One Happy Family

GERTRUDE JOBES

"Gertrude Jobes has something original to say, and an original way of saying it—and it may well be that she will originate a new school of writing."

—ELLIS ST. JOSEPH
Playwright and Producer
of *King's Row*

*

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ONE HAPPY FAMILY

By

Gertrude Jobes

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ONE HAPPY FAMILY is a rich novel: one that is richly packed with action and human understanding. Moreover, it has a powerful theme of social and individual life in the United States, beginning near the turn of the century and continuing into the turbulent thirties.

It is also rich in characterization. Few heroines in modern literature come to life as believably and as touchingly as does Susan Bates—a deadly woman but an entirely convincing one. The Family—whose destiny is Susan Bates' mission in life—is a group of people as real as everybody's next-door neighbors: their problems are ones encountered every day; their personalities reflect familiar people who will be recognizable to all readers of Gertrude Jobes' engrossing novel.

(Continued on back flap)

SIGNED

To Idelle + Sidney Levin

with love

Gertrude

GERTRUDE JOBES

One Happy Family

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* *The lines from "Down by the Sally Gardens" on page 210 are taken from* Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats (*New York, Macmillan Company, 1951*). *These lines are used by courtesy of the Macmillan Company.*

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To My Mother

Frances Blumenthal

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1908, June 24

THE BASEMENT SCREEN DOOR SLAMMED BEHIND SUSAN BATES. WITH the jolt her arms twitched and a splash of soapy water broke over the rim of the white enamel basin she carried. Until the water steadied she stood still, thinking, "I'm jittery, jittery, spilling everything."

Slowly she stepped into the sunlight and made her way up the stoop to the open porch of the boxlike four-story attached house which, except for a street number, was without individuality, one in a long monotonous line that repeated itself on street after street throughout South Brooklyn. After placing the basin on a footstool she settled in a high-backed green wooden rocker and rubbed her ankles, which were somewhat swollen, one against the other. Filmy, faintly iridescent waves of heat hovered over the sidewalk. She observed the way the haze distorted the shape of a scrap of paper on the walk and wondered how long the hot spell would last. A small turkish towel and wash cloth that hung over her arm fell to her lap. Exhausted by the short climb, she made no attempt to straighten or fold them. She dreamily noticed the evenly spaced horizontal stripes created by the overlapping of the white shingles of the wall of the house; then closing her eyes, she rocked slowly back and forth. In time to the creaks of the rocker she found herself asking, "What has happened to us? What has happened to us?" Abruptly she stopped the chair and sat rigid, her feet flat on the ground. "This nonsense," she told herself, "must cease."

As she struggled to stifle the question which had been tormenting her for weeks and to which she really did not want an answer, her son and daughter, Tim and Eleanor, and two other children, Nellie Taylor and Hiram Robinson, dashed around the corner screaming and screeching in a game of cowboys and Indians. Tim, she noticed, galloping to imitate a horse and hold-

ing an imaginary rein, was out in front. The others, with chicken feathers tied around their hair, their heads bent forward, clapped their hands and slapped their mouths as they sputtered, "Eeeeeee. Eeeeeee. Eeeeeee." Susan watched them coming toward her and warmed to a tinge of pride that her son, only nine and a full year younger than Hiram, was a born leader.

"Eleanor," she called.

"Yes, mamma."

"Come here. Let me see your hands."

Eleanor dropped out of line and stood before her mother, her heels close together, her toes apart, her chubby hands outstretched, palms up, the first stage of a familiar ritual. Susan looked into her daughter's intensely serious large brown eyes, particularly conspicuous in a face made smaller than it actually was by the way in which the hair was parted in the middle and drawn back in two flat tight braids that strained the skin about the ears. Self-conscious under Susan's steady gaze, Eleanor tilted her head and, with the strong light directly on it, a tiny violet vein quivered in the thin youthful skin above the right eye.

Susan continued to stare at her daughter as she asked, "Aren't you ashamed? You're a big girl now. Nearly eight. You know better than to put such dirty hands to your mouth."

Eleanor's face wrinkled into a grin and she moistened her soft full lips. Susan ran a finger down Eleanor's nose. They both smiled broadly. Then, although the effort seemed too much, Susan bent over, dipped the wash cloth in the basin and with the damp cloth rubbed Eleanor's hands to take off the top dirt. Before she had a chance to dry them the child was off.

After Eleanor left Susan twisted about. She stretched her legs, which had swelled from the weight of her body, drew them back, and stretched them again. She started to mend a petticoat she had pulled out of the woolen bag embroidered in large red, yellow, and black flowers which hung on the arm of her chair, but stopped before she took a half-dozen stitches. Leaning forward, her elbows on the arms of the rocker, she tried to recollect exactly when she first felt a strain in her relations with her husband and what had brought it about.

From uncertainty to uncertainty she shifted, wishing yet not wishing to recall a single incident, a word, a gesture, for which she might accuse him. There is nothing, nothing, she assured herself. With the back of her hand she wiped away beads of moisture along the edge of her carefully marcelled brown pompadour. She resumed her mending and for a few minutes sewed furiously; then she slumped back in the rocker. Listlessly her eyes picked out smudge spots where the original white of the shingles was completely lost in a layer of soot. "The house needs a painting. It always needs something, a new grate in the furnace, carpet on the stairs, linoleum in the kitchen. But whatever it needs I thank God for it. A house gives a family roots."

Designed with Victorian thoroughness to make the home the center of social activities, the flat-roofed frame house had two parlors and a den twelve steps above the ground, a dining room and kitchen in a semi-basement three steps below the street, and sleeping rooms on two upper floors. On each of the bedroom floors was a long narrow bathroom, complete with the most up-to-date equipment, a marble wash basin, a zinc bathtub, and a mirrored medicine chest; the bathroom on Susan's floor also had a white enamel douche bowl. At the front and rear of the house were patches of grass where the children sometimes played. A wrought iron balcony, the single attempt at decoration, provided the porch, level with the parlor floor, with a streak of shade. To Susan, who caught a glimpse of the balcony's lace-like shadow on the wall each time the rocker tilted back, it was a romantic touch, and she liked to think that the iron work was as beautiful as that of old places illustrated on postcards of New Orleans and Charleston. She fell into a favorite dream, in which she walked with Henry in magnolia-scented air under the knobbed branches of old shade trees weighted by hanging moss. "Perhaps someday," she sighed, "that is if Henry—" A faint odor of smoke drifted up from the factories along Gowanus Canal, two blocks away. "If Henry could convince the Robinsons and the Taylors to paint at the same time, the saving would be considerable."

For the past ten years, the Robinsons, next door in the corner

house, went along with this plan but Susan had misgivings about what the Taylors, neighbors on the other side, would be willing to do. They had not been in the row long, scarcely a year, and except for an occasional chat with Mrs. Taylor on the street or over the slat fence that separated the back yards, she had little contact with them. Mr. Taylor seemed a quiet enough sort, but something about Mrs. Taylor, Susan could not say exactly what it was, made her uncomfortable. Not that Mrs. Taylor wasn't pleasant. On the contrary, Susan wished her neighbor was not quite so sweet, not quite so affable.

From the Taylor stoop where the children had settled down to a game of jacks, the giggles and chatter of Nellie rose above those of the others. Lazily Susan watched them. Nellie's sun-heightened red hair bobbed in and out among the players, making the pale, almost white hair of Hiram and the silky brown of her own children seem dull in comparison.

A loud hiss cut through the tittering of the children. Then, "Nellie, you have too much ass."

"Tim," Susan said, "come here. Come here this second."

Sly glances passed from one child to the other. As they suppressed low giggles they fell forward on their wrists and their young heads converged. None of them attempted to catch the ball which bounced crazily three or four times before it settled among the jackstones.

"Tim," Susan called.

Hiram nudged him and Tim rose. Deliberately tripping over his toes, scraping his soles on the cement walk, kicking stray stones along the edge of the grass, he moved toward his mother.

"Walk a little faster, young man," Susan said. "And what did I hear you say?"

At the foot of the steps he hesitated; then shuffled up to the top where he leaned against the rail. "I told Nellie she has too much luck."

"Is that what you said?"

"That's what I meant."

"Is that what you said?"

"No, mom."

"What did you say?"

Both mother and son twitched, caught unawares by the grating of a wagon wheel against a water trough midway down the street. Until the squeaks gave way to the hollow clap of a horse's hoofs moving out into the gutter, Susan remained silent, rubbing goose flesh that had come up on her arms. Then she said, "Tim, answer me."

"Mamma, you don't like to hear me use such words."

"Then why do you?"

"They slip out."

"Does my son let such words slip out often?"

Tim sucked in his cheeks and pushed out his lower lip, showing the moist inner flesh.

"I will have to punish you, Tim."

Rising and falling on the balls of his feet, rubbing his back against the rail, Tim glanced up at the rain gutters along the roof; he gazed at a broken twig that dangled from a branch of the small tree in front of the house; mentally he traced the outlines of urns frosted in the colorless glass of the door; he directed his green-gray eyes, impassive and unrevealing, everywhere but at his mother.

All the while the other children, now mute, did not move. They remained as they were with their heads close together, indifferent to the ball and the jackstones scattered among them, peering over at Susan and Tim.

"Tell Mary to bring out a cup of water," she said.

Tim continued to avoid her eyes. Instead he cocked his head and with a forced smile looked at his friends. Susan felt let down. Actually his remark had struck her as rather funny, and she expected him, as he usually did when she was about to discipline him, to make up to her, to win her over. Once she had exhibited her authority, his coaxing always brought her closer to him. With this break in their customary routine she had the sensation of being thrown from the driver's seat. She sought the eyes of her son; they remained turned from her. To break the taut silence Susan was about to ask if he had heard her when he shrugged his shoulders, shoved his hands into the pockets

of his knickers, and went to the door, which he pushed open with his body. Susan heard him call over the banister to Mary, who was in the kitchen preparing the evening meal.

When his voice died away and he failed to reappear, she said, "Tim, come out here. Let me see your hands."

Ignoring the "let's-get-this-over" attitude with which he approached her, Susan rinsed in the basin the cloth previously used on Eleanor. When she lifted Tim's hands and saw broken black streaks in the seams of his palms, she said, "You children have absolutely no sense of cleanliness."

A heavy tread emerged from the hall and Tim jerked away from his mother; only a warning shadow saved him from bumping into Mary's large square body.

"Water expensive?" Susan asked as she took the half-filled cup which Mary offered her.

"Well, mum, I didn't want to spill any on the stairs." Mary spoke in a low monotone. Her flat ruddy face, which had been scrubbed until it had a gloss, remained wooden.

"Mary, Mary, you spoil the children."

"Yes'm," Mary answered and went over to the shelter of the doorway. With the edge of her starched blue gingham apron she wiped away a stream of sweat that ran from her face to her neck. "Whew, it's hot," she said and, with all the force of her boulder-shaped body behind it, she plumped a broad black oxford down on the shoe scraper. After a few tugs at the hem of her apron, in a futile attempt to restore an ironed smoothness, she folded her arms across her breast. The knuckles of her closed fingers pressed against the bulging sinews of her muscular arms.

An impulse to order Mary into the house was shattered by lack of courage. Smarting from mortification and anger, Susan took the yellow soap from the basin and dipped it into the cup which she shook up and down. "Here you are, young man," she said. "Wash that evil out of your mouth."

Mary wiped her face on her arm.

Without a murmur Tim gurgled and spat, gurgled and spat over the rail. When the mixture was gone he thrust his hands in back of him. Mary reached over and took the empty cup,

which dangled on his pinkie, and Tim slumped down onto the top step.

"You may return to your game," Susan said, picking up her mending.

He did not move, not even to brush away a mosquito that had settled on his cheek.

Seconds passed, still he did not move. Mary's sentinel bulk was again framed by the doorway. Susan felt crowded on all sides. "Didn't you hear me, Tim? I said you may return to your game."

He looked straight at Susan. The muscles of his mouth constricted; the color had gone from his face. Susan thought he was trying to suppress tears, but he spoke with a cold hate. "I know why you are so fat," he said.

Before Susan fully grasped what he had said he had run around the corner and was out of sight. Hiram and Eleanor and Nellie ran after him. More to herself than to Mary, Susan said, "I do my best to bring up the children well. Where does a boy learn such wicked things?"

With her apron Mary kept wiping the sweat off her shiny face. "That naphtha soap," she said, "is terrible tastin', Mrs. Bates. You ought to use white soap."

"White soap is too expensive. Besides, it is my duty not to spoil the children."

"Yes, mum."

"Mary, how is the stew?"

"Good, mum." She wiped her face again. The corner of her otherwise faultlessly ironed apron was completely limp.

"That's fine. I want Mr. Bates to be in good humor tonight. I have several things to take up with him."

"Far as I can see the mister is always in good humor."

"Because, Mary, we keep him well fed. You know the way to a man's heart."

"Yes mum." Again wiping her face, Mary dragged her foot across the scraper and went indoors.

Susan listened to Mary's heavy steps on the stairs until they died away; then she sank back in the rocker, depressed by the

feeling that Mary did not understand she was only trying to do what was right.

Henry came home after six. Tim and Eleanor, who were running after him, caught hold of his coat as he stepped into the dining room. He spun around and lifted Eleanor high in the air. She let out a light screech and laughed. "Upsadaisy," he said. Eleanor clutched his head. Tim, his jaws going up and down, clung to his father's leg.

"Tell us a story," Eleanor begged as Henry put her down.

"What have you in your mouth?" Susan, resting on the sofa between the windows, asked Tim.

He stopped chewing.

"I asked you a question, Tim."

"Chewing gum."

"Where did you get it?"

"From Nellie."

"That child. No wonder Europeans call us vulgar."

Tim took the chewing gum from his mouth and kept rolling it into a ball with his fingers.

"But mamma, we could even smell the soap," Eleanor said.

"What soap?" Henry asked, an arm around each child.

Tim slipped away from his father. "Who won today's ball game?" he asked.

That clever little devil, Susan thought, partially suppressing a smile. Tim, she sensed, not knowing exactly how his father might react, wanted to avoid a discussion of the afternoon's incident. She watched him get down on one knee to tie a loose shoelace. He carried his shoulders well and bent over gracefully. Susan was pleased that he looked like her, had the same green-gray eyes, the same sharp turned-up nose, the same soft moist mouth, but even to herself she never fully admitted this. Neither would she admit the pride she felt in small things he did, in his mannerisms, in saucy things he said; above all she would not admit he was her favorite. As a mother she would not admit she had a favorite. All she would admit, and this seemed right inasmuch as he was a boy and her eldest child besides, was that her hopes were centered in him.

"The sports editions aren't out yet," Henry said and went over to the tufted black leather sofa where Susan was resting. Tim and Eleanor ran out into the hall.

As Henry sat down everything tightened within Susan. He patted her hand and their eyes met. For the fraction of a second she peered into his. She wanted to tear down into them, to fathom what he thought, to pry among his deepest feelings, but in the thin strips of light that came through the slits of the dark green shutters which had been drawn to keep out the heat, all she saw was their lively warm brown creased in a smile.

She smiled back, smiled while she thought, "What part have I in his high spirits? Beast. Beast. Men are . . . all men. Heaven forgive me. If I carry on this way the children will sense something is wrong."

Fearful her expression might betray her, she glanced away. Henry clicked her chin with his fingernail and brought her face around toward his. Her lips managed a smile, but her eyes remained heavy. With closed fists Henry spread out his arms and yawned; his buttocks as he stretched pressed against Susan's thigh. She inhaled whiffs of stale bay rum and had an impulse to shove him off the sofa. "What a day," he yawned. "What a day." He laced his fingers in those of Susan. Again she tried to penetrate his mind.

The room darkened. She could no longer clearly distinguish his features; his eyes had become a mere black mass above his nose. She resented the darkness because it shielded him. If only she could hurt him physically in some way, scold him, compel him to say whether he still loved her. Gently his fingers brushed against her cheek. She shivered, but the feel of him made her tender. She wanted to cry. She asked herself why she had doubted him; she cautioned herself to stop looking for trouble, to think of the children. A sob almost choked her, but she dared not sigh. "It's my nerves," she reasoned, "my condition. That's why Henry—"

"What's on your mind, kitten?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Nothing at all?"

"Not a thing, dear, really."

Henry's arm went out. Susan lifted her head to nestle against it when she realized he was reaching over her to release the shutters. Her head dropped back to the tufted sofa. His age flashed through her mind. Thirty-five, wouldn't be thirty-six until fall, scarcely four years older than herself. Was he being considerate? He had never been so before. And weeks had passed, more than two months. Henry folded the shutters back into their boxes, and the room turned red with the late afternoon sun. She watched his hand come back to the sofa.

He kissed her and her head pressed against his sleeve; he put an arm around her and she sank into the folds of his coat and drifted off on the narcotic beat of a soft rubber ball that the children bounced against the wall in the hall.

"There must be some way to teach a boy a lesson without using soap."

Seconds passed before Henry's remark penetrated; finally she blurted, "But, Henry, Tim used bad language."

"Careful, careful, your wings are flapping. Try not to hear him next time. It is in the nature of boys to say all sorts of things. New hairdo?" he asked.

"Not exactly." She smiled and fluffed up her hair. "I just worked some puffs in back of the pompadour. Like it?"

"A bit fancy, isn't it?"

"You mean because of—"

"Now, Susan."

"Eleanor," Susan called. "You may tell Mary to fill the tureen while your father washes."

Without removing his coat Henry turned on the brass sea-horse faucets of the marble basin in the narrow passageway between the kitchen and the dining room. First he let a stream of warm water, then a stream of cold, run over his hands. When Mary passed him with the steaming tureen he quickly brushed his fingers against the small linen towel hanging on the rod above the basin and fell in line in back of her. Looking up at the ceiling, giving her face a stern expression, Mary slowed her pace almost to a stop. Henry remained in back of her, walking

like a toy soldier, singing in falsetto, "I smell lamb stew. I smell lamb stew."

The meal was lively with the chatter of the children until Henry said gravely, "Ellie, Tim, I would like your advice. Do you think we should manufacture round spittoons or should we make them octagonal?"

"What's 'octagnal'?" Eleanor asked.

"Octagonal is eight-sided."

"Huh?"

"How can a spittoon have eight sides?" Tim wanted to know.

"Like this." Henry took a piece of paper and pencil from his pocket and started to draw. The children went over to him.

"Eleanor. Tim. Sit down and eat your stewed plums. It is late enough," Susan said.

With childish disappointment they looked at their father, who silently pointed to their chairs.

"I wish you would try to get home a little earlier, dear. The children shouldn't go to bed so soon after eating."

"I'm sorry, but conditions at the factory aren't up to snuff. Sales have fallen off, and that keeps me a little closer to the grind."

Susan ran a spoon around the inner edge of her dessert saucer. She had been about to mention the needs of the house; his remark caused her to change her mind. It would not be fair to burden him while he was eating.

"In fact," Henry continued, digging into a plum, "I'll have to run back tonight to check some figures. I'll be going on the road for a month or six weeks to call on the New England accounts, and I'd like to have things in order before I leave."

"Oh, you plan to go shortly?"

"In a couple of weeks or so. After I see you through."

"New England isn't far. You can come home week ends."

"I want to circle around."

After dinner, as was the custom, Henry and Susan drifted upstairs to the back parlor. Henry paced back and forth on the red carpet, puffing a long cigar. Susan sat in one of the squat armless chairs. She tucked the green and tan awning stripe ma-

terial with which it was covered for the summer into the crevice along the back and tugged at the cloth to keep it from creasing over the seat; then she let her eyes wander over the porcelain figures, the china bowls, the miniature eighteenth-century men and women in ivory, the boxes inlaid with mother-of-pearl on the shelves of the almost ceiling-high carved mahogany whatnot in the corner. As often of late, when they were alone, husband and wife had nothing to say to each other. Henry continued to walk about the room smoking his cigar. A more coquettish or imaginative woman might have found some way to bring about an intimate moment or, with the magic of small talk, break the heavy silence, but Susan merely sat and brooded about what she ought to do until for want of anything else to say, she blurted, "I had no idea you were worried about business."

"I haven't started you worrying, have I, kitten?"

"Well, I intended to ask you for a few things, but if business is bad, dear."

"What's on your mind?"

"I could use another girl now. A big house and three children. Mrs. Hnetikov, who has helped me out occasionally, has a daughter Katie, not quite seventeen, who should be able to handle the baby. Her wages wouldn't be high. And I can dispense with the laundress if I have another all day girl."

"That all?"

"The house needs a painting, Henry. If the Taylors and the Robinsons would do theirs at the same time—"

"Now, now, don't you worry your pretty head. Forget the Taylors and the Robinsons. Have the painters at your convenience." Henry stopped almost directly under the frame of the hall door and flipped open the cover of his gold watch. The gesture gave Susan a sick feeling at her stomach. "Anything else?" he asked.

"No. No."

Slowly Henry closed the arch of his four fingers until the watch lid snapped. When his long fingers, whose very smoothness Susan always had considered an indication of an artistic temperament, with their thin childlike nails were bent over,

his large fist was soft and pudgy, almost knuckleless, and a fleshy cushion rounded the skin between his thumb and his first finger. For the first time in all the years she had known him his hands appeared weak to Susan, and she felt a slight repulsion.

"It's almost eight," Henry said at last and dropped the watch into his vest pocket. "I'll have to run along. Don't wait up for me. I'll probably be quite late."

With Henry, Susan walked out onto the porch and as she stopped at the top step she gasped slightly.

"Why the deep sigh? Upset about what I said about the business?"

"It's the heat. The night is so humid, so sultry." She smiled sweetly.

"Take it easy. And be a good girl," he said and lightly kissed her cheek which was tilted in expectation.

Susan's hand made its way to the bend in his arm. He lifted it to his mouth, rubbed dry lips along her fingers, turned quickly, and ran down the steps. Left looking at his back, she waited until he reached the street before she said, "Send the children in. They're probably at the Robinsons'."

With a motion of his hand, otherwise not answering, he walked off. Susan stood on the stoop staring after him, lost in the supple rhythm of his body, his long easy strides, the grace with which the straw hat he carried swayed slightly to the movement of his legs. When he stepped from the darkness into the bright glow of the gas flame of the street lamp she started to call him. Almost in the same instant he was out of the circle of light and back in the darkness. The last of his name withered in her mouth. At the Robinsons'—the factory was below Second Avenue, along Gowanus Canal, two blocks away—without turning to look at her, he waved his hat and disappeared around the corner.

As Henry passed out of sight the Taylors came out of their basement door. She was in her shape, trim and smart in a starched waist, a light linen skirt that swept the ground, and a white sailor hat. Mr. Taylor climbed the steps to his porch. Mrs. Taylor lifted her skirt and, swinging her hips and her purse

with an arrogant lively self-possession, went off in the direction of Fifth Avenue.

"Don't come home late," Mr. Taylor called.

Tim and Eleanor and Nellie Taylor came running around the corner. Nellie dashed next door; Tim and Eleanor came up the porch steps.

"I'd rather go to the ball game," Tim was saying.

"You're mean." Eleanor stopped to stamp her foot.

"Rather go to the ball game than where?" Susan asked.

"Pop's going to take us to Coney Island, Sunday. Mom, tell him the ball game's more fun."

"It isn't. Nellie doesn't like baseball either."

"Nellie?" Susan asked. "What has Nellie to do with this?"

"Pop's taking her along," Tim answered.

"She's your girl. She's your girl. She's your girl," Eleanor chanted as they went indoors. "Ma," she shrieked, "he stuck his tongue out at me."

"Quiet. You'll disgrace us. What must the neighbors think? And remember, no pillow fight tonight. If I hear a bit of noise, I'll punish you both. Severely."

The children raced up the stairs.

"Read us a story," Eleanor called down over the banister.

"Not tonight. And get right into bed. It's late."

Tim dashed into his room and Susan could hear him whoop as he rode the springs of his bed.

"Tim," she called, "you'll break those springs."

He answered with a yelp.

Susan went up two steps, but feeling slightly dizzy she leaned on the round top of the post at the foot of the stairs. She rested there until she realized that the children had become unnaturally quiet. "Tim," she called. Receiving no answer, she gripped the rail and pulled herself up the two flights. She found Tim on his knees peeking through the keyhole into Eleanor's room. "What's going on here?" she asked.

"Sh," he said, "Eleanor's play acting."

Susan walked up to him and pushed open the door. On a chair before her dresser mirror Eleanor swayed in a pair of

French-heeled red satin pumps. She had on a black silk dress belonging to Susan. With one hand she held her hair up high on her tilted head. The other was pressed over her heart.

The jerking of the door startled the would-be tragedienne, who lost her balance and tripped on the long skirt which trailed down the far side of the chair. Her hands grasping air, Eleanor landed on the floor, her feet and her dress over her head. One slipper hit the ceiling. Tim, laughing and jeering, caught it. He was about to force it back on Eleanor's foot, which he gripped between his legs, when Susan separated them. "To bed with you," she said. "And you too, Eleanor. Get out of my dress this instant, in a hurry. The idea, my good dress."

Susan waited until they undressed and tucked them in. Fagged out by the excitement, her body heavy and uncomfortable, she went back to the porch. "Be a good girl. Be a good girl. Be good. If you can't be good— Chatter, chatter, that's all it is, chatter. Just meaningless chatter, meaningless." With a start she realized that Mr. Taylor, who was sitting on his porch, had spoken. "What was that, Mr. Taylor?" she asked.

He cleared his throat. "How do you suppose women can sew on a night like this? Not a breath of air stirring. Awfully hot for June."

"Didn't Mrs. Taylor's sewing circle disband for the summer?"

"Seems not."

Susan did not feel like talking, but to be polite she said, "Where is the meeting?"

"Somewhere out near Coney Island. Wonder what those women will do when she goes away?"

"Mrs. Taylor going away?"

"Yes, for July and August. She talked me into it. Has a way all her own. No matter how I put my foot down she knows how to get around me. A bit of a vamp for a respectable married woman." He smiled and winked as much as to say that he was gay blade enough to appreciate her. And then he added, "Pretty, ain't she?"

"Pretty," Susan thought, "what's pretty about her? Attractive, flashy, perhaps, but not pretty." Mrs. Taylor's long narrow eyes,

which slanted upward, disquieted Susan; their seductiveness Susan considered brazen; and they violated a face with a short broad nose, dotted with freckles, and framed by fluffy red hair. Susan was particularly resentful of the aggressive self-approval expressed in the way Mrs. Taylor carried her angular flat body. All in all, she considered Mrs. Taylor unrefined. Susan nodded to indicate, "Yes."

"I don't know how I will get along without her. We never were separated before."

He seemed so eager to speak, to be friendly that Susan, merely to say something, asked, "Where is she going?"

"To a place in the White Mountains, Fabyan House, it's called, but it's not a bit like that socialist society in England. It's quite elegant."

Susan rarely had conversation with Mr. Taylor. Only on a hot evening such as this, when they sat out of doors, did they exchange a few words. The impression that there was a kindly simplicity about him crossed her mind. He was not nearly as well off as Henry. After all, he had only a retail drygoods store. Yet neither Henry nor she thought that she should go away for the summer. "Won't you find it expensive?" she asked.

"My wife is clever as well as fascinating, Mrs. Bates. She'll earn her way by entertaining guests, giving lessons in bridge-whist."

"Where did you say Mrs. Taylor will go?" Susan stretched her leg.

"To the White Mountains. They say it's the Switzerland of New England."

A dull, "Yes, I know," left Susan's parched mouth. A current of bitterness, at first vague, just waves of a hazy unacknowledged resentment, coursed through her until she found herself repeating inwardly, "Once I was so happy, so very, very happy."

"And how are you this evening, young lady?" The speaker was Dwight Robinson. The Robinson entrance was on the other street, but their porch extended around the house, and since the fad for automobiles had increased they usually sat on the side that faced Fourth Avenue, which was a main thoroughfare, be-

cause of the excitement it provided. Frequently horses, frightened by explosions of a sputtering motor or a shrill horn, with an agonizing neigh jumped or reared out of control, sometimes even throwing those in the carriage or running off with them.

"Quite well, thank you."

"From the way you held out your leg, I thought it might be bothering you."

"A certain little devil rebels at being caged so long and kicks up a slight cramp. I get a bit of relief by stretching it this way."

"Let me pry into one of your secrets," Mr. Robinson said in a confidential tone, and Bertie Robinson, lost in a hammock, raised herself on her elbow and leaned over the edge until Susan was afraid she might fall. "How do you balance those chestnuts on the top of your head?" Again Bertie slipped from view and the hammock began to sway.

Susan put a hand to her head and ran a finger through a curl. "They are puffs, Mr. Robinson," she said. "Quite a difficult coiffure."

"Don't let him tease you, Susie," came from the bottom of the hammock, which went back and forth and made Susan, who watched it, queasy.

"I'm not teasing at all. I think they are very nice. What is your opinion, Mr. Taylor?"

Mr. Taylor had no opinion; he knew nothing about fashions. The two men drifted into a conversation about business and the effects of a high or a low tariff. Occasionally, Mr. Robinson directed a word or two to his wife or to Susan to indicate they were among those present. The hammock went up and down. Susan closed her eyes. The squeaks of the hooks drowned out the dull talk of the men and made Susan's flesh creep. If only Bertie would get dizzy. Maybe the hammock would break. But it continued to go up and down, back and forth, and the only sign of Bertie Robinson was the outline of her buttocks at the bottom.

At a quarter to ten Mr. Taylor began to fidget. His shirt sleeves were turned up, and when he wasn't scratching his hairy arm, he fumbled with his watch chain, which held his unbut-

toned vest together. Every few seconds he pulled out his watch, flipped it open, glanced at it, and put it back. Finally he said, "It's getting late. Ten o'clock."

The hammock stopped. "Sleepy, dear?" Mr. Robinson asked.

Bertie yawned, and together she and her husband left the porch. With the opening of their door Susan felt a pang of envy. How lucky Bertie was. Mr. Robinson was devoted and considerate; he knew exactly what to say to please a woman. Susan weighed other points in Mr. Robinson's favor. He was a sound solid citizen, an important man in the community, president of a local bank; once he had been an alderman. Not that she begrudged Bertie her good fortune, but any other woman in Bertie's place would make more of her position, would entertain lavishly, would become a leader in local society. Not that Susan would want Mr. Robinson as her own husband. He was perhaps fifteen years older than his wife, forty-five at least, and his eyes, watery and shrivelled from the strain of constant figure work, seemed older. The way he blinked, the way his scanty blond lashes brushed against his spectacles, detracted from his dignity.

Mr. Taylor coughed, and with a start Susan realized she was alone with him, that she should talk to him. She excused herself and went upstairs.

Her room was a large one, and the bed, in an alcove directly under Mary's small hall room, left considerable space for easy chairs and a sofa. She sank into the Morris chair, which was against the wall facing the windows, and adjusted the back into a semi-reclining position. Now that both children occupied rooms on the top floor, it was a great comfort to know that Mary was up there too. In many ways Mary was so dependable. Although she never mentioned the fact, Susan knew she looked in on the children during the night to make sure they were covered. She wondered, however, if Mary had remembered to have the satin crib cover feather-stitched. She probably should have seen to it herself, but she had not developed any enthusiasm for the nursery which had been set up in the room adjoining her own; in fact at times when she was in it, she had the feeling it

was a trap from which she could not escape, that its open door would lead right back into it again. For a while she tried to read new recipes in the "Woman's Home Companion." Her mind would not stay with the articles. Alternately her body was in pain and numb. She studied the pattern of the Axminster rug, followed the grain in the woodwork, picked out figures carved in the furniture. Directly under the light, on the wallpaper, a gray background with a yellow flower pattern, she noticed a moth and a fly. Under her stare the insects left the wall and circled the gas jet. The fly, a large one, buzzed like a bee. Except for a dull thud each time its body, attracted by the light, hit the globe, the moth made no sound. Around and around they went, the fly after the moth, the moth after the fly, noise after silence, silence after noise. And around and around went Susan's head.

The rhythm of the flight was magnetic. Each time she looked away her eyes were pulled back to the light. She closed them. The even, monotonous buzz of the fly hissed in her ears without a pause, without a break. It took on the form of the flight, and pounded round and round, filling her ears, filling her head. It grew clearer and clearer, heavier and heavier, louder and louder. She shuddered and placed an arm over her face. Suddenly, without warning, she heard a thud, an explosion.

She sat without moving. Dead silence lasted for a moment, and then the noise of the flight recommenced. When Susan opened her eyes she noticed specks of brown dust from the body of the moth on the globe. To quiet her nerves she got up and walked about. At the sofa she took one of the small paisley pillows, made from an old shawl that had belonged to her mother, to support her back, and sat on a slipper chair in the window. The moth and the fly were now above her, a little to the side. She could still hear the hum and the thud and see them out of a corner of her eye, but she was calm. Her body throbbed and ached. Every sound from the street, a couple laughing, a horse neighing, the honking of a horn, jarred her. Again she picked up her magazine. She ran her hand across the window screen. Near the frame she felt a small rip in the wire and

thought, "When Henry comes in I must ask him to bring up the swatter."

But there was nothing on which to keep her mind, nothing to distract her. Pain made her sweat. She looked out of the window. Mr. Taylor was walking up and down in front of his house. She began to measure the rise and fall of her pain by his steps, and she regulated his steps to the hiss and buzz of the fly. In time to the whole rhythm she kept thinking, Fabyan House, Fabian tactics, Fabyan House, Fabian tactics.

At ten forty-five Mr. Taylor walked across her lawn. That the only telephone on the block was downstairs in her hall flashed through her mind. As he was about to place his foot on the bottom step, she switched off the gas jet. Mr. Taylor stopped short. Instead of sitting down again she pressed against the wall, although the screen would have shielded her from view. The moth and the fly knocked against the windowpane above the screen. The light outside attracted them. The light, always the light. For a moment Mr. Taylor did not move. He stood looking up at the darkened window. Then he went back to the sidewalk and paced up and down. At eleven o'clock he went indoors.

Her pain became unbearable. With both hands she rubbed her abdomen. A cramp in her leg forced her to sit down on the paisley pillow. She looked out upon the street. The neighborhood had gone to bed. The night was without a moon, without stars. The only light came from lamp posts at the corner and in the middle of the block. The trees were sickly. City trees. Stunted. Sapless. A feeling of rain hung in the air. The moth and the fly flapped against the glass. The fly hissed resentfully. Her pain became so intense she found herself saying, "Call Mary. Call Mary," but she did not do so. Finally, she undressed and got into bed.

The incessant whiz of the fly hit every nerve in her body. She felt it in her elbows, in her knees, in the pounding of her heart, in her finger tips. She placed Henry's pillows on her own to raise her head and support her back. The vibrations subsided, but the pain increased. She was hot and cold. She sank into the

pillows. She sat up. She covered herself and uncovered herself. She cried softly. Again she thought of calling Mary. And in all her agony she dozed.

With a start she became aware of the sound of a woman's heels running across the sidewalk. She heard those heels climb the stoop next door and a door close. The salt of tears had caked along her eyes. Her puffs were displaced. The pain had increased. To lift her arms was an effort; nevertheless, she forced herself to take out her hairpins and let her hair down. As she braided it she heard Henry saunter along. His steps echoed in the night. He crossed the street. Why? Why did he come from the direction of Fifth Avenue? But he was coming. "I won't have to call Mary," she murmured.

When he walked into the room she said, "I think you better call the doctor."

1912, February 2

"PAPA, PAPA, TURN IT OFF. I CAN'T LET GO," ELEANOR CRIED, HER cheeks flushed, her eyes feverish, although the dining room was actually rather chilly.

Hiram Robinson, with one hand at the end of a metal bar attached to an oak box, which stood on the carved walnut sideboard near the window, and with the other hand joined to a human chain composed of Nellie and the three Bates children, hopped from foot to foot. Too big, too broad, for his thirteen years, with a saucer haircut that gave his square bony face a silly expression, Hiram bobbed up and down, his legs off this way and that, like a giant mechanical monkey that at the pull of a string danced crazily on a pole. Tim stood tense, his shoulders thrown back, his mouth taut. A perfect little soldier, thought Susan, who was watching the performance from a chair at the table. For an instant her eyes remained on his thin upturned nose. A perfect little soldier, she repeated to herself, with an

elfin face. Nellie Taylor laughed until tears rolled down her cheeks and her freckles wrinkled into dark streaks. Arnold turned white.

"My, my, my. So none of you can take it," Henry said, and turned off the electric switch of the box. "All right, Hiram, you can let go now."

The muscles of his face relaxed and Hiram came to a sudden stop. He released his grip on the metal handle and the children scattered. In an offhand way Tim asked if that was how the electric chair felt.

"The electric chair! Why, this is life's energy-builder," Henry said.

Nellie said, "It tickles."

"You giggle no matter what," Eleanor said and moved close to Hiram who, as their bodies curved into each other, put an arm around her waist.

Hiram, like Tim, assumed a matter-of-fact voice and asked how the box worked.

"Okay, kids, let's see." Henry, who had already lifted the box from the sideboard and had started toward the cupboard at the opposite end of the room, set it down on the long dining table, where he opened the top and exposed a narrow glass tube the length of the box, which contained threads much like those in an electric light bulb. Short wires outside the tube connected with metal points in a row of small slots which in turn connected with the handle. All the children, except Arnold, were gathered around him, absorbed in what he was saying.

Arnold, who had crept under the raised head of the sofa, crouched on his knees to fit into the small space. He was not a particularly pretty child; everything about him was too long, too thin, his body, his hands, his face. His upper teeth protruded slightly below his lip and seemed too large for his mouth. His one claim to beauty, dark eyes shadowed by dark lashes, grave and questioning even when he smiled, expressed a disquieting bewilderment as he stared at the others. Reaching down, Susan took his hand, led him around to the front of the sofa, sat down, and rather roughly pulled him up next to her.

He remained close by her side without saying a word, his back rigid, his legs straight before him, his square-toed little shoes protruding over the edge.

"Wouldn't you like to examine the magic box?" Susan asked.

He looked up at her; his eyes widened and became moist, but he made no attempt to answer and no tears fell. She stroked his hair and he let his head fall against her arm. He's a strange little chap, she thought, so inarticulate. Not that he's backward; he's just not like the older two. She wondered how children born of the same parents, brought up in the same household, could be so completely different. Tim and Eleanor came to her, as children should, with their small troubles; more than half the time she did not even know what Arnold, who was not yet four, was thinking. Yet, he was more obedient than the older pair. Never protesting, without even a murmur or a question, he submitted to whatever she planned for him. If she sat him on the stoop, there he would stay; if she put him on the floor in a corner near the dining room window with building blocks, he would play with them for hours, arranging the colored squares into his conception of trains and houses. Suddenly she realized he never entered into competitive games, and this was followed by the uneasy feeling that underneath his placid silent submission were the roots of a strong stubborn streak. Once Henry had showed him how to click his fingernail against a glass and make it sing. After that Susan frequently found a chair in the dining room closet where cut-glass bowls of different sizes and shapes were stored on a high shelf. Although she had long suspected he had made a game of ringing the glasses, she never caught him at it until the day before when she came upon him climbing down the rung of the chair. "We was just going out, mamma! We was just going out, Katie and me," he said. Katie. Katie. Always Katie. Of course, she had been with them since he was born—long enough to know that the child should be outdoors on a nice day.

