

Where the Wealthy and the Powerful Rule...

Judith Nolan



“Wealth consists not in having possessions, but in having few wants...”

Epictetus



All her life, Margaret Chase had been used to having the very best of everything. The finest linen, elegant clothes, and the most expensive of foodstuffs. She only had to stretch out her hand, and it was filled with opulent largess. But that was the old Margaret...

Now, she lay in a wide, deeply-pillowed bed, hidden in a quiet, rock-cut chamber, which was buried deep in the bowels of the earth. All around her flickered a myriad of candles, keeping the ultimate darkness at bay.

She couldn't be happier. Except for one last, nagging detail that had begun to plague her restless sleep. She was fast running out of time...

“You'll do this last thing, for me?” Margaret watched the younger woman sitting beside her, reading through what she held in her hands. Margaret drew a shuddering breath, releasing it in a rush. “Please...”

“I can see you've put a great deal of thought into this. Your estate is substantial and diverse. Disposing of it, as you propose, will cause a lot of speculation, and consternation.” Catherine looked up from the yellow legal pad she'd been asked to bring with her, on her last visit. Margaret's notes were meticulous and comprehensive. “I will make sure it's done.”

“That’s why I asked for your help. I know you’re strong enough to run interference for my wishes, and deal with any awkward questions.” Margaret shrugged.

“Besides, who else can I trust to look after my affairs now, but you?” She stretched out a hand. Catherine clasped it in one of her own.

Margaret shook her head. “Henry Dutton turned out to be a murderous charlatan. And poor Alan paid with his life, for trying to shield me from the awful mess I’d allowed my life had become. We must protect this place, at all costs.” She withdrew her hand and settled it on the quilted bedcovers.

“None of it was your fault, Margaret,” Catherine reassured her. “You fell prey to someone who did a very good job of convincing you he was following your wishes. We try to look for the best in the people we must depend on.”

“And sometimes we can’t see the blasted truth, even when it’s so obvious.”

Margaret’s lips twisted painfully. “I’ve been blind for most of my life. I should never have allowed my father to annul my marriage. I should have been stronger.”

Her fingers plucked anxiously at the bedcovers. “He knew how important Jacob was to me, so he sent me away to Paris. Because he could. He wanted to punish me for disobeying him, and I allowed it. I was such a coward. This is the best way I can make amends for my folly. Dutton has been made to repay all the money he stole from me.”

“Dutton will spend a good deal of the rest of his life, in jail.” Catherine attempted to sooth the older woman. “We both know, your father was an unstoppable force of nature. What Preston Chase wanted, he got. He was far too wealthy and powerful for anyone to stand against him. I’ve read about him. My father once told me about some of your father’s more dubious business moves. He didn’t care who he trampled. He always played both ends against the middle. How else could he have survived for so long, unscathed by war, or the Great Depression?”

“So, you know about my father, the great, unlamented, robber baron.” Margaret’s lips thinned with disgust. “My poor mother hated him. She ran away with another man, when I was barely five. Preston never forgave her, and never spoke of her again. I soon learned to hold my tongue around him, or suffer the consequences.”

She reached out her hand again, and took Catherine’s. Her hand turned within the beautiful attorney’s, gripping urgently. “My life has always been too full of men who’ve wanted to control me, for money and power.” Her gaze moved to the chamber entrance. “Only one man wanted me for *who* I am, not *what* I am. And I allowed him to slip away from me. I want to change that, now.”

She looked back to Catherine. “The trust fund I’ve asked you to set up, will be enough to help all those who live Below. And those to come. As my trustee, its

administration I will leave completely in your hands. I know you'll use the money wisely. It must be put to good use."

"I couldn't think of any people more deserving," Catherine nodded.

Margaret smiled softly. "It's the least I can do. I wish..."

She looked back to the chamber entrance. "Jacob will be back soon, to take my temperature, and fuss over me. Do we have an agreement? You will represent my interests after I'm... after I'm gone?"

"It would be my honour," Catherine replied sincerely.

Gently tugging her hand away, she closed the legal pad and pushed it into the leather carry-all at her feet.

"I'll draw up the papers for your will, and Peter Alcott has agreed to come Below, to witness your signature. As your new, personal physician, he has also certified that you are of sound mind. My father has already secured all your files from Alan Taft's office. He only knows that you wish to be my private client, and none of your decisions are to be questioned."

"Thank you, for all your kindness. And the other matter we discussed, yesterday?" Margaret put out a hand to detain Catherine, as she rose from her chair. "Don't organise anything fancy. I have a dress I can wear. Mary has already done a fitting with me. I don't need anything else. Everyone has be so kind to me."

