

## The Way up to Heaven

All her life, Mrs Foster had had such a strong fear of missing a train, a plane, a boat or even the start of a play that her fear was almost an illness. In other respects, she was not a particularly nervous woman, but just the thought of being late on occasions like these would throw her into a terrible state. As a result, a small muscle in the corner of her left eye would begin to tremble. It was not very much, but the annoying thing was that the problem refused to disappear until an hour or so after the train or plane – or whatever it was – had been safely caught.

It is really strange how in certain people a simple fear about a thing like catching a train can grow into serious anxiety. At least half an hour before it was time to leave the house for the station, Mrs Foster would step out of the lift all ready to go, and then, as she was unable to sit down, she would move about from room to room until her husband, who must have known about her state of mind, finally joined her and suggested in a cool dry voice that perhaps they had better go now, had they not?

Mr Foster may possibly have had a right to be annoyed by this silliness of his wife's, but he could have had no excuse for increasing her anxiety by keeping her waiting unnecessarily. It is not, of course, certain that this is what he did, but whenever they were going somewhere, his timing was so exact – just a minute or two late, you understand – and his manner so calm that it was hard to believe that he was not purposely causing pain to the unhappy lady. He must have known that she would never dare to call out and tell him to hurry. He had trained her too well for that. He must also have known that if he was prepared to wait just a little longer than was wise, he could make her nearly crazy. On one or two special occasions in the

later years of their married life, it seemed almost as though he had *wanted* to miss the train, simply to increase the poor woman's suffering.

If the husband *was* guilty, what made his behaviour doubly unreasonable was the fact that, with the exception of this one small weakness, Mrs Foster was, and always had been, a good and loving wife. For over thirty years, she had served him loyally and well. There was no doubt about this. Even she knew it, and although she had for years refused to let herself believe that Mr Foster would ever consciously hurt her, there had been times recently when she had begun to wonder.

Mr Eugene Foster, who was nearly seventy years old, lived with his wife in a large six-floor house in New York City, on East 62nd Street, and they had four servants. It was a dark, cheerless place, and few people came to visit them. But on this particular morning in January, the house had come alive and there was a great deal of activity. One servant was leaving piles of dustsheets in every room, while another was covering the furniture with them. The butler was bringing down cases and putting them in the hall. The cook kept coming up from the kitchen to have a word with the butler, and Mrs Foster herself, in an old-fashioned fur coat and a black hat, was running from room to room and pretending to organize these operations. Actually, she was thinking of nothing at all except the fact that she was going to miss her plane if her husband didn't come out of his study soon and get ready.

'What time is it, Walker?' she asked the butler as she passed him.

'It's ten minutes past nine, madam.'

'And has the car come?'

'Yes, madam, it's waiting. I'm just going to put the luggage in now.'

'It takes an hour to get to the airport,' she said. 'My plane leaves