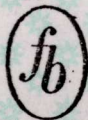


*Never
Victorious,
Never
Defeated*

(ABRIDGED)

TAYLOR CALDWELL



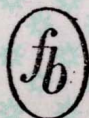
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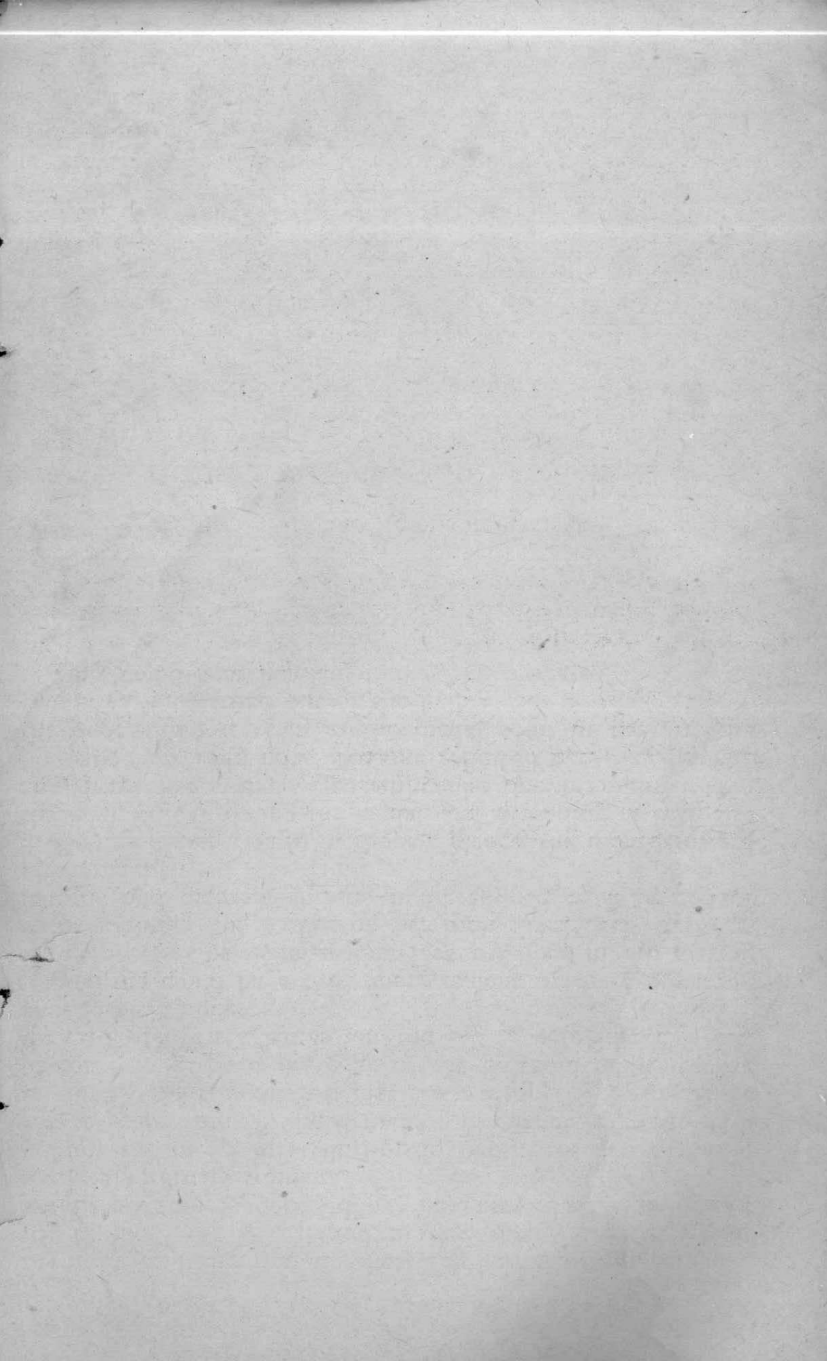
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*For all the pastors, priests, ministers, and rabbis
who all my life comforted, counseled,
and encouraged me*

*Man is never victorious, never defeated,
The cheater yields up his loot to the cheated,
Wisdom and folly can never be parted,
The waters return to the hills where they started.*

TAYLOR CALDWELL

PROLOGUE

IT WAS generally agreed, and with indignation by a few, that it had been a great scandal. Cornelia deWitt Marshall had not only insulted herself, but all her friends, and the company which her grandfather had founded.