The room had become quite dark and Susan rose and switched on the dull yellow light of two small candle-shaped wall fixtures. As she did so, her thoughts, still with Arnold, she caught

a glimpse of Hiram's hand with his five fingers spread flat over Eleanor's undeveloped breast. Neither Hiram nor Eleanor seemed aware of each other; their eyes were directed over Henry's shoulder. "El—" she ejaculated, but checked herself before anyone became conscious that she had uttered a sound. Noisily she shoved a chair under the table and stared at Henry, but he paid no attention to her; he was engrossed in explaining how the box was built to give light shocks to stimulate the blood.

"But why couldn't we let go?" Tim asked.

"Because you were too scared. Just a bunch of fraidy cats."

Susan glared at Hiram and Eleanor; they remained indifferent to her.

"You will have to ask your mother," she heard Henry say.

Tim ran around the table and stood before her. "Can we, ma?" he asked.

"May we," Susan said.

"May we?"

"May we what?"

"Go to the hockey game. It's a pippin."

Nellie and Hiram and Eleanor, who were in front of the fireplace on the other side of the table near Henry, were all gazing at Susan. Susan's impulse was to walk over and slap down Hiram's hand. Her eyes shifted from them to Henry and back again.

Henry winked in a manner that said, let them go, so Susan nodded her consent: then she gave her head several quick thrusts in the direction of Hiram and Eleanor. Henry looked at her rather quizzically, picked up an almond from a bowl on the sideboard and tossed it into Arnold's lap. "Would you like to come, too?" he asked.

"At night!" Susan pointed to Hiram and Eleanor.

Henry drew in his chin, scratched his head, frowned, and winked. "Who," he said, "would like to build a snow man?"

"The last one out's a pink hippopotamus. The last one out's a pink hippopotamus," Tim cried.

Tripping over each other, scampering for coats and caps, the children pushed and ran, screaming, slamming the door, Henry

with them. Often the children had run out this way, but never before had they left Susan with such a drained empty feeling, a feeling of not belonging. She sank onto the sofa. Her arms rigid, her hands flat and still beside her, she stared vacantly into the room's sickly yellow light, focusing her eyes on the artificial logs in the fireplace in which the furnace grate was concealed. After a while her finger began to travel through the narrow black leather valleys of the sofa; searching, forcing its way in and out of the tight crevices. A shrill cry outside pierced the thin silence of the room and Susan, in a sharp move, pounded the leather tufts with her fist. "Why," she asked herself, "why didn't I run out as Henry did?"

Why? Because . . . Because . . . And he never asked me to the hockey game.

A shriek of laughter drew her to the window. In the pane she caught a glimpse of her face, and to blot out the transparent image she pressed close against the glass, indifferent to the drifts of cold air that penetrated the window seams and chilled her arms. The sky's last streak of color had yielded to darkness, but since Susan had remained in a dim light she easily followed the lively figures against the snow. As Henry bent over to shape the snow belly, one of the children smacked him with a snowball, and the snowman was forgotten in a free-for-all.

Everyone except Arnold entered the fight. His shoulders slightly raised, his arms close to his side, his hands in his pockets, he stood apart, and when a mass of soft snow spattered over his face he merely shook his head and laughed. "Throw one back, throw one back," Susan whispered hoarsely. As the room behind her burst into light, Susan's head twitched away from the scene outside on the sidewalk.

Katie, unaware that she had startled her mistress, tapped on the window and called, "Nolly, supper is ready." With no word to the others and unobserved by them Arnold ran into the house. At the dining room door, where Katie met him, he sprang at her and wrapped his arms and legs around her gray cotton uniform. Susan drank in every gesture. When, with Arnold still clinging to her, Katie went into the kitchen where Arnold ate,

Susan turned toward the sideboard and with the palm of her hand tried to rub away a thin scratch that had been dug into the walnut by Henry's electric box.

There Henry found her when he came in. "Susan," he asked, "what do you make of Arnold?"

"He seems bright enough."

"Oh, he's bright all right. I didn't mean that. It's a sort of beyond-this-world quality that baffles me. Sometimes he seems as patient and profound as an old man, and damn it all, at the same time he's artlessly childish. That mixture of motionless submission, and subtle resistance gets me. You noticed the snow fight? He just stood there. When he was hit with a snowball he didn't throw one back. He didn't cry. He didn't even duck. And who could throw anything but soft snow at him?"

"He is like that. Always on the side, looking, watching, never in the game. Sometimes he exasperates me. Yet, in a way, he is friendly. If the boys in the street drop a ball, he will run after it and throw it back. In fact, it's gotten so they expect him to. The bigger boys call him their mascot, and that seems to be enough for him."

"Maybe it isn't enough. Maybe he just doesn't let on. It might be that he hasn't anyone his own age around," Henry said. "It might be that, like the boys in the street, we take him too much for granted."

Dinner over, Henry went into the kitchen where Arnold was prattling away to Katie as she washed the dishes. Without warning he lifted the child, swung him between his legs several times and then, slinging him across his shoulders, piggy-backed him into the dining room. There he tossed him high into the air before settling in the rocker and riding him on his foot in time to made-up ditties. When Arnold caught his breath he also broke into one and, bobbing their heads, half-laughing, half-singing, the words further distorted by squeaks from the rocker, they both sang over and over:

Whee!
Up and down, high and low,

Upon my daddy's boot I go.
On the journey all I see
Is mamma's crochet bumble bee.

Infected by their high spirits Susan, as she moved in and out the room clearing the table, hummed along with them.

"Time for bed," Katie called and walked into the dining room.

Before Henry's foot came back to the floor Arnold jumped off and ran into Katie's open arms. She held him close and moved her hand, which she kept stiff, from side to side across his back. Whirling and waltzing, she went toward the steps. "Fiddle dee dee. Diddle dee fee. Fiddle, fiddle, fiddle dee dee," she sang.

Susan paled and looked at Henry; he was peering into the hall where the child's laughter and Katie's sweet voice could be heard.

"I thought he was having such fun with us," Susan said. A whiff of coal gas made her cough.

As she started on her way upstairs she said, "Close the grate, Henry, please."

Once in her room, she combed her hair into two long braids and slipped out of her corset into a gray flannel wrapper. When she returned to the dining room she noticed that Henry had taken off his coat and was sprawled out on the sofa, his head inclined toward the window, holding his newspaper. With her highly buffed untinted nails she tugged at the points of the crochet table-center until they formed an eight-pointed star; then she put down a cut-glass fruit dish which stood on a round chased mirror base. She paused to enjoy the broken cubes of red and blue and yellow, flashing now here, now there, in the mirror and to compare the dazzling glitter of the pieces on the table with that of a large punch bowl on the sideboard. She wanted to call Henry's attention to the brilliance of the glass pieces but he seemed to be trying to doze off, so she went into the narrow passageway between the dining room and the kitchen without speaking.

From the cupboard above the basin she took a large bar of yellow soap and snuffed in the naphtha trail, quenching her

thirst for cleanliness in its disinfectant smell. From the enclosed shelves below she took a long-handled knife. Henry, meanwhile, had become so still Susan glanced over at him. While she tried to decide whether or not he had fallen asleep, the newspaper crumpled noisily and he sat up with a start. An instant later the doorbell twanged violently. Henry pulled a small comb out of his back trouser pocket, ran it once through his hair, and hurried to the door.

Susan heard Nellie's giggle. "Mamma wants to come along," she said and in the same breath asked, "Where's Tim?" Without waiting for an answer she dashed up the stairs shouting, "Yoo hoo, Tim."

Trapped in the narrow walled-in passageway, Susan leaned heavily on the black handle of the steel knife with which she had started to cut soap slices. Not this. Henry won't do this to me. He won't go. And while she thus assured herself, Susan's eyes remained on Margaret Taylor, noting everything about her; the elegant fit of the simple black broadcloth coat with Persian trim, how well a matching turban suited Mrs. Taylor's freckled white skin and red hair; how under the hat, with only a few curly strands showing, it was impossible to discern that the hair had been dyed. Not so much the clothes or even the hair offended Susan. It was Margaret Taylor's air, her way of carrying herself like a woman confident that she is attractive to men that repulsed Susan most. Susan's hand dropped and brushed against the fuzzy softness of the flannel of her wrapper, and she thought of the silk Japanese kimono she had started to put on but had changed her mind because of the chores she had to do. It now lay across her bed where she had dropped it.

"You don't mind my joining you, do you?" Margaret Taylor asked in a clear full voice; then turning sharply as she took a few steps deeper into the dining room she drawled almost in a whisper, "Mr. Bates." To avoid bumping into her Henry had stopped short and braced himself by placing a hand against her arm. Almost instantaneously he pulled it back. Tilting forward from her ankles until her body nearly touched his, Mrs. Taylor broke into a soft laugh. "I adore hockey," she said. "It's

so exciting. If I stay home, I'll be all alone. Roger has the store open tonight."

Susan strained to read Henry's expression, but much of his face was hidden by the angle of the Persian lamb hat. She saw only how close they were and how awkwardly he pulled a chair away from the table and offered it to Mrs. Taylor and heard him say, "Quite all right. Quite all right."

With a teasing gurgle Margaret Taylor flitted away from Henry and sat on the far side of the table in front of the fireplace. "What a comfy room," she said. Henry reddened and kicked the chair he held back into place.

"It's warm in here," Mrs. Taylor said.

"I'm sorry. Let me take your coat." Henry went over and placed his hand on her shoulder in a gesture to help her.

The black-leather gloved fingers of Margaret Taylor pressed his with a restraining grip, remained still for a moment, then moved slowly down. "We'll be going right out, won't we? I'll just open it."

Henry frowned, whispered a word or two, and then walked into the hall where he jerked a Norfolk jacket off the elk antlers. Meanwhile Mrs. Taylor loosened the fur at her neck and sat back in the chair, rolling her fingers over something pinned to the lace yoke of her shirtwaist. Then Susan, who observed every motion of the woman in the dining room, became aware that it was a diamond studded red enamel watch. It was, except for the color, exactly like the blue enamel watch Henry had given her at the time Arnold was born. Her hand slipped and the steel of the knife resounded against the marble top of the basin.

Turning toward the passageway, Margaret Taylor said, "Oh, good evening, Mrs. Bates. How are you?"

Susan brought the knife back to the soap and again measured off the slices, counting, "A piece for the lavatory, one for the ground floor, one for the dishes, the scrubbing, the wash, one for the upstairs bathroom, the basins in the childrens' rooms, the one in ours."

At the round head of the stair post Henry whistled through his fingers.

"We'll be right down," Tim yelled from the fourth floor. "Eleanor is getting out her Sunday coat."

"Henry, tell Eleanor the coat she has down here is good enough." Susan's voice was high, on the verge of breaking. "Her red coat will get shiny on those benches."

"Susan, why don't you come along?" Henry called from the hall, but his question was lost in the ringing of the doorbell. He jolted the door open and almost bumped into his sister Olive. "What brings you here tonight?" he asked.

"My, aren't you glad to see me!"

"Sorry, sis. Where's Courtney?"

"Where would he be? At his club. Poker as usual." She took Henry's hand and dragged him toward the street. "Come on outside. I have a surprise." Without seeing her sister-in-law she called, "Susie. Susie. Come on out."

Susan dashed away from the sink. In the hall she grabbed a long brown serge cape and threw it over her shoulders. Outside the door, in the dark vestibule, she hesitated, closed her eyes, and sucked in the dry cold air. For perhaps five seconds she held her breath, conscious of the gay excited talk of Olive and Henry without comprehending their words. When she opened her eyes and peered through the iron street gate, she gasped, "A motor car."

"From Court to me with love and kisses. This is what I was supposed to get for Christmas, and got the diamond bracelet because this couldn't be delivered in time."

"You're spoiled, Olive," Susan said. Quickly she added, "But we love you just the same," and put an arm affectionately around the waist of her sister-in-law. The feel of Olive's firm slim body made Susan self-conscious of her own, made her aware that she ought to be about ten pounds lighter, ten pounds younger, as Henry often teased her.

To get close to the car Henry jumped over a low ridge of soft snow. He slipped and reached for the trunk of the small ice-covered tree that struggled for life near the curb, but it was beyond him, and his foot disappeared in the dirty white fluff. Susan and Olive laughed, but Henry, annoyed, merely shook

his leg to rid himself of the dry snow that had clung to his trouser.

"Isn't it a beauty?" Olive asked as Henry tried to turn the steering wheel.

"Courtney lets you drive it?"

"Of course. He bought it for me. If I keep busy with the car he can play more poker."

"A woman driver?"

"What's wrong with a woman driver?"

"Women can't handle machinery. The streets won't be safe."

"Fiddlesticks. I came down here to take you all for a ride."

"Not me."

"It's late," Susan said. "And dark."

"What difference does that make? I have headlights, and the night is wonderfully clear."

"Henry's taking the children to the hockey game at the armory."

"I'll drive them up."

"No, you won't," Henry said, "not on those slippery streets." Meanwhile he examined the motor, looked under the chassis, felt the springs in the seats, sounded the horn.

"Slippery nothing. The snow is packed down hard." Olive nudged Susan and whispered, "You'll be getting one soon, I can see that."

Susan glanced up into Olive's laughing eyes and thought, "She's just like Henry, she'll never grow up." Aloud she said, "I doubt it. Wiring the dining room and parlor floor chandeliers cost more than we had anticipated, and we plan later in the year to put electricity through the upper floors."

"I can't understand why you pour money into this old place. The way the neighborhood is running down it's time you moved. The kids would be much better off up on the slope, near the park." Olive squeezed Susan's arm and pointed to the way Henry examined the car. "And I could look in on them oftener."

Several years before Olive had lost her only child, a boy of three. For a couple of years she scarcely looked at Tim and

Eleanor, but after Arnold came her interest in the children revived, perhaps for the reason that he looked something like her own little boy. However, she and Courtney lived up on the hill, not because it was close to the park, but because it was close to his club. Since slums began to fringe the Fourth Avenue neighborhood, and one-family houses on the side streets were being converted into small flats for those who worked in factories along Gowanus Canal, Susan did think they ought to move to a newer, more fashionable section where the children could have social advantages. However, Henry came home for luncheon except on rare occasions when he was tied up with a business engagement, and Susan, who considered her first duty to her husband, refrained from expressing herself on the subject. Besides, the children were still young; there was plenty of time to worry about their social connections.

"Whose is it? Yours?" Tim asked, running from the house followed by Eleanor and Nellie. "A five-seater. Whee."

"Another affectionate greeting."

"Oh, Aunt Ollie, it's thrilling. A motorcar in the family. Imagine," Eleanor said.

"Yes, you scalped monkey, and you are going to ride in it tonight. But first come over here so I can make you look human." Olive pulled out the narrow pink ribbon in Eleanor's tight braids, fluffed out the long satiny brown hair, and turned screw curls on her fingers. "How can you do this to a child, Susan?"

"I can't have her picking up nits in school."

"Oh, Aunt Ollie, are we really going to get a ride in a real automobile? Gee."

"Your father is afraid it won't be safe," Susan said.

"Fiddlesticks. I had driving lessons. Courtney wouldn't let me drive if it weren't safe."

"Men. Men. For all they care you may break your neck as long as you don't interfere with their pleasures."

"Why, Susie," Olive said. "You, my sweet home-body sister-in-law, cynical! Court meant for me to have fun with the car. I'll be a careful driver."

For years, ever since that spring that Arnold was born, Susan

had guarded herself against just such a revealing blunder, and the outburst left her trembling. Afraid of what she might find in the eyes of the others, a reproach, a question, even sympathy, yet compelled to know, she glanced furtively from one to the other. Henry and the children were too absorbed in the car to notice what she did or said, and if Olive attributed any hidden significance to the outburst, she passed over it lightly by adding, "And you'll have as much fun as anyone riding with me."

"Of course. Of course." Susan realized her voice lacked conviction. Olive was looking straight at her. Taking three or four steps back to move out of the light that came through the dining room windows, Susan turned slightly and noticed that Mrs. Taylor had remained at the table, leaning on her elbow, the sharp point of her pink-tinted thumbnail cutting into her expressionless face, expressionless except for a mummy-like smile. That everpresent smile had long tantalized Susan, made her feel that she lacked the tact, the poise, the geniality of her rival. Time and again Susan had been tempted to tell Margaret Taylor that she hadn't been fooled by a smile that was a mere tool of the craft of charm. Roger Taylor might be hoodwinked and unsuspecting men twisted around her little finger by it, but Susan could see clearly the cold calculating character that lay behind it. Open conflict, however, had been avoided; both women when they met exchanged casual greetings and moved on. Now, their unuttered code violated, challenged by Mrs. Taylor's visit, her first inside the house, a rush of things Susan had often imagined herself saying twisted into a mass of incoherent words. If only she could give vent to her feelings in some physical action. She shifted her weight and although she felt incapable of unraveling her tangled sensations, in that second they were destroyed by an impression that Mrs. Taylor's smile was devoid of gaiety, was instead sadly pensive. What had really prompted her to come into the house? Inside, under Susan's steady gaze, although she seemed not to be aware of it, Mrs. Taylor began to tap her foot.

"Well, Susan, when are you coming for a ride with us?" Olive asked.

"Tomorrow," Susan answered absent-mindedly.

"Atta-girl." And Olive pushed Susan ahead of her indoors. Noisily talking and laughing the others followed. At the first creak of the door Margaret Taylor sat erect and when Nellie ran up to her she was resting nonchalantly against the turned posts of the high-backed chair.

"Mamma, you didn't see the automobile! We are going to ride in it," Nellie said.

"Seems you've won, Sis." Henry pushed Nellie's head forward and rumpled her hair. "Are you sure you can handle the blooming thing?"

Susan thought Nellie's red hair, her flashing narrow green eyes, so like her mother's, the way freckles ran over her face, gave the child a common look.

"I got down here, didn't I?"

"Yes, but not with a load of kids in it. Tim, run next door and see if Hiram is ready. Are you going to dress and come with us?" Henry asked Susan.

"Pop, it's late now. We ought to be there already," Tim said. As he ran out he called, "Hi and I will wait in the car."

For the second time that evening Susan let her hand run along her gray flannel wrapper, and then she followed the others outdoors.

"If we are all to get in, Henry, you better sit here next to me with Eleanor on your lap," Olive said, her eyes on the hand of Mrs. Taylor, who was pointing to the space next to her on the back seat. "And if Mrs. Taylor will hold her daughter, we will have room for the two boys."

Tim and Hiram increased the excitement of getting started by squirming about until they were comfortable, urging Olive to get going, and tugging at the blanket. Only Henry and Susan were quiet, looking intently at each other. Sudden thunderous noises like blasts of a gun broke one after another. A black smelly cloud rose from under the motorcar which lurched, threw everyone forward, and then puffed its way around the corner. Particles of snow drifted from the branches of the tree and settled on Susan's face. Even after the car was out of sight she

stood in the dry still cold, the melted snow running down her cheeks, breathing in fumes of gasoline, listening to the chuck, chuck, chuck hammering in her ears. Her whole body constricted with anger and she ground her kidney-shaped heel in Henry's footmark in the snow until the pressure of her heel cut into her ankle. She beat the rough bark of the trunk she was using as a prop, but the ill nourished, cement-girdled tree never quivered; it merely scratched her palm and speckled her with snow. Her mad urgency to strike, to hurt something, passed, but she shrank from the idea of returning indoors. Outside, at least, she could breathe. The question of where Mrs. Taylor's bold step might lead began to trouble her and, while she stood on the snow bank pondering how to meet it, she caught the words, "Mrs. Bates—Tim—mean."

"What's that? What's that?" Susan turned around and faced the Nugents, an elderly couple who lived in the house below the Taylors.

"I'm sorry to have to make this complaint, Mrs. Bates, but I must say your son Tim has a mean streak," Mrs. Nugent repeated.

"Mrs. Nugent!"

"He sets cats afire."

"He what?"

"He sets fire to cats; sets matches to their fur."

"You're mad. He loves animals, loves to play with them."

"Loves to torture them, you mean."

"I don't believe it."

"Believe it or not as you choose, but if you don't do something about it I'll report that child to the proper authorities."

"I'll speak to him."

"That won't do any good. We've already spoken to him; in fact Mr. Nugent boxed his ears."

"Don't you lay a hand on Tim. Neither Mr. Bates nor I approve of using physical force on a child. We punish them in other ways. I said I'll speak to him. Good night."

What Mrs. Nugent said broke the thin shell of what was left of Susan's composure, and when she went inside and resumed

her soap cutting, tears dropped onto the yellow cake as she bore down with the knife. She assured herself that Tim was just a mischievous boy, that he was not really cruel. He needed a good talking to. She tried to decide what she ought to say to him, but the things she thought of were things to be said to Henry; how little attention he paid to the behavior of his children, the bad examples he set, how selfish he was, how he neglected her. Before Arnold had been conceived he never went anywhere without her. Now he rarely took her out. Why? Why? She hadn't changed in any way. Mechanically she picked up the yellow soap squares and went from room to room, all the while telling herself what she ought to do, all the while planning ways to show up Margaret Taylor. Henry couldn't believe the woman loved him. It's what he gives her. That's all. What she can get out of him.

In her own room, she picked her Japanese kimono up from the bed, held it before her for a moment, and then put it on over her gray wrapper. As she was looking in the mirror, tying the sash, an impatient ringing of the basement bell reverberated through the house, and force of habit drew Susan to the banister. Peering into the dark pit she could see nothing, but she could hear Mary's heavy clumsy tread move toward the door. Without stopping the bell twanged, loud, then softer, then loud again, until Olive's short clear laugh broke through. After an exchange of a few words with Mary, Olive called, "It is I, Susie. I'm coming up."

Susan couldn't see her. She just couldn't see anyone. In panic she withdrew from the rail and tiptoed into her room. Then, inch by inch, so it would be noiseless, she closed the door. When Olive burst in without knocking, Susan, who was at the sink in the corner, picked up a white porcelain soap saucer and started to wash it. Olive slammed the door.

Neither moved. Susan remained with her back toward Olive, and Olive stood just inside the door, staring at the strip of gray wrapper that hung below the embroidered kimono.

"Susie," she said, "why didn't you go to the game tonight?"

Susan's mouth opened involuntarily. Slowly, deliberately, she

dried the porcelain dish, scraping with the hemmed edge of the linen towel hardened drippings of soap that clung to the ridges.

"I had things to do," she said at last and went over to the sofa and sat down with her feet raised from the floor, her body against the wall between the two windows.

"Isn't being a companion to your husband something to do?" Olive tossed her coat across the back of the Morris chair and sat on the edge.

"I wasn't dressed."

"Why weren't you? Say, how friendly are you with this Taylor woman?"

"Why?"

"I don't trust her."

Susan gulped. "You don't trust her."

"She's after Henry. Take my word for it."

"Now, Olive." Although Susan felt her lips form the words, they seemed not to come from her. In some manner the room became non-existent, everything became non-existent, except the giddy waves that rushed through her body. Yet, at the same time, she remained keenly aware of every detail about her, the dust that had settled under the green glass lampshade, the porcelain boy in a white shirt and tight blue breeches and the porcelain girl in a red dress on the white marble mantel above the fireplace, the way Olive had flung down her coat. When the split sensation lifted she found herself reasoning, "I can't take any more; I simply can't take any more."

In a parched voice she asked, "What could Mrs. Taylor possibly do in front of all of you to give you such an impression?"

"She's a bitch, a real bitch, if ever I met one."

"Olive, such language."

"Well, she is. You saw how crowded we were when we left and how she tried to get Henry to sit in back with her." Olive grinned. "But, I didn't let her get away with it, did I? I had her number from the minute I laid eyes on her. Well, when the car stopped the children jumped out, but not Mrs. Taylor, not that lady. After Nellie got up she simply sat, prettily straightening her coat, until that brother of mine held out his hand to

her. Well, from that point on she clung to him like a kitten."

"Olive."

"Don't Olive me. Susie, you must nip this in the bud."

"Henry is too sensible to—"

"Look, Sue, she also asked him why he had to invite you twice to go along. And right in front of me and the children."

"She must have been teasing."

"Maybe, but I doubt it. It was said cute-like all right. But that woman is bitchy enough to know how to do it."

"Some harmony we'd have around here if I were to nag Henry for things other people say to him. Some atmosphere in which to raise children."

"Some harmony there will be if this thing gets a chance to develop. And some atmosphere that will be for the children. I don't believe in letting things smoulder, not with something like Mrs. Taylor around."

"That's a nice way to talk about your brother."

"Susie, my brother is only a man. And like any other man his thinking apparatus is located in a bewitching but unreasonable part of his anatomy."

"It's a man's world," Susan answered.

"Phooey. Don't feed me that baloney. It doesn't upset his social position, it doesn't affect his attitude toward his family, it doesn't interfere in any way with his life." She grimaced. "That view makes me puke. What about the woman who is part of all this glorious experience that doesn't ruin a man's life?"

"Women must—"

"How did we get off on this tangent? I'm not interested in saving the world; all I'm interested in is cutting this Taylor business short."

"There is nothing to it."

"You don't want to see anything to it. And with this female right under your nose."

"I wouldn't see anything, that's true."

"Why?"

"I'd be smart. I'd play the waiting game. I'd bring Henry around by the examples I set."

"Good grief, Susie, men aren't born mind readers."

Deep shadows began to come up under Susan's eyes. She had a headache. She wished her sister-in-law would go home.

Olive rubbed her hands along her skirt and with her toe toyed with the petit-point stool before her. "Forgive me," she said, "for butting into your affairs. I should have enough sense to keep my trap shut." She jumped up and asked abruptly, "How's the little brat?"

"We might go in and take a peek. But don't wake him, Olive."

In Arnold's room Olive pleaded, "Turn up the gas a wee bit." She lifted the cotton net that had been thrown across his crib, pushed back a strand of black hair, and lightly stroked his head. "Do you remember the other day when I was here and told him to get into his coat and I would take him out for some air? Well, we walked a couple of blocks without saying anything, and at the toy shop we stopped to look in the window. I asked him what he'd like to have. He turned those dark questioning eyes on me and said, 'Aunt Ollie, you promised me some air! That's what I want.'" Olive sighed. She ran the tips of two fingers along his hairline. "I could eat him up."

"Not enough meat on him," Susan chuckled. After her sister-in-law left she went back into Arnold's room. The episode Olive related revolved in her mind. The rest of the evening she thought of him, how he squatted under the sofa, how silently he played, how much he kept to himself. She made no attempt to explain his peculiarities. She could not decide what ought to be done with him. She merely let various images crowd one another; how he walked with his hand in Katie's, how he sat on the stoop and watched other children play without attempting to break into their games, how he gazed at things in the distance seemingly unaware of things that were near, how he listened to all sorts of sounds, how he fed the sparrows. Thinking of Arnold saved her from thinking of Henry.

Just before eleven o'clock Susan undressed and sat in her dark bedroom looking out the window. Henry and Mrs. Taylor came along in back of the children. Laughing and chatting, she clung to his arm. Although Henry smiled and nodded his head as she

spoke, two or three times he said something to the children; once he turned to watch the efforts of a drunk stepping down from the curb.

"Night," Hiram shouted and ran around the corner.

Tim and Eleanor started in toward the house when Henry called, "Aren't you going to escort Mrs. Taylor home?"

They all walked over to the Taylors' where Henry freed himself and shook Mrs. Taylor's hand. Susan wondered if Mr. Taylor saw them. Margaret Taylor reached toward Henry's arm, as if to emphasize something she had to say or to detain him. Before she was able to touch him, he was racing through the snow toward his own house with Tim and Eleanor. Tim won. Mrs. Taylor watched them. Nellie meanwhile climbed her stoop.

Before Henry came in Susan got into bed and pretended to be asleep. Henry undressed quietly; in bed he lay along the edge. Susan struggled to smother every breath. Henry moved in toward her. "Susie," he whispered. She did not answer. Bitterly she recalled how a few weeks before when she had nestled close to him he had yawned, sent off fumes of stale tobacco and said, "I'm dog tired," and turned away from her. Tenderly he touched her thighs. His warm fingers electrified her, and she stirred. "Don't give in," she warned herself. Henry moved closer. Susan trembled and moved away. Henry put an arm across her and locked her where she lay. Still she said nothing. His body, hot and moist, drew closer. Susan buried her face in the pillows. He encircled her with his arms and pressed against her. The warmth of his breath trickled into her ear. The tickling sensation caused her to move slightly and she felt the firm smooth skin of his inner arm against her breast. He wrapped his legs around her and rubbed against her. "Don't, don't," she cautioned herself and threw her arms around his neck. He held her tight and gripped her with his knees. He kissed her ears, her opened mouth, her neck, her breasts, her body. He separated her legs and pulled a pillow down until it raised her buttocks. His body moisture bubbled and broke against her as he rose and fell. She clung to him even after he moaned release and lay still until he pinched her lightly and said, "Night, Kitty."

Contentedly she sighed.

"You looked very pretty and young tonight with your hair in braids." Roughly, but playfully, he rolled her over and with his knee crooked hers. "Damn it, you looked as ripe as a virgin wench in that kimono." He yawned. "I kept feeling you all through the game."

She thought of how the gray wrapper had embarrassed her. "Thank you, dear," she said.

A grunt acknowledged he had heard her speak. His head dropped onto her shoulder. With his knee pressing into the back of her own, his arm heavy on her hip, he took a deep breath and snored.

Throughout the night she lay without a desire to sleep, without feeling, without thinking. Nothing mattered, neither the noises that Henry made, nor that the heat of his body made her sweat, nor that he stretched his legs with such force he almost shoved her off the bed.

Toward morning, her joints aching after a night of long periods in which she forced herself to lie still, she sat up in bed and looked down at him. In the gray light of dawn his features were hazy and gave a shadowy softness to his easy smile, a guiltless childlike smile, it seemed to her.

Olive was wrong, she thought; a man can go in and out of an affair without a woman creeping under his skin. What was that her mother used to say? Oh, yes. A married couple in a double bed can weather any storm, patch anything up. He had been especially tender tonight, made her feel she was a part of him once more; by the way he had kissed her she knew he had fully desired her once more. She was glad she had never created a scene or tried to bring the situation to a head. Nothing had happened to destroy the unity of the family. Henry had had his fling. He was approaching forty now; old enough to settle down. Much of the fire was gone.

She recalled early days of their marriage, the intensity, the madness, the fury with which he embraced her, the way he explored her body and lingered over it, where and how he kissed her, words he had taught her to say, her lack of shame. She

wondered if he ever thought of those nights, regretted that they were lost in the past. She wondered if he had ever experienced such ecstatic delights with anyone else, if he, indeed, ever went as far with anyone else. Areas of light began to break, and she noticed the exactness with which his hair was trimmed along his ears. An impulse to run the length of her finger against the stiff unseen hairs of his face was more than she could resist. He shook his head to throw off the tickler and turned his back to her.

1912, December 7

HAND IN HAND, MARY AND ARNOLD TURNED FROM THE SECOND AVENUE smells of spices and garlic and oil and hot bread to the faint stench of the stagnant water of Gowanus Canal that hung in the thin winter mist grayed by smoke. Ahead of them Tim and Eleanor, skipping and hopping, waved to the driver of a wagon which bore the legend, "If cutting prices is a crime, Bates pleads guilty." Seven or eight narrow five-story soot-rotted brick tenements headed both sides of the long street; beyond were two- and three-story factories that depended for shipping on the narrow waterway cut back from New York Bay.

Arnold jerked his hand out of Mary's and rubbed his eye.

"What's the matter?" Mary asked.

"Something got in."

Mary kneeled down before him. Children playing in the street gathered around them. "Look over there, that way," Mary directed, and put the rolled corner of her handkerchief to his eye. "Ah, a cinder. Blow it into the wind for luck."

A boy standing in back of her blew over her shoulder and the corner of the handkerchief she held up quivered. "I didn't mean you," Mary said.

"Wanna make something of it?"

Without answering him, Mary rose, took Arnold's hand, and

tucked it into the pocket of her tweed coat, where she continued to hold onto it. "Nolly, what is Santa to get you?" she asked.

"I won't tell." His voice was muffled by the turned-up collar of his dark blue and green plaid mackinaw and the lowered ear flaps of his cap.

"What's that!"

"It's a secret."

"Secrets from Mary?"

His face jutted out of the heavy cloth that encompassed it and broke into a guilty grin. At a sound like that of a stumbling animal they turned around and paused to watch a horse and wagon pass over broken cobblestones interspersed with mud patches before they followed Tim and Eleanor into the factory. The poorly aired, poorly lighted two-story wooden structure, heavy with the smells of warm leather, rancid machine oil, sweat, and the dry wood of the old building, which was made up of crude sections hurriedly added as the business had grown, vibrated to the pounding of heavy machines. Arnold clung to the skirt of Mary's coat as they went from the narrow hall through the office which led to the factory proper. Tim and Eleanor, who had devised a game of crunching with their heels twisted scraps of metal on the floor of the narrow aisles, interrupted their sport to watch the spiritless regularity with which a grease-stained man fed sheets of brass and copper into the gaping jaws of a huge press.

"What makes it come out that shape?" Tim asked, pointing to an oblong tray, almost touching the machine's rotating leather belt as he did so.

Slapping down his hand, Mary shouted above the heavy even drone of the machines, "God ain't going to give you another set of fingers."

"I'll beat you upstairs," Tim called and tagged his sister. The two of them ran alongside a moving conveyor, which carried bowls and candelabra and umbrella urns dropped by the machines through a hole in the wall, and dashed up splintered steps to the second story. At the top they glanced at one another,

Tim nodded his head, Eleanor nodded hers, and they slid down the banister. Arnold, who had a tight grip on the rail, winced, but made no attempt to remove his hand when their bodies passed over it. "Slow poke," first Tim, then Eleanor called, as they passed him on their way up the second time.

"I ain't," he answered, moving as fast as his small thin legs could carry him, while taking care to remain a safe distance from the opening in back of each step.

Through the ladder-type openings Arnold caught a glimpse of a woman at one of the presses. "Do 'chines go old like peoples?" he asked.

"Such questions you think up," Mary said and, lifting him, carried him under her arm.

"No," he cried, kicking frantically. "No, let me down."

Ignoring his request Mary carried him as far as a partitioned-off corner on the second floor, where they found Henry bending over a two-burner gas stove on a crudely constructed table. Above him, precariously low, were some unpainted shelves, black with age and dirt and crowded with bottles of all shapes and sizes, each one carefully labeled. When his visitors burst in upon him he turned to face them, holding before him a toy-sized platinum pan filled with a boiling black liquid.

"What you making, pop?" Tim asked.

"Horse medicine."

"Again. Which horse is it this time?"

"Languor."

"Which one's he?"

"That one, that one." Henry pointed indefinitely out the window, yellow with smoke and dust, in the direction of a group of six or seven grass-starved lifeless horses tied to posts before a row of delivery wagons in the dirt enclosure below.

"Which one, pop?"

"That one down there."

"Languor? Hasn't he been sick a long time?"

Henry put down the pan and switched off the gas flame. He rose and fell on the balls of his feet, swaying slightly, snapping his suspenders in time to his pendulous motion. "Yes, son,

he is slow in coming around. We must give him time. The older we get the more we realize that many things, many things we really set our hearts on, elude us only because of lack of time. Some of us go through life, a long life, Tim, without having the time to find the things we seek or to know what we seek. It even takes time to discover what is reality, and then it takes more time to lose reality in dreams."

The children, even Mary, gaped.

Henry chuckled and patted their bottoms and laughed. "Don't look so puzzled. That wasn't intended as a riddle. Come on, let's get moving."

"We want a ride first," Eleanor said.

"Okay, while I clean up, go down into the yard and have your fun."

Tim and Eleanor ran ahead. At the stairs Arnold sat down and moved from step to step in a sitting position.

"Baby," Mary said.

"The stairs has holes," Arnold answered, but when Mary offered him her hand he shoved it away.

By the time they reached the yard Tim, already mounted, was tugging at the rope tied loosely around the horse's neck, urging the animal to "giddyap." Eleanor was imitating him. "Come on, Arnie, get in line," Tim called.

A porter lifted Arnold onto the sunken bony back of one of the horses and led the animal around the circle in back of Tim and Eleanor. Arnold, grim and tense, leaned forward, tightly hugging the horse. However, each time he passed Mary his eyes glowed with daring and he relaxed his hold enough to motion a greeting with his fingers.

"Perhaps you kids would get more fun putting some pep into these horses than from visiting Santa," Henry called when he came out.

"What!" Tim shouted, and he and Eleanor jumped to the ground.

Henry helped Arnold down. "I wonder where he's more apt to be, at Loeser's or Segal Cooper's."

Tim winked. "Segal Cooper's, pop."

"That boy just likes the idea of getting into New York," Mary said.

"Daddy promised Segal Cooper's," Eleanor pouted.

"I guess we all have a yen for New York, haven't you, Mary?"

Mary blushed.

"Gee, some class," broke from Tim when he saw that Henry had hired an automobile for the occasion.

"Daddy, which was Languor?" Arnold, sitting next to his father on Mary's lap, asked as they drove along.

"Couldn't you tell? The one languishing."

Arnold looked at him quizzically. "They all looked sick," he said.

"They sure did," Tim called from the back seat. "And what ever happened to Adynamia?"

"Adynamia? Adynamia? Oh, Adynamia! Apparently he never realized that his slow plodding services were of value to his masters, and he just moped away."

"What about the magic medicine? Couldn't that cure him?"

"That particular formula didn't have the right magic in it for horses."

At Segal Cooper's Tim helped Arnold onto the moving steps and as they rode along asked him, "Who wrote your list for you, Arnie?"

"Nobody."

"How will Santa know where to send what you choose?"

"Santa knows."

When they reached the toy department, Henry, who stood behind the others on the escalator, gripped his younger son under the arms and set him on the floor. They all stood spellbound before the wonderland of miniature ferris wheels, slides, chute-the-chutes, trains, doll houses aglow with real electric lights, unicycles, bicycles, tricycles. Santa sat on a gold throne under a crimson canopy embroidered in gold. He patted the cheek or pressed the hand of each youngster who passed before him. In back of him, in readiness to take him to the land beyond the sky, stood four reindeer harnessed to a sleigh. A giant who could reach to the ceiling made an arch of his stilt legs

under which children walked. Little Jack Horner sat in a corner pulling plums out of a pie. A dwarf led a donkey, on which a little girl was seated, around a ring of sand.

"Simple Simon, live, real, fishing in a pail. There," Arnold cried and was about to run to Simon when he bumped into a green-faced clown with an orange bulb nose in a suit of shiny white satin with patches of broken purple hearts and wearing three yellow cotton jonquils in his lapel.

"Hello to you, hello, big boy. I tumblesault hello, and low, smell my fragrant yellow, my, my, that's the plucky fellow."

"OH!" Arnold's face, wet with water that had been squirted from the flower, puckered, ready for tears, but the others laughed so heartily he strained a smile, and then, looking up, informed the clown seriously, "Your nose is lighted up."

