

"LOST ELYSIUM" by EDMOND HAMILTON

NOVEMBER

# Weird Tales

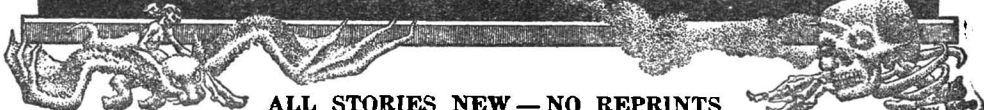
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A tale  
of  
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amber  
doom . . .  
Harold  
Lawlor's

BLOCH  
DERLETH  
HARDING

"THE CRANBERRY GOBLET"

# Weird Tales



NOVEMBER, 1945

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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*Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.*

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# The Cranberry Goblet

*Doom comes in many guises, each one sure and deadly . . .*

By **HAROLD LAWLOR**

**I**T LOOKS as innocent as Coralie herself—that cranberry goblet. It has been in Michael's family for many years—the last of a set once owned, perhaps, by his grandparents. But no one really knows. Michael himself doesn't know. It has just been around for as long as he can remember. Square at the top, slightly convex at the sides, its bowl is the color of ripe cranberries—a live glowing scarlet, deepening sometimes to ruby; its stem and base are of rock crystal, clear and beautifully cut.

The first time I ever saw Michael's sister, Coralie, she held it in her hand. It was early morning and she was in bed, propped up among a number of tiny, lacy pillows. The sun was streaming brilliantly through the white venetian blinds, and Coralie was holding the goblet between herself and the light, regarding the effect in the mirror opposite her bed.

"Look, Michael!" she cried as we came in. The goblet threw a roseate glow over her pallor. "Look how disgustingly pink and healthy I've grown while you've been away!"

Coralie's laughter was as crystal clear as the stem of the cranberry goblet. Michael grinned, and I was smiling as he drew me nearer the bed. "This is Ann, Coralie," he said.

Her swift turquoise glance took in all that there was of me to see in one brief instant—brown hair, brown eyes, the plain blue suit I'd been married in. Then she held wide her arms like a child, and cried, "Ann, dear!"

I was quite prepared to love her. In the hectic week I'd known Michael at the lake, there'd been room only for this wonderful thing that had happened so suddenly. Our

falling in love. It wasn't until we'd made our hasty decision to marry, and were driving in Michael's car to the nearest justice of the peace, that he'd turned to me and said, "I have a sister, Ann. An invalid since she was a child. She'll have to live with us."

The wind had feathered his brown hair down over his tanned forehead. His dark blue eyes were worried. I never loved him so much as at that moment. "Where else would she live?" I smiled.

He gave a sigh of relief at that, but the little furrow still remained between his brows. "You see, she's badly spoiled, I'm afraid."

So that was it. He thought she'd be jealous of men. But, "I'll spoil her, too!" I promised recklessly.

And now here she was, not at all alarming, kissing my cheek with cool lips, seeming not to resent me at all. Looking like a fragile angel among her pillows, with her turquoise eyes and pale gold hair.

Michael was beaming suddenly, too, and looking oddly relieved. It was only then I realized he'd been wearing a worried frown ever since sending the telegram to Coralie announcing our sudden marriage. *Men!* I thought in fond despair. What had he expected us to do—claw each other's eyes out? It was absurd. As if I could help feeling fond at first sight of this sister of his—so child-like, so appealing.

**T**HERE was some mix-up about our luggage. Before attending to it, Michael stayed until Coralie had filled the cranberry goblet with water from a silver carafe on the bedside table, dropped in a capsule which dissolved instantly, and swallowed

Heading by **LEE BROWN COYE**

the colorless mixture. Something wrong with her heart, Michael had said. From where I was standing I could see the box from which she'd taken the capsule, could even read the underscored warning, printed in red: *One capsule only, mornings.*

I went with Michael to the door, and when he was gone I turned back to the bed. To Coralie. To shocked surprise.

Gone were the soft eyes, the dimples,

the child-like air. She lay back among her pillows, and over her face was a blank expressionlessness, infinitely cold.

