

I

PAUL MORAY looked doubtfully from the heap of books on his desk to the almost-full packing case beside him. He was well on the way to proving the truth of the old saying that a quart will not go into a pint.

Maybe they would not want so many books—maybe they would not stay in Santillanos for a whole year—maybe there would be so much to do in getting the new airline running that a quiet evening with a book would be out of the question.

He sighed and moved across to the window, wondering if there was anything in all the world quite like a New England landscape. In a few days they would be leaving the cool greenness of Harmony Hill for the lush color and heat of Colombia. It had happened so often. It would happen again. And his family, bless them, took all the upheavals in their stride, and made themselves at home in whatever part of the world they happened to be.

Quick, light footsteps sounded in the hall, and as the door opened, Paul held out a hand without turning round. "Come and look, darling" he said. "The hill's gone a sort of misty lilac and Reuben's funny old barn looks like a cloud-castle."

Dinah Moray laughed and moved into the circle of her husband's arm. "That's not what you said when you told Reuben his shingles were a disgrace to the district! You're getting sentimental about the place when you know you'll be perfectly happy in Santillanos. It's a good thing the girls were born with wandering feet like ours! It would have been awful if any of us had pined for a settled existence."

"You've had twenty-four years of following me around," Paul said ruefully. "Honestly, I never thought it would be like this. Dinah, are you *sure* you haven't had enough? I'm not the only man in the company who can run an airline, and they'd give me a home job if I asked for it."

Dinah shook her head. "You'd hate it—and so would we. O Paul, what we'd have missed if we'd stayed put in Harmony Hill all our lives! We've had some wonderful years and I wouldn't exchange them for the coziest, most uneventful life in this town. Listen, the kitchen barometer's set for fair weather!"

Paul smiled with her as the strains of "Stars in My Crown" drifted down the passage. The family could always tell from Samantha's choice of hymn just how Samantha was feeling.

Her repertoire was extensive, but "Stars in My Crown" meant that spiritually and temporally, Samantha was just fine. "Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen" meant that she was in the depths, therefore to be left alone until "the misery" passed and her ebony features resumed their usual cheerful cast.

Dinah glanced thoughtfully at her husband as a clear young soprano joined Samantha's deeper tones.

Paul nodded. "That's Ariel. Any minute now they'll get down to discussing who'll know whom in Heaven and measuring each other for harps and halos and what not."

"O Paul! You're making them sound like a couple of—of gossips and they're not a bit like that. They *like* to talk about these things and they've no one else to discuss them with."

"It's not natural," Paul protested. "Last year Ariel was a scatterbrained youngster of eighteen, and then she went to those revival meetings and became a changeling overnight. Yes, yes, I know she's perfectly sweet, but she worries about *us*. About us, for goodness sake, as if we were heathens!"

"But, darling, it's only that she feels she's found something we've never known and she wants us to share it. You must admit she hasn't gone all pious on us, or preached at us, or even looked reproachful! You must be fair, Paul. Ariel was always a poppet, and being converted has not changed that at all. You know what I

think? She's made us envious and we don't quite know why, and then we get a bit annoyed with her and with ourselves."

"Could be," Paul admitted with his kind smile. "She got you to attend the last of those meetings. What did you really think of it all?"

"I was really impressed," Dinah said, rubbing her cheek against his sweater. "It was all so quiet and sort of solemn. I was sorry when it was over and I found myself just the same as when I'd gone in. I wanted so desperately to know what was making people there look as if they had found a new Heaven and a new earth. But I just sat like a log and felt as miserable as I have ever done in my life."

Paul turned her face up to his and his clear blue eyes were perplexed. "But, honey, you never told me any of this before! Why didn't you say something at the time?"

"I wouldn't have known how to put it into words! And anyway, you didn't really approve of the campaign. You said the services at St. Mark's were good enough for you and that Harmony Hill was the last place that needed to have religion brought to it."

"But it's always been a decent-living community, Dinah! There aren't many St. Mark's people who don't have family prayers, and the church is always packed on Sundays."