The banquet honouring her and the one hundredth anniversary of the mighty Interstate Railroad Company was given in the main dining-room of Philadelphia's oldest and most aristocratic private club. Scores of the largest stockholders, including the younger Jay Regan of New York and one or two of the Vanderbilts, not to mention all the directors and officers of the company, were present. At the head of the table, with his mother at his right hand, sat deWitt Marshall, president of the company, his son Rufus next to him. (Rufus was only twenty-one, but as he would one day be president himself, it was considered proper that he sit beside his father.) It was well known that Cornelia deWitt Marshall had been, and still was, "the guiding genius of the company." The gentlemen present (and there were only gentlemen in deference to Cornelia's aversion to women) regarded this seventy-year-old woman fondly as she sat there at the immense table in the glitter and glow of the crystal chandeliers.

There she sat in her thronelike gilt chair, and she was impressive. When she stood, she was five feet eight inches tall, and her figure might have been that of a woman forty years her junior. Her waist was slim, her breast full and white, though the neck above it was raddled. She could stride like a young woman, and her gestures were quick and dominant. She could ride a horse like a young man, and she often drove her own car and engaged, at intervals, in an excellent game of tennis and golf. When she sailed on her enormous yacht, *Rufus*, she would often take the wheel, to the awed admiration of the captain. She could swim like a vigorous child, swear like a New York policeman, outshout anyone at a football game, and dance like an adolescent. She

also had an original and very large fund of ribald stories and could outdrink almost any man. She smoked constantly.

Seventy years old, and still full of immense vitality—Cornelia. It was amazing, thought her older male friends, some of whom tottered when they walked, and had rheumy eyes. Cornelia never forgot anything, either. Her memory was a complete library of the whole railroad business.

So, there she sat, smiling, tall and stately in her chair, emanating energy and liveliness. A diamond necklace blazed about her throat; diamonds glittered in her ears, in her hair and on her fingers, and all up and down both long white arms. It was a crude display, and the more tasteful of the guests commented on this to themselves. But then, Cornelia had never pretended to have taste. She was vulgar and raucous and coarse, and gloried in it all. She displayed her vulgarity as she displayed her diamonds: proudly, and with wicked humour.

DeWitt, and his son Rufus, studied Cornelia to-night, seeing the rapt faces about her, watching her gay gestures, her swift and glittering smile, hearing her uproarious laughter and the laughter which joined hers. Rufus shifted uneasily in his seat and after a moment's hesitation whispered. "Have you noticed, Father? There's something diabolical about Grandmother to-night. . . ."

"Nonsense," said deWitt with disapproval. His son, whom he considered a rather hulking masculine edition of his mother—without Cornelia's brains, of course—subsided, and a sulky expression settled on the big mouth so like his grandmother's. As if he felt his son's resentment, deWitt shifted in his seat and played with his cane. Rufus annoyed him; everybody annoyed him, except Tony, and Tony was not here. For an instant, deWitt, to his own disgust, felt the old familiar pang of desolation.

Old George Hill, one of the directors of the company, was lighting Cornelia's gold-tipped cigarette. His hand shook with age. He was cackling at her last joke. Then he became sober. He was to make the speech and the presentation of the medal. He rose slowly to his feet and leaned on the table, a fat old man with glaucous eyes and a thick pink double chin.

Mr. Hill glanced portentously about him. "Dear friends,"

he rumbled, "we're here on a very special occasion. Such an occasion might call for long speeches. But Cornelia—Mrs. Marshall—has asked for no speech at all! Isn't that so, my dear?" he asked, turning to Cornelia.

