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OFTEN I HAVE WONDERED why life appears to flow along like a placid stream for some people, and for others, it is a series of dangerous rapids and raging torrents.

Looking back over more than seventy years, it is hard for me to remember a time when I could feel relaxed and perfectly happy. Always there has been turmoil and anxiety, even in the only short spell of happiness I enjoyed.

My parents' home was in Switzerland, but my father was killed when I was only ten years old, so my mother had a hard struggle to bring me up on her own.

When I was sixteen, she died of pneumonia, and I went to live with her cousin, who was crippled with polio. She was appointed my legal guardian, and I called her "Aunt" and her husband "Uncle." My "aunt" had no children of her own, but my "uncle" had a son by a previous marriage.

There had been a small amount of money left for me besides my mother's jewelry, and I continued to go to college, but I had a great deal of work to do in the house in the evenings and during the short vacations.

I began to realize very soon that life was going to be difficult for me. As an old woman now, I can look back and realize that I had the kind of beauty which causes a girl heartache and disillusionment. I was very tall and slim; I had vivid blue eyes, long golden hair which I wore in thick braids wound around my head, and a complexion which many people raved about.

If I had had parents to protect me, I am sure life would have been easier, but I was so alone. My aunt was often ill and could not leave her bed or wheelchair without help,

so she saw little of what actually went on in the house. As she was my guardian, I never thought of appealing to anyone else for help.

At first, my uncle pretended he wanted me to marry his son—my aunt's stepson, a weak, stupid boy whom I despised; then he himself started pestering me with attentions. He would wait until no one else was present, then try to make passes at me, until I was terrified of being alone with him.

One night, when I was eighteen, he came to my room, and only by fighting like a tiger did I manage to get away from him, and lock myself in a small bathroom.

The next day, I told my aunt what had happened, and I will never forget the sad, hopeless expression on her face. "You are not the only one," she said with no emotion in her voice. "But you must get away. I'll help you if I can. I have a little money of my own, and after you have gone, I'll try to get whatever there is left from your mother's money, and send it to you. Take her jewelry with you. Some of the pieces have been handed down in the family, and although they may be old-fashioned, they are valuable. Someday if you are in desperate need, you may be obliged to sell them. But where can you go to be safe?"

"I will go to Marie DuBois in Geneva. We were friends at school, and once I helped her escape when the building caught on fire. She has often written, asking me to stay with her family. They will help me to get work, I am sure."

Hastily, I gathered my belongings together, sent a telegram to Marie, and unknown to my uncle, I set off for Geneva.

Marie's whole family was waiting for me, and showed me tremendous kindness, insisting that I must look upon their house as my home from now on.

Besides Marie and her parents, there were two brothers and a divorced sister living at home, and at first everything was very enjoyable.

I loved Geneva. Everywhere I looked, there was a vista of majestic beauty which made me catch my breath in delight.

How beautiful Lake Geneva was, with its white-winged sailing boats and steamers, against the background of dark green trees and majestic Mont Blanc, always capped with snow, towering into the blue sky in France, on the southern border of the lake.

Marie's sister, Luci, ran a bookshop down by the lakeside; she was in need of another assistant, and would be glad if I would work for her. I accepted with delight. What could be more enjoyable than to work among the books I loved, and to be able to look out continually on such a feast of beauty? Also, hundreds of foreign tourists visited Geneva every year; so I would meet many interesting people.

I soon began to realize that again I was to have no peace. Marie's oldest brother, Edo, began to pester me; and if he saw me talking to any man in the shop, he was wild with jealousy. It was his responsibility at night to close up the shop and to accompany me home, and how I hated those evening walks.

At last, I made up my mind that I would have to move to another place; but I had no idea where I could go, certainly not back to my guardian.

One day, by telephone I was asked to take some books to a customer's house. When I got there an elderly gentleman I had noticed in the shop several times opened the door.

"Please come in and rest, until I decide if these are the books I require," he said very politely, inviting me into a lounge and offering me a chair. He pretended to examine the books, then said, "Excuse me a moment." He returned with a tray, upon which there were glasses and a decanter.