"Yes, darling, I know. And it seems to me it's quite right to call that religion, but Ariel's got more than that, and we can't help seeing the difference."

Paul turned to the window again, his face troubled and his mind a chaos of thoughts. He and Dinah had shared most things all these years, but on a question like this she had not been able to tell him what she felt. She had known it might embarrass him; known that he preferred to keep what he called a decent reticence about his own soul and everyone else's.

He sighed softly, remembering Judith who was three years older than Ariel. Judith, who did not care for "soul surgery" either, but who had attended several meetings during the campaign, had been rather subdued ever since.

Dinah gave him a little shake. "Come on, honey, let's get on

with the packing. Do we *have* to take all those books? Santillanos isn't completely dead, is it?"

"N-no," Paul said thoughtfully, "but I had the feeling of being a bit of an alien there, if you know what I mean. We haven't any near neighbors because the house is a couple of miles outside the town. It's actually on the coffee estate of Montemayor, and although the owner of the plantation was very polite, he did not go out of his way to be welcoming."

"There's something else," Dinah said. "Come on, tell me."

"Well, probably it needn't affect us, but when I was with the mayor I saw the ruins of what must have been rather a nice building on the edge of town. I was told that that had been the Protestant church. The mayor looked at me with a sort of grin and said, 'It is so sad that the Protestants will interfere in politics. When there is a riot and their churches and missions are damaged they shout about religious persecution. But these things happen only when the missionaries have communist ideas which they try to spread among our people.' And it seemed to me that the sight of that dynamited church pleased him a lot."

"But how awful, Paul! I've heard that some evangelicals have a tough time in Colombia, but I didn't know missions got blown up. What happens to the missionaries then?"

"I've been finding out a thing or two. In the last eight years forty-six churches have been destroyed, seventy-five Protestants murdered for their faith—politics had nothing to do with it—and more than two hundred Protestant schools closed down by the government. Seems to me the government is synonymous with the Roman Catholic Church, and they'll go to any length to keep the Protestants down. Anything can and does happen to native Protestants, but even American and British nationals have been beaten and shockingly treated."

Dinah walked slowly across to the desk and riffled the pages of a book. "I don't see how it can do otherwise than affect us, Paul. We could never just stand on the side lines and watch our own people beaten!"

"For the first time in my life," Paul said, "I'm wondering if I'm

wise in taking you three with me. I've nearly gone crazy these last few days, not knowing whether to tell you all this or just leave it and hope we'd never come against religious discrimination in Santillanos."

They could hear Judith and Ariel talking in the hall, and Dinah whispered, "We'll discuss it later, but get this, my lone warrior, we're coming with you—riots, dynamite, revolutions, and all!"

Paul bent and kissed her quickly as the two girls came in, and he grinned when Judith said to her sister, "I keep forgetting that we ought to cough or shuffle our feet before we come into any room in this house."

"You'd think they'd be used to each other by now," Ariel agreed in long-suffering tones. "There's a silver wedding in the offing, but I can't see either of them showing the dignity appropriate for the occasion."

Dinah threw a cushion at them and exclaimed, "If you have the kind of marriage we've had, you'll do better than you deserve. Been out with Andy, Judith?"

The laughter faded from Judith's wide gray eyes and she lowered her long lashes quickly. She hesitated, wondering how to tell them about herself and Andy Blackmore, and not at all sure that she could explain it clearly.

Andy was the nearest thing to the-boy-next-door, if she would have lived long enough in one place for that to mean anything. But whenever the family did take root in Harmony Hill, Andy was her escort and inseparable companion. He had wanted to marry her the last time they were home, but she had begged for time to be sure that she really loved him.

Rather gloomily, Andy agreed to wait until the Morays returned from their next trip abroad, sure that Judith would realize she had wasted a whole year.

Now Judith looked at her family and smiled faintly. "Don't look so bothered! I just wanted to tell you that I've been fairly sure I wouldn't marry Andy, but things came to a head tonight. He's been trying to get permission to run Sunday performances in

the Barn Theater and he says the die-hards will soon have to give in."

