
Chapter 1

OCTOBER 1914, *Philadelphia*

Standing before a large window, Kara Douglas didn't see the marble balcony beyond the bedroom. The dispelling darkness of the night would have displayed dead flower gardens and trees that had lost their foliage. The fall season had arrived early with freezing temperatures.

"Why so gloomy, darling?" Matthew Douglas asked, sliding his arm around his wife's stiff shoulders.

"You promised we would only be here a month," Kara said. "We've been here four months. You promised."

"I know, darling, but I didn't expect my father's business to be in such a bad state. It won't be much longer," Matthew said, trying to soothe her worries.

"I can't stay here any longer," Kara said. Her voice broke, and she was trying to hold back the tears. "Your mother hates me, and I shouldn't have to put up with her insults. Something is wrong with her. I'm beginning to fear for my safety."

“Don’t be silly,” Matthew said dismissively. “My mother is high-strung, but she doesn’t mean any harm.”

“You’re not here when she threatens me, and you always take her side,” Kara said, shrugging off his hand and stepping away from her husband’s embrace. “Your mother hates me. She’s dominating every second of our lives! She won’t even call me by my given name!”

“Kara is an unusual name, darling. She thinks Vivian is more dignified.”

“It’s my name, and it’s none of her business!” Kara snapped.

“It’s just a name,” Matthew said. “It’s easier to give Mother what she wants than get into an argument. We won’t be here much longer, I promise. Calm down and be fair. You’re letting your insecurities get the best of you. I’ve been told some women become irrational during their pregnancies.”

“Undoubtedly by your mother!” Kara said angrily. “It’s not irrational to want to be called by my own name or to pick a name for our child! She is constantly barging in on us! Constantly sticking her nose in our business! I will not dress in a manner more appropriate for a woman her age, regardless of what she says!”

“Viv... I mean, Kara, we’ll have to discuss this later. I’m running late,” Matthew said firmly. “I know it’s a lot to ask, but you must try to get along with Mother. It won’t be for much longer. She only wants what is best for us.”

“She does not want what is best for us, and you have repeatedly made that promise to me and broken it every time!”

“I promised, and I will keep my word,” Matthew said.

“You said that months ago, and it was a lie!”

Matthew felt his wife stiffen, and she jerked away from his touch. He backed off and glanced at the clock. He

needed to get dressed for work and went to the closet. When he returned, his wife didn't answer when he said goodbye. She stood stiff and angry where he'd left her.

Frustrated at being caught between his mother and wife, Matthew left his parents' house. He had to prepare for an important meeting. The bank was threatening foreclosure on his father's business. At the bottom of the staircase, he retrieved his briefcase from a side table where he'd left it. His mother appeared before he could make his exit.

"Matthew, darling, you can't go to the office without breakfast," Blanche scolded.

"I don't have time, Mother, and I can't be late. Father's business affairs are not in order," Matthew said, pulling on a coat and opening the front door. He was keeping a lot from his mother, but she had never shown any interest in his father's business affairs.

Blanche Van Heusen-Douglas, watched her son leave and stamped her foot in a childlike manner. Her chest heaved with temper. Her son wasn't willing to spend time with her because of that horrible, trashy girl he'd married. That Branbridge girl had put her son under a spell. She was a witch. Otherwise, why was he distancing himself from his own mother? Her daughter-in-law was just like the obscene, harebrained aunt who had raised her.

Blanche had only met Selina Branbridge once, and the woman had dared to look down her aristocratic nose at the Van Heusen-Douglas family!

Kara closed her eyes as the bedroom door closed behind her husband. They'd had a perfect marriage until her husband received a telegram informing him of his father's death. At fifty-eight, Wilber Douglas died by his own hand. He'd hung himself in the attic and had been found swinging from the rafters. It gave Kara the chills to walk by the attic door.