"Allow me to offer you some wine," he said gallantly, but by this time all I wanted was to get out of the house.

"No, thank you, I must hurry back," I said, standing up and edging toward the door.

"I feel it my duty to tell you that a nice, innocent girl of such beauty should not live with the type of people you are with now," he began, and I stared in surprise. "I know a great deal about them that is not to their credit. I realize

that you are of a quite different class—your manners and speech show it. I believe you have no parents to protect you, so please let me help you. Come here and live with me, and you will have money, clothes, and everything you desire.”

My heart was beating furiously, for now I realized what he was suggesting; but trying to be as calm as possible, I said, “Thank you for your thoughtfulness, but I must think it over.”

“Very well, but remember this is between you and me. If you confide in the family with whom you live, they will never let you go. Take this little gift to show you that I mean what I say,” and offering me a small jewel box, he snapped open the lid, and held out a beautiful bracelet.

I shook my head. “I could not accept such a gift,” I said firmly. “You will have your answer very soon,” and pulling open the front door, I almost ran down the steps.

I rushed to the lakeside; and forgetting all about the shop, I threw myself down on the grass in the shelter of some trees, my body shaking with fright.

Why was I never allowed to live in peace? Why did every man I met have only one thought in mind? Were there no decent people whom I could trust? Where could I go? I certainly would never allow Marie’s brother or this horrible old man to ruin my life.

Then I remembered that earlier in the day a customer had inquired if we knew of anyone who could act as his secretary and copy out a book he was writing. Marie’s sister had told me that this dark-eyed, black-haired stranger was an Arab scholar who had come to Switzerland because of his health, together with his stepmother, who was a titled English lady, or as we would say, a baroness.

I was proud of my own handwriting; and that night I wrote a letter, which I handed to him the next day. He seemed surprised, then asked why I wanted to leave the shop. I replied that I felt I would like a change, and that if my handwriting was good enough for him, I would like to copy out the work he required.

He said, “I will think it over and let you know tomorrow.”

I waited in a fever of impatience until he appeared the next day.

"I have decided that you will be useful as my secretary," he said when there was no one else within earshot. "But where will you live?"

"I must get away from the place where I am at once," I said, and he must have realized that I was desperate.

"Come to this address tomorrow, and we will discuss the possibilities," he said, handing me a card.

The next day, inventing some sort of excuse, I slipped out, and made for the address he had given me.

An elderly woman opened the door, and eyed me up and down. "Monsieur Poitier is expecting you," she said coldly, and turning back into the hall, knocked on a door.

"A young woman to see you, sir," she said, and gave the door a slam behind her.

"Frau Kramper does not approve of my having a secretary to live in the house," he said. "Up until now, I have only employed one from time to time by the day."

"I'm not really a secretary," I replied, wanting to be perfectly honest.

"I realize that, but I think you will be able to meet my requirements. Of course, you realize, there will be long hours of weary copying to be done. I cannot pay a big wage, but you will have your room and your food free."

"Can I come at once?" I asked desperately.

"Why are you so anxious to leave your present employment?"

I felt my face flushing, as I said, with an effort to meet his eyes, "Because circumstances have become too much for me. My employer's brother will not leave me alone, and I detest him. There are others also."

He made no reply for a few moments, then turned and stared out of the window, while I waited, wondering if he despised me.

Without looking around, he asked, "You would not be afraid to live here?"

"I think I could trust you," I said, and was amazed at my daring.

"Thank you," he replied simply. "Frau Kramper sleeps here, so you will not be alone, and my stepmother will return shortly. This is her house, but she has gone to England to arrange matters concerning her father's estate; he died recently. I suppose you must give notice to your present employer."

"I only agreed to help until I found other employment."

"Then you can come immediately?"

"I will come tomorrow," I said, determined to get away as soon as possible.

That evening, I packed in secret once more, wrote a note to say that I felt I must leave, but did not reveal where I was going. Then, the next morning, before anyone was awake, I slipped out, carrying my suitcases, and made my way to a taxi stand. It was far too early to present myself at Monsieur Poitier's house, so I went as near to it as I dared; then I waited in a bus shelter until people began to hurry to work.