"We can talk now, without pretending," she said.

"Pretending?"

"You heard me." Stiff-armed, she thrust herself up to a sitting position. "You're not so naïve as to think I intend to share Michael with you? He's *my* brother. In



the past, all his attention has been for me. It's going to continue that way. You don't count at all."

She *was* a child, after all, I thought. Smiling, I went over and sat on the edge of the bed. "Coralie, listen to me. There's room for both of us—"

But she wasn't listening. Her eyes held that blank look of an ego turned in upon itself, and her voice was hot with resentment. "No doubt you think you'll have an easy time of it, winning him away from me. But you won't. Maybe I'm helpless, but I'm clever, too. I'll never rest till I drive you out."

An infantile threat, surely. I don't know why I took it seriously. Yet her anger was contagious. I found myself losing my temper. "And do you think I'll stand by, doing nothing, if you try it?" I started for the door, determined to get out before I made an exhibition of myself.

"You won't do anything, you won't do anything," she taunted in a chant that followed me across the room. "No matter what you do, I'll win. Because—" Her voice fluttered uncertainly. "Because—"

Curious, I looked back. Her eyes were fixed, not on me, but upon the cranberry goblet. Slowly, as I watched, they turned to me. And surely that was fear lurking in their depths?

"Because," she said in a whisper now, "even if I lose I'll win."

A strange thing for her to say. It's only now that I know just how strange. But certainly, for a minute there, she must have seen the fate of the three of us in the cranberry goblet?

**T**HERE were weeks, then, in which I learned just how clever Coralie could be. And it took me weeks to learn. I don't know how I could have been so stupid, so blind. By the time I saw the way things were going, it was too late for ordinary measures. The damage was done.

In the beginning, every morning after Michael had left for the office, I would knock at Coralie's door, eager to make amends, to try to get off on the right foot with her. But I was never permitted to enter. Mrs. Dunnigan, our housekeeper (and Coralie's willing slave), would open

the door the merest slit. And her thin-lipped mouth would open the merest slit, too, in her hard, set face.

Miss Coralie was resting. Miss Coralie didn't feel well enough this morning for visitors. No, there was nothing you could do. Yes, Mrs. Whittington, I'll let you know if she asks for you.

Days of this. Until, after a time, I stopped trying to be friendly. Perhaps she'd get over it faster if I left her alone.

Then Michael, one morning at breakfast, said mildly, "Why don't you ever go in to see Coralie?"

I looked at him in blank amazement. Surely he must know how Coralie felt about me? "But, Michael dear, I've tried. She doesn't want to see me. I can never get in."

Mrs. Dunnigan, pouring coffee, sniffed audibly. And her narrow, black back somehow managed to convey eloquent disbelief for Michael's benefit. Before I could say anything, Mrs. Dunnigan was asking Michael's advice about something, so that her insinuation that I was lying was left dangling in the air until it became, somehow, truth.

What Michael believed I do not know. But he must have said something to Coralie. And always, after that, I visited her room with him in the morning before he went to work. True, between Coralie and me there was nothing more than an exchange of polite insincerities. But she didn't dare deny me entrance—not with Michael at my side. Nor could she any longer accuse me to him of neglect.

But Coralie wasn't finished. It went on. Michael's friends, who'd welcomed me so gladly at first, slowly began to withdraw, and to eye me with suspicion and dislike when we did meet. It hurt me, at first, and bewildered me, but gradually I began to understand. Their coldness always seemed to coincide with their visits to Coralie.

What was she saying to them about me? That I was mean, cold, heartless? Perhaps that I'd married Michael only for his money, and wanted to drive Coralie out? However she was knifing me, she was gaining her effect. She was ill, lovely, pathetic; I was well, presumably at an advantage. It's only natural that the sympathies of Michael's friends should go to her.

Even by the time I grew morally certain of just how she was accomplishing her ends, it was too late to do anything. I couldn't go to Michael's friends and ask them, for they would only deny it strenuously, misguidedly thinking that in so doing they were only protecting Coralie from further abuse. I most certainly wouldn't go to Coralie and tax her with what she was doing. Accuse her, and know that all the while, behind her bland surprise and pitying denial, she'd be laughing at me delightedly. She *wanted* me to suspect what she was doing. She just didn't want me to get any proof.