"Because they love you, as Father does. I've already set things in motion. I will see to everything. I think it's a wonderful idea."

"Thank you for not saying you think I'm being a sentimental old woman for wanting to marry Jacob, again."

The younger woman shook her head. "What I think doesn't matter, at all." She sighed. "But, for the record, I agree, it's a charming idea. How does Father feel about it?"

"Yes, well..." Margaret chuckled. "I haven't told him yet. I wanted to wait until everything is set in stone. Then he can't wriggle out, or tell me I'm too ill to go through with it. He worries too much."

"Ah, that's the doctor in him. He is right to be concerned for you. But, the man you know and love will be so happy. Once he gets over the shock."

"Good," Margaret replied stoutly. "Because, I will not take no, for an answer. I plan to tell him, tonight. There's so little time left."

“What are you disagreeing about, now?” a man’s voice demanded, from the chamber entrance. “I thought I told you to rest, Margaret. You’ve already done too much, today.”

Jacob came in, leaning on his cane, as he approached the bed. “It’s late.” A look of deep concern creased his forehead. He frowned at Catherine. “Whatever this little *tête-à-tête* is about, surely it can wait until the morning.”

“Bully...” Margaret regarded him, with smiling affection. “I don’t know why I put up with you.”

“And I have never had a more difficult patient.” Jacob took her wrist between his fingers, assessing the speed of her pulse.

“Well, it was all my idea. I asked Vincent to send Catherine to me. We have things we needed to talk about.”

Father glanced between the two women, having no idea what the two of them could be discussing.

“That’s as may be. But it still doesn’t give you permission to exert yourself.”

Margaret regarded her love fondly. “I’ve lived more in these last three days than I have ever lived, since we last saw each other. We both know what time we have now, is limited. I wanted to do so much with you.”

He met her loving gaze. “I do know that...” Jacob’s voice choked. “Margaret, I—”

“Let’s not talk about what we can’t fix. Not tonight.” She frowned up at him, then smiled sweetly. “Come, sit with me, and tell me some more lies. Tell me we can have forever, and we can grow old, together. Please, Jacob...”

Father shook his head slowly, but he was not immune to her pleadings. He sank down onto the side of the bed, linking his fingers through hers. They stared at each other, sharing an emotional moment that didn’t allow for an observer.

“I’ll leave you two alone.” Catherine picked up her bag, and backed away, tactfully.

“Come and see again me tomorrow,” Margaret confirmed, leaning forward to look around Jacob.

“Only if your doctor allows it.”

Jacob glanced at Catherine, his eyes full of anxiety. He pushed Margaret gently back onto the pillows.

“You should be resting. What is so important?”

“Gossip.” Margaret laughed quickly. “How am I going to know what is happening in your world, if no-one tells me? I want to know everything.”

“If you take it easy, you can walk again, with me, tomorrow. If needs be, we can find you a wheelchair.”

“No wheelchairs.” Margaret made a face. “I’ve seen too many of them.” She lay back on her pillows, allowing her love to fuss over her. “I’ll be good.”

She looked again at Catherine, who’d retreated to the chamber entrance.

“Tomorrow... promise me?”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Catherine nodded.

“Good, then I can rest easy. And allow this old man to make a silly fuss over me. He seems to think he has nothing else to do.”

Jacob frowned at her, releasing her hand to pick up a nearby thermometer. “Who are you calling old, old woman?”

Catherine stood watching them with deep affection, as they bickered back and forth. Jacob fussed and Margaret allowed it, because she loved him.

“Just like an old married couple,” she whispered, retreating quietly to the tunnel, outside.

“Who are?” a deep, soft voice asked, from behind her.

She turned to find Vincent watching her, quizzically. As always his ability to move so silently, for such a big man, fascinated her.

“Jacob and Margaret.” She indicated the chamber behind her, where their hushed voices could still be heard.

Catherine managed to catch the inflection of Margaret’s voice saying a word that sounded like “married.” The chamber fell suddenly silent. She smiled, as she tried to imagine Jacob’s shocked expression in that moment.

“Ah, I see...,” Vincent nodded. His eyebrows rose inquiringly. “It seems the moment of ultimatum has finally arrived. I gather Margaret has told you of her wishes?”

“You know?” Catherine asked, guardedly, not wanting to give away any confidences.

“That she plans to make an honest man of Father before it’s too late?” Vincent smiled. “It’s fast becoming an open secret around here. To everyone but the future groom. He has remained happily ignorant... until now.”

“Yes, until now...” Catherine indicated the silent chamber. “I think their secret is out. It’s a marvellous idea. They belong together. It’s such an awful shame they don’t have more time.”