"I've heard about that," Paul said. "He's got a lot of support from the summer people and from some of our own youngsters here on the Hill. Still—it's only Andy's hobby, it's not his job."

Judith looked at her mother. "Would *you* go on to the Barn after church?"

Dinah hesitated. "Well—no, I don't think any of us would. But—"

"Look," Judith broke in, "I feel it's utterly wrong to open the theater on Sundays even for a 'good' play—and that's how Andy's trying to start the thing, by putting on semireligious stuff. I told him it was a dreadful idea, and he couldn't see that it mattered as long as he went to church and didn't keep others from going because the performances would be after church. We'd never agree on anything like this so we've called it a day."

Paul smiled at her. "You know best, honey. Tell me, would this have mattered so much a year ago?"

"No, I guess not," Judith murmured. "But don't ask me why! I don't think I can put it into words."

"Some day you will, honey," Ariel said as she tucked her arm inside her sister's. "Andy's a nice boy, but I never thought he was for you."

They smiled at each other and Paul thought, as he so often did, that no one would ever take them for sisters. Judith, almost a head taller than Ariel, had short brown curls and eyes of a strange silver-gray. Her face in repose was grave and rather thoughtful, but as soon as she smiled people forgot that they had thought her less attractive than her younger sister.

Ariel was the beauty of the family, laughter never very far from her vivid blue eyes, her smooth fair hair like wheat which had caught the sunshine.

They all turned to the window as the gate clicked, and they saw a young woman walking slowly toward the porch. Her head was bent as if in thought and when she came to the steps she hesitated and looked back the way she had come.

"I've never seen her before," Dinah murmured, and they waited while Samantha went to answer the rather diffident knock.

"It's a Mrs. Belmont," Samantha announced a few moments later. "Says she heard you all aimed to go to Colombia and she's got something special to ask you."

Paul looked ruefully at the upheaval of packing in the study and then shrugged. "Send her in, Samantha. She'll just have to excuse the mess."

Mrs. Belmont was obviously at a loss to know how to explain her errand; her blue eyes looked from Paul to Dinah in troubled indecision.

She came from Carra, she said, and she had heard their minister say that the Morays would soon be off to Santillanos. He was interested because he knew some missionaries in Colombia and he was rather anxious about them.

"Do you know much about that kind of thing?" Mrs. Belmont asked hesitantly. "I mean, it doesn't seem to get into the newspapers much, and not many people seem to care."

"We've heard a little," Paul admitted. "In fact, we were just discussing it this evening and wondering what effect it would have on our lives there."

"You'll have to be careful," Mrs. Belmont burst out, and sudden tears sparkled on her eyelashes. "I'm sorry, but I'm worried. You see, my young brother David is a minister and he lives in Altimira which is quite near Santillanos. We went to Colombia when he was a baby and I never left again until I married an engineer from New Haven and came up here to live. David went to college in the States, but after he was ordained he went back to Colombia. He said they needed the Gospel there, and he loved the people."

"Go on," Dinah prompted gently as the stranger paused.

"David wrote long letters to me every week, but I haven't heard a thing for two months! I've written to people we both knew and one man went to Altimira and was told that David had gone on a preaching tour somewhere in the wilds. He never mentioned anything like that in the last letter I had from him, and even if he

had gone he'd have written to me from somewhere. It's—it's all wrong! Every inquiry comes up against the blank wall of this story that David left Altimira by himself. I don't believe it!"

"But—what can we do?" Paul asked. "If your friends can't get any information, it seems doubtful that we will. Have you tried what they call the 'official channels'?"

"Of course I have! And all the satisfaction I got was that the evidence pointed to the fact that David had set off on horseback for a lengthy pastoral visit. They said his case of books was gone and that he had left his house in perfect order, locked up and awaiting his return. No accidents had been reported within miles of Altimira, and they said they would try to trace him if they could find which direction he had taken."