Everyone assumed her father-in-law hung himself because his business was failing. Kara's personal opinion was that Wilber Douglas had chosen death over having to continue living with his dominating wife! She couldn't voice that opinion to her husband, but it was true. Blanche's constant disapproval made it impossible to be in her presence. Kara wanted to get on a train and return to her home in New York City. The idea of continuing to live under her mother-in-law's domination made Kara daydream of running away. Facing Blanche Douglas daily made her cringe, but she had to endure it for the sake of her husband.

Matthew didn't see his mother as others did. Her husband knew she hated living in his mother's home, but Blanche refused to allow them to live elsewhere. Matthew had gone from promising Kara they were there only temporarily to ignoring her pleas to leave and return to their New York City apartment. Matthew had no real attachment to his parents' home or Philadelphia. If the truth was known, he didn't have a strong attachment to his parents. He'd been sent to a boarding school in New York State at the tender age of eight.

Blanche was ecstatic about the return of her son. She'd been less excited when her son had arrived with a wife she'd known about but had only met once. A wife who had announced she was carrying her son's child soon after they had arrived. Blanche knew how to play the game, though. She was all sweetness and cooing smiles around her son. She was determined to run that silly girl out of her son's life.

Matthew waved at the second-story window as he slid into the chauffeur-driven vehicle his mother insisted he use every morning.

Kara watched from the window, but she didn't wave back. She knew Blanche Van Heusen-Douglas would revert

to her true personality the second Matthew was gone. Her mother-in-law was an annoying, overbearing snob.

Kara had been raised in upper-class wealth in a chic neighborhood in New York City. She vaguely remembered her mother and father. Her parents died in a boating accident when she was only five years old. She'd been well provided for financially by her parents and left in the care of her only living relative, her father's sister Selina Branbridge.

Selina wasn't a fussy old aunt. She was a socialite, an avant-garde free spirit in a very elite sphere of wealth. Selina loved her niece but wouldn't abandon her lifestyle because she was responsible for a child. Her niece's care had been delegated to nannies and servants. She turned the child over to nannies and the nuns at Sacred Heart School for Girls while she continued a decadent lifestyle of opulence and freedom.

At one of her aunt's flamboyant parties, eighteen-year-old Kara met the young man who had stolen her heart. Matthew was a young attorney quickly gaining a name and reputation. He'd recently won a corruption case against a crooked politician and received a promotion in the law firm where he worked.

Matthew Douglas had swept Kara into a whirlwind courtship, and they had married four months later, against her aunt's wishes. Selina Branbridge considered the institution of marriage unnecessary and *démodé* (old-fashioned). She believed life was to be lived freely with abandonment and no constraints. Aunt Selina traveled and enjoyed her freedom, as only the *nouveau riche* could, and was involved with many married and unmarried suitors.

Feeling the baby move inside her, Kara smiled and gently touched her abdomen. She was only four months along and thought she was feeling the quickening of the unborn. Because she was small and thin, she was barely showing.

Mother-in-law, Blanche, had been harassing her daily about dressing appropriately for a woman 'in the family way.' She'd even gone so far as to tell Kara she must not go out in public because it was unseemly. Kara's pregnancy had given her mother-in-law something to constantly harp and nag about.

When Kara left her room, she had already missed breakfast served precisely at seven a.m. each morning. Charlotte Newsome, who everyone called Cook, wouldn't complain about fixing Kara something to eat later. Blanche would, but not Charlotte. Kara was on good terms with all the servants because she treated them as friends. Cook would provide a late breakfast when Kara was ready to eat. The early days of her pregnancy hadn't allowed her to keep food down in the early mornings.

At the top of the stairs, Kara looked down. Even if she wasn't happy living in the Van Heusen-Douglas domicile, she did admit it was a beautiful home. The staircase was elaborate, with two landings and ornate banisters. The view from the first landing over the beautiful marble floors of the foyer was lovely. Kara stepped to the edge of the landing. She heard a noise behind her, but before she could turn, she was shoved. She screamed, tumbled down the steps, and struck her head on the newel post. Her world turned black, and excruciating pain ripped through her abdomen.

