "With three hopeful children."

"I have no intention of making his life awkward for him. What a goose I should be to do such a foolish thing. Great Heaven, Mrs. Kent, he is my banker. I rely upon him to look after my financial welfare while I am in San Francisco." She smiled easily. "And because he is, I will have to speak with him upon occasion, and call at his office to take care of transactions that married women leave to their husbands to perform, but which I must attend to for myself. I hope that people understand the reasons are those of

business; I have no motives beyond that."

"Of course, of course," said Fanny hastily.

"It would be most inconvenient to have to contend with malicious speculation over such minor but necessary encounters." This time her smile had purpose to it.

Now Fanny let out a long sigh, one hand to her opulent bosom. "It is very sad that Mrs. Sherman has had to be away from him just now," she said. "The run on the bank left him exhausted, and his asthma, you know, has been particularly bad.

To care for those two children as well—" She put her hand to her cheek. "Not that you have any reason to be concerned. I'm sure the worst is behind him. He managed the crisis of the run quite successfully, and now Lucas and Turner is likely to stand as long as the city. It would be a terrible thing if scandal should fix to his name after he has won through so great a trial."

Madelaine blinked as she listened, and realized that Sherman had been right to warn her about gossip.

San Francisco, 29 May,

I must look for a house. I need someplace where I can lay down my native earth and restore myself through its strength, and I do not want to pay Mrs. Mullinton another \$75 for my apartments, pleasant though they are. A few of the other women here are starting to question how I live, especially my refusal to dine with them, and I must make an effort to stop their speculations as soon as possible. If I had an establishment of my own, and my own staff, I could deal with these problems summarily. No doubt Lucas and Turner can assist in finding what I want...

"This is an unexpected surprise," said Sherman, coming out of his office to greet Madelaine shortly before noon two days later. He motioned Jenkins aside and indicated that he wanted her to follow him. "I have the papers ready for you to sign. They'll go off on the next ship, and the funds will arrive as quickly as possible after that. In these days we can handle these transactions in less than two months. But let us discuss your matters less publicly. If you will be kind enough—?"

"Of course. And I thank you for giving me a little time; I am sure you are very busy." As she made her way back to his office, Madelaine realized that many of the customers and about half the staff in the bank were staring at her, either directly or covertly. She knew it was not just because she had worn her newest walking dress—a fetching mode in grape-colored fine wool; she drew her short jacket more closely around her as she took the chair Sherman offered, aware that once again, he had left the door half open.

He settled himself behind his desk and held out a pen to her as he reached for the papers needing her signature. "Now then,

Madame, what more are we to have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Madelaine squared her shoulders. "I want to rent a house. At least through August, possibly for longer."

Sherman stared at her. "Rent a house?" he repeated as if she had spoken in a language he did not adequately understand.

She went on without remarking on his surprise. "Yes. Something not too lavish, but as comfortable and suitable as possible. And I will need to hire a staff for it." She swiftly reviewed the permission form and signed first one, then the second, the pen spattering as the ink dried on the nib. "Probably no more than three or four will serve me very well."

"You want to rent a house," Sherman said again, as if he had at last divined her meaning. "But why? Is there something not to your liking at Mrs. Mullinton's?"

"Only the price and the lack of privacy," said Madelaine as politely as she could. "That is not to say anything against Mrs. Mullinton. She has been all that is courteous and attentive, and Mrs. Mullinton's establishment is a fine one, but not for what I am engaged in doing."

"And what might that be?" asked Sherman, disapproval scoring his sharp features.

"I am writing a book," said Madelaine candidly.

Sherman's glower vanished only to be replaced by an indulgent smirk; Madelaine decided she liked the glower better, for it indicated genuine concern, and this showed nothing of the sort.

"A book?"

"On my studies here in America," she said with a coolness she did not feel.

"Have you any notion of what must go into writing a book? It is far different than making entries in a diary; it requires discipline and concerted effort." He continued to watch her with a trace of amusement.

Stung, Madelaine said. "Yes. I have already written three volumes on my travels in Egypt."

"When you were an infant," said Sherman. "You told me you have spent your time here at sghool, and before that—"

"Actually, I said I had been studying," Madelaine corrected him. "You were the one who said I had been at school."

Sherman straightened in his chair as he took the two papers back from her. "You were not in the convent!" he declared with conviction. "You have not the manner of it."

Madelaine had managed to regain control over her impulsive tongue; she said, "That is nothing to the point. All that matters is that I find an appropriate house to rent. If you are not willing to help me in this endeavor, you need only tell me and I will go elsewhere."

This indirect challenge put Sherman on his mettle. "Certainly I will do what I can. As your financial representative, I must question anything that does not appear to be in your best interests." He gave her a severe stare. "If you will let me know your requirements and the price you had in mind to pay, I will have Jenkins begin his inquiries."

"Thank you," said Madelaine, her temper beginning to cool. "I will need a small- or medium-sized house in a good location, one with room for a proper study. I will need a bedchamber and a dressing room, a withdrawing room and a parlor, a dining room, a pantry, and a reasonably modern kitchen, with quarters for a staff of three." She had established these requirements for herself over eighty years ago. She added the last in an off-handed way. "Also, I must be able to reach the foundation with ease."

"The foundation!" Sherman repeated in astonishment. "Why should the foundation concern you?"

Madelaine thought of the trunks of her native earth and felt the pull of it like exhausted muscles yearning for rest "I have learned that it is wise to know what the footing of a house may be," she answered.

"Most certainly," Sherman agreed, pleasantly surprised that Madelaine should have so practical a turn of mind. "Very well. I will stipulate that in my instructions to Jenkins: easy access to the foundations." He

regarded her with the manner of one encountering a familiar object in an unfamiliar setting. "How soon would you like to occupy the house?"

"As soon as possible," said Madelaine. "I want to get my work under way quickly, and I cannot do that until I have a place where I may examine my notes and open all my records—I assure you, they are extensive—for review; at the moment most of them are still in trunks and are of little use to me there." She smiled at him, noticing for the first time that he had dark circles under his eyes. "If you will excuse me for mentioning it, you do not appear to have slept well, Mr. Sherman. Are you unwell?"

He shrugged, looking slightly embarrassed. "My son was fussy last night; he is very young and misses his mother. I wanted to comfort him, and so I..." He made a brusque gesture of dismissal, then relented. "And for the last few days my asthma has been bothering me. It is a childish complaint, one that need not concern you, Madame."

Madelaine regarded him with sympathy. "I know what it is to suffer these conditions, for I, myself, cannot easily tolerate direct sunlight." She hesitated, thinking that she did not want to create gossip about the two of them. Then she offered, "I have some preparations against such continuing illnesses. If you would let me provide you with a vial of—"

"I have nitre paper," Sherman said, cutting her off abruptly. He stared at the blotter on the desk, and the papers she had signed. "But I thank you for your consideration."

"If you change your mind, you have only to let me know," said Madelaine, noticing that Sherman's face was slightly flushed. "Think of it as a gesture of gratitude for finding my house."

He nodded stiffly. "If you will call back on Monday, I will let you know what Jenkins has discovered. What was the price you had in mind again?"

"Anything reasonable. You know better than I what that would be, and you know what my circumstances are," Madelaine said as if she had lost interest in the matter. "And you know what is a reasonable amount for a landlord to ask, even with prices so very high."

Sherman nodded, his expression distant. "And the matter of staff? You said two or three?"

"If you will recommend someone to help me in hiring them, I would appreciate it." Why was she feeling so awkward? Madelaine wondered. What had happened in the last few minutes that left her with the sensation that she had done something unseemly? Was it something in her, or was it in Sherman?

"There are employment services in the city," said Sherman, looking directly at her. "I will find out which is most reputable."

Madelaine was startled at the intensity of his gaze. "I don't know what to say to you, Mr. Sherman, but thank you." He rose stiffly. "On Monday then, Madame de Montalia." She took his hand; it might as well have been made of wood. "On Monday, Mr. Sherman."

San Francisco, 6 June,

It is still in his eyes. When Mr. Sherman and I met at the soiree given by General Hitchcock, I saw him watching me; never have I experienced so searching an expression, as if he wanted to fathom me to the depths. It is not like Saint-Germain, who looks at me with knowing: Sherman is questing. This considered inspection had nothing to do with the soiree: the fare was musical, for the General has some talent on the flute, and he, with the accompaniment of Mrs. Kent at the piano, regaled his guests with a variety of airs by Mozart and Handel, all very light and pleasant.

Yet for all his watching me, Sherman hardly spoke to me during the evening. If he seeks to avoid gossip in this way, he will not succeed, for his Russian friend, deStoeckl asked me why Sherman was making such a cake of himself, an old-fashioned question I cannot answer...

I have been given descriptions of three houses Mr. Sherman thinks would be suitable for my needs. One is on Shotwell Street; there is a second house on Franklin, somewhat larger than the first—it is quite modern and comes with many furnishings included. The third is on Bush Street, where the hill becomes steeper; it is not as well situated as the other two. I will go inspect them in the next few days, to make up my mind...

The rooms in the house on Franklin Street echoed eerily as Madelaine made her way from the front parlor to the withdrawing room.

"I am sorry that the landlord has not carpeted the place," said Sherman, walking slightly behind her. "I have discussed the matter with him, and he is willing to make an adjustment in the rent charged because of the lack. You will be expected to provide the carpets, as well as the draperies and the bed. The rest is as you see," he added, indicating the furniture all swathed in Holland covers.

"Actually, I don't see," said Madalaine. "But I know the furnishings are here." She continued through the withdrawing room to the hall leading through the dining room to the kitchen and pantry beyond. "And the servants' quarters? Where are they? Upstairs?"

"They are in the rear of the house," said Sherman, the roughness in his voice not entirely due to a recent attack of asthma. "A detached cottage with three apartments."

Madelaine paused in the door to the kitchen, thinking that having the servants' quarters out of the house could be a real advantage. "Are they adequate? Do they have sufficient heat? If the summers are as chilly as you say they are, Mr. Sherman, it will be necessary to provide heating for them, even in July."

"There are stoves in each of the apartments," Sherman said stiffly. "That will be sufficient to their needs."

"And they will dine in the kitchen?" she said, looking into that room.

"Naturally," said Sherman, and veiled a cough.

"What of the location? Is it... acceptable?" she asked.

"Well enough," answered Sherman, and added, as if against his will, "I have only recently moved from Green Street to a fashionable house on Rincon Hill. To please my wife."

"Who is visiting her family," Madelaine finished for him.

"Yes." He waited until the silence was too laden with unspoken things; he then chose the most trivial of them to break it. "There are so few areas where reputable women may live safely alone in this city, though this comes as close to being that as any neighborhood might do. The location is not the most fashionable, but it is not inappropriate for a single woman keeping her own house, conserving her money, and assuring her good character in society."

"All of which is important." Madelaine turned to him. "I will need to find a good draper. I will need heavy curtains and draperies for the windows in the front parlor and the withdrawing room, as well as for the front bedrooms."

"Which face west," he said, looking impressed by her resolution. "You have not yet seen the third house, Madame de Montalia."

"Why should I waste your time and my own when this suits my needs so well?" Madelame asked, coming toward him.

Again he masked a cough, a sign of discomfort in him. "You haven't seen the bedrooms upstairs. They might not suit your purposes, or you could decide that the withdrawing room will not serve you well as your study," he pointed out. "I do not want you to contract for this house and then complain to me later that it is not what you wanted."

Madelaine smiled at him, annoyed that he would not admit she knew her own mind, and decided to enjoy herself at his expense. "Dear me, Mr. Sherman, are you always so hesitant yourself?" She could see that he was uneasy with this challenge, and she pressed her advantage, feeling his uncertainty about her as if there were a third person in the house with them, a silent judge who evaluated all that passed between them. "From what General Hitchcock told me the other afternoon, I thought you were of a decisive nature. Captain Buell says the same thing about you."

Stung, Sherman regarded her through narrowed eyes. "What do you mean, Madame?"

