

VOLUME ONE

*A Cup of*  
**CHRISTMAS  
CHEER**

TALES *of* FAITH *and* FAMILY  
*for the* HOLIDAYS

**Guideposts**

New York

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## CONTENTS

THE CHEVALIER .....	I
<i>Susan Page Davis</i>	
SECOND-CHANCE CHRISTMAS.....	25
<i>Jenness Walker</i>	
NOT QUITE HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.....	49
<i>Pam Hanson &amp; Barbara Andrews</i>	
MRS. MEYER'S CHRISTMAS CALLER.....	71
<i>Jessica Keller</i>	
RIDING ON A CHRISTMAS WISH.....	93
<i>Anita Draper</i>	
UPON A CHRISTMAS TREE SCHOONER.....	117
<i>Carla Olson Gade</i>	
SNOWED IN.....	143
<i>Carrie Fancett Pagels</i>	
THE PRODIGAL .....	169
<i>Jennifer Johnson</i>	
ABOUT THE AUTHORS.....	193

*A Cup of*  
**CHRISTMAS  
CHEER**



# THE CHEVALIER

*Susan Page Davis*

*December 1931  
A small Maine city*

The bell on the door of Bygones Antiques jangled, and Ned Fournier looked up from his ledger. Christmas was less than a week away and business had been slow lately. Perhaps today would be better. A uniformed man held the door open, and Elliott Bacon slowly entered the shop. The chauffeur stood beside the door, and the white-haired man leaned on his cane and studied the cherry secretary Ned had recently acquired at an estate sale.

Ned stepped forward with a feeling of anticipation. Mr. Bacon was hard to please, but, while he didn't buy often, when he did, he bought good-quality pieces.

"Good morning, sir."

Mr. Bacon looked him up and down, his shrewd blue eyes squinting at Ned from behind his wire-framed spectacles. "Ah, Fournier."

Ned nodded, smiling serenely. “May I help you with something particular this morning, sir?”

Mr. Bacon looked back toward the secretary, then lifted his cane, pointing vaguely toward it.

“That desk. It’s new, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir. It’s a very interesting piece. It came from France on a sailing ship in the 1750s.”

“*Hmm*, yes.” Bacon’s gaze traveled from the secretary’s delicately curved feet to the finial atop the cabinet above. “Graceful lines.”

“Yes, sir.”

The old man cleared his throat. “I came to have a word with you.”

“If there’s any way I can be of service, sir...” Ned took great pleasure in finding just the right item for a finicky customer. He was young, but he had a flair for the business. Already he was consulted by other dealers when a rare piece was sought. All the auctioneers in the state mailed him their sale preview books. Not bad for a French Canadian boy whose father had left Quebec thirty years before to work in a Maine paper mill.

Of course, people weren’t buying many antiques these days. Several dealers had closed shop, and a formerly successful auctioneer was now stitching uppers at the local shoe factory. But Ned had tightened his belt and kept buying a few extraordinary pieces, like the secretary, trusting that a wealthy client—one whose fortune was not ruined by the stock market crash—would come through for him.

Mr. Bacon looked around, squinting at the furniture. “Find me a seat, Fournier,” he snapped.

“Certainly, sir.” Ned indicated a delicate Sheraton chair with needlepoint upholstery. Ordinarily, Ned would cringe if a client sat on one of the fragile chairs he displayed, but Mr. Bacon was slender, and if he liked the chair, he might order the chauffeur, Daigle, to load it into his Packard limousine and cart it home to his rambling mansion on High Street.

Mr. Bacon sat down and folded his hands over the head of his cane, which he had purchased from Ned last spring. Mr. Bacon had been intrigued by the compass in the brass topper and the secret compartment under it.

“I’ve a job for you, Fournier. It’s a small matter.”

“A job? Is there a particular item you wish me to find for you, sir?”

“Ha! Yes! Precisely.” Mr. Bacon’s laugh rattled through the shop.

“Well, sir, if you’ll give me an idea what it is that you’re seeking...”

“Yes, seeking. That’s just it. It’s a small sculpture.”