Alice Anders, the head maid, came running. "Oh, my God!" She knelt beside the young Mister's wife as Diane, a young maid in training, came running.

"Ring the hospital," Alice ordered. "Tell them to send an ambulance!" She glanced to the stairwell landing and saw a large dark shadow moving up the stairs, not down.

Diane came running back. "I called! They'll be here in a few minutes."

"Go upstairs and tell Mrs. Van Heusen-Douglas there's

been an accident,” Alice ordered. The young maid looked frightened, but Alice snapped, “Go!”

A few minutes later, Diane came running down the stairs. “She said she is getting dressed.”

“As if,” Alice mumbled. “It’s after eight o’clock, and she hasn’t been late for a seven o’clock breakfast in the two years I’ve worked here.”

“What are you saying?” Diane whispered.

“I’m not saying anything untrue,” Alice hissed. “There is something evil about that woman.”

There was a loud knock on the door, and Alice ran to open it. Two hospital attendants carried in a stretcher and gently lifted the young Mrs. Douglas onto it. They carried her out to the ambulance.

“Is anyone coming with her to the hospital?” one of the attendants asked.

Alice looked to the stairs. “The mistress of the house has a driver.”

The attendants tipped their hats and left.

“Alice!” the sharp voice of Mrs. Van Heusen-Douglas was heard from the first stairway landing.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Tell the staff to take the rest of the day off. I want everyone out of the house except Jacob. Tell him to go to the servant’s dining room and wait for my instructions,” Blanche ordered.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Alice said. “What about the young Mistress? The ambulance has taken her to the hospital.”

“How dare you question me! Tell Cook she is to leave the house too!” Blanche ordered. Then she pointed a finger at the youngest of the maids. “You will stay here!”

Diane’s eyes widened, and she looked frightened.

“Should Mr. Douglas be called?” Alice asked.

“Mind your own business, and clean that mess off the

floor before you go,” Blanche ordered, pointing to the blood on the marble floors.

“Yes, ma’am,” Alice repeated.

Diane scurried close to her mentor. “What was that all about?”

“I don’t know,” Alice whispered. “But I’m not staying here another minute! If you’re smart, you’ll leave too!”

“What about the young Mistress?” Diane whispered.

“I’ll go by the hospital to look after her,” Alice said. “Leave with the rest of the staff, and go straight to the employment office on Calvert Street. There are always jobs for maids.”

Kara awakened to a throbbing headache. “Lie still,” a nurse instructed quietly.

“What happened?”

“You had a bad fall,” the nurse said.

A doctor entered the room. He looked into her eyes and checked the stitches at her temple. “How are you feeling, ma’am?”

“Woozy and tired,” Kara whispered. “I fell... no! I was pushed!” She jerked awake and tried to raise her hands to touch her abdomen, but her arms were wrapped tightly under the blankets. “Is my baby okay?”

The doctor held a gas mask over her face. His patient struggled for a few seconds and then closed her eyes. Turning to the nurse, he issued orders. “Keep her sedated. We can delay telling her of the miscarriage until she’s a bit stronger. By then, her family should have arrived.”

Matthew escorted the latest of his father's creditors out of his father's office, assuring the man he would be paid as soon as possible. He was surprised to see Jacob, the chauffeur sitting in a chair in the secretary's office.

"What's wrong? Is Kara sick?" Matthew demanded.

"Not that I know of, sir," Jacob said. "I was told to fetch you by your mother. I saw Dr. Hillsboro coming and going but was told to wait in the servant's room. After he left, your mother told me to bring you home."

Matthew dashed into his father's office and dialed his mother's number. The phone rang repeatedly, but no one answered. He hurried back into the secretary's office. "I'm leaving for the day, Mildred."

Matthew burst into his family home and yelled for his mother, but there was no answer. He ran through the rooms, looking for the servants, but they weren't responding because they weren't there. Even Cook was gone, and she rarely left the house. She was a live-in.