"I mean that you doubt my capacity to choose that which suits me," she answered, coming closer still to him. "This house will do well. The cellar is large enough and secure enough for my purposes, the rooms are pleasant, the location is satisfactory, and it requires very little attention from me, once I select the carpets and draperies. You tell me the rent is not too high for the house. Since it has so much to recommend it, I am willing to take it on a lease through... shall we say September?"

"You will have your book written in that time?" He flung this back at her, his face nearly expressionless.

"The greater part of it, certainly," she answered, unflustered; she enjoyed the awkwardness he felt in response to her emerging confidence.

He shrugged, making it plain that he washed his hands of the whole affair. "Be it on your head then, Madame." His eyes belied the indifference of his demeanor. "I will arrange for the lease to be drawn up this afternoon; you may sign it at my office this evening, if that is convenient."

"Excellent," she said. "And perhaps you can recommend a firm to move my things to this house at the beginning of next week? We might as well be about this as soon as possible."

He offered her a small salute. "Certainly, Madame."

"When I have established myself here, you must advise me how best to entertain, so that I will not offend any of the important hostesses in San Francisco." She meant what she said, and was relieved that for once Sherman seemed convinced.

"If my wife were here..." he began, then let his words trail off as he stared at her.

"If your wife were here, we should not be having this conversation, Mr. Sherman," said Madelaine, being deliberately provocative, and wondering what it was about him that so intrigued her, aside from his apparent fascination with her.

"No," he said, and looked away toward the vacant window and its view of the street beyond.

San Francisco, 10 June,

I am now in my house on Franklin Street, near the intersection of Grove Street, and very pleasant it is, too. The draper is making up curtains, draperies, and valences for me; they will be installed by the day after tomorrow, or so he has assured me, which will do much to make the place more

comfortable during the day. With my chests of native earth in the basement, and my mattress and shoes relined, I am already quite at home. In a week or so, all should be in order. I think I shall go on very well here.

This afternoon I interviewed over thirty applicants for my three staff positions, and have chosen a housekeeper-cum-maid who has but recently arrived from Sweden, a woman of middle years named Olga Bjomholm. I have also found a man-of-all-work named Christian van der Groot who came here to find gold but realized that he could do better helping to build houses and guard them than panning in the mountain rivers, and so here he is. I have yet to hire a cook for the household, but I have found a coachman to drive for me as needed.

I am reluctant to ask Mr. Sherman for more assistance, for I sense that his attraction is deepening, which causes him distress. It is apparent when he speaks to me that he does it with confusion springing from his attrac-

tion. If only my attraction were not deepening as well. It has been so long since I have let myself be loved knowingly; for the last decade I have taken my pleasure— such as it has been—in the dreams of men who have been interesting to me, and interested in me. And that has sufficed; it is gratification but not nourishment. For that, there must be intimacy without fantasy. And I cannot help but long for that intimacy, for knowledge and acceptance—although why I believe I should find either from William T. Sherman, I cannot tell, except for what is in his eyes.

Madelaine arrived at the French Theatre on Montgomery Street and found herself in a crush of carriages trying to get into position at the front of the theatre, where the sidewalk was broader and two wide steps were in place for those leaving their carriages. Ushers were at the edge of this boardwalk helping the arriving audience to alight.

"I don't think I can get much closer, Madame, not in another ten minutes, and you would then be late," said Enrique, her coachman, as he looked over the line of vehicles waiting to discharge their passengers. "It is less than a block from here."

"It is satisfactory, Enrique," said Madelaine with decision, handing him a small tip as she prepared to get out. "I will walk the rest of the way; if you will watch me, to be sure I am not—"

"I will watch, Madame," he said, drawing the coach up to the boardwalk. "Do you need me to let the steps down?"

"No," she replied. "I can manage well enough. The street is well lit, and I doubt anyone will importune me with so much activity about." With that, she opened the door panel, set her lap rug aside, and stepped down from the carriage, swinging the door behind her to close it. She was about to turn when she felt her cloak snag on the door latch; as she struggled to free it, she stumbled back against the coach.

"Allow me, Madame," said a voice from behind her; William Sherman reached out and freed her cloak, then held out his hand to assist her to the wide, wooden sidewalk. "Good evening, and permit me to say that I am surprised to see you here."

"At the French Theatre? Where else should I be?" Madeleine recovered her poise at once. "Thank you for your concern, Mr. Sherman. Why should you be surprised?"

He answered indirectly as he glanced at his pocket watch. "The curtain will rise in five minutes. You will have to join your company at once."

"Then I will have to hurry," said Madelaine, starting along the boardwalk in the direction of the French

Theatre. "But there is no one I am joining, Mr. Sherman. And no one is joining me. I am a Frenchwoman here for the pleasure of hearing her own language spoken, not to indulge in the entertainment of society"

"Surely you do not go to the theatre unescorted?" He gazed at her in dismay. "No, no; Madame, you must not."

"But why?" she asked reasonably. "I have attended the theatre alone in London." As soon as she said it, she realized she had slipped; it was rare for her to make such an error.

"Never tell me you went alone to the theatre as a child," he countered. "Not even French parents are so indulgent."

"Not as a child, no," she allowed, irritated that her tongue should have got her into such a pass with Sherman, of all people. He was too acute for her to forget herself around him.

He stopped walking, and looked down at her, cocking his head; the lamplight made his red hair glow like hot coals. "As a gentleman, I should never ask a lady this question, but I fear I must"

She returned his look. "What question is that? I have told you the truth, Mr. Sherman."

"Of that I have no doubt." He answered so directly that she was startled. "I can perceive the truth of you as if it grew on stalks. No, the question I ought not ask is: How old are you?" Before she could answer, he added, "Because I have received an accounting of your money in the Saint Louis office of Lucas and Turner, and with a portrait and a description to verify your identity. It would seem that you have not altered in any particular in the last decade. You appeared to be about twenty when you first went there, and you appear to be about twenty now."

Very carefully she said, "If I told you when I was born, you would not believe me."

He studied her eyes and was satisfied, "That, too, was the truth." He again looked at his pocket watch. "We are going to miss the curtain."

"Does this mean you are escorting me?" asked Madelaine, unable to resist smiling at him.

"Perforce," answered Sherman, his eyes creasing at the corners.

"But what of the gossip you have warned me about? And your wife is still with her parents." Madelaine noticed that the theatregoers had all but disappeared from the street. She glanced at Sherman. "Are you really set on seeing Racine?"

His face did not change, but his voice softened. "No."

"Nor am I," said Madelaine, who had seen *Phaedre* more than twenty times in the last sixty years. "Surely there is somewhere we can go that will not cause tongues to wag?"

Most of those going to the theatre were in their place. The few who remained on the street hurried to reach their seats before the curtain went up; they paid no attention to Madelaine and Sherman.

He coughed once. "There are rooms at the casinos, private rooms. Men dine there, in private. Sometimes these rooms are used for assignations."

"Would that bother you?" asked Madelaine. "Going to such a place?"

"It should bother you," said Sherman sternly. Then he made up his mind. He took her by the elbow and started to lead her in the direction away from the French Theatre. "My carriage is in a livery around the

corner on Pine Street," he said.

"I wish you would not hold on to my arm in that manner," she said to him. "It's uncomfortable."

He released her at once, chagrined. "I meant nothing unsuitable, Madame." He put more than two feet between them. "You must understand that I only sought to guard—"

"Oh! for all the saints in the calendar!" Madelaine burst out, then lowered her voice. "I meant nothing but what I said: I dislike having my arm clutched. But I am glad of your company, Mr. Sherman, and your protection. I know these streets can be dangerous."

He paused at the corner of Pine Street. "I will take you home."

"My coachman will do that, thank you," said Madelaine amiably, "after we have our private discussion."

This time there was an eagerness in his eyes as he looked down at her. "What did you mean by discussion, since you are clarifying your meaning, Madame?"

"That, in large part, is up to you," said Madelaine, regarding him steadily. "I will not seduce you, or demand what you are unwilling to give; I want no man who is not enthusiastic to have me."

He laughed abruptly. "What man would that be? One who is dead, or prefers the bodies of men?"

Maddaine answered him seriously. "I do not mean only my body, Mr. Sherman. If that is all I sought, it is there for the taking, all around us, at acceptable prices. I mean a man who is willing to see into my soul. And to let me see into his."

Taken aback, Sherman straightened up and stared down the dark street. "Well, your candor is admirable." He paused thoughtfully. "Let me make myself plain to you, Madame, and if what I say is repugnant to you, then I will not impose upon you any longer, and I will forget that any of this was said. No matter what you may stir in me, I cannot, and I will not, compromise my obligations to my family. I am married, and that will not be changed by any desire I may feel for you."

"I don't recall asking you to change, or to hurt your family," said Madelaine as she put her hand through his arm. "I only remember suggesting that we spend the evening together."

"And that I may have you if that is what I wish," he said, as if to give her one more chance to change her mind.

Madelaine's smile was quick. "I am not challenging you, Mr. Sherman. I am seeking to spend time with you."

"Whatever that means," said Sherman.

"Whatever that means," Madelaine concurred.

San Francisco, 16 June, 1855... Tonight will be better.

The sheets were fine linen, as soft as antique satin, and there were six pillows and a damask comforter flung in glorious disarray about the bed. In the wan spill of moonlight from the window, Sherman was standing, wearing only a loosely belted dressing robe, and smoking a thin cigar as he gazed out into the darkness. "The other evening and now this. What must you think of me?"

"Nothing to your discredit," said Madelaine quietly, hardly moving as she spoke. "I think you do not trust what you want." She pulled the sheet up to cover her breasts.

"That's kind," he said tightly. "Many another woman would be offended."

Madelaine turned on her side to look at him, regarding him with a serious expression. "If that's not it, what is bothering you?"

He met her eyes. "You are."

"Why do I bother you? Would you rather not be here?" she asked, more puzzled than apprehensive.

"No. There is no place I would rather be," he answered evenly.

"Then why—?" she began, only to be cut off.

"Because it *is* what I want," he said bluntly, and stubbed out his cigar in the saucer she had set out for that purpose. "A man in my position, with a wife and a good marriage, has other women for convenience and amusement. It isn't that way with you. You are not a convenience or an entertainment. You are not convenient at all. You are what I want. All of you. And I should not. I must not." He started toward the bed, tugging at his sash and flinging it aside as he reached her. He stared down at her as his robe fell open. "Do you know what it means to want you so much, to go beyond reason with wanting you? I want to possess you, and I fear you will possess me. I am afraid that once I touch you, I will be lost."

"Is that so terrifying a prospect?" she asked, moving to make a place beside her in the bed.

"Yes." In a shrug he dropped his dressing robe to the floor, letting it lie in a velvet puddle.

"Then come and stretch out beside me. We can talk as friends, all through the night." She piled up the pillows. "I don't require you to take me."

"How do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"If you do not want to touch me at all, you need not." She regarded him kindly. "If you would like to, then you may."

He scowled. "How can you say that you want me, that you have me here in your house, in your bed, and not care if I—"

She sighed. "I've told you before, William."

"Don't call me William," he interrupted, seeking a distraction from the confusion that warred within him.

"I won't call you Mr. Sherman, not here," she said, slapping one of the pillows with the back of her hand; though it was dark, she could see his face clearly and knew he was deeply troubled. She strove to lighten the burdens of desire that so plagued him, and decided to stay on safe ground. "What does the *T* in your name stand for?"

"My friends and... and family call me Cump," he said, swallowing hard.

"Cump?" She was baffled.

"My given name is Tecumseh," he said at last. "The Ewings added William when they took me in after my father's death. So that I could be baptized into Maria Ewing's Catholic religion." He sat on the edge of the bed and absently reached out to stroke her hair.

Madelaine knew he had just given her a very special gift. "You're named for the chief of the Shawnee."

"Yes," he said with urgency as he reached out and wrapped his long-fingered hands around her upper arms. "How do you know about Tecumseh?"

"I know he had a twin brother, Tenskwatawa, and they were both called The Prophet." It was not a direct answer, but it was all she was prepared to give now. "Come to me, Tecumseh. You don't have to do anything if you don't want to."

