

EXCERPT



Outside, thunder rumbled ominously in the darkened sky as she dressed to go down to supper. She deliberately chose her most becoming gown, a deep blue muslin edged with silvery ruffles. The front of the dress was artfully draped to resemble an overskirt, and was pulled tight over the bust and abdomen. She did have an attractive figure, and if that would impress the old codger she certainly would not be averse to making the most of it.

Sometimes she thought uneasily of what her parents would say if they knew what she had done...that she was entirely on her own and living as a boarder in the home of an unmarried physician. Of course, as she'd already told herself, the war had changed the way society looked at things...necessity had been the mother of many of those changes, and now situations that might have caused scandal and outrage now hardly did more than raise a few eyebrows.

But Genny knew in her heart that her father would not approve.

She drew her blonde curls away from her face to accentuate her high cheekbones, noting in the mirror they were flushed and rosy. For some reason her heart beat unusually fast. She heard the sudden deluge of rain as it dashed against the roof, and a crack of thunder made her jump. Shaking off her feelings of guilt, she crossed the bedroom and was walking down the hall to the stairs when she heard the front door open with a loud whooshing sound. Thinking it had been blown by the wind, she hurried down the stairs and then stopped with a jerk, staring in utter surprise.

The tall man hanging up a coat and removing his gray slouch hat stared up at her, poised on the staircase, with the same surprise. A moment passed with neither of them saying anything, though he finally nodded a greeting, which she was too flustered to

acknowledge. Then Agnes rushed into the hall, drawing the man's attention, and took his coat as he placed his hat on the rack behind the door.

"Agnes, how have you been?" His voice was deep with a pleasant resonance.

"Foin, and it's good to have ye home, Doctor," Agnes answered merrily. "And just in time for supper, ye are."

"Of course he is," came a voice from down the corridor. "Have you ever known him to miss a meal?"

Geoff appeared with his crutches, and Genny saw that his right leg was gone just above the knee. The sight shocked her a little, for she hadn't imagined his "impediment" to be so serious.

Valerie stood behind her father, smiling. "Hello, Ethan."

The doctor kissed Valerie on the cheek and said amiably, "I see you've both managed to stay healthy in my absence." Then his eyes turned back to the stairway, meeting Genny's again. Geoff followed his gaze.

"Ah, Genny, come down. Ethan, this is your new assistant, Genny Stuart. Genny, this is Dr. Carey."

This man was not elderly. Nor was he thin and hunched, with weak, squinty eyes behind a pair of spectacles.

He appeared to be in his mid to late thirties, and must be at least two inches over six feet tall. Lean and well-defined muscles showed through the damp cloth of his shirt. The lighted hallway revealed his eyes to be a vivid bluish-gray in color, the lashes thick and dark brown, as were his brows and hair; their expression, as they surveyed Genny, was direct and appraising.

He was certainly more handsome than he had any right to be, but he seemed entirely unself-conscious, nor did he have the popular air of exaggerated gallantry. His face glistened with raindrops, and in its clean-cut lines was etched an impression of heavy responsibility, of danger faced, of determination...yet there was humor, too, especially in the fine creases around his eyes. He stood straight and alert like a soldier, though it seemed to come naturally to him for he was at the same time relaxed and at ease.

This was not at all what she had expected. It took her a moment to regain her composure. Then, annoyed at herself, she managed to say calmly, "How do you do, Doctor. I hope I shall prove an able assistant for you."

An almost imperceptible frown had come into his face and she knew that he was doubting her capabilities.