"Jacob, where is everyone?" Matthew demanded of the older man standing by waiting for his next order.

"I don't know, sir," Jacob said.

Matthew hurried up the stairs and burst into the bedroom he and Kara had been sharing. She wasn't there. He ran down the hall, knocked, and called out for his mother. There was a weak answer he could barely hear, and he opened the door.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"I've fallen ill, son," Blanche whispered.

"Where is Kara? Where are the servants?"

"I don't know where Vivian went. She's never around when I need her. I had the doctor come around. He says it might be a while before I'm on my feet again. Vivian said she wasn't going to tend me and left. I don't know where she went, and the servants have ignored my calls. Dr. Hillsboro

might have told them to leave. Please don't leave me. I'm frightened."

"What did the doctor say?" Matthew demanded.

"Dr. Hillsboro never tells me what's wrong," Blanche whined. "He's never been able to understand my spells. He said I needed to be nursed, but everyone has abandoned me, including that horrible girl you married. I know Vivian doesn't like me, but I didn't think she would abandon me in my time of need."

"My wife's name is Kara, Mother, and she wouldn't abandon you. She's not that kind of person," Matthew said. "It would help if you'd call her by her given name."

"Kara is a ridiculous name, and it's unsuitable for a Van Heusen-Douglas. She did leave me!" Blanche snapped. Then she began to cough. "Water!" she gasped between coughs and then lay back against the pillows.

"I need to find out what is going on," Matthew said.

"Stay with me, son. I feel so weak, and I'm frightened!"

"I'll stay for a little while," Matthew said as his mother grabbed his hand and closed her eyes.

Every time Matthew tried to leave, his mother had a coughing fit. When the doorbell rang, he disengaged from her clinging hands to answer it, even though she protested. He opened the door to Dr. Hillsboro and demanded, "What's wrong with my mother?"

"Not a damn thing I have ever been able to diagnose," the physician said gruffly. "Your mother is a malingerer. She has been for years. She claims to be ill and often imagines symptoms and illnesses that don't exist.

"I thought I'd stop by and find out why you haven't visited your wife in the hospital. When I was doing my morning rounds, I saw her there. She's going through a perilous time and needs your support!"

"What? Kara is in the hospital? What happened?"

“She fell down the stairs, and she has a concussion. I’m afraid she lost the baby,” Dr. Hillsboro said matter-of-factly. “When she was told, she went into hysterics. She screamed and claimed your mother pushed her down the stairs and murdered her child. She’s been under sedation for hours, but someone from this household should have the decency to show her some respect and support!”

“I didn’t know. I wasn’t told,” Matthew admitted, his voice breaking. “Dear God!”

Dr. Hillsboro gave the young man in front of him an assessing appraisal. “Mr. Douglas, your mother has pretended to be ill many times over the years. She has screaming outbursts, lashes out at others, and claims she will harm herself but never does.

“My recommendation to your father has been the same for years. She needs to be examined by a psychiatrist. If you don’t know, that’s a doctor who specializes in mental issues. Your father refused to accept my diagnosis.

“Severely disturbed individuals should be confined for their safety so they don’t harm those around them. I have always believed your mother fits into that category. You should question your long-term staff, Mr. Douglas. The house help generally have a good idea of what goes on in their places of employment.

“When your wife was brought in this morning, the stretcher carriers were told she fell. Your wife is telling a different story. Frankly, I wouldn’t be surprised if she is telling the truth. She is understandably upset. Whether your wife fell or was pushed, as she claims, she needs support to accept the loss of her unborn child. The only good news I can give you is that she is young and should, in all likelihood, be able to bear more children.”

“Yes, sir,” Matthew said. “Thank you for coming by, Dr. Hillsboro. Do you wish to see my mother?”

“No, I don’t,” Dr. Hillsboro said frankly. My time is valuable young man. I doubt I will find anything different now from what I have observed many other times. I have actual patients that need my time and attention.”