Cornelia waved away the smoke, nodded, laughed exuberantly. "Even a railroad must be embarrassed to be one hundred years old," she said. Her eyes sparkled on each face, and there was something of reflection in them. Her stare came at last to her son and grandson, and her grin widened. DeWitt drew his black brows together and involuntarily stiffened. Rufus felt a curious thrill of alarm. He did not like his grandmother; he had always considered her intensely ugly, and sometimes hated his own appearance which was so like hers. His hand moved without volition, as if to touch his father's thin arm, then dropped on the table.

He thought: There is no denying that the old red devil has a mind, perhaps a better mind than all of us put together. But there's also no denying she's a witch. He reached absently for a cigarette in a crystal box and began to puff amateurishly. There was something in the air, centred in "that old woman," which made him angrily apprehensive.

Then, while old Mr. Hill rumbled on with his eulogies, her gaze shifted to her grandson Rufus. He watched her; she was laughing soundlessly, he could see. Yet there was an odd sort of triumph in her eyes now. Rufus was puzzled. He was no favourite of Cornelia's, but still there was that triumph, that assurance in her eyes. What the hell is she up to, and how does it concern me? Rufus asked himself.

"We all know," said Mr. Hill, his voice trembling with emotion, "that it was Rufus deWitt, father of Mrs. Marshall, whose enterprise, vision and determined courage—inherited from his own father, Mr. Aaron—set the Interstate Railroad Company on its path to huge success. But we also know that it was Mrs. Marshall's genius and ambition which caused our company to assume such gigantic proportions and importance. Always, she was her father's 'right-hand man.' She was the light that never dimmed; her ideas, her enthusiasms, her plannings, are unique in the history of American rail-roading."

Rufus suddenly thought of his dead grandfather, Allan Marshall. He had known little of Allan. The family did not

speak of him since his death; he was a man to be forgotten as quickly as possible. But no one can forget him, commented Rufus to himself. He is here, like a ghost, forceful and passionate, and listening. Nobody can escape him.

Mr. Hill had come to the conclusion of his rhapsodies. Everyone waited. Mr. Hill was holding a white satin box in his hand, worshipfully, as a priest would hold a chalice. Something shone in it: a big gold medal. Mr. Hill bowed, and laid the box before Cornelia, who glanced down at it with smiling tolerance. Then she looked up, and this time she did not direct her eyes to her son or grandson. She was looking at one of the sons of her cousin Laura, Miles Peake, executive vice-president of the company. Miles returned the look with the utmost gravity, and there was no expression on his face. Cornelia smiled, and chuckled. She removed the medal and examined it critically.

"Well, well," she said, holding up the medal. "Look at it, everybody! It's beautiful. On one side is our old wood-burning engine and on the other side is our latest locomotive. With cars, rounding a magnificent curve in the mountains. Wonderful. 1835 to 1935. One hundred years!"

The banquet hall thundered with applause and loving laughter. Cornelia passed the medal to her neighbour, who passed it on. It went from reverent hand to reverent hand, and Cornelia watched its passage. She was smoking rapidly, and through the smoke her sparkling eyes were full of evil mirth.

The medal reached young Rufus. The thing was cold and big and heavy in his hand. It represented incredible power. He passed it on to his father, who studied it closely and then seemed reluctant to pass it on. It reached Cornelia again, and her smile was very wide, as if she had noticed her son's desire to retain the medal.

It was then that the scandalous incident began. For Cornelia began to toss the medal in her hands, throwing it higher and higher each time. And as she did so she laughed, the laugh becoming more ribald, harsher, louder, with each burst. No one moved; no one spoke. All smiles had gone. Everyone watched the coin shining in the air, and they saw it fall, saw it rise again. They could not move even when Cornelia abruptly thrust back her chair and got to her feet, still tossing

