

5th in Series

# Hetty on Hold



Written and Illustrated by  
Martha Sears West

PREVIEW

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by  
Martha Sears West



CLEAN KIND WORLD  
Los Angeles

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Edited by Page Mallett

*Hetty on Hold*  
Fifth in Series

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Steve,  
thank you  
for the adventure.  
I miss your counsel, love, and encouragement.

With Page's continued guidance,  
Hetty came to life.

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*The Lawrence Home*

*Ocean*

*To the Office  
and the Hospital*

*Hannah*

*Olive Witch Forest*

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## CHARACTERS

Hetty, *Henrietta Anne Lawrence Morganthal*

Morgan Morganthal, *Hetty's husband*

Katrinka Wallace, *Morgan's former fiancée*

Joseph Ostler, *Katrinka's husband*

Max and Mimi Morganthal, *Morgan's parents*

Leaf Locke, *Hetty's biological father*

Marian, *young wife of Leaf Locke; Joseph's stepsister*

Anne Locke, *Leaf's deceased first wife*

Beverley Ignatz Gorman, *former Morganthal Circus employee*

Freydis Fairburn, *Hetty's aunt; sister to Leaf Locke*

Dan and Dora Lawrence, *Hetty's adoptive parents*

—This story takes place in the year 1964—



*Laughing at nothing and everything.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Intertwined*

Morgan glanced at his watch. Hetty was counting on him to meet her at the radio station in half an hour. He paced to the cockpit and parted the curtains. The copilot made a move as if to give up his seat. "What can we do for you, Mr. Morgenthal?"

Morgan's hand on his shoulder gave the man permission to stay as he was. "Not a thing. I just want to thank you again—both of you. It's not the first time you've come to my rescue."

"It's an honor, sir."

Morgan resisted the urge to look at his watch again, but the pilot sensed his concern. "We'll make it," he said. "And a car's waiting for you." Morgan flashed him a smile, and together they praised the steady tailwinds.

The copilot seemed reluctant to end the pleasantries. "I hear the U.S. team wants you in the glider competition," he said. "Think you'll do it?"

"No, I'll pass on this one—we'd have to miss our daughter's fourth birthday."

"Too bad. You hold a distance record, don't you?"

Morgan shook his head. "Not officially."

His glider was in mothballs, but he thought how happy Hetty would be if they could spend some time in the air. A thatch of hair fell across his forehead, hiding his serious dark eyes, and he returned to his seat.

Even during a short business trip like this one, he longed for Hetty and ached at their separation. The hint of a smile crinkled the corners his eyes, and he imagined himself soaring with her, high toward the brilliance of the sun—like eagles rising together above the clouds to a place of pure love.

The steam from Morgan's breath fogged the window, and he cleared it with his sleeve. As the plane descended through the clouds, he watched for their home. The lush forest that spread north of the cottage was easy to spot.

Many memories connected him to that piece of earth. The day before Morgan was to marry the beauty queen Katrinka Wallace, he knew he would find Hetty there in the forest. He sought her with the painful intention of saying goodbye. She was seventeen at the time.

When he found her she was in a tree, sobbing with a broken heart. What happened next changed everything. Hetty's desperate confessions of love astonished them both, forever blending their lives and dreams.

Twelve minutes after the plane touched down, the limousine delivered Morgan to the entrance of the radio station. The driver would deal with the luggage, and Morgan thanked him. As he sprinted up the steps, Morgan noticed the shine of the revolving doors. The *Morganthal* logo was spotless.

The manager was waiting. He appeared nervous until Morgan smiled and extended his hand. "Looking good, Joe," he said. Morgan suspected the cleaning crew scurried around in a panic whenever they heard he was coming. Still, they deserved his appreciation.

Together the men hurried to where Hetty stood outside the broadcast studio. Her cheeks colored with pleasure as Morgan approached, and his eyes drank in her unspoken

affection. “You must have been worried,” he said. “I’m so sorry.”

“No, not at all. I knew I could count on you.” Her smile affirmed her confidence. Morgan saw no reason to mention having chartered the plane. Her lips were moist and sweet. She smelled like honeysuckle, and he wanted to be alone with her.

The manager lit the neon *quiet* sign with a snap and opened the door to the radio studio. “Let’s go in,” he said. “They’re ready for you.”

The microphones were on. Morgan sat across the table from Hetty. A short bald man waved an *applause* sign, and the audience clapped in response.

Hetty’s long legs reached under the table close to Morgan. The lights played softly in the puffs of her pale hair. Leaning toward the microphone, she raised her eyes to meet his. “Welcome,” she said, “to the first broadcast of *Hetty on Hold*. I’m Hetty Lawrence Morganthal.”