Ariel went to sit beside her and touched her arm gently. "There was no clue in your brother's last letter? I mean, was he in trouble of *any* kind? I've been reading about the persecutions in Colombia in a church magazine. I was horrified at the depths to which even the police would sink when Protestants were being ill-treated."

"That's what scares me," Mrs. Belmont exclaimed. "The people loved David, and he's had converts to his own faith. The authorities wouldn't *let* him go on like that! It worried me a bit when he said in his last letter that his house had been broken into and all his personal papers stolen. But that didn't seem as sinister then as it does now!"

Paul got a sheet of paper from his desk and sat down. "Will you describe your brother for us, Mrs. Belmont? We'll do whatever we can to find out something about him."

David Westwood was twenty-five, his sister said, slight in figure and not very tall. He was so fair as to be almost white and his eyes were a green-hazel. "Laughing eyes," Mrs. Belmont whispered, "like the stones in the clear water of a brook." He was light on his feet and had a sort of joyous step as if he found it good to be alive.

"He's a very gentle person," Mrs. Belmont went on. "He's 'good' if you understand what I mean, and not in a priggish way. His goodness is part of him, like his happy spirit, and—oh, I don't

know! I sound like an adoring sister, but the ordinary people of Altimira loved him too."

"He sounds a dear," Dinah said warmly. "Don't forget to give us your address, and we'll get in touch with you as soon as we can."

"You've been very kind," Mrs. Belmont said as she handed over an envelope with her name and address on it. "I'd give anything to go to Colombia myself, but apart from the expense, our baby is only six months old and we have two other children. It's wonderful that you should accept all I've told you like this. Lots of people have not heard anything of what happens to evangelicals in Colombia, and those who have heard it, just do not believe it."

After the visitor had gone Paul smiled wryly at his family. So much for his hope that they might be able to avoid clerical and political trouble in Santillanos! From what he had heard and read he knew that "politics" was always the excuse when the Colombian government was questioned about riots involving Protestants.

In the beginning it had been enough to call the evangelicals "liberal agitators." But the smear tactics had penetrated to South America and now the Protestants were branded as communists and their Gospels and tracts seized as "subversive literature."

Paul sighed and ran his fingers through his thick, fair hair. "I've just remembered something else," he said. "We've got an extra passenger on the airplane. She's a Miss Bernice Taylor, a relative of one of the directors. Seems her sister died in Santillanos recently, and it'll be quicker to fly with us than to go by the regular passenger route. There are three children with only a housekeeper to look after them until Miss Taylor gets there. The father died a couple of years ago. He was Spanish, but his wife was from Rockingham; she wrote to her sister before she died and begged her to come for the children."

"Well, isn't this Miss Taylor nice?" Judith asked.

"Oh, I liked her a lot!" Paul exclaimed. "No, it's nothing to do with her personally. But this Ramon Quevedo, her brother-in-law, was a convert to the evangelical faith, and Miss Taylor is terrified that his family will insist on keeping the children and bringing them up in the Roman faith. Evidently they just ignored Quevedo

after his conversion and blamed his 'lapse' on his wife. Miss Taylor has all the evidence to prove that the mother wanted the children brought up in the States, but that won't be much good if the authorities decide otherwise."

"Trouble, here we come!" Dinah said on a little surge of laughter. "Remember my asking you if Santillanos was more dead than alive? The Morays had better order chain-mail vests! I reckon we'll stand the whole place on its ear by the time we've found our stray missionary and flown out the Quevedo children!"

2

THE CLOUDS THINNED for a space as the big transport plane bumped and staggered through misty mountain corridors. Far below, Villadiaz, which possessed the nearest airport to Santillanos, was a cluster of white dots against its sheltering hill.

"This last hop has seemed the longest of all," Dinah said, gathering together scattered magazines and a half-knitted pullover. "Can we go straight on to Santillanos, Paul?"

"Tired, honey?" he asked with a smile. "We shouldn't have to wait too long here if they've got the transport I asked for. Pity the Santillanos airfield isn't ready yet but another two or three months should see that part of the work finished."