Matthew closed the door and leaned against it. He’d always known his mother was a high-strung woman. She demanded attention, and her needs and desires were the highest priority when he was a child. Nothing was more important to her than forcing everyone to bend to her will.

As he grew older, he understood why his father sent him away to boarding school. His mother’s behavior was why his father had encouraged him to take holidays and summer vacations with the families of his school friends. Matthew had preferred to bunk in with his friends or stay at school rather than endure his mother’s smothering when he visited. The same applied during his years at law school. He reluctantly climbed the stairs to face his mother.

“Who was it, dear?” Blanche asked, sounding weak and fake to him now.

Matthew walked over to his mother’s bedside. He picked up a pitcher of water and dashed it over her.

“What!” Blanche screamed, sitting up instantly and trying to scramble from the soaked bed.

“That was Dr. Hillsboro, and he said nothing is wrong with you,” Matthew said furiously. “Meanwhile, my wife was seriously hurt early this morning, hospitalized, and you didn’t bother to contact me!”

“I’m ill,” Blanche moaned.

“My wife is in the hospital, Mother. We have lost our child!” Matthew said furiously. “The fall caused her to have a miscarriage.”

“I didn’t know,” Blanche said in a weak voice. Then a strange look appeared on her face. Her eyes were flickering around the room rapidly. “My sweet boy, do you know what

this means? She has no hold on you now. You can divorce her. We can move away, and no one will ever know you were married.”

Matthew stared at his mother in disbelief, shocked by her words. “What kind of a woman are you? I love my wife, and I loved my unborn child! She said you pushed her.”

“I didn’t,” Blanche denied. “She lost her footing!”

“And you didn’t think I should be told while you are pretending to be sick?” Matthew demanded. He stepped away from the bed. He was seeing his mother as others had seen her for years. Blanche Van Heusen-Douglas was a spoiled, heartless woman beyond redemption. Turning from her, Matthew walked away.

“Don’t leave me, darling,” Blanche pleaded. “I love you!”

“You don’t know what the word means,” Matthew spat in disgust. “I’ve always known you were selfish, but this goes beyond belief. Have you no decency?” He went downstairs, where Jacob sat in the hall, waiting to be released from his duties. “I’m sorry to keep you waiting, Jacob. You may go. I’ll drive myself to the hospital.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Wait,” Matthew said. “Jacob, you’ve been with my family for a long time.”

Jacob nodded and smiled. “Since you were in short pants, Mr. Douglas.”

“Tell me the truth, Jacob,” Matthew asked, thinking of the doctor’s words. “Has my mother always been mentally incompetent?”

The chauffeur looked uncomfortable at the question. He looked to the floor and then raised his eyes to the young man.

“Please, I need your honest opinion,” Matthew said.

“This might get me fired, Sir, but I reckon your mother has been tetchd in the head for a long time, young sir. Your

papa sent you to that boarding school to get you away from her lunacy. You didn't come home often, and he encouraged you to take that job in New York City after you graduated from law school. I always knew your papa was behind you not coming back. He wanted you to be your own man. Bless his soul, but the Mister couldn't stand up against your mother. He was the one who suffered the most from her fits.

"Staff ain't supposed to notice what is going on, Sir, but your papa had a hard time dealing with the missus. She had screaming tantrums, would throw and break things, and fired anyone that dared to challenge her. Whatever she damaged was blamed on someone else. There's always been a high staff turnover because no one wants to be screamed at and accused of something they didn't do. Cook and me are the only ones who have stuck around. Your papa paid us well to put up with her shenanigans and tell him the truth."

"What happened to the rest of the staff today?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. I was in the carriage house. I heard Alice tell Cook and the others to leave the house. I reckon it wasn't extended to me."