He glowered at her, then looked down at himself, sighed, and swung his legs up and under the covers. He stared up at the ceiling in the darkness. "What should we talk about?" he asked, his manner forbidding.

"Anything you wish or nothing at all. Either will please me if that is what you want." As much as she desired to lie next to him, to feel his flesh against hers for the length of her body, she, too, lay on her back and stared at the ceiling, noticing a faint crack in the ornamental plasterwork. She wanted to bridge the rift between them, and sought for something she could give him, as he had offered his name to her. "Let us share secrets, as friends do," she suggested impulsively. "If you like, I will tell you how old I am."

"That is a wonderful secret for a lady to share with a friend, and quite an admission for any woman to make." He laughed once, then looked grave. "Very well. On my honor I promise I will never repeat it," he told her somberly.

"You had best not," said Madelaine, and plunged ahead, telling herself that surprise was an advantage with this man. "For I was born on the twenty-second day of November, 1724, at Montalia, my family estate, in the south of France."

For several seconds Sherman was silent. Then he chuckled. "Seventeen-twenty-four, not 1824. That would make you more than a century old, Madame."

"I am," she said, beginning to worry.

He turned toward her, trying hard to keep the incredulity out of his voice. "All right. I deserved that. For the sake of argument, we will say you are ancient, a veritable crone. You are one hundred thirty-one years old, or will be in November." His chuckling continued, rich and easy, the hard lines in his face relaxing so that he, himself, now appeared younger than he was. "And how did you attain this great age without looking older than a girl just out?"

"Because I died on the fourth of August, 1744. I was just out," she replied, trying to keep her voice from trembling, though she could not disguise the chill that seized her, making her quiver.

"The fourth of August, 1744," he repeated, as if hearing the words again would change them. His chuckle turned to coughing, and he took a minute to bring his breathing under control. He lay back on the pillows, willing himself not to cough. "You don't expect me to believe this, do you?"

"Why not?" she answered, fighting the desolation that swept over her. She was afraid her teeth would chatter. "Tecumseh, you know when I am lying. I am not lying now, am I? This is the truth."

"The truth?" he scoffed. "Well, Madame, you sure look mighty pretty for a corpse." He rolled onto his side, propped himself on his elbow, and stared at her. "How can you claim to exchange confidences and then tell such bald-faced..." The words straggled; when he spoke again, he was awed. "You *are* telling the truth, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said as if from a great distance.

"But how...?" He touched her face with one long finger, he did his best to comprehend the enormity of

what she said. "Dear God, Madelaine, how?"

She gave him Saint-Germain's answer. "I drink the Elixir of Life. And I do not die. I cannot die."

This was not nearly sufficient to convince Sherman. "Then tell me something of your youth." His steel-colored eyes grew sharp. "Who was ruling France then?"

"When I came to Paris, Louis XV was king," she answered calmly, though she continued to shiver as much from the strength of her memories as from apprehension about Sherman. "That was in the fall of 1743. I went to my aunt so that she could introduce me into society."

"What sort of fellow was he, Louis XV?" demanded Sherman, making her answer a test. "I warn you, I know something about the man, and will not be fobbed off with vague answers."

"Venal, luxury-loving, indolent, handsome, overindulged, manipulative. In a word, spoiled." She stared at him, surprised when he took her hands in his. "I escaped the Terror, which is just as well."

Sherman managed a kind of laugh. "A lovely corpse without a head—that would be difficult," agreed Sherman in ill-concealed excitement. "Limiting, I should think."

"A corpse is all I would have been. Those who taste the Elixir of Life are not proof against all death. Madame la Guillotine is as deadly to me as to you. So is fire." She looked directly into his eyes. "In the time I have lived, can you imagine the number of times I have said good-bye?" And how many more times I will, she added silently to herself. She thought of Trowbridge then, of his devotion which had cost him his life to save hers; and Falke, going willingly into the furnace of the Egyptian desert in order to be free of her and the life she gave.

"No, Madelaine. Don't despair," he said, with the urgency of one who knew despair well. His arms went around her, and he drew her close to him as if to protect her from the weight of grief. "It is unbearable," he murmured, pressing his lips to her hair.

She rested her head on his chest, listening to his heart beat, hearing the pulse quicken. "I am told one learns, in time." Her breath was deep and uneven.

He reached out to turn her face up to his, searching out secrets. "What are you, then? I'd better warn you, I don't hold any truck with the supernatural. And don't preach religion at me, whatever you do. I get enough of that from Maria Ewing." He made an impatient gesture at the mention of his mother-in-law.

"No religion," she promised. "Other than that most religion is against those of us who come to this life." She stretched out to kiss him, feeling yearning and resistance in his mouth. "We die, but slip the hold death has on us, and we live—"

"On the Elixir of Life," he said, one hand sliding down her flank. "And how is this mysterious Elixir obtained?"

"It is taken from those who are willing to give it," she answered quietly. "Where there is understanding, and passion, there is also great... joy."

"Joy," he echoed, as if the word were terrible even as he pulled her inexorably nearer, kissing her with what he had intended as roughness but what became a tenderness of such intensity that he felt all his senses fill with her. He tried to push her away, but his body would not answer the stern command of his will; and as she guided his hands over the treasure of her flesh, he surrendered to her with all the strength of his desire.

"Slowly," she whispered as she flicked her tongue over his nipples, seeing his shock and delight. "It is better if you savor it."

"God and the devils! I am ready to explode!" He kicked back the sheet to show her, proud and embarrassed at once. "Hurry, Madelaine. I am at the brink."

"Not yet," said Madelaine, bending to kiss him again as she straddled him. "Do not deny yourself the full measure of your passion, for you also deny me. This is not a race where glory goes to the swiftest." Then, with exquisite languor, she guided him deep within her.

His breath hissed through his clenched teeth. "I can't—"

"You can," she promised, remaining very still until he opened his eyes. Then she began to move with him, feeling his guard fall away as his ardor became adoration; at this instant her lips brushed his throat.

They lay together until the first predawn call of birds warned them of coming day.

"I don't want to leave," Sherman said, kissing the corner of her mouth. "You have enthralled me, Madelaine."

"And I am bound to you, Tecumseh," she said.

With sudden emotion, he pulled her close against him, his long fingers tangled in her hair. "What have you done to me?"

"Touched you," she answered, "And you me."

As he rose, gooseflesh on his pale skin, he brushed the arch of her lip with his fingers. "We will have to be very careful, very discreet. They know, the women here, that a man has appetites, but they will not look upon you with the same understanding."

"Yes," she agreed. "I know," and turned her head to kiss the palm of his hand.

He gathered up his clothes with care and dressed quickly, listening for sounds in the street. "I don't want anyone to know I've come here," he told her, his manner stern. "For both our sakes."

She got out of bed and pulled on a heavy silken peignoir. "I am not about to cry it to the world."

He paused in the door, regarding her steadily. "No, you are not," he conceded with a curious mixture of relief and exasperation. "It isn't in you to do that." Then he smiled, and the harshness left his face. He held his arms open, and she ran into them.

San Francisco, 1 July,

Yesterday I met Tecumseh's two children, though he tells me he has a third child, Minnie, living with her grandparents, an arrangement that does not entirely please him. The children currently living with him were at a puppet show presented near the old Mission San Francisco de Assisi. I came with the Kents...

He is clearly fond of both children, but takes the keenest delight in his son, Willy, who is still a baby; the boy has hair almost as red as his father's, and is quick and amiable. It is no wonder his father dotes on him...

Most of my notes are prepared and ready and I am about to set to work in earnest...

Sherman read the first three pages in growing disbelief. "Indians," he said to her at last. "*Indians!* What in infernal damnation do you mean with this?"

Madelaine watched him as he began to pace her front parlor, ignoring the raised, cautioning finger Baron deStoeckl offered him. "It is the subject of my studies." She was in a deep-green afternoon dress, and her hair was neatly arranged, as suited any woman prepared to receive guests; the filmy light from her curtained windows gave the whole room a soft, pale glow.

Sherman would not be stilled. "Indians! What is the matter with you? How can you be such a romantic fool, to go among savages?" He was dusty from riding and made no excuse for it as he prowled his way about the room, refusing to look directly at her, for fear he might give himself away. "What do you know about Indians?"

"Enough not to call them savages. I have been studying them," said Madelaine, determined not to argue uselessly.

"Studying! A nice word for adventuring! But what do you *know* about them?" He put down the pages in triumph.

"Not nearly enough," she answered steadily. "That is why I study them, to end my ignorance."

"But you do not know what they are like; you prove that by what you're saying now," Sherman persisted. "You are one of the dreamers, thinking you have come upon discarded wisdom or neglected perceptions. You haven't a notion what kind of superstitious, bloody barbarians they are."

"Some might say the same of me," Madelaine interjected in an undervoice, then spoke up. "I have already spent time among the Osage, the Kiowa, the Pawnee, the Arapaho, the Cheyenne, the Ute, the Shoshone, and the Miwok, without anything untoward happening to me. I am working from my journals and other records I have made. For my book."

Sherman stared at her, aghast. "Is *that* what you are doing in America? Living with *Indians!*"

"For the most part, yes," said Madelaine, her face betraying no emotion.

"Don't you know how dangerous that is?" Sherman insisted, this time looking directly at her. "You think that they are noble, but they are not. I have fought Indian skirmishers, while I was mapping in the South for the army. I know what they can be. I do not need a pitched battle to show me the cruelty they embody."

"They did me no harm, and I do not think they would ever do me any," said Madelaine. "Once they realized what I wanted to know, and were convinced of my sincerity, they were most cooperative. They permitted me to study them. As I expected they would do, since they are reasonable peoples." It was not quite the truth. "Most of them," she appended, aware of Sherman's keen gaze.

"You were luckier than you had any right to be," said Sherman brusquely, breaking away from the spell of her violet eyes.

"How can you say that?" Madelaine asked, unable to keep from responding to his challenge, though she realized he was deliberately provoking her. "What danger is one European woman to them?"

"I was referring to the danger one European woman was in from them, little as she is willing to acknowledge it," said Sherman dryly. "I have some experience of Indians, remember. I have seen Seminole, Madame, and I know to my cost what implacable enemies they can be. They killed troopers who were doing them no harm whatsoever. They would ambush a few men and pick them off with

arrows and blowguns. Indians are dangerous. And if the European woman is not willing to heed me, then be it on her head."

Baron deStoeckl cleared his throat. "Perhaps each of you has a point? In your own ways," he suggested in French. "I do not mean to increase dissension, but it seems to me that there is good reason to concede as much to each other."

Sherman rounded on him, his brows drawn down, his mouth a thin line. "I do not want any misfortune to befall her."

"And I do not want any misfortune to befall my Indian friends, since they have endured so much already, although they do not complain of it," said Madelaine, sensing that Sherman might understand this better than he admitted. "You know that many of them have been forced to change their way of life since the Europeans arrived here."

"As Europeans were forced to change their way of life when they came to the American wilderness." Sherman sighed once, his breathing strained. "It was not like visiting another European country, coming to this one. It still isn't, though we have cities and a few of the amenities of life. Not as we do in the East, of course, but this is not the frontier, as it was when I was here eight years ago. Then there were only a dozen streets in the whole of San Francisco." He sat down abruptly, his face draining of color as the severity of his asthma attack increased.

Madelaine recognized the symptoms; she asked Baron deStoeckl to tend to Sherman for a moment so that she could fetch something that would ease his labored breathing.

"Certainly," said Baron deStoeckl.

"No need," wheezed Sherman.

"Because it offends your pride to be helped?" Madelaine suggested, then excused herself and hurried toward the back of the house, calling to Olga to assist her. "I have a number of large stoneware jars in the cellar. Will you please bring me the one with the green seal. At once."

By the time Olga returned, Madelaine had made a hot brandy toddy, and as she peeled off the seal with a knife, she explained, "This is a very old remedy. I obtained it while traveling in Egypt." She poured some of the contents into the toddy. "If you will seal the jar again and put it back where you found it?" As Olga obeyed, Madelaine took the toddy and hurried back to the parlor where she could hear Sherman trying not to cough as he labored to breathe.