Mary started to wipe his face with her handkerchief, but the clown bumped her aside with his buttocks. "This is enchantment land," he said. "Water vamoose."

"Ow! Your stick stings."

"A wand, my dear fellow, a genuine imitation fairy wand. What will you have from it? A balloon. Presto, a balloon. One, two. Quite a few. Red, yellow, green blue. And a pipe. See the color bubbles of the pipe. Blow, bubbles, blow, blow. Off you go. Bubbles, poof to troubles, float too high, too high. There, a ballon goes by. Catch it! Quick! Ugh, it floats away. Hear it click? Zoom, no more balloon, all too soon. Look, a careless bubble burst by a balloon. Don't pull my pantaloon. To the moon leap for a bubble or a balloon. Where is a bubble? Where a balloon?"

"I caught it."

"The bubble or the balloon?"

"The balloon. The red balloon."

"Boo hoo. You who've robbed me of my balloon, take my pipe, for I'm all goon." The clown, surrounded by green and yellow and blue balloons that floated in the air around him somersaulted away and left Arnold, who held the soap bubble pipe and the red balloon, and the others staring after him.

Mary laughed. "He left us all flabbergasted, Nolly, but he

was only playing. Come," she said and led Arnold away. At the sleigh she lifted him up to touch the snowflakes that did not melt sprinkled on the huge bearskin blanket thrown across the back seat. Eleanor went from counter to counter. Tim was inspecting sails as tall as himself on a toy yacht when he heard a woman on the other side of the boat display say coquettishly, "But, well, you said you'd be here."

"I didn't say you were to come," a voice that sounded like his father's answered.

Otherwise remaining still, Tim crushed the sail slightly. All he could see was the green sleeve of a woman's coat.

"This store is a public place."

"I told you I was going to spend the day with my family."

"I'd like to meet them."

"You—"

"'You what, Henry?"

"You know that's impossible. Now, be a good girl and run along."

"I intend to stay here."

"Do as you please as long as you leave me alone."

"If I go to the fountain will you meet me there?"

"No."

Tim let the sail fall back into place and walked over to Eleanor.

"This doll opens and closes its eyes," she said. "Beautiful as a queen, isn't she?"

"Well, isn't she?" she asked again when he did not answer her. "Not that I want a doll; I'm going to get a bike."

"I'm sorry, sis. I didn't follow you." He walked away chewing the side of his mouth.

Eleanor trailed after him. "What's the matter, Tim?"

"I, I stubbed my foot."

"Why don't you sit down?"

"It'll be all right." He noticed his father coming toward them and turned off at the counter on which bridges and houses built of miniature steel beams were on display.

Henry, cutting around the opposite side, came face to face with

his son and daughter. His hand on Tim's shoulder he asked, "Interested in one of these sets, Tim?"

Pulling sharply away from his father he said, "No, pop, I'd like that boat to enter in the Prospect Park races."

"Which one?"

"That one, the big one over there."

"That's quite an expensive job."

"Yes I know, I just came from there. I was looking at it."

"You were just looking at it! Well, we'll see."

"I'd like it, pop." They moved along and in passing Arnold, Tim pinched the red balloon and it burst with a bang.

"That wasn't kind," Mary said and raised her hand to slap his.

Ducking he called, "Pop, tell her to keep her hands off me," and he glanced in the direction of a young woman in a dark green coat who was watching them.

"Let's get out of here, Mary," Henry said.

"You promised to take us down to the fountain for a hot chocolate with whipped cream," Eleanor said.

"Arnold ain't seen Santa yet," Mary said.

"Well, take him up and get it over with."

Mary looked bewildered.

"I'm sorry, Mary. I've developed a headache."

Taking Arnold's hand Mary stood in the long line before Santa.

"I'll stay with you," Henry said.

Instead of merely patting Arnold's cheek, as he did the other children's, Santa lifted him onto his lap. "And what am I to bring you?" he asked.

"A yellow bird. A yellow bird that sings."

Santa looked at Mary. "Wouldn't you rather have a kiddie-car? Or a three-wheel bike? Only one wheel more than a man's."

Vigorously Arnold shook his head.

On the way home everyone was unusually quiet. Arnold, clutching his clay soap-bubble pipe and the string with a small piece of torn red rubber dangling from it, was fast asleep on Mary's lap.

"Cute, wasn't he," Henry said to break the silence, "the way

he asked for a yellow bird? Probably got the idea at my sister's. Her canary, you know."

"A bird must have care, Mr. Bates."

"Then, I guess my young son has his first responsibility."

"Pop," Tim called from the back seat, "I made a list of things I'd like from Santa beside the sail boat."

"That so?"

"Yes, pop, that's so."

1914, June 24

SUSAN TWISTED AND TURNED UNTIL THE THIN BLANKET WHICH COVered her slipped to the floor. In her sleep she reached for it but seized only air. Turning around she rolled into the center of the bed where she made wry faces and shook her head as if to throw off a bad dream. Aroused by her own movements she half-opened one eye, inhaled deeply, and still drowsy, dug her face into the warmth of the large feather pillow and tried to fall asleep again. In her resistance against waking she flung out her arm. For perhaps five or six seconds she remained without moving; then, her fingers spread, her hands moved slowly down the sheet. Where was Henry? With a start she sat up. What time was it? Six o'clock. What was that sickening stench? She sniffed several times; then for a moment she sat still listening. The house was terrifyingly quiet. She sniffed again. The odor was not at all like something burning; yet, what else could it be? She jumped up, slipped into a wrapper, and ran into the hall. No smoke on the fourth floor. She looked into Arnold's room. Everything in it was in order, the child and Katie were asleep. She leaned over the rail. The odor came from below.

Just outside the kitchen she stood with her feet apart, her hands on her hips, her expression one of weary resignation. A brown sticky substance oozed in streaks down the wall above

the iron coal stove, which, to keep dampness out of the house, was kept in use throughout the summer. The heat in the kitchen intensified the foulness of the odor. Henry, his hair uncombed, without socks or slippers, in red peppermint striped pajamas rumpled after a night in bed, stirred a thick substance that steamed and boiled over. Susan retched. Without looking up Henry said, "I solved it, Susie."

Gagging painfully, Susan put her head over the basin in the passageway. Henry laughed. "You funny girl."

"What goes on here?" Susan demanded when she was able to speak, and walked over to see what Henry was doing. "My frying pan, my new aluminum frying pan."

"I'll get you another."

"Who is going to clean up this mess?"

"It is pretty bad. I guess I should have waited until I got to the factory, but I couldn't, Susie. About four-thirty this morning, I must have been dreaming, an idea hit me. Woke me up. I didn't want to lose it."

"What are you making this time? What is this smell?"

"Glue. I worked out a formula to make glass and metal adhere. You know the trouble I've been having on those materials. That stuff I picked up at the chemists on my way home last night works wonders."

"Ridiculous." Susan retched again. "The idea of doing this at home is ridiculous. What a man you are to live with."

With the hem of her wrapper she covered her nose and the flesh of one leg, extended forward, could be seen through the transparent chiffon of her nightgown. Henry rolled his hand, sticky and brown with glue stains, around her thigh. At the click of Arnold's childish steps on the stairs, Susan drew her legs together and shoved his hand away. The patter of tiny feet stopped abruptly inside the kitchen door, and Susan and Henry both laughed at the look of nausea on Arnold's face and the way he stood tugging at his short cotton ribbed shirt to bring it down below the navel. "It stinks," he said.

"I'm sorry, son. I guess horse medicine can't pass for lily-of-the-valley perfume."

"How is the horse, daddy?"

"Coming along fine. Going to get well. Why don't you come down to the factory and see him?"

"I don't like the factory. The stairs has holes."

"Holes? Oh, you mean they have no backboards. You're a big boy, Arnold, you shouldn't mind that. Tell you what you do; have Katie bring you down tomorrow afternoon. Now that Speed King is almost well, I'll let you ride him in the street. You won't have to come upstairs at all."

"Henry, you should correct Arnold."

"What for?"

"He said stairs has."

"Did he?" Henry scratched his head and pushed out his lower lip to emphasize how thoroughly he was weighing the problem. "Let's not be too hard on him today. It's his birthday. Birthdays come only once a year. Thank God for that. Do you realize I'll be forty-one?" With the spring of an animal that has broken a leash he lifted Arnold. "Piggy-back," he sang. "Piggy-back to market." The child on his shoulders, one thin leg pressed against each cheek, Henry started upstairs. Hastily Susan opened windows and doors and followed.

On the way up Henry said, "Let's have a get-dressed race. The first one downstairs gets a cookie."

Be forty-one, Susan thought, he'll be forty-two, but who would believe it?

"I'll get a cookie anyway."

"That so! Okay, we'll make it a nickel, five whole pennies."

"Who pays?"

"Mamma." To Susan, Henry said, "And we thought he had no business acumen."

"You shouldn't teach the children to gamble," Susan said. "They pick up bad habits soon enough."

"How right you are, Susie old gal. I love you for your wisdom."

All morning the stench hung about the house. Mary and Susan sprayed eau de cologne and violet water around, and the mixture with sweet scents made that of the glue more sickening.

One vexation followed another. Arnold could not be kept out of the front parlor while Eleanor was getting her piano lesson. Three times Susan tiptoed into the room and led Arnold out, and each time, as soon as Susan became occupied with some household chore, he went right back inside. The fourth time Susan shoved him onto the porch with a warning that a spanking was due him; then she hurried back into the hall and pulled together the wide double rolling doors, shutting off Eleanor and her teacher. Her anger made her breathless, and she waited a moment before she called, "Katie." That girl, that girl; she knows I want him out of doors. Boys, dances, boys, nothing else on her mind. A good steady place doesn't mean a thing to a girl any more.

"Katie's out in the back yard hanging the wash," Mary yelled from the kitchen.

Susan shook out the duster she held and went into the den. When she came out Arnold was leaning against the closed panels, his head pressed against the crack between them. At sight of Susan he ran. She started after him but was distracted by a commotion in the basement vestibule. Arnold, meanwhile, got halfway down the porch steps so Susan looked over the banister. Two boys, supporting Tim, were tugging at the screen door; three or four others could be seen behind him. "What are you boys up to?" she asked.

"Tim's been hurt."

Susan rushed down the steps and pounded her fist where the wooden frame of the screen was stuck until it gave way. Two thin streams of blood ran down Tim's face from cuts above his left eye. Susan pushed back his head and tried to lift him but he was too heavy and tall, almost as tall as herself. One of the boys who supported him stepped aside to let her take his place. With the other she dragged Tim, who leaned heavily on them, his toes scraping the floor, to the sofa in the dining room.

"Mary," she called, "bring me some water. Hot. Quickly. Quickly. Tim has been hurt."

A sound of running water stopped and a heavy pot crashed into the sink. "What's it, mum?" Mary called.

"Some hot water. Tim's been hurt." Sweating, her hand trembling, Susan wiped the blood away from his face with the edge of her white embroidered petticoat.

The boys, silent and pale, huddled together, their gloomy frightened faces grotesquely mottled by whitish sunspots which came through the ecru lace curtains. When they shifted their weight they did so in unison and tried to do it noiselessly and with each small squeak of the floor they came to rest at awkward angles. Occasionally one sniffed or stifled a cough. Their throats, already dry from fright, were further irritated by the oppressive smells of peroxide, glue, and perfume, but they dared not let themselves be heard. In this disquieting silence Mary tore an old sheet into bandage lengths and with each piercing rip the boys looked anxiously from one to the other.

Mary examined the wounds; one gash extended into his eyebrow, another, somewhat longer, ran along his forehead. "Not deep," she said and dabbed them with peroxide.

Tim let out a piercing shriek and turned his face toward the wall. Susan, on the edge of the sofa, drew his head into her lap and gently washed away the blood with balls of moist absorbent cotton. Each time she dabbed his wounds with the wadding a finger lightly brushed the smooth skin that ran off into his hair, and as his head dug deeper into her legs a protective smile crept into her eyes.

The door upstairs banged. Susan, still somewhat unnerved from the shock of the way she had found Tim bleeding, gave a short sudden jump. Her involuntary twitch startled Tim; she could feel him tremble. "That was only Eleanor letting the music teacher out," she said and pulled the shutters from their boxes and drew them part way across the windows. "Someday your sister may learn how to open and close a door like a lady."

Voices drifted down from the parlor floor and Susan called, "Arnold, why don't you stay outside and play? With whom was Tim fighting?" she asked, not directing her question to any boy in particular.

"He wasn't fighting, ma'am," one of the boys answered. "We were playing baseball in the gutter. He got struck by the ball."

"Give each of the boys a cookie, Mary," she said. "And, if you will excuse us, I think it would be better for Tim to rest quietly."

"Yessum, sure," the boys whispered almost in unison. One by one they dipped into the cookie jar that Mary held out to them and, their heels barely touching the floor, they filed through the door, some expressing thanks with a nod, some mumbling it under their breath.

The boys gone, Mary said, "There ain't much peroxide left in that bottle."

"I have some iodine upstairs. Wait a minute, Mary, I don't know in just which cabinet. I'll get it."

"Don't use iodine, mom, it burns worse than peroxide."

A ray of sunshine that drifted in through the split in the curtains and the partially opened shutter brought streaks of red and yellow and gold into Tim's straight brown hair. Susan paused to gaze at him; she wanted to get back onto the sofa, to lie down next to him, to take him in her arms, to sing softly to him, to rock him to sleep. Gently, along the streaks of light, she stroked his head. "I'll be careful, very careful," she said.

While rummaging through the medicine chest in her room she heard a sharp crackling sound followed by a scraping and scuffling of feet on the street. Before she could decide whether the boys had resumed their game in front of the house, a shrill voice yelled, "Out. Batter up." She stepped into the hall, thinking she must tell the boys to play further down the block, when she bumped into Eleanor and Hiram Robinson who were coming out of the big hall closet where she stored out-of-season clothes.

"Good morning, good morning," and Hiram, an embarrassed grin on his face, his pink cheeks pinker than usual, hastily tipped his cap three or four times. Eleanor muttered something about looking for a blue and yellow striped flannel blazer. Both fled down the steps two at a time and dashed out of doors.

As Susan painted his wounds Tim twisted and whined that the iodine burned. When she bent over to caress him, to assure him that the sting would last only a moment, he lurched and

threw the bottle from her hand. She caught it before it reached the carpet, but not before the iodine stained her fingers. With one of the bandage strips she tried to rub off the brown streaks, but the iodine had already dried on her skin. When she turned back Mary was placing a white patch over the cuts.

Her head splitting, Susan sank into the rocker. The steady click, click, click, of the mantel clock's pendulum reverberated around her, and she did not ask the boys to play elsewhere, thankful to have the noise of their game break into the even rhythm, but before she realized it, the street noises and sounds were lost in the monotonous beat of time. The throbbing in her head, the thumping of her heart, the pulsing at her wrist, keyed to the measured tick, and all pain lessened and gradually ceased. The light dimmed; the ground slipped away from under her. She no longer heard anything, no longer saw anything; all sensation passed except a sensation of floating. Easily, swiftly, slowly, she whirled where nothing remained but time, where time, itself, although it gyrated in a gigantic revolution, ceased to exist. In this timeless space her transparent form floated round and round and round, growing longer, thinner, fading into, becoming one with the lightless, darkless swirl.

An icy kiss on her neck caused Susan to shudder.

"Susie, you look pooped. And your hand?"

Opening her eyes, Susan looked straight into Henry's. "What time is it?" she asked.

"Time to eat," he said and walked over to the sofa and pointed to the bandage square on Tim's head.

"That late?"

"Susie, what is the matter with you?"

"I had a terrible morning."

"What happened? What's wrong with Tim?"

"Shhhh. Keep your voice down. He was hit by a baseball. Nothing serious. More frightened than hurt. But I want you to talk to Eleanor." The remark slipped out and only then did she become aware that she had placed any significance to the meeting on the landing.

Henry put a large manila envelope he carried on the table,

pulled out a chair, and sat down. "What about Eleanor?" he asked.

"She went into that big hall closet on our floor with Hiram Robinson."

"What for?"

"That's just it. I don't know. She said something about looking for an old flannel blazer. But what would she want that for today? She's not playing tennis."

"Why didn't you ask her?"

"I had my mind on Tim at the time."

"Don't you see, Susie, you are just unstrung."

"Now, look here, Henry Bates, Eleanor is your only daughter. I'd think you'd worry about her going into dark closets with boys. In the first place the jacket is not in that closet. And if it were, why did she have to take Hiram Robinson in to look for it?"

"Why not?"

"She's at a dangerous age. Going on fourteen. For weeks, ever since I let her change over from a Ferris waist to a corset cover, she's been pestering me for a long dress and high-heeled shoes."

"Now, now," and Henry reached over to pat Susan's iodine-stained hand gripping the arm of the rocker. "Take it easy, take it easy. Mmmmmmm, something smells good." He walked toward the kitchen and called softly, "Mary, I'm home. You might let Eleanor and Arnold know."

When he turned back to Susan he was grinning.

"I had a wretched morning. You. Tim. Eleanor. And Arnold won't obey me. What strikes you so funny?"

"What you said about Eleanor being at a dangerous age. Which age isn't dangerous?"

"I fail to see the humor. And I don't see how you can take your only daughter's growing up so lightly."

"I'm not taking it lightly. You know I feel that both she and Tim are getting a bit out of hand. I sent away for that information, Susie, that's what I have here." From the envelope Henry had placed on the table he withdrew some folders and

fanned them. "Booklets issued by specialists in culture."

"I won't have it; I told you I won't have it; I don't believe in it."

"We've had all this out before. What were your experiences at boarding school that you object so vehemently?"

Susan reddened. "I only slept in for one year, while my mother and father were abroad. I believe children should grow up at home where they have the examples and love of their parents. I won't have the family broken up, Henry."

"Cut the dramatics. I don't intend to go through another performance such as we had the other day."

Mary's voice calling to Eleanor and Arnold over the Robinson fence drifted in from the yard. Henry bent over Tim, who rolled back and forth. "Are you well enough to get up and have a bite with us?" he asked.

Tim blinked several times; then digging his knuckles into his eyes said, "What's that, pop?"

Arnold came in and, noticing his father, ran over to him and jumped up and tightened his legs around Henry's waist. Henry made a seat of his arms. "Happy birthday, young man," he said.

"Where's my present?"

"Where's your tooth?"

"Mary has it," Arnold answered and bent his head to wipe drivel from his nose on the shoulder of his blue dimity shirt. "She tied a string around the doorknob and pulled it out and she's saving it to bring me luck. Where's my present, pop?"

"What makes you so sure I brought one?"

"You promised me."

"Now, did I?"

Arnold looked at him with wide eyes, but said nothing.

Henry hugged him. "Don't look so disappointed, son. It's in the hall, just beyond the door. But you are not to look at it until after you have eaten."

"Why?"

"I don't want you all excited. I want you to digest your meal."

"Is Eleanor coming?" Susan called to Mary.

During luncheon each one tried to guess what Henry had

brought Arnold. Mary, as she placed a platter of creamed salmon on the table, guessed drawing books with paints and crayons. Eleanor said, "Nope, it's a music box that plays seven tunes."

"Seven is the lucky number," Mary said and pulled Eleanor's braid. No one except Susan seemed aware of the catalogues in back of Henry's plate. She joined the guessing game by speculating that Henry's gift was a steel building set, but all the while her eyes were focused on the pictured heavy blocks of gray stone covered with oak vines, the deeply chiseled acanthus leaves of the heavy, tightly closed bronze doors, the broad, unpeopled, treeless lawn that ran off the edge of the glossy cover of the top booklet.

"You're all bad guessers," Henry said, his mouth full of food. "But Arnold is not the only one I thought of today. Tim, have you ever dreamed of military school?"

Susan turned white; her eyes bulged with fury.

"Have I?"

"I thought it might be a good idea to let you get off to school for awhile. Give your mother a little more time for me."

"No joke?" Tim asked.

"No joke."

"Have they a football team?"

"Football, baseball. Every sport you can think of. Even fencing."

"Gee. Real boy's stuff."

"That's it; real boy's stuff. However, your mother isn't enthusiastic about giving you up; for some reason or other she enjoys having you around, so we worked out a compromise plan." He glanced at Susan and smiled. She avoided his eyes and toyed with the ivory handle of the silver coffeepot. "Here's a school up on the Hudson from which you could get home every Friday to spend week ends with us." He waved the booklet at which Susan had been staring.

Tim pulled it from Henry's hand. "Looks dead like a monastery."

"It's a fine old structure. Built by a millionaire, well, not exactly built. He bought an old Balkan castle, had it disman-

tled and reassembled stone by stone over here. But the wheel being what it is, he went broke and the school bought the place for a song. There's a 35,000-seat stadium in back of this main building."

"I have something to say about this." Susan's tone was emphatic.

"What about me?" Eleanor asked.

Ignoring them both, Henry turned to Arnold. "Would you like to go away to school, too?"

Arnold, who had stopped drinking his milk to follow the conversation, moved his head slowly. No, he did not want to go.

"Tim. Tim. Everything for Tim," Eleanor said.

"I wouldn't say that." Henry's voice was serious, almost stern. "But why are you so eager to leave us?"

"What will I do here after Hiram and Tim go away?"

"You have the Taylor girl and other girl friends, haven't you, Ellie?"

"Girls." She scowled.

"Don't you think you ought to stay home as a companion to your mother?"

Eleanor ran over to Susan and buried her head in the folds of Susan's sleeve. With an arm around her daughter, Susan said, "Stop teasing her."

"Come here, Ellie," Henry said. Eleanor clung to her mother. "Wouldn't you like to see what boarding schools there are for girls?"

Before Susan could catch her breath, Eleanor was leaning against her father's knee.

"Where is Hiram going?" Henry asked.

"To a school in Virginia."

"Virginia, huh. Well, that's too far. Anyway, I think it would be nice to send you to a school where your big brother can look after you."

"I'd rather be near Hiram."

"I haven't said you may go anywhere yet," Susan said.

Arnold meanwhile pulled in the box that Henry had left in the hall. As he opened it his face dropped. Slowly he took out

his gift, a football, long as his body was wide, and stood with it pressed against him. His heavy lashes were down and seemed to cast a shadow over his entire face. His slender, childish hands, wrapped around the ball, were completely still.

Tim gasped, ran over, and with his entire hand caressed the inflated leather. "Whee. Pigskin," he said. "A real genuine football. Gee, won't I have fun with it." He ran to a window. "Hey, fellas," he called into the street. "Hey, fel—"

"That ball is Arnold's," Henry said.

Tim turned back into the room. "He'll never play with it."

"Why not?"

"He never does anything."

"Anything? He must do something with his time."

"He follows hurdy-gurdies. Yesterday he trailed one for six blocks. The organ-grinder had to bring him back. Couldn't shake him. And was he sore. 'You keepa your brudda away,'" Tim mimicked, "'I ain't no kidanapper.'"

"We were so ashamed of him," Eleanor cut in. "Those big teeth of his sticking out and wiping his nose with the dago's dirty red handkerchief. Ma, can't you teach him not to let his nose drip all the time?"

"Ellie," Henry said. "What did you call the organ-grinder?"

"I'm sorry, papa," she said somberly, pressing close to him and twirling a strand of his hair around her finger.

"You bad girl." Henry smiled and slapped her lightly on the buttocks.

Susan winced. Not that she was jealous; she simply wished she had her daughter's knack of winning Henry over.

All the while Arnold stood with both arms around the football. Without uttering a word he remained just inside the doorway tightly gripping the ball, his long thin face appearing longer and thinner in the dim light of the hall.

"Come here, Arnold." Henry motioned to him. Slowly Arnold walked over and dropped the ball in Henry's lap. "Don't you like your gift?"

"Thank you, daddy."

Tenderly Henry wiped Arnold's nose. "I thought a football

would thrill you. A boy should take an interest in sports. It's healthy."

Tears ran down Arnold's face, but he did not speak.

"Don't cry, Arnold," Henry said. "A family is like a symphony; that is, a well-balanced family. There are all sorts of movements, gay, sad; all sorts of desires; all sorts of dreams. Tim, here, he covers sports well enough for us. Eleanor represents the feminine element; you, the dreamer. Yes, a family is like a symphony, with its harmony and discord, its light moods and heavy."

Arnold stood entranced, his tears drying in muddy streaks along his cheeks, listening to his father's words. When Henry finished Arnold looked up at him as if he expected, hoped, that more might come. When it became apparent that Henry had finished speaking, Arnold, a catch in his voice, said, "That sounds pretty, like music."

"Music? Everything is music to you, isn't it, son?" Henry turned to Susan, who, with two knives and two forks, arranged and disarranged a square around her plate. "I think we should give him piano lessons." Susan shrugged her shoulders. "Would you like that?" Henry asked Arnold.

Arnold grinned happily, and Henry patted his head. Arnold started to climb into Henry's lap, but was hindered by Henry taking out his watch from his vest pocket. "Sorry, son. I must be getting along." In the hall he stopped at the foot of the steps. "I'm going upstairs to get some cigars. I'll leave from the parlor floor. Bye," he called and blew a kiss to Susan across the palm of his hand. "Hope the kids don't get a belly-ache from their ice cream and cake this afternoon."

The children ran out into the street and Susan, left alone, continued to play with the silver knives and forks. At last she started upstairs to sort some linens and as she approached the third-floor landing Katie's giggle rippled through the hall. Susan wondered what the girl could be giggling about. Why was she in the bedroom at this hour? The upper floors had been done during the morning. The giggling became muffled; then sharp and clear again. As the door had not been tightly closed a slight

push sent it flying wide open. Petrified by the scene in the mirror over the mantel shelf of the bedroom fireplace, Susan remained where she was, staring at Henry who had one hand across Katie's mouth, one hand down the wide round neck of her peasant blouse.

"Hush, your mistress will hear you," he whispered.

With two hands Katie pulled away the hand he held across her mouth. Her eyes heavy, her lips puckered, she said, "You tickle me."

Henry's free hand went up and down across Katie's thigh, over her breast, over her abdomen. He drew close to her. She threw her arms around his neck. Their bodies moved, hers backward, his forward, until together they pressed heavily against the foot of the ebony bed. He kissed her neck, her ear, her mouth. She sighed. Without warning he drew away from her. He breathed unevenly and ran a finger inside his starched collar. She drew the leather of his belt through the buckle. "You little devil, lovelip the sugarstick."

Dizzy, Susan made her way down the steps. Lipdevil. Little devil. Lip. A hired girl. A servant. A servant in the house.

A long time Susan stood with her hands on the high back of one of the carved walnut dining room chairs. All the while she stared at a reflection in the dining room mirror of two Dresden dolls, a boy in tight blue breeches, a girl in a short red dress, separated by the length of the mantel with the clock between them. Each smiled happily, insipidly. Both remained as the potter had fashioned them, the boy bowing to the girl, the girl in a curtsy. Except for the reflection of the two figures and the peppered brown paper of the wall, the mirror was blank. The porcelain girl and the boy had stood for years, since they were given to her as a wedding gift, in her bedroom. Susan decided she must be going crazy. She closed her eyes and opened them again. There stood the fixed pair.

"Katie, Katie," Susan heard Mary call out the kitchen window, and then mumble, "Where's that girl gallivantin' now?"

Susan's eyes went back and forth from one happy insipid smile to the other. "Smile," she thought, as she walked around the

table, "you can smile." At the mantel she put out her hand and touched them. It had not occurred to her that someone might have brought them down, and the actual feel of them completely unnerved her. To keep from falling to the floor she held onto a chair and leaned her head against the cool black marble ledge. Henry's steps on the stairs resounded in her ears. The street door on the parlor floor opened and closed. A few seconds later she heard Katie coming down.

"Katie, will you come here?" she called.

"Yes, ma'am."

Susan sank into a chair before the fireplace. The table was between the two women. "Katie," she said without emotion, "we will not need you any more. I would like you to leave immediately. Go upstairs and pack your things now. You will be paid for a full month."

"Yes, ma'am."

Lacking the energy to move, Susan leaned on her arms. "Not that I'm jealous, just hurt, terribly hurt," she repeated to herself over and over.

About an hour later Katie came down and went into the kitchen where she spoke a few words to Mary. When she came out, Susan, who had remained seated in the dining room, paid her. As Katie was about to leave by the basement door she bumped into Arnold. At the impact he laughed gayly and asked, "You coming out, Katie?"

"Yes."

"Why you wearing a hat?"

Katie was silent.

For the first time he noticed her valise. "What is this?" he asked.

"You know that is a valise."

Arnold reached over to touch it. Katie jerked it away.

"Where you going?"

"Away."

"Where?"

"Away."

"Mamma, mamma," Arnold cried. "Katie is going away."

"Yes, dear," Susan said and stepped into the hall.

Arnold threw his legs around Katie's. He encircled her waist with his arms, and the valise fell to the ground. "Where are you going? Where are you going?" he cried.

Susan pulled him away and drew him to herself. He slipped out of her arms and ran back to Katie as she started out again. Katie bent down and put her arms around him. Susan pulled him away. He kicked and screamed. The door opened but did not close. Arnold tried to pull away from Susan. "Behave yourself," she said, "or I will punish you. I will put you in the dark coal bin and bolt the door."

"No, no," he cried.

Unable to lift him because of the way he screamed and kicked, Susan dragged him along the floor. "I will put you in the coal bin. I will put you in the coal bin with the boogie man, where it is dark, black, where there is no light."

Mary came rushing out into the hall. "Missus. Missus Bates. Please. Please." She tried to block the cellar steps.

Arnold screamed and kicked. Susan pulled him along. "Get out of my way, Mary. Get out of my way." At the head of the steps she bumped into Mary and shoved her aside. Arnold slipped from her hands. She ran after him and caught him by the leg. He fell to the floor. She tried to pick him up. He screamed and kicked. With him half on the floor, half in her arms, she dragged him to the steps and started down, crying as she went, "I'll put you in the coal bin with the boogie man. I'll put you in the coal bin."

"Please, Missus Bates. Please."

"What's going on here?" Olive called down the steps.

"I'm putting him in the coal bin. That's where a bad boy belongs."

"Susie. Stop this nonsense. Let the child go and come up here."

Susan relaxed her hold. Arnold slipped away and ran to Olive. "Katie," he sobbed and sighed. "Katie."

Olive held him against her. "What's wrong with Katie?" she asked as she soothed him.

"Away," he sobbed. "Katie went away."

"I fired her," Susan said and walked over to the stairs leading to the parlor floor, where she sat on the bottom step. Her head ached and throbbed.

"Now, now," Olive said, "don't you want to see what I brought?"

"What?" Arnold stuttered through his sobs and tears.

"There it is."

"A piano."

Near the door stood a child's toy piano and a small stool. Arnold ran over and sat on the stool. With one finger he touched key after key. All the while he sighed and sobbed. Tears streamed down his face.

Olive sat next to Susan on the bottom step. "Susie," she said, "whatever has come over you?"

"You can't understand what I have been through."

"I have a small idea." Olive put her hand on Susan's.

"What am I to do, Olive?"

"Clarify your position."

"I can't, Olive. Such a step might lead to divorce."

"You don't want a divorce under any terms, do you, Susie?"

"I don't believe in divorce. If you make a bed . . ."

"I know. I know. You are supposed to lie in it. My mother filled me up with that rot, too. Fiddlesticks, I say. Anyway, a bed gets mussed up after a while even if no one sleeps in it. Susie darling, divorce isn't the only alternative. Why must you think in extremes? But you cannot go on destroying your personality, suffocating healthy emotions, subjecting yourself to the whim of another. You must re-establish your life on some sort of a—a self-respecting basis."

"The children. I must think of them."

Olive threw up her hands. "If it isn't religion, women have children to think of. Susie, you are deceiving yourself. Was the scene you just went through good for the children? Has it never occurred to you that Henry, without admitting why, has noticed you have grown what he calls unreasonable? He doesn't blame himself. The contrary. You are now a good excuse, a

justification for anything he chooses to do. Pull yourself together. Henry dropped in to see me one day last week and told me he thought the children were too much for you, that you haven't been the same person since Arnold was born. He thinks it might be a good idea to send the two big ones away to school for a while."

Susan turned white. "How considerate of him. Incredible, isn't it, that a woman can live with a man so many years and not be able to anticipate his actions, not be able to fathom the way he thinks?" Her head fell onto her sister-in-law's shoulder. "You can't understand what it means—" Her voice broke and she dropped her head onto her hands, supported by her elbows on her knees, "to watch your husband seek, seek, seek, without knowing what he seeks, to wait for the day he will wake up, to hope he will fall in love again, fall in love with you." Abruptly she sat up and clutched Olive's arm so tightly Olive winced. "Oh, Olive, you can't understand what it means to have an unfaithful husband."

"Yes, I can," Olive said quietly. Gently she removed her arm from Susan's grip and placed it around Susan's waist. "I can understand because I have one."

"What? Courtney?" Susan straightened and looked at Olive. "He is so good to you. He gives you everything."

"Huh! Henry gives you everything, that is he buys you anything you ask for." Her tone was flippant, skeptical. "Unfaithful husbands are generous husbands."

A dry laugh, almost a groan, broke from Susan. "A man is supposed to value a woman as he does a horse, by what she costs him."

Arnold sighed with such intensity his body shook. Susan shuddered. He kept sounding the keys.

"What happens to the sweet innocence of childhood in grown-up men?" Olive asked.

"What are you going to do?"

"Go to Reno."

"Why?"

"Less scandal."

"Stop being facetious. You know I mean why should you get a divorce?"

"Why not?"

"A woman your age. You're forty-four. How will you get another husband?"

"And if I don't?"

"A woman without a husband just does not belong. She is a misfit. People pity her."

"Do people pity Jane Addams?"

"You're not a Jane Addams. You're an average middle-class woman. You can't be expected to sacrifice your life for others."

"Or for one."

"Courtney is your husband. Marriage is give and take. Why throw him into the arms of another woman? I bet there are at least a dozen who would be tickled to death to have him. Be patient. The affair will pass."

"Yes, and then there will be another. Don't you see you cannot say that things will again be what they once were, that we can again find happiness together? No, Susie, I've been as patient as I care to be. It isn't that I don't love Courtney; I'm sure I do or I wouldn't have taken this much, but my illusions have been snapped. I'll never fully trust him again; I'll always be suspicious, looking for trouble. I am face to face with the fact that there is no escape from suffering. There is only adjustment. I did not want my marriage to break up. I did all in my power to keep it from breaking. But I must retain my self-respect."

"Olive, Olive. You will be lonesome. You will be alone for years and years."

Olive placed her hand back on Susie's. "Yes, Susie darling, I realize all that. I also realize something more. We are a group of beggars, Henry, Courtney, you and I, starving, quaking, pathetic beggars. We beseech each other to satisfy the hunger that gnaws and burns away our souls. We extend ourselves, we prostrate ourselves, we stifle ourselves, make monkeys of ourselves, only to discover that it is all in vain. The vast silent depths, the black emptiness must be lighted from within. We cannot,

we have no right to ask someone else to fill our voids. Susie, aren't you as lonely as you say I will be? Can't you see that loneliness is a transition, a step between depending on someone else and finding one's self?"

"But you will be a divorcée."

"I will also be free."

"Free for what?"

"I don't know exactly. Free anyway of a bad taste."

"It isn't feminine for a woman to be free."

"Feminine! What do you mean by femininity?"

"A woman isn't complete without a man; she needs a man to lean on, to fulfill her."

"Yes, Susie, yes, a man to tell her what time to have dinner on the table, when to be ready to go stepping, when to be satisfied to sit home alone and twiddle her thumbs, when to listen to how smart he is, when to be responsive in bed, when to doctor his belly aches, and through everything she must smile." Abruptly she rose and went through the dining room. She returned with a small linen towel, wet at one end, and washed Arnold's dirty face, asking as she did so, "Isn't it time for the party?"

Without waiting for an answer she opened the screen door and called Tim and Eleanor and the children with whom they were at play. When she stepped back into the hall she took off her duster and hung it on the antlers. In the powdery streak of sunshine that poured through the narrow panes of glass set as a frame around the door, she looked exceedingly young. Her natural colored pongee dress with a small Irish lace collar was girlish and becoming. The cream-colored veil she had worn on her head in the car fell softly over her shoulders. Susan, looking at her, felt old and miserable, and did not move from the step where she sat until Olive said, "Come, Arnold, you take in the stool and I'll carry the piano."

Noisy with laughter and talk of their game the children ran in from the street. All except Arnold found a place at the table which was gayly decorated with an apple-green crêpe paper spread and highly colored favors and flowered cardboard plates.

The explosion of the favors, from which the children pulled out vari-shaped orange and blue and purple and pink paper hats and small white strips on which fortunes were printed, frightened Arnold's canary, and it crouched in its cage. While the others called out their fortunes, Arnold went over and put two fingers between the wires of the frame. The bird crawled under them, and Arnold stroked its back. Then he went over to the piano and struck a key. The bird sang one high clear note and flew up to its perch. Arnold struck the keys again and the bird chirped and sang.

When Mary brought in a cake with six candles the children stood up and sang, "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday, dear Arnold, happy birthday to you." Mary waited until they finished before she placed the cake on top of Arnold's little piano. With one puff he blew out the candles and sighed, a deep broken sigh. The children at the table spinning wooden noisemakers and clicking metal frogs did not hear him. Suddenly aware that the candles had been blown out, they yelled, "Hurrah," and with shouts and laughter turned and shoved and pushed and reached into silver and cut glass bowls for pastes and cookies shaped into elephants, donkeys, sheep, and lions, calling out what they had drawn. Olive helped Arnold cut the birthday cake; Susan served the ice cream. When Susan gave Arnold his portion he handed the plate back to her, a plea on his slender face. She knelt down and wiped his driveling nose with her finger and wiped her finger on her lisle stocking, kissed, and fed him.

1916, May 12

SUSAN PULLED IN HER CORSET LACES UNTIL SHE GASPED FOR BREATH; even so both halves of the corset remained separated by four to five inches. Glancing over her shoulder she caught a glimpse of herself in the dresser mirror and with one quick, violent tug

tied the laces around her waist. Impatiently she poked the ribbed shirt padded with soft flesh that bulged through the crisscross strings, wondering as she did so if Henry had observed how plump she had become. Long ago he had stopped teasing her about her weight, but, she consoled herself, Henry, as she did, no doubt noticed many things he let pass without comment. Often she pretended not to see when he put his face close to a looking glass to examine how large the pores of his nose had become or to pull out a white hair, a stray among the glossy black he wore brushed straight back to accentuate his widow's peak.