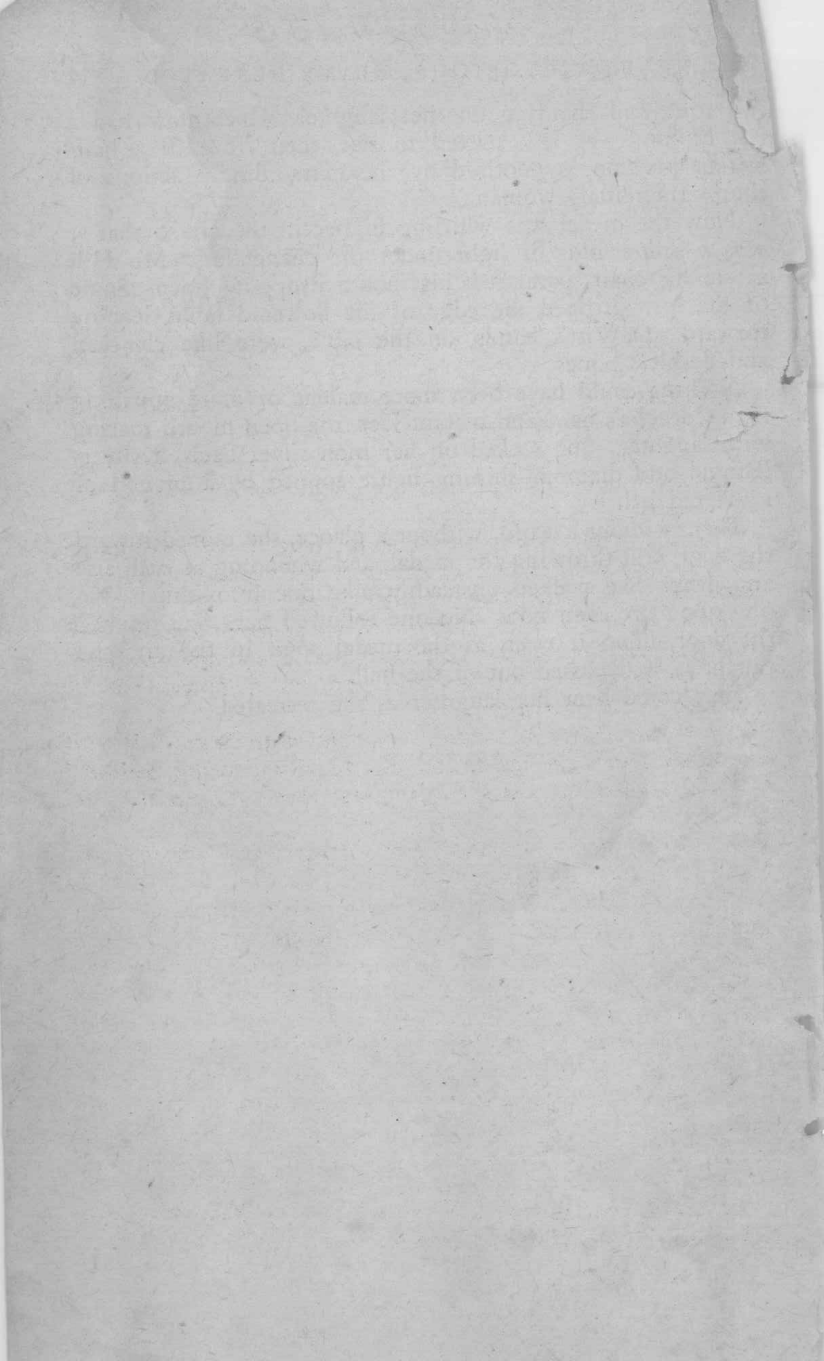
the coin, still shouting out her laughter, which now had a jeering note. A few started to rise, then froze in a half-sitting position, hypnotised by the extraordinary actions of that extraordinary woman.

Now the medal was whirling higher in the air so that it was a yellow blur of light under the chandeliers. Mr. Hill sat in his chair, paralysed, his mouth dropping open. Some of the men gripped the edge of the flowered table, leaning forward. DeWitt's hands, on the table, were like clenched and fleshless bones.