Morgan wanted to grab her by the hand, run through the glorious spring sunshine, and take her home to the cottage. That’s where they belonged. Not in this radio studio, with strangers gawking at him. He’d had enough of adoring fans that knew him from pictures in the society pages.

When the applause tapered off, Hetty continued. “This is a weekly show. Each Saturday I’ll invite a guest to entertain or inform us,” she said. “Today I’m honored to introduce my favorite person—and the owner of this station—successful businessman and attorney, Mr. Morgan Morganthal.”

The applause was loud and sincere, but Morgan couldn’t smile. The sweetness of her voice brought a lump to his throat. Hetty’s trust in him was transparent.

Her ankle touched his. “We’re fortunate to have you as our guest, Mr. Morganthal. Many of our listeners have been following your life and career. We look forward to hearing about your experiences. Or maybe your hopes and dreams.”



Something in her tone seemed to invite a deep and personal honesty. If only he could read her mind! “You really mean it?” he asked.

“Yes, I do.”

In no time, Hetty announced a commercial break. A noisy jingle about Whittlesey’s Drug store followed.

During the interruption, Morgan felt sorry he and Hetty had no topics in mind to discuss. Soon after he had asked Hetty to host the talk show, legal problems threatened the Morganthal Circus. A deadlock halted the Ferris wheel negotiations, and Morgan had to catch a quick flight to solve it. He had been gone all six days since then.

Morgan’s responsibility for running the immense Morganthal conglomerate kept him constantly in the public eye, so he was seldom at a loss for words. But for some reason all he could think of now was the sweet change Hetty had brought to his world.

Gratitude warmed his thoughts. He pictured their ivy-covered cottage . . . the wooden bench where they found shade under the rose trellis. They often sat there listening to the birds while Pippa picked violets. When it cooled at sundown, he would hold his family close to keep them warm. Sometimes the aroma of hot fresh bread drew them inside to the cozy kitchen. He and Pippa would watch Hetty slather honey butter on the thick, crusty slices.

Hetty had risked her life to have their child. The love they shared for Pippa was in stark contrast with the coldness of his childhood. His parents had shown little interest in him and his sister Melinda.

Hetty’s voice signaled the end of the commercial, jolting Morgan from his thoughts. What was it she asked him? Oh, yes . . . she said it again . . . his hopes and dreams.

Morgan stroked his chin with his knuckles. “Don’t you think this is risky interviewing your husband?”

Hetty smiled. “We’ll know by the end of the hour.”



*I think a couple's hopes are intertwined.*

He had expected her to ask about the new acrobatic act, or his plans for the elephant sanctuary—maybe his summers as a smokejumper. Shifting his weight, Morgan fixed his serious dark eyes on his wife.

He paused and breathed deeply. “I dream of my wife caring for our child at home,” he said. “Wiping her tears and singing her to sleep. Helping her to grow up secure and happy.”

Morgan surprised himself with his words. Maybe he was being selfish. He really didn’t mean it that way.

Hetty’s eyes widened, and she blinked rapidly. “Oh, yes . . . I see,” she said. “But isn’t that more about what you want your *wife’s* dreams to be?”

“I suppose so,” he said, “but I think a couple’s hopes are intertwined.” His honesty seemed to require further explanation. “Why would a wonderful mother take time off from what she enjoys and does so well?”

Hetty’s hand tightened on the microphone. “Well, I know you love being a dad,” she said, “but does that mean you can’t perform with the Morganthal Circus? Or enter glider competitions?”

“You do have a point.” The tone of his voice signaled a dead end.

Attempting a weak smile, Hetty began again. “So . . . you think we should only pursue the things we already do best? Isn’t it good to try new things too?”

“Yes,” he said, “but I wonder what Hetty’s planning to put on hold. Is it her family? Her legal career? Maybe it’s both.”

“Oh, no! It just means I’m on hold while you talk. The microphone is all yours now. Today’s program isn’t supposed to be about me. It’s about you.”

“Fair enough,” he said. “I’d be glad to explain something that happened to me a few years ago. It was 1955. An unbelievable summer. My father and I decided to shelter a baby chimp and a couple of our circus elephants. We hired a sweet young girl to help us. She worked with us every day,

shoveling elephant dung. She was shy and quiet, but she kept up with the work.

"It was the surprise of my life. I found myself bewitched—crazy in love."

Hetty's hands shook slightly, rustling the papers before her.

"I want to tell people what she did to me," he continued. "For years I was promised to someone else. Then the afternoon before the wedding, that teenager proposed to me. She threw the stars out of alignment.

