

"THE FOX"

JILL stands in front of the fire. NELLIE is now standing against the staircase wall

JILL

Well I can't wait anymore. It's been hours since last the dogs barked..! You've put two extra logs on the fire already. Are you going to stay the night?

NELLIE

No.

JILL

Till when then?

NELLIE

I haven't tired yet.

JILL

Won't you come up with me anyway? Nellie?

NELLIE

I'll settle you in, but I won't sleep. I can't.

JILL

Why not?

NELLIE

No reason.

JILL

Will you come back down?

NELLIE

Yes, I think so. Why?

JILL

Then I won't go.

NELLIE

Why won't you?

JILL

I don't like to sleep without you there, you know that.

NELLIE

One of these days you'll have to. Forever.

JILL
What do you mean?

NELLIE
When I'm dead.

JILL
I'll go long before you, no fear of that.

NELLIE
Do you know what you are, Jill? You're a faker. With all your aches and all your ailments, you've got a heart that'll beat till Doomsday. You're a sham, that's what you are...! Look now if you're really buttered out and you can't even blink your eyes open enough to sit and talk, then I'll set you in your room, fill your bottle, and hum you off to dreamland. All right?

JILL
Are you waiting up for Henry?

NELLIE
Of course not.

JILL
I think you are, Nellie.

NELLIE
I've just told you I'm not.

JILL
If you were, why would you be?

NELLIE
Jill, I'm not. Don't be silly.

JILL
I've seen the way he looks at you, and I've seen the way you look at him.

NELLIE
How?

JILL
It's no good your pretending surprise. I see what I see...

NELLIE
You can't see anything with your eyes.

JILL
And I know what I know!

NELLIE
And I'm asking, what?

JILL
You're thinking about going away with him!

NELLIE
Jill, have you gone off your chump?

JILL
I wanted him to stay on because I thought he'd be a bit of fun in the house, but he's begun stamping about the place as if he's half-owner and he's been looking you up and down like a farmer checking stock at a fair.

NELLIE
Jill!

JILL
If you haven't seen him then I have! He moves to you like a stable hand with a new horse! We came out here to get away from looks like that, didn't we? Didn't we?

NELLIE
Yes, we did.

JILL
So if Henry's going to start fiddling around with the same kind of look then we'll have to get away from him too, won't we?

NELLIE
Jill-

JILL
Well I think he's already started! He's not just a boy, Nellie, he's a grown man. He's got a gun in his hands and ideas in his head, and he's not just the sweet thing we imagined. He's got a temper and he's got a reputation for trouble.

NELLIE
Whatever trouble he's caused...

JILL
I'm not talking about his loafing off the work—although we have yet to see how long he's going to give us a hand!

NELLIE

Jill, will you hush now?

JILL

I'm talking about his prowling thought the woods! They told me he was out there every night. Every night, Nellie. Warm or cold. Light or dark!

NELLIE

He was fifteen at that time.

JILL

But he's got that same kind of look about him now! Whenever he mentions the woods, or animals, or the gun, he's got an excitement inside him that shines through like a beacon. You must be dumb if you can't see that!

NELLIE

Are you frightened of him Jill? Is that what it is?

JILL

Yes!

NELLIE

Well I'm not!

JILL

I know you aren't, that's what I'm arguing about!

NELLIE

Listen now...

JILL

Ohh, Nellie—

NELLIE

Listen! We've asked him on, and he's said yes, and he's done nothing yet that I can call a real bother, and if he's got some great need to be off in the woods while the rest of us sit by our fires then more power to him. He's a bigger man for it than we are.

JILL

Why?

NELLIE

The woods aren't the safest place you could name, are they? A gun isn't the easiest thing to handle well, is it? Henry was right there when he said those gossipers were

jealous of him. They're jealous of us too. Because we're doing what none of them thought we could do alone, and we're doing what they hoped we wouldn't be able to do because that'd prove that we were better than they are! And if you're frightened because of Henry then it's for the same reason. You think he's better than you, braver than you. And he is! He can't cook, but he can provide. He can't hang curtains, but he can sturdy a barn. He can't sit, but he can run! Jill, I'm not angry at you, and I'm not trying to slight you. If you're tired now, please let me put you to bed. I won't be long to follow. I promise. Please. Please!

JILL
All right.

NELLIE
I'll heat your bottle now, while you ready up.

JILL
Nellie!

NELLIE
What?

JILL
You won't leave me though, will you? Will you?

NELLIE
Leaving you would be like leaving half my life, how could I do that? Go on up, Jill. Go on.