Nothing could have been more malefic or more appalling than Cornelia's hard and blatant face, the open mouth roaring with laughter. She rocked on her high silver heels, a silver-flaming and diamond-shining figure topped by a mound of vivid red hair.

Then, without a word, without a glance, she moved toward the door, still throwing the medal, and whooping at each rise and drop. She walked unsteadily, like one intoxicated. No one stood up, even now. No one followed her. She reached the door, flung it open as the medal spun in the air; she caught it, and passed out of the hall.

They could hear her laughter as she retreated.



PART ONE

I

IT WAS eleven o'clock, and in the midst of the storm, when Lydia deWitt rose slowly through the oblivion which had engulfed her for hours. Her dazed ears became aware of the battering against the windows, and then her eyes, feeble and still dim, caught the glare of the lightning between the folds of the red velvet curtains. She was very confused. She could not remember where she was.

"Well!" exclaimed a hearty male voice. "She's awake at last! Our Liddie's awake!" The solid floor, heavily carpeted, shook slightly under someone's footsteps.

Lydia kept her eyes closed and swallowed against her nausea. She shivered when a violent peal of thunder exploded over the house. It was a great and sturdy house, but it trembled under that assault.

"A wonderful baby, Liddie!" said the male voice. "Won't you open your eyes again, and the nurse will bring her in."

Lydia sighed. Her lashes fluttered open. "A girl?" she whispered.

"A lovely girl," said the voice exuberantly. "Bright red hair. Cornelia! Yes, that's what we'll call her."

Cornelia. A hard and rocky name. Lydia lay flat in the huge bed and looked at her husband. She looked at him, and hated him, and turned aside her head. But he continued to stand near, smiling, tall, wide, and strong, his red and waving hair afire in the lamplight. She could see him as he stood there, though her head was averted. She could see the massiveness of him, and his fine black broadcloth suit, and his black cravat with the pearl pin. She could see his large and ruddy face, his beaming hazel eyes, his thick lips parting widely over big white teeth. His hands were large and white and soft, and he wore a fine signet ring.

She could feel the magnetism that crackled about him, and his health and vitality. She knew he was still broadly smiling.

She knew many more things about him, and her loathing mounted in her until she was afraid she would shriek. Then a stiff white skirt and apron intervened between her and the fire, and the voice of Mrs. Brunt, her nurse, spoke again: "I'll bring in the sweet baby for you to see, Mrs. deWitt. Such a beautiful baby girl!"

No, thought Lydia. I don't want it. I don't want to see it. A hand touched the long sweep of her dark hair which coiled on the pillows, and she winced.

"Such a hard time our girl had," said her husband murmuring, continuing to stroke her hair. "But everything's well now. Did you have a good sleep, darling?"

Lydia drew in an exhausted breath. She wondered if she could not throw herself back into that darkness forever. Someone kissed her cheek, and she shrank away. The presence of her husband overpowered her, and her flesh prickled. "Don't," she muttered. "Please don't, Rufus."

Rufus began to laugh. His hand touched her wet throat solicitously. "I don't mind that it's a girl, dearest," he said. "I wanted a boy, yes. But this baby is even better. She looks just like me, Dr. Worth said." His voice, always rich, became richer with pride. Lydia knew his chest was swelling. Red Rufus! she thought with bitter contempt.

She turned her head abruptly and looked at him, wanting him to see the hatred that boiled in her, and which had begun to boil in her less than three months after their marriage. She could not help herself now.

Rufus stepped back. His reddish brows drew together as if he were bewildered. His face took on that anxious young look which was so appealing to women. Mrs. Brunt saw it, and clucked. "Sometimes ladies are disturbed at a time like this," she said consolingly. "Perhaps I'd better not bring in the baby yet. Mrs. deWitt ought to sleep some more."

But husband and wife regarded each other fixedly, and in silence. Then Lydia, looking only at Rufus, said slowly and clearly, "I don't want to see the baby. I want to see Alice and Stephen."

Rufus glanced away, and after a moment he said jovially, "Why, of course, my darling! They're still here. They never went away. And Mama and Papa are waiting up."