My only defense was to withdraw more and more into the shell of pretended indifference. Then Coralie for days would be gay and kind and friendly, until I began to doubt my own suspicions. Eagerly I'd make friendly overtures in return, only to be rebuffed. It was all nicely calculated to drive a sensitive person to the verge of insanity. It was all done so subtly that even now I despair of making anyone see just how she gained her ends.

And Michael? What did he see? What was he thinking? It was impossible for me to guess. His face was blank most of the time, his manner that of a polite stranger. Gradually a rift appeared between us. Gradually it widened. I couldn't be sure what Coralie was saying to him. I grew more and more uncertain of myself, more and more withdrawn.

While I watched in a sort of sick despair, I saw him grow first wary, then cold, then indifferent to me. I still retained enough reason to blame Coralie for what was happening. But I had no proof. For she was never crude, or careless, or even explicit. There'd be a sly insinuation here, a subtle suggestion there. To Michael. About me. Anything to create doubt.

But Michael, I thought, would never understand this, never blame Coralie for what was happening. Men, they say, are by nature more open, more direct. If I went to him, telling him what I suspected, I felt he'd only regard Coralie as misunderstood, and myself as jealous, suspicious—at best, a whining martyr.

Coralie, I knew, was relying on this.

My hands were hopelessly tied. It was impossible to combat her tactics.

**M**Y DECISION to kill Coralie was not a sudden thing. I think it had been growing on me for weeks. Perhaps in the beginning my mind had rejected the idea in horror, but in the end I grew to accept it. I don't think I was entirely sane by that time, living as I had been in an atmosphere of suspicion, intrigue, and distrust. But perhaps I was sane enough. Perhaps I'm only trying, now, to rationalize my guilt.

I remember the night my purpose crystallized. It was after a climactic quarrel with Michael. We'd been quarreling frequently, our nerves rubbed raw. But tonight we shouted like drunken tenement dwellers, and at the last I slapped him stinging. Strange that I can't remember the source of our quarrel. It was like that, those days. We were fighting about nothing at all.

But I can remember thinking how glad Coralie was going to be when she learned of it, as I knew she very shortly would. Mrs. Dunnigan always went to her immediately, I was sure, carrying stories.

Michael slammed out of the house finally, and I dragged myself to the bedroom, and threw myself across one of the twin beds, sobbing stormily. Until at last I grew quieter, and my emotions played themselves out, and I could think.

Was this the way it was going to end? The marriage I'd entered with such high hope? Once I'd loved Michael, and he'd loved me. Somewhere still, I felt the seed of that love yet existed. But unless I did something, soon, even that would be gone.

And I thought, I must kill Coralie. Now. Before it was too late.

**I**T LOOKS so dreadfully melodramatic as I set it down. *I must kill Coralie.* But I felt calm, even happy, at the time. I rationalized. Coralie had been an invalid for years. It would be a mercy-death, really, not murder. I was only sacrificing one for the happiness of two.

I knew just how I must go about it. The capsule Coralie took every morning. *One capsule only.* I could see those red letters plainly, here on the wall of my darkened bedroom. Every morning Michael and I were in Coralie's room as she took her capsule. It would be so easy for me to drop

two of them beforehand into the cranberry goblet. And they left no betraying trace.

**DOCTOR HADDON**—Peter Haddon, Michael's good friend—was not suspicious. He straightened up from where he'd been bending over Coralie's body, lying there so still among the laces and ruffles of the bed-covering. He stood there a moment, looking down at her, and his dark eyes seemed sad.

Coralie once again looked like the fragile angel I'd first seen upon coming to this house. Except for a thin line of dried saliva running from mouth to chin, she was lovely as a bit of Venetian glass.

I felt no pity. I had no regrets.

Dr. Haddon turned to Michael, who was looking so stricken. (Oh, I'd make it up to him! I would!)