"I'm talking about you. Now what kind of girl would do a thing like that? You'd think it was someone who wanted to be a wife and mother." The words came on his breath, to her alone. "I wanted to have you forever. So here we are—two lawyers in the same house." He touched her fingers. "Now we're married," he said softly, "and it still feels like a dream."

A muffled cough in the audience seemed to remind Morgan they were not alone. He straightened his back and grinned. "I've always thought you'd be at home with our daughter on a day like this, but instead, you've left her with two people who know nothing about children."

"Morgan! Our listeners must think your wife is impulsive and irresponsible."

"I'm sure they do," he said, "so let me explain. *I'm* the one who asked my parents to babysit." There was a short silence and a burst of laughter from the audience.

Morgan continued. "Tell me, do you really expect to keep this up?"

"What . . . what are you saying?"

"I wonder if you can do it," he said.

"But you're the one who asked me to!"

Morgan flashed her a smile. "You were the best choice, but I thought you'd say no. I just wish you hadn't been so enthusiastic."

She steadied her hands against the edge of the table. "My enthusiasm began," she said, "when you were willing to be my first guest."

"I wasn't willing," said Morgan. "You'll remember I suggested Katrinka Wallace should do this instead of me. In the future, what sort of guests do you want to have?"

"Not any one sort. Everyone's interesting inside. The adventure is in finding what makes them that way."

"Sounds like you want to keep this up."

"Well actually, yes. That is if my husband . . . or I mean my boss invites me to."

"As your husband, I want you home. As your boss, I'd be a fool not to hire you."

The hour passed quickly. The audience cheered before the bald man raised his sign. The show was over.

When the microphones were turned off, a group of girls approached Morgan for his autograph. The shy ones hung back a little, but when they put their papers and pens forward, he stood to put them at ease.

At last they whispered and giggled their way out of hearing, leaving Morgan and Hetty alone. For an awkward moment, Morgan frowned into space. "You should call this program *People Say Stupid Things*. Will you forgive me?"

Hetty stood and put her hand in his. "Well . . . you did stay on the subject," she said. "You told us your dreams."

He lowered his eyebrows. "I think I've needed your influence since you were twelve years old. Now suddenly you want to do this public thing," he said. "It's hard to share you. I'm not sure how I'm supposed to feel." His finger tapped the table. "Before I asked you to host the show, I heard Katrinka wanted the position. I almost gave it to her."

The color spread across Hetty's cheeks. "So . . . you almost gave it to Katrinka? If that's who you prefer, I'll understand."

Morgan took a deep breath. "No. Besides, I can't. I already told her you'd be taking over."

"Oh, I see . . . that puts you in a rather awkward spot."

“Yes,” said Morgan, “but I’ve done it to myself. I fired Lambert so suddenly I had to think fast. It didn’t give you much time, either.”

“It was a surprise,” said Hetty. “Lambert had a lot of fans. What was the matter?”

“Nothing,” said Morgan. “Except his mouth,” He looked up. “But I’d feel just as uneasy if *Katrinka* were hosting it. She’s so unpredictable.”

He seemed to recognize the irony of his words and inspected the floor apologetically. “Speaking of unpredictable,” he said, “I know my comments threw you off guard. Please let me make up for it.” His smile was kind. “Maybe I could take care of Pippa during the next show.”

“Oh . . . Yes. Good,” said Hetty. “Pippa would love it.”

Visibly relieved, Morgan embraced her warmly. “Look out, world,” he said. “Here comes Hetty!”

“And about *Katrinka*,” he added, “could you have her on the show right away? Just to make peace with her, you know.”

“*Katrinka*?” Hetty’s voice was weak.

“Right,” he said. “People know she’s a beauty queen. They’ll tune in.” A smile crinkled the corners of his eyes. “And they’ll expect fireworks. That’s her appeal.”

The color drained from Hetty’s face. She clenched the folds of her skirt and sat slowly.

## *Rice*

Hetty was silent as they drove away from the radio show. She pressed her forehead against the vibrations of the window and looked out at nothing in particular.

Maybe Morgan would understand if she avoided talking just now. She leaned back and closed her eyes. It was easier to think that way.

*Why am I so afraid of Katrinka Wallace? Maybe it's her breezy self-confidence. Exactly what I lack.*

*I ought to sympathize with her. She was so young when her father sent her to boarding school. She missed him terribly. Phil Wallace was such a dear man—just trying to do the right thing. He didn't want her friends to know he was a dwarf.*

*I mustn't resent Katrinka's connections with Morgan. It's not his fault. But I wonder if he understands how uncomfortable she makes me.*

The car swung around a familiar curve. Hetty opened her eyes as they passed through the massive entrance to Max and Mimi Morgenthal's estate. The guard saluted Morgan and lifted the bars to open the wrought iron gates. They entered and circled past the spacious gatehouse in which Katrinka Wallace lived with her husband, Joseph Ostler.