“Hence the need for such urgent plans,” Vincent inclined his head. “She’s asked me to stand up as Father’s best man. William and Mary have been helping with the planning. Mouse is hard at work on their wedding rings. Verity has offered to provide the flowers.”

He shook his head. “Lady May has insisted on supplying the champagne from her own cellar. I saw her a few minutes ago, bickering with William over what they will be serving for the canapes. I wisely declined to referee that match, and retreated to find you. It seems everyone has been given their parts to play, including you and me.”

“Margaret has thought of everything,” Catherine marvelled. “She commanded me to attend her as her maid of honour. I was happy to accept.”

“Margaret is very much a woman used to getting her own way. It is such a pity she has been brought so low.” Vincent took Catherine’s arm, turning her to walk beside him. “When is the happy event to be held?”

“As soon as I can organise it,” Catherine admitted. “Do you have anyone in mind who could officiate?”

“Father Winston is a helper. He runs a small parish church, and helps out those of us who wish to attend his services. He knows how to be very discreet.”

“Perfect,” Catherine approved. “Can you take me to see him?”

Vincent nodded. “Meet me at the threshold tomorrow night, after you’ve finished work. I will wait for you.”

“Thank you, Vincent.”

Catherine linked arms with him, and they walked slowly down the tunnel, spending what precious time they had, together, before the realities of their different worlds intruded, once more...



“Are you sure about this?” Father adjusted his collar for the umpteenth time. “I mean, the last time we got married, I wore a suit.” He fussed with his tunnel clothing, brushing at his sleeves, and straightening his cloak, once more.

“That was the old Jacob.” Margaret linked arms with him, pressing her cheek to his shoulder. “I much prefer the look of the new Jacob. Very handsome.”

“You look incredible...”

Jacob drew back to study the picture his love made in an ivory dress trimmed with antique lace. Her simple bouquet had been supplied by Verity, from her flower shop on Duane Street, in Lower Manhattan. Each bloom had its own special meaning.

Jacob sighed, as he shook his head. “You look just as you did, on that long-ago summer’s day... When I first saw you...”

“Keep that memory... Always...” Margaret whispered, kissing his bearded cheek.

Jacob looked around at the sea of guests, crowded into the Great Hall. “I’m amazed so many people decided to come.”

Everyone had been invited, and they all appeared to be having a great time.

“I shouldn’t have allowed you to talk me into it. You’re too weak for this,” Jacob murmured, worriedly.

“As if you were given a choice,” Vincent commented drily, coming up on Father’s other side. “What does it take, for a blind man to see?”

Vincent looked resplendent in his ruffled white shirt and black jeans. In his left hand he held a small velvet box, containing a pair of matching gold wedding rings Mouse had crafted.

“I know you had a part to play in this. You could have warned me.” Jacob cast Vincent a frustrated look, before turning back to his bride-to-be. “If it gets to be too much... If you get too tired, just tell me, and I’ll stop the ceremony. I won’t have you overtaxing yourself.”

Margaret straightened defiantly. “You’ll stop nothing, Jacob Wells. I will be your patient again, tomorrow. I’ve been waiting for this day for almost forty years. I’m not going to allow a silly infirmity to stop us now. I am going to become your wife, again.”

She linked her arm through his, as Catherine came up to take her other arm.

Together, the four of them advanced slowly down the aisle, toward Father Winston. He greeted them with a broad smile, and a knowing wink.

He opened his prayer book, before looking up at the assembled crowd. An expectant hush fell.

“My friends, today is a celebration. We are gathered here today to witness one of life’s truly great moments. The re-joining of two hearts which have finally found each other again. Despite everything that has conspired to keep them apart...”

He smiled at the couple standing before him.

“Because despite all of our differences, love is what we all share. It’s the one, great, universal truth. That no matter who we are, where we’ve come from, what we believe, we know this one thing: love is what we’re doing right. That’s why you both are standing here. That’s why you all are here to bear witness. We have all loved in our lifetimes, and in this moment, we’re reminded that the ability to love is the very best part of our humanity.”

He looked around the crowded hall. “All of us here today have our own love stories. Some are short, others long. Some are yet unwritten, while others are just getting to the good part. There are chapters in all of our stories that are sad or disappointing, and others that are exciting and full of adventure. Now we will witness their vows, each to the other.”

Father Winston nodded to Margaret.

“The wreck of my memories...” She smiled softly, looking at Jacob. “Despite everything, I clung to those memories, throughout the terribly lonely years, knowing I could never bring myself to finally abandon them.”