He touched her arm and glanced across the aisle to where Bernice Taylor sat with her head back and her eyes closed. She was not asleep because now and again she clenched the hands which lay idly in her lap, clenched them until the knuckles showed white.

"It looks to me as if she's fighting dragons before she even sees them," Paul whispered. "She's been on pins and needles ever since we left home and she doesn't look the type to be scared of anything."

"She's not scared," Dinah murmured. "But she adored her sister

and the kids, and it upset her terribly that she never got word in time that her sister was dying. She's been here before, you know, and maybe she feels she has reason to worry over being given the custody of the children. The authorities can easily state that an unmarried woman of—what would you say?—forty—wouldn't be as suitable a guardian as the father's family right here in Colombia."

The pilot turned and motioned Paul forward, and as he went down the aisle Bernice Taylor smiled tiredly at Dinah.

"I was remembering the last time I came here," she said. "Felicia was at Bogota to meet me, and I don't think we stopped talking for three days! Ramon was alive then too, and he was such a dear. We made great plans for them all to come to the States for a holiday, but it was only a few months later that Ramon died. He was on his way home one evening—he ran a printing business in Santillanos—when one of those stupid riots broke out. He started to run toward his own house, and someone shouted, 'There goes another of these filthy communists!' and Ramon fell with a bullet in his back."

Dinah shivered. "And Felicia?"

"She was in the doorway," Bernice went on dully. "She ran out to him but he must have died instantly. I think that's what killed her too in the end. She never really got over it."

Dinah tried to imagine what it would be like to see Paul fall dead at her feet, and she felt beads of sweat dewing her forehead and upper lip. If there were any riots in Santillanos while they were there, she would see to it that Paul kept well out of the way.

"Why didn't Felicia leave here after that?" she asked.

"Because of the business. She ran it herself with the workers who had been with Ramon. She had a lot of courage really. If she had sold out she would have received very little money because a bigger combine was ready to take over the business but not the premises or the workers. So she stayed on and made a big success of it. She came north with the children last year, but I could see that her heart was back here."

"The children will be so thrilled to see you," Dinah said, and a ghost of a smile lighted Bernice Taylor's tired features. "Who's been looking after them since—since they were left alone?"

"Felicia had a wonderful nursemaid—something like your Samantha, only she was white—and she stayed on as a sort of housekeeper when Felicia ran the business. Actually, housekeeper's the wrong word—Raquel was more like one of the family and she'd have done anything for them. I hope she'll come back with us when I take the children."

The big plane was coming in to land, and Dinah clutched her safety belt with cold fingers, trying to remember the hundreds of safe landings she had known. But it was always the same—this feeling of amazement and relief that the touchdown was accomplished without incident.

Paul, who had slipped back to his seat, covered her hands with his own. "Fine traveler you are!" he mocked gently. "Nearly a quarter of a century of world flights and you still go green at the end of them!"

Dinah waited until the plane rolled to a final standstill and then said coldly, "I know someone who can't bear spiders—after nearly half a century. I hope he won't be surprised if he finds the biggest one in Santillanos down his neck!"

"You dare!" Paul exclaimed, unfastening their safety belts. "Just one hairy spider and I'll have you over my knee—like this!"

"Stop it, Paul! Everyone will think we're crazy! The whole office staff is behind us—oh, you wretch!"

"No spiders," Paul said inexorably. "Promise."

"No spiders," Dinah muttered. "All right. But you wait!"

She shot to her feet and met the open laughter of Samantha and the girls. For a moment she simmered and then her mouth curved involuntarily.

"He'll never grow up!" she exclaimed. "Goodness knows why, but everyone thinks *I'm* the scatterbrain!"

"Perhaps if you could manage to look matronly," Judith suggested helpfully, "people might believe you were a sober married woman. As it is—."

She shrugged as if Dinah's case of arrested development was beyond hope, and suddenly Bernice Taylor startled them all by laughing aloud. It was the first time they had heard her laugh since

they had left Harmony Hill, and they realized what a very attractive woman she was when her brown eyes lost their somber shadows and her face came alive with amusement.