Baron deStoeckl was patting Sherman on the back and frowning when Madelaine moved him aside and held out the cup and saucer to her stricken guest.

"What's this?" Sherman demanded with difficulty.

"A toddy. It will make you better directly," she promised. "Drink it before it is too cool to help ease your trouble."

Sherman glowered at her, but took the proffered cup and winced as he sipped. "It's hot." When the cup's contents were half gone, he was noticeably improved, his breathing more regular and less labored.

"Thank you, Madame," he said as soon as he was sitting straight once again.

"Finish the toddy, Mr. Sherman. You are better but not yet restored." Madelaine watched him sternly as he drank the rest and set the cup and saucer aside on the rosewood end table beside his chair. "Very good."

"I am pleased you think so, Madame," said Sherman with a wry smile. "What a stern taskmistress you are."

"I am concerned with your well-being, Mr. Sherman. Who else would handle my affairs as well as you have done?" This was intended to return their conversation to more formal tones, but it did not succeed.

"What other banker would care enough to ignore the impropriety of your studies?" Sherman countered with a gesture of capitulation that made the sharp-eyed Baron deStoeckl raise his brows in surprise.

"I doubt you will do that, Mr. Sherman. I suspect you will adopt a flanking strategy and try to wear down my resolve through a series of skirmishes, like the Seminole." Madelaine did her best to make this a teasing suggestion, one that could not be taken seriously by either man.

Sherman grinned. "Yes, a series of skirmishes along your flanks would be most... rewarding."

The Baron lifted his hands to show he was helpless against these blatant flirtations. He leaned down and made one last attempt. "My good friend William, I think you are taking advantage of our hostess."

"I would certainly like to," said Sherman incorrigibly. Now that he was feeling markedly better, he was seized with high spirits. "A covert campaign is required."

"God and the archangels!" Baron deStoeckl burst out. "What of your reputation? What of hers?"

Sherman regarded his Mend with a canny look. "What danger are we in? You will not repeat what we say here, will you? I know Madame de Montalia will not, and neither will I, so where is the problem? You will keep our secret." He got up and strode to Madelaine's side, purpose in every line of his body. "Don't preach to me about good sense and prudence. Not now. Not here." With that, he caught her up in his arms and bent to kiss her.

Few things flustered Madelaine; this unexpected demonstration unnerved her thoroughly. She felt her face redden, and when she could speak, she said, "What a burden you are imposing on your friend. Think, Tecumseh." She glanced at the Baron, about to apologize for the impropriety of it all when Sherman took her by the shoulders and nearly shook her.

"Damn it, woman, I want someone to know." Sherman looked down into her eyes, and his sternness vanished. He went on quietly. "I want at least one man I can trust to see what I feel for you, so that I will be able to talk with him about what you mean to me when... this is over."

"When your wife returns," said Madelaine.

"When you leave," said Sherman.

Baron deStoeckl bowed to them. "You may rely on my discretion," he promised them in French.

San Francisco, 21 July

After an absence of sixteen days, Tecumseh has returned to my bed. This time he had no hesitation, no awkward beginnings. His embraces were long and deep and he undertook to follow my lead, to find out how long he could build his passion before spending. He was merry as a boy with a prize, and he romped with me for more than an hour before fatigue finally overcame him. When I woke him an hour before dawn, he was as refreshed as if he had passed a full night in slumber, and was in good spirits when he left. He promised to come again in three nights, and said he would find good reasons for us to be in one another's company without attracting undue attention or gossip, which pleased me very much, for it is enervating to live with such close

scrutiny as attends on single women in this city. I pointed out to him that this would require careful planning, to which he replied that he is very good at strategy and swore he would relish the opportunity, thinking it worthy of his talents...

The warmth of the day was quickly fading before the chilling fingers of fog came, caressing the hills from the west. As they turned down the steep hill, the wind nipping at their backs, Sherman signaled Madelaine to swing, her horse off the main road to the wooded copse, indicating through gestures that they could then dismount and put on their coats.

"The Spanish call those two hills the Maiden's Breasts," he said to her as he lifted her out of the sidesaddle under the trees. He indicated the slope they had just descended. "I like yours better." He took the reins from her hand and secured them to one of the low-growing oak branches, next to where his grey was tied.

"Less hectic to ride, I imagine," said Madelaine in spite of herself.

"I wouldn't say that," Sherman whispered as he bent down to wrap her in his arms, his lips seeking hers. He took his time about it, feeling her warm to him; it promised well for the night ahead. When he moved back, he said impishly, "Isn't there any other land you would like to inspect, with the prospect of making an offer to purchase? I would have to escort you to advise you and negotiate for you, wouldn't I? I could not allow you to venture abroad without suitable protection. I would be remiss in my duties if I did—everyone would agree to that." He bent again, and moving the thick knot of hair at the nape of her neck aside, kissed her just under her ear. "Where you kiss me, Madelaine. When you pledge me your bond." His lips were light, almost playful.

It took her a while to gather her thoughts, and when she did, she straggled to voice them. "That is a good notion, on its own; never mind the chance for privacy it offers us. If you know of any property I might like, tell me of it, and I will arrange to see it for myself," she said quite seriously. "I am in earnest, Tecumseh. I want to purchase some land here."

"So far speculation has been very profitable, at least in this area." He nodded, doing his best to fall into his role as banker. "All the West is going to be valuable, someday. When Congress finally comes to its senses and builds a railroad linking the East Coast with the West, then land here will appreciate dramatically, but that will not happen until there is a railroad. Not even a good wagon road would help as the railroad would. But a wagon road would be better than nothing," he said, letting his rancor show. "Politicians! They cannot think beyond the next election. There is no sense in their reluctance to authorize the railroad other than their usual damned lack of foresight. The telegraph link with the Mississippi only be, j, s the question, but it is typical of Congress to settle for half measures when full ones are wanted. As long as they keep California isolated, it will have little to attract investors beyond the gold fields, and that is not investment but exploitation, and it will continue as long as there is no land connection but trails across the continent. Only when goods and people may cross quickly and comfortably will the Pacific come into its own, and assume its place in the scheme of things, bringing the Occident and Orient together as no gang of Chinese laborers and cooks can do now. Until that time, it will be the last point of escape for the dreamers and scoundrels who seek their own private paradise, and attempt to create it for themselves here. It is shortsighted political chicanery to refuse to unite East and

West by rail, I am convinced of it. The trouble is that California is an enigma; not even those who live here understand it." He folded his arms, his shirtsleeves suddenly too little protection for the encroaching fog. "I will get my coat."

"Bring mine, will you?" She strolled deeper into the small grove of trees, listening to the sounds around her, the rustlings and flutters that reminded her that there were other occupants of the copse, many of

which began their day when the sun went down—just as she would do if she did not line the soles of her shoes with her native earth. It was cool enough to be unpleasant, and she was relieved when Sherman came and held up her nip-waisted coat for her as she slid her arms into the leg-o'-mutton sleeves. He rested his hands on her shoulders as he stood behind her, then slid them down to cover her breasts.

"How can I give this up?" he murmured, drawing her back against him, holding her tightly as his hands moved down the front of her body; he did this with ease, being more than a head taller than Madelaine. He stopped his rapt exploration abruptly. "I must be mad."

"For planning to give me up or for wanting me in the first place?" She avoided any hint of accusation in her mild rebuke, but she could not shake off the sadness that swept through her at the realization that she would have to leave San Francisco and Sherman before long.

"Both," said Sherman with utmost conviction, turning her to face him, staring down into her violet eyes as if he wanted to meet her in combat. "I am not a man who loves easily, and I am... possessed by you. What is it about you? You are more of a mystery than this place." His countenance was stern, his brows drawn downward. "Had I thought I would be so... so wholly in your thrall, I would never have begun with you."

"*Bien perdu, bien connu,*" said Madelaine, hoping to conceal the sting she felt from his harsh words.

"But you are *not* well lost; that is the trouble. I do not need to lose you to know you, Madelaine." He surrounded her with his arms, his mouth rough on hers. He strained to press them more tightly together, then broke away from her. "But I will not compromise my marriage."

"So you have said from the first," Madelaine reminded him, as much to assure him that she still understood his requirements of her as to lessen his defensiveness. "And I have never protested your devotion to your family. I will not do so now."

"I meant it. I mean it still." He reached out and took her face in his long-fingered hands. "I treasure you as I have never treasured another woman, and may I be thrice-damned for it."

"Tecumseh," she said gently. "I have no wish to bring you pain."

He released her and moved away, leaves crackling underfoot. His voice was low and his words came quickly. "But you will, and that is the problem. There's nothing that can be done about it now: you are too deeply fixed in my soul for that. Oh, it is no fault of yours; you have been honorable from the first, if that is a word I may use for our adultery. Never have you asked, or hinted, that you want me to leave my wife: it is just as well, no matter what sorcery you work on me. Yet when you go, as go you must, you will leave a wound in me that no enemy could put there. When you are gone..." He stared down at the ground as if to read something there in the dying light. "I have never known anyone who has so completely won me as you have."

Madelaine did not go after him. "Then we must make the most of the short time we have, so that our joy will be greater than your hurt, and you will remember our time together with happiness." She did not add that she longed for his ecstasy to sustain her in the long, empty months ahead.

"How can we?" He met her eyes in the dimness. "Why take the risk? We have been discreet so far, but I must resist my impulse to set caution aside."

"Why? Who is to know what passes between us? When we are private, there is no reason for caution," said Madelaine, feeling some of his contained anguish as her own.

"No reason? Can you not think of one?" He shook his head, unwilling to look directly at her any longer. "It may be there is the greatest reason of all, for when we are alone together, I have no strength to resist you."

"You are managing to resist me well enough now," she said, more sharply than she had intended.

"Do you think so?" he asked, his voice very quiet and deep, the lines in his face severe.

The silence between them lengthened, opening as if it were a chasm deep as the pits of hell. A scuttling in the underbrush as a fox hurried to find his supper provided a momentary distraction, then Madelaine took a step toward him, her hands turned palms up. "Tecumseh, do you recall what I told you of the bond the blood makes between us?"

His features grew less formidable, and he reached out to caress her face as if compelled to do it. "Yes, Madelaine. How can I forget?"

"Then believe that when we are parted, we will not be separated," she said as she touched his fingers.

He put his hands into hers but would not close the gap between them. "What else would you call it?"

For once she had an answer. "Tell me, when you cannot see the sun or stars, do you still know which direction is north?"

"North?" he repeated, baffled, and then said, "Yes, of course."

"And how do you know it?" she asked him.

He frowned, hitching up one shoulder. "I... sense it."

She nodded. "Then understand that I will always sense you, no matter where you are, or where you go. It is the way of those of us who have become vampires."

He winced at this last. "Vampires."

"Yes," she confirmed.

He regained his skepticism with effort. "For heaven's sake, isn't there another word for it? What a ludicrous notion. Vampires. Legends for the credulous and childish. Surely there is another explanation to account for what has happened." He lacked conviction, but he glowered at her, anyway. "How can you expect me to believe such a fable?"

"I don't," she said wearily. "But it is still the truth. Oh, I have read that Polidori tale, and the little horrors Hoffmann writes, and I cannot blame you for how you think of us. If I were not what I am, I would be inclined to feel as you do, and scoff at the very idea of vampires." She came a step nearer to him. "But I am what you may become, and you need to know the dangers you may face."

His laughter crackled, brittle as autumn leaves. "Very well, you have warned me. If we continue as lovers, I could become a vampire when I die if my spine or my nervous system or my body is not destroyed. I will have to avoid direct sunlight and running water and mirrors. That covers all the hazards, I think. Yes, and I will need my native Ohio earth to sustain me. And blood. Should it come to pass, I will take the precautions you advise, on the odd chance they may be necessary." Then, with a deep sound that was half sigh, half groan, he pulled her into his arms again and bent to open her mouth with his own.