Beyond the gatehouse was the open stretch of lawn where Hetty and Morgan had received wedding guests almost four years ago. After the reception, rice was everywhere.

*Rice, she thought. The symbol of fertility. I forgot to notice if it sprouted. When we ran across the lawn to the car, people threw handfuls at us. It's supposed to wish newlyweds lots of babies. They meant well. No one knew I wasn't supposed to have any.*

*Not ever.*

Before their marriage, Morgan and Hetty endured a self-imposed distance. They remained apart four long years. Morgan needed to be sure her affection for him was more than a youthful crush.

When at last they were married, their years of waiting rewarded them with exultant gratitude. Confessing to the misery of their previous lovesick yearnings, they could marvel freely at the joys of respectful familiarity. In spite of concerns for Hetty's health, the rapture of discovery sweetened their union beyond imagining.

Pippa's birth came in celebration of their sacred intimacy. Rice had not been responsible.

### *The Phone Call*

When Morgan stopped the car at his parents' front door, little Pippa stood in the marble entry. She wore a costly sun suit and matching sandals Max and Mimi Morganthal had purchased for her on the French Riviera. She had been waiting eagerly to show them, but above all to give them joyous hugs and moist kisses.

On the way home Hetty and Morgan listened to their daughter's cheerful chatter, and in no time they found themselves home at the cottage.

Pippa took Morgan's hand and skipped along the smooth stones to the front porch, but Hetty lagged behind them. With grim resolve, she entered through the open door and moved stiffly to the kitchen telephone.

For a brief moment she closed her eyes. Her fingers gripped the receiver tightly, and she dialed Katrinka.

"Oh, Hetty, my *dearest* friend!" said Katrinka. "I'm so glad you called. I listened to the whole program, and you were absolutely adorable. I wanted to jump up and down and let the whole world know you're my attorney. I was so proud of you!"

"I knew my name would come up. If it hadn't, someone from the audience would have mentioned me anyway. Morgan and I made such a fabulous looking couple for so long.

"I can't believe how beastly he was to you. My Joseph would *never* have done anything like that. Of course it's because he *adores* me. But we can't all be so lucky."

Hetty twisted the telephone cord. Her breathing was shallow and rapid as she listened.

"I think you're amazingly brave," said Katrinka. "Especially since you know less than nothing about hosting a radio show.



But it might not be so obvious to the average person. Hetty, you've simply *got* to loosen up! You could have come to me for advice, you know. I've had so much experience before the public. The difference is that *I* of course prefer the *camera*. If color television ever gets popular, I might even want my own TV show some day.

"For now, isn't it a blessing you're on radio, and nobody can see you? I just mean this is the sixties, for heaven's sake," said Katrinka. "You need to get with the times. And your hair! Bless your heart, it's so totally unmanageable. Don't you need to cut it or something? You know, because of Pippa. A normal three-year-old would be pulling on it. But maybe she's a little behind in her development.

"Joseph and I don't want a family. At least *I* don't. I don't even want to adopt. I can't imagine how you cope with being adopted, you poor thing. It's a wonder you can even remember Leaf Locke is your real father. I mean the way you thought Dan and Dora Lawrence were your parents. I'm sure everybody else could tell you were adopted. It's so obvious, what with you being so much taller.

"My Joseph doesn't see what's so complicated about the whole mess. You must admit it's odd having two entire sets of parents who are all chummy, when I don't have any living parents at all!

"Don't get me wrong. I think it's the sweetest thing ever, the way Dan lets you and Morgan practice law with him. Really I do.

"Obviously Morgan could have done better," she said, "but I realize you didn't go to Harvard like him. I suppose Dan was worried about his little girl not getting in any other firm." She laughed sweetly, perhaps to demonstrate how charming cruelty could be when delivered with a sense of humor. "So what if they didn't accept women! All it takes is a little gumption and a certain *je ne sais quoi*. If it was me, *I* would have found a way.

"Anyway," she said, "I can't imagine it working out very long. Family businesses can get pretty nasty, if you know what I mean.

"I'm only saying these things to let you know my heart is with you. I understand how much you have to overcome. I feel these things more deeply than other people.

"I hope this little talk has been helpful to you," she said. "I'll always be your friend. I feel so much better when I confide in you."

Katrinka sighed with a depth matched only by the sensitivity of her soul.