But no matter how they attempted to deceive each other or themselves, the years would not be denied; children made denial impossible. Tim had shot up to a lanky five-foot-eleven. He had grown so fast. Susan chuckled aloud as she recalled how his arms and legs hung as if they were on loose hinges over which he did not have full control. Each time he came home—he came home those week ends on which a special game or prom was not going on at school—his gracelessness struck Susan afresh and added a comic touch to the anxiety she felt when she observed how thin he was. Recollections of Tim aroused a longing for him, and with longing came a rush of tenderness, which quickly gave way to waves of bitter resentment. She had never fully forgiven Henry for sending Tim off to school. Usually her antagonism lay dormant; it flared up only when she fell into an abstracted mood. While hooking her corset cover she paced back and forth, all the time imagining herself telling Henry that he had overstepped his privileges, that he had cheated her of a mother's rights, had deprived her of the joy of watching her boy grow up. She imagined Henry first laughingly avoiding the issue, then contrite, admitting he had decided too hastily, no longer positive that Tim was better off at school than he would have been at home. She felt a little kindlier toward her husband. Stubbing her toe against her chair brought her partially out of her meditative mood, and she turned to the dresser, briskly pulled open a drawer, and drew out a nainsook waist. The waist, which she held against herself

to see how her eyeleted lingerie looked through it, made her think of how Eleanor had carried on in Loeser's dress department when she refused to buy a white voile dress cut much too low for a young girl and how Eleanor had ridiculed every suggestion she had made, saying Susan had not the faintest idea how to choose a dress that boys would turn to look at twice. Susan had reported Eleanor's behavior to Henry, expecting him to reprimand his daughter; instead he guffawed and called her a devil and he and Susan had heated words in which Susan accused him of encouraging Eleanor to be a flirt. At that he said, "Susie, your wings are flapping," and walked out of the room.

She slipped into her waist, deftly circled the ball-like crochet buttons into the small linen loops, and went to the window. Arnold, with one foot on the curb, one foot in the gutter, hobbled up and down the street. Susan sighed. A compulsion to grab onto, to hold onto, something, sent her back into the past, and in her ears rang Arnold's hilarious laughter as he wriggled out of her soapy hands, scrambled to the top of their old zinc bathtub and with a loud splash slid down into the water. A short hoarse gurgle broke from her lips. What use deceiving herself! At eight, Arnold would not be babied any longer, resented her attempts to bathe him, said he was too big. But then, he always was an irritatingly independent youngster; as far back as she could recall he was content to wander off by himself, preferred to work things out, even play, alone. Even now, as she looked down at him, Susan noticed that as soon as anyone approached he slowed his pace, and when another little boy trailed him for awhile and tried to turn this make-believe limping into a game of follow-the-leader, Arnold, without a word, without the least sign of annoyance, withdrew, stretched himself out in a sunny spot on the pavement and watched the other child. Susan turned her eyes away.

Her glance followed a ray of irregularly striped blue light on the gray stone houses that walled the street and accentuated deeper gray shadows in the shallow crevices between the large beveled sandstone blocks. The years had moved along indeed; many were the changes. When Olive and Courtney separated,

Henry bought the house on the slope. Now, instead of living in the center of a real estate development of white frames set off by patches of grass and small shrubs, they lived in the center of a real estate development of gray stones set off by cement squares framed by low fences with stubby belly-bulging posts; instead of an open porch they had a twelve-step stoop where on warm evenings they sat on purple and yellow raffia mats to chat with new neighbors, the Faulkners and the Watsons.

In a way Susan was grateful for John and Dorothea Faulkner. Not that she wholly approved of these neighbors, but Henry spent a great deal of time with them. Occasionally, when one night after another they dragged Henry off to a motorcycle race at Madison Square Garden, to a boat race at Sheepshead Bay, to a prize fight, or a tennis match, though she would be mildly resentful, she at least knew with whom he was. At times, however, weeks of amusement gorging were followed by weeks in which John Faulkner would not participate in any form of fun; Henry nevertheless did not spend his evenings at home. Strange, but during such periods John leaned toward Susan. Once he told her she reminded him of his mother, who had died when he was seventeen, and then by way of apology added, "Dot is such a scatterbrain, such a kid. Not that you can be more than a year or two older; it's—well, you have more sense, are so dependable, so solid."

Susan knew he meant it as a compliment, but the remark had made her unhappy. However, he had no awareness of how she felt and started calling her "mom."

One day when Susan returned home after shopping she found him in the kitchen straddling a chair, his arms across the back, his chin so deep in the sleeves of his house coat that only his faded brown hair, as usual in need of a trim, was visible, intently listening to Mary explain how to pour in the milk and when to put in the eggs of a cake she was mixing.

"Precisely as my mother made it." His speech was thick with dough.

"Mary, you'll give Mr. Faulkner a stomach-ache," Susan said good-naturedly.

John jumped up and ran over to Mary and put an arm around her firm waistless body. "That's for me, Mary, that's for me, an old-fashioned belly-ache, the kind I used to get when I was a shaver." And he dipped his finger into the pan of batter and licked it. "With every pang I'll scream, Mary."

"Get you gone." Mary, blushing, pushed him away.

"I'll go only if you promise to miss me. Promise."

"Oh, go on, Mr. Faulkner."

"Promise."

"Mr. Faulkner."

"Promise to miss me."

"I promise."

He kissed Mary on the cheek and her eyes watered. Turning quickly, he grabbed Susan's hand. "Come along, take a peek at a poor little thing in my green house." He pulled Susan out of the house and through an opening he parted in the shrubbery which separated their rear gardens into the narrow glass hot-house where he kept tropical plants. All four walls of the small stifling room, oppressive with heavy sweet scents, were lined with plants of deep burning colors and with thick velvety petals and leaves. Midway down the aisle that divided the hothouse in two he stopped and asked, "What can I do to save her?"

Susan poked into the soil around a small dark red plant that was turning yellow. "Let her breathe; open those holes at the bottom; they're all clogged, and put some fresh black soil in the pot," she said.

"As simple as that?"

"As simple as that."

"Mom, I want you to know I appreciate how often you have come in here and looked after the plants when I neglect them. I wanted to tell you lots of times."

"Oh, I've only been puttering around in a neighborly sort of way. Maybe I've been a little sorry for the way you can run off and neglect such lovely, lovely things."

"You must think I'm awfully low. I like to think I have a reason for living as I do." He leaned back, half-sitting, against

the long narrow plank that fenced the table holding the plants, and poured out a series of youthful mishaps; how, when he had refused to tell what he knew about cribbing during an examination, he had been expelled from college; how he lost the right to drive a car for a full year after several arrests for speeding; how, in his twenty-second year, after a season of summer stock at Newburgh, where Dorothea was the liveliest debutante of the season, he had joined a North Pole expedition that for him ended in Labrador. Five days out of New York he was stricken with pneumonia and the ship, which he had helped equip, pulled in at Hopedale, a coastal town, to drop him. There he was nursed by natives. The weeks he tossed in fever, depending on people with whom he could not even talk, made him realize how alone he was in the world, and he dreamed of that devil of a girl in Newburgh. As soon as he reached home he married her, and together they settled down to a serious spending of the fortune he had inherited from his parents at seventeen.

All the while Susan caressed a heavily veined finger-shaped leaf of several shades of green. "Stop fretting about the past; what's gone is gone. You're a young man, John; look to the future."

"I'm afraid of it."

"Are you that unhappy?" Susan recalled how Dorothea, when he fell into one of these spells, would complain, "That skinny lug of a husband of mine is in one of his moods again, and I have to sit around and twiddle my thumbs until he snaps out of it."

"I'm not really unhappy, mom, merely restless."

"What do you want out of life, think it ought to give you?"

"I don't know."

Fond as she was of John and Dorothea too, for all her light-headed ways, Susan preferred the Watsons; she understood them better; they were her kind of people; had their feet on the ground. Charles Watson, who was president of one of the largest breweries in the country, regarded his position as part of the fun of living. To Tim he was "the cat's meow," because he

owned an interest in a baseball club and on week ends frequently took Tim along with his own two sons into his box. A brittleness in Mr. Watson's voice may have been caused by too large a consumption of alcoholic beverage, but this was to be forgiven because he knew how to carry his liquor. Alice Watson, whose life was completely devoted to her husband and sons, was Susan's ideal of a perfect wife and mother. She was a tall thin woman with heavy breasts, which from the noon hour on each day were decorated with a variety of rhinestone brooches. In a moment of candor she confided to Susan, who had come to look upon her as she might an elder sister, that she "could get away with these pins," no one would suspect that the wife of Charles Watson wore imitation diamonds, especially since her earrings and rings were the real thing. Susan readily forgave this eccentricity because Alice's understanding of life was fundamental.

The uneven blue light on the gray stones had faded. Except for the top floors, the houses across the street were all in shadow. A low deep sigh broke from Susan. She really didn't miss the old place; after the incident with Katie she was in a way glad enough to get out of it. Moreover, the interior of their new home was almost identical to the old; with the same number of floors, the same size rooms, the same narrow halls. Except for dimpled plaster cherubs that floated along the border of the parlor ceiling, and Dutch molding in the dining room, which gave her an opportunity to arrange an artistic display of china, brass, and pewter, the same architect might have designed them both. Susan, who had an instinctive fear of change, might have been comforted by the similarity if Henry had not subjected her to another adjustment.

The morning they had moved, as she sat on the dining room floor taking china out of newspaper wrappings, the word "insomnia" trickled out of the barrel of dishes over which Henry was bending. When she asked him if he had said something, his head came out of the barrel and, straightening up, he rubbed the small of his back with both hands. "I'm all in, Susie. Been suffering from insomnia for weeks. It's been hell. To keep from disturbing you I try not to move around and by morning I

ache in every joint. You better put Arnold in one of the top floor rooms. He can share it with Tim week ends, and I'll take the back master bedroom until I'm over this spell."

She blushed, recalling how her eyes had closed and her head had twitched and she had answered him, "I hadn't noticed you weren't sleeping well. Guess that only shows I'm not as light a sleeper as I thought I was, but you know my mother always used to say that a couple sleeping in a double bed can patch up any quarrel."

Henry reached down into the barrel, took out a paper-wrapped cup and tossed it into Susan's lap. "What do we ever have to patch up?" he asked.

True. As she hooked her skirt Susan, for the thousandth time, told herself that except for occasional words over the children they never quarreled. What had they to quarrel about? He did as he wished; she never questioned him. For years whatever he did she attributed to the nature of men. Sometimes, however, she wondered if a part of her had died. Only a week before, when she went into Henry's room to put away some freshly laundered shirts, she noticed a gold wristwatch on a black cord in the top drawer of his chiffonier. Under it were two tickets for Rose Sidelle's London Belles. Two days later the watch and the tickets were gone. In the old days she would have been terribly shocked, terribly hurt, that Henry wasn't embarrassed watching a burlesque show with a strange woman. Now she merely wondered how long it would be before he would tire of his new fancy piece. Henry went from one to another. No one woman ever got her clutches into him; but that was in the nature of men. She was lucky in a way, he was not one to desert his family. Time. Time had helped her to understand. Henry used to say there is not enough time. Well, there is. A woman must be smart, smart and patient, that's all. If she is, a family won't go to pieces. It is up to a woman. Everything depends on a woman. If she is the right sort, everything will straighten out in time.

The honking of a horn straining a line from "When You Wore a Tulip" drew Susan's glance down into the street. Henry,

who had bought an automobile when they moved up to the slope, was parking it. Susan smiled as she might at a child showing off and, telling herself that no one enjoyed life quite as much as Henry, she hurried downstairs.

"You're early," she said as she let him in.

He slapped her lightly on the buttocks. "Let's have a quick supper," he said, "and get to the park before dark. Look what I discovered on one of the outdoor counters of that dirty little shop around the corner from the factory." And he tossed a small green book to Susan.

"Whatever do you want this for?" The book was entitled "Trees and Shrubs of Prospect Park." But his mood was infectious, and she laughed.

"We're going in search of a *cercis candansis*."

"A what?"

"A Judas redbud to you, my dear."

Henry's suggestion that they go to the park meant a full evening together. She clutched his arm and clung to it as they walked into the dining room. "What a man you are," she said gayly. "I never have any idea what I'll be doing next. That, I guess, is what makes you fascinating to live with."

Henry kissed her behind the ear.

He was talkative and while they ate he entertained Arnold with the fable of Judas and how each spring a blood-red flower blossoms on the tree on which the unhappy man had hanged himself.

"The one that I'll see in the park?"

Henry chuckled and reached across the table and jabbed Arnold's shoulder with his fist. "Don't look so skeptical. It's not exactly the one he hanged on, it's a great, great grandchild of it."

"Stop feeding the boy nonsense," Susan said. "And you, young man, are not going to the park."

"Aw, ma."

"Why not?" Henry asked.

"A school child must get proper rest."

"Tomorrow's Saturday," Arnold said.

Her eyes deep in her cup, her two hands around it, Susan sipped some coffee.

Henry looked at her before he said, "I'm sorry, son, but as usual your mother is right. A growing boy must get his rest."

A forced grin spread along Arnold's lips.

Digging a spoon into a stoneware jar, Henry scooped up some thick strawberry jam, spread it over a Uneeda biscuit and handed it to Arnold, who took one bite, which he let soften on his tongue and swallowed without chewing. The piece left in his hand he placed on a saucer. For a moment he watched the jam trickle off the cracker onto the dish; then he withdrew from his pocket a small harmonica and ran up and down the scale. Henry put out a cigar he had just lighted, rose, patted Arnold's head, motioned to Susan, and said, "Let's get out of here."

The sun was just above the horizon and cast a warm glow over the wide stretches of grass in the park. While Henry studied a map in the book, Susan watched his skin become translucent in the deepening green and orange light. She wanted to run her hands down his cheeks, she wanted to grab his arms and fold them around her waist; she wanted to drop her head against his shoulder. She restrained herself from touching his fingers as he traced the supposed location of the Judas tree on the diagram. Quietly she said, "Here's the weeping cypress. It should be there."

"Judas could never have hung on that. It's only a lilac bush."

"Only a lilac bush. The season of lilacs is the season of love."

"Spring fever biting you this evening, my pet? Come on, let's see what this tree is called."

Turning her back on Henry she walked in the opposite direction to an elm. Standing on her toes she reached up and tugged at a leaf on a low branch until she pulled it off. Each time she had a leaf in her hand she let it fall to the ground and reached for another one.

Until dark Henry examined flowers and leaves and felt the texture of the grass; by referring to the book he tried to identify various trees and shrubs. Several times Susan attempted to draw him into conversation by asking questions or calling atten-

tion to the shape or color of a bud, and each time he answered in monosyllables as if he had not fully heard her. She envied and admired him for his ability to lose himself in a variety of interests. She wished she could. She wondered if in this respect men were really differently constructed than women and if that was why love meant less to them.

When the last glow disappeared from the sky they wandered over meadows and low hills and drifted toward the bandstand where, with tired sighs, they dropped onto one of the hard benches. A soft breeze, sweet scents of grass and foliage, a medley of Victor Herbert airs played by a brass band, were pleasing and soothing after the long walk. Neither spoke nor moved even after the music was over. With the last crunch of footsteps on the gravel around the benches, Susan nestled close to Henry and placed a hand affectionately and possessively on his thigh; her fingers, between his legs, caressed him. Henry scratched her scalp with his square thumbnail, and Susan's eyes closed and her head bent back and Henry's finger each time it came down ran over the folds that had formed on her neck.

"I was just thinking, Susie dear, how disappointed Arnold was when he realized we were going to run off without him and how he consoled himself with that tin harmonica. We should engage a more advanced piano teacher for him."

Susan's hand slid along his leg until her fingers hung limply between the slats of the bench. Seconds passed and she remained silent, staring down at the ground. Henry drew away from her and with the knuckles of his closed fingers gently rapped her chin until she lifted her head. "What's the matter now?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"But something is the matter."

"Well, it's just that I was thinking only of you," and her voice quickening, "I think Arnold's lessons should be stopped altogether."

"Stopped. Why?" Politely Henry extended his hand to help her rise, and she grabbed it roughly. She knew she was not be-

having well; yet she continued to hold tightly on to it as they cut across the damp grass to the path that led to the exit they sought.

"You haven't answered my question. Why?" Henry let the sole of his shoe play lightly over the grass.

"We should encourage him to develop other interests, healthy ones."

"Such as?" Henry freed his hand and stretched his fingers.

"Sports. Like Tim."

"But Tim has no ear for music. Why do you object so vehemently?"

"Music leads to bohemianism."

"But he loves it. He might make a great musician." Henry and Susan were walking somewhat apart.

"Would you want him to?"

"Why not?"

"I want him to grow up to do something useful, to be somebody. I don't want to encourage him to be wild and lazy."

"Lazy?"

"Yes, lazy. You can already see that tendency in him, the way he dreams all the time, the way he drags his feet when he walks, the way he slouches."

"We might try to teach Arnold to correct his posture without condemning musicians as a class."

"I talk myself deaf, dumb, and blind. He completely ignores whatever I say. Do you know what I caught him doing the other afternoon?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"A fly was buzzing around the dining room. You know, one of those horse flies that sound like a bee." A sudden vivid recollection of the flight of the moth and the fly the night he was born ruffled Susan.

"Yes," Henry said, "I'm listening."

A lone man walked past them.

"Yes, Susan. What is the matter with you, girl?"

"He was clicking his fingernail against one of my good crys-

tal tumblers and when I went to swat the fly he asked me not to. He wanted, he said, to catch the difference in the sound of the fly from that of the glass. Imagine such nonsense."

"I think it was real cute."

"Well, I didn't, and I killed the fly, and he just picked up the glass and shuffled out of the room, red as a lobster."

"That was a rather unkind thing to do."

"I can't have a fly breeding around the house."

Henry pressed Susan's hand. "Would a few minutes more of life have made any difference, Susie?"

Both fell silent. Their footsteps echoed and re-echoed among the trees. When, after a while, Henry began to toy with a rosette on her sleeve, she said, her voice on the point of breaking, "Before you know it, we won't be good enough for him."

"Susie."

Again they walked in silence; then Henry whistled a few broken notes which he repeated over and over. Finally he gave up trying to piece the song together and said, "What a pity the canary died. It was an ideal pet for him. I wonder why he doesn't want another bird?"

Susan started to say something, but before she had a chance to do so, Henry said, "Susie, I insist. That child must be given a better teacher."

"You talk as if we have a young Mozart in the family. From which side would he inherit this great talent?"

"Let's not get sarcastic. Even though he may not be a Mozart, we should give him a chance to express himself."

"A child should be disciplined, trained to amount to something. I don't believe in all this individualism that seems to be the rage. A boy is a member of a family; he should carry on the traditions of his family. Where does a musician fit into ours?"

"What are the traditions of our family?"

"Respectability. Industriousness. Plain hard work. You know that as well as I do."

"You said Arnold practices a great many hours each day. Isn't that a form of hard work?"

"It is an escape."

"Susie. Susie. From what does an eight-year-old boy want to escape, need to escape?"

"This argument is getting to be pointless." Her temples throbbed and each click of her high wooden heels on the paved walk pounded in her head. The steady monotonous rustle of the heavy foliage that darkened the path intensified their silence. She tried to recall where and how she and Henry had gotten off onto a wrong track. She knew she was right and could not understand what persuasiveness in Henry made her feel ashamed; she wondered if children have any idea how much they are responsible for most misunderstandings and disagreements between parents. She felt she had been caught in a trap of words, and had a compulsion to say something to break the dense wordlessness, but nothing she could think of seemed worth uttering. Because she had to do something, she rummaged through her purse for a handkerchief and her eyes fell on folded sheets of foolscap. "I'm sorry," she said as she handed them to Henry, "I forgot to show you the letter that came from Olive this morning."

He took the long yellow pages and stopped under one of the lampposts to read Olive's neat bold script.

Dear Susan,

Forgive me for allowing months to go by without writing you, but my mood was incommunicable. I was in an in-between state in which I was indifferent to what the future held and at the same time curious to see what it would bring me. I knew that a change, a great change, in my life was about to take place, but I had no desire to bring that change about. After leaving Reno, I traveled here and there, wherever the fancy of the moment carried me, never inquiring what I might find, never caring.

After stopovers in Arizona and New Mexico, I traveled up the California coast. Alone in my two-seater in that bald land I jounced along and comprehended for the first time the meaning of desolation. Mile after treeless mile lay in back of me; mile after treeless mile lay before me. Mountains looked down on me without seeing me; they sup-

ported me without feeling me. Nothing moved, nothing stirred, not a blade of grass, not a stone, not a grain of sand. I grew thirsty, but in a land which cared not whether I lived or died, a stream did not flow. I called, "Ah, ah, ah," as we used to when we were children to give us courage when we ran from the sun into a dark tunnel in the park, but the lifeless masses of dry soil did not even bother to send back an echo. In fury I cried out, "Earth, tear off your pasionless mask. It is spring. It is spring. Let me see a sign." But mile on mile the earth remained brown and parched. By some miracle, at that moment when aloneness drove me to the brink of madness, the mountains separated, and there before me like a vision I came upon men and women, alive, swimming in water beyond the coves of a white sandy beach; children climbing steep violet-flowered cliffs; a monk walking across a lawn of a mission sanctified by Indian as well as Spanish symbols. I watched them and listened to them, but I lacked the courage to approach them.

Was I falling to pieces? I turned inland in search of people with whom I might talk, among whom I might settle, and came upon a community called Hollywood. Hollywood differs from the other sleepy villages of the valley only because one of its mud paths is lined by a row of barn-like shacks, a section incensed natives call Poverty Row. One day while having a cup of coffee at a counter I got into conversation with the man on the stool next to me. He was wearing greasy mechanics' overalls, his hands were stained black. He was, he informed me, a motion picture executive, producing films, and he invited me to his "set" to see a film made. The address he gave me was that of one of the shacks. I teased him about Poverty Row; in response he laughed and boasted that within a few years Poverty Row would bring wealth and fame to California, that it would make Los Angeles, a city a short distance away, one of the great metropolises of the world. Not only did I visit the set but I took a job as make-up artist. The motion picture people are zany, and I loved them. Though

their zest, their enthusiasms, their recklessness, saved my mind, Hollywood was not for me; a magnet pulled me on.

Back I went to greenless highways, where my dreams, like dreams of the night, which vanish before I awaken, vanished into the hills, the sea, the space, of which they were a part.

I went on, through the city of San Francisco across the bay, and over a mountain which sprawls inland from the sea, a mountain much like those I passed or drove over on my trip north. Not a tree grows on it; its slopes, scorched by the sun, are gold or sallow according to the light of the day. Only shadows, cast by clouds in an almost cloudless sky, relieve the monotony of the yellow and give occasional relief to those who are stationed at the enemy lookout post high on the peak overlooking the Pacific. A short distance beyond this barren mountain, as if scorning it, is a grove of the oldest, tallest trees in the world. For some strange reason this contrast filled my mind and I kept picturing a few lines, simple as this

I drove quite a few miles before I was hit by the realization that the city of San Francisco had given me an almost identical sensation. I drove back. My days as a nomad were over.

Let me see if I can describe what I have found. San Francisco is a city of seven hills; it is a city of a low broad plain. It is a city of sunsets as vast as the Pacific Ocean. It is a city of gray blinding mists. It is a city of vistas as wide as space. It is a city of narrow streets. It is a city of chateaus and mansions, the silent spacious homes of the rich one never sees, and of dingy noisy tenements, where men haggle over price with women who crowd at dirty windows. In an endless land it is a city where real estate is valued so high homes of the middle rich are built in long lines, each

joined to the one next door, like flats. Cement is more abundant than grass, yet geraniums grow in tiny hidden gardens on bushes as tall as lilac trees. These and other blossoms unsurpassed in size and grace are without scent, but the dreary streetcorners where they are offered by cart-pushing vendors for a few pennies are livened by their beauty. It is a city inert, a city of growth. It is an old city, a new city. It is the financial core of the West, where men, faultlessly tailored in striped trousers and cutaways, to vie with competitors across the continent on Wall Street, open their offices before six in the morning. It is a fishing village, where men in blue jeans, singing lazy songs, mend nets in the streets, and peddle their catch at the dock. The sea that bounds its shore is lost in mist, and on this water which has no horizon, a constant movement of ocean-going liners and freighters shackles this city to an actual outer world.

In San Francisco I have found the great contradiction that is life.

Did you know that Courtney has been pursuing me? When he was married to me he wanted to be free; now that he is free he spends his time trying to persuade me from whom he had wanted to be free to put him back in fetters. Why must we give up that which we no longer cherish to discover it is the only thing in the world that can bring us happiness? Why must we give up that which we hold dear to discover we no longer want it?

Courtney thinks I hate him. I cannot make him understand that to hate him I would first have to love him. Yes, Susan dear, I realize now that when I left him I no longer loved him. If I had ever loved him that love had died so slowly, so gradually, so painlessly, so thoroughly, I can no longer comprehend what love is. Please do not interpret this to mean that I am cynical or unhappy. Quite the contrary. Unlike Courtney, I did not look forward to divorce; I actually desired the sheltered narrow life he provided for me. I have now tasted another life and can never again be to Courtney what I once was. He refuses to believe this

and is confident he can win me again with the trinkets that dazzled me when I was young.

Luxury can never again lure me. I know now that its most ravishing moments are slippery. I remember once I contrived to get a ruby bracelet. No sooner did Courtney give it to me than I wanted a necklace of pearls to show off. A woman has taken the place of the peacock; you won't know her, Susan.

Can you recall that day on the steps in your hall—it was Arnold's sixth birthday, and we celebrated by speaking to one another with sympathy perhaps, but certainly with cruelty. At that time, one of us, I cannot now remember which, mentioned Jane Addams. Why, I can't recall; she certainly had nothing to do with our way of life. Yet, after that, I frequently thought of her, and as I arrived in each city I wondered what she would do if she were in my place.

Perhaps that is why I chose to settle here on the tenement-ridden flat streets at the base of the hill for which the city with which I have now identified myself is famous. Here a story related to me about one of my new friends decided my life:

One night last winter, a young man, tubercular, called on his sweetheart, and she scolded him because he wore no overcoat. He said he did not need an overcoat. She told him he should not come again to see her without one. On the next visit he refused to remove his overcoat. When she insisted the room was warm, he said, "You like an overcoat so much I'm wearing one to please you. Now look at it." He did not tell her that on the first evening he pawned his overcoat, which he would not remove on the second visit because his one good suit had taken its place in the pawn shop, and the trousers he wore were patched.

Yes, Susan, my life has taken on new meaning. I have an idea for a community center that can be self-sustaining, or almost. Small shopkeepers in the vicinity, eager to see the neighborhood improve, have already agreed to give me substantial assistance. We will have nurseries for young chil-

dren and a gymnasium for those who are older, rooms with light and air and space. Dances will be arranged for Saturday evenings, and we will provide lessons in music and drawing. We will arrange boxing bouts and baseball games. Local residents will be asked to pay nominal dues. Those who cannot afford to give money will be asked to contribute time and labor. Thus no one need feel that a place has been provided for him, given to him. He will know that as a member of a community he has helped to build a meeting place for young and old, a place that is his own, a place where he can develop self interests and learn something of the nature of the interests of others.

I have already leased a house with an option to buy. Tomorrow I start redecorating and rearranging the rooms. As soon as the carpenters are out, before I get so involved in this plan that it will be impossible for me to break away, I will make a trip back East to see you, Henry, and the children. Until then,

Much love,
Olive

As Susan listened to the crackling of the yellow paper she had an almost irresistible urge to pull it out of Henry's hands. She wanted to throw her arms around his neck and cling to him and tell him she was sorry for the way she had spoiled their evening together, not because she believed she had been at fault, but because she was willing to pay any price to get him to lose himself in her as she could lose herself in him. The time he spent over the letter tantalized her and when he went back over pages to reread passages she was hurt and walked a few steps ahead so that he could not see the displeasure that had cut into her face.

The benches, partly hidden by tall bushes, were occupied by women in the arms of men, their legs stretched along the benches, their heads deep in the laps of companions who bent over and kissed them. In the dark it was impossible to tell where

one body ended and another began. Sporadic groans of love filled Susan with disgust. She peered into the darkness, wondering about the ages of the couples, thankful that Eleanor was the sort she could trust, not the type to go into a park at night with a young man.

Without comment Henry approached her, took her arm, and directed her toward an exit. As they left the park, Susan said, "Did you notice how red Tim gets when he plays basketball?"

Henry looked at her in a way that asked what she was talking about, but he said apathetically, "Yes." He remained quiet for a moment; then he said, "But the basketball season has been over for months. Whatever made you refer to it now?"

"It has been on my mind. Do you think we ought to let him play next term?"

"Why not?"

"Isn't it too much of a strain on the heart of a growing boy?"

Henry laughed, but his eyes had a rather melancholy expression. "You look for things to worry about, don't you, Susan? Before you complained that Arnold is not like Tim. Now you want Tim to be something different."

"I believe in moderation in all things."

"Don't worry about Tim getting red. If he stayed white during a game I'd say something was wrong with him. The boy is excited when he plays." Henry looked at his watch. "After ten," he said. "Tim and Eleanor probably got in an hour ago, and the way we've been dilly-dallying."

The banging of a piano greeted Henry and Susan. Eleanor, who was playing the upright, and Tim, who was showing a strange girl a dance step, waved gayly to their parents who stood in the parlor doorway. Grouped around the piano were Clarence Watson, whose finger was drawing a face on Eleanor's shoulder, his brother Paul and two girls unknown to Henry and Susan. Hiram Robinson turned the music sheet; all were singing "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." Then Eleanor played another tune and Clarence, the older Watson boy, and one of the girls danced. Their hips swung, their buttocks went back-

ward and forward, they went from one another and toward each other with great speed. Susan started into the room and at that moment noticed Tim, in the corner, pull back a chair as one of the girls was about to sit on it. The girl almost fell to the floor before she regained her balance. Henry, whose eyes were on the dancers, moved forward and blocked the entrance. Without resisting, Susan stopped short and let him lead her to the steps. Henry hated practical jokes and Susan was relieved that he had not chastised Tim and humiliated him before his friends.

On the way upstairs Henry said, " 'The Whirligig.' Crazy, but lets off steam. But any form of dancing is a healthy outlet for young folks."

At Henry's door they said good night and Susan went on to her own room. She had just gotten into bed when Henry, wearing black and green striped silk pajamas, came in. Quickly she pulled a nightcap from under her pillow; the lace and the narrow blue silk ribbon that ran through the edging caught in her curlers and she was struggling to straighten the cap when Henry sat on the bed. He took her hand down and braided and unbraided her fingers. She looked at him, but he avoided her eyes, keeping his focused on the peach-colored blanket. He let go her hand and gently rubbed his palm along the smooth warm skin of her inner arm until it became moist.

"Yes, Henry," Susan said.

"Don't you think it would be kind to invite Olive to spend the entire summer with us? If I share your room at the shore we will be able to put her up."

They had rented a house at Sea Gate for the summer, one out on the point with a view of the ocean and outer bay. Their neighbors would be the same as in town, on one side the Watsons, on the other the Faulkners. In fact, John Faulkner had convinced Henry that with a car he could commute "in no time at all." Sometimes Henry wondered if he really could. The fable of the sick horse had undergone a transformation; now the children teased him; they wanted to know why he didn't

cook up a cure for autos that would save him from getting out and under.

Henry was kneading her elbow. "What do you say, kitten?" he asked.

"I adore Olive. Henry, you know that, and I'd like to please you."

"But?"

"I don't want you to think I'm not sorry for her, without roots, among strangers, but Alice has such strict standards."

"Alice who?"

"Alice Watson."

"What has she to do with this?"

"The boys. Paul is eighteen, Clarence, twenty, only three and five years older than Eleanor."

Henry's hand dropped to the blanket and remained still. "I fail to understand you, Susan."

"It's up to a mother to see that her daughter mingles in the right circles. The Watsons are nice people."

The dry cushions of Henry's fingers gripped Susan's arm. "Susan. Susan. Okay." He rose to go.

Susan reached over and grabbed the hem of his pajama top. "Henry, Henry, I'll invite her if you like."

Henry sank back onto the bed and ran his hand along his forehead. "Good girl," he said and his chin dropped until it rested against his neck. Finally he got under the cover. He drew her to him and her head dug into his armpit. Scents of hair and fresh sweat blended with eau de cologne made her giddy; his fingers tantalized her. She was ready to scream when he stopped and lay still. Tears came to her eyes and she held her breath to keep from crying. A light, perhaps in a window across the street, went out and the room became intensely dark. She felt suffocated. The cologne almost caused her to sneeze; she twitched and pulled away from Henry. He waited a moment; then moved along the bed until he was close to her again. He led her hand over his body, bent down and kissed her, and indicated how she should kiss him. "That's it," he whispered, his

breath breaking in short gasps. "Oh, oh, that's it." Before long she lost consciousness of everything except his gentleness and his brutality until he sighed and let his legs fall limply against hers; then she became aware of strains of coarse wild magnetic music. Henry started to doze.

"If only the Robinsons weren't going to be at the beach too," she said.

"Huh? What's that?"

"I understand the Robinsons have taken a house near us at Sea Gate."

"The Robinsons?" he said sleepily. "What's wrong with that?"

"Hiram."

Henry never heard her; he was on his back, snoring.

1916, July 3 and 4

LATE IN JUNE THE HOUSE ON THE SLOPE WAS CLOSED AND THE move was made to the beach. Olive came East a week later. Henry met her at the depot. Before the taxi in which he brought her to the house came to a full stop, Tim, with Eleanor right behind him, was on the running board, tugging at the door. One on each side they dragged Olive from the cab and up the slate-slab walk that divided the front lawn.

At the stoop, laughing and out-of-breath, Olive broke away from them and reaching out her hands, bent down to kiss Arnold. He shied away but, when her hands dropped and she became suddenly silent, he leaped up and put his arms around her neck. Her eyes moist, Olive hugged him with such force that a glass from which he had been drinking milk and which he still held fell and broke. Pressing Arnold tightly she looked over his shoulder at her sister-in-law and laughed. "To break a glass is lucky," she said. "I've brought you luck, Susie."

"It's, it's good luck to have you with us." And with the toe of her patent leather pump Susan kicked the broken pieces of

glass to one side. Olive released Arnold and the two women, without saying anything more, took each other's hand and went indoors.

Henry helped the taxi driver carry Olive's luggage to her room, and all gathered around while she unpacked. "Oh," "Ah," broke with the appearance of each article. To Susan she gave a jade ring, to Eleanor jade beads. She uncovered rose quartz figures, a clay horse, and a crackled bowl. For Henry, Tim, and Arnold she had brought Chinese Mandarin robes. Arnold, fascinated by the rich blue silk and the embroidery, slipped into his. Tim and Eleanor howled at the way he stood, wiggling his hands which were lost in the sleeves, looking down at the skirt which formed a train. "You really are a comic sight," Olive said, "but we can shorten it, and you can have it for years and years." She winked and ruffled his hair and he smiled. After she wiped his nose with her pocket handkerchief she pointed to one of the unpacked bags. Susan, who had started to examine some of the articles Olive had placed on the dresser, did not notice the gesture, but in the mirror she caught a glimpse of Arnold opening the bags and looking up at Olive with a shy grateful grin. By the time she turned around, the long embroidered sleeves, the ends drooping listlessly, were wrapped around an Oriental guitar.

"Who said you may have that?" Susan asked.

"Why of course it is his. For whom else would it be?" Olive answered.

His dark eyes went from Susan to Olive; he pressed the guitar closer to him.

"Scoot. Scoot." And Olive motioned to him to leave.

Henry carried out the empty bags and Tim and Eleanor pushed their aunt onto the bed where they sat down beside her. "Aunt Ollie, did you really drive all over the West alone?" "Did you ever meet an Indian? Or a cowboy?" "What are the opium dens like in San Francisco?"

Olive laughed. "Your questions come too fast."

"What sort of places do you think your aunt frequents? Run along, both of you; let her get some rest."

"You don't look a bit tired, Aunt Ollie," Eleanor said. "You look right smart in that suit. Is it Palm Beach?"

Tim whistled. "Are my friends dying to meet you!"

"Run along. Run along. You have the rest of the summer to pester Aunt Olive."

When the children left Susan opened the window wider and lingered to look out across the beach. She inspected two towels that hung on the bar of a chest along the wall. She looked into the chest and rearranged bath salts and other toilet articles. In glancing around the room seeking something else on which to focus her attention, her eyes met those of Olive, who had risen and was leaning against the white enamel bedrail. For a moment the two women stood face to face before they fell into each other's arms and wept.

Right after dinner the next evening, the Fourth of July, the Faulkners, the Watsons, and the Robinsons came over to meet Olive. Susan, who was upstairs primping, heard their voices on the porch. Quickly she dabbed her nose with a downy puff and, brushing particles of powder from her dress, she started to leave the room. At the door she paused, went back inside, and stood before her closet. Even after she opened it she hesitated before taking out a gold satin dress which bore the label of Pierre Bulloz, the Italian designer who was all the rage in Paris. Never before had she been quite that extravagant. With it still on the hanger, she draped it around herself. A wave of laughter came up from the porch, and then, "Oh, Dot." Susan changed her dress. The square neck, embroidered in gold and silver, she felt, enlivened the creamy smoothness of the skin of her throat. A straight skirt gave her hips a deceiving slimness; at the same time, the waistline, which dropped into a point, made her figure attractively voluptuous. Just enough space was left between her bronze kid slippers and the hem to reveal a glimpse of the lace clocks of her stockings. Susan walked before her mirror and tried holding her arm in different positions until the gold-thread tassels, which hung from each corner of the three-quarter-length sleeves that were slit coquettishly to the elbows, swayed gracefully. She was overdressed for an evening at home, and she

knew it. She thought of several modest responses to make to the comments that were certain to come from those on the porch.

When Susan emerged from the vestibule she heard Charles Watson, who with Olive was sitting along the wall of the house, say, "What a pity to throw over your good work so soon, Mrs. Slade."

Mrs. Watson, in a sweet-grass fanback chair, a large rhinestone pin on her bosom, was engrossed in a gossipy conversation with Bertie Robinson, who with her toe kept herself in motion on the settee that was suspended from the ceiling. Mr. Robinson patted Dorothea Faulkner's hand as she excitedly described a bloody spill at the auto races. John Faulkner, wearing white flannel trousers and a blue serge jacket, sat near the screen, his long legs thrown over the arm of the chair, one dangling indifferently. Henry, also partially facing the street, sat next to him; his hand over his mouth he sang to John:

"A young pagan hero,
More virile than Nero,
Pierced a boar of great size
And sighed over his prize,

Oh, the joy of my spear
Had it slashed through a deer
Or a veil tightly drawn
Of a slender young fawn."

A woman in a white voile dress which swayed from side to side with the swinging of her hips went by.

"A knight on a bear hunt,
Tried out a queer stunt;
With his lance he impaled
A male wolf and then wailed;

"Oh, the joy—"

The arms of the woman curved with studied grace to the long shepherd-staff handle of a flamingo red parasol which she held before her and which clicked against the sidewalk each time she took a step. John Faulkner whistled softly before whispering, "Hot meat."

"An old neighbor of ours. Not bad. Not bad at all. You two should—" A burst of firecrackers drowned out the rest of Henry's sentence.

Susan eyed each one frantically until she came to Dwight Robinson, who was still engrossed in what Dorothea was saying, holding her hand in a fatherly manner. "You oyster, you huge smiling oyster in gray seersucker," Susan thought. Her heart was beating furiously. She eased her way back into the hall. For several seconds she leaned against the wall; then fearful someone might drift inside she took a deep breath and went through the kitchen to the back porch.

