

DAWN - 005

AT first I told myself it could not be. That day I saw his big handsome figure leaning against the dock and listening to the men who fenced with words for his life with listless, almost bored indifference, I went home feeling they were not mad to kill him. Not Tony. Not steady, reliable glowing Tony.

And then the next day. I shall never forget it. The jury filing back into the still room, the judge's long fingered, blue veined hand reaching out to retrieve the black cap which had fallen to the floor, the impersonal, monotonous voice reciting the death sentence. . . .

I wanted to run and squeeze his throat into silence, to squeeze some feeling, some emotion into the mettled face and, as I held him on the briny of death, scream in his face what he was doing. I wanted to tell him how much the man he was so coolly sending to his fate meant to me, his limbs were too straight and clean, he was too much alive, too true a friend, too much a man to be jostled to his death, to be hung by the neck until he was dead. But I couldn't move. I dared not trust my weight upon my nerveless feet. I saw his eyes sweep the room as they hustled him out, and I could see he was glad it was over. I sat there staring at the door through which he had passed. I couldn't even rise when the court rose around me.

For all my twenty years I still worship him just as I had worshipped him when he used to bend down and flex his muscle for me to feel when he rode me on his back, when I watched him in his snowy ducks leading the first out on the field. And then to share his trust and secrets in later years. It was worse than death to lose him so.

It must have been cold out there in that damp December foredawning. For hours I had stood on the jetty, heedless of the drizzling rain, staring down into the restless dismal sea. All my senses were dulled under this awful tragedy, I knew no other emotions than these engendered by my terrible loss.

I heard the steps on the planks and knew it was Mona. She must have made out my form bent over the rail from the verandah. Mother had asked her to come with us to Blenheim after the reprieve failed. I felt her hand on my shoulder as she spoke. Her voice had the same deep ring as her brother's.

'Dal you're wet; come on in. You're courting pneumonia.'

Minding my damp dressing gown when somewhere in the darkness they were preparing to snuff out her brother's life. I could have laughed, but I felt that if I started I could never stop.

"Dawn!" I said, lifting my head and throwing my hand out as if to ward off some awful doom. "Oh Christ! I'll hate all dawns."

At first she tried to be strong, to hide the tears in her voice, but her words came in catches.

“We-let’s-we mustn’t take it so, Dal. After all, it’s not the Tony that we knew they’re killing; not our Tony. He died when he found out Jennie’s guilt.” She was crying now.

“I’ll kill Jennie.” She shrank away, for she knew I meant it. Then she was back, pleading, passionate.

‘No no, Dal, not that, not that. Leave Jennie alone. God knows I can hardly bear losing Tony, but you, not you . . . not you. . .’

Slowly something that had withered and died within me came back to life. I had always liked Mona, but now I realized I could never live without her. The same true, red blood that was now still in his veins flowed through her, and she loved me. I drew her closer to me, felt the swift heat of her breath, longed for the lips that were still taut with grief. But I didn’t kiss her. I felt it would have been like making love over Tony’s grave. We just stood there locked for a while, and then we parted. We had no words.

The sun came up, striking gold in Mona’s hair, and we knew that Tony was dead.