"Anyway, if I had children, I'm sure they'd be real smart like my Daddy. Most likely they'd be dwarfs like him. I miss him terribly. I wish I could talk to him. Everything would be better if Daddy was still alive."

"Yes," said Hetty. "We all miss Phil." After a tactful silence, she continued. "I called you, because I wondered . . . I mean I'm hoping you'll be my guest on the next program."

There was a long pause followed by Katrinka's sweetest musical voice. "Tell me, Hetty dear," she cooed, "Whose idea was it?"

"Hetty?" There was more silence. "I thought so," said Katrinka. "It was Morgan who wanted me." The triumph broke her laughter into icy splinters.

"We both want you to do it," said Hetty. "You know how to get people's attention."

"Of course I do, Hetty darling." Katrinka's frozen words rang like little bells. "That's why you need me."

The phone call was over. Hetty hung up the telephone and stared at the floor. Pippa stood next to Morgan in the wingback chair with one arm around her father's neck. She hummed and folded his earlobe up and down.

Hetty waited, as if reluctant to disturb the scene, but Morgan closed his newspaper and turned toward her. Hetty

moved to his side and fingered his other earlobe with unnatural cheerfulness. "Katrinka will do it," she said.

Morgan nodded. "I hope you're all right with it." He listened for her reply. "Are you?"

"I don't know," said Hetty.

"Why not? Is it because of the way I asked?" he said. "Did you call her because you thought I left you no choice?"

Pippa hopped to the floor and stuffed the newspaper under the chair.

"I'm not sure," said Hetty. "It's not your fault I wanted to please you, Morgan."

"Let's think then," he laughed. "Who should we blame?"

"Well," she stammered, "I think sometimes there is a fine line between . . . between suggesting and manipulating."

Morgan jolted forward and pulled the crumpled paper out from under the chair. He didn't pretend to look at it. "So you feel what—controlled?"

She bit her lip. "Maybe I used too strong a word."

He paused, and silence controlled the space around him. His hands jerked as he smoothed the rumpled newspaper across his lap. "Not necessarily," he said. "Not if you meant it." His unwavering gaze was a question mark hanging in the air. Neither one knew the answer. He lowered his eyebrows. "You can make your own decisions about what you want," he said. He paused again and inspected the smudges of newsprint on his fingers.

"Here's what I think is going on," he said. "We come from two different families. The guidance from your parents—no matter how subtle it was, you learned from it. I didn't get any guidance. Except for the bruises, and getting knocked around a little. Dad used the direct approach, and you could say I took it on the chin.

"Of course Phil Wallace was like a father," he said. But I couldn't stay with him when he toured with the circus." He turned his hands up again.

Hetty sat on the arm of his chair. "Everything is a balancing act, isn't it? Between the office and Pippa and shopping and cooking and laundry and gardening," she sighed. "And other things. It's hard to get it right."

He smiled. "Yes, it's the other things," he said. "Knowing what matters most, so we don't get too busy for what's important." He opened his mouth as if to soften his words, but Hetty stood and put her hands in his.

"Don't let the newsprint rub off on you," he said.

Hetty leaned closer. "You say I should make my own decisions about what I want." Her lips parted in a smile. "Please Morgan, I want everything about you to rub off on me."

"And you," he said, "the way Dan and Dora raised you—with absolute love—that's what I want for us and our children."

He caught himself quickly. "That is our . . . Pippa."

### *In Recovery*

It was Saturday afternoon. Max and Mimi Morgenthal were exhausted. Pippa had been with them during Hetty's broadcast because no one else could tend her that morning. They sat on the edge of the bed and removed their shoes.

"I wonder how Hetty does it," said Mimi.

Max stretched out on the silk brocade coverlet and looked up at the immense crystal chandelier. "So do I." He closed his eyes.

Mimi laid her hand on his chest. "I wish Swenson hadn't retired. He knew how to keep her occupied. Pippa felt grown up, helping him polish silver." She sighed. "It's been hard enough losing the chauffeur. And now the butler."

Max opened his eyes. "I can see why people our age stop having children."

“But just think,” said Mimi. “Hetty’s father Leaf is almost fifty. He and Marian have Danny.”

Max put his hands behind his head. “Well, Marian’s younger. She has the energy, if not the competence.”

“True,” said Mimi. “She’s no better at parenting than we were. But at least she tries, which is more than we did.”

Max nodded in agreement. They both regretted their neglect of Morgan and Melinda. At an early age, Morgan had taken responsibility for his little sister. His attention to her was probably all that kept the family together.

Mimi’s eyes wandered over the perfection of her husband’s chiseled features. She sighed as if enjoying the tranquility. “Max,” she said, “I don’t know how we could have been invisible to each other for twenty years.”