He took a step toward the fire, and Lydia could see the

strong muscles of his back and shoulders. He began to stir up the coals; they shattered and filled the big warm room with yellow light. He stood there then and stared into the fire. He said softly, "What's the matter, Liddie?" He looked at the closed door through which Mrs. Brunt had vanished.

Lydia became aware for the first time of the huge pain in her body. She writhed with it, gripping the sheets. Sweat burst out over her face. The hatred in her mind and the pain in her flesh were too much to be borne. She cried out, suffocatingly. Rufus did not turn. He pushed a fallen coal back on to the hearth.

"I'll never have another child!" exclaimed Lydia, and she writhed again in her agony. "Not ever by you, Rufus!"

He came to her now, apprehensive and genuinely concerned. He did not touch her. He began to frown, and he bit his underlip thoughtfully. He was uncertain and baffled. It could not be possible that Lydia hated him, he thought. It was just imagination, or the lamplight, or the suffering she had endured, which had given such a fierceness to her eyes.

"Why, Liddie," he said. "I don't understand. Of course, you've had a dreadful time, and women——"

Lydia lay on her pillows, panting, looking up at him, her hands tense and white as they pulled the sheet over her in a self-protective and instinctive gesture. She had no more words. The emotion that surged in her was too powerful for speech. It had been there, held down, kept in control, for over two years. Now it rose to her lips in a flood of cold rage and loathing. The habits of twenty-four years of gentle breeding could not be overcome, however, so she was silent.

Rufus spoke again, almost inaudibly, and as if to himself: "You look at me as if you hate me, Liddie. Why? What have I done? Have I hurt you in any way, my darling? You know how much I love you, don't you, Liddie? Was the pain too much for you?"

Lydia said through the hard muscles in her throat, "Yes."

He was satisfied, and relieved. Ladies like Lydia, who had always been protected and sheltered, sometimes became emotional after childbirth. Dr. Worth had warned him of this. There might even be a period of "depression" and "melancholy." It was quite usual. He looked down into Lydia's eyes, and saw the bright and staring fever of them, the furious con-

centration. He put his hands in his pockets and rocked on his heels, frowning again.

Lydia turned away her head and closed her eyes. Oh, God! she thought. If I never had to see him again! She did not think of her child at all.

The door opened and Mrs. Brunt appeared. She was a short stout woman with a coarse and friendly face, though her small eyes were fawning and obsequious. She smiled at Rufus archly, and lifted a fat finger in coy warning. "Mr. and Mrs. deWitt, sir. But only for a moment. Please. We must sleep, you know."

Lydia turned on her pillows eagerly. There was her sister, her dear sister Alice, and Stephen. They were coming toward her, walking gently. She held out her hand to Alice, and her fingers closed tightly about her sister's fingers.

"She's very tired. It's been hard," said Rufus. The handsome and ruddy face had turned cold, though it still smiled. It was impossible for Rufus not to smile. "She mustn't be disturbed too much."

Alice bent over Lydia and her pretty, light blue eyes filled with tears and sympathy. She whispered, "Dear Lydia. I'm so glad it's over. And such a beautiful baby. Hush, dear. Hush, hush." Lydia was trembling violently, and her fingers clutched Alice's hand in a kind of desperation.

"Don't leave me, Alice, don't leave me!"

Alice was alarmed. She stroked her sister's damp forehead and tried to understand the frantic expression in her eyes. This was not like Lydia, the quiet, the humorous, the steadfast and poised. She had never seen Lydia like this, not even when their parents had died after a long struggle against "lung fever." There was something frightfully wrong with Lydia. Was it so awful, then, to have a child? With apprehension, she thought of her own child, who would be born in three months.

Even in her suffering, Lydia at last saw the fear in her gentle sister's eyes. Alice was only twenty-one, three years younger than herself, and she had always protected her, for Alice was frail. She told herself sternly that she was frightening this young creature, and she despised herself for her emotionalism. She held her body stiff against her trembling, and tried to smile.