“I see,” Ned murmured.

“It’s in my brother’s house. You know it? Three-forty-five Maple Street?”

Ned swallowed hard and nodded. Everyone knew 345 Maple. It was a showy Queen Anne with two turrets and a broad bay window in the parlor. He had never been inside, but he’d heard the interior was fabulous.

“This sculpture that I want you to find is in there.”

Ned frowned. “Your brother has the piece, sir?”

“Yes, although he’ll deny it. I know it’s there. But it shouldn’t be.”

“It shouldn’t?”

“No. *The Chevalier* is mine!”

Ned eyed him cautiously. “Well, sir, I beg your pardon, but . . . why don’t you just ask him for it?”

“Ha!” Bacon tapped the curious cane on the floor and snarled, “I wouldn’t ask Robert for the time of day, let alone a valuable piece of property. But that bronze is rightfully mine. He claims he doesn’t have it, but I’m telling you he does.”

Ned stirred uneasily. “What exactly is it you wish me to do, sir?”

“Verify that it’s in the house, of course. Just go in and look around, see if you spot it.”

Ned had feared for an instant that the old man would ask him to commit larceny. But to go to the brother’s house and look for a small statue seemed innocent enough. Assuming, of course, that Mr. Robert Bacon would let him through the magnificent front door with the stained-glass side lights and bracketed portico roof.

“I’ll pay you, naturally,” Bacon said, and Ned gave a small, deprecatory wave of the hand, signifying that discussing money was beneath them both. When Mr. Bacon bought antiques, they never haggled. He would examine the discreet tag and take his purchase home. A few days later, a check signed by Bacon’s accountant would arrive in the mail.

Ned couldn’t guess how much Mr. Bacon would pay to verify that the sculpture was in his brother’s possession, but he knew he would give Ned what he considered fair.

“You’ll go to Robert’s house and take a look,” Bacon directed. “Of course, you’ll need some ruse by which to gain entry.”



“Yes, sir. What would you suggest?”

“My brother collects snuffboxes and Venetian glass.”

Ned nodded, intrigued. Mr. Robert Bacon had never come to his shop. Ned had heard rumors of the brothers’ fifty-year feud, and he wondered if Robert avoided doing business with him because of his brother’s patronage.

“If you had a likely specimen to sell, you could perhaps go and offer it to him, telling him you’d heard he had an eye for such things.”

It wasn’t Ned’s usual way of doing business, but perhaps, if he were careful, it could be done in a genteel and convincing manner.

“Here.” Bacon reached into the pocket of his overcoat and brought out a small object. The snuffbox’s luster and fine craftsmanship made Ned’s heart race, but he refrained from reaching for it.

“A beautiful specimen, sir.”

“Yes, I thought so too. My brother will like it, I daresay.”

“Regency period,” Ned murmured. “Is it—could it possibly be a Garver?”

Bacon smiled. “You’re quite good, Fournier. That’s why I come here. I doubt you handle many ornamental snuffboxes, but you’ve studied them, obviously. How would you value it?”

Ned frowned. “I’d have to do some research, sir. At least forty dollars, with that ivory inlay. Perhaps fifty. The market has sagged since the Crash, you know.”

“I paid too much,” Bacon said regretfully. “Oh well, I can take a loss on it if necessary.”

“I’m sorry, sir. As you say, I’m no expert in this field.”

“I gave fifty-seven-fifty, so you weren’t far off. Take it. If Robert’s not interested, you’ll return it when you make your report to me.”

Just holding the box was pleasant. It was such a beautiful little thing, carved rosewood inlaid with gold and ivory.

“There’s one other thing you should know.” Bacon reached into his inside pocket and produced a photograph. Ned took it and held it toward the light.

The young woman in the picture was attractive, and no doubt would be more so if she smiled. Ned looked up into Bacon’s piercing gaze.

“She’s lovely, sir. Who is she?”

“My brother’s granddaughter. She lives with him.”