Margaret paused, before taking a steadying breath.

“Then a miracle happened. Somehow we found each other again. With one, sweet kiss, I fell in love with you all over again. To be able to stand beside you now, is all I ask. My eventide will be here soon enough, but the rain in my heart has gone forever. All because of you...”

Jacob wiped a quick hand over his eyes, as he took her hands in his.

“All I know is what I see, when I look at you. All I see is what I’m feeling deep down inside. This feeling that I have finally got it right. When we wake up together, tomorrow, I’m going to wrap my arms around you, once again. I will thank my lucky stars I found you. Nothing matters more to me now, than knowing I was your first, and only, love. Whatever is to come, know that I will always love you...”



“It’s so lovely, out here, tonight.” Catherine sighed, leaning against the wall of her balcony. “Such a beautiful evening shouldn’t be filled with so much sadness.”

She turned to look at Vincent, who was standing quietly beside her. He moved his head in slow agreement.

“Yes, but we cannot escape loss...,” he replied, softly. “For Jacob and Margaret to have lived, never to meet, or love, would have been the true tragedy. It’s the price we must pay for living, and loving. All life moves a cycle that is as unchangeable as those stars above us, Catherine. For every burgeoning beginning, there must be an ultimate end. Margaret understood that. She embraced it, fully.”

“I know you are right. But, still...,” Catherine sighed.

Moving together, they looked up, into the inky velvet of the heavens, bottom-lit by the city lights. After a long moment of contemplation, Catherine turned to face Vincent. They both became deeply absorbed in the silence, and their shared memories.

Finally, Catherine said, “I’ve made all the necessary arrangements for Margaret’s funeral. It has been posted as a private, family affair. All donations to be made to her chosen charities, in lieu of flowers. She asked me to be the executrix of her will. Her wishes were meticulous and clear. She didn’t want any memorial, or a headstone.”

She bit her lower lip, before continuing. “She said she didn’t wish to lie up here, alone, and without anyone to sit and talk to her. Jacob said they found a quiet, peaceful place deep in the tunnels, for her to rest. Somewhere he can go and visit her, any time he wishes.”

She wiped a tear from her cheek. “I think it’s such a beautiful ending. Powerful, in its own way. Something that awful people like her father, or Henry Dutton, could never touch.”

“She became one of us,” Vincent replied quietly. “And that is important to Father. Margaret said the last seven days were the happiest of her life.”

Catherine nodded. “And how is Father?”

Vincent sighed. “Healing... Alone... Grateful.”

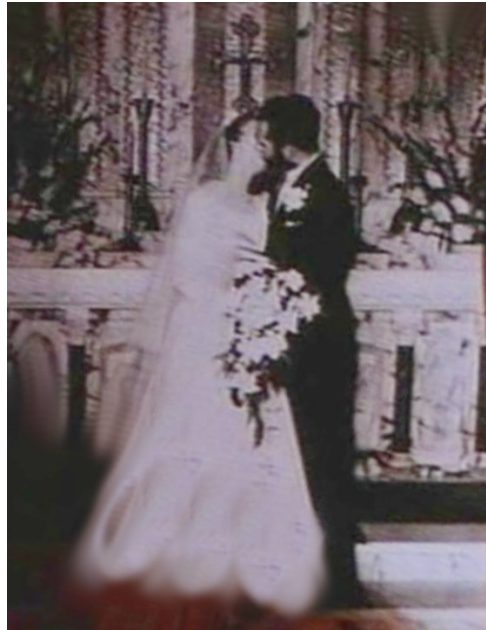
“They truly loved each other.”

“Yes...”

Catherine fought back fresh tears. “It’s so sad, to have had a beginning and an end and all the time in the middle, empty.”

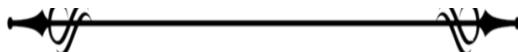
“They had seven days, Catherine. Seven days...”

She regarded him steadily, with all the poignancy of their impossible love. Vincent turned, bringing her closer to him with an arm around her shoulders. Catherine leaned into him, secure in his great strength. Vincent laid a lingering kiss against her hair, before they went back to their contemplation of the stars, glittering far above...



“The beautiful journey of today can only begin when we learn to let go of yesterday...”

Steve Maraboli



To read more about Verity, and her flower shop on Duane Street, please click here:

<https://treasurechambers.com/FanFiction/Judith/JudithBegetting%20the%20Rose.pdf>

To learn more about Lady May’s story, please click here:

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AIg7QIVuSMA7tMU&cid=365826C0B9F33E18&id=365826C0B9F33E18%21109013&parId=365826C0B9F33E18%21107943&o=OneUp>