"I'm going to ask something strange of you, Jacob. I'd like you to watch over my mother," Matthew said. "Don't let her know you are here, and if she tries to leave the house, refuse to drive her. You've been loyal to my family for a long time, and I'll make sure you are paid a full retirement. You have my word, although I don't have time to discuss it now."

"Thank you, Mr. Douglas. My son has started a fleet of cabs, and he's been after me to drive for his company part-time," Jacob said.

"Thank you. My father's business has been lost, and I don't know yet if I'll be able to keep the house out of foreclosure. Whatever happens, I will reward you for your years of service" Matthew promised, offering his hand to shake. "I remember Fred. We played together as children. I'm glad to

hear that he's done well for himself. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I'll keep an eye on things, sir," Jacob responded.

"Thank you," Matthew said. He went upstairs and deliberately removed and hid his mother's purse and barricaded the two doors leading into his parents' bedrooms. Jacob took a seat on a chair between the doors.

When Matthew arrived at the hospital, he asked for directions to his wife's room. Walking down the hallway, he saw the maid Alice sitting in the hallway on a bench. She stood when he came closer. "How is she?"

"I've only been allowed in for a few minutes at a time, sir. When she's awake, she's taking the loss of the baby hard."

"Thank you for staying with her. I just found out!"

Matthew entered the room to find Kara huddled under a blanket, sobbing. "Sweetheart, I'm so sorry. I just found out what happened. I'm so sorry." He leaned over to kiss her, but she cringed from his touch and turned away. There was a bandage on her head, and the left side of her face was blackened with bruises.

"Go away," Kara whispered. "You let her murder my baby!"

"Honey, you need to tell me what happened."

"Go away," Kara repeated hoarsely. "Go away!"

"I need to know what happened," Matthew said. He touched her shoulder, but she jerked away from him.

"That bitch you call a mother killed my baby! She pushed me down the stairs! *GET OUT! GET OUT! GET OUT!*" she screamed and dissolved into sobs.

"Sir." A nurse appeared. "You must not upset the patient!"

"I need..."

"Sir, she needs rest," the nurse exclaimed. "I can't allow you to be here if she is going to be this upset."

“Viv...”

“Don’t you ever call me that again! Get out!” Kara sobbed. “You wouldn’t listen, and you let her murder our baby!”

Matthew backed away, hurt by her accusation, although he knew she was reacting to the trauma of losing their child.”

“Please, sir,” the nurse repeated.

Matthew nodded, although he was near tears himself. He left the room and stood outside the door. He gradually became aware that Alice, the maid, was still sitting on the bench. “What happened, Alice? Did my mother push Kara down the stairs?”

“I didn’t see Mrs. Douglas fall, sir, but I did see your mother’s shadow on the landing wall. Your mother was the only one upstairs when it happened. She didn’t come downstairs to help. I was cleaning the foyer when I heard the scream. I was too far away to stop her from falling. The young Missus was lying on the steps, bleeding from a cut on her head. We called for an ambulance, and I had Diane tell your mother that the ambulance men were there. She didn’t come downstairs until after they left. When she did come downstairs, she told us to leave the house except for Jacob and Diane. I wasn’t going to take the blame for the accident, and I wasn’t going to let your mother blame it on Diane either. I’ve worked for your parents long enough that I know what Mrs. Douglas is capable of doing.”

“Why are you here?” Matthew asked.

“I came to see if the Missus was okay. She’s always been nice to me,” Alice said. “When I found out she’d lost the baby and no one was here, I stayed. She needs someone to be here for her, sir.”

Soft-spoken and sincere, the words sliced through Matthew as sharp as a knife. “Thank you. I wasn’t told my

wife was here,” Matthew said. He raised tear-filled eyes to the ceiling. “How can she forgive me for not being with her?”

“The doctors wouldn’t have let you in when it was happening,” Alice said kindly. “Men aren’t allowed in during childbirth or... I am sorry, sir.”

“Thank you, Alice. Thank you for being here for my wife.”

“Mr. Douglas, there is a phone call for you at the desk,” a nurse said.