Ned took another look the photograph. Her pale hair swept gently back from her brow. Her light eyes were probably gray or blue. It would be interesting to find out if he was right. He noted the details of her costume. Miss Bacon was decidedly out of his class. Not only did she reside in one of the most ostentatious houses in town, she dressed the part of a great lady.

Ned looked expectantly at his patron.

“Corinne is impressionable,” Bacon explained. “If my brother won’t see you, perhaps you can manage an interview with her. She became Robert’s ward three years ago. He sent her to finishing school in Boston, but she’s been with him for a couple of months now.”

Ned schooled his features not to show his surprise. If Elliott Bacon never spoke to his brother, how did he know what went on at 345 Maple?

Bacon smiled. "I have ways of keeping up with my brother's affairs, Fournier. But my informant has not been able to tell me if *The Chevalier* is in the house."

"Yes, *The Chevalier*." Ned leaned forward.

"It's a small bronze from the Defleur foundry—a knight-errant, wounded and slumped in the saddle. His horse is bearing him home. It's not of great value, but I always liked it as a boy. My grandfather kept it in his office, and I was allowed to play with it when I visited him there. But when I inherited the castle and its contents, that sculpture was missing."

"Perhaps your grandfather sold it."

"No, no, he knew I fancied it. Told me several times I would have it one day, with the castle."

Ned nodded. The castle was the house Elliott and Robert's grandfather had built in the 1880s, after the spool mill had made his fortune. It looked like a medieval stronghold, with stone walls, crenellated battlements, and even a portcullis at the massive front gate. People came from miles around on Sunday afternoons to stare at it. Some folks thought it a monstrosity, but every child in town fantasized about living there. Elliott, as the eldest son, had inherited the castle when both grandfather and father were dead. Robert had built the Queen Anne on Maple Street as a young man, knowing that as long as Elliott lived he would never again set foot in the castle.

And so the two brothers lived three blocks apart in their respective mansions, each pretending the other did not exist. In a small city, it was difficult to maintain such aloofness, but somehow they had carried it off. They attended different churches, patronized different tailors, and never appeared at the same public events.

“Well?”

Ned’s attention snapped back to the old man’s face. The bushy white eyebrows were drawn together, wrinkling the skin between them.

“I’ll accept your commission, sir. Could you describe *The Chevalier* for me in more detail?”

\* \* \*

Ned approached the house with trepidation. Even armed with the Garver snuffbox, he was nervous. The thought of meeting Robert Bacon was intimidating in itself, but the possibility of coming face to face with Corinne had him shaking. What did one say to a young woman of her class and beauty?

He strode briskly along the sidewalk, taking in the precise flower borders, now mulched for winter, and the perfectly manicured lawn that would soon be covered with snow. Labor was cheap these days.

He rapped soundly on the ornate brass knocker. No use being timid. While he waited, his pulse began to soar, and he took a deep breath in an effort to calm it.

The door opened abruptly, and he stood eye to eye, not with a servant, but with Corinne Bacon. She was tall, and he stood a step below her, putting them nearly at eye level. Her eyes were light blue, and she looked more approachable than she had in her stern portrait.

She drew in her breath quickly, then arched her eyebrows. “May I help you?”

“My name is Ned Fournier, and I’d like to see Mr. Bacon, if he’s in.”

She looked at him intently, and Ned felt increasingly uncomfortable. He had worn the suit he usually reserved for church and his five-year-old woolen coat. It was difficult not to think she assessed his inexpensive clothing unfavorably.

She gazed into his eyes for a moment and then stood back. "Come in."

As Ned stepped into a spacious foyer, a middle-aged woman in a black housedress and white apron came from the back of the house. She dipped a curtsy. "Begging your pardon, Miss Corinne. I was in the laundry."

"No harm," Corinne said. "I'll let you take Mr. Fournier's hat and coat while I tell Grandfather he has a visitor." She hurried off across the foyer to a doorway beneath the stairs.

Ned slipped off his overcoat and let the maid hang it up with his hat. With the snuffbox secure in his pocket, he followed her across the parquet floor. He noticed several large paintings in the foyer, as well as antique side tables and elegant lamps, and a curio cabinet against one wall. He would love to explore its contents, but in his brief passage of the room, he saw no sign of the small bronze he was commissioned to find.