San Francisco, 30 August,

In the last ten days I have seen Tecumseh once, and that was in his carriage with his children, taking them on an outing to the Chinese market where Willy had purchased a paper kite in the shape of a dragon's head that he was attempting to fly off the back of the carriage, which annoyed the horses. Tecumseh was meticulously polite, doing nothing anyone could construe as paying untoward attention to me, but his eyes were haunted. Why he should be so distant now, I do not know, but it saddens me...

Rain was turning the streets from dust to mud as the afternoon wound down toward night. Along the streets, lamps were being lit early to stave off the coming darkness as the first storm of autumn whipped over the hills.

Madelaine sat at her desk, busying herself with writing, when she heard the knocker on the front door. She looked up, annoyed at the interruption, recalling that Olga had taken the evening off. Clicking her tongue impatiently, Madelaine blotted the half-finished page and reached to pull a vast woolen shawl around her shoulders before hurrying to the front of the house to answer the urgent summons.

"Madelaine," said William Tecumseh Sherman as the door swung open. He was wet and bedraggled, his hair quenched of fire and rain-slicked to his skull. He glanced over his shoulder at the street. "May I come in? Will you let me?"

"Tecumseh," said Madelaine, holding the door wider. "Welcome."

His head bowed, he hesitated, and asked in a whisper, "You are willing to speak to me? After my inexcusable behavior?"

Perplexed, Madelaine stepped aside to admit him. "Certainly. Come in. You have done nothing that would keep me from knowing you. What do you want?" It was the only question that came clearly to mind, and it was out before she could soften or modify it in any way.

He pressed the door closed quickly. "I don't think anyone saw me." he said cautiously.

"Possibly not," said Madelaine, her bafflement increasing as she looked at him. "You are soaked to the skin."

"It doesn't matter," he said, squaring his shoulders and daring to look directly into her violet eyes. "I have been a fool and a coward, and I wouldn't blame you if you tossed me out on my ass."

Had she truly been as young as she looked, Madelaine might have taken advantage of the offer; as it was, she shook her head. "No, I won't do that. But I have a few questions I hope you will answer." She indicated the way to the parlor.

"Thank you, Madame," he said with unwonted humility. He turned and locked the door himself, leaning against it as if he had been pursued by the hounds of hell. "Let me say what I must, Madelaine; if you stop me, my courage may fail me, and then I will be thrice-damned." He looked directly at her, keeping his voice quite low. "I have chastised myself every day for not coming to you, and with every passing day it grew more difficult to act at all. I have all but convinced myself that you do not wish to see me because of my cravenness. So I must come to you now, or mire hopelessly in my own inaction. Poor Hamlet had to bear the same trouble, in his way; I don't think I ever grasped the full scope of his predicament until now." He passed his hand over his eyes. "I'm mauling. Forgive me; I don't want to do that." He straightened up and moved a few steps to stand directly in front of her. "I'm no stranger to suffering. I have not yet fought a war, but I have seen men fall of fatal wounds, in Seminole ambushes, and I have

held my comrades while they bled to death so that they would not be wholly alone."

"What has that to do with you and me?" Madelaine asked, growing confused.

"Let me continue," he said forcefully. "There are things I should have said to you days ago."

She realized now how determined he was. "If you think it is necessary, go on."

Sherman took a stance as if to fend off attack. "You would think that one who is... or, rather, has been a soldier would not have such weakness." He held up his hands to stop any protests she might make. Now he looked away, unwilling to let Madelaine see the shine of tears in his eyes.

"Tecumseh..." Madelaine said gently, searching for a phrase to end his self-condemnation.

He fixed her with his gaze, determined to admit his faults. "You have been so self-possessed, that I—"

"I may appear that way to you, but I am far from feeling so, you may believe," she said, hoping to turn him away from further abasement. "You have no reason to cast me in such an angelic role."

"You conduct yourself like a good officer, Madelaine." This was the highest praise he could give her.

"If that is true and useful, then it pleases me you think so." She tried to smile and nearly succeeded. "Well, I will consider myself fortunate that I have some poise, and will tell you I am grateful to you for holding it in high regard. Let me get you a cup of coffee, or something to eat."

"No," he insisted. "I am not finished, and I am not hungry." He put his hands together so that he would not be tempted to reach out for her. "It is inexcusable of me not to offer you any succor I can provide. My only excuse is that I am filled with anxiety about my children, and so have kept close to them for these past several days, for with their mother away, they are— You cannot blame me more than I blame myself."

"Doubtless," she said dryly.

"I am sorry I deserted you." He faltered, struggling to finish. "I am... tremendously proud of you."

It would have been easy to give him a facile answer, Madelaine realized; it would also shut him away from her as no barred door could do. She considered her response carefully. "I know how hard it is to say these things to me."

"As it should be," he agreed in self-disgust.

"The more so because you have taken all the responsibility upon yourself, as if you were the only person who might protect me," said Madelaine, her understanding of him making this a precarious revelation.

"But I am... your lover," he protested. "You yourself say there is a bond between us."

"And so there is," she said, "which is why I do not hold you in the contempt you dread and hope I might. My sensibilities are not so delicate that I must have constant reassurance for my—"

His supplication gave way to aggravation. "For heaven's sake, Madame, get angry with me. Denounce me for my desertion. Rail at me for not coming to you before now. Tell me what a poltroon you think I am."

"But I don't wish to do any of those things," she said reasonably as she attempted to move nearer to him without upsetting him. "I think you are what you say you are—a father who is worried about his family."

He nodded, the first dawning of hope in his steel-colored eyes. "There is some truth in that."

"The more so because you have castigated yourself for things I have not held against you. The accusations you make against yourself are of your own creation, not mine. I do not hold you to the account you hold yourself. And just as well, given the catalogue of offenses you have conjured for yourself." She went and stood next to him, not quite touching him. "You have assumed I would not recognize your desire to protect your family, and would expect you to devote yourself to me."

"As I should have done," he interjected harshly.

"You may think so; I do not." She put her hand on his shoulder, noticing again how wet he was, then looked up into his face. "Tecumseh, listen to me: I will not deny that I would like to have you here with me, for I would."

"It would be poor recompense to tarnish your reputation." He put his hand over hers where it rested on his shoulder. "I am taking a chance coming here now. Your housekeeper might—"

"My housekeeper will not be back until late tonight. I have told her she need not look in on me; she may go directly to her apartment and retire. My man-of-all-work is dining with his cousin's family." She smiled at him.

He did not return the smile. "You mean they left you alone?" he demanded. "What kind of servants do you have, Madame, that they leave you by yourself?"

"I have servants who do as I instruct them." Now Made-laine grew impatient. "What nonsense you talk, Tecumseh," she said with asperity. "You would think I am a hothouse flower, incapable of fending for myself, when you should realize I have managed on my own for decades."

"Visiting Indians," he said, determined to make his point.

"Among others," she responded, refusing to be dragged into yet another dispute with him.

"Oh, yes; those travels in Egypt," he grumbled. "Hard going, no doubt."

"They were," she said. "Some of the time. The expedition was a small one, and we were four hundred miles up the Nile." She recalled the endless heat and sand; she remembered the Nile at flood, and the profusion of insects and vermin that came with the water; she saw the faces of Falke and Trow-bridge and the Coptic monk Erai Quran, and the death of Professor Baudilet.

"What is it?" Sherman asked, reading something of her memories in her face. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she said. "It's all in the past, all behind me." She shook off the hold of the memories and made herself pay closer attention to him. "Your hand is like ice," she said. "You're wet to the skin. You may not want any food, but you need to get warm and clean once again."

"It's not important," he claimed.

"It is if you are taken ill because of it," she said briskly, and slipped her hand from under his, but only to seize it and lead him through the gloom of her house to the curtained alcove off the kitchen where her bathtub was kept. "I will start heating water right now," she declared as she went to the stove, opened the tinderbox, and stirred the embers to life. She pulled two split logs of wood from the box near the stove and put them, one on top of the other, on the glowing coals. "This will be hot shortly, the kitchen will be warm, and your bath will be ready in a half hour." She paused to hold out her hand to him again. "Do this for me, Tecumseh."

Sherman regarded her tenderly. "A bath. I wish I could stay for it," he said in a rueful voice, his fingers lacing through hers.

"Do you tell me you will not?" she asked.

"I fear I must," he said by way of apology.

She closed the stove grate and put her hands on her hips. "And why can't you? And no farragoes, please, about my reputation. No one saw you come, and only I know you are here."

He looked somber. "My children are—"

"Your nurse is more than competent to care for them," said Madelaine, who had met the woman several times and had been impressed with her reliability. "And don't tell me you have never got home later than expected."

"But—" he began, only to be cut short.

"You need to get warm and dry before venturing out into that weather; I will supply you with an oilskin against it. You would tell me the same if I had paid you a visit, and well you know it, you need not bother to say otherwise." She stared at him, waiting for his answer.

"What would be the point?" Sherman said. "You wouldn't believe me if I did. And neither would I."

"Good; at least you admit that much: we make progress," said Madelaine as she lifted the side of the curtain and took the first of four large pots from the shelf next to the bathtub. She carried this to the pump at the sink and began to work the handle to fill the pot.

"You're never going to be able to lift that," said Sherman, reaching out to heft it for her. "Let me."

It was tempting to let him take the pot, but Madelaine kept her hold on the two handles and hoisted the eight-gallon pot from the sink to the stove without effort. "Unnecessary; I can do it, thank you. I told you those of my blood acquire extra strength; this pot is a minor thing," she said, unwilling to permit him to claim otherwise, even if there were no reason for it other than good manners.

"But it isn't fitting," Sherman protested as Madelaine reached for the second pot. "No, Madelaine. No, I can't allow it. You should not have to do such menial work, not while I am here to help you."

"Why not?" Madelaine asked, setting the pot in the deep sink and starting to work the pump handle once again. "What is the vice in menial work that you think I should disdain it? Why should anyone feel shame, doing necessary work? Don't tell me you never filled a pot, or carried one, before now?"

"Of course I've done both," he blustered. "That's different."

"Because you did it?" Madelaine guessed, and shook her head. "Where did you learn such intolerance?"

He glared. "It is what everyone expects of well-bred men and women."

"Isn't that a bit... extreme?" Madelaine asked. "To require well-bred men and women to become dependent puppets requiring the labor of servants to make their way in the world?"

He did not answer her question, and stood, with an expression of distant blankness, staring at the two windows at the rear of the kitchen. The anemic light filtering into the room banished most of the colors, turning the figures of both Sherman and Madelaine a ghostly, washed-out shade of sepia with pale beige faces. As if to be rid of this perception, Sherman shook himself and found the nearest kitchen lamp and a

box of lucifers to go with it. As the flame rose, the kitchen seemed to warm with the return of color. "There. That should make your task easier."

Madelaine did not point out that the increasing dusk made little difference to her; she saw in darkness almost as well as she saw in moderate light. Instead, she nodded her thanks and carried the second pot to the stove while Sherman took the third from the shelf and set it in the sink under the pump, and started to ply the handle with vigor. "The wood is catching; that will make everything more comfortable," she remarked as she glanced at the tinderbox of the stove.

Sherman continued to fill the third pot of water, then carried it to the stove, setting it in place with care. "Since you are determined to do this, I suppose I ought to lend my assistance."

"If you like," said Madelaine, handing him the fourth pot and saying, "Just fill it with water." She then tugged the curtain aside so that the bath alcove was completely open, revealing the large enameled-copper tub and a wall of shelves where the various requirements for bathing were placed. "I have set out bath salts, if you want them. And I have a razor and shaving supplies, if you need them."

"You are always prepared," he said, intending it as a complaint, but making it into a compliment. "Yes, I will rid myself of this stubble," he said, and went on slyly, "or I might have to explain where all the scratches on your body came from. Since you insist on doing this, I shall do it properly. Perhaps I should grow a beard again."

Madelaine could not stop herself from smiling, knowing now that he would remain with her for several hours, if not all night. The weight of his absence lifted from her and she said playfully, "In fact, given the circumstances, shaving would be a prudent thing to do."