"I'm sorry, Michael," Peter said gently. "I know there's nothing I can say, but—she hadn't much of a life, you know, chained to this bed as she was."

Michael mumbled something. Then, "Will you show Peter out, Ann? I'd like to be alone—with her—for a while."

Out in the hall, Peter drew me away from the door we'd closed behind us. "I'm not saying anything to Michael, Ann, but there's something—"

He *was* suspicious! My heart lurched sickeningly. My hand trembled as it went to my lips.

Peter's face softened. "I know this has been a shock for you, too. But I thought I'd better tell you. Coralie took an overdose of those capsules."

I breathed again. "Over-dose?"

He patted my shoulder. "Deliberately, I'm afraid. But no one need ever know. And I thought it was kinder not to tell Michael. We can avoid an inquest—I'll take care of everything. Poor Coralie—"

Luckily, Peter had been away for months. Coralie had never poisoned his mind against me.

But when he was gone, and all during that time until the funeral, I watched Michael walking around like a man in a daze, and wondered if I'd only made everything worse.

But once the funeral was over, I knew that I had not. It was as if a miasma were

suddenly lifted from the apartment and both of us in it. Only Mrs. Dunnigan walked around numbly, watching me covertly.

I'll always remember those two days after the funeral. The happiest days I've ever known. Once more, Michael and I were as we had been that first week we'd met at the lake. All the bitterness and distrust had gone with Coralie.

And then, on the third morning, happened the first of those weird occurrences that were to follow so frighteningly.

**I'D DECIDED**, and Michael agreed, that we should dismantle Coralie's bedroom and turn it into a game room. The day before I'd gone in there to see what needed to be done, and the first thing that met my eyes was the cranberry goblet.

It seemed to hit me with the force of a blow, glowing there so redly in the sunlight. I didn't want to touch it. I didn't want to remember those two capsules sliding so stealthily from my hand into its bowl. I didn't want to be reminded of Coralie, and the goblet was a symbol of her.

Perhaps I was being fanciful, but to me the goblet *was* Coralie. Outwardly she appeared like its stem, pure and white and crystal-clear; but at the core, I'd always believe, she was scarlet as its bowl.

I didn't touch the thing. I called Mrs. Dunnigan and I pointed to it. "Wash that, please, then put it away. We shan't be using it ever again."

I thought the woman looked at me queerly, but she only said, "Yes, Mrs. Whittington," and bore it away.

But now, on this third morning after the funeral, as I went into the room with the man who'd come to measure for the new linoleum floor, I saw the cranberry goblet glowing at me again from its place on the bedside table.

I waited till the man had done his measuring and gone before I called Mrs. Dunnigan. "I wanted you to put the goblet away," I said mildly. "Not return it to where it was."

She frowned at it. "But I did, Mrs. Whittington. I put it in the pantry, and I'm sure I don't know—" She picked it up. "Why, it's full of water!"

She brought it to me so that I could see the clear liquid lapping gently against the square sides of the glass. That was the way it had looked the morning Coralie died. When I'd dropped those capsules—

I turned away, feeling a little sick. "Empty it and lock it in the court cabinet in the dining room."

Michael kept his liquors in the cabinet and always locked the door—though this was a gesture, merely, since the key remained in the lock.

The men came just then to remove the furniture from Coralie's room and I busied myself with other things, forgetting about the goblet.

**B**UT the next morning, when I awoke, I was angry. And, I thought, enlightened.

For the first thing I saw was the cranberry goblet on my bedside table. I didn't get up, but by stretching I could see that it was full of colorless liquid.

I thought I had the explanation right away. Mrs. Dunnigan was doing this. I didn't know what she suspected, or what she hoped to gain, but it seemed obvious she was leaving this reminder constantly about.

I rang for the housekeeper.

"I thought I told you to lock that in the cabinet," I said, when she was standing before me.

She seemed genuinely surprised when she saw the goblet. I hadn't thought she'd be so good an actress. "I did put it away, Mrs. Whittington. And locked the door."

"You're lying to me," I said flatly.