"If you'll step this way, sir." The maid gestured toward a well-lit room beyond the doorway. Ned walked in, finding it to be a library with two large windows. Apart from a field-stone fireplace, the other wall space held floor-to-ceiling shelves, filled with books.

A white-haired man rose from one of the leather armchairs. Corinne stood beside him as he looked Ned up and down.

"Mr. Fournier?" Mr. Bacon asked.

“Yes, sir.” In the past, Ned had seen Robert Bacon only from a distance, but he was struck at once by both the similarity and the disparity of the two brothers’ features. The silver hair and keen blue eyes were the same, but Robert looked much younger than Elliott. His skin was not as wrinkled, and his complexion was clearer. He also stood straight without the aid of a cane, surpassing Elliott’s height.

“I have a shop in town,” Ned said. “Bygones, it’s called.”

“Of course. I’ve seen it many times. How may I help you?”

“Well, sir, I hope you won’t think it too presumptuous of me to call upon you like this. Someone told me you took an interest in old snuffboxes, and an exquisite one recently came into my inventory. Forgive my audacity, sir, but I thought you might like to see it.”

For a moment Ned was afraid Mr. Bacon was angry and would have him tossed out of the house. But then he smiled.

“I suppose I could take a look.”

Trying not to show his relief, Ned reached into his suit jacket’s pocket and took out the small box Mr. Elliott Bacon had entrusted to him, unwrapped the tissue paper he had folded around it, and handed it to Mr. Bacon. He quelled the impulse to talk about the item. It was fine enough to speak for itself.

Mr. Bacon made a small noise in his throat that could have indicated surprise or approval. Another knot of tension in Ned’s spine relaxed.

“Won’t you sit down?” his host asked.

“Thank you.”

As Ned moved toward a chair, Corinne smiled. “I’ll get some coffee.”

Her grandfather didn't protest, and she left the room with long, confident strides.

Ned perched on the edge of the deep chair, afraid to let himself look too comfortable, and glanced about the room for the bronze as Robert Bacon examined the bait.

His fingers itched to caress some of the tooled leather bindings on the books behind Mr. Bacon's chair, and the lamp on the table at his elbow had to be Tiffany. The Chinese vase was especially fine-looking. Still, Ned was certain the sculpture he sought was not among the myriad treasures gilding the room.

He glanced back at his host, and a shiver ran down his spine. What was he doing, spying on this man?

"A very nice piece," Mr. Bacon said. "What can you tell me about it?"

"It's a Garver, made in France in the early nineteenth century." Ned had looked it up in one of his reference books before he came, just to be certain.

Mr. Bacon smiled. "Yes. It's not as old as some, but the workmanship would be hard to match. I have four Garvers, but none like this one. Would you like to see my collection?"

"I'd love to, sir."

Bacon rose and led him to a smaller room containing several cabinets with glass-fronted doors. Ned drew in a deep, slow breath. He stood in the midst of a collection worth thousands. Many thousands. Two cabinets held the snuffboxes, perhaps fifty in all, and another thirty or so snuff bottles. On the other side of the room, several cabinets were devoted to the Venetian glass that Elliott had mentioned.

Robert unlocked one of the cabinets and took out a small enameled gold box inlaid with rubies in the figure of a dragon.

“This is my prize—this and the jade one you see there.”

Ned shook his head slowly. “Magnificent, sir, but you shouldn’t—” He stopped. Who was he to tell this man what he ought not to do?

“Shouldn’t show you? Shouldn’t display them here in my house? Perhaps you think I should keep them all in a bank vault.”

“Well...” Ned felt his cheeks heat. “Forgive me. It does seem somewhat...”

“Careless?”

“I was going to say *trusting*.”

Mr. Bacon smiled as he put the snuffbox back and locked the cabinet door. “I could do more to protect them, it’s true. But then I couldn’t walk in here any time I choose and enjoy them. But I don’t advertise my collection, and the windows of this room have grilles. At night I assure you that the room is closed and locked.”