When I eventually dragged my cases to the door of my new employer, and very hesitantly rang the bell, I dreaded most of all what Frau Kramper would say.

Actually she said practically nothing, but the look on her broad stolid face, with its hard blue eyes, said more than enough.

She made no offer to help me carry my possessions, but silently led the way upstairs. At the end of a short passage, she threw open a door, announcing, "The linen is there; I have no time to make your bed." Then turning, she disappeared.

The room was clean and comfortable enough, but I wished I could have been welcomed in a kinder manner. However, by now I was used to being treated like this. In a hazy sort of way, young as I was, I realized that my looks were to blame. Women like Frau Kramper thought that I could be up to no good. They believed that men wanted me for one thing only, and that I was probably far too free with my favors. I realized it was up to me to alter her opinion.

When I had put my possessions in the drawers and closet,

and put out the picture of my beloved mother, I went quietly downstairs.

I was still standing in the hall, when Monsieur Poitier came out of his study.

He jerked in surprise as he caught sight of me. "I did not know you had arrived," he said. "Did Frau Kramper show you to your room?"

"Thank you, yes," I said shyly. "Now I am ready to work."

"Very well, we will begin."

Leading the way into the study, he indicated a table on which were spread a pile of written papers and a pile of unused sheets.

"I am afraid you may have trouble deciphering my handwriting," he said wryly. "I scribble too fast, and I make many alterations. Ask me concerning anything you do not understand."

As I settled myself in a chair, he said, "I must go out this morning." Then he turned back, remarking, "Do not let Frau Kramper upset you. She is not bad at heart, only suspicious."

"Thank you," I replied, and bent to look at the pages before me, my eyes blurred with tears at the kind note in his voice.

Here, I was sure, I had at last found a man who was clean and decent, and did not regard me as a plaything, designed only for his pleasure.

At first I found the rather crabbed writing difficult to understand, but gradually it became easier. I destroyed the first sheet I had written, because I made several mistakes; then I began to settle down, and by the time Monsieur Poitier returned, I had several pages ready for his inspection.

He scanned them for several minutes while my heart hammered rapidly, waiting for his approval. At length, he said, "This is better than I had hoped. Now you must stop for lunch. Frau Kramper has suggested that you have a tray in your room, but I would like you to eat with me."

"Thank you, but I would rather have it in my room," I

said quietly, knowing that Frau Kramper would object to such familiarity.

"Very well," he replied, and turned to his desk.

I went to my room, washed, tidied my hair, and was standing staring out of the window across the lake and to the far off mountains, when Frau Kramper entered and placed a tray on a small table.

I turned, and summoning up my courage said, "Frau Kramper, this will make a lot of extra work for you."

"That is what I am paid for," she snapped.

"Couldn't I eat with you in your room?" I suggested humbly.

She stared at me, then said, "I eat in the kitchen. You would not consider that good enough."

"Certainly I would. I'm not used to the ways of rich houses, and you could help and advise me, and save me from mistakes."

"Why do your parents not protect you?"

"They are both dead," I replied. "I have no one whom I can trust."

Suddenly her face relaxed slightly. "Very well, you may join me," she said, and lifting the tray, she marched downstairs again. I followed as she led the way down a further flight to the basement kitchen.

"There are far too many stairs in this house," she grumbled. "It needs several domestics to keep it as it should be kept."

I turned as we went into the kitchen, and said sincerely, "How homelike this is."

A fire burned cheerfully in the huge stove, the curtains and rug were bright red, and comfortable chairs were drawn up by the fire. Everything was spotlessly clean, and the brass and copper pans and jugs twinkled in the firelight. Otherwise it was rather poorly lighted, as not a great deal of light came in the basement windows, but one soon grew accustomed to it.

A small white cloth was laid at one end of the big scrubbed table, and Frau Kramper quickly set another place,

and we started our first meal together. She was not exactly communicative, but at least she was less hostile.

Sensing that she would think it beneath her dignity to question me, I gave her a brief explanation of why I had come to work in Geneva, and why I had been so desirous of finding another job and residence.