The young folks were on the beach close to the sea. Tim, Hiram, and the two Watson boys, each with one hand straight up in the air, the other before them, were lined up with their backs to the house. Off to the left, facing them, was Eleanor; a girl in a white middie blouse with a deep sailor collar stood to their right. Susan speculated, but in the shadowy light just before dark she could not make out who the girl was. The girls called out, "Clarence won. He shot the farthest." "Oh, what a man is Clarence," one of the boys sing-songed. The line broke up and the strange girl asked, "What can we play now?" Susan, in no mood to chat with the young people, started toward the front of the house. "Geezus," one of the boys screeched, and then in a lower voice, "Your mom."

On the front porch the talk had turned to war in Europe. John Faulkner was sitting on the arm of Olive's chair, his arm across her shoulders. Olive, dressed sedately, almost mannishly, in a tailored blouse and white linen skirt, was leaning back against him.

"So, you're pro-English," John said.

"No, not at all."

"God knows that I'm not prejudiced," Alice Watson said,

"but those Germans are absolutely barbaric. Anyone will tell you that. Look at what they have done to women and children in Belgium."

"What have they done?" Olive asked.

"Why, why, everybody knows they have taken six-year-old girls," Mrs. Watson's voice lowered to a hoarse whisper and she looked about to make sure no one but those on the porch could hear her, "and treated them like married women." A sprinkling of saliva fell on Bertie Robinson's hand; unthinkingly she wiped it off on the skirt of her dark blue polka-dot dress.

"Piffle. Paffle," Olive said. "That story has been handed down from generation to generation; every time war breaks out it makes the rounds. And people still fall for it."

To be heard above a steady bombardment of firecrackers, Bertie Robinson almost shouted. "I saw photographs of the way they have mutilated children, babies."

"Lots of things happen in a war, but no man maltreats a child merely because he's in an enemy uniform." Olive's voice was irritatingly emotionless.

"Anyone who can read a newspaper must admit, Mrs. Slade," Alice Watson said.

"Olive," Olive broke in.

Susan passed them all without giving or receiving a greeting and stirred the punch at the table in the corner.

Ignoring Olive's attempt to be friendly, Mrs. Watson went on in a voice shrill with impatience and antagonism. "Anyone must admit it is just horrible what they do to respectable married women."

With the long punch spoon, Susan motioned to her sister-in-law to tone down her remarks.

"I don't admit anything, but if what you say is true, for Pete's sake, be hush hush about it. Some of our respectable, our most respectable married women are dying for a chance to learn what life, what love, is really like. Besides, you wouldn't really want to cheat a soldier of his due. Isn't rape one of the most delectable spoils of war?"

Mrs. Watson gasped. "So that's why you, why you—"

Charles Watson cleared his throat loudly. "Mother doesn't have your sense of humor, Mrs. Slade."

"I have as much humor as anyone else."

"Of course, mother, it's of a different kind, that's all. But," he went on somberly, "whatever their gains, the Germans are paying through the nose. The L-7 down. Those Zeppelins cost a pretty penny."

"What do they give a damn about the cost? So they'll jack up taxes and someday France and England will pay for the whole boody mess," John said. "They're mighty clever, mighty clever. They sure took the jump on the Allies when they sent their soldiers into action dressed in French ambulance uniforms."

Susan poured and passed the punch. Each one took a glass without a break of any kind in the conversation, without as much as a nod of thanks.

"That's dirty war."

"If the Germans were really smart they'd lay off sinking boats with Americans on board."

"Americans should stay at home where they belong; why should they go traipsing around in these times and drag us into war?"

Across the street a series of deafening firecrackers exploded into green, red and orange. When the noise and the colors died away a small boy shrieked and threw into the air a chain of sparklers that burst into shooting stars. Those on the porch sat sipping their drinks, saying nothing, watching the cluster of brilliants vanish into the blackness of the sky. After a while Dwight Robinson reached over and placed his glass on a small book on the porch rail. As he settled in his chair he said, "Doesn't that Stephen affair give you cold feet, Mrs. Slade?"

Susan, who had noticed where Dwight Robinson placed his glass, moved it to a tray on the table and wiped the cloth cover of the small volume with a cocktail napkin.

"I don't seem to recall any Stephen affair," Olive said.

"She was a society lady who when the shooting got hot developed love-of-country itch. In her anxiety to get back to the

good old U.S.A. she sailed on the 'Hespian,' and when the ship was torpedoed she was drowned. Her body was recovered and shipped on the 'Sussex.' But the Germans, it seems, had made up their minds that even dead she was not to be contaminated by any contact with freedom, and so to save her they sank the 'Sussex' and her body went down with the ship."

Susan was about to ask what all this had to do with Olive when Henry said, "That 'Sussex' sinking was a mighty heavy straw. Mark my word, we'll be fighting before we know it."

"German soldiers are uncouth brutes. Women aren't—"

John cut in with a low gloomy whistle and followed with, "Those Russians, I wouldn't want to be in their boots."

"It's the Italians who are taking the brunt of it."

Each was engrossed in his own opinion and seemed unconscious of a tremulous, uneven sound that intensified the general morbidity of the talk. Susan, who caught it every once in a while, listened carefully. It came from above. "That's it," she thought and went upstairs, where she found Arnold in his Mandarin robe, the long sleeves turned back into deep cuffs, twanging the strings of the guitar for Mary, who sat on the edge of the bed.

"You ought to be ashamed, Mary. That child should be asleep."

"Please, mamma, a little while," Arnold said.

"I have enough trouble without you starting in."

His dark eyes wide and sad, Arnold appealed to Mary. "No need to look at Mary that way," Susan said. "The idea. An eight-year-old boy up this late."

"Your mamma knows best, Nolly. You ought to go to sleep." Mary took the guitar from him and said, "Now I lay me down to sleep." Solemnly Arnold went on, "And pray dear God my soul to keep. If I die before I awake, I pray my God my soul to take. Lord, bless my papa, mamma, Tim, Eleanor, Mary and Brian Boru."

Sheepishly Mary said, "That's what we named the guitar." And bending over Arnold she kissed him. "God love you this night," she said.

Susan started toward him but stopped short when he threw his arms around Mary and clung to her so that he was partially hanging as she kept trying to pull away from him. Susan watched Mary unlock his hands and tuck the blanket under his mattress. Without another word she and Mary left the room. As she went down the stairs she listened to Mary climb to the floor above, assuring herself that in many ways Mary was a gem; she kept the house spotless and running like clockwork; her roasts melted in the mouth.

In the parlor someone yelled, "Geezus."

The young folks, she noticed, were looking through an album of Grafonola records. "Boys, boys," she said, walking toward them, "please watch your language."

All turned to face her. The girl in the middie blouse was Nellie Taylor. "Good evening, Mrs. Bates," she said.

"Oh, Nellie, I didn't know you were here. You are—are you down for the summer?"

"Ma and I have a room only one block outside the gate. Pop'll come down every Saturday night to be with us on Sundays. But next year, if business is better, he promises to get us a place inside the gate."

"Oh. Be more careful of your language, won't you, boys?" Susan said and went back to the porch.

Henry was spiking the punch. "Let's drink a toast to the troops sweltering in the African campaign," he said.

"It's not our war." The settee stopped for a full quarter-minute to give emphasis to Bertie Robinson's words.

"I think we ought to drink to a patriot, although a Frenchman, the sort of a man we can depend on to fight to protect our way of life, a man in whom we can place our faith for the future; Petain, the great hero patriot, Petain." Charles Watson held his glass high.

"Did you say parrot or patriot?" John Faulkner asked. As he spoke, his wife finished her drink and refilled her glass.

"He said parrot, patriot!" Dwight Robinson tugged rather roughly at Bertie's skirt, which had caught under her knee while she was swinging.

"Well, what is a patriot?" John Faulkner asked Charles Watson.

"Why, one who loves his country."

"Oh, a sucker for scenery."

With his finger Henry played, "Brrrrrrr," on his lower lip.

"I don't think you're a bit funny." Dwight Robinson lifted the wire of his eyeglasses away from his ear; then let it fall back into place.

"Okay, King Solomon, you seem to be bursting with a definition," Charles Watson said. "What is it?"

John Faulkner closed his eyes and tightened his fist around his chin. "You've got me there. Every time I hear the word I think about a guy I met in Austria before the war. The goddamndest patriot I ever did meet. You know they go big for that sort of stuff over there." He relaxed and leaned his elbow on Olive's shoulder. "Deuce of a charming fellow. Fine chap at heart. And fun. Once, after a night of, oh what a night, he took me home to see his patriot rewards—ruby and diamond studded medals—all lined up in velvet-padded cases in a gold-paneled tomb called the trophy room. I was so properly impressed I got an invite to stay for ten days. Had the time of my life. We hunted and fished and rode, and he took me out among his crowd. Wherever we traveled the caps of the peasants swept the dust." John sighed. "I sure thought that was the way to live even if I did ride them on the way they harped on preserving their traditions, their way of life; and kidded them about letting their patriotism go as far as to open their estates to peasants who, if they worked hard could earn enough, except in bad times, for a nourishing supply of dry brown bread. My friends thought my kidding a bit crude, but after all I was an American; an American was expected to crack barbaric jokes; and on the other hand I was a pet American, so what I said ran off their backs. And I must admit the average peasant was appreciative of the opportunities given to him. He considered it not merely a duty but an honor to become a ghost on a battlefield to protect the estates of the lords who provided these opportunities. One thing I hadn't cracked wise about, and that

was how quick they were on the trigger when any political crackpot suggested it was time for a change. At that, considering the country was overpopulated with paupers, a lot of guys got off easy; they were merely tossed into a stinking old jail where they were forgotten, allowed to rot for as many years as they could last. With time on my hands when I got home I began to hang around my broker's office. One day it dawned on me that in a way the tape-pullers there were spilling a line almost identical to that of my fat-fingered friends in Austria. I got such a kick out of listening to how much they were doing for the people of our country, I was inspired to write a poem. Like to hear it?" Before anyone had a chance to answer, he recited:

"We are the tape-guessers,
the brain in this free reign.
We up or down the price
of stock; the worth of land
we frame. We are a band
of super-sups who preen
the trade of crackered-cheese
and oleomargarine,
and chart, as charity,
some brands that we might freeze.
Philanthropists, we risk
our wealth in enterprise;
our capital we gamble
in alms, commercial alms—
the aim: to bestow jobs.
At times a hooligan
or bearded radical
will snarl, 'Coupon clipper.'
'Freedom deviator.'
Unfit for our way of life,
our traditions, they despise
opportunities we

have wit enough to squeeze.
For our sagacity,
our perspicacity,
our perspicuity,
punctiliosity,
meticulosity,
our magnanimity,
immutability,
respectability,
our sensibility,
for our normality,
we modestly request:
appreciation, admiration,
approbation, appellation,
adoration, exultation,
veneration, preservation,
perpetuation, chortation;
in short: patriotism."

Out of breath he stopped, looked at the floor a moment; then jumped into a goose-step. "Naturally, I refer only to those yawn-wrinkled, cigar-chewing, brown-spittling, ledge-legging Caesars, and the Austrians."

Charles Watson coughed once. Dwight Robinson said, "Of course." No one else made a sound; they merely sat still holding their glasses before them.

Behind his hand John whispered to Henry, who was standing next to him, "Did you ever think the word was a lot of bull—" Henry kicked him in the shin. "Ouch," he ground through his teeth.

"Why, you old so and so, you're a philosopher," Dorothea blurted.

John slid off the arm of Olive's chair, laid his cigarette on a small glass tray on the table, bowed to his wife and said, "My dear, when a man approaches forty, he either becomes a philosopher or degenerates completely. After meeting Mrs. Slade

tonight I have decided not to go to the dogs." He reached out to take Dorothea's glass away from her. She snatched it back just in time.

"Well, I never," she said. "What are we waiting for? Down the hatch." And down went her drink in one gulp.

His face red with anger, John mumbled something, but his words were lost in the coarse tinny tunes of the Grafonola that accompanied out-of-key voices in the parlor singing, "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier, I—"

"Our children have shown us the way. Let us not drink to war. Here's to peace," Charles said and held up his glass.

"Here's to peace," Olive said.

Dorothea hurriedly refilled her glass. All drank.

Mrs. Watson took a quick gulp and then sputtered, "My land, Mrs. Slade, I must say I can't understand you. A woman who is going to war drinking to peace."

"Going to war!" Susan exclaimed. "Who is going to war? What are you talking about?"

Olive went over to Susan and put an arm around her waist. "Quite a dress. The cat's whiskers, I'd say," she whispered. Aloud she said, "We've had so many things to talk about I haven't had a chance to get around to this war business. Susan hasn't the faintest idea what I intend to do." Turning back to Susan she said, "Darling, out West I came to understand the meaning of conflict. One comes face to face with it in the raw out there. The soil is so barren the natives are always at grips with the ground as well as with the weather. I became so absorbed in the struggles of those about me, those with whom I eventually intend to make my life, that the European war did not exist for me except as something exciting to read about, something that was happening in another world, might have been on another planet as far as I was concerned. And then I decided on this trip back home. The first night on the train I could not fall asleep and drifted into the club car. There a group of college kids were singing and laughing. Before long I was the butt of a prank, and because I took it good-naturedly I was accepted as one of them. As the trip progressed we drifted into serious

discussions and I discovered the boys, to use their own expression, were chucking everything to sign up with the Canadian Air Force."

"But what has all this to do with you?" Susan asked.

"I'm coming to that, darling. I tried to dissuade them, tried to convince them they were going in for a thrill, tried to show them that war is a perversion, a dissipation of man's energy, the raving madness of imperialism, a fever that pockmarks civilization, that, well, maybe men have something when they say it is woman's revenge on the masculine sex." Alice Watson opened her mouth, but Olive, without giving her a chance to speak, went on. "I tried to convince them that man has only one justifiable struggle, a struggle in which all must cooperate to conquer the elements, that any struggle involving man against man is wasteful and immoral. I couldn't budge them, Susie darling; they threw the book at me. Young as they are they had been all over the ground I tried to cover and had come through convinced that periodically eruptive forces in men have to be restrained by those who understand this. I tried to show them that war would never solve anything, that they would be wiser and better to use their energies to educate men how to solve differences peacefully, how to level off populations before birth." Alice and Bertie looked at each other. "I talked and talked and talked and the more I talked the more I realized that right or wrong was of no consequence; what mattered was the life of those boys, my friends."

"What are you trying to say, Olive?"

One by one the young folks drifted out. Hiram and Eleanor sat on the steps. The two Watson boys went over to the table and helped themselves to soda pop.

Olive drew closer to Susan. "Remember that wire you had from me telling you I would be delayed? Well, when I changed trains at Chicago, I took the time out to sign up. I'm going as an ambulance driver."

"A romantic notion," Susan said.

"Why an ambulance driver?" Dorothea asked.

"I'm too old to go in any other capacity. Anyway, I'm a

woman, anyway, I wouldn't want to." Olive spoke with a note of levity in her voice.

"Well, at least you're pro-English," Mrs. Robinson said.

Dorothea was back at the punch bowl. Henry dipped the ladle; she held out her glass.

"But I'm not," Olive said.

"Then why did you enlist with the English?"

"Because I agree with those kids that the puss flow in Germany stinks more than the puss flow in England."

"The Germans are a brilliant scientific people."

"Oh well, what good does it do to enumerate the virtues and the vices?" Although Olive hesitated before going on, no one interrupted her. "What difference does it make to those who die where we place the blame? In a sense we're all at fault. Who goes to war?" Olive was speaking rapidly, her speech was tense. "The kids, the kids, who believe their elders who get fat sitting on their behinds sipping lemonade and punch without once saying to those kids, 'Ask why before you go, ask why.' I'll wager someday some smart aleck of a politician will pop up and in a long-winded speech declare how the war might have been averted. Where was he before it started; where is he now? Let us see if the war brings him profit or glory."

"Aren't you a bit of a cynic, Mrs. Slade?" Charles Watson asked.

"Yes." Olive shook her head. She smiled. "A nice cynic, though."

"I'll say you are," John Faulkner said.

"I can't understand you, Mrs. Slade." Alice Watson made no attempt to disguise her contempt. "If you really have such sincere feelings against war why did you join up?"

"Well, a war is here. A bleeding boy needs a bandage no matter how he thinks or doesn't think. Besides, I'm as guilty as you."

"Guilty as I?"

"You seem to find my remark offensive, Mrs. Watson."

"Easy does it, Olive. Easy does it." And John Faulkner pushed her gently from her chair and led her over to the other side

of the porch near the screen. As they passed Susan, she heard him say softly, "—soul can't be cleaned by squirting water from a syringe into it. It isn't that simple."

"You seem to take a delight in trying to make us dislike you, but I know it's all just an act, and I'm glad you're going with the English," Bertie Robinson said.

"I'm not going with the English; I'm going with the Canadians. That's not true, either; I'm going with my friends."

"Bravo, Mrs. Slade." Clarence Watson shook her hand. "I'll be seeing you. I'm going with the R.C.A.F."

"What's this? What's this?" The rhinestones on Mrs. Watson's bosom went up and down; she held her lorgnette up to her nose and peered at her son over them.

"Don't get excited, mother," Mr. Watson said. "The boy is only teasing. Why should he want to go? America isn't in it."

"I wouldn't care if it were; I don't want him in any war."

"Now, now, mother. You wouldn't want him to shirk his duty."

"I don't want him fighting."

"Now, now, don't excite yourself. Didn't you just hear him sing, 'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier'?"

Clarence, who was doodling on a paper doily on the table said, "Oh, that, Dad, that's only a catchy tune. I've been figuring out ways for days how to break this news to you. Don't try to stop me, Dad, you can't."

"I'm with you, Clarence. We'll join up together," John Faulkner said. He was standing in front of Dorothea. His body hid from the others exactly what he was doing, but he appeared to be trying to get a glass out of her hand.

"You're too old for the air force," Paul, the younger of the Watson boys, said.

"You needn't rub my age in, but you're probably right. In that case maybe Mrs. Slade will let me drag along with her. We could make a team. What do you say, Olive?"

Not a word from Tim. Where was he? And Nellie? Susan walked through the house. No sign of them in the parlor, the dining room, the kitchen. When she reached the back porch

she thought she heard a movement and stopped to listen. No, only the dull lap of the sea. She peered into the darkness and sensed rather than saw a rhythmic motion on the ground a short distance from the house. The sand shifting, she decided. And then the unusual quiet of the night occurred to her. She remained where she was, listening. The night was inert, motionless, the sort that sometimes exists at the beach just before a rain storm, when the low roll of the water is the only movement and nothing else stirs, neither the trees, nor the grass, nor the sand. Susan's pulse quickened. The stillness was broken by an almost imperceptible sound like the intake of breath. Again motionless silence. Susan did not move. She waited, her ears burning and throbbing. For several seconds she could see no movement or hear any sound.

Suddenly, without warning, Tim stood on the sand, stretching his arms, yawning. He buttoned his fly. "Damn that jelly," he said. Nellie Taylor was sitting at his feet. She rose, straightened her collar and brushed sand from her clothes. Then she threw her arms around Tim's neck. "I love you, Tim," she whispered. Again Tim stretched and yawned, and all the while Nellie Taylor clung to him. "We're grown up now," she said.

As noiselessly as possible Susan went through the screen door into the house.

"Before we leave, a toast to Mrs. Slade," John Faulkner called as Susan came along. "A toast to a truly courageous woman."

"Stop this nonsense. Of course Olive isn't going to war at her age," Susan said.

"Of course I am, Susie darling."

They all drank. Henry collected the glasses, the ladies picked up their bags, and everyone started toward the steps. As Susan was about to push open the screen door she noticed Hiram put his hand to Eleanor's face, draw it away quickly, and press his fingers against the back of the step on which they were sitting. Goodnights were exchanged. Hiram followed his mother and father down the slate walk. Eleanor went up to bed. A lone firecracker went off in the distance. Susan sauntered to the edge of the lawn with the Watsons. Henry and Olive waited for her on

the porch. At the top step she bent over and the gold tassel of her sleeve brushed the ground as she picked up a small fragment.

"What treasure did you find?" Henry asked.

"A cigarette butt."

Henry worked his finger into her closed hand, took the butt and threw it away. "The children are growing up," he said.

"Eleanor is a baby yet. Not sixteen. That's what they learn at fancy girls' schools. Ladies."

Henry turned to Olive. "You made quite a hit with my friend John Faulkner."

"Oh, Henry, he was just being polite to your sister."

"He's quite a guy. Too bad he's not single. You two could hit it off." Henry held the door open while the two women walked inside.

"Henry, I'm not looking to marry again. Anyway, he's not my type."

"Why not?"

"Too flighty."

"I thought he gave a pretty good account of himself tonight. Set us all up on our ears."

"Maybe. I thought he was putting on an act, showing off. He strikes me as the kind who'd rather be having fun, even plays philosopher for a thrill."

"That's because he's too damn rich. He's bored, can't you see that? He doesn't know what to do with his time or money. Deep down he's really a swell guy. The right woman could do wonders with him."

"Why make a woman responsible?" Olive asked.

"This whole conversation is nonsensical," Susan said. "Not only is John Faulkner married; he's younger than Olive."

"Night." Olive flapped her fingers against her palm in a good-night gesture and went into her room.

For a long while after Henry fell asleep Susan remained awake, over and over counting from one to ten, occasionally breaking the count to thank God that Nellie Taylor was not her daughter. Henry stretched his leg and pushed her over to one side of the bed. "Henry," she said. She had an impulse to awaken him

to tell him that he ought to explain to Eleanor the bad effect smoking can have on a woman who wants to bear children. He turned over and shoved her with his buttocks. She started to count again; the numbers fused into Tim, Eleanor, Nellie Taylor. "Maybe Nellie is smart; lots of girls are. But suppose her cap is set for, and who does she think will marry a smoker? Pity Clarence, he's so nice looking." Feeling chilly, she nestled closer to Henry and let her head fall against his shoulder, but the warmth of his body did not warm her. He pulled away slightly and lay flat on his back. "I must talk to Mary; the way Arnold wraps her around; she's been with us too long; smoking; thinks she's entitled to privileges; the idea a girl her age going to smoke." Henry rolled over and faced her, and in so doing he pushed her from him. "Perhaps Tim knows how; maybe Nellie, maybe." The jagged words blurred into a smoky stream; Henry shoved her and Susan came fully awake with a jolt, visualizing the lines Olive had once drawn in a letter:

She sank back into her pillow and fell asleep again and Henry had the form of a tall reaching redwood, his mouth and his eyes narrow slits in the heavy bark. He repeated himself until he was a forest of trees. She became a mountain stretched out across the countryside, her slopes round and smooth, without a bush or a blade of grass to break the contour, her eyes large round holes filled with water. Throughout the night her sleep was restless; she kept waking in spurts, sweating and shaking. Each time she dozed off she dreamed that she, the mountain, lost her smoothness, that she became shriveled, twisted and snarled, and that in her agony she leaned against the trees. When she did, the trees crumpled into a snarled and twisted mass, like herself, and in despair and disgust she would pull away. As soon as she did the trees sprang up again, straight and beautiful, and high in their branches the wind hummed in the mellow, vibrant tones of a guitar, "Why? Why? Why?"

1917, Spring

THE AFTERNOON WAS ONE OF THOSE PUNGENT, SUNNY SPRING AFTER-noons that sometimes come after a morning of showers, and Susan decided to take a short stroll along the park before going for some groceries. Everything she saw, the quiver of young stems, the bursting buds, the April yellow of the foliage, the short shoots of grass, filled her with a joyous sense of aliveness. In sheer physical animation she threw her head back and trees, still moist, sprinkled her cheeks with a cool refreshing mist. She took a deep breath of scents of blossoms she could not see beyond the low stone wall that enclosed the park and walked on, humming in a cheerfully preoccupied way.

At the park entrance, standing on a box under an American flag that was supported by a crude pole dug into the ground, a man was haranguing, as so many were during this period, to a crowd that had congregated about the war raging in Europe. Susan, who had resolved to remain untouched by the morbid fanaticism that had been intensifying daily, crossed the street. The man shouted, "Before we know it the Germans will have a squadron of airplanes over here bombing New York." For emphasis he threw out his finger, and it pointed directly at Susan and seemed to follow her as she walked. She kept going, feeling the finger burn into her back. "Rabble rouser! An airplane crossing the ocean! The idea of anyone making such a fantastic, irresponsible statement!" But she stopped humming and at the corner turned into the side street.

Outside the grocery she came upon another crowd, somewhat smaller but more disquieted than that which the park speaker had attracted. Among themselves the people were talking, arguing, trying to push their way to the window to look into the store. Beyond the mob, on the step of his doorway, the grocer, his voice tense, his hand circling wildly, was talking to a policeman. H - U - N had been painted in large red letters on the

window. With tears streaming down his face the grocer, in a heavy German accent, kept interrupting himself to cry that he was one hundred per cent American, a better American than the Americans. "Sure, pop, we know that," the policeman assured him and drew out a small black book in which to write up his report. By shifting about and rising on her toes Susan was able to see inside. Barrels were overturned, rows of canned goods had been toppled over, many cans had fallen from the shelves, the glass of a case was broken.

"Whatever happened?" Susan asked a woman near her.

"A group of hoodlums pinned Dutchy against the wall and ransacked his store. Before they left they decorated the window."

Impulsively Susan started to work her way through the mob. She wanted to rush up to the grocer, to put her arms around him, to tell him she believed in him. Before she could reach the old man the policeman backed him into the store and locked the door. About her the crowd broke up, but she had neither the energy nor the desire to move. Rooted to the spot, a series of impressions hammered at her nerves, a frenzied group of students walking through the streets shouting, "Down with imperialism, make the world safe for the free"; a woman waving a flag and shouting, "I'll get the vote yet," as a policeman shoved her into a Black Maria; an article she had read in the morning paper about a group of bankers who together with some college professors had started a riot by breaking up a pacifist meeting that ended only after a policeman clubbed one boy so brutally he had to go to a hospital.

"What in the world are you dreaming about?"

"Oh, Dorothea. Oh, Dorothea, you startled me. Dot, the world has gone mad, stark mad. No one seems to know what the war is all about, yet everybody argues about it, either to get into it or to keep out of it. In Washington, the President speaks one way, Senator LaFollette another. Nothing makes sense any more. If those men don't know which way to go—"

"What's eating you?"

"My nerves, I guess. Just nerves. Any news from John?"

"Yes, a letter finally came this morning, the first in a month.

He and Olive are operating along the Somme. The fighting's heavy there. Pray for him, won't you, Susie?"

"Of course."

"You might look in on Alice; she's in one of her moods, ranting that if Olive hadn't come into our lives, Clarence never would have signed up."

"But he signed up before he met Olive. You don't blame her too, do you?"

"I'm too good a sport. Besides, if that stinking good-for-nothing husband of mine could pack off and leave me alone—"

"Dot."

"Sorry. Want to come to New York with me? I'm going to Hickson's. A new suit will perk me up. I want to look well when Henry takes me to the Garden tonight."

With the departure of John, Dorothea's quest for fun became frenzied. Alice Watson, on the other hand, after Clarence left, fell into moods that were morbid or hysterical. Henry, who said that Susan had a way with Alice, took Dorothea under his wing. Susan knew there was nothing more to it than boxing matches, polo games, and the like; Henry was too honorable to betray a friend.

Except for groups of two or three people here and there who lingered to gossip about the incident in the grocery or passers-by who stopped to ask what had happened, the crowd had dispersed. The policeman came out of the store. A violent urgency to get away from the whole thing gripped Susan.

"Snap out of it, Susie. Are you coming with me?"

"I can't make it this afternoon," she said and started for home. Before she realized what she was doing she was thanking her stars that Tim was not in the war. When she became aware of the turn her mind had taken she broke into a cold sweat and twitched uncomfortably. All at once she itched in a dozen places, especially her feet. In agony she ran home and, in the bathroom that connected her room and Henry's, she savagely rubbed her soles on an iron ball and claw, one of the supports of the white porcelain tub. The skin under her toes broke and, when her foot began to bleed, she undressed and got into some

warm water. Soothed by the warmth she leaned back in the tub. Drowsy, free of tensions, she wiggled her toes under a steady warm flow. Her name floated into the torpor into which she had drifted but it was so airy Susan felt she imagined it. Again she thought she heard her name; this time it seemed to come in with the water. The eeriness alerted her and she turned off the tap to listen. She heard nothing further, nevertheless she asked, "Someone call me?"

"Yes, Susie, I did," Henry said. "I said I rented the house at the beach; the one we had last year on the point."

"What's wrong?" Susan asked.

"Wrong?" Henry came in and sat on the clothes hamper. "Why should anything be wrong?"

"Your put-on-voice doesn't fool me, Henry Bates. Something is wrong. Why should you be home this early?"

He shifted his position and the hamper creaked. "The LaFollette block did not help. War has been declared." And he added wearily, "A war to end wars."

Susan took a piece of white floating soap from the small wire basket that hung on the tub and ran it up and down her arm. "You will break the hamper," she said.

Henry did not move. A few drops of hot water fell from the tap and scalded her leg. She pulled her leg back but continued to soap her arm. Neither spoke for several seconds; then she said, "Thank God this is a free country. Henry."

"Yes?"

"You must not let Tim enlist. Promise me."

"I promise you, Susie. I will do the best I can." Henry unbuttoned his fly and walked over to the toilet bowl and lifted the seat. "It had to come. It had to come," he said. "I knew it from the type of orders that have been pouring into the factory."

Once Susan was no longer able to pretend that she was without a stake in the war she lived in constant terror, and whichever way she turned she was brought face to face with a reminder. The school issued war diplomas in April so that those who wished to enlist would not have to wait until June. Sun-

day after Sunday the newspaper supplements carried pictures of student groups drilling, enlisting, saying, "Farewell." Each day special articles told stories of how or why this or that one joined up. Hiram Robinson received his father's consent to enlist provided he signed up with the army and not with the air corps. Charles Watson gave Paul, his younger son, the same permission. One son, he said, flying around in a crate that a good wind could tear apart was as much as he and Alice could bear. During these weeks Susan was sustained by Henry's promise; she knew he would not let her down.

On the tenth of May Henry, who now manufactured articles of war, left for Washington. Brooklyn, where everything was at fever pitch, became unbearable. Susan moved out to the beach. Scarcely anyone was at the shore; most of the houses were boarded up. Rain was almost constant. Tim, who now that he was graduated was helping out at the factory, complained about the long trip he had each day, and over the week-end when Eleanor was also home and their friends refused to come to the beach because of the weather, they both accused Susan of purposely cutting them off from everyone who was any fun. For hours they chatted on the telephone, whispered jokes, sang naughty songs; they played billiards in the basement playroom; they played rag-time on the Grafonola. "Over There" had become their favorite song. When they left the talking machine Arnold went to the piano. The scales, the chords, the finger exercises, drove Susan mad. On Sunday afternoon to get away from it all she went out onto the rain-soaked beach. With the rain beating down on her she stood before the sea, and the look and sound of the dark violence that stretched as far as she could see silenced her thoughts. To escape their dead weight she walked up and down, indifferent to the putrid odor of decayed fish and fusty weeds, the mournful clang of buoys, the monotonous roll of water, aware only that everything about her was deaf, blind, pitiless. Her feet sank into the soggy sand. Each step created a hole which quickly filled with water, which just as quickly was sucked back into the sand. She had an irrepressible desire to keep the water from running off and she created other puddles

and tried to scoop some water up before it was sucked in; her hands came away grimy with wet sand. Sharp points of rain pricked her skin. The sky darkened and she tripped over a barnacled stump and bruised her knee; yet up and down the beach she went, hemmed in on one side by houses that were boarded up like discarded tombs and on the other by the sea, endless, no, not endless, but reaching, reaching until it would suck her in.

1917, May 18

RIGHT BEFORE DINNER HENRY CAME HOME. THE NEWSPAPER HE brought with him he left on a small table in the hall. Frequently he read while he ate; instead he talked about the men he had met in Washington and the work he had agreed to do in a Liberty Loan Drive.

The meal over, Henry and Susan went out onto the porch; Tim and Eleanor went into the parlor to practice a dance. A feeling of rain lingered in the air. For quite some time the two sat without speaking, watching the hazy, iridescent afterglow that penetrated the mist. Finally Henry said, "A sunset after rain can be soft and beautiful, soothing, can't it, Susie?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Won't all that noise in the parlor keep Arnold awake?"

"It doesn't matter. It's early yet. Mary is probably reading a story to him anyway."

"She has been good to the kids."

"Yes, she has been a faithful servant."

"Susie."

"Yes."

"You didn't read today's paper."

"No."

Henry filled his pipe, but he did not light it. He leaned forward on the arms of the rocker, biting the cold polished stem.

"A draft bill has been passed. Any man who does not enlist can be conscripted," he said.

Susan did not answer. Henry leaned back and rocked slowly for over a minute; then he sat still and said, "Susie, I have often let you down, I know, dear, and I want to tell you how sorry I am that I ever hurt you."

Still she did not speak.

"I really didn't want to let you down again, not this time. Honestly, Susie."

Both remained silent and motionless, keenly aware of the small sounds of the evening, breaths of air in the grass, the flight of insects, the flutter of leaves. Finally Henry rose. Without looking at Susan he paced up and down a few times, sat down again, and said, "You believe me, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Before I left town Tim asked me for permission to enlist. I told him I would think about it while I was away and let him know when I returned from Washington. I just couldn't give a cold 'No' to something that means so much to a boy's self-respect. I told him not to worry you while I was away. He didn't, did he?"

"No."

"Naturally the first thing he did— Well, you know how he ran up the street to meet me." Henry stopped. He lighted his pipe; the fire died out in the bowl. "Damn it all, Susie, with the draft bill signed there is no point withholding permission. The boy might as well choose where he wants to be and sign up with his old friends."

"I understand, Henry. I understand."

The pipe slipped between Henry's legs and fell to the floor. Henry put his head in his hands and wept.

Susan did not move until the sky was completely dark. When she rose Henry rose also. Shyly he took her hand. "Susie darling," he said, "you are an unpredictable woman. And you're a good sport too, a much better sport than some people who claim to be."

She patted his arm and started through the screen door.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Inside."

"Maybe you better not speak about it to Tim tonight. We might all get a little too emotional."

"I'm not, Henry. I'm going to write Olive."

> Olive, how I need you, how we all need you [she wrote.] Tim and Eleanor, who has been confined to the house for a week with a bad cold, are dancing a silly vulgar dance in the parlor. The "Turkey Trot" it is called. Heaven knows when they will be as carefree again. A little while ago Henry told Tim he may enlist. If only you were with the American forces. Do you think you can get transferred? I would be comforted to know that you could look in on him occasionally. He is still only a baby. Why, he isn't fully grown.
>
> Oh, Olive, Olive, I am terribly distraught. All our hopes, all our plans, are gone. Tim played football during the last year at school, and he counted on playing it at college. I was so fearful he would break his nose or otherwise hurt himself in that brutal game, and now look what I have to face. You will probably say, as you so often used to, "See how foolish it is to worry in advance, so few of the things we worry about come to pass." But I can't help it, Olive, I can't help it. I want to rush into him and shout, "Ask why, ask why, remember your Aunt Olive told you to ask why." But, what good to ask why, Olive, what good?
>
> Our way of life has greatly changed. Henry has been given quite a few important war orders and has been asked to work for the Liberty Loan Drive. Because he might have to expand the plant he has bought up quite a lot of property in the neighborhood, tenements and such. He has become quite an important man and is now a director of the bank on Second Avenue, the one around the corner from the factory. As he will be out of the city a great deal he has opened a checking account for me. You know how terrible I am at figures and now I am afraid of disgracing him, especially since Dwight Robinson is the president of the

bank (you remember the Robinsons, Bertie forever swinging and he with such an air of efficiency and importance), but I have worked out a good system. Whenever I make out a check for an odd amount, say $9.62, I enter it on the stub of my book at $10.00 and I do the same thing with deposits. In this way I do not have to figure odd sums and at the end of the month I am always pleasantly surprised by the balance on the bank's statement.

Is there anything you would like us to send you, anything we can do for your comfort, anything you want? Henry and I miss you terribly. We constantly pray that no harm should come to you.

Love,
Susie

Susan sat at the desk, her elbows on the ledge, her head cupped in her hands. She neither thought anything nor felt anything. Her breath rose and fell in time to the strains of music that drifted in from the parlor. Until Henry picked up the letter to read it she remained unaware that he was in back of her. While he read the letter she stood up and leaned against the desk.

When he put the letter down he said, "And I thought I had a practical, precise wife. Do you mean to say that all these years I have been married to a woman who can't even add two and two?"

Both laughed uneasily. Then they fell into each other's arms. Susan started to cry. Henry stroked her hair. "Now, now," he said, "the war will be over before we know it, and Tim will be back running the factory for me. Then we can take a long trip, around the world if you like, a second honeymoon."

1917, Summer

"OVER HERE, MARY, OVER HERE, THERE IS LESS DRAUGHT." ALICE Watson, who had been holding out her hand to test the currents of air, flattened her palm on a small cloverleaf table which stood against the wall close by the door and opposite the grand piano.

At the mantel, Mary lifted a glass containing a wax flame. The heat of the glass burned her fingers, and she let it drop back onto the saucer on which it had been standing.

At the thud Alice moaned, "Oh, Mary, Mary."

Susan, who was arranging flowers in a bowl on a long table in the bay window, asked, "Didn't you just take it off that table?"

"The breeze keeps changing."

"Breeze?"

"There is a breeze if you stand over here."

Mary, carrying the candle on the saucer, moved it without further mishap, and Alice, with a sigh of exhaustion, sank down onto the hard seat of the gold-framed green brocade chair next to the table.

Bertie Robinson, in a flowing apple-green voile negligee, came into the parlor. She scratched her head with a hairpin, pulled the pin out of the disheveled bun in which it had been lodged, and pinned up a stray lock. "This weather has me down," broke through a yawn as she sat on the sofa. Noticing Alice's needlework kit on the seat beside her she peeked into it and partially drew out the embroidery rings which held some rather heavy white linen. "Nice work," she commented, and letting it slip back into the kit, stretched her arms, and yawned, "I could go right back to sleep."

Into her apron, which she held like a bag, Mary brushed particles of leaves and stems that had fallen from the bowl of flowers Susan was arranging, and with Susan remained at the window looking out into the fog which veiled the trees and houses of the street.

"I got hardly a wink of sleep last night. My Hiram's baby

pictures are so cute I couldn't put them away. He was the darlingest thing you ever saw, so plump and chubby. As if it were yesterday I remember the morning we took him to get his photograph on the bearskin rug. He gurgled and cooed all the time we undressed him—all his life he has adored going around without clothes. He kept chewing the hairs of the rug, and when we pulled them out of his mouth he let out one wail, 'Mamma.' That was the first word he spoke and he was only thirteen months at the time."

"That is young for a boy, but my Clarence spoke at eleven months. His first word was 'no.' " Alice said. "Charlie taught him how to wiggle his big toe and he would ask Clarence, 'Can you wiggle your toe?' and Clarence would giggle and wiggle his toe and shake his head and say, 'No. No.' " Alice sighed.

"My hubby was such a good daddy, too."