Ned wondered if that was enough—apparently it had been thus far. As they turned away, he almost stopped in his tracks.

Sitting on the polished oak floor, holding the door to the room open, was a small bronze statue about a foot high. The weary knight drooping in his saddle, with his lance slanting downward at his side, was unmistakable.

Had Robert been using that bronze as a doorstop for fifty years? Did it mean so little to him, when to his brother it meant so much?

Ned recovered quickly and followed Mr. Bacon into the next room. His host didn’t seem to notice his pause. In the



library, Corinne was setting out the coffee. She smiled at them and took a seat behind the small table.

"I'm told your shop is quite interesting," she said as Ned and her grandfather resumed their seats.

"I would be honored to have you visit at any time."

"Thank you." She handed him coffee in a wafer-thin Sèvres cup. "Perhaps I shall. Cream and sugar?"

"No, thank you."

Mr. Bacon leaned forward to accept his cup. "Thank you, my dear." He looked over at Ned. "I've passed your business many times, but..."

Ned waited, not willing to risk supplying the wrong words.

Mr. Bacon smiled. "My brother is a patron of yours, I believe."

"Yes, sir, he comes in now and then. Not more than four times a year, but I do count him among my customers."

"I shouldn't let that stop me, but I confess, I don't like to give Elliott the discomfort of coming face to face with me."

His host's voice was tinged with regret, and Ned decided to take his fate in his hands.

"Why is that, sir? Begging your pardon, but I've often wondered, and you seem willing to discuss it."

"We quarreled when we were youths. It seems ridiculous now, to have let it stand between us all these years, and yet..." He smiled faintly. "I say that, having come out the victor, so to speak. You see, it began with Corinne's grandmother."

The young woman laughed. "Really, Grandfather. You say that, but I still find it hard to believe you've been estranged so long over a girl—a wonderful girl, of course, but really!"

“It’s true,” Mr. Bacon said. “We both fancied Adelaide, and she chose me. Elliott never forgave me.” He raised his cup to his lips and glanced at Ned, then lowered the cup without drinking. “What is it?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“You don’t believe me?”

Ned said carefully, “I’m sorry. It’s just that he . . .”

“Yes? Come on. You must tell us now.”

“Certainly,” Corinne said with a playful smile. “You can’t leave us hanging.”

Ned could see no graceful way out, yet he must remain loyal to Mr. Elliott Bacon. He huffed out a breath and met Mr. Bacon’s gaze. “He represented the quarrel differently, sir, but I don’t think it’s my tale to tell.”

“Very well, though I can’t imagine what other reason he would have to despise me.”

Ned swallowed hard. He might have just lost Elliott Bacon’s commission, along with his future business. “Forgive me, sir.”

“I see you are still troubled,” Robert said.

“I fear I have overstepped the bounds of good manners. I don’t understand your relationship to your brother, but it’s not my affair.”

Robert set his cup and saucer down. “I don’t mind telling you my side of the tale.” His lips drew into a grim smile. “I’m afraid my brother has lived his life an angry, bitter man. He has driven away people who might have been his friends. My Adelaide tried to make peace with him, but he would have none of it. He refused to attend our wedding, and he has not entered my house since—neither the one

Adelaide and I shared in our early marriage nor this one, though I invited him.” He sighed. “Our estrangement was not my choice.”

Corinne leaned forward. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard how the rift began, Grandfather. Only that he was angry when Grandmother agreed to marry you instead of him.”

“That was the start of it. He met Adelaide first, you see, but when she and I met, we both knew we were meant for each other. Elliott couldn’t accept that, though she tried to tell him gently. He ignored our invitation to the wedding and went on a bit of a tear immediately afterward. He spent six months in Europe and apparently lived wildly over there. He got into some trouble in Scotland. I don’t know exactly what he did, but Father had to wire a great deal of money across to square things. After Elliott returned to the States, he and Father had a big row, and not long afterward, Grandfather Bacon died. My father inherited the entire estate—house, mills, everything, including all the artwork Grandfather had collected. But Father was still on the outs with Elliott at the time. It was several years before my brother was back in his good graces and accepted as heir to the mill. The spool mill, that is. Father earmarked the woolen mill for me. He always told me he thought I’d make a better go of it than Elliott, but both of us did fairly well in the end.”