She opened her mouth, perhaps to deny the charge, then closed it, trap-like. Her eyes seemed to be appraising me shrewdly, and I didn't like the calculating look that flitted across her hard face. I'd had enough of the woman. There had always been veiled insolence in her manner to me.

"I'm giving you two weeks' notice," I said. "With the help shortage what it is, you should be able to find something else by then."

She drew herself up. "If you'll give me two weeks' salary, I'll leave today. I've not been satisfied here since Miss Coralie—"

I nodded.

Mrs. Dunnigan went out. "I *did* lock that goblet away."

"I don't believe you."

She continued. "But why does the goblet bother you so much, Mrs. Whittington? Do you think it's strange that it's always full of liquid? I do."

"Keep still!"

"Perhaps Miss Coralie is putting it there," she said nastily. "Perhaps she wants you to drink—"

"Get out!" I cried, infuriated.

The woman shrugged, and turned to leave. But at the door she faced me again, with a sly smile. "Are you *afraid*, Mrs. Whittington?"

I was, suddenly. I think for the first time I really realized what I'd done. And it must have showed in my face. For Mrs. Dunnigan burst into satisfied, hysterical laughter.

**I** WAS furious with myself for letting the woman bait me so successfully. It was not only stupid of me, it was dangerous. I couldn't afford to be rousing anyone's suspicions. In the future, I must be more careful.

I dressed, emptied the contents of the goblet down the lavatory drain, and this time locked it away myself in the court cabinet. Then, taking the key, went to drive Michael to the station. He had to go to St. Louis on business for two days.

"Mrs. Dunnigan is leaving," I said casually, as we drove along. I was a little nervous as I didn't know just how attached he might be to the housekeeper, or if he would resent my dismissing her.

Luckily, Michael was preoccupied and asked no questions. "Get somebody else," he suggested shortly, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Evidently her going meant nothing to him.

At the station, I gave him the key to the court cabinet, and asked him to put it on his key-chain with the others. This roused him. "What?" he laughed. "Are you a secret drinker? Are you locking temptation away?"

"Exactly!" I agreed demurely, lifting my face for his kiss.

So that was that. The cranberry goblet would stay where it was for awhile. There'd



be no more Mrs. Dunnigan in the apartment, playing tricks. Just as there was no more Coralie.

I shivered suddenly, and for the first time since her death felt a vague depression.

**I**T WASN'T until the next morning that I really began to know what fear could be like.

I remember lying there with my eyes still closed, feeling, even at the moment of awakening, a slight uneasiness. Sensing something wrong in the empty apartment, in the bedroom empty save for myself.

The uneasiness increased. And slowly the conviction grew upon me that I had only to turn my head, open my eyes, to find it there on my bedside table. The cranberry goblet.

It was ages before I could nerve myself to turn my head, inch by cautious inch, on the pillow. Eons, surely, before my reluctant eyelids opened, and—

Yes, it was there! Its contents lapping softly against the sides of the bowl, as if the glass had just been set down.

A sharp intake of breath, the startled leap of my heart. There was someone in the room! I felt the presence strongly, though I could see no one.

I drew myself up slowly until my back was resting against the headboard of the bed. My eyes ranged the room warily. Was that a shadow, deeper than the other shadows, over in the corner? Was that my voice calling, "Coralie?"

No answer.

"It is you, Coralie." My head nodded wisely, my voice echoed eerily in the quiet bedroom. "You're trying to play on my nerves, aren't you? Trying to frighten me into confession." I smiled cunningly. "Well, you won't succeed. You'll never succeed." Bravado crept into my voice. "I'm not so easily frightened."

I don't know how long I crouched there against the tufted satin headboard. But reason came back abruptly. I was like one roused sharply from a bad dream, who doubts the dream. Surely I had been dreaming?

But no. The goblet *was* there, its contents making a gurgling, contented sound

in the stillness. It didn't frighten me now. Mrs. Dunnigan, of course! Somehow she had crept back.

I opened the venetian blinds so the sunlight might pour in, and dressed swiftly. My spirits lifted with the sun, and I could scarcely credit my superstitious terror of the moment before.

Coralie was dead.