"You're all such fun," she said impulsively. "I'm going to love staying with you for awhile. Oh, look—is this a reception committee or something?"

Paul glanced at the procession coming across the turf and hurriedly straightened his tie and smoothed his hair. "I hope they won't expect a speech," he groaned. "I'd forgotten we're some kind of VIP's here and that they'd turn out the mayor and his minions to meet us. Oh, well, here we go. The quicker it's all over the quicker we'll get on to Santillanos."

He did not have to make a speech, but greetings and introductions took quite a time. Eventually, the ladies were conducted to a very comfortable lounge for a light snack of fruit and sandwiches and coffee, while Paul and his staff saw to the unloading of the plane.

One of the first items down the ramp was the Morays' all-purpose car. It was neither jeep nor station wagon, but it combined the best points of both, and Paul had christened it "Dorcas" because it was "full of good works."

The six trucks he had asked for were waiting at the airstrip to be loaded, and after an hour or so the procession was ready to start.

Dinah sat in front with Paul; Bernice and Samantha in the back; and Judith and Ariel on the tip-up seats. Miscellaneous bags and packages took up all the rest of the space, but as Ariel said, it would all act as ballast and it looked as if they might need it on this journey.

The road zigzagged through a narrow pass and then seemed to wander down without end into the vastness of dim green forest. Now and again small monkeys jumped from one tree to another, jabbering crossly at this invasion of their privacy. Bright beautiful birds winged across the road, their feathers iridescent jewels against palm fronds and dappled tree trunks.

Then the forest thinned out on one side and the road twisted

round rocky outcrops and past deep gorges which made Samantha shut her eyes and moan that this time the Morays were asking too much of Providence. This time for sure they'd all end up in a heap at the bottom of nowhere.

Paul laughed. "Get an eyeful of this, Samantha," he said, and signaled to the trucks behind that he was pulling up.

The road went on past a sharp bend, but in front of the car there was nothing but space, not even a mountain to cut into the infinity of sky and cloud and the terrifying immensity of unbelievable heights and depths.

They all got out of the car and cautiously approached the very low wall which was all that stood between them and this sheer drop into emptiness. Far below were the foothills and the fields and a dream-distant town, and beyond that again the vast plains of the Llanos which seemed to go on over the edge of the world.

"Oh, my!" Samantha said weakly. "We've been lots of places, Miz Dinah, but did ever you see the likes of that? I reckon this is the place to put anyone who don't believe in God. 'Look out there,' I'd tell them, 'and then say all this just happened along.' Only the Almighty could have shaped anything like this."

"I've never felt so puny in my life," Judith murmured. "Let's move, Daddy, before we all get dizzy."

"Come along, wench," Paul ordered, grabbing Dinah's arm. "You'll fall over if you lean out like that. But I'll bring you up here again. Some day when you haven't been showing me the respect to which I'm entitled, I'll sit you on this wall until you get back to your proper size."

"Then you'll find you've got a grasshopper instead of me," Dinah said dreamily. "Oh, Paul—it's wonderful! Is this place far from Santillanos?"

"About half an hour," Paul said as he started the engine. "We have to pass through the town to reach our place on the far side of it. Let's hope there's no *fiesta* today because six trucks and 'Dorcas' will cause chaos!"

But Santillanos was no more than normally busy as the small convoy passed through. Paul had stayed there for a while when he

made arrangements to rent the house and to oversee the progress of the new airfield, but everything was new to the others who looked round eagerly as they drove slowly along the main street.

Side roads gave views of small white houses with tin roofs of every shade from silver to deep rust, but here and there stood solid Moorish-style buildings with roofs of mellow brown tiles. The plaza was dominated by a twin-towered church with a life-sized painted Virgin above the door.

"Oh, I like this place," Ariel said. "Look—pink houses with black balconies; and there's a house exactly like the mosques we saw in Damascus—and, oh, did you see the gorgeous painting on the outside wall of that other one?"