“Not very nice of your father to say that,” Corinne said, her lower lip in a pretty pout.

“My father was a good businessman,” Robert said, “as was his father before him. I won’t say he was a warm or engaging person. Anyway, when our father died a few years later, it seemed he had mended his fences with Elliott, at least to a

degree. Elliott is older than I, and he inherited not only the spool mill, but the family home and the lumberyard.”

Corinne shook her head. “It’s so sad that you’ve not spoken for so long.”

“You’re right.” Robert reached for his cup and took another swallow of his coffee.

“Sir, am I to understand that you wish it were otherwise?” Ned asked.

“I do. I’ve tried to reach out to Elliott a couple of times, but he snubbed me.” Robert sighed and gazed toward the fireplace. “The older I get, the more I regret not having my brother in my life. It’s senseless. We could have had good times together. And he never had a chance to get to know my son or Corinne.”

“We’ve all missed something,” Corinne said. “I’m sure God would wish it otherwise.”

“I haven’t thought enough about what God would wish, I confess. But lately it’s become of more concern to me.” Mr. Bacon’s chin drooped. “At any rate, I do wish this quarrel was ended.”

Ned’s heart ached with sympathy, and he sent up a silent prayer for wisdom. Had God brought him here for a nobler task than spying? He glanced at the snuffbox sitting on the end table beside Robert’s cup. “I might know a way to bring you two together, if you’d like to try again. I think I could bring you and Mr. Elliott face to face. From that point, of course, it would be up to you.”

Corinne clapped her hands together. “Do you think so? It’s nearly Christmas. What a gift that would be.”

“You intrigue me,” Robert said. “Tell me your plan.”

Two days later, on Christmas Eve, Ned paced his shop, trying to calm his nerves. Daigle had telephoned to say that Mr. Elliott Bacon would visit Bygones that afternoon to receive his report on *The Chevalier*.

To Ned's relief, only Robert and Corinne Bacon were in the store with him when the big black car pulled up out front. He'd had only two paying customers that morning and a handful of browsers. Usually he wished for a throng of shoppers, especially during the Christmas season, but he didn't want an audience for this interview with Mr. Bacon.

The elderly gentleman came in slowly, leaning on his cane. His eyes darted about, as usual seeking new additions to the inventory. Ned had deliberately set out a few new items, including a newly restored Limoges clock and a fine Dresden vase. The Sheraton chair was placed conveniently for his customer's use.

But it was on his brother that the old man's eyes focused, and his posture stiffened.

"Good day, sir." Ned stepped forward quickly, before either Mr. Bacon could speak.

"What is the meaning of this?" Mr. Elliott Bacon scowled at him.

"Your brother would like a few words with you, sir."

"You brought me here under false pretenses."

The old man's icy tone made Ned's heart sink. Had his good intentions already backfired?

Robert stepped forward. "Hello, Elliott. It's good to see you again, and I mean that."

Elliott's face blanched whiter than usual. He threw a hard look at Ned.

“Daigle!” He turned toward the door but staggered a bit.

Daigle leaped forward as Ned reached to grasp the old man’s elbow. The two of them steadied him.

“Please sit down, sir,” Ned said. Elliott Bacon didn’t protest as Daigle and Ned guided him the two steps toward the Sheraton chair. He turned slowly and crumpled onto the seat.

Ned watched the old man’s face. Mr. Bacon stared at his brother now, and his color began to return.

“How... could... you?”

Robert took a step toward his brother, but Daigle waved him away.

“Mr. Bacon needs some air,” the chauffeur said.

“And perhaps a glass of water,” Ned added. The old man’s face was turning red. What if Mr. Bacon had a heart attack or a fit of apoplexy right here in the shop? If the old man died, it would be his fault. “Er, perhaps we should telephone his doctor.”

Daigle frowned. “Sir? Are you all right?”