It was in a spirit of defiance then that I emptied the goblet and hid it on the highest shelf of one of the cabinets in the kitchen. To make the hiding place doubly secure, I first buried the glass deep in a canister full of flour.

There. Let Mrs. Dunnigan sneak into the apartment again and try to find it. Let Mrs. Dunnigan try— My smile of satisfaction slowly faded. But I'd locked the door of the court cabinet! And the key—the key was with Michael, in St. Louis!

A cold draught from nowhere played against my back. The apartment was quiet, dreadfully quiet.

I was afraid.

**L**A TE that afternoon I had a curious conversation with Dr. Peter Haddon, who'd dropped in thinking to find Michael at home. A conversation that should have been enlightening, but wasn't—plunging me instead into deepest bewilderment.

It must have been Peter who first spoke of Coralie's death. Heaven knows I wouldn't have introduced the subject myself. But as we spoke of her I found myself wondering—had Coralie known, just before the end, that her medicine had been tampered with?

I found myself hoping vindictively that this was so—that she'd suffered bitterly, helplessly in the knowledge, as she had made me suffer.

Had there been a moment, just before death came so swiftly, when she had known from the taste of the drink that I must have given her an over-dose? Or had the stronger solution tasted no different than her usual dose?

So strong was my sudden desire to know that I heard myself saying, "I don't see how she could have forced herself to drink that over-dose. Surely those three capsules must have made the drink so unpalatable—"

But I found out something else. Something totally unexpected.

"Three capsules?" Peter questioned. "Three capsules wouldn't have killed her."

That startled me. "But she died! Three must have—"

"How do you know there were three?"

Careful! I'd nearly betrayed myself. I looked up to find Peter watching me strangely.

"Why," I faltered. "The box said one capsule only. It seems reasonable to suppose that a person bent on suicide would put two in the glass, doubling the dose, then add a third to make certain."

But Peter shook his head. "Three would have made her very ill, but they wouldn't have killed her. She must have taken more."

I couldn't understand it. Peter was very emphatic that three wouldn't have killed her. When he had left, I kept thinking, "But there were only three! The one capsule Coralie had put in the glass herself, and the two that I—"

I shut off my thoughts. I didn't want to remember those two capsules sliding from my hand, dissolving immediately as they struck the water in the goblet.

Nevertheless, Peter's revelation disturbed me. For what had caused Coralie's death, if I had not killed her?

I SPRANG out of bed the next morning humming. Michael would be home late that afternoon, in time for dinner. I opened the blinds, and then I was standing rooted, the song dead on my lips. Slowly I retreated until the edge of the dresser was hurtful, but sharply reassuring, against my back.

My eyes never left the bedside table, never left the brimming cranberry goblet standing upon it.

My heart, that had plunged, began pumping wildly. My horrified gaze wavered with the gently lapping liquid in the goblet's bowl. First one side, then the other. Gently, but with a mesmeric insistence that was hideous to behold.

My thoughts circled wildly, like hunted things seeking escape. Why? Oh, why? And how did it get here again?

But I knew. Again I sensed that invis-

ible presence in the apparently empty room. And again I called out softly.

"Coralie?"

The liquid in the goblet lapped still more insistently against the convex sides. I was sure, then. Certain the goblet contained the same lethal dose it had held the last time Coralie had lifted it to her lips.

"You want me to drink?" I whispered. "Is that it, Coralie? You want me to drink?"

Slowly my trembling legs gave way, and I sank to the carpet. I wouldn't drink. I never, never would. Ah, God, why did she punish me so? I hadn't killed her. Peter said so.

I crouched there sobbing, but presently my courage returned sufficiently so that I could get on my feet and approach the cranberry goblet. I dreaded to touch the thing, but gingerly I took it, and again emptied its contents.

I knew I must get rid of it, quickly, before Michael came back. It was wearing me down. One of these mornings, fear might even force me to tell Michael what I had done.

I shuddered.

I tottered down the hall, and clawed through the closet impatiently until I found an empty carton. Placing the goblet within, I wrapped the package securely with trembling hands and addressed it to a fictitious name and street number in Los Angeles. And I placed no return address on the wrapper.