"I better go for them there groceries and things," Mary said.

"You have enough to do; I'll take care of the marketing myself," Susan answered.

"It might rain hard."

"I want to get out, Mary."

At the gate after marketing (stores were prohibited on the point, and all marketing was done outside the restricted area), the keeper asked, "Would you like me to call you a cab, Mrs. Bates?"

"No, I'm going to walk home."

"This drizzle's terribly penetrating, and that's a good two miles you have."

"I know. Thank you, Tom." Susan patted his arm and passed through the gate.

"Them hedges sure smell nice in the rain," Tom said.

Susan sniffed. "Yes, they do, they do, Tom."

Tom tipped his peaked cap, but she had already walked ahead and did not see the salutation. After she had taken a few steps she looked back, but Tom had disappeared into his shelter. The streets were deserted, and she moved in the silent mist, aware more of a heavy void rather than of any particular thought; nevertheless feeling less lonely than she did in the house.

Tim was at camp and Eleanor had gone off with Nellie Taylor to a place in Pennsylvania to do her bit as a farmerette. Susan missed their youthful liveliness, the noise they made, the young folks who ran in and out of the house with them. That she would not be alone, Henry, who was out of town a great deal, invited Alice Watson, Bertie Robinson, and Dorothea Faulkner to spend the summer with her. Like Henry, Charles Watson and Dwight Robinson were tied up in various war activities and were in and out of the city. For two months, through June and July, rain had been almost constant; the only change in the weather was the degree of moisture, which fluctuated from a mean cold drizzle to a heavy downpour. Indoors a dank clammy air clung about the rooms and settled in the hair. Everything at the beach, the dark dreary days, the monotonous hours, the sand, the sea, the candle Alice kept burning in the parlor for Clarence, the house with its ever-present women, who feigned an interest in each other's small occupations, and who were absurdly polite in their efforts to stifle the brutal things they burned to say to each other, had become hateful to her. Susan wished she had some place else to go. When she reached the house she took two or three steps up the walk, spun around and started out toward the beach. The grayness had become denser. She could not distinguish the sand from the sea and the sky. A few feet away a gull cried out in the silence. A frog responded and all was still again. Susan sighed and went up to the porch, where she stood with her face lifted, relishing the cold mist that trickled onto it, trying to separate the salty smell of the sea from the minty scents of rain-soaked greens.

The piano droned mournfully. She became oblivious to everything but the mist and the sounds and the smells, and even of these she was only dimly aware, drifting with them rather than taking cognizance of them. A shrill piercing, "Yippee," aroused her. "Here they come, Nolly, the cowboys, the Indians." Instantly the piano playing became fired with excitement and suspense. "That's the idea, you've got it. Just like at the movies," Dorothea laughed gayly. "Now let's do the Eva Tanguay act."

Susan smiled. For the first time that morning she breathed

without a desire to sigh. The day might not be too hard to get through after all. The mood of the house frequently responded to the mood of Dorothea, who went from fits of despair—some days she would not leave her room—into fits of mirth, when she would dance and sing in all sorts of grotesque ways.

From the hall as Susan hung up her raincoat on the wall rack, she caught a glimpse of Arnold's serious woebegone expression. It made the ribald antics of Dorothea, who was kicking high into the air and singing in a shrill loud voice, "I don't care. I don't care," and the frenzied rhythm of his own playing seem so ridiculous, Susan burst out laughing. Dorothea, her hair teased Medusa fashion, her face wild with rouge, winked at her and took two small velvet cushions off the sofa. One she shoved down her blouse; the other she pushed up under the rear of her skirt. She drew in her stomach and thrust out her buttocks and to Arnold she gave a cue for soft music. Before Alice's candle she salaamed three times. Then she went to the piano, leaned on her elbows, and held up an imaginary lorgnette while she scrutinized the large hand-painted copy of a popular painting of a nymph-like pink nude who ran through green foliage. The corners of her mouth curled disdainfully. Her eyelids fluttered. She leaned over until her nose flattened against the glass of the case that protected the painting and its ornate gold-leaf frame. "Indecent, no doubt painted in Boston," she muttered. Shaking her head in violent disapproval, she turned around and with her back to the picture bent over and threw her skirt up over her head; the pillow fell out; then she walked about the room, running the tip of her finger over the furniture. "Dust, dust, dust," she sneered, "dust to the—" Abruptly she snapped her fingers. Arnold started to bang away, and she kicked and sang, "I don't care. I don't care." Without looking, Susan knew Alice Watson stood behind her.

With Alice, Susan drifted to the porch. "That violet breath. Only a violet breath could be vulgar enough to carry on like that coarse indecent creature of the stage."

Susan turned away and smiled. "Don't be too hard on her," she said, "she misses John terribly."

"Hmff."

"And the weather; it has us all down. That powder from the shooting in Europe, they say, brings on all the rain."

"Hmff." And Alice pulled out her lorgnette, let it roll back into the black enamel pin on her blouse, took a pair of steel-framed glasses from the pocket of her sweater, and shifted the rings on the pillowcase she was scalloping. She was dressed in mourning; except for the black enamel pin which held her lorgnette and her wide gold wedding band, she no longer wore any jewelry, not even the rhinestone baubles of which she once was so proud.

Bertie, throwing a mackintosh over her shoulders, sat in one of the straight-back rockers. She lifted the pillowcase, tested the embroidery with her nail, and said to Alice, "Nice work, but my hubby says we should give all our time to knitting for the boys."

"Leave Alice alone, Bertie; I'm glad to see her doing something like this for a change."

"Oh, well," Bertie yawned, and went over to the swing, where she lay down with one arm folded beneath her head; her free hand working her long narrow cardboard knitting case to keep her swaying. "Tomorrow's Tuesday. No doubt Dot will be going into the city as usual. What do you suppose she does every week?"

"Something, you'll notice, she never tells us." Alice let the needle come to a full stop in the linen and looked over her glasses.

"She gets restless out here; she was used to such an active life with John."

"Hmff; hasn't enough on her mind."

"Isn't John enough?"

"What would she do if she had two sons to worry about, as I have? Not that I object to Paul doing his duty, but Clarence fighting for foreigners!"

"If only the rain would stop," Susan sighed.

In mid-August Susan awoke early one morning with the glare of the sun on her eyes. She jumped out of bed and ran to the window and watched the red ball separate from the sea. "Thank

God," she said. "Thank God. We'll be able to get away from one another today."

She got into a bathing suit, prepared a light breakfast for herself, and before anyone else in the house was awake, she spread a blanket under a yellow and blue beach umbrella, which she dug into the sand, and stretched out flat, her head resting on a small mound. The warmth of the sun made her drowsy and she was dreamily letting sand trickle through her fingers when Bertie, a towel thrown across her shoulders, her knitting case on her arm, lay down next to her. While Bertie kept rolling back and forth, trying to settle herself, Alice, Dorothea, and Arnold came out. Bertie finally came to rest on her stomach with her arms under her chin. She asked Susan to rearrange the towel to protect her neck from the sun. Alice complained that the sand was still damp, that it got into her bathing shoes, that sand flies were biting her. When she whined, "I simply can't sit without a support for my back," Arnold dashed up into the house. He came out with an old arm chair from which the legs had been sawed. When he rejoined the women, Dorothea was saying, "Pipe down, Alice, you'd wear a sleeveless bathing suit, too, if your arms weren't so flabby."

"Ladies!" Susan said.

"Ladies," Alice snickered. No one answered her. Grunting, she moved with the legless chair into the shade of the large umbrella and closed her eyes.

Dorothea, sitting in the sun, rolled her black silk stockings down below her knees. Arnold, on his back, placed his head on the flesh thus exposed and threw his arms around her legs. Dorothea kneaded his scalp. Alice opened her eyes and shifted around until she faced Dorothea and Arnold. For a while she sat still and glared at them. Dorothea, her eyes on a speck of a ship on the horizon, kept her fingers going in Arnold's hair.

"Hmff," Alice grunted.

Dorothea kissed Arnold's forehead. When she sat up again she stroked his hair.

"That's what I call the height of something or other," Alice

said. "Silk stockings. It's a disgrace in times such as these, especially when lisle stockings are not only cheaper but last much longer in salt water."

"But Nolly likes me in silk. Don't you, Nolly?" And Dorothea bent over and ran her hands up her legs in a gesture of straightening her silk stockings. Arnold smiled up at her adoringly.

"What a way for a woman your age to talk to a child," Alice said.

Arnold sat up and moved close to Dorothea, who put an arm around him. "You mean a male child," she said. "Come on, Nolly, I'll race you into the surf."

Hand in hand the two ran off.

"Well, I never," Alice said and sat with her mouth open. When Dorothea and Arnold disappeared into a breaker, she turned on Susan. "I never would have believed that I would live to see you permit a woman of that sort to corrupt your son right under your nose."

"She really doesn't mean anything evil."

"She doesn't mean anything good."

"Alice, let us not be too unkind. She's simply a warm-hearted child who has lost her way."

"Child. Warm-hearted. Evil does as—"

Mary called out across the sand, "The postman has brought a letter from Mrs. Slade."

"Thanks, Mary, thanks." Susan jumped up and ran across the sand into the house.

At luncheon Susan mentioned the letter. "And listen to what she says about John. 'Dorothea will not know him when he gets home. He is taking his job so seriously he would not even run up to Paris for a day to celebrate his fortieth birthday. I don't know when he had his last drink. He is remarkably cheering and handy around the wounded and ill and often acts as nurse as well as ambulance driver. Strange how every man out here is affected differently; some break off in tangets; some sober up."

Dorothea hiccoughed. "Well," she said, "that makes us even; he won't know me either."

Susan noticed that Dorothea had not bothered to sweeten her breath with a violet lozenge.

That evening Dorothea and Susan sat on the front porch. They were quiet for some time, each lost in her own thoughts, unconscious even of the luminous flicker of fireflies outside the screen. Finally Dorothea broke the silence. "I'm going back into town tomorrow," she said. "For good."

Susan did not ask her why and made no attempt to prevail upon her to stay; she herself wished she could get away from this dismal house, overinhabited by women.

The next morning Dorothea left. Susan stood at the curb and watched the cab drive away and smiled sadly to Dorothea who waved through the rear window. Bertie, meanwhile, came out and sat on the steps. For several seconds after the cab was out of sight Susan remained at the edge of the walk. She could not shake off a feeling of guilt. Henry had asked her to do what she could to help Dorothea, kept pointing out how much Dorothea needed love and understanding if she were to pull herself together. "What could I have done? What have I failed to do?" Susan asked herself.

"So, she's gone," Bertie called.

"Yes, she's gone. Gone." Kicking chips of the slate blocks into the grass, Susan walked toward the house.

"Wait'll you hear what I have to tell you, you'll die."

"About what?"

"About Dottie. I've been bursting for days. I know exactly what she does on Tuesdays. A friend of mine saw her in the Waldorf-Astoria. She was sitting in Peacock Alley until a man, from the description a dead ringer for Charlie Watson, joined her and arm in arm, gay as a couple of larks, they strutted into the dining room. Remember how she always stayed in town over night?"

"So what? She has a house in town."

"Don't put on innocent, Susie. I almost died keeping it all to myself while she was here. I could hardly wait until she was gone to tell Alice."

"You haven't told Alice?"

"Why not?"

"You haven't, have you?"

"You don't have to look at me like that. I haven't said anything yet. Don't you think I should?"

"I do not; not if you want to keep Alice as a friend."

"Why not?"

"How would you like someone to come and tell you something like this about Dwight?"

"About my tootsie-wootsie? How could anyone?"

"I imagine Alice feels much the same way about Charles, and I have an idea she'd develop an intense dislike for anyone who disillusioned her."

"But think how far an affair of this sort can go, especially when they're alone together in town! You know how romantic a man can get, especially about a younger woman."

"You think about it, but don't talk about it. Alice has enough on her mind. I don't want her hurt, not while she is out here at any rate. And you might take consolation in the fact that few men are romantic enough to give up their families for another woman, young or old."

"Why men can, everyone knows they are much more romantic than women."

"That's right, romantic enough to want romance without obligation. Has it never occurred to you—"

The wooden floorboards creaked with the steps of someone coming out of the house. "Sorry if I'm intruding," Alice said sarcastically. Majestically erect she moved to the porch screen. The door was caught top and bottom. She tugged harder and the door took on the shape of a swollen belly, but did not open. In silence Susan and Bertie watched her. "Well, I never," she said. She jerked the door angrily and almost lost her balance when it gave way. "Hmff," she grunted and sat in one of the porch rockers. "It's going to rain again, mark my word for it."

"It probably will," Susan said, rose, started indoors, changed her mind, and sat down on a rocker next to Alice. Bertie was on the swing.

All the next week rain again confined the women to the house. Susan, more and more fearful that out of sheer boredom Bertie might drop a word that would set Alice wondering, rarely let one or the other out of her sight. At night, after she had drifted into sleep, she timed her breathing to the creaks of the moving porch swing, in a filmy darkness she followed a woman, who shielded with her arm a flickering candle which she carried, groping for an indefinable something which eluded her, and she became thankful for the mornings she dreaded. When Tim telephoned to say that he and Hiram and Paul would be home on leave, she used this as an excuse to close the house at the beach.

While packing, Mary tipped over Alice's candle and the flame went out. "Quick, quick, pick it up," Susan said. "Light it. If Mrs. Watson doesn't know it went out maybe nothing will happen to Clarence."

"Oh, Mrs. Bates. Oh, Mrs. Bates," Mary cried and did not move.

Susan ran into the kitchen and came back with a box of matches. On the way into the parlor she struck a light on the sandpaper strip along the side of the box. With her arm she shielded the small flame against the wind in the passage and thought, "Alice escapes through the candle. But I?"

1917, September

TIM, HIRAM, AND PAUL RECEIVED FURLOUGHS THE FIRST WEEK IN September. The girls had returned a few days earlier. Everyone was in gay spirits. The young folks were taken to the theatre, and a round of parties was arranged for which Charles Watson supplied beer and champagne. Everything ran smoothly. Although Margaret and Robert Taylor dropped in for a while the night the Robinsons, still neighbors, entertained, they sent regrets to Alice Watson and to Susan Bates. Dorothea drank moderately,

and at the last party of the series, held at the Bates', even Alice Watson burst into laughter when Dorothea, in a long tight dress of reddish orange with slits on each side that reached above the knees, did her Eva Tanguay act.

Teasing her already teased hair, her heavily mascaraed eyes turned toward Alice, Dorothea said, "I practiced all summer to give you boys a laugh."

Alice smiled and said, "She certainly did. She worked real hard."

Dorothea broke into a loud, "I don't care. I don't care," and went around the room mocking everyone. Before Dwight Robinson, she ran her hand down the side of her skirt as if she were digging into a pocket, pulled up some imaginary coins which she counted several times before separating one from the others which she rubbed between her thumb and her forefinger, and then placed on an imaginary table. Dwight laughed uneasily. She imitated the way Charles Watson threw a glass of beer down his throat and then reared his head like a horse that has just enjoyed a lump of sugar. When she neighed and kicked one leg against her buttock, everyone roared. Charles rose and kissed her hand, which she pulled away, slapping his chin as she raised it. Her eyes turned sad and weary, and seemed to say, "I'm finished."

Close to midnight, while Susan was carrying a tray of clean glasses up to the back parlor, where the older men were playing pinochle, she noticed shadow shapes on the wall at the head of the steps. They kept moving back and forth, meeting and separating. Through the partially closed door of the den came the sound of muffled speech. She stopped to listen.

"I love you, Tim," she heard Nellie say, "and you love me. Isn't that enough for the folks?"

"They'd think I'm too young to be engaged. My father says I haven't broken my shell yet. Ha, that's a hot one. He should have an idea. But you know how parents are. They'd argue that I must finish my education. And ma's so upset. My going to war and all that. Let's wait 'til I get back."

"I'll wait for you forever, Tim," Nellie said.

Susan almost dropped the tray. With her hands trembling she went into the parlor.

The next day the boys went back to camp and a few days later Tim telephoned to say that he would be in a parade the following Monday.

When Monday morning came no one expressed an eagerness to be on the way, but Henry, Susan, Eleanor, Arnold, and Nellie Taylor were all ready to leave for Manhattan before nine o'clock. Arnold, dressed in a blue serge Eton suit with a broad stiff collar that came out over his navy top coat, went into the street. "Don't get dirty," Susan called and followed him out. Both stood leaning against the fence watching a traveling carrousel come to a stop in front of the house opposite.

A group of children quickly gathered and scampered up the open merry-go-round cart, where with one hand they clutched the rubber reins of the wooden horses or the poles that pierced them while with the other they reached for the lucky-ride brass ring. They shouted and laughed and called to each other. Some joined in the song of the owner who, with a parrot perched on his white cotton sailor cap, and his head, in spite of its occupant, bobbing from side to side, played the calliope and sang:

Around, around, on a horse of wood,
Beneath a sun-brown cardboard hood,
I ride to music scratched and shrill
To snatch a gold ring as a thrill.

My hand-carved horse can win no race;
No one will clock or chart his pace;
We steeplechase on an iron pole
That through my steed has dug a hole.

"Giddyap, Giddyap," others shout.
Indifferent to all about,
Around I go, rein tight in hand;
My journey is to merry-go land.

"Wouldn't you like a ride?" Susan asked.

Without answering Arnold dashed across the street and climbed up onto a horse. He waved to his mother before gripping the pole with both hands. Singing along with the others, he went around twice after the ring-holder was thrust out without making any attempt to snatch a ring, but the third time around he reached over. The brass ring gave to his pull; a great gloomy shout went up from those who were close enough to hope to seize it. He held up the ring and laughed and when the merry-go-round came to a stop he ran across the street to his mother and Mary, who had joined her at the fence, shouting, "I caught it, I caught the gold ring."

"When Tim was a little lad like you he caught the ring too and didn't give it back neither," Mary said. "I have it, missus; it will bring him luck; I'll get it."

When Mary returned, all except Susan were in the car. She gave the ring to Susan, who in turn gave it to Henry before she climbed onto the front seat next to him.

In Manhattan, Henry parked the car on 47th Street west of Fifth Avenue. The morning was gloomy and raw. Occasionally a long narrow slant of sunshine forced its way out but it soon disappeared. To throw off the chill they walked for a while looking at various articles displayed by the merchants. Color on color, red, white, blue, orange, green, waved in both directions. A lone pigeon strutted up and down along the lower lip of the Spalding sporting goods shop window. The pigeon stopped, tilted its head, and with its red and yellow eyes looked inquisitively from Susan to the banners. "This is a festive occasion, you know," she said. Arnold bent down to stroke it; before he was able to touch the bird, it flew away.

Late in the morning the sun broke through the thin gray haze and came out strong and bright. Except for Arnold they all sat on the curb and enjoyed the warm rays on their backs while they sipped hot coffee from a large thermos bottle that Mary had given them. Arnold amused himself by testing the strength of crossed boards that had been nailed up to protect plate glass windows and by poking his head into the lobbies of office buildings. From

a lame peddler laden with two baskets, each filled with an assortment of sandwiches under a layer of American flags attached to sticks, Henry bought a flag for each. He waved the flags in the air, and Arnold ran through the thin crowd that had gathered and climbed up Henry's leg until he had one. When Henry handed one to Eleanor he patted her on the shoulder; he did likewise with Nellie. Both girls were unusually glum. From a cross-eyed man, who grinned and nodded to no one in particular and whose wares were lined up on a panel that was strapped across his shoulders, Henry bought a large blue celluloid-topped pin and ribbon on which was the slogan, "And we won't come back 'til it's over over there," and pinned it on Arnold.

Nellie giggled.

"What's funny about that?" Eleanor asked.

"The pin. It's just like the first prize badge at a cattle show."

Gradually the crowd formed a heavy dense mass, leaving only a narrow lane along the buildings for pedestrians. Whiff on whiff of garlic, tobacco, alcohol, human bodies, floated from one to another. Here and there someone hummed the national anthem or sang a few words from a popular song. Men and women in office windows high above the ground waved and shouted. Regularly, police on foot pushed the crowd back and only with difficulty did anyone retain a place along the curb.

A group of horse-mounted police rode into the crowd. Nellie fell. Henry snatched her away from a horse's hoofs just in time. She clung to him, trembling. The police moved along and the crowd pushed forward. "Music," Arnold cried.

A hush blanketed the mob. Everyone stood still. Yes, there was music. Barely perceptible, but it was there. And then almost immediately it became distinct and an army brass band was in sight; then legs, rows and rows of legs in khaki overseas puttees moved up and down in unison beating out the time of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." Nellie yelled, "Tim." Eleanor yelled, "Hi." They all rushed forward, their arms stretched toward the boys. Tim, Hiram, and Paul waved. Tim reached into the air as if to catch something. Paul pointed to the block above. Hiram, who stood out taller than the rest, threw a kiss to Eleanor. The police

rode into the crowd and forced it back to the curb. Tim, Hiram, and Paul were out of sight; all that was left was a blur of marching youngsters, skinny as half-grown gander, in ill-fitting uniforms. Arnold waved his flag. Susan's had fallen to the ground. Its stick was broken; its red, white, and blue dirty from the feet that had tread on it. Nellie cried softly in her handkerchief. Henry and Susan held each other's hand. Someone in back, practically in Susan's ear, said, "They march right onto the boat." "No. No," Susan cried inwardly. "Yes," someone else said, "the idea is to have them board in gay spirits."

The parade was over. The crowd broke up. Eleanor stood at the curb trying to vomit. "Like the show, folks?" Henry asked three or four people, who had stopped to watch her, and they walked on.

"Put your finger down your throat," Susan, with an arm around Eleanor, said. "Put your finger down your throat. That will bring it up."

As they stood waiting for Eleanor they noticed Charles and Alice Watson walking slowly down from the street above.

"Hello there," Henry called to them.

"Hello, folks," Charles Watson said sadly.

"Can we give you a lift home? That is when our little girl here gets over the effects of the excitement?"

"Oh, thanks. I'd hate to take Alice in the subway."

On the way to the car, Susan said, "We didn't give Tim the ring."

"Didn't you see me throw it to him?" Henry asked.

"No," she sighed. "I didn't see much of anything."

The car was overcrowded. Eleanor sat up in front with her father and Charles Watson. Susan held Arnold on her lap. She overheard Eleanor say, "Daddy, I don't want to go back to school. I want to go away somewhere."

"Where?"

"I don't care. Anywhere."

"And I was thinking that perhaps you should go to school here in town so that your mother will have you at home with her."

"I want to go away," she said.

"Everything for your convenience," Susan said. "I am not to be considered at all." Her eyes fell on the slogan on Arnold's pin, "And we won't come back 'til it's over over there."

"What are you wearing that for?" she asked. "Take it off." She reached for it and Arnold slid to the floor of the car and covered the slogan with his hand.

Alice Watson bent over and whispered, "Calm yourself, Susie. You are so excited. You are not yourself."

Susan jerked Arnold back onto her lap. "We have enough trouble without you falling out."

Nellie, who sat between Alice and Susan, was so pale she looked as if she might faint. Susan drew Nellie's head to her shoulder, and Nellie burst out crying. With a gloved hand Susan stroked a wisp of fluffy red hair along the edge of Nellie's black satin tam.

None was in a talkative mood and little more was said all the way home.

For several days Henry tried to convince Eleanor to enter a local private school. Finally he enrolled her at Manual Training, a city high school in the neighborhood. After school each afternoon she went straight to her room. Except for Nellie, occasionally, she saw no friends. Her eyes were frequently red, her face pale. Neither she nor Henry nor Susan referred to the way she acted or how she looked until one evening Henry threw down his fork and said, "What the devil is the matter with you, girl? All you do is nibble, nibble. Can't you eat any more?"

"I want to go away."

"Away. Away. Where?"

"Anywhere. Just away."

"I'm surprised at you, Ellie. Other girls have lost their beaus, you're not the only one."

"I'd like to go away, Daddy, that's all."

"Do you think you can give into every whim?" Susan asked. "What's wrong with you young girls nowadays?"

Without answering, without glancing at any of them, Eleanor put down her knife and fork, folded her napkin and started to leave the table.

"Wait, Ellie, wait. You'll be ill if you keep this up. Tell you what we'll do. Let things rest until Christmas and then if you still feel you must run off, that you will be happier among strangers, I will not object."

"Thanks, Daddy," she said. She tried to swallow another bite and could not.

"All right. All right, darling," Henry said. "Go to your room if you want to."

Eleanor left and Arnold followed, carrying a glass of milk intended for her. Henry lit a cigar and Susan helped Mary clear the table.

On a Saturday morning late in the month, Mary was sitting out front in the sun watching Arnold play stoop ball. She kept tapping her foot in time to the beat created by the regularity with which the ball hit the bottom step until the rhythm was lost in the scraping noise of a horse-drawn vehicle pulling up to the curb. "Where are you going, Nolly?" Susan, in the dining room, heard Mary call to Arnold who was running up the stoop. When a few minutes later he came running down, it seemed to Susan someone was with him so she asked Henry, who sat in the rocker in the window reading a newspaper, "Is that Eleanor with Arnold?"

"Yes," he said. "Say, a marionette show is set up outside. Let's go out and watch it."

The stage was cut into the side of the wagon. A man perched on top pulled a cord to lift the curtain, which was decorated in flat cubist blues and greens and reds and yellows with the grin of comedy facing the grin of tragedy. The curtain rose half way; then fell with a thud. Arnold, who held Eleanor's hand, laughed heartily. Eleanor looked at him and smiled. It merely goes to show, Susan thought, how superficial the tragedies of youth are when a small thing such as the accidental dropping of a curtain can cheer Eleanor up. Without mishap a second time the curtain rose.

The father in the puppet drama, who wore brown trousers with red and blue patches, opened a cupboard door. The mother, with a torn black lace shawl over her head, and a boy and a girl,

likewise in tatters, grimly watched the father, whose shoulders sagged and who turned up the palms of his hands with a hopeless shrug as he walked away from the empty shelves. After tearfully kissing his wife and children, the father left the house. He walked along the stalls of a market place and stopped before each booth. At the baker's he danced a jig before the counter on which bread was stacked. While dancing he looked slyly around; then picked up a loaf and ran. The baker bobbed up from behind the counter and ran after him. A policeman joined the baker. They caught the father and beat him, the policeman with a stick, the baker with his fists. The father, still clutching the bread, pulled away from their grasp; in so doing he stumbled and brushed against a man in the street and the bread dropped to the ground. On he ran, holding his head where the policeman had hit him. When he rushed through the door of his house, the mother and the children ran up to him. The father pushed them aside. He beat the mother. The children cried and he beat them. A knock could be heard at the door, but the whole family was crying and no one answered it. Cautiously, slowly, the door was pushed open from the outside, and the man into whom the father had bumped when he dropped the bread, followed by the policeman and the baker, walked in. The man handed the mother the loaf of bread. In a dance of rejoicing the stranger, the policeman and the baker were invited to partake of the bread.

The curtain dropped on the dance and simultaneously the man on the top of the wagon landed on the sidewalk. Holding a tin cup he walked through the small crowd that had gathered. A monkey jumped from the seat of the wagon to his shoulder.

"You son?" the man asked as Henry dropped some coins into the cup.

"Yes, this is my boy."

"He look so high. I know him when he much little."

"Yes, he has grown tall, he has grown tall, indeed."

"He no play with my Dominic today." The puppet player stretched out the monkey's tail.

Henry looked over at Arnold, who had walked to the edge of the crowd with Eleanor, and said, "No, not today."

The puppet player tipped his small peak cap and, with the monkey moving along his arm and shoulders, climbed into his seat. As he drove away a postman handed Susan a government postcard. "When you receive this," it read, "you will know I have landed safely on French soil. I will write you from there. Love to you all. Tim."

Susan gave the card to Henry. He read it and handed it to Eleanor. "Hiram must have landed too," she said. Otherwise no one commented. Mary held the gate open and one walked in behind the other.

At luncheon Arnold scarcely ate. "Haven't I troubles enough?" Susan asked. "What is the matter with you now?"

"Are all families mean to one another?" he asked.

"What a question. Of course not. Family life is the blessing of our civilization," Susan said. "Where else would we find happiness?"

"You see, son," Henry said, "nothing runs entirely smoothly. Like everything else most families, all families have ups and downs, good moments and bad." Susan caught Henry's eye and motioned to him. "That is," he concluded hurriedly, "especially when there are financial difficulties."

"Why don't you tell him the truth?" Eleanor burst out. "Why don't you tell him what hateful, unsympathetic, selfish things families are? Why don't you tell him how we speak of honesty and how we deceive one another, pretend to one another? Why don't you tell him how cruel we really are? Why don't you tell him the secrets we keep from one another?"

"Stop this minute," Susan said.

"Ellie, I would like to speak to you privately." Henry went upstairs. With tears streaming down her face Eleanor followed. Arnold went over to Susan. He was trembling. So was Susan. She put an arm around him. He was so thin she shuddered.

Henry and Eleanor were gone only a few minutes when Henry came back to the table. "Sit down, Arnold," he said. "Try to eat something. You are a growing boy; you need nourishment. Didn't you hear the puppet master say you look high?"

Arnold went back to his seat. With his fork he moved the food

around his plate, but he lifted none to his mouth. "I'll eat later," he said and ran to Mary in the kitchen.

Henry took a few sips of black coffee and then he said to Susan, "I gave Eleanor permission to go out to Olive's place in San Francisco. Her nerves might settle if she gets away from us for a while."

"She promised to wait until after Christmas."

"I gave her permission to go now, Susan."

"A girl's place is at home."

"I know. But these are unusual times." He lit a cigarette and puffed it before he spoke again. "This shouldn't be too tough for us. At least she'll be in this country, and we can run out and see her. That might not be a bad idea to plan a West Coast trip for next summer. We never have seen the West."

"You said Eleanor would be going for only a while."

"Well, that is, if she gets tied up through the winter."

"Henry."

"Susie, she thought she would like to try her hand at something, pick up the work Olive started."

"She's had no experience. What will she do out there alone, in a slum? All sorts of things can happen to her."

"Not worse than has already."

"Meaning what?"

"Well, what I mean, Susie, is suppose she breaks down completely? Let us give her a chance to pull herself together, to make a go of things on her own."

"She's so young to live away from home, so far away."

The strains of a mouth organ drifted in from the kitchen. "She's in love, Susie, in love," Henry said and crushed his cigarette in his saucer and sipped his coffee. Susan sat still, counting the steps as Eleanor left the parlor and slowly climbed the stairs to her room.

1918, February 9

THE YEAR-END HOLIDAYS HAD BEEN GLOOMY AND BITTER. ARNOLD derived little pleasure from noisy toys. Tim and Eleanor, who always made Christmas a lively affair, had become shadowy cares. Henry arranged a midnight supper at Churchill's to celebrate the coming of the New Year, but his efforts to be jolly were as obvious as Susan's and depressed her further. She really had wanted to be gay; she felt she owed that much to Henry, who, although he was working very hard, was exceedingly thoughtful of her. When the holidays were over she was glad, but she continued to look back on them with regret. She had missed an opportunity to show Henry a lighter side. Gradually, as the weeks passed, she ceased to actively reproach herself, but the quiet sobriety that gripped her was as trying. She no longer had the energy to try to divert Arnold from long sessions of piano practice each day and was perfectly content to sit hour after hour knitting khaki wool scarfs or rolling bandages. In fact, she had developed a fiendish delight in losing herself in what had become a stupefying routine. Almost any interruption upset and annoyed her. She visited no one; her only excursions away from home were to Red Cross Headquarters where she delivered whatever she had finished and picked up materials for additional work. As she was winding wool into a ball, using the back of a dining room chair to hold the skein, the postman tapped on the windowpane. By the sprightliness of the trill she knew he had a letter from Tim and she dropped the greenish brown wool ball to the floor and rushed over and opened the window a crack to let the envelope through. She sank into the rocker, where she turned it around and around before she tore a ragged edge down the side and pulled the letter out.

"Slut," she read. "Slut. My own sister a slut."

Slut, slut, slut. What else did he say? Hiram. Hiram; slut. Oh, my God, it can't be true. It can't be true. She's so young. "I told you so," Eleanor screamed and stamped her feet. "I told you so."

The parasol was inside out; even so, she stood holding it above her head, screaming, "I told you so." The colors of the Roman stripe silk ran down her face onto her white dress. "Wait for a sunny day when we will go to the park," Susan had said. "I will carry it now. Now," Eleanor answered and strutted up and down the street. Without warning the parasol was pulled inside out, Eleanor's skirt was above her waist, and the rain beat down and washed the colors of the parasol onto Eleanor's face. Hiram jumped from his porch and ran to her and held down her skirt. "I told you so," she screamed. "I told you so." Hiram wiped her tears away.

"I'm mad. Mad. Eleanor isn't a child any more. She's a—"

Mary, the steps of one foot heavier than those of the other, rushed in from the kitchen. "Are you all right, mum?" she asked.

"Yes, yes. I'm all right."

"The way you rocked. I never heard anything like it. I'll telephone the mister." With the corner of her gingham apron she wiped Susan's forehead.

"No. Don't. Don't. He knows. He knew all along."

The letter dropped to the floor. Mary stooped to pick it up. "Don't touch that," Susan screamed. "Don't touch that."

Mary picked it up and placed it on Susan's lap. Susan shivered. "Oh, Mary, Mary." And Susan sobbed convulsively. Her head fell against Mary's flat broad chest. Mary ran her fingers over Susan's hair; she too was crying.

1918, February 11

"SO, OLIVE KNEW. SHE AND HENRY. HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO blind? But I knew. I knew." Susan broke into a hard cold laugh and crushed a letter from Olive which she held. But the letter was an escape from images of Eleanor which had been haunting her and so she read it again.

The noise of death explodes in our ears all through the day, all through the night. It affects each of us in a different way. Some count the minutes; others make every minute count. A devil-may-care swagger may hide a heavy heart. A few tears may wash away fear. Out here, where heroes are born, cowards are forgiven, for often today's coward is tomorrow's hero and vice versa. But, whatever we may be, you who are safe at home must bear with us. And for this reason I ask you to forgive Tim for writing you as he did.

I tried desperately to get into his sector for Christmas Day, but I was unable to. Not until last night, a week after all the holidays were over did I get to visit him. Imagine the mood of his shelter, a low small old cellar of a bombed-out farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, not far from the German front, too near the German line for comfort. The night was cold, bitter cold. The men who came in from shifts in the trenches were stiff, covered with snow, wrapped in big, heavy coats and mufflers and hoods. Outside, one had his choice between mortar shells, artillery, small arms fire, and all the other delicacies that war supplies with such generosity. Inside the men were unshaved, tired, taciturn and tense.

In the middle of all this mail arrived. In fact, I stepped aside on the bottom step just outside the door to let the mail crew pass in first. Picture, if you can, Susie, the excitement. For seconds there was a complete hush. The even, everlasting bombardment outside intensified the stillness within. Everybody huddled around the couple of candles and oil lamps, the only lights to brighten up the dreary stone-walled room. Each one was transferred thousands of miles to places warm and cheerful. The lucky ones opened their packages. And the dirty, battle-weary, grown-up fighters nibbled at small crackers and candy like kids. They laughed and enjoyed themselves like school children on a picnic. Yes, that is the way your sweets were enjoyed, because that night the package you intended to reach Tim for Xmas was delivered.

I dried my eyes and dashed some powder on my nose and let Tim know I had arrived. He broke down completely when he saw me. An hour passed before I could get him to stop sobbing and go to sleep. In the morning we had a long talk. He told me how Hiram, when wounded, had confessed that Eleanor was to have his child, and how, when Hiram died the next day, he wrote you that terrible letter. If only I had arrived a few days earlier, all this pent-up feeling might have had another outlet. Tim wrote as he did merely because he had fallen to pieces. Paul Watson had received word that same day that his brother Clarence had lost his foot at the ankle, and this news coming as it did right on top of Hiram's death was a bit more than the boys could bear. Tim now feels entirely differently about the whole thing . . .

Wearily, Susan closed her eyes. Eleanor was on the floor and Tim was forcing a slipper onto her foot. Susan groaned and went back to the letter:

. . . and is quite ready to stand by Eleanor. Henry wished to spare you this news, but since you are aware of it I know you will understand Eleanor's position. She loved Hiram, Susie.

None of us, it seems, can escape the effects of war because effects of war are effects of life. Our channels are filled with currents over which we have no control. They pull us this way and that no matter how hard we try to go in another direction.

Susie, dear, all your dreams have been torn apart, haven't they? The family you wanted closely knit is spread over the globe. The son who was to become a college athlete became a soldier instead. The daughter for whom you planned a brilliant marriage is content with so much less. When we dream for others we are sure to inflict pain on ourselves, even though those for whom we dream do not intend it so.

For one thing you may be thankful. Eleanor is not burdened by remorse. Also, she gets the best of care. When

she went out to my place in San Francisco, I contacted a doctor who has an excellent reputation and with whom I am acquainted, and he looks after her. He wired me that the news of Hiram's death was of course a terrible shock, but she is holding up well under the circumstances.

Henry, I understand, plans to go to California early in May to spend a month with Eleanor in spite of what it means to be away from the factory for such a long period in times such as these. Why don't you go with him? A mother means so much to a girl, especially under these circumstances. And as Henry wrote me recently, "There is something deep and dependable in Susie. The peculiar thing is that just when I expect her to act perversely she invariably comes through." And that is true, Susie, you have always come through. Don't let Eleanor down. When the baby comes you will love it more than you can now realize.

Might it not be a good idea to get involved in something to take your mind off your home problems? Why don't you pick up a worthy cause, such as woman's suffrage? You are still a young woman, barely forty, and such an activity would stimulate you mentally, keep you from brooding.

On and off this winter John Faulkner has suffered from attacks of grippe. I tease him, tell him to go home, tell him that he cannot hold up under the strain because he was hothouse bred, but the winter has been severe and our quarters are not always weatherproof. I had to come out here to discover how very healthy I am.

Much love,
Olive

The hand which held the letter dropped listlessly to the side of the sofa. With the other, feeling a draft that came through cracks of the bedroom windows, she pulled the afghan with which she was covered closer to her. She wanted to fall asleep, to lose herself in darkness, to transport herself away from a world of decisions, but her head, wrapped in a damp towel, seethed with a succession of bitter sensations. She kept repeating, "She never

had a daughter; she never had a daughter. What will become of her? What will become of her?"

Susan closed her eyes. "If I could only sleep," she moaned, "I only want to sleep. That's all. Sleep." Again she saw Eleanor as a little girl in a trailing black dress on a chair posing before a mirror in which Eleanor, in a white organdy dress, ran up to her with a dandelion, "a dandelion to tell the hour," and then rushed to take her place in a May Day dance. Eleanor was queen; her streamer was white; all the other streamers of the pole were red. On her head was a gold paper crown; the other girls wore broad satin red bows to match their streamers.

Clap, clap, clap, dance and sing;
We harbinger the queen of spring.

The girls twirled and their short white starched skirts spread out like sunflower petals.

She comes to us from winter's cold
In gown of white, in crown of gold.

Around they went, spinning and singing.

Clap, clap, clap, dance and sing;
To May Day's pole a queen we bring.
She circles for the hymned embrace;
The bridal torch she takes with grace.