“Leave me alone.” Mr. Bacon waved Daigle aside, but his eyes stayed on Robert. “You! You’re nothing but a scoundrel!”

A pained expression crossed Robert’s face, but before he could speak, Corinne stepped forward, her hands on her hips, and addressed her great-uncle.

“Uncle Elliott, I’m ashamed of you! How could you say such a thing? Grandfather has done nothing to deserve such a slur.”

“Oh, hasn’t he?” The old gentleman brushed his hand over his white mustache and glared at Robert. He took several deep breaths, then waved away Ned and Daigle. He looked up at Robert and Corinne, his lips in a disapproving pucker.

"I don't believe he has." Corinne smiled bravely and held out her hands. "I'm Corinne, and I've been longing to meet you."

Elliott did not clasp her hands. He glared at her for a moment and then said, "You look like your grandmother."

"Thank you, sir," Corinne said, continuing to smile.

Elliott turned a flinty gaze on his brother. "Well, Robert? Why are you here? You must have something up your sleeve."

"I only wished to speak to you in a civilized manner, Elliott. To tell you how sorry I am for our quarrel. I'd like to be friends, if you're willing."

Elliott said nothing for a long moment. Instead of answering his brother, he turned again to Ned. "My commission—did you carry it out?"

"Yes, sir." Ned shot Mr. Robert a glance, but he had turned aside and seemed to be studying the Dresden vase. "I have a positive report to make, sir. It is as you thought."

"If you're talking about the bronze *Chevalier*," Robert said, "I have it here." He pointed to a pasteboard box atop the cherry secretary. "I'd no idea you were still stewing about that until I pried it out of Mr. Fournier."

"No idea?" Mr. Elliott's face went scarlet, and Ned was afraid the old man would fly into a rage again.

Robert stepped closer. "I wish you'd take it home with you."

Elliott Bacon blinked at him from beneath the thick white eyebrows. "Oh, so now you're willing to give it up!"

"Well, yes." Robert's face colored slightly. "To tell the truth, I'd have given it to you long ago, if it weren't for Father."

"What has Father to do with this?"

Robert shrugged slightly. “He gave me the bronze shortly after Grandfather died. He was quite put out with you, and he told me to take it and not say anything about it. At first, I thought he was just tired of it. In retrospect, I think he gave it to me just to annoy you.”

“How can you say that?” Elliott demanded. “I asked you about it after Father died—told me it wasn’t in the house. You denied having it.”

Robert cleared his throat. “I remember the occasion. I believe I told you that it was Father’s property—he inherited it from Grandfather—and that he may have disposed of it. I never said I didn’t have it.”

“You should have told me.”

Robert frowned. “That was the last time you ever spoke to me directly. But you’re right—I should have told you then. But I felt as though I’d betray Father if I did that. I honestly didn’t know you’d been thinking of it ever since. I see now that I was wrong.”

“Grandfather promised it to me.” Elliott’s voice was thin with remembered pain. “I didn’t want it for its value, you know. I wanted it because Grandfather liked it—and he seemed to like me and wanted me to have it.”

“I’m sorry,” Robert said. “It’s yours now. And I do hope you’ll put away our quarrel over Adelaide.”

“Adelaide?” Elliott threw his head back and stared at his younger brother. “Where does she fit into all this?”

“I...” Robert stared at him for a moment and then glanced at Corinne. “I thought that was why you’ve snubbed me all these years. You were angry over my winning Adelaide’s hand. Isn’t that why you haven’t spoken to me?”



Elliott sighed and clasped his hands over the head of his cane. "I accepted my loss. She chose the man she preferred, and nothing I said would change her mind. I was angry for a good while, yes, but I cooled off after a time."

"Then why—" Corinne spoke out, but quickly put a gloved hand to her lips as though to stop her own words.

Her grandfather, however, was not so timid. "Yes, why, Elliott? If you were no longer upset about Adelaide, why have you been so angry with me?"

The old man pushed on his cane and stood slowly. He walked three steps to the secretary and turned back the top of the carton.

Ned walked over to stand beside him. "May I help you, sir?"