I hurried with it to the postoffice and my depression didn't lift until I'd pushed it through the slot marked "Parcels."

I was safe. All that afternoon, in my relief, I was almost feverishly excited. It wasn't until I met Michael at the station that my spirits died. For Michael seemed preoccupied still, and his greeting lacked the warmth I expected it to have. Business, I thought.

"Didn't Findlay sign the contract?" I asked.

"What? Oh, Oh, yes, he signed it." Michael returned to gazing moodily out the window of the coupe at the passing shops.

"Aren't you glad to be back?" I persisted.

"Sure, I'm glad," he said listlessly.

His lethargy bothered me. "What's the matter? Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, for God's sake, Ann! Cut out the nagging!" he snapped irritably. But when I'd subsided into hurt silence, he reached over and covered my hand on the wheel with his. "I'm sorry. Guess I'm tired."

But there was something wrong. I knew it.

While he showered, I put the dinner on the table. I still hadn't replaced Mrs. Dunningan with someone else, and I was doing the work myself—badly enough. But it was fun, in a way. My mistakes made me feel very inefficient and bride-like.

BY A miracle, the dinner was surprisingly good. Under its influence, the lines of strain slowly became erased from Michael's face. And I relaxed for the first time in days. Surely I had nothing to fear, now that Michael was with me again. We were talking and laughing, almost on the old footing, when it happened.

Michael lifted his glass to drink. I saw him lift it. One instant my breath held in disbelief. Then I was screaming hysterically, "Put it down! Put it down!"

That wasn't the plain crystal water glass I'd placed on the table! There, just two inches from Michael's lips, was the cranberry goblet!

Michael's startled eyes went from me to the goblet, and when he saw what it was that he held in his hand, he swore softly. With his face turning a leaden gray, he set the thing back on the table with a hand that shook.

"The goblet!" he muttered. "I cannot escape it. It was there, even in St. Louis."

Oh, I hadn't thought she'd strike at me through Michael, whom I loved! I couldn't—I dare not fight her any more.

I was standing, half-swaying. "I didn't kill her, Michael! I put those two capsules in the goblet, but Peter said—"

Michael's face was grim, stony.

"Don't look at me like that!" I pleaded. "Three weren't enough to kill her, but—"

"She died," Michael said strangely. "Died, because I, too, dropped two capsules in Coralie's glass that last morning."

My breath caught. I couldn't understand.

Michael had loved Coralie! What was he saying?

"Don't you think I saw what she'd been doing all along, working to destroy our marriage?" His face was cold, implacable. "I knew what Coralie was capable of. Why, when she was a child—" He broke off. "It doesn't matter now. But she never fooled me. Never. I had a right to some happiness. And that was why I killed her."

Why we killed her. Five capsules, I thought dully. Five had been enough.

Michael picked up the cranberry goblet. Looking around for some place to throw its contents, he finally poured the liquid into the bowl of zinnias on the table.

"Come," he said then, the goblet still in his hand. "We'll make an end of it."

We were turning away from the table when I whispered, "Look!"

The zinnias were wilting, turning to gray ash that drifted on the damask cloth.

In the living room, Michael threw the goblet into the empty fireplace, where it shattered. With the poker he pulverized the remaining fragments. It was done. He came to me then, and caught me in his arms. And I found myself shrinking. Shrinking from his embrace, even though I knew he was no worse than myself.

But I could hear Coralie's voice again, saying, "Even if I lose, I'll win."

Clever Coralie, cruel Coralie. Together we have killed her, and together we had killed whatever future we might have had for ourselves. There is no love without trust, and there'll be no trust, ever, between Michael and me. There'll be no children now, for Michael and me—children whose parents were murderers.

Slowly we went back to the dining room. And it was there, glowing evilly red on the table, its contents lapping invitingly, insistently. We stood there looking at it, feeling no surprise. Only an infinite weariness. We can never destroy it. It will be with us always.

You'll never give up, will you, Coralie? I know that now. Know it as certainly as I know that the day will finally come when Michael and I, goaded beyond endurance, will drink as you desire—from the cranberry goblet.