Paul half turned to Bernice. "Did you want to stop off to see the children—or come home with us first?"

"Could I just make sure they're all right?" Bernice asked hesitantly. "I won't keep you long because I'll be coming back for them later anyway. The house is down the second street on your right."

Paul waved the convoy to a halt and then went back to speak to Peter MacBride who was the Company's chief engineer. He was in charge of the airfield construction and a very old friend of the Morays.

Yes, Peter said in the Scottish brogue he had never lost, he would see to the unloading of their personal possessions at Montemayor and then take the rest of the stuff on to the airfield.

"I'll come along later to see how everyone's settled in," Paul promised. "But I feel we ought to relieve Miss Taylor's mind about her sister's children."

"If I'd known about them I could have made inquiries before you came," Peter said, and a thoughtful frown creased his brow. "I—I hope she'll find everything all right."

Paul returned to his own car, illogically uneasy over the way Peter had looked when he heard of their errand. But he said nothing as he swung the wheel round at the corner Bernice had indicated and drew up before a pleasant white house set back from the road.

"It's—very quiet," Bernice said doubtfully as she got out of the car. "Perhaps they haven't come home from school."

She walked up the path between borders of colorful flowers and lifted the knocker on the pale blue door. Nobody in the car said anything, and Dinah found to her surprise that the tension around her was making her mouth dry.

Bernice knocked again and then moved over to look through the windows on each side of the door.

Such a lonely figure she seemed, slim and erect in a gray dress with white collar and cuffs, looking like a shadow against the gay frontage of the house.

After a moment she came down to the car again and Samantha jumped out to meet her. "You come along with us, Miz Taylor," she ordered, "and sure enough you'll find the kids after supper."

"Yes—yes, of course," Bernice murmured. "Thank you, Samantha. I—perhaps they haven't received the message I sent, and they're waiting for word from Bogota by the regular route."

"Can you ride?" Ariel asked as Bernice got back into the car. "Peter told us at the airport that he'd arranged horses for us. It's really the best way of getting around this kind of country."

"Yes, I ride quite a bit at home," Bernice said woodenly and she shook her head as Paul said he would bring her back in the car after supper. "Thank you, Mr. Moray, but I'd rather like to ride if there's a horse to spare. It might help to clear away the cobwebs, and you have to go to the airfield anyway."

"Ariel and I will come with you," Judith said, and Bernice smiled gratefully as Ariel agreed with enthusiasm.

Once outside the town, the road started to twist and rise toward the foothills and the "Hacienda Montemayor."

"What's the owner of the place like, Daddy?" Judith asked. "You said he wasn't very forthcoming, but that's all we know."

"I reckon it might take a while before any of us know more than that," Paul said. "I should say he's about thirty-five, very dark and Spanish-looking, arrogant manner, and acts as if he owned South America."

"Well, he owns most of this part, doesn't he?" Dinah asked reasonably. "It's been in his family for centuries."

"Oh, yes," Paul agreed, "but a little warmth in his manner wouldn't hurt. According to the lease we signed he's Rodrigo de Culveras Alvarado; looks as if he ought to be addressed as Don Rodrigo but seems to be known as *Señor* Alvarado."

The road ran past a high wall, and after a few hundred yards Paul turned in between solid stone gateposts and along a tree-shaded avenue. The great iron gates had been left open for them, and Peter was still waiting at the house.

"Well," Dinah breathed as she got out of the car and surveyed her new home. "If this is a—a sort of Lodge, what on earth must the 'Hacienda' itself be like?"

Peter grinned at her. "Like a Spanish *casa*, Dinah. It's a gorgeous piece of work both inside and out, but maybe you'll see it for yourself soon. This place of yours is called 'La Esperanza'—an old aunt of *Señor* Alvarado used to live here, but it's been empty since she died. I think he rented the place just to keep it in good condition and he'd rather let it out to strangers than risk contact with the commoners of Santillanos!"

"You men!" Judith marveled. "What do you and Daddy know about the *Señor's* motives? We're jolly glad they worked in our favor anyway. I'm going to love this place."