Matthew went to the nurse’s station. “Hello?”

“You’d best get home, sir,” Jacob exclaimed over the phone. “Your mother tried to set the house on fire! I only left the hallway to go to the john, and she snuck out and set fire to your wife’s clothing in your room. I put the fire out, and I’ve got her locked in a closet. She’s gone plumb crazy, sir. What do you want me to do?”

“Don’t let her out, and call Dr. Hillsboro and have him come to the house. He’ll know what to do. I’ll be there as soon as I can,” Matthew promised.

He turned to the nurse on duty. “My wife is understandably upset, but I’m dealing with another emergency at home. I’ll be back as soon as possible.”

Alice watched the son of her employer rush from the hospital. She’d never liked Mrs. Van Heusen-Douglas. The woman was rude and snobbish, insisting that she be called by her last name in addition to her married name. The staff was paid well to deal with the temper tantrums and the crazy fits, although there was a constant staff turnover. Alice had only stayed because the job allowed her to live elsewhere, and it paid enough that she could afford rent and the cost of night-class schooling. After Mr. Douglas hung himself, his wife had been even harder to deal with.

Alice watched the nurse go into a wardroom, and she slipped into the private room. The young Missus had been

kind and pleasant from the moment they'd been introduced. Kara had treated Alice more like a friend than a servant. She took the young woman's hand and squeezed it. "Please calm down, ma'am. You'll just make yourself more ill."

"Alice, help me get away," Kara whispered desperately. "His mother tried to kill me and has murdered my child. I can't go back there. I can't. Please help me!"

"What can I do, ma'am?"

"Help me get out of here," Kara said.

"The doctors won't let you out so soon," Alice said.

"The worst is over," Kara said in a voice void of emotion. "Find my clothing, please, and take me to where you live."

"Ma'am, it's not fittin'. I live in a tiny room in the basement of a tenement building," Alice whispered.

"It will do until I can get on my feet," Kara said. "Please help me, Alice, please. Once I'm stronger, we can decide what to do next."

"What about your husband?" Alice asked.

"I can't go back there," Kara whispered. "He made his choice, me and our unborn child or his mother. He chose his mother. I won't go back to that. I won't."

Alice nodded slowly. "I'll help you, ma'am. I'll do the best I can." She went to the door, looked out, and returned to the bed. "I worked here as part of the cleaning staff before I went to work at your house.

"It's getting late, and soon the nurses will be busy giving the patients medicine for the night. They'll treat the patients in private rooms before they go to the wards. Pretend to be asleep when the nurse makes her rounds. I'll hide over there behind the privacy screen. They won't want to wake you. We'll get you dressed and leave while they are in the ward rooms. I live about ten blocks away."

Matthew had a terrible evening. The fire damage to the

room was severe, and he didn't know how Jacob had put it out before it spread through the entire house. Dr. Hillsboro had restrained Blanche to her bed with leather straps and forced medicine down her throat that would make her sleep. He'd called for a nurse and a male attendant to stay in her room and watch over her until morning.

Blanche Van Heusen-Douglas was obviously a danger to herself and others. Matthew was being advised by Dr. Hillsboro, and he was given very few choices. He wanted to get back to the hospital. Calling the nurse's station several times, he was assured that Kara was asleep for the night. He was asked to stop disrupting the nurse's duties. Visiting hours began at nine o'clock in the morning.

Kara was safe. His mother was a danger to herself and everyone around her. Long after midnight, he fell asleep in a chair guarding the door outside the room where his mother lay restrained and sedated. In the morning, Dr. Hillsboro would admit his mother to the Northside Sanatorium for evaluation.

Alice whispered in Kara's ear and promised that she would return. She ran to her room blocks away and grabbed a long cloak, a wool hat, and a blanket. Returning to the hospital, Alice entered through a side door used by the night workers. Silently she went into Kara's room and hid behind the dressing screen. She knew the schedules of the nurses.