She listened with scarcely a word, and I wondered if she believed me; then as the bell above the door rang, she hurried upstairs.

When she came down again, she said as she unloaded the tray she carried, "Monsieur Poitier says you are free now for two hours. You must go out for exercise."

"I would rather not," I replied. "I am afraid Edo, or others, may search for me."

"Very well, then I will accompany you," she replied. "We will go by paths where they will be unlikely to think of looking."

"But you need rest," I said.

"Fiddlesticks, I am not an old woman yet."

"Then I will help you with the dishes," I insisted, and I believe that gesture finally made Frau Kramper my friend.

"There is no need," she said grumpily, but picking up the drying cloth, I proceeded to make myself useful.

From then on, for about an hour every afternoon, Frau Kramper insisted on accompanying me along the country paths away from the town. I never went into Geneva. If I needed anything, Frau Kramper shopped for me, and gradually my fears of being discovered, subsided.

I had written to my aunt, explaining why I had been forced to move from Marie's home, telling her of my present employment and of the care Frau Kramper took of me. This, I knew, would allay her anxiety; and I begged her not to give my address to her husband, or to Marie, if she wrote inquiring where I was. I hoped that in time, Marie and her family would assume that I had left Geneva.

I often smiled to myself, as I thought what a strange pair Frau Kramper and I must have made as we set out every afternoon.

I was much taller than she was, with her typically solid

German figure. She always wore a wide-brimmed, black felt hat, screwed on to her big bun of hair with a large steel hatpin. Her skirts were wide and trailing, her boots flat-heeled and clumsily made. She strode along, putting her feet down heavily with the toes turning outward at a wide angle; and always she carried a long rusty-black umbrella, which she plonked down with a vicious prod at every step.

She talked in Low German, and at first I found it difficult to follow. I could speak Swiss French, and Swiss German, but this was rather different. Obviously, Frau Kramper was glad to have someone who knew her own language more than most of the people in Geneva did, and years later I was to be thankful to her for that practice.

After our brisk walk, she ordered me to rest for an hour; then at about four o'clock, I was given a cup of coffee and a pastry, and allowed to work again until seven o'clock.

Often I worked alone in the study, laboriously copying the sheaves of papers, which mounted day by day. Sometimes Monsieur Poitier worked at his desk for hours without speaking; sometimes he was out most of the day, copying down data he required in the library.

I realized that he must often work into the early hours of the morning, because when I went to bed, I could still see the light from the study window streaming out across the small garden in front of the house.

We had so little to say to each other; yet I felt a sense of peace and security in this house, such as I had not experienced for a long time.

Frau Kramper never became affectionate, but at least she ceased to resent my presence, and by gathering a hint here and there, I pieced her story together. Her husband had been an engineer, and had been sent to Geneva to work. Frau Kramper did not like Switzerland, but when he died in an accident, she was left with three young children, and as they had already started school and she had a house, she chose to stay where she was. Conditions were difficult in Germany in those days, and she had decided she could support her family by taking in paying guests

during the vacation seasons, when so many tourists poured into Switzerland.

Then two children died with diphtheria, and she was left with only her eldest son, Freiderik, who was then about twelve years old. He was a brilliant boy like his father, and she determined he would go to the university. To make this possible, she sold their house and took a job as house-keeper. Freiderik had taken a degree at Hamburg University, and was now working in Germany. Always he had said he would make a home for her when he had finished studying, but now he was married and did not need her, and she did not want to share a home with her daughter-in-law. She preferred to be independent, and here in the house of Baroness Wykeham and Monsieur Poitier, she was almost her own mistress.

Gradually, I noticed a change in Frau Kramper. Her face looked even more serious, and she spoke less than ever. After letters from Germany, she seemed unsettled; and I noticed that every morning she seized the newspaper even before Monsieur Poitier had opened it, and scanned the headlines with an anxious frown on her brow.

Occasionally, too, Monsieur Poitier would sigh as he glanced at the news; and sometimes he said sadly, "The war clouds are gathering again. Why must men try to destroy each other?"