He laughed. “It was insane—like two blind people in the same house trying not to bump into each other.”

“Yes,” she said, “we owe a lot to Hetty. If it hadn’t been for her, we’d still be living that way.”

He chuckled. “We’re making up for it, aren’t we?”

Mimi smiled and looked up at the cupids painted on the ceiling. “Before long, we’ll be on the beach in Jamaica,” she said.

Max propped himself up beside her. “After we get there, I’ll have to leave you for the day. The tourism board in Kingston wants my advice. Morgan says it won’t take long. I’ll set you up in the hotel first. The concierge will give you whatever you need. And I’ve arranged for a driver,” he said. “Don’t you worry. Soon as we’re home from Jamaica, I promise we’ll find a replacement for Swenson.”

Mimi gave him a tender smile. “Until then,” she said, “I like being alone with you.”

*The Letter*

Leaf and Marian Locke never had the problem of losing servants. For that matter, they never had servants. Leaf's career as a botany professor did not suggest that sort of luxury, and Marian, by her own account, worked at the library more for pleasure than for profit. It was unusual for work to occupy an entire Saturday as it had today.

They both regretted being unable to care for Pippa that morning. Leaf was as entranced with his granddaughter as he was with his own sturdy five-year-old son Danny. Little Pippa was a slender wisp—a small image of her mother Hetty—and so very like Anne, his first wife. Anne had passed down her pale lashes and translucent skin to them both.

Anne's hair had been soft as the down of milkweed, and she had eyes blue as the summer sky. Leaf kept a picture of her hidden in his bottom drawer, under his winter shirts.

Soon after walking in the door, Leaf preheated the oven for the peach pie he had prepared that morning, and Marian went to the mailbox with Danny. She lifted him to see what treasures it contained. Though his big sister Hetty lived in the same town, sometimes she sent him real letters, because he was getting big and would soon be in kindergarten.

Leaf waited at the door for his two redheads. Danny carried the stack of mail back to the house with help from his mother. "I'm the mailman, Daddy. You can be Mr. Locke."

Leaf got down on one knee. "All right, Mr. Mailman. Anything for me?"

The minute Danny discovered a postcard from Hetty, he lost interest in the game and skipped away with it.

"Leaf," said Marian, "here's one from Freydis." He inspected the envelope. "That's odd. It's from England, all right. But this isn't my sister's handwriting."

Leaf moved toward the kitchen to find a knife, walking slowly, as if reluctant to open it. His large gray eyes were

soft and kind. Marian held her breath and watched his long slender fingers turn the pages.

He moved his tall frame to stand silently beside her. Together they looked out the window until it was time for words.

“About Freydis,” he said. “She’s had a stroke.”

Marian slipped her arms around him. “Oh, Leaf, I’m so sorry. I know she’s much more than a sister to you.”

He fixed his gaze out the window. “She’s twenty years older than I am. Still, I wasn’t prepared for this. At least she was living out her dream. As long as I can remember, she’s wanted to spend time in England—Stratford-upon-Avon, The Globe Theatre . . .” His voice trailed off.

“How bad is it?”

“Apparently she’s more frail and a little confused,” he said. “Sometimes she forgets her husband’s dead. And she’s been imagining impossible stories.”

Leaf looked down into Marian’s brown eyes and freckled face. “Freydis wants to come home and live with me again in the cottage,” he said. “She doesn’t understand it can never be the same. It can’t work with Morgan and Hetty living there now. And she forgets you and I are married.”

Leaf anticipated Marian’s thoughts and stroked her red hair.

“Leaf, I’m frightened,” she said. “You know I love Freydis.” Her voice was unsteady. “She ought to live with us, but I don’t think I can do it.” She put her head against his chest.

Across the room, Danny faced a cowboy puppet that was hopelessly tangled in its own strings. Its head drooped to one side, so Danny leaned it against a boot. Standing over the little figure, he instructed it to pay attention. Then to the best of his ability, Danny read aloud the greeting on Hetty’s postcard.

*Keeping Score*

Leaf unfolded the letter about Freydis, but he knew it wouldn't change anything to read it again. Marian would still worry. He sat on the edge of the bed and tapped the envelope on his knee.

Leaning forward, he opened the bottom drawer of his dresser to put the letter away. He laid it on top of his plaid flannel shirt, but instead of closing the drawer, he felt under the folded clothes until his fingers held the rim of a picture frame.

"Anne," he whispered. That was all he wanted to say, really. But his hands were eager to pull out the photograph and hold it, if only for a minute or two. As he tilted the frame, Anne's eyes seemed to follow him. He would have hidden the picture again, but something about her expression encouraged him to speak.