"Prudent," he repeated ironically. "What a word to use for anything pertaining to you and me, Madelaine."

"All the more reason it is necessary," she said, satisfying herself that the tub would be ready when the water was hot. She set out two large sponges and a rough washing cloth on the rack next to the tub, and then pulled out a brass towel rack. "I'll get a robe for you from the linen closet."

He extended his arms to block her progress and pulled her to him, bending to kiss her as his embrace enfolded her.

She shifted against his arm, then gave herself over to his caresses as if she had never before experienced them. Finally when she could speak at all, she said softly to him, "Tecumseh, I have no wish to compel you to do anything that displeases you."

"I know that," he said indulgently as he stroked her breasts through her clothes.

"You're distracting me," she objected without any determination to stop him.

"Good," he approved. "I intend to." His kiss was light and long, full of suggestions that left both of them breathless. "Why don't you let me help you out of that rig you've got on?"

"Tecumseh," she said again, making a last-ditch effort to keep from giving in to him completely. "You will not be angry, will you? For my turning you from your purpose?"

"Why should I be angry?" He kissed the corner of her mouth. "And what purpose do you mean? I only wanted to apologize for failing you."

"You mean you had not resolved to break off with me?" she asked.

He stared at her, a hint of defiance in his answer. "After what I have done, I am shocked that *you* are not angry with *me*." He reached up and pulled the long pins from the neat bun at the back of her neck. "That's better," he said as he loosened her hair with his fingers.

"I could not be angry with you, not when I have tasted your blood," she said.

"That again," he muttered; he became patiently courteous, all but bowing to her. "And why is that, Madame Vampire?"

"Because I know you, and I know what you are." She looked up at him, and read vexation in his eyes. "I know that you despise weakness, especially in yourself, and you often regard your feelings for me as weakness."

He looked at her in amazement. "How the devil—?"

"It is your nature," Madelaine said swiftly. "It is intrinsic to your soul. You have decided that if you love me, you are weakened. I don't know how to make you see that loving is strength, not weakness—that it takes courage to love because love's risk is so great."

Sherman shook his head, scowling down at her. "If I were not married, what you tell me might be true, for there truly are risks in loving. But as I have a wife, and you, my dear, are not she, I must look upon this as an indulgence."

"But you don't," she said softly, "look upon this as an indulgence."

The light in his eyes warmed and gentled, and he drew her tightly against him. "No, I don't."

This time their kiss was deep, passionate, and long; it was the strangest thing. Madelaine thought in a remote part of her mind, but it was as if Sherman wanted to absorb her into himself, to pull her into him with all the intensity of appetite. Then she let all thought go and gave herself over to the desire he ignited in her.

When they broke apart, Sherman had to steady himself against the table, laughing a little with shy embarrassment. "Sorry. That was clumsy of me. I was... You made me dizzy."

"You weren't paying attention," said Madelaine as she ran her hands under the lapels of his jacket and peeled it off him.

He did not protest this, but set to unfastening his waistcoat and the shirt beneath it, working so precipitously that he got the shirt tangled in his suspenders and had to let Madelaine disengage them for him, which she did merrily. "It isn't funny," he grumbled.

"If you say not," she told him with a smile that pierced his heart.

He caressed her hair as she continued to unfasten his clothing, and said dreamily. "If I were truly a brave man, I would take you and my children, and we would sail away to the Sandwich Islands together, and live there, the world well lost. But I'm not that brave."

She interrupted her task and said somberly, "You would come to hate me within a year or two, for making you forsake your honor."

"But you *don't* ask that," he said, holding her face in his hands and scrutinizing her features.

"In time you would persuade yourself I had," she said with grim certainty. "And I am not brave enough to

sustain your loathing."

"How could I do that?" He asked her, marveling at the forthrightness she displayed in the face of his examination.

"You would," she said, and moved back to let him step out of his trousers. "I will fill the tub for you; the water is nearly warm enough." She could see the first wisps of steam rising from the large pots. "Then you will bathe and we will have time together." She reached for the pot holders and lifted the first of the vessels from the stove. As she emptied it into the bathtub, a warm cloud rose, made tangy by bath salts.

Sherman was down to his underwear and shoes; he started to protest her labors, but stopped and offered, "Shall I help you out of your clothes, as well?"

Madelaine emptied the second pot, "No. I will do that once you are in the bath," she assured him.

"Where I can watch," he ventured.

"Of course." By the time she had poured the contents of the third pot into the tub, Sherman was naked and shivering. "Hurry. Get in," she said, gathering up his clothes and setting them out on the butcher's block to dry.

"It feels so good it hurts," Sherman sighed as he sank into the water, taking the sponge and soap from the stand beside the tub.

"Then enjoy it," said Madelaine, reaching to release the fastenings of her bodice as she went toward the bathtub.

San Francisco, 8 September,

I am almost finished with my chapter on the Utes, which pleases me tremendously. I tell myself I have captured the spirit of their legends and other teachings clearly enough so that the most opinionated of university-bound scholars cannot misinterpret what I have said. But

I know such lucidity is impossible, so I must be content to accept my satisfaction as sufficient to the task.

Tecumseh has been with me for five nights out of the last ten, and he alternates between anguish at his lax-ness and joy for our passion. When he is not berating himself, he tells me he has never been so moved before, that I have revealed pleasures and gratification that he thought did not exist except between the covers of novels. But this rapture is always accompanied by the warning that he will not shame his wife any more than he has done already, and that he will never leave his children. He refuses to be convinced that I do not wish him to run off with me, and nothing I have said to the contrary has made any lasting impression on him.

Tomorrow I go to an afternoon party given by Mr. Folsom to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the marriage of Captain and Mrs. Kent—or so reads the invitation that was delivered to me last week. Baron deStoeckl has offered to be my escort, and I suppose I will accept...

Fanny Kent was radiant in a flounced gown of peach-colored tarlatan over petticoats *a la Duchesse*; her eardrops were baroque pearls surmounted by rubies, and she wore an extravagant and hideous necklace of diamonds and rubies, the gift her husband had given her for this occasion. She took advantage of every opportunity to show off these splendid presents, coquetting prettily for all those who were willing to compliment her.

Beside her, Captain Kent was in a claw-tail coat of dark-blue superfine over a waistcoat of embroidered white satin. He was beaming with pride as he lifted his champagne glass to his wife and thanked her for "the ten happiest years of my life." He was delighted by the applause that followed.

"I won't bother to bring you wine," the Russian Baron whispered to Madelaine after they had greeted their host. "But excuse me if I get some for myself."

"Please do," said Madelaine, returning the wave Fanny Kent gave her. "You do not have to wait upon me, Baron."

"You are gracious, as always," said deStoeckl, and went off to have some of the champagne.

Madelaine had no desire to go sit with the widows and dowagers in the kiosk, nor did she want to join the younger wives, all of whom seemed to spend their time talking about the unreliability of servants, the precocity of their children, and the ambitions they had for their husbands. She would have nothing to contribute to their conversation, so instead, she went to where a new bed of flowers had been planted; she occupied her time identifying the plants, her thoughts faintly distracted by the realization that she would have to make more of the compounds Saint-Germain had taught her to concoct nearly a century ago; she did not hear Fanny Kent's light, tripping step behind her.

"Oh, Madame de Montalia," she enthused, prettily half turning so that the tiers of her skirt fluttered becomingly around her. "I was so happy to see you arrive with Baron deStoeckl."

"Why is that?" Madelaine asked, adding. "My felicitations on your anniversary. May all those to come be as happy."

"Thank you," said Fanny, a smug hint of a smile showing her delight in this occasion. "I am a fortunate woman; my husband is devoted to me."

"Yes, you are fortunate," said Madelaine. "The more so that you are fond of him."

Fanny clasped her hand to her throat, touching her new necklace. "Dear me, yes. I have seen marriages—well, we all have—where the partners do not suit, and one is forever trapped trying to win the other, with flattery and gifts and other signs of affection that gain nothing but aggravation. The greater the effort, the greater the failure in those sad cases. Fortunately, I am not of their number."

"Which must please all your friends," said Madelaine, thinking that festive small talk had not changed appreciably in the one hundred thirty years she had been alive. "I see the Captain has given you a wonderful remembrance."

"So he has," she preened. "How good of you to notice." She looked around, then moved a step nearer to Madelaine. "I mentioned Baron deStoeckl just now, in the hope that there might be... an interesting announcement from Mm?"

Madelaine realized at once what Fanny sought to know; she chuckled. "Do not let his affianced bride hear you say that, or she will never lend me his escort again."

Fanny's face wilted. "Oh. An affianced bride, you say?"

"So he has informed me," said Madelaine, her good humor unaltered. "Dear Mrs. Kent, you must know that even with your best efforts, few of us can become as happy as you are with your Captain. Although I appreciate your wish to see me thus." She regarded Fanny, trying not to lose patience with her.

"Yes," said Fanny naively. "It is true that happiness like ours is rare. But I think it is necessary for a

woman to have a husband in this world. Life is quite impossible without one." Impulsively she put her hand on Madelaine's arm. "And I *hate* to see you so alone."

"I deal well enough with my single condition," said Madelaine, knowing that Fanny intended the best for her, but offended by the intrusion in spite of her intuition.

"But the *future*; think of the future, Madame." Her pretty face was now puckered with distress. "What will become of you? I cannot bear to think of it, not when I know you to be a prize any man would be glad to win."

"Please, Mrs. Kent," Madelaine said, her manner less conciliating than before, "do not think that you must make arrangements for me. I have no wish to be any man's prize. I am capable of caring for myself; I value your interest as I ought, but I must ask you not to pursue the matter."

Fanny dabbed a tear from her eye with her lace handkerchief. "If you insist, I will refrain, but why I should, I cannot grasp. Surely you must know that we all wish you well. Nothing would please us more than to see you well situated." She lowered her eyes to the flower beds. "This will be so splendid next spring. Don't you look forward to seeing it?"

"Yes," Madelaine answered, "and I regret that I will no longer be in San Francisco when they bloom."

Fanny's expression changed to shock. "What are you saying, Madame?"

"Only that my purpose for being in your country will take me away from here before much more time goes by; I will be leaving soon, ahead of winter setting in, for I do not like hazardous travel," said Madelaine, trying to make these statements calmly so that Fanny would not be too inquisitive about her plans.

"Gracious," said Fanny, nonplussed to the point of brief silence. "What purpose is that, Madame de Montalia?"

"I am making a study of America; the United States are part of my subjects." It was not a lie, Madelaine reminded herself, though it was also not quite the truth.

"But why would you want to do that?" Fanny marveled. "Why should a well-born woman like you undertake so arduous a task?"

"Curiosity," said Madelaine. "Women are supposed to be more curious than men, aren't we?"

"Well, I suppose so," said Fanny dubiously, then turned as she heard her name called. She waved in response, then looked guiltily at Madelaine. "Oh, dear. You must excuse me, Madame. My husband needs me."

"By all means," said Madelaine, and went back to her perusal of the flower beds. But she could not bring herself to concentrate on what she saw now, for Fanny Kent's well-meaning interference niggled at the back of her thoughts, and she remembered how Saint-Germain had cautioned her against making herself too noticeable in society. At the time, she had thought the advice too protective, but now she could perceive the reason for his warning, and she tried to think how best to undo the damage she had done.

A short while later, Baron deStoeckl found her once more. He carried a glass of champagne, and he smiled broadly, his whole manner amiable, his eyes shrewd. As usual, he addressed her in French. "How are you faring, Madame?"

"Well enough," she said, taking care not to appear too interested in him. "Fanny Kent was hoping she

could make a match of us."

Baron deStoeckl chuckled. "And did you tell her of my promised bride at home?"

"Yes," said Madelaine. "I think she was more disappointed than shocked."

He strolled along beside her, content to say little as they went. Finally, as he reached the foot of the garden, he remarked, "I hope you will not allow yourself to worry about what she said to you."

