

C198657

Rust to invite you to a tea party at just three o'clock this afternoon in her room. You'll learn the why of it at dinner in just about an hour from now. I do hope you can manage to come at just three. You'll add so much to Melvina's happiness."

Mrs. Christianson dismissed the pleasantries.

"I shan't eat my dinner today," she said briefly. "And I thought tea parties were at four o'clock. I'm busy today at four, and at three I'll be deciding what to do when the clock strikes four."

"We all seem busy today at four," Emma Davis said brightly. "That's why Mrs. Rust decided on three; but come if you possibly can, won't you?" Before she started for the door, she put both her hands impulsively on the clenched ones of Mrs. Christianson and smiled into her pale, distraught eyes. "We'll all miss you if you decide you can't spare the time."

Mrs. Christianson stood, tall and massive in her ugly dress, looking down upon Emma Davis like some disheveled Norse Fury, biding her time.

"I think I can spare it," she said, carefully shaping each laden word. "I might even decide what to do right there at that party."