They were all so pretty, but Eleanor was the prettiest.

Clap, clap, clap, dance and sing;

Her silky long brown hair rippled in the sunlight; her toes touched the ground gracefully, daintily.

The bride was blessed by seeds of spring.
The harvest now is her deep care;
A harvest for us all to share.

"Oh, Eleanor, Eleanor," Susan cried and buried her face in a small sofa pillow.

Mary came in with a warm cup of broth. After she drank it, Susan said, "I'm getting up, Mary. I'm going down to Red Cross headquarters. I want to start work again."

"The doctor said you're not to, yet."

"I'm going to, Mary. I've got to get out of here."

"But the doctor—"

"I've got to, Mary. I'll go crazy if I don't."

"Then I'll go with you."

Mary helped Susan onto the trolley. "Do you think you can make room?" Susan asked sweetly, and men who were spread out on the long varnished reed seat moved together to make room for the two women. At the next corner a woman in a mannish-cut suit boarded the trolley. Although she held onto a strap, when the trolley lurched around a corner, she was thrown and almost fell into the lap of the man sitting next to Susan.

"So you want the vote. Well, you can't have the vote and my seat besides," the man snarled.

"From where I stand," the woman answered quietly, "I would say you have the vote and the seat too."

"If she'd dress like a woman, turn on some feminine charm," Susan whispered to Mary, "she'd get the seat."

"What's that, mum?" Mary asked.

"What do women want with the vote? Isn't taking care of their homes and their families a big enough job? Olive must be shell-shocked."

"What's that, mum? I can't hear you."

1918, February 16

ARNOLD OPENED THE WINDOW A FEW INCHES AND PUT HIS HAND in the snow that had piled against the house. The unexpected whiff of air surprised Henry, who was dozing over his news-

paper. With a start he sat up in his chair and shook himself like a waking dog. "My, that feels good," he said. "This dog-gone furnace heat in here puts me to sleep. We should switch to steam."

"It's your age, Henry, your age," Susan said. "Why not admit it?"

Henry stretched and scratched himself under the arm. Nellie, who had had dinner with them, tiptoed over to Arnold, opened the window wide, and pushed Arnold's head into the snow drift. Arnold turned suddenly and a handful of snow that he intended for Nellie hit Henry full in the face. Until Henry laughed Arnold stood with his mouth open; then he said, "Pop, there's a red ball up today. I'd like to go ice skating."

"Me too," Nellie said.

"We'll all go," Henry said.

"What do you mean all?" Susan asked.

"Well, I'm going."

"You haven't skated in over twenty years. You'll break your neck."

"Now, Susie." And Henry expanded his chest in a demonstration of strength.

"What will you use for skates?"

"We'll rent some. Come on, Susie, be a sport."

"My ankles are weak, but I'll watch. And you, Arnold, straighten up. Throw your shoulders back."

The night had a crystal, glasslike quality; a full moon and stars were static luminaries in a satiny black sky. Bundled in a sealskin coat that Henry had given her at Christmas, Susan sat on a bench in the snow along the edge of the frozen lake. Weary, exhausted from the hysteria that had seized her the week before, she put her head back and let the clear fresh air flow into her nostrils. Occasionally she took a short deep breath. The steady unbroken grind of steel blades cutting into ice made her rather dreamy. A vision of Eleanor began to form, but she thrust it from her and concentrated on the skaters. A young man fluttering his arms too gracefully was showing a girl how to cut a figure eight backwards. To get his bearings Henry went around

several times with Nellie; then he tried skating alone. He wobbled uncertainly, bumped into the young man who was cutting the figure eight, fell heavily, sprang up, grinned sheepishly, and without brushing the snowy particles from his trousers went on again. The young man, who by pulling in his stomach saved himself from falling, ignored Henry and swung over to the young girl and with her skated off. The whole episode, especially the young man's obliviousness to those around him, amused Susan and she laughed lightly.

After a while her toes began to freeze so she went into the refreshment parlor and stood at a window where she could watch the skaters through a space she had rubbed clear with her glove in the steam-clouded glass. Henry kept coming into view, weaving in and out the crowd. He seemed steadier and was obviously gaining confidence in himself. Slyly he crept up in back of Nellie, grabbed her waist, and pushed her along. "He'll be stiff tomorrow, stiff as a board," Susan thought. She was wondering how she could tell him so without appearing to begrudge him some fun when he put an arm around Nellie and skated off into the crowd. Susan stepped outside, but they were out of sight. She remained outdoors until she became chilled again; then she went back inside and looked out the window. When next they came into view, Arnold was with them. He waved to Susan. She motioned. He nodded, said something to the others, and, arms interlocking, the three skated off the ice, tripped up the wooden steps, and burst into the warm grease-smelling shelter, laughing and breathless.

Nellie's freckled face was almost as red as her hair. Her lusty robustness brightened the room. Susan gasped at the way she skipped over and stood before her and like a little girl, who, without saying so, made Susan understand that she expected Susan to straighten the white woolen scarf that was twisted in the collar of her jacket. Involuntarily Susan brushed back loose strands of unruly red hair and kissed Nellie's tingling cheek.

"You are such a warm impulsive girl," Susan said.

Henry and Arnold stamped their feet and blew on their hands. "Now for a good cup of hot chocolate," Henry said.

"In this smelly place?"

"Aw, mom."

"Hey youse over there," a man behind the counter called, "don't stamp on them there skates in here. Wanna cut my floor to pieces?"

"Sorry," Henry said. "Won't do it again."

"We should take Nellie to Newman's or some nice place, Henry."

"I don't mind. I like it here. Tim used to bring me here all the time."

"You really love Tim, don't you, Nellie?"

"Oh, yes."

"Even so, you shouldn't spend so much time with Mr. Bates and me. We love having you. You're good for us; we know that instead of losing a son we're gaining a daughter, but you should be with young folks."

Tears came to Nellie's eyes; she put an arm around Susan's waist. Susan let the weight of her body fall against Nellie. The contact comforted her. She wanted to say that she was sorry, sorry if she had ever hurt Nellie; she hadn't realized; she'd make up for the past; she would buy her some little trinket, something to make a young girl happy. With their arms around each other the two went to a table.

Henry tossed a quarter to a boy standing nearby and asked him to get their shoes from the checking booth.

As Nellie started to undo the laces of her skates Henry bent down to help her. Their heads bumped lightly and his hand came in contact with hers. He let his fingers run over her knuckles. "Nellie," he said, "I'm so glad your name is Nellie. So like our own little girl's."

"My name is really Helen."

"To me it is Nellie, plain Nellie. I always called her Ellie, you know."

Susan stared at him icily. Without helping Nellie he sat up in his chair and took a sip of his hot drink.

He seemed so calm Susan felt like shaking him. The flash of a new idea choked her. She coughed and a few drops of chocolate

spattered over the table. Arnold leaned over and slapped her back. "Down the wrong hatch?" Henry asked. Only half-conscious of what he said, she shook her head in agreement. "A mother doesn't love a baby she never holds." Susan's eyes met Henry's. "You can do it," Susan thought.

Henry looked away from her. "Nellie," he said, "as usual, Mrs. Bates is right. We'll take you stepping, any place you want to go, Saturday."

1918, November

"WHAT'S EATING YOU? GET UP ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE BED?" Henry asked.

Susan buttered a roll before she answered. "I was just thinking. We haven't heard from Tim in weeks."

"No news is good news."

"Unless he's at the front again and his letters can't come through."

"There's no sense thinking the worst."

"Henry, according to the papers, Germany is about to collapse. The war might be over any day. Henry, he's come along this far!"

"If the war is over as soon as the papers predict, he's safe."

"How can we be sure?"

"Well, I had a letter from him."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"I'm sorry, Susie. It's, it's the sort of a letter a boy might write. I didn't know how you'd take it. Here it is; don't say I didn't warn you." Henry dug among some papers in his inside pocket and pulled out the letter. "Don't be upset by the hospital stationery; Tim's all right."

Dear Pop,

I address this letter to you at the factory, because I do not want to alarm ma. You know into what a dither she can get and nothing much is wrong with me. In fact I'm ashamed to tell you that all I have is the itch. Crabs and cooties are the damndest things and have made a mess of me. Ma, I imagine, will be furious if you tell her. You know what a fusspot she can be about keeping clean. But it is all in the breaks. Anyone who escapes this sort of thing out here is just lucky like the guys who escape a dose of the real thing. But then, nothing serious can happen to me; I still have my lucky ring.

I hated like hell to come into the hospital because I was having the time of my life on my last assignment. After I was made Warrant Officer I was sent some distance in from Somme, which was a great relief after the heavy fighting. My job was to stand on a road that cuts through a one-horse village and direct heavy artillery and tanks headed for front lines. What an assignment! Villagers kept bringing me stale bread and cheese as if such food were a luxury to a Yank. These people over here think an American soldier knows more than a ouija board. Where is there a water closet, or when will the midwife be back? One day a guy, who had sat on the other side of the road all the while a long line of heavy equipment went by, ran up to me as soon as it had passed, waving his arms, jabbering away. I shook my head as if I agreed with every word he said. Then, without warning, he stopped short, and we were standing there staring at each other. I guess they don't teach such good French in Westchester. But I was curious to find out what gives with this guy so I pulled out my Easy Way to Speak and Understand French. What do you think he wanted to know? Where some dame in her twenties, if he told the truth, who came from his village about fifteen kilometers away, was getting married. I judged him to be fifty, and he kept cursing his rival, saying he was *trop vieux, trop vieux*. War gives old guys a break, doesn't it, pop? When it finally

penetrated Frenchie's skull that I wasn't a general information bureau he sat down on the side of the road and cried and blew his nose in a dirty bandana. After a while he got up, opened a jug slung over his shoulder, and we both had a slug of wine. Then, with the same dirty bandana he wiped his mouth and the jug, kissed me on both cheeks, and went away.

As for the girls. Ooo la la. These French girls are something. They're always ready, and it makes no difference if it's behind a barn door or in the back of a truck. Believe me, pop, if you haven't known a French girl, you haven't lived.

I miss Paul. About a week ago I had a card telling me he was going to London on leave. Why do you suppose he would pick London instead of Paree? Of course his father has some high tone connections in England, with plenty of Scotch in their cellars, but he'll have to be on good behavior with their girls, and it isn't every day that a fellow has a chance to get to Paris.

I also had a letter from Clarence. He writes he is not going back to college. Guess when you can't play football, school isn't much fun. And, while we are on the subject, pop, I want to say something that has been on my mind. I don't intend to go to college when I get back. The army has wised me up too much; school is kid's stuff.

Aunt Olive drops in to see me almost every day. Say, she looks younger than ever, snazzy is the word for it. Her hair is clipped short like a man's except that hers falls into tight little curls all over her head, and her figure shows off to perfection in her uniform. No wonder John Faulkner fell for her. If she weren't Aunt Olive, I could make a pass at her myself. Even so I could. But you know Aunt Olive. She'd as lief slap me down as not. Too bad Faulkner was shipped home in September after that last spell of Spanish influenza. Aunt Olive misses him terribly, although she won't admit it. Whenever I tackle the subject she'll say it is

a good thing he could go home to take care of his wife. But I notice she doesn't use tinted powder since he is gone.

I don't suppose ma intended to be funny when she wrote that Arnie traded a sweater she had knitted for him for a battered-down violin that didn't even have strings with one of the kids down the block, but I laughed like hell. I can just picture how unnerved she gets hearing him scratch away if the box squeaks half as much as she says it does. Does his nose still drip?

Here comes a babe to fix me up, and this I wouldn't miss. I tickle her, she tickles me. Oh boy.

See you at the ball game,
Tim

"But John is married, Henry. I don't want to be narrow-minded about this whole thing, especially the way Dorothea is drinking, but he did go off and leave her alone for two years. Besides, Olive is fully five or six years older than he. She'd be crazy to think this can be anything more than a mere infatuation on his part. I hope he doesn't hurt her too."

"Susie, you bowl me over." Henry took a quick last sip of coffee and went into the hall.

Susan followed him. "Why?" she asked.

"You do; that's all." Henry pinched her buttocks and left, and Susan went back to the table.

With both hands around her cup she alternately blew and drank hot coffee, at the same time rereading the letter which was on the table before her. Occasionally she chuckled softly. When Arnold came in and said, "Good morning," she mumbled a greeting, but her thoughts obviously were on the letter. "It's a pity," she said, as much to herself as to Arnold, "that they don't teach Spencerian in the schools any more; it would suit Tim's personality much better than this Palmer method."

Arnold, who had been looking at her, uttered a sharp shrill cry, the bread knife fell to the table, and he gripped one hand with the other. Blood oozed between his fingers.

"Mary, Mary," Susan cried.

Mary was already beside Arnold. "Now, now, Nolly," she said, stroking his head which she had brought back against her body. "Let Mary see."

The cut was deep and ran from the base of the thumb almost to his wrist. Mary pulled up his hand and held it high in the air. Susan called a doctor across the street who rushed over.

All the while the doctor washed, sewed, and dressed the wound Arnold leaned forward, occasionally blowing through his teeth. Otherwise he gave no sign of pain. Mary spit on the bread knife and said some words in Gaelic.

"Keep that hand in a sling for a couple of days," the doctor said as he taped the bandage.

"Will I be able to play with it again, doc?" Arnold asked calmly.

"Why, of course. You'll be shooting marbles in no time, no time at all."

"I mean the piano."

The doctor looked from Arnold to Susan and back to Arnold. "Why," he said, "a lad your age shouldn't worry about things like that. You should think of playing games." He patted Arnold's shoulder. "Take it easy, son, and before you know it Mary's hocus-pocus will have your hand as good as new."

Without much coaxing Arnold agreed to lie down. Late in the morning, after he had fallen asleep, Susan drove over to Manhattan in the electric coupé Henry had given her to try on a cutaway suit she had on order at Hickson's. On the way over her thoughts drifted to a remark Alice had let drop about Clarence corresponding with Eleanor. She tried to stifle the recollection of the talk she and Henry had had when he returned from California, in which he had told her Eleanor would never forgive her. But how could she have anticipated the baby would be stillborn? Perhaps, if she wrote Eleanor, or took a trip West to visit her . . .

She parked the car on West Fifty-second Street, and about a quarter to twelve, when she left Hickson's, she started to walk down Fifth Avenue to look at styles in the shop windows. The

avenue was fairly empty, and when all of a sudden she found herself in a crowd of people, she decided she had been caught in the lunch hour rush, and started toward the car. An uneasy feeling, a feeling of indecision, as if a noise about to break were held suspended in the air, compelled her to look around. Here and there small groups had gathered. People walked up to one another on the street and spoke. "What's cooking?" one man asked no one in particular. One who had heard the question shrugged his shoulders into, "I don't know." The heads of the crowd turned in all directions. People would walk, stop, look around, walk on again. Susan too. She was not able to rid herself of the sensation of an impending blast. Spasmodic whistles muffled by distance seemed to resound in her ears. Many, like herself, hesitated every few steps. "Easy, Mr. Castrato, easy," a driver called to his horse as he pulled in his reins. To a companion on his wagon he said, "What the devil do you suppose makes the horse so damn nervous?" Several men looked up into the sky. A group that had congregated focused its attention on the traffic control towers in the middle of the street. Nothing wrong could be seen. A sailor looked at Susan and she looked at him. Before she could decide how much she imagined and how much she heard, the overhanging noise broke through. Sirens blew, whistles blasted. The opaque heaviness of fog horns blended with the clear ring of church bells. Automobiles backfired. Rat-a-tat, rataplan, was beat on a large pan by boys who snaked their way up the avenue yelling long after their voices were hoarse, "The war is over. To hell with war. The Kaiser is a dead duck." The sailor rushed over, grabbed both Susan's hands and spun her round and round. He threw his arms around her and kissed her. She almost lost her hat. He grabbed her hand and pulled her into the gutter into the snake line. And her dizzy brain kept saying, "Nothing can happen to Tim. He has crabs."

People poured from the buildings into the street. They leaned out of windows, and stood on ledges, calling, shouting. Wagons, trucks and autos came to a standstill or were halted by the crowds. Toilet tissue rolls were thrown out of windows and unwound in the sky. Streamers of ticker tape floated in the air.

Telephone directories, office stationery and records, were torn into small bits and tossed about like confetti. An American flag, pole and all, was torn from its place above the window of a store by a man who yelled, "Follow me, follow Old Glory." The sailor jerked Susan out of the snake line and they followed the man with the flag. Hundreds fell in line, pushing ahead of them, shouting hysterically, waving crudely lettered signs, hats, handkerchiefs, hands. Gallows with the Kaiser hanging in effigy, crude biers supporting likenesses of the German emperor, became part of the wild procession. Straw dummies, caricatures of German officials and officers of high rank, were thrown to the ground and men and women jumped and stamped on them with frenzied glee. A group of soldiers turned their voices loose with the song, "When the Boys Come Marching Home." Men threw their hats into the air and screamed until their lungs were dry. They reached for their nearest neighbors, unmindful whether men or women, young or old, and pulled them along. "Come on, mother, step it up," the sailor cried, "you're holding back progress." Young women grasped the arms of men and Turkey Trotted on the sidewalk. The sailor let go Susan's hand to dance with a girl in a red coat. Wildly he kissed the girl's open mouth, pinched her breasts, and then went off with his arm around her waist. An older man pushed Susan along. He took her hand. The crowd became so dense it was impossible to move except with the mob. People shrieked, cheered, moaned. They laughed and cried. They sang and groaned. They kissed one another. They fell into each other's arms. Some soldiers drank from a flat dark brown bottle. Four French sailors sang "Allons, enfants de la patrie, Le jour de gloire est arrivé!" The sky became a mass of flying paper. The man who held her hand said, "I lost my boy," and went over to the soldiers who had the bottle. Susan was swept along by the mob. Her coat was torn; her hat hung tipsily to one side and pulled at her hair where it was pinned; her feet ached, but she stayed in the crowd.

Hours later, exhausted and breathless, she made her way back to the coupé. A man was standing on its roof. When she saw him she started to cry. He came down, helped her drive through

the mass of people across Fifth Avenue, and then left her to go back to the noisy mob. Although all the streets were crowded, she managed to drive without mishap. In the car her head started to pound and she remembered she had not eaten since morning, so midway home she stopped to get a cup of coffee. An excited conversation went on among the people in the confectionery but Susan was too tired to take part in it, too tired even to pay attention to what they had to say. Several times she tried to get Henry on the telephone, but the line was busy. Finally she gave up trying and drove home.

As she approached the house she saw Henry walking up and down in front of the house; Nellie and Arnold were standing on the bottom step of the stoop.

"Look at your hat. It is all out of shape," Henry said before she let go the steering rod. "I have been calling all over town for you. Where on earth have you been?"

Arnold ran up to her. "Are you all right, mamma?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, I'm all right." She noticed he looked pale, paler than normal, and he favored his bandaged hand, holding it up. "I was in New York celebrating the peace."

"Peace, Susie," Henry said. "There is no peace. All we had was a false rumor."

Susan remembered stepping into the street and sinking to the ground. Her mind went blank; then things rushed into it, things all confused.

She stood on the edge of an immense swamp, not a bird flew over it, nothing moved, neither among the reeds nor in the soggy soil. The only sound of life was the sound of death, the explosion of gunpowder. In the mud she saw footprints. They were deep, such as might be made by heavy boots and filled with water that soaked back into the soil. Large monstrous crabs crawled in and out of them. "Scat," she said and waved a washcloth and the crabs disappeared. So did the swamp. Mud extended over a treeless slope, and the footprints pointed up toward the summit on which a lookout tower was standing. She heard Tim call, "Ma, Ma." Though she looked all around, in back of her, to the side, up into the sky, she could not see him

anywhere. When she looked back where the slope had been the ground was flat, covered with snow, spotted with blood. She saw shallow holes, the shape of men's bodies, and then it snowed and the holes and the blood disappeared. A wave of heat made her gasp, and palm trees sprang up in the snow. She heard a blast of guns. No, not of guns, of a violin, squeaking, screeching. The violin buzzed like a bee. "Stop that nerve-racking noise," she shouted. "Don't you know my ears are sharp, that I am sensitive to sound? I hate sounds that are loud or shrill or unexpected. I hate noise. Noise makes something inside me twitch." Was she mad? It wasn't a violin at all; it was the whirr of an aeroplane. It flew over New York and into space, and all it left was a leg without a foot. A hand rubbed the stump where the foot had been. The hand said the leg had no pain, but the hand lied, because the hand itself writhed in pain. A dead duck drifted in to separate the hand and the leg. The head of the duck was the face of the Kaiser. Troops, endless rows of troops, walked over the duck, for the duck was a bridge. The bridge collapsed. Soldiers fell into the water which was so hot they screamed. The water evaporated and the soldiers marched on hard parched ground in the blazing sun singing, "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier over here."

And "Over here" was the top step of a stoop. It was crowded with people who sat and stood on raffia mats, Hiram, Bertie Robinson, Charles Watson, almost everyone Susan knew, even Margaret Taylor. Mrs. Taylor wore an apron cut from a burlap bag and carried a sieve filled with ashes she had removed from a furnace. She said, "I am an old woman now and I am repentant. I cannot compete with my rival Nellie. I give my daughter to my lovers." Susan looked but could not see Tim. Everyone else was distinct except Eleanor and John Faulkner. Yes, Eleanor was there too. She looked thin and sad, but oh, so pretty. Susan could see her through the heavy gray veil which fell over her face and shoulders. Behind her a naked baby floated in the air. "You cannot hide from me," Susan cried. Eleanor crouched behind her father. "I am your mother. I know you. I love you.

Haven't I always fought for you, fought to see that nothing would happen to you, that you would not be hurt? I will keep you with me and protect you. What has happened? Why can't I protect you?" A lot of soldiers jumped out of ambush, shooting everyone with violins. No, they weren't shooting. They were standing before long lines of crosses planted in low mounds of grass playing softly. "I like soft beautiful music," Susan said quietly. "I like anything that is sweet and beautiful." The soldiers had tears in their eyes and they plodded slowly through the mud, pulling a gun that was too heavy for them. Susan could not see Tim. "Tim. Where is Tim? I can never see the face of my Tim. I can see only Henry's face in a mirror as he pulls gray hairs from his head." The soldiers were at the graves again with the violins. The graves were gray, covered with dandelions that swayed in the breeze. One soldier with curls all over his head spoke. He had the face of Olive. "Old men make wars. Young men fight them. Old men buy the loves of young men. Old men get rich. Young men die. I died." He bent down, picked a dandelion, blew its feathery petals into the air, and went on, "And now I rot under the dust of moments. I died because I did not think. I did not ask, 'Why?' When old men said 'Salute,' I said why not! and saluted. When old men said, 'Lower your eyes, blind yourself to the disagreeable,' I said, why not! and lowered my eyes. When old men said, 'March,' I marched. I respected my elders; I did not ask 'Why?' Old men told me I was brave and I believed them. Why? Why?" "Y is a crooked letter," Susan shouted. "That's what Nolly says." "Ha, ha," a soldier sang. Others around the grave sang a refrain, "Ha, ha," and a chorus moaned, "Y is a crooked letter." Susan tried to catch the tune which was sometimes deep and heavy, sometimes like a whisper, but she could not. "Nolly will know it. Nolly will know the tune." The tune. What tune? There was no tune. There was only a salvo of guns. No, it was not as flat, not as heavy as that. It was the crash of a dish.

Susan opened her eyes. The sun streamed across her bed; it shimmered on the snow outside her window. She was wet with

sweat. John Faulkner came over to her and felt her head. "I'm sorry I broke your bowl, Susie," he said. "I was trying to water the sweet potato plant you had planted in it."

She was too tired to answer him, but she thought, "That was the crackled dish Olive had brought from San Francisco." He felt her head again. "You're all right," he said. "Try to get some sleep."

She closed her eyes; it seemed for quite a while, but when she opened them John was on the floor picking up pieces of the broken bowl. Vaguely she was conscious of the light clatter of pottery chips, sun shapes moving on the wall, the weight of her quilt. "I dreamed Eleanor was here," she said.

John went over to her; he sat on the edge of the bed and took her hand. "Eleanor is here. She came East as soon as we wired her; arrived this morning. But you must get some rest, some real rest. You may see Eleanor a little later. I'm your nurse," he chuckled. "You must obey me. Now, go to sleep." Too tired to argue, she dozed off before he walked away.

When she awakened the solid heavy body of Mary was bending over her, straightening the lace center of the counterpane. "Miss Eleanor is coming up," Mary explained. "I knew you would want to look nice."

Mary looked so strong, but Susan knew that every movement tortured her, that she was crippled by rheumatic pains. "Mary." She ran her fingers along the back of Mary's hand.

Henry and Eleanor tiptoed into the room. They both stopped at the foot of the bed, and then Henry went up to Susan on one side, Eleanor on the other. "Turn around, Eleanor, toward the light," Susan said, "I want to see your face. I want to see what you look like." Instead Eleanor buried her head in her mother's pillow.

"Now, now," Henry said. "Your mother is not to have any excitement." He leaned over to lift Eleanor up.

"Let her stay. Let her stay." Susan reached to touch the little violet vein in the smooth transparent skin above Eleanor's eye; her hand ran over Eleanor's silky hair. It was cut short, Buster Brown. "Your hair, your hair, all your beautiful hair gone," she

said. Neither Eleanor nor Henry answered her and she fell asleep.

The next two days she slept a great deal and on the third day when John was satisfied she no longer had any fever she was allowed to sit propped up in pillows in the Morris chair. Not only had the war created a shortage of nurses, but an epidemic of Spanish influenza was raging, which made them practically unobtainable, and so John, assisted by Mary, was taking care of her. "Are you sleeping in the house?" Susan asked him. "You always seem to be available."

"Yes," he said. "I have Tim's old bed."

"How does Dorothea feel about it?"

"It doesn't make any difference how she feels. We separated on Armistice Day."

"Armistice Day? The Armistice was false."

"It was on the seventh. We had a repeat performance on the eleventh."

"Is it because I am ill that I don't feel anything any more, that the news doesn't mean anything to me?"

"Your heart has been severely taxed; it is just as well that you don't get excited about anything. Try to forget that you are sick, and, mom darling, try not to be such a Mrs. Serious. You went through a bad spell; the way you raved and clawed at us for six days, but you are well on the mend. Soon you'll be so well I'm going to take you dancing."

"Oh, John."

"That's it, old gal. Keep smiling that way."

"John, do you think Eleanor is thin?"

"She's beautiful. Looks more and more like her Aunt Olive."

"I thought she looked like me."

"Yes, now that you mention it, she does somewhat, has your features, your coloring, but Olive's expression."

"You love Olive, don't you, John?"

"She's quite a gal."

. . . . . .

1918, December

ELEANOR CAME INTO HER MOTHER'S ROOM CARRYING TEA AND TOAST on a tray. Susan, who was sitting in the Morris chair, put the ecru doily she was tatting in the drawer of the sewing stand beside her and straightened the afghan that had been thrown across her legs.

Eleanor placed the tray on Susan's lap. "Always working, aren't you, ma?" She lifted the doily and let one of its raised petals curl around her finger.

"I believe in keeping busy. Someday, when you have a home of your own, you can use these for luncheons."

"It's beautiful, too elegant for me."

"A young woman should have things that make her proud to entertain. I'm making a set for Nellie too, but she's so careless, so harum-scarum, I'm making hers flat with stars instead of roses."

While Susan drank the tea Eleanor sprinkled voilet water on her mother's hair. She lifted a strand; seconds passed before she let it fall back into place.

"I've aged, haven't I, Eleanor?"

"Not a bit. All you need is a good marcel wave." With the top layer of brown she covered the gray streak that had been exposed and stroked her mother's head.

"Why did you cut your hair?"

"Men cut their hair; women and horses bob theirs."

"Why did you do it?"

Eleanor laughed. "I could say because it is more sanitary. Remember how you used to pull my hair back in tight braids so I wouldn't pick up nits? But, mother," she said more seriously, "I can't even say because it is the style. I wear it this way because it is so convenient while I go about my work."

"Well, now that you are home, now that we can all be together again, that sort of life is a thing of the past."

Eleanor lowered her eyes.

"I think I'll go downstairs this afternoon," Susan said.

"The steps are still too much for you. Why the rush?"

"I want to call up the stores for something."

"What is so important that can't wait a day or two?"

Susan blushed. "I thought I'd like to have them send me some swatches. It would be nice to have your old room redecorated, fixed up." Susan finished her toast and leaned back in the chair.

Eleanor placed the tray with the tea things on the mantel.

"Would you like it any special color?" Susan asked.

"Mother."

"Yes?"

"It's nice enough as it is."

The next afternoon, a coat thrown over her arm, Eleanor poked her head into Susan's room. Her mother was going over household bills with Mary. Looking up when the door opened, Susan asked, "Going out?"

"For a couple of hours."

"Have you a minute?"

Eleanor looked at her watch. "Of course." She walked into the room, tossed her coat onto the bed, and leaned against the ebony footboard.

"Mary, show Eleanor the ideas we saw."

Mary dug among the magazines in the rack, but before she pulled one out, Eleanor asked, "Ideas for what?"

"For your room."

"Mother, I'm going to be here such a short time."

"Short time!"

"I miss my work. I must get back to it."

"Well, if you really have your heart set on doing something for the poor, you might become active in a charitable organization here. Or, you know your father bought up a lot of that tenement property around the factory, you might work among the tenants. As his daughter it would be quite fitting for you to take an interest in the people down there. Your father has become a very rich man. And you are so young. You should go back to school, finish your education."

"That's impossible." Hurriedly she kissed Susan's forehead. "I'm late. I've got to meet Clarence. He thinks I ought to see the special exhibition at the museum."

"Paintings?"

"Yes, the French Dadoists."

"I never heard of him."

"Ma, it's not a him, it's a school."

"Oh."

"Isn't it time Clarence settled down to serious work?"

"He sold a car yesterday. And he's only taking off a few hours."

"He seems to be very fond of you."

"Mother." Eleanor picked up her coat and left.

After dinner that evening Eleanor sat on the footstool in front of the Morris chair, where her mother was working on one of the doilies. Henry was sitting in one of the slipper chairs smoking a cigar, engrossed in a newspaper. Eleanor had her arms around her knees, her knees up to her chin. Susan could not see her face.

"Did you have a good afternoon?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes. The paintings were crazy, absolutely crazy, but Clarence says that's what's good about the show, that experiment, revolution, keeps art alive, leads it to great forms. Clarence is awfully smart."

"You ought to consider him. He's not so badly crippled and that might make him a more devoted husband."

Eleanor dropped her legs and spread them out on the floor. She stared at Susan for a moment and then she burst out bitterly. "You probably look upon us as a couple of cripples. According to your standards we are. And maybe we are, but not the way you think."

"What's going on?" Henry looked over the top of his newspaper.

"Mother thinks I ought to marry Clarence because he is a cripple."

"I'm only trying to protect you."

"I don't want to be protected. I want to go out into the world. I want to understand it."

"I'm thinking of your happiness."

"Well, to marry Clarence won't make me happy, and that has nothing to do with his foot. I can't marry a man I don't love, and I don't love Clarence."

"A woman learns to love a man who is good to her."

"What makes you so positive he will be good to me?"

"Well, he ought to be."

"Mother." And then, her voice calm, deeply sad, she said, "Everyone ought to be good to everyone else, but who does what he ought to do?"

"The trouble with you is you think you know all the answers. Remember this, young lady, girls who know too much don't get men to marry them."

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Are my two women going to get into an argument?" Henry moved over to the sofa. "Ellie dear, come here." Eleanor went over to him. She stood between his legs while he placed his hand on her hips. "Your mother," he said, "may not express herself well, but she has your welfare at heart. She has given us a lifetime of devotion; suppose we listen, even if we don't agree with her."

"But, daddy, I don't want a husband, any husband."

"Rubbish," Susan said. "Every girl wants a husband."

Eleanor sat down next to her father. "Mother," she said, "you don't seem to understand. As far as I'm concerned I had one."

"Henry, did you hear that?"

"Yes, I heard."

"Mother, daddy, I loved Hiram."

"Puppy love. What does a seventeen-year-old girl know of love?"

"Mother, I loved Hiram before I was seventeen. I loved him as long as I can remember."

"You subjected yourself to him and so you thought you loved him."

"No, mother, I did not subject myself to Hiram. I was in harmony with him. I loved him."

"Loved him for what? What could you see in him?"

"Everything that I wanted."

"What was that?"

"I never stopped to ask. It was just there, that which made me know that never again could anyone mean as much to me. I don't think I will ever be able to say to anyone else, 'I love you.' And if I say it, it won't mean the same thing."

"Eleanor, Eleanor," Susan cried, "don't talk that way. You're young. Life isn't over for you."

"I don't think it is. In fact I look upon myself as beginning life, beginning a different sort of life than I once dreamed, but one that will do very well for me now."

"You can't know what it means to bring up a child and see her throw her life away."

"No, mother, I can't. I can only know what it means to bury one."

After a quick light rap on the door John came in. "Why so glum?" he said. "Didn't I forbid serious conversation in here?"

"Susie thinks Ellie ought to stay in the East. Settle down, marry, you know."

"That might not be such a bad idea, bright eyes." John handed Henry a wire and sat on the sofa, drawing Eleanor close to him.

"It's from Olive," Henry said. "She's leaving for home."

John jumped up. "Yippee," he yelled.

"What the devil are you so happy about?" Henry asked.

John slapped Henry across the shoulders. He kicked his legs, jumped sideways in the air, and then sat on the window sill rubbing his knees. "Well," he said, "all I can say is you better learn how to make yourself useful around here, Mr. Bates. I'm going to clear out and leave Mom in your clumsy hands."

"Clear out? Where?" Henry asked.

"To California. To get things ready for Olive."

"I'll go with you," Eleanor said.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. This job I do myself. Anyway, you just got here. You might want to stay after you've been with the folks a while longer."

Susan smiled gratefully.

"What makes you so sure Olive will want to go way out West again?" Henry sounded hurt.

"She dreamed about that place in San Francisco and what she could accomplish there all the while we were together." He noticed Henry's disappointed look, and added, "She'll no doubt stop off and visit with you."

"What do you mean no doubt? Why can't she open a settlement here? I'll stake her. Give her any amount she needs or wants. It's time she stopped gadding around."

"Look Henry, I made the same offer. You might as well face it as I had to. Olive is a developed personality. She wants to do what she wants to do. Either you love her for what she is or you forget her, but you don't try to buy her, you don't try to stifle her. She just isn't that sort of a woman. She has a brain and damn it, she exercises it."

"But Dorothea," Susan said. "You just can't walk away and leave her."

John jumped off the sill. He shook first one foot, then the other to force his tight trouser legs down; then he walked over and stood in front of Susan. "Why not?" he asked.

"Don't you think you owe your wife anything? Don't you think you ought to give her another chance?"

"Susie, Dot doesn't want me. I bore her to death. She wants a bottle."

"Worry over you made her drink so much."

"Yeh, maybe." He threw out his hands and slapped them against his thighs in a gesture of hopelessness. "When people want to drink, anything, everything, is an excuse. New Year's. Illness. An anniversary. The death of a public figure. Maybe, if I had stayed with her, I might have kept the doses down as I used to. Or maybe I'd be right where she is now. I've thought of that many times and shuddered. You see, I'm ashamed of the might-have-been since I've had a taste of something better, something bigger, finer, something I don't want to lose."

"Dorothea loved you."

John paced up and down. "Yes, I think she did. We loved each other once. But now she loves something else much more than she ever loved me. And I, well, I'm just not in love with fun any more." He went back to the sill, drew one foot up and

clasped his hands around his knee. "Don't get me wrong," he went on. "I wanted to help her. I tried to help her. I walked out on the woman I love to help Dot. But I can't help her if she won't help herself. I pleaded with her to take a cure. Even now, if I thought she would straighten out, I'd stick. Olive would want me to."

No one spoke; no one looked at anybody else.

Two days later John left for San Francisco. When he came to bid Susan good-bye he took her sweet potato vine from the glass in which he had placed it at the time he broke the bowl and put it in a Lalique vase.

"Thank you, John," she said, "but it is much too delicate, much too exquisite for such a homely little plant. I'll have to tell the florist to send me orchids every day."

"Please don't, Susie. A sweet potato vine in a Lalique vase suits you; it is you." He kissed her and let his cheek linger for a moment against hers.

One afternoon a few days after he left Eleanor sat in the slipper chair at the foot of Susan's bed knitting a purple sweater for herself while Susan sat in the Morris chair tatting. Arnold, on his stomach on the floor, assembled a paper aeroplane. A dark scab extended from the thumb to the wrist of his left hand. "Since when are you interested in aeroplanes?" Susan asked.

"Oh mother, he's interested in many things," Eleanor said. "I never met a boy who could ask more questions. He's a regular pest." And Eleanor reached over and slapped his bottom.

"Arnold inquisitive? He is usually as silent as a cat. It must be having you around. You're a good influence."

"I hope so. Maybe you'll let him spend a summer vacation with me in California."

"You're not really set on going back?"

"Yes, after Christmas. Right after Christmas."

Arnold sat up and used Eleanor's legs as a back rest.

"Eleanor."

"Yes."

"Tim won't be home that soon. How nice it would be if we could pick up as a family once more."

Arnold dropped some glue on his pants. He tried to rub it away. Eleanor watched him for a minute and then she said, "Don't you see, mother, we live in different worlds."

"You could soon adjust yourself to my world where things are comfortable, orderly, pleasant."

"No, mother, that is impossible."

"If only you would let me help you."

"You don't want to help me. You want to plan for me."

"But I am so much older than you. I have the experience."

"And I, if I learned nothing else, I learned it is a privilege to be responsible for one's own mistakes, to adjust oneself to those mistakes, if mistakes they are."

What should she do? What could she do to make Eleanor realize the world was before her? Susan leaned back in the chair and slowly opened and closed her eyes. She felt as if she were losing her sight; if only she could reach for the light that was slipping away. "Tell me something about the settlement," she said. "Do you take care of very young children?"

"That was Aunt Ollie's intention. To make the house into a sort of meeting place for children. Adults too."

"What do you mean by intention? You went out to work in the settlement, to carry on while Olive was away."

"Oh mother, I didn't have the experience to conduct a nursery or carry out any part of the project. That was the excuse we gave you when I left."

"What did you do out there all this time?"

"I sheltered a few girls like myself."

"You what!"

Arnold stared at Susan; his leg twitched. "War, I guess, makes girls immoral," Susan said.

"Frantic, desperate, unhappy," Eleanor answered calmly, "but not immoral."

"Why don't you stay here and marry? A woman is happiest with a family. It's normal to have babies. It's a woman's duty."

"Her duty to whom?"

"To God."

Eleanor looked down at her lap.

Susan felt weak, terribly weak. "I'm rather tired," she said. "I think I better rest."

"I'm sorry, mother. Anything you would like?"

"No. I simply want to rest."

Eleanor and Arnold went up to Arnold's room. Susan could hear him play "Humoresque" on his violin. Several weeks before Henry had taken him to hear Mischa Elman, the violinist, and frequently since he had practiced the piece. Susan thought he played it rather well; it brought tears to her eyes.

