

at eleven. I have to be there half an hour before that to check in. I shall be late. I just *know* I'm going to be late.'

'I think you have plenty of time, madam,' the butler said kindly. 'I warned Mr Foster that you must leave at 9.15. There's still another five minutes.'

'Yes, Walker, I know, I know. But get the luggage in quickly, will you, please?'

She began walking up and down the hall, and whenever the butler came by, she asked him the time. This, she kept telling herself, was the *one* plane she must not miss. It had taken months to persuade her husband to allow her to go. If she missed it, he might easily decide that she should forget the whole thing. And the trouble was that he was determined to go to the airport with her to say goodbye.

'Dear God,' she said out loud, 'I'm going to miss it. I know. I know, I *know* I'm going to miss it.' The little muscle beside the left eye was trembling violently now. The eyes themselves were very close to tears.

'What time is it, Walker?'

'It's eighteen minutes past, madam.'

'Now I really *will* miss it!' she cried. 'Oh, I wish he would come!'

This was an important journey for Mrs Foster. She was going all alone to Paris to visit her daughter, her only child, who was married to a Frenchman. Mrs Foster did not like the Frenchman very much, but she was fond of her daughter, and, more than that, she had developed a great desire to see her three grandchildren. She knew them only from the many photographs that she had received and that she kept putting up all over the house. They were beautiful, these children. She loved them, and each time a new picture arrived she would carry it away and sit with it for a long time, examining it lovingly and searching the small faces for signs of that old satisfying blood likeness that meant so much.

And now, recently, she had come more and more to feel that she did not really wish to end her days in a place where she could not be near these children, and let them visit her, and take them for walks, and buy them presents, and watch them grow. She knew, of course, that it was wrong and in a way disloyal to have thoughts like these while her husband was still alive. She knew also that although he was no longer active in business, he would never agree to leave New York and live in Paris. It was extremely surprising that he had ever agreed to let her fly over there alone for six weeks to visit them. But, oh, how she wished she could live there always, and be close to them!

'Walker, what time is it?'

'Twenty-two minutes past, madam.'

As he spoke, a door opened and Mr Foster came into the hall. He stood for a moment, looking carefully at his wife, and she looked back at him - at this small but neat old man with the large bearded face.

'Well,' he said, 'I suppose perhaps we'd better go soon if you want to catch that plane.'

'Yes, dear - yes! Everything's ready. The car's waiting.'

'That's good!' he said. With his head over to one side, he was watching her closely.

'Here's Walker with your coat, dear. Put it on,' she said.

'I'll be with you in a moment,' he said. 'I'm just going to wash my hands.'

She waited for him, and the tall butler stood beside her, holding the coat and the hat.

'Walker, will I miss it?'

'No, madam,' the butler answered. 'I think you'll catch it all right.'

Then Mr Foster appeared again, and the butler helped him to put on his coat. Mrs Foster hurried outside and got into the hired car. Her husband came after her, but he walked down the steps