There was reason enough for the delight with which they all looked at "La Esperanza" and its surroundings. The walls were white with lacy black grilles on the main windows, and a beautiful black tracery of veranda all round the upper floor. The doorway was recessed under a wide cool-looking archway which was gay with ferns and hanging baskets of flowers.

The windows set in the outer wall were shaded by red-tiled eaves which matched the roof, and the other windows opened to an arched patio bounded by the garden.

"Well, come on," Paul said impatiently from the doorway. "You'll see enough of it for the next few months, and I'm getting hungry. Come and look at your modern kitchen."

"Really modern?" Dinah asked, taking a reluctant backward

look at the smooth lawn, the riot of exotic flowers, the feathery tops of the bamboos and the great shining leaves of the palm trees.

Samanthy was already walking purposefully toward the back regions, but she halted at the kitchen door as a stout middle-aged woman in black came forward.

"*Señora* Moray?" she asked, her dark gaze picking out Dinah from the group in the hall. "Welcome to Montemayor. I am the housekeeper at the 'Hacienda,' *Señora* Benevente. The *Señor* Alvarado regrets his absence on business, but he will call on you tomorrow if that is suitable. Please you will tell me, have you made any arrangements about servants?"

"Not yet," Dinah told her. "We always do that after we've seen where we're going to live. Of course, Samanthy goes everywhere with us, and sometimes we all just share the work."

Señora Benevente looked shocked. Obviously the ladies of her experience had never known the meaning of work. However, Dinah agreed that with a house this size domestic help was a necessity, and the *Señora* said she would send along some girls and a handyman in the morning. The plantation workers lived on the estate which was entirely self-supporting, and there was always somebody available who would prefer to work at Montemayor rather than find a job in Santillanos.

Before she left, the housekeeper showed them the stock of provisions in the cool stone-floored pantry. "It was the *Señor's* orders," she said. "You will learn about the estate farms tomorrow, but for tonight you will not go hungry."

"You see?" Judith said to her father after the housekeeper had gone. "You must admit that that was kind of our patrician landlord!"

"Just wait till you meet him," Paul promised, "and you'll feel like a specimen on the end of a pin!"

Judith wrinkled her nose at him and hurried after the others who were exploring the house. Every room was beautifully furnished but there was plenty space for the personal possessions which would turn the place into a home. The Morays had created a

home-like atmosphere in much less promising surroundings than these.

Two of the bedrooms had dressing rooms attached, and Bernice was given one so that the children could be near her when they came. The dressing rooms were as big as any of the bedrooms back home in Harmony Hill.

Judith and Ariel chose neighboring rooms, both windows facing in the direction of the "Hacienda." Above the trees they could see the upper floor with its arched and pillared veranda, the rambling towered red roof, and beyond it the soaring peaks of the mountains.

Judith was still dreaming by her window when Samantha made vigorous use of the gong in the hall. Judith turned away reluctantly, fascinated by the tropical dusk and not feeling in the least like eating. Then she remembered that Bernice was on edge to get back to Santillanos and ran down to the dining room.

Afterward, Peter MacBride took them round to the corral to introduce them to the horses and to little Alonso who was the groom.

"Very quiet horses," Alonso said with a flash of white teeth. "Suitable for ladies, yes?"

There would be plenty time later to decide who was to have which horse permanently, but now they were in a hurry because it was dark and the road was strange to them.

Bernice, in borrowed riding clothes, led the way down the drive, reining in suddenly as a rider on a big black horse swept through the gateway.

"A thousand pardons!" the rider exclaimed dismounting quickly. "I had not expected to meet anyone here. Allow me to present myself—Juan Alvarado, at your service."

He bowed gracefully, a slight, dark, charming young man in his middle twenties, and as Judith introduced herself and Ariel and Bernice she recalled a vague reference of her father's to a younger brother of the Hacendero. This must be he, and he certainly showed no signs of the forbidding exterior they had been led to expect from the Alvarado family.