"It is not my intention," said Madelaine, trying to sound unconcerned, and went on impulsively, "but it galls me to think I have been foolish enough to expose myself to her..."

"Scrutiny?" suggested deStoeckl when Madelaine did not go on.

"Something of the sort," she admitted. "Though that may be too strong a word."

They started back to where most of the guests were gathered. DeStoeckl gestured to indicate the expansive garden. "You know, at the rate this city is growing, holdings of this size will soon vanish. Ask William what it was like when he was in California the first time. It was nothing like the place you see now. Once the Rush was on, San Francisco mushroomed. And it is mushrooming still." He grinned impishly. "William learned a great deal then, and it has stood him in good stead now. He claims that at the time, he had other things on his mind. Ask him why they called Monterey Bay 'Sherman's Punch Bowl,' six years ago."

"You may be right about the city," she said with verve, not wanting to be pulled into talking about Sherman. "Though it would be a pity to lose this garden."

"The price of land is rising steadily," deStoeckl reminded her. "And buildings are going up everywhere. I venture to guess that one day the city will stretch from the Bay to the Pacific itself." He saw the mayor signal to him. "I will return later," he said as he went to answer the summons.

It was too early to leave the party, but Madelaine wanted some relief from it. She went into the house and looked about for the library; the chance to read would diminish her growing anxiety.

There was no library, only two small shelves of books in the withdrawing room. With a sigh, she resigned herself to the limited fare, and taking a copy of *Bleak House* from the top shelf, sat down to read, deciding she would discover at last what it was Sherman so admired in Dickens.

"I wondered what had become of you," said a voice from the door, a young importer stood there, smiling fatuously at Madelaine. "No fair, you running off the way you did."

"It is too bright in the garden; I fear I do poorly in such bright sun," she said, noticing the fellow looked a bit flushed. "So do you, it would seem."

"The sun doesn't bother me," he boasted and held up his glass in a toast to her. "But not looking at you does. You're better than the sun any day of the week."

This flattery was more alarming than complimenting; Madelaine began to wonder if the high color in the young man's face did not result from too much champagne rather than too much sun; there was a certain glaze to his eyes that suggested it. A quiver of consternation went through her as she recalled other unwelcome encounters: Alain Baudilet in Omats' garden, Gerard le Mat on the road to her estate in Provence, Ralph Whitestone in her box after *The Duchess of Malfi*. "Thank you for the pretty words," she said automatically, continuing with great deliberation. "I think, perhaps, it is time to rejoin the others."

The young man gave her a lupine grin. "Not so fast. I thought we could have a little... talk on our own."

"Did you?" Madelaine closed the novel and put it back into its place on the shelf. "I fear you were mistaken." She rose and started toward the door, not so quickly that she would seem to confront the young man. With all the composure she could muster, she said, "Will you let me by?"

He extended his arm to block the door. "I don't think so. Not yet."

"Mr..." She could not bring his name to mind; it was something simple, uncomplicated, but not as obvious as Smith. She maintained her outward equanimity. "There is no reason to do this."

"There's plenty of reason," said the intruder, enjoying his position of advantage. "And a Frenchwoman should not need to be told what it is."

Madelaine frowned. She could always scream, but that would defeat the whole purpose of her withdrawal from the garden—to remove herself from observation and the occasion for gossip. "I don't think you want to do this," she began reasonably. "Please stand aside." She thought she sounded like a schoolmistress with a recalcitrant pupil.

"Not on your Me," the young man said, swaying toward her. "Not while I have this chance." He drank the last of the champagne in his glass, tossed it away without paying any notice to its shattering, then reached out for her.

Madelaine sought to get around him and was about to reach for something she could use as a weapon when Sherman abruptly forced his way into the withdrawing room, grabbing the young man by the front of his shirt to back him up against the wall, leaning hard on him, pinning him to the wain-scoting. "You didn't hear die lady, sir. She asked you to step aside."

The young man blanched and sweat broke out on his forehead. "I... I..."

"And you will do it, won't you?" Sherman demanded through clenched teeth.

"I..." Though bulkier than Sherman, the young man was terrified, and he squirmed in an attempt to escape; Sherman leaned harder. "Oh, God."

The relief and gratitude that had filled Madelaine a moment before ..vanished in a wash of exasperation. "Mr. Sherman," she said crisply, "I think he has taken your meaning."

Sherman kept his relentless grip on the young man. "You will apologize to the lady, sir," he ordered.

"I... Sorry. I... didn't mean..." He stopped as Sherman released his hold and moved back. "I... just a mistake. Never meant anything... untoward. Upon my word, Madame." He was shaking and kept glancing quickly at Sherman, then at the windows, anything to avoid looking directly at Madelaine for fear of the red-haired banker's wrath.

"And because it was a mistake, you will say nothing to anyone, will you?" Sherman pursued, giving the fellow no chance to capitalize on his gaffe through boasting or smugness.

"No. No. I won't. Ever." With that, he bolted from the room. His hasty, uneven footsteps were loud.

The withdrawing room was still, neither Madelaine nor Sherman being willing to speak first. She relented before he did. "Mr. Sherman. I didn't know you were here."

"I arrived not long after you did," he said, keeping his distance.

She had nothing to say to that. "How did you happen to follow that young man in here?"

"Winters? I heard him boast that he would get a better taste of France than mere champagne. When I saw him come into the house, I followed; I had an idea he might attempt something of this sort." He locked eyes with her. "I'm sorry I was right. I would not have you subjected to... such things for... anything."

"Thanks to your intervention, I wasn't," she said bluntly, and could read shock in his face. "His intentions were—"

"If he had touched you, I would have killed him," said Sherman with quiet certainty.

She achieved a rallying tone. "Now that *would* have been a grand gesture. And neither of our reputations would survive it, so it is just as well you arrived when you did." She managed to keep her hands from shaking as she slipped out the door. "Speaking of reputations, it might be wise if we did not leave this room at the same time. I will go back to the garden now; follow when you think best."

He nodded, and before she could turn away, he blew her a kiss.

San Francisco, 7 October,

How still it is this evening. After a week of wind and fog, it has turned bright and hot. I was surprised at this sudden change, coming when it does in the year, though I now understand it is not unusual to this region. I was told that this is one of the reasons vintners have been flocking to the inland valleys north of here, where they can plant vines with a reasonable prospect of a long, warm growing season...

It is arranged that we will depart no later than 10 October, no matter what the weather. It is tempting to delay, but I must not, for my own sake as well as Tecumseh's...

"I know it is what must be done, and I hate it," Sherman whispered, his hand tangled in her hair, his leg between hers, his body replete, tired, and yet unwilling to sleep; it was after midnight, and the city beyond the house on Franklin Street was quiet.

Madelaine shifted her position so that she could lift herself up enough to look into his face. "I will miss you. Tecumseh."

"I will miss you, too, and be damned for it," he said softly, the usual tension gone out of his features, making him look younger than he was. The hand in her hair moved down to brush her face lightly, and he stared into her eyes, wanting to pierce more than the night. "I should never have let myself become..." He drew her down to kiss her search-ingly.

She gave herself over to his mouth, opening herself to his growing renewed need, lying back as he made his way down her body as if by passion alone he could take the whole of her into himself. As he moved between her thighs, he gave a harsh sigh, then lowered his head. Madelaine caught her fingers in his fine red hair. "What's the matter?" she asked, sensing the return of his ambivalence.

He raised his eyes enough to meet hers. "It has nothing to do with you," he told her, touching the soft, hidden folds of flesh and relishing the shiver that went through her.

"If it impairs our loving, it has something to do with me," she said as gently as she could.

"Later," he muttered.

"Now," she insisted, concern more than determination coloring her inflection.

"Very well," he said, and brought his elbows under his chest so that he could more easily look at her without moving from his place. "Since I cannot truly grasp the enormity of your leaving, I was thinking that this is one—one of many—delights I will lose with you. If I could contain myself, I would do this for hours, to have the pleasure of your transports." He laughed once, chagrined. "But I am not patient enough for that, and so I have to make the most of our desires and be content with memories."

Madelaine reached down and stroked his shoulder. "You are a generous lover, Tecumseh, more than you know, and you have learned..."

"To be less precipitous?" he ventured. "To increase our gratification by postponing its fulfillment?"

She touched his neck, feeling the strong pulse there. "It grieves me that you cannot be as generous in your marriage as we are together."

To his acute discomfort, he blushed. "Not all women have the capacity to enjoy these things." He rested one hand on her thigh, caressing her with delicious languor. "And many who claim to be suspect, since it is their profession to please men." He moved to adjust himself more comfortably between her legs, saying, "If I had been less infatuated, less off guard, I would have kept away from you, arranged things with one of the whorehouses for discreet..."

"Servicing," Madelaine supplied for him. "If that was your only alternative to me, then I am gratified your infatuation was—"

He stopped her. "It isn't infatuation," he said in a flat tone. "And you know it."

She looked at him, deep into his steel-colored eyes. "I know."

This time when he sighed, he slipped away from her, ending up at the foot of the bed, naked and cross-legged, with a mess of sheets in his lap. "I should not have permitted this to happen. My life ought to be better ordered than that. But what proof am I against you—you, with a face filled with light, and all the sweet delirium of the world in your body. No wonder I could not reason myself out of my fascination. It is mad of me to love you."

They were both silent for a short while, then Madelaine shivered and sat up, facing him down the length of the bed. "I cannot help but love you, madness or not."

"Because it is your nature," he said, repeating what she had told him so often. "Because you have tasted my blood."

"Yes," she said, trying not to fear his response.

"Yes," he echoed, wanting it to be an accusation and hearing himself make the single word a vow.

"And you accept it." She felt a surge of rapture go through her as no physical act would bring. That he finally recognized the bond between them! She would have laughed with utter joy had she not understood that would offend him.

"How can I not?" he asked in mock capitulation.

Certain his resistance was crumbling, she went to him in a single, sinuous motion, sweeping the sheets and comforter aside; she would not let him turn away from her. "Then tonight must stand for all the nights to come that we will not share, Tecumseh; why waste it in anticipating our separation when we may yet be

together for a few hours more?"

It was more than he could bear, having her so close. With a sound that was not quite a groan, he reached out and pulled her tightly to him, his carnality igniting afresh as he embraced her. At last he took her firmly by the shoulders and held her back from him. "How can you endure parting?" There was pain in his voice and his body was taut.

"I can because I must," she answered, not resisting him.

"Those of my blood do more parting than anything else. Or at least it seems that way to me."

"And when you have gone, there will be others, won't there?" He meant this to hurt; his long fingers tightened on her shoulders.

"Yes. There will." She looked directly at him, unflinching in the face of his accusation. "As you will have your wife, and those women you seek out for... didn't you call it necessity and amusement?"

He released his hold on her and looked away. "You are right, Madelaine; I have no basis for complaint. I, after all, made the conditions of our liaison: how ill-mannered of me to protest them now."

She took his hand. "Stop berating yourself," she said in discomfiture. "If you must know, I find your jealousy unrealistic but... flattering."

"I am not jealous." In spite of his forbidding demeanor, he could not stop a quick burst of rueful laughter. "Fine pair we are," he told her at last. "It would serve us both right if we lost the whole night in bickering."

"If that would make parting easier, then—" she offered, only to be cut off by his lips opening hers.

He seemed determined to press the limits of their passion, for he went at her body as if it were territory to be won. He lavished attention on her face and mouth, on the curve of her neck and the swell of her breasts, using every nuance of excitation he knew to evoke a desire in her as intense as his own, all the while reveling in her tantalizing ministrations and ecstatic responses to the onslaught of his relentless fervor; it was an act of flagrant, erotic idolatry. "Now. Let me have. All of you," he whispered to her as he drew her onto his lap, guiding her legs around him, shuddering in anticipation as she sheathed him deep inside her. His kiss was as long and profound as his flesh was frenzied; while she nuzzled his throat, he clasped her as if to brand her body with his image until their spasms passed.

They were quiet together for some undefined time afterward, neither wanting to make the first move that would break them apart. Then he shifted, changing how he held her. "My foot's falling asleep," he apologized.