"What are we going to do?" He sought answers in the blue eyes looking back at him. Though her voice was seldom clear in his memory, the sound of it now seemed to speak to his thoughts.

*"I will always love you, Leaf." She seemed to say it with a little sigh the way she had when she was alive.*

*Leaf smiled. "I know," he said. "Some things go on forever." He checked the back of the frame and tightened a small screw with his fingernail.*

*"I wish I could help," said Anne. "I agree Freydis should live here, but would it be fair to Marian? It's hard enough for her, just taking care of Danny."*

*Suddenly, her eyes brightened. "Oh, Leaf, what a wonderful child he is! I wonder—maybe in time Marian won't be so overwhelmed. When does Danny start kindergarten?"*



*"He'll be going this fall, and I'll miss him terribly." Leaf looked out the window at the swing set. "Do you think I should keep helping Marian with the cooking?"*

*"You never helped me with the cooking?"*

*"Did you want me to?"*

*"Not really." Leaf loved the way Anne's brown eyes shone when she smiled. Or maybe it was Marian's eyes he was picturing. Anne's were blue as the sky.*

*He could hear her voice again. "Remember when we used to play Scrabble?" she said. "I'd be stirring a pot at the stove, but I'd run back to the game when it was my turn."*

*Leaf chuckled. "Marian is even better at Scrabble, but she doesn't keep score like you."*

*No matter what game they played, Anne always kept score in a little red notebook. Or was her notebook blue? He couldn't remember.*

*"Marian probably thinks it would be hard on your pride," she said.*

*"If you had lived," thought Leaf, "would you have found it hard to be a wife and mother? As hard as it is for Marian?"*

*Anne flopped down on the bed, and her eyes narrowed with amusement.*

*"You'll never know, will you?"*

*She held onto the bedpost, floating and swirling lightly around it. Leaf wanted to reach for her, to become entangled in her glorious red hair and feel it shimmer in his fingers. Or maybe he was thinking of Marian's hair. Yes, of course. Anne's hair was pale like Hetty's.*

*Anne floated behind him so he couldn't imagine her as well. "I have an idea," she said. "You could pretend homemaking was just as hard for me as it is for Marian. On the other hand, does it really matter? You love her anyway."*

*Leaf nodded. "You have a point," he said.*

*"Thank you." Anne held up her little notebook. "That's one point for me," she said. She recorded the score with her finger and hummed something he couldn't identify.*

*Anne cocked her head. "You wondered if I would always be tone deaf," she said.*

*Leaf raised his eyebrows. "How did you know?"*

*She laughed and clapped her hands. "I didn't. You just now thought of it yourself."*

*"Well, it really didn't matter," he thought, "because I loved you." Anne smiled and produced the spiral notebook again. Her finger recorded one point for Leaf.*

*"I've been thinking," she said. "Marian has a good ear for music. If you fiddle for her, she'll probably yodel like she did before you were married." Anne looked pensive. "I love Marian," she said, "because she makes you happy."*

*Leaf indicated the notebook, and Anne added another point with her finger. She spoke quietly to herself. "A point for me is a point for you is a point for Marian is a point for Danny is a point for Hetty . . ." Her voice trailed off. "That's how it works."*

*Leaf laughed to himself. "Anne's right. That's how it works.*

*"Marian may always be a little insecure," he thought. "Her mother taught her never to trust men. It's a wonder she trusts anyone."*

Leaf was startled to hear Marian approach from behind. His thoughts ended abruptly, and Anne's picture clattered to the floor.

"Oh! I didn't mean to surprise you." Marian sounded quite breathless with embarrassment. She watched Leaf pick up the picture and put it in the drawer. The glass hadn't broken.

The phone rang, and Marian appeared relieved by the excuse to escape such an awkward moment. It was Hetty wondering if her little brother had received the postcard, and her voice triggered Marian's tears.

"Are you all right?" asked Hetty.

Marian sobbed softly. "I don't know," she said.

Hetty waited for her stepmother to recover, but that didn't seem likely anytime soon. "Do you need me?" she asked.

Marian wiped away her tears and whispered into the phone. "I'm mad at your father," she said. "Why does he keep Anne's picture? I wanted to be enough for him. When we first got married, I hoped he might try to forget her. Do I have to share him forever?"

When Marian seemed ready to listen, Hetty spoke. "I guess . . . I honestly hope so," she said. "If he'd married you first, of course he'd never forget *you*. He wouldn't want to. Everything that's happened to Father could only make him understand and care about you even more. His life is so full of you and Danny that it spills over to me, and I'm glad."