Elliott gestured for him to proceed. Ned lifted out the small statue that he had carefully wrapped in newspaper at Robert's house and peeled off the layers of paper. Elliott gazed down at it.

"This, Robert. This is the cause."

"*The Chevalier?*" Robert shook his head. "For fifty years you've despised me because of that thing?"

"This and what it represented. Father no longer trusted me. Oh yes, he left me the spool mill, but he gave you the woolen mill, which I daresay was worth at least as much. And he stayed friendly with you until the day he died. He only tolerated me. We worked together on a strictly-business basis."

Robert shook his head. "I don't know what to say, except... I'm sorry."

Elliott turned to face Ned. "Fournier, you told him that I sent you. I imagined you were a man of discretion, but I was wrong."

Ned looked down at the tips of his shoes. “Yes, sir. Although I did perform what you asked me to.”

“So you did.” Elliott seemed to deflate. His shoulders drooped, and his eyes narrowed. “All this time,” he said.

Robert glanced about the shop. “Elliott, this seems a fitting place to put this question to you: Can we let bygones be bygones?”

Elliott barked out a laugh. “Fitting indeed.” He looked up at Ned. “Fournier, later I’ll send round your check for the work you did for me.”

Ned gulped. “You don’t need to pay me, sir. Seeing you and Mr. Robert together is wage enough.”

Elliott scowled. “Don’t be foolish, young man. You won’t get ahead by throwing money away.”

“He’s right,” Robert said. “You’ve more than earned whatever he agreed to pay you. These are hard times—you’d best take it.”

Ned could see no virtue in continued refusal. He nodded to Mr. Elliott. “Thank you, sir. I was happy to be of service.”

Elliott cleared his throat. “Daigle, please take my...gift out to the car.”

“Oh, wait, Uncle Elliott.” Corinne grasped his sleeve. “Won’t you please join us tomorrow for Christmas dinner? I shall be making the pies myself, though our cook will roast the turkey.”

“Making pies, are you?” Elliott eyed her keenly. “I usually stay in on Christmas Day.”

“Won’t you join us, El?” Robert asked. “We’d both like it immensely. I could show you my snuffbox collection.”

“Oh, so you collect snuffboxes, do you?” Elliott threw Ned a quick glance, but Ned kept his expression neutral. “A vile habit, snuff.”

“So it is, but the boxes caught my fancy years ago, and I’ve amassed quite an exhibit now. I’ve told Corinne she should sell the entire collection when I’m gone.”

“Let’s not talk about such things now,” Corinne said. “It’s Christmas Eve, and time for jollity.”

“Right, then,” Robert said. He extended his hand to his brother. “El—we’ll look for you tomorrow.”

Elliott reached out and clasped Robert’s hand. “All right. If it doesn’t snow. And if I’m not too arthritic tomorrow.”

Robert smiled. “It’s settled then.”

Ned quickly wrapped *The Chevalier* and put it in the box. Elliott watched him and then turned to his brother. “I believe young Mr. Fournier showed you a snuffbox the other day.”

“Why, yes, he did,” Robert said. “I offered to buy it.”

“It will be my gift to you,” Elliott said.

“I... thank you, El. I can’t tell you how pleased I am.”

“So am I.” Corinne leaned forward and kissed Elliott’s papery cheek. “Merry Christmas, Uncle.”

Daigle took the boxed statue to the car and then came back to help his employer out the door. The bell rang as Ned closed it behind them.

As soon as Elliott’s car had pulled away, Robert smiled. “Thank you, Ned. That was quite a Christmas present.”

“You’re welcome, sir.”

“I like your shop. I expect I’ll be back soon.”

“So will I,” Corinne said. She smiled winsomely at Robert. “Grandfather, you may have bought my Christmas present, but my birthday is coming up.”

“So it is.” Robert winked, then shook Ned’s hand. “Perhaps you’d join us for luncheon one day?”

Corinne smiled directly at Ned, making his heart flutter. “I think that’s a splendid idea. Will you come next Sunday?”

“Thank you,” Ned managed. “And merry Christmas.”