I understood very little of the political conditions of the world at that time. Shut away in this little backwater, I was content to go on day by day, thankful for the peace and security that surrounded me.

I dreaded the thought of the return of the baroness. Perhaps she would object to my living in the house. Perhaps, like others, she would resent me and insist that I left this home, which I had come to love in so short a time.

My pile of clearly-written pages grew higher and higher, and often Monsieur Poitier gave me other work to copy and letters to write. Nowadays, of course I would have a typewriter, but at that time, handcopying was more widely used.

As the days went by, even in this quiet house, a feeling

of tension crept in. The baroness was detained in England longer than she expected, as there were many technical difficulties over legal settlements. She had written, urging her stepson to join her, but he said he preferred to stay until his book was finished.

From Frau Kramper, I had learned that my employer was the son of a French diplomat who had married an Arabian girl. She had died when Pierre, their first baby, was born, and later his father had married Lady Margaret Wykeham, whom Frau Kramper always called "the baroness." She had brought Pierre up as her own son, and after the death of his father, had brought the boy to Europe. He had gone to various schools in France, Italy, England, and Spain—anywhere the baroness had settled for any length of time. She had money of her own and kept Pierre well supplied. He was not strong, and had had several spells of treatment in sanatoriums. That was why they had come to Switzerland. Pierre loved to study, and he had been working on his book for many months.

At that time, Geneva was full of foreigners studying at the university, besides the continual flow of tourists; and it soon became obvious that the police were scanning all outsiders very carefully. Everyone had to go to the security office to be questioned and to register. As I was a Swiss citizen, I had no trouble, but Pierre and Frau Kramper were aliens, and were regarded as potential spies or trouble-makers.

One day Frau Kramper startled us by announcing that she was leaving immediately for Germany. Her son had sent her the money, and insisted that she leave at once, and Monsieur Poitier seemed to understand, for he made no objection. Later he explained that he felt war was imminent, and it was as well for people to return to their own country.

"Will you have to leave?" I asked, my heart heavy with fear.

He smiled rather sadly. "I can hardly claim any country as my own. I have a French passport, but I have never lived long in France. I could go to England to my step-

mother, but that country, too, is preparing for war. I cannot fight because of my health, so I will take my chances here. I believe Switzerland will endeavor to stay neutral, so I may be able to escape the terrible holocaust to come."

I let out my breath in relief, then my heart started to beat quickly once more as he said, "But what about you? Without Frau Kramper we will be alone, and that is not suitable for one so young. I was expecting my stepmother any day, but she has met with an accident, and has a broken leg, so she cannot travel at present."

"Please let me stay," I begged. "You will need someone to look after the house and cook your meals when Frau Kramper has gone."

"I must advertise for another housekeeper. Have you no friends to whom you can go, or a friend who could come here to stay in the meantime?"

"There is no one I would trust," I replied.

"I have often gone to the bookstore where you used to work, and have heard that the brother who annoyed you has been called into the army, so at least you are safe from his persecution. Marie, your friend, is taking nursing training, but I admit I do not care for the other sister, or her so-called boyfriend. I will go to the employment office today and try to replace Frau Kramper."

Frau Kramper departed, and I was surprised at how upset I was to see her go. She had been good to me in her own way, and had helped me to grow a little more sure of myself.

Monsieur Poitier returned with the news that there was no housekeeper available. The hotels were full of people pouring into what they hoped was the comparative safety of Switzerland. A woman would come in during the day to clean, but it was impossible to find someone willing to sleep in the house.

This did not worry me, because I felt I could trust Monsieur Poitier implicitly. Never by word or action had he given me the slightest indication that he thought of me as an attractive woman, and my greatest worry was that he

might have to leave the country, and I would be homeless once more.

I was too young to realize that I had fallen in love with my employer. I knew that I admired and respected him, but I thought of him as being far above me in every way. If only I could stay in his home and serve him, I believed I would be completely satisfied. He was about thirty years old, a man of learning who had traveled widely. To him, I was sure, I was only a young, uninformed, simple girl. I had nothing to offer such a man, except a willingness to serve him in any capacity I could.