Hetty took a deep breath and began again. "It doesn't mean he loves you any less just because of me. Love doesn't get used up in the exercise of it. I think it grows, instead.

"And isn't it harder to love somebody when you're angry at the same time? I don't like that feeling."

"I know," whispered Marian, "I know."

It was quiet, and Hetty asked, "Are you still there?" Her words went unanswered. Marian dropped the phone as Leaf kissed a tear from her cheek.

Anne would have reason to add a point to everyone's score.

### *Family Conference*

It was a peaceful Sunday afternoon. The lazy sun slanted through the windows. Hetty had put away the leftovers, but the cottage still bore the scent of buttered potatoes and Yorkshire pudding. Leaf had called earlier to ask if they could meet as a family. Both sets of her parents would arrive soon.

Hetty leaned into the curve of the piano and looked outside to the garden. A robin flew to the climbing roses over the gate, and a squirrel hid an acorn in the moss beneath the ferns. But Hetty's gaze followed Morgan. Her countenance softened with an expression reserved for him alone, and her eyes were misty. Perhaps it was the memories they had made together.

She wanted to deserve his approval now as much as ever. The very thought of Morgan made Hetty reach for whatever was fine and good. Maybe she still wondered how her dreams of him could have become reality.

She watched Pippa run to her father from the far corner of the yard, her soft curls dancing and her arms reaching. Morgan lifted her to the strong support of his shoulders. There was a natural grace and ease to his movements.

Phil Wallace had recognized those gifts and trained him in the ways of the circus at an early age. Morgan was at home on an elephant or a dancing horse. He could juggle with a steady hand or perform on a unicycle. Yet he appeared most at ease here in the cottage garden with Pippa.

Firm and steady, maybe he was born to stand facing the forest and the clouds with a child who laughed and gripped his dark hair with her pudgy fingers. It seemed to Hetty that Morgan had been created for just such a moment.

Hetty's adoptive parents, Dan and Dora Lawrence, arrived first. Soon, Hetty's father Leaf entered with his wife Marian and their son Danny.

"I hope they recorded your program yesterday," said Marian.

Hetty avoided a direct answer. "There's always next week," she said.

Dan gave a shiny penny to his young namesake and another to his granddaughter Pippa. It reminded Hetty of when she had been their age. Papa Dan's eyes were smiling

and he honked his nose into a large red handkerchief like the one she remembered.

The adults gathered in the dining room, and when the six of them were seated, Leaf spread the open letter on the table. He explained what he learned of Freydis the day before.

“We need a plan,” he said. He looked at his good friend. “I think I should quote you, Dan: *‘Gather the facts, and the decisions will make themselves.’* You’ve said it many times.”

Dan nodded, and Leaf looked at their daughter. “I’m sorry, Hetty dear,” he said. “I wish I didn’t have to involve you.” He shifted his long legs under the table.

Morgan faced his father-in-law squarely. “If I may, before you go on—there’s no reason you should apologize. Things like this happen.”

Hetty was the next one to address Leaf. “I can understand why she wants to live here. We all love our memories in this place. I’m sure she remembers the music we all made together.” She sought Morgan’s hand under the table. “And Aunt Freydis bought this place with you, Father.”

Leaf nodded. “I didn’t want her to be a widow living alone.” He looked at his wife.

Marian mentioned another complication. “Your Aunt Freydis has some hearing loss too,” she said.

Hetty glanced at the children under the piano in the sunroom. Pippa was crooning a lullaby to the dump truck she cradled in her arms. Danny drummed noisily on an oatmeal box with Pippa’s doll. Hetty said, “A little hearing loss could be a blessing.”

Dan Lawrence remembered he was supposed to bring Dora’s oatmeal chocolate chip cookies in from the car. While he went for them, Morgan poured some tall glasses of milk.

The family nibbled and talked until Marian took a deep breath. “I think Freydis is our responsibility. She’s my sister-in-law, and I think she should stay with us.” She spoke bravely, but her unsteady voice betrayed her.

The firm grip of Morgan's hand gave Hetty the courage to answer. She spoke to Marian, her stepmother and dear friend. "Why don't we see how it works here first?" she said. "We want her to live with us."

So it was decided, and Marian was visibly relieved.

Hetty looked around quietly. The cottage had many small but inviting gathering places. She loved the sunny corners that encouraged thoughtful conversation, the cushioned seat in the bay window where she read to Pippa.

She thought of the quiet moments alone with Morgan, when his breath was on her cheek. The climbing roses by the front gate would always nod in the breeze, but would she ever again have time to notice?

While Morgan said good-bye at the door, Hetty removed herself to the bathroom and wept in secret.



*Nothing could hide her humiliation.*