"Does it hurt?" Madelaine asked, moving off his lap entirely. In the predawn umber gloom her bedroom looked more like a sketch in charcoal than a real place; no birds yet announced the coming of the October sun, but Madelaine saw it heralded by more than the muting of darkness.

"No, it tingles," he said, wrapping his arm around her shoulder. As he pulled her close, he said, as he flipped his foot to restore circulation, "What a prosaic thing to happen."

"It might have been a leg cramp," said Madelaine as levelly as she could; she was still filled with the glory of their consummation.

"*That* would be a different matter, wouldn't it?" He chuckled once.

She turned her head and kissed the lobe of his ear. "Oh, entirely."

He ran his hand down her neck to her breast, cupping it and brushing her nipple with his thumb. "I hope you won't have bruises."

"No," she said. "I won't."

"Another of the things those of your blood don't do?" he asked deliberately lightly. "As you do not eat or weep?"

"Yes," she said quietly, and kissed the angle of his jaw where it met his neck.

"Is it difficult, not to eat or weep?" he asked, still holding on to her.

"Occasionally," she admitted, aware that she would have welcomed the release that weeping would bring her upon parting. She was about to move away from him when he tightened his arm, pulling her back close to him.

"Oh, God, Madelaine: I cannot give you up. I must, but I cannot." This was wrung from him, a cry of such utter despair that she was rendered still by its intensity.

"I know," she said, moved by his anguish; she sought to find some consolation to offer him but could think of nothing.

His eyes were frenzied as he pulled her around to face him. "I will not let this end. If I took you with me, if we left right now, we might be anywhere in the world in a month."

"If that is what you want, Tecumseh, then I will do it," she said, amazed at how deeply she meant what she said.

"It is, it is," he insisted. "It would be the joy of my life to have you at my side. Think of all the places we might go, and all the time we would have." He tried to smile, but succeeded only in stretching his lips over his teeth.

"That might not be the advantage you assume it would be," said Madelaine, a sadness coming over her that surprised her more than it surprised him. "You would grow old and I would not. You might not mind this year, or next year, but in time it would vex you. To say nothing as to what your children would think."

He stared at her. "My children?"

"Well, you would not leave them behind, would you?" she asked reasonably, and knowing what his answer would be.

"No," he admitted after a moment. "I could not do that."

Madelaine kept on. "They would see what you would see: they would grow older and I would not."

He did his best to deny what she told him. "If I could have you all to myself, then I would be happy, no matter what became of us. Or what my children might suspect."

"And how long would you be content?" Madelaine bent to kiss the fingers of his hand on her shoulder. "Even with your children along?"

"I would be thankful to the end of my days," he said with profound conviction.

"Do you think so?" Her voice was soft and poignant. "You tell me this is how you feel, but it is not. You would not like to face age as the living do, while I would hardly change at all."

"I wish you wouldn't say it that way," he protested.

"How would you like me to say it?" she challenged. "You would grow old, and I would appear not to. Vampires age very, very slowly. I have hardly changed in the last century. How would you—"

"I would accept it," he insisted, his fingers digging into her flesh, driven by the force of his emotions. "I might not like it, but I would be willing to accept it."

"Would you? What of the lovers I would have?" She made her question blunt deliberately.

"You wouldn't need them. You would have me," he told her firmly.

"For a time, perhaps," she responded, continuing with great care, "but I would need to find others, or you would soon be exhausted and come to my life." This was not quite the truth, but it was near enough that she knew she had to make him aware of what was likely to happen.

"Then we would carry on in vampire fashion," he said, his emphatic tone shoring up any doubts that might trouble him.

"But vampires cannot be lovers of vampires," she said, and felt him go still.

"And why not, pray?" His tone was harsh, sarcastic, as if he expected some self-serving answer.

"Because vampires must have life. It is the one thing we do not have to give, and the one thing we need above all others," she said quietly. "Once you come to my life, you and I will not be able to—"

"It's not true!" he exclaimed, pushing her away.

"But it is," she said.

"So I must share you or lose you," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes," she said.

"And I take it there is no alternative to this?" He reached out for her hand. "Can we not devise some means to allow us to remain together without having to become estranged?"

"We can never be estranged," Madelaine said.

"Because you have tasted my blood," he said, a wistful note creeping into his statement.

"Yes, Tecumseh; because of that."

He had a sharp retort in mind, a single, pithy remark that would show his skepticism was flourishing; the words never came. Instead, he turned, took her face in his hands and scrutinized her features, memorizing them, before he kissed her with the sudden, harsh misery of parting. As he rose abruptly from the bed, he said, "Stay there. Please, Madelaine. Don't come to the door. I won't have the courage to go if you do."

"All right," she said, watching him dress, her violet eyes filled with anguish. Only when he was ready to leave did she say to him, "You are part of me, Tecumseh. You will always be part of me."

He paused in the door but would not look around. "And you of me." He waited for her to say good-bye; when she did not, he strode out of the room and down the stairs.

San Francisco, 8 October,

Tomorrow I will be gone from this place. It is a harder parting than I would have thought possible, for I

am torn between my certainty that I must go and my reluctance to leave Tecumseh. I find his hold upon me quite astonishing, for I have been resigned from the first—or so I thought—to going before his wife returns. I had not thought I would find leaving so arduous, or the wrench of separation as painful as it is proving to be... The two buckboard wagons are ready, one carrying my books and papers and personal things, one carrying four crates of my native earth. I have bought two horses to ride, and mules to pull the wagons, and I have paid off those I have hired. There only remains the closing of my account at Lucas and Turner; I have decided to do it as I am departing tomorrow, my last stop in this city before we turn to the south-southeast. It may be that Tecumseh will not handle the matter himself, but will deputize one of his assistants to tend to the matter...

"We're sorry to see you go, Madame," said Jenkins as he held open the low gate, admitting Madelaine to the realm of desks and files.

"I am sorry to leave," said Madelaine with as much sincerity as good manners. "I have truly enjoyed my stay here."

"Yes," said Jenkins, going on a bit too smoothly. "Mr. Sherman has your account information ready, if you'll just step into his office?"

Madelaine was a bit startled to hear this. "Very well," she said, and turned to walk toward the door at the end of the aisle between the desks. She had to steel herself against seeing Sherman this last time, and she waited a long moment before she knocked on the door.

"Enter," came the crisp order.

She obeyed, making herself smile as she went up to his desk. "I've come to say good-bye, Mr. Sherman. And to pick up my account records and traveling money."

Sherman had risen, but he did not take her proffered hand; instead he rummaged through a stack of papers on his desk. "I have your account information here, Madame de Montalia, and the funds you requested," he said in a voice that did not seem to belong to him.

"Thank you," she responded.

"I wish I could persuade you to carry less gold and cash with you." Concern roughened his tone. "You are not on the boulevards of Paris, Madame, and any signs of wealth are likely to attract attention you cannot want." His face was set in hard lines, but his eyes were full of anguish.

"I know something of the dangers of travel, Mr. Sherman, although I am grateful for your warning. I will heed your admonitions to the extent that circumstances allow." How formal and stiff she sounded in her own ears; she wanted so much to weep, and could not. It would not be seemly, she told herself, even if it were possible, and added aloud, "I will take all the precautions I can."

"Yes," he said. "Be sure you keep a loaded pistol to hand at all times. If you need one, you will need it instantly."

"I'll do that," she said, delaying taking her file of material into her hands, for that would be more final than closing the door.

"You will be wise to learn as much as you can about those you hire to guide you. Many of the men in that

profession are scoundrels and not to be trusted." He spoke crisply, yet all the while his eyes revealed suffering he could not admit.

"I will be careful, Mr. Sherman," she promised him.

Sherman coughed twice, short, hard coughs that might signal an asthma attack. "Don't trouble yourself, Madame," he said brusquely, waving her away, although she had not moved. "It will pass. And I have a vial of your medicine, if it does not."

Madelaine had to stop herself from going around his desk to his side, to comfort him. "Well," she said rallying, "do not let pride keep you from using it."

"I won't," he said, and stared down at his desk in silence for several seconds, then asked, "Do you think you will ever come back to San Francisco, Madame?"

"Ever is a long time, Mr. Sherman," she pointed out. "I do not plan to now, but in time, who can tell?"

"Who, indeed," he said. "And we knew when you came that you would leave, didn't we?"

She nodded. "Soon or late, I would go."

"Off to study America," he said, trying to be jaunty; his voice cracked.

"Yes." She bit her lip to keep from saying more. With an effort, she remarked, "I suppose your children must be glad that their mother is coming home."

"Oh, yes," he said, grateful to have something safe to say. "Both of them are delighted."

"I'll think of them kindly," said Madelaine.

"You're very good." He fumbled with a square envelope, then held it out to her. "Here. I want you to have this."

"What is it?" Madelaine took the envelope cautiously, as if she expected something untoward from it.

"A sketch I did. Of you." He looked her directly in the eye, a world of longing in his gaze.

"Oh!" Madelaine said softly. "May I open it?"

"Not here, if you please," he said, his standoffishness returning. "I couldn't keep it with me, much as I wanted to. It... it is very revealing—oh, not of you, of me. If Ellen ever saw it, she—" He cleared his throat. "It is enough that one of us should have a broken heart. I will not chance giving such pain to her."

Madelaine nodded, unable to speak; she slipped the envelope into her leather portfolio which she had brought to contain her account records.

"This is too difficult," Sherman whispered as he took the file and thrust it toward her. "If you do not leave now, I don't think I will be able to let you go. And let you go I must."

"Yes," said Madelaine as she took the file and put it into the portfolio.

"And your cash and gold," he went on with ruthless practicality, handing her a heavy canvas sack with Lucas and Turner stenciled on its side. "Be careful where you stow this."

"I will," she said, and turned to leave.

"Madel—am," he said, halting her. "I wish, with all my heart, you... your stay here wasn't over."

"You're very kind, Mr. Sherman," said Madelaine, struggling to retain her composure.

"As it is," he went on as if unable to stop. "I will think of you each... often."

"And I of you," said Madelaine, wishing she could kiss him one last time and knowing she must not.

"If only you and I..." He let his words falter and stop.

Madelaine backed away, reaching behind her for the door. "Our... our friendship is not at an end simply because we part," she told him, forcing herself to speak steadily. She pulled the door open, readying herself to leave the bank.

His reply struck her with the full weight of his constrained emotions, as if he wanted to impart to her all that he could not say: "I know, Madelaine; I know."

Presidio de Santa Barbara, 14 November,

We have found an inn near the Presidio itself, and I am assured we will be safe here... This pan of California is much more Spanish than the north, more like Mexico; I suspect it is because there are fewer men willing to prospect in the deserts than in the mountains. Perhaps the hold of the Spanish landlords is stronger here than in the North, as there are fewer newcomers to challenge their rule and their Land Grants. Thanks to gold, San Francisco has become quite an eclectic place, what with miners arriving from every pan of Europe and America. But here, I am told, it is not so dramatically changed. For the most pan, the Camino Real, which our guide calls the Mission Road, is well enough maintained that we made good progress along it, and lost only one day to rain. Our average progress has been a respectable ten to twelve miles a day, although we did slow in our climb through the mountains around San Luis Obispo. Generally, however, we have traveled swiftly, and at this pace, we should reach San Diego by Christmas, from whence we will turn east.

I have sent two letters back to Tecumseh, though I have had no replies and expect none; I have not yet found a way to thank him sufficiently for the sketch he made of me and gave me the morning I left. He is right: it is too easily read for him to keep it by him, where it might be discovered and understood. In execution it is simple enough: he has drawn me seated on a fallen log, my hat in my hand, in all considerations a most innocuous pose—but there is something about it that smolders, so that I half expect the paper to burst into flame. He included a shon note which said he would have to carry my likeness burning in his heart; that is very gallant of him, as well as being very nearly accurate, if this sketch is any indication of his sentiments. I am surprised to discover how strong the bond between us is, though why I should feel so, I cannot think.

I wonder if Saint-Germain is right, and I am developing a weakness for Americans?