Kara pretended to be asleep while her temperature was checked. The nurse couldn't awaken her to take the medicine, so a notation was put on her medical chart before leaving the room. The nurse left a bottle of medication on a side table by the door.

When the door closed, Alice came out of hiding and helped the Missus get dressed. When they were ready, Alice slid the medicine bottle into her pocket before looking out to ensure the nurse wasn't at her station.

With Alice's help, the two women quietly left the hospital. Once outside, Kara was wrapped in the blanket and hat. There was no street or pedestrian traffic at that time of night. They limped along the sidewalk, occasionally stopping for Kara to rest on a brick stoop.

When Alice unlocked her door, she supported a weak Kara inside and helped her into the single bed.

Matthew and Dr. Hillsboro were going to check Blanche into the Northside Sanatorium for a mental evaluation by expert physicians. His mother was locked in a windowless room and would remain there until the medical assessment was completed. He'd been told the doctors would take a week or more to determine her mental health. Matthew hated doing this to his mother, but Dr. Hillsboro insisted it was the proper course of action.

The next morning he followed an ambulance to the sanatorium. Although he could still hear his mother's screams, pleading, and swearing, Matthew signed the commitment papers. Then he drove Dr. Hillsboro back to his practice and went straight to the hospital.

Matthew was praying that his wife would be calmer and they could talk. He'd turned a deaf ear to Kara's complaints because he already had too much to deal with. Dealing with his father's financial problems and complaints from creditors had consumed his time.

Charlotte Newsome, the cook, had returned to the house early that morning and given him an earful of his mother's mistreatment of his wife, father, and servants. It wasn't the first time Matthew had heard the complaints.

He was ashamed to admit that when Kara had made the same complaints, he had ignored most of what she said as exaggerations. He knew Kara didn't like his mother, didn't like living in Philadelphia, and wanted to return to New York City. His father had always dismissed the

complaints from the staff, claiming they were inept or too lazy to do their jobs properly. Now, he knew that wasn't the case.

Matthew had been called home to deal with Wilber Douglas' suicide. His mourning had been cut short when he realized that his father's factory was on the verge of bankruptcy. He was dealing with angry workers, suppliers, and banks. All were owed money.

Every evening when he returned home, he faced complaints from his mother and wife. Matthew hadn't realized the extent of harassment his mother spewed or how badly his mother had treated Kara when he wasn't present. Now, he was getting the truth and he felt like he was drowning from guilt.

Returning to the hospital, Matthew was silently berating himself. He was beginning to realize how much he had ignored in the name of tranquility. He had to explain and apologize to his wife and hope she would forgive him.

Matthew swore when he couldn't find a place to park his automobile near the hospital. Parking was becoming a problem on the streets of Philadelphia, as it was in every major city. So many people were buying automobiles and not using public transportation. Most men and even women were learning to drive, although the newspapers and public officials discouraged women from doing so. He finally found a place to park and walked several blocks to the hospital. Matthew knew something was wrong when he approached the nurse's desk.

The nurse rose from her chair, but he panicked, ignored her, and ran down the hall. He opened the door to an empty room, already cleaned and prepared for the next patient.

"Where is my wife? Is she okay?" he demanded, addressing the nurse who followed him.

"We don't know, sir," the nurse said. "We assumed you

had taken her home. That happens when people don't want to pay the bills."

"My wife was in no condition to leave the hospital!" Matthew shouted.

"Sir," a doctor said, approaching. "Your wife went missing during the last rounds of medication last night. No one saw her leave."

"How could you allow that to happen?" Matthew demanded.

"Sir, we have other patients who need our care. We can't be held responsible for decisions made without our advice or permission. We hoped she had gone home, but we didn't have any information since she was unconscious when she arrived. We were going to ask you to fill out her admittance forms, but you left before we could get that information."

Matthew felt a wave of emptiness sweep over him. His wife was missing. He needed to find her and beg for forgiveness.