For some time she mused over the year and a half that had just passed. She thought of what it had done to Eleanor and to Tim. In letters to his folks Paul mentioned that Tim drank quite heavily. Well, for that matter, Paul apparently did too. Susan nodded her head. A couple of smart alecks. Showing off to each other. She assured herself that drinking was an inherited trait; no one in her family or Henry's drank to excess. Once he reached home and settled down to work and a normal routine he'd straighten out. She had so much to be thankful for. Eleanor had come home. Henry was a new man. Hadn't looked at another woman in years. But, the price. The price. A tear fell to her cheek; she wiped it away with the sleeve of her pink satin negligee.

1921, April

SUSAN LIT A KEROSENE STOVE BUT THE FUMES WERE SO SUFFOCATING she soon turned it off and threw a violet crocheted shawl over her shoulders. Alice Watson, who had brought her darning and mending up to Susan's room, wore a bulky tan sweater.

"Henry has been trying to talk me into moving into one of those modern apartments on Prospect Park Circle," Susan said.

Alice pulled a small French-English dictionary out of her sweater pocket. *"A propos,"* she said, "they say they are wonder-

ful with all that up-to-date equipment. Makes a housewife's life a dream."

"Yes, Henry thinks it will be much less work for me, but how can children feel an attachment to a rented place?"

"Raw, isn't it?" Alice shivered.

"Mmmmmm. I advised Henry not to be fooled by a couple of warm days, but he's been that anxious to change from furnace heat to steam. The dry heat irritates his throat and besides he's developed a regular obsession against floor grates. He keeps stubbing his toe on the one under the window in his room."

Alice cleared her throat. *"Printemps,* spring that is, is late this year."

"Spring is late every year," Susan answered. "Winter is never over until after the April snow. No matter how light the flurry, snow always falls in April. My mother pointed that out to me when I was a little girl, and though I've proved it every year I have never been able to convince Henry."

"Men, that is *monsieurs,* can't stand being told anything, especially by a woman."

"Is Charles that way too?"

"Oh yes. That is, he was until he had the stroke. Now he keeps saying how sorry he is that he didn't listen to me years ago, and nags and nags because I was too easygoing." Alice shifted in her chair, which creaked under her weight. "I'll never understand a man." Slowly she rolled a pair of dark brown socks into a ball, pressed the ball flat, and put it in her basket. She looked into her French-English dictionary and cleared her throat. *"Les larmes,"* she faltered, *"aux yeux.* I like to practice so I can converse with Paul in French." The dictionary dropped into her lap. "Clarence wants us to move to California."

"California! Why?"

"He says the climate will be good for Charles; and living is cheaper out there." With her middle finger she pushed her small gold-rimmed glasses up on her nose.

"Such ugly glasses," Susan thought impatiently. The tan sweater was stretched out of shape. Alice's skirt was glossy in streaks. But those glasses; how could she wear such glasses? Susan

fixed her eyes on her friend, itched to tell her that if she gave half the time to her appearance that she gave to French— The last few years had told on Alice; age lines crept away from her eyes, her mouth had thinned, her nose had broadened, the tone of authority was gone from her speech. But tortoise shell glasses were so inexpensive and comfortable besides. Susan took hers off and polished them with the hem of her skirt, hoping Alice might succumb to the power of suggestion, but Alice did not even notice what Susan was doing; she had her head down, rummaging through the things she had brought over to mend and pulled out a pair of blue striped shorts. Completely unaware that Susan was performing for her, Alice moistened a piece of thread, twirled the end tight, and threaded a needle.

Susan felt a wave of shame. "These tortoise shells are really comfortable, the most comfortable I've ever had," she said. "They're flattering and fashionable too. You should get a pair, Alice, they're not expensive."

The dictionary thumped to the floor. "Susie, I don't want you to think I jump at conclusions, but I'll stake my bottom dollar that boy wants to be near Eleanor."

"Eleanor!" A few lines in a recent letter from Olive came to Susan's mind. "She is beautiful, and, as a beautiful girl should, has a string of beaus. This date, that date, is all we hear these days. Like others in her set she brags about the speakeasies she visits, but don't worry about her; she has a head on her shoulders. Her work at the settlement has made her fearful of the dangers of bootleg liquor, and she is not ashamed to order lemonade. A young doctor with a lucrative practice on Nob Hill, if you please, is at her beck and call. This I know must make you happy. John and I are thrilled that she has made such a wonderful readjustment."

"I had such high hopes for him," Alice said.

"But what has he to offer a wife? He's been floundering so."

"He wasn't meant for business."

"But who will ever buy those things he paints? You know what he paints. Dirty ash cans. Clothes lines. The elevated structure."

"He always had a soft spot for Eleanor, used to be terribly

jealous of Hiram. Perks him right up when he gets a letter from her. I can't understand modern morals. Doesn't a young man expect a girl to be—"

"Eleanor is a good girl at heart."

The pair of men's shorts fell to the floor. Before Alice picked them up she scratched her thigh vigorously. "Don't get me wrong," she said, "I don't want you to think I can't forgive a mistake, but every mother wants her son to marry a—"

"The war has been hard on all of us," Susan said. "Clarence was hurt too."

Alice winced. "Well, we can be thankful of one thing," she said, "those Huns will never be able to start another war. We have a peace to end peace, I mean we have achieved peace in our time, peace for all time."

"Yes," Susan sighed. "Look at Tim and Paul."

Flashes of a rhinestone and imitation sapphire brooch trickled through the needle holes in Alice's sweater.

"Yes, indeed, the war is over," Susan said half to herself.

The smothered cry of a peddler drifted up from the street.

"Pff. They're young, Susie. They're young. You expect too much. Every boy should sow wild oats, *féroce d'avoine,* before he settles down." She scratched her thigh again and the chair creaked as she settled comfortably into it.

Susan leaned against the back of the Morris chair. "No one in my family ever drank like that before."

"They're a couple of smart alecks trying to show off. Charlie says it's all because of that Prohibition law."

"But they started in the army."

"It's a phase. They'll get over it. You must give them a chance to become accustomed to peace, to life at home."

"They've been home two years. Henry says he didn't need any time at all after the Spanish-American war."

"Oh, stop worrying. That was no war."

"That's what I've told Henry, but he just won't understand getting adjusted is a matter of temperament."

"You worry too much. Before you know it Tim and Nellie will be married and you'll be a grandmother."

"Yes, I suppose so." Susan thought she heard the peddler again; she sat up to listen.

"You don't sound enthusiastic."

"Nellie uses lip rouge. I don't like it. It makes her look fast."

"Stop being such a prude. Lots of girls use it nowadays. Don't forget our boys saw French women. Does she find it fun being Henry's secretary?"

The peddler's voice was more distinct.

"She seems happy enough; after all Tim is down there too, but I guess she'd rather be married," Susan said.

"Naturally, any girl would. By the way, what do you hear from Olive and John?"

"They're fine."

"Olive's lots older than John, isn't she?"

"A year or two."

"Do you think that marriage can last? Of course he had a bad time with Dorothea. Did you know she had a shady reputation?"

"Was that the fruit peddler?"

Alice, who was sitting near one of the windows, pulled the lace curtain apart and looked out. "Yes, he's a couple of houses up." She let the curtain fall back into place. "Of course," she said, "I wouldn't breathe this to another soul; you know I don't believe in talking about anyone, especially about a woman who isn't here to defend herself any more, but somebody told me that she had loose morals, that while John was in France—"

"People say all sorts of things. What happened to the peddler?" Susan walked over to the window. Arnold and the peddler were sitting on the curb, the peddler examining Arnold's violin. Susan opened the window and called, "Arnold, you will catch a death of cold." Without looking up at her he got up slowly and walked into the house. "Straighten up," she called, and to the peddler she gave instructions to leave a basket of apples with Mary. "That child will take up with anyone who will discuss music with him. We've all been sniffling since Henry let the fire out. I don't want him sick on my hands."

"I must say he is a rather peculiar child, Susie."

"He's a good boy, really. No trouble at all. Sometimes I don't even know he is around."

"That's the trouble; he's too tied up in himself."

"It's his mania for music."

"You were never strict enough; you were always too easygoing, let the children do too much as they pleased."

"I tried my best. Maybe he'll outgrow this inclination. It might wear itself out. Most of the things we worry about never materialize, and children can be so unpredictable. Take Clarence; did you ever suspect that he would become an artist?"

"But he always did draw well, won prizes at school. And sketched all over the place. Not that I approve of what he is doing, but you must admit he did try his hand at other things. It wasn't his fault so many of Charlie's friends went broke in the crash and couldn't afford expensive cars."

"I realize everyone can't be a salesman, but that radio broadcasting idea he was so enthusiastic about—"

"Charlie just couldn't put any more into that venture; he just couldn't, after losing all that money in the stock market himself, and it's not like it used to be when he was active at the brewery. The only income we have now is what he gets in dividends on his investment there."

The room suddenly darkened. Susan switched on the lights.

"It will probably rain," Alice said.

"No, it will snow. I hope it does. Then we can look forward to warm weather."

"You seem eager for it."

"Yes, Henry promised to take me out to California this summer. I've always wanted to travel, but first the children were too young, then the war came along and Henry had no one to relieve him at the factory." Susan blushed but went right on. "Now, we have nothing to stop us."

"How do you suppose John took the news about Dorothea?" Alice asked.

"Pretty hard, pretty hard. Olive wrote that even she was all shaken up over it. It was such a bad way to die."

"Wasn't it."

"Heart burned out by alcohol. That's what makes me worry so about Tim."

"Oh, stop it. She drank for years and years."

"Not the wood alcohol they serve these days."

"Yes, that is pretty bad," Alice admitted.

Arnold's steps were on the stairs. Susan opened the door and asked, "And where are you going?"

"To my room."

"Arnold, come in here."

He shuffled into the room and stood before her, his violin hanging limply from his scarred left hand. "I don't want you buried in your room practicing. I want you outside, playing."

"You just called me in."

"Sitting on the curb in this weather. You'll catch a death of cold. Can't you behave like any normal child?"

"You always want me to be like everybody else."

"What's wrong with that?" Alice asked.

"Because I'm not. I want my mother to be proud of me. But my mother is afraid of what people like you will say. She's afraid she'll lose control over me."

"Arnold," Susan snapped, and looked up to see Henry standing in the doorway. "What time is it?" she asked.

"Four," Henry answered. "I have a headache. Might be a cold coming on. I'm going to lie down for a while."

Susan felt his head. He had no fever. Even so, she gave him a physic and a hot toddy and did not let him up for dinner. In the morning he slept late and did not come down to breakfast until nearly eight-thirty. His eyes and nose were running and he sneezed quite a bit. While he was digging into his grapefruit the telephone rang. Susan answered it. The foreman at the factory wanted Henry.

"What do you mean no one is in yet?" Henry asked. He listened for a while and then shouted, "Standing in the street. Why? You're not sure. You're not sure. Well, find out."

Henry hung up and started for the stairs.

"Aren't you going to finish your breakfast?" Susan asked as

she carefully wiped the telephone mouthpiece with her apron.

"No, something is cock-eyed. I have to get down and see what it is."

The telephone rang again. This time Dwight Robinson was on the wire. Henry came back to speak to him.

"A bank run," he shouted. "Aren't we in good shape? I'll be right down." He rang off. "Help me get out, will you, Susie?"

While Henry changed from his slippers to his shoes, Susan put cuff links in his shirt and took his watch and chain from the top drawer of his black walnut chiffonier. For a second or two she rolled the chain in her fingers. It occurred to her he no longer wore the elk tooth fob she had given him years ago. Fobs were out of fashion and so of course Henry would not wear one.

"When did Tim leave?" Henry asked as he ran down the stoop.

"About eight-fifteen. Paul called for him and they went off together." Like Tim, Paul refused to pick up his studies and went to work for Henry after he was discharged from the army.

"Phone and tell him not to go out. I might need him."

Susan spoke to Nellie, who did not know where either Tim or Paul were.

Arnold was eating his breakfast. "Mary," Susan called into the kitchen. "I'm going upstairs to dress. See that Arnold doesn't dilly-dally. He'll be late for school."

She heard Mary's heavy uneven steps make their way slowly toward the dining room. "Mind what your mamma says, Nolly, but don't gobble that food down."

Before Susan finished combing her hair Henry telephoned. "Come down to the bank as fast as you can," he said. "Come through the grocery next door into the yard and we will let you in the back way. And see if you can locate Tim. I need him to run some errands."

The persistent murmur of an anxious mob greeted Susan as she parked her coupé up the street from the factory and around the corner from the bank. Men and women, coming from all directions, ran toward the bank. As the crowd that had gathered became heavier it swayed with the pushing and shoving of those

who were trying to work their way forward. An occasional shout could be heard above the sound of running steps on the pavement and the grumblings of those who were forming a solid mass of people. Susan zigzagged through loosely scattered groups into the factory. Nellie, who was standing at the office window, went out into the narrow hall to meet her. "Where's Tim?" Susan asked. "His father wants him."

"I don't know," Nellie answered. "I've called up every place I can think of."

"Doesn't he leave a message when he goes out?"

"Usually, but we've had such excitement this morning."

"Didn't he give you some inkling?"

"He didn't come in. The workers had congregated on the street, right outside my window. When Tim and Paul came along, Mike, one of the men, called Tim aside; then Tim motioned to Paul. They each put an arm around Mike's shoulders and walked off. The foreman was furious when he saw everyone hanging around outside instead of coming in to work. He was sure a strike was on and called Mr. Bates."

"Nellie, I have to get to the bank. Try and locate Tim."

"I don't know where else to call."

"Call the same places over again."

The crowd kept getting heavier. Merchants in their doorways gossiped and joked with one another about the excitement. Policemen, on foot and on horses, went among the people swinging sticks, and the people called back to them in Polish, Italian, and Spanish. Six or seven men threw their weight against the door, which was reinforced by iron bars, in an attempt to force it off its hinges. Several stood on their toes to peer inside. One woman beat her fists against the windows and shouted, "I'm gonna get my dough." A mounted policeman rode into the mob to pull her away and she pushed and kicked him. Many, however, were quiet, confused rather than upset. The police kept shouting, "Get in line. Form a line."

Susan wormed her way through the tightly packed crowd. Once inside the grocery she stopped to catch her breath before she went on into the bank, where just inside the back door a man

was saying to Dwight Robinson, "No wonder banks are failing. No wonder we're in the midst of a general business depression. Financial manipulations in this country during the last couple of years have been absolutely fantastic. They might be compared with the conditions that existed after the Napoleonic wars. Mark my word for it, we'll have another panic before long."

Henry started to say something to Susan but sneezed instead. He whispered, "He's from the banking department. I don't know how they get wind of these things so fast."

"Mr. Perkins," Dwight said, twirling his watch chain around his finger, "this is hardly a time to discuss economics or to make predictions. I told you the bank is solvent. I can't understand what caused the run. Someone must have started a false rumor."

"That's a laugh. I never saw it to fail. Rumors are always false; that is until the examination."

"Now look here," Dwight said, paused, and then with the anger out of his voice, went on, "our books are open to you. We'll cooperate in every way possible."

"You haven't much choice."

"What!" He noticed Susan. "Oh, Susie. Henry said you could do a little errand for us. Have you your car here?" Without waiting for an answer, he said, "Henry, is that note ready?"

"Yes." Henry waved an envelope he held in his hand.

Henry pushed through the crowd to open a way for Susan, who followed. One man started after Henry, but after a few steps turned around and fought his way forward in the crowd. The police rode in and out of the people waving clubs and shouting that the doors would not open until a line was formed.

"The blame fools," Henry said. "The blame fools." At the car he cautioned Susan to be careful, told her that he had instructed the banker to whom the note was addressed to give her $50,000 in small bills.

By the time she returned the police had succeeded in organizing two long lines and the front door was open. Henry was in the booth of a teller named Hughes. Dwight was pacing up and down the narrow aisle between the wall and the cages. Susan handed him the envelope containing the cash. "I can't under-

stand it," he said. "We have such small accounts. Nobody in this neighborhood has much money. Every one of the depositors knew us; trusted us. The run must have started in your factory, Susie. That's where the first crowd came from."

A man at the end of one of the lines inside the bank yelled, "How long will your money hold out?" The lines broke and everyone crowded around the cages. A guard slammed the door shut; the tellers closed their windows with slabs of wood. Susan could hear Henry sneeze and cough. A policeman pounded his club against the floor, yelling as he did so, "Not a red cent will be paid out until you get back in line." The crowd grumbled; the man who had started the trouble called, "Let's get their scalps." A policeman hit him on the head with his stick, grabbed him by the collar and pants and threw him out into the street. Still grumbling, the others got back into line. Hughes wiped his face with a large handkerchief. A bundle of money he was counting fell to the floor and his hands shook so he had difficulty straightening it.

"Did the bank examiner leave?" Susan asked.

"No, he is in my office, questioning the men one by one. Henry will relieve Hughes who goes in next." Dwight nodded in the direction of the teller, and Hughes came out of his cage. Susan assumed Hughes had misunderstood, had thought that Dwight, when he nodded, had motioned to him, and she stepped aside to make room next to Dwight, but Hughes walked right past them into the men's room.

"You men must be starved. I'll run out and get some sandwiches," she said.

When she came back everything was going on as orderly as could be expected. Here and there someone tried to edge ahead of someone else, but a policeman quickly rebuffed any offender and the lines, which ran out into the street, moved along without serious disturbance. At the gate that led to the back she nodded a greeting to the man in Hughes' cage. When she stepped through the gate she noticed Henry, Dwight, Mr. Perkins and the bank's bookkeeper huddled in the doorway leading to the men's room. Someone inside held the door partially open.

"I knew it. I knew it. I said so," Mr. Perkins said.

"Like hell you knew it." And seeing Susan, Dwight said, "Excuse me, Susie. You better go home."

Susan could not see exactly what was going on beyond the door because those in the entrance blocked the way, but someone said, "He's still breathing," and gave Henry a small slip of paper. Henry looked at it, handed it to Dwight and said, "Pull a cop away from up front. No, that might start a riot. I'll call the station." Over Dwight's shoulder Susan read a few scribbled, barely legible words, "I would have made good." Mr. Perkins pulled the note from Dwight's fingers.

"What happened?" Susan whispered to the bank's bookkeeper.

"Hughes shot himself."

"Oh, is he—"

"No, he's alive."

Dwight tapped Susan on the shoulder. "Susie, will you please go home."

At the telephone Henry coughed so hard Susan thought he might break a blood vessel. "I'm worried about Henry. I don't want him to get pneumonia."

"He won't. He's as strong as an ox. What's this?" Dwight pointed to the large brown bag which she still carried.

"Sandwiches and hot coffee."

"You're a sweet lady, Susie. Here, let me take it. But go home, please. I'll see you to your car."

"That isn't necessary."

On the way to the car she paused outside a store that sold live birds and fish. Like the shopkeeper who stood in his doorway, she looked across the street. The lines moved steadily in and out of the bank. The police quickly ordered anyone who stopped to peer or talk to move on. She remained unaware of the tiny turtles with painted backs that crawled around in a basin of water in the shop window, but, in shifting her weight, she noticed them and became fascinated by the indifference with which the turtles walked over one another and the unconcern of those who were walked over. Through the glass she noticed the shopkeeper looking at her. "Children grow up so fast," she said. "My little

boy is too big for one." She smiled and went up to her coupé.

The clang of an ambulance startled her and in turning around she noticed three men in the doorway of the tenement next to the factory. Suddenly she realized one was Tim, another Paul. She ran over to them. When Tim saw her he staggered forward; saliva trickled down the side of his mouth. "Ma, help me," he drawled and fell heavily into her arms. Paul leaned against the wall. The third man in a dirty heavy dark blue sweater and cap was able to stand without assistance.

"Hold these two," she said to the man. "I'll get my car."

She ran up to the car and drove back to them. The man in the sweater helped her get Tim into the seat next to her. Then he got in and pulled Paul onto his lap. All the way up the hill the man in the dirty sweater fumbled trying to get something out of an inside pocket, but Paul was in his way. Over and over Paul repeated, "It was all in fun." Tim kept saying, "Ma, help me." Just before she drove up to the house the man pulled out a small bank book. He jabbered something about, "Bucks," but she was too upset to pay attention to what he said. He helped her get Paul into his house, and then he helped her with Tim. Between the two they managed to undress Tim and get him into bed. All the while Tim kept repeating, "Ma, help me. Don't let them do anything to me."

She led the stranger to the basement door. "I no go," he said. "I wait for Meester Bates. I wanna my money."

"Come back in a day or two when the boys feel better. If they can't pay you what they owe you I'll pay you."

"No, no, I wait," he insisted.

As she asked, "How much do they owe you?" Henry came along.

"Ah, Meester Bates." The dark blue cap came off and the man bowed. "I wanna see a you."

"I have a headache and a cold, Mike. I've had a lot of trouble today. I'll see you in the morning at the factory." Henry started to cough. When he stopped he said to Mike who was still bowing, "Say, what are you doing here?"

"I wanna my money."

"What money?"

"My hundred-seventy-nine bucks. Tim, he say no good in you bank."

"Excuse us, Susan."

Henry and Mike walked into the dining room. Susan ran upstairs to Tim. He had sobered somewhat, but he still kept saying, "Ma, you won't let them do anything to me."

"Who wants to do anything to you?" With her finger she wiped his mouth, sticky with dribble. "What happened, Tim?"

"Paul and I were only kidding, honestly. We had a few drinks last night with Mike upstairs in the bootlegger's. We got a little high and when Mike boasted that he had money saved and passed his bankbook around to prove it, we—"

A door slammed and Susan heard Henry's steps on the stairs. She closed Tim's door and sat on his bed. He clung to her. Henry walked in.

"Don't let him hurt me," Tim said and moved closer to his mother.

"That's right, let him hang onto your skirts. Let him hang there and rot."

"He was only joking."

"You and your jokes. You're fired. Do you hear that, Tim, you're fired. You and Paul. It's time you two bums learned how to stand on your own two feet. Susie, get out of here."

Tim held onto her. "Don't, ma," he said.

"No, I'm not going. And furthermore, you're not fired."

"You can't overrule me. It's time he shifted for himself."

"Did you ever shift for yourself? That was a pretty juicy business when your father left it to you."

"He cannot come back to the factory; not while I'm there."

"Listen to me, Henry Bates, Tim is not going to be thrown out onto the streets. Not by a man who rents flats to bootleggers."

"Susie, keep out of this. A man shot, probably dead by this time."

"And my son, and my son." Alice was standing in the doorway shaking her finger at Tim. "It's all your fault. You're a bad influence."

"Paul's old enough to think for himself," Henry said and pushed Alice outside the door, which he closed behind him. Susan held Tim in her arms and stayed with him until he fell asleep.

When she went downstairs she found Mary giving Henry a cup of tea. He was coughing and sneezing. "Where is Arnold?" she asked.

"I sent him across the street to visit Bobby Clarke," Mary said.

"Thanks, Mary. I don't know what we would do without you. You better get upstairs to bed, Henry. I'll come up and give you some aspirin."

"Susie, you must listen to me about Tim."

"Let's talk about it tomorrow when we will all feel better. My head is splitting."

Arnold came in while Henry was still at the table. "Oh pop," he said, "I got some information on several music schools that I'd like to take up with you."

"I've had all the nonsense I can stand for one day without you starting in," Susan said. "It's time you realized life is a serious business."

"Let it rest for a few days, son," Henry said and went upstairs.

In the evening the parlor floor doorbell rang, and Susan answered it. Dwight was standing on the stoop with Bertie behind him. "I hope I haven't disturbed you, my dear, but I must go over some figures with Henry."

"Dwight doesn't leave me alone nights any more." Bertie's tone was apologetic.

"Of course, of course, come in," and Susan offered her hand to Bertie. Bertie let her head fall to Susan's shoulder, and Susan patted Bertie's arm and then led the way upstairs to Henry's room, where Bertie planted herself in the rocker. She looked old and worn and as she went slowly back and forth Susan could see a gold tooth glitter above her lower lip which drooped listlessly. Susan, on Henry's bed, leaned against the footboard. Her head still ached. Dwight sat on a straight-back chair, rummaging through papers in a brief case on his lap, taking out some for Henry to sign, explaining figures on others.

"What are Hughes' chances?" Henry asked.

"Hopeless." Dwight leaned on his elbows on the upright brief-case. "The doctors don't give him more than a few hours. He never regained consciousness. I can't understand why he did it; he didn't seem to be a gambler or play with women. On a quick audit his accounts appear to be only $450 short. Obviously he had not confided in anyone so that couldn't have started the run. Someone must have had it in for us. What reward do you think we should offer for information that will fix responsibility?"

Susan jumped up.

"None," Henry said calmly. "The less publicity about this sort of thing the better."

"Excuse me," Susan said, "I must get an aspirin."

She left the bathroom door open. In the mirror of the medicine cabinet she hoped to see what those in the bedroom were doing. Instead the reflection was that of a scene hanging on the wall that she had cross-stitched during a term she spent at boarding school in her twelfth year while her parents were on a trip abroad. The design was worked into a yellow gabled house set in a garden of roses, lilies-of-the-valley, and forget-me-nots. In a semicircle across the bottom were the words, "Home, Sweet Home." She stared at it without seeing it, and when at last she opened the cabinet she heard Henry say, "Dwight, I would like you to send a thousand dollars over to Hughes' widow. Charge it to my account, but don't say who sent it."

"Are you crazy, man? Hughes was a thief."

"Who can say what any of us would do if we wanted or needed money badly enough? A man's life is worth more than $450."

The next morning Henry's cold was considerably better, and he left the house early. Tim went with him. Shortly after Arnold left for school, Clarence Watson dropped in. Susan was having breakfast at the time.

"I'm awfully sorry the way mom blew up last night," he said.

"We were all excited. Won't you sit down and have a cup of coffee with me?" She was sitting as she so often did with both hands around her cup, blowing and sipping her coffee.

"No thanks. I haven't a minute. We have so many things to do.

We're closing the house and leaving for California tomorrow. Mom's probably too ashamed to come in and say good-bye."

"I'll have a dead house on each side of me now."

"Ellie wrote that she expected you and Mr. Bates to visit her next month."

"No. That's all off. Mr. Bates doesn't think we can go. He doesn't think it would look right to leave the city so soon after the trouble at the bank. We're too well known in the neighborhood. People might gossip."

"Well, I didn't want to go without saying good-bye to you."

Susan put down her cup and walked with Clarence to the door. A light flurry of snow sprinkled their heads and their faces. "Terrible weather we're having. Raw, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, but it will soon be spring. It will soon be spring." She kissed him warmly.

"Where I'm going I won't have to wait for it. California is the state of springtime," he said and hobbled away on his cane.

1924, July

THE NIGHT WAS HOT AND STICKY, AND RIGHT AFTER DINNER SUSAN went up to her room where she slipped out of her corset. Except for Arnold, she was alone in the house. Mary had gone to visit relatives in Hoboken; Tim was out with friends. Since the run on the bank Henry rarely ate his evening meal with the family. Arnold, as usual, was in the parlor playing the piano. He had graduated from high school in three years and when he graduated in June, Henry gave him permission to study at the Damrosch School of Music.

From a low rack next to the Morris chair she picked up a magazine but let it fall to her lap without even looking at the cover. After a while she moved into a slipper chair at the window. The houses next door on each side were boarded up, but

otherwise the street was lively. Many of her neighbors were sitting outside on chairs or on their stoops. Much of their chatter reached her. Although she listened to the small talk with interest, she had no desire to join in the conversations.

About nine-thirty Henry came up the street. In the dark his hair looked black; it was in fact hardly grayer than it had been ten years before; his figure too remained about the same. Time had stood still in Henry. A boy on a bicycle suddenly swung into view and, if Henry had not quickly hopped aside, he might have been hit. The boy tipped his cap apologetically and peddled on, the wheels of his bike zigzagging from side to side as he looked at the numbers painted on the stoops. He stopped in front of the house and was about to walk up the steps when Henry, a few steps behind, whistled. The boy removed something from the inside of his cap and handed it to Henry, who dug into his pockets and, from the handful of change he drew out, selected a coin which he tossed to the boy.

"Susie," he called as he opened the door, "are you in?"

"Yes. Up here. In my room."

"We have a wire from Ellie. She's leaving for the East tomorrow. Says she has a big surprise for us."

Susan ran into the hall. "What can it be?" she called over the banister. "When does she arrive? Do you think she means to stay?"

"Just a minute. Just a minute. One thing at a time. Let me see, if she leaves tomorrow and doesn't stop over anywhere she should get in Friday, Saturday, the latest."

"How can we meet her if we don't know the time or which station?"

"We'll probably have another wire with details."

No second wire arrived. By eleven o'clock Saturday morning the whole family, including Mary, was sitting on the stoop. Henry, the boys and Susan sat high on the steps. Mary sat at the bottom. Henry tried to read a newspaper, but turned page after page without absorbing anything and finally sat on it.

Each time a taxi appeared at the corner or on the street they stood up expectantly, only to sit down again when it drove by.

About a quarter to twelve Susan said, "Mary, you'd better prepare lunch." As Mary wobbled away Susan noticed Nellie turn into the block. "Set a place for Nellie too," she called.

"Mary is getting old," Henry said. "We'll have to put her on a pension soon."

"We're all getting old," Susan said.

"Not I." And Henry grabbed her ankles playfully.

"Hello, Nell," Tim said.

"Eleanor not here yet?" she asked and walked up the stoop and sat down between Tim and Henry.

"No. Not a word from her," Henry said.

Arnold started to take off his flannel sport jacket. With one sleeve dangling he pointed and said, "Hey look."

A taxi with a woman's arm waving out the window drove up the street. They all ran down the steps, each pushing the other, sheets of newspaper floating through the air above their heads. Eleanor jumped out of the cab before it came to a full stop. Tim grabbed her. "Hello, sis," he said and held her close to him. Susan, trembling, stopped at the gate.

All crowded around Tim and Eleanor. No one seemed to notice a man inside the cab fumbling to pay the driver.

"Ellie," Henry said.

"Mrs. Watson, if you please."

Susan took Eleanor in her arms and started to cry. Clarence meanwhile hobbled out of the cab. He put an arm around Susan. "Now, now, mother, you always wanted me for a son, didn't you?"

Susan shook her head up and down.

With the corner of her apron Mary wiped her face. Clarence shook hands with everyone and Eleanor kissed her father and Nellie. Nellie laughed lightly. "Same old Nellie," Eleanor said, "the same freckles, the same giggles," and then she went over to Mary. Before Eleanor reached her Mary had her apron up to her face again. Eleanor pulled it away. "Mary," she said, "crying for me. For shame," and hugged her.

Arnold stood quietly next to Mary. "Arnold," Eleanor said,

"how tall you are and how good looking, a regular Phryne." He was almost six feet tall. His lips were full; his teeth no longer seemed too big for his mouth. His deep dark heavily-lashed eyes danced with expectancy. Shyly he offered his hand to his sister.

"Oh, no, you don't," she said and reached up and kissed him. With one arm around Mary and the other around Arnold, Eleanor led the way into the house, relating to Arnold, who had asked her, the legend of the little girl in ancient Athens who was so ugly she was nicknamed Phryne, frog, and who was so beautiful when she grew up she became one of the most famous courtesans of the city and the model for Praxiteles' statue of Aphrodite.

At luncheon they all talked and laughed across the table; they all spoke at once. Everyone had questions. In the midst of the hilarity Mary brought in a high white cake and placed it in front of Eleanor. "Mary, you darling," Eleanor said, "a banana shortcake. My favorite. How sweet of you, Mary, how very sweet of you on such a hot day." She dug a finger into the whipped cream and licked it. "I see you still have mice," she said, "that dig into your cakes."

Mary slapped Eleanor's hand. "You was the only mouse we ever had around here," she said.

While Eleanor cut the cake Mary shifted painfully from one foot to the other. Her joints creaked as she moved. "Henry is right," Susan thought, "she has grown old. She has grown old without having lived because she wouldn't give up a good place."

The telephone rang. Arnold answered it. "For you, Tim," he said.

"I can't make it today." Tim's voice was so pointed and cruel everyone stopped talking and looked at him. "I said I can't make it today," he repeated and hung up the receiver.

As they were about to go up to the parlor the telephone rang again. Tim ran up the steps and picked up the extension receiver in the hall. "I told you before I can't make it today. My sister just got into town. Now don't bother me again."

Nellie in the meantime had walked into the parlor with

Henry, Clarence, and Arnold. Eleanor and Susan had lingered in the hall.

"You weren't talking to a girl like that, were you?" Eleanor asked.

"Natch."

"Still true to Nellie, eh? Say, when are you two going to get married?"

"When I get around to it."

"Isn't it time?"

Tim shrugged his shoulders and went into the parlor. Arnold played a waltz he had composed and Eleanor and Clarence, limping slightly, danced to it.

The next day, Sunday, the young folks went to the beach. Henry was taking a nap on the leather sofa between the windows. Susan, who was reading the newspaper spread out on the table before her, was enjoying the sweet aroma of hot dough that floated in waves from the kitchen where Mary was baking, when the telephone rang. A man with a foreign accent asked for Tim. When Susan said he was not at home the man spoke to someone near him. Susan could hear a woman's voice, but she could not make out what was said. Without speaking further to Susan the man hung up.

On Monday evening as they were about to leave the house for the theatre another telephone call came for Tim, who instructed Susan to say that he was not in. After doing as he requested she asked him, "Who is calling you like this?"

"No one," he said.

"What do you mean, 'No one'?"

"Oh, leave me alone." And he walked out and joined the others who were waiting in the street.

Tuesday morning, shortly after Henry and Tim left for the factory, a swarthy skinned man with a dirty flat-brimmed straw hat, which he carried, appeared at the downstairs door. He spoke with an accent with which Susan was not familiar, Hungarian or Armenian, perhaps. In scarcely more than a whisper he asked for Tim. Although Susan told him Tim was not at home he remained in the doorway, his head lowered, rolling

his straw hat. Susan tried to close the door; his foot was in the way. Something about him frightened and embarrassed her. "I said Tim won't be home until tonight."

"I go factory," the man said quietly and started to leave.

"No, wait. Come in. I'll try to get him on the phone."

"Did you leave someone in the hall?" Eleanor, who was having breakfast, asked.

Susan nodded and called the factory. She described the stranger to Tim and said she would put him on the line. "Tell him to drown in his bathtub gin," Tim said and hung up.

"Are you a bootlegger?" Susan asked.

The man blushed. "I no trade," he said.

"My son says your gin is no good."

The man caught his breath convulsively and stammered, partly in English, partly in his native tongue. Nothing could be made of what he said, except, "My girl, she much in trouble."

Susan drew her wrapper close to her throat and looked at Eleanor, who walked over to the man and tried to take his hat. Although he was turning it round and round, he held it so tightly Susan was afraid Eleanor might break the straw. "Try to calm yourself. Come in and sit down," Eleanor said, and she led him to the table where she poured out a cup of coffee from the silver pot. "Here. Drink this. It will do you good."

The man put his hat on the table and sat down. Instead of drinking the coffee he buried his head in his hands and sobbed. Eleanor patted his shoulders. "Now. Now," she said. "This won't help any."

He tried to speak but could not.

"Mother," Eleanor said, "get into a dress. We are going with this man."

Susan instructed the garage to send her coupé around. All the way down she knew exactly where she was going, and she had almost come to a stop when the man directed her to pull up before the tenement from which she had seen Tim emerge drunk three years before, the day of the bank run. Her heart beat so fast she was afraid to move; she had a sensation of blood rushing in and out of her head.

Eleanor put out a hand to help her. When Eleanor said, "Mother, no one is going to bite you," Susan leaned heavily on her daughter's shoulder and stepped to the ground.

On the stoop a child with a dirty face, digging the fingernails of one hand into her scalp, ran the other along the hem of Susan's short straight skirt as she passed. The hall was narrow and dark and Susan's high French heel caught in the torn linoleum strips with which the steps were covered. On the second floor landing a door opened a crack and Susan was aware of someone staring out at the three silent people climbing the stairs. When they turned out of sight the door closed quietly. An odor of stale bacon grease and garlic nauseated Susan. After her eyes had become adjusted to the darkness she noticed a greenish powder along the baseboard. She looked at Eleanor who went up the steps quickly without glancing to left or right. The man led them into a fourth floor flat. A sudden change from the dark hall into a sunny parlor blinded and confused Susan. She blinked several times before she could see that the large red poinsettia design of the wallpaper was stained with yellow streaks and that the room was overcrowded with heavy armchairs, with broad mahogany frames and worn mohair upholstery, and stool-like tables marked by alcohol rings. The man rushed over to the hard mohair sofa, which occupied one wall, on which someone was lying. Almost a second passed before Susan realized that that someone was a young woman, who tossed and mumbled, but who said nothing comprehensible. Susan wondered if the young woman was delirious. Eleanor felt the girl's pulse; the man caressed the arm which lay limply on the sheet which covered her. He did not bother to wipe away the tears which ran down his face. Susan looked away from him and stared at the yellow sun glow on the chipped soot-darkened bricks of a tenement opposite.

"Do you have a doctor in the neighborhood?" Eleanor asked.

The man pointed toward Second Avenue.

"Where is your telephone?"

The man pointed down a narrow dark hall that led from the room.

While the doctor examined the sick girl, Susan and Eleanor waited in the dining room at the back of the flat. Two children, a boy and a girl, huddled in a corner and stared at them with large dark eyes. The boy spread one hand over a rip too long to be concealed in the side of his knickers. The girl stood with her toes pointing inward. Her black ribbed stockings were twisted and fell in folds at her ankles.

"Where is your mother?" Eleanor asked.

Neither child answered.

"Have you lost your tongue?" Eleanor asked.

The children remained silent; their large eyes roved from Eleanor to Susan but never dropped.

"Then you have lost your tongue," Eleanor said.

The boy, the younger of the two, stuck his tongue out.

"Oh, you have one! Is your mother around?" Eleanor asked again. "We would like to talk to her."

"No got," the boy said.

Susan's sweaty underclothes stuck to her body. Again she had a sensation of blood rushing into her head. She needed fresh air.

"Who takes care of you?" Eleanor asked.

"Maria," they answered in unison. Their heads bobbed toward the parlor.

"Is she your sister?"

"Yeh," the girl answered.

"Have you other brothers and sisters?"

The room had two windows, one on each side of the corner diagonally opposite the door which led to the narrow hall of the flat. Susan, who stood between them, looked first through one, then through the other. The house was hemmed in by a network of narrow alleys, littered with dirt and people. A smell of frying lard and fish hung in the air. In one alley a dark green shade hissed and flapped around its roller. A man in shorts pulled the shade down halfway; then got into a pair of pants. A woman in a small kitchen was stirring something in a pot on her stove. Another, feeding a baby at her breast, shouted from her fifth floor flat to a boy in the yard below, "Go play in the playground." A young woman piled sheets and pillows on a

window ledge. An old man, his shirt sleeves rolled back, puffed peacefully on a pipe while he leaned on his sill and looked down on a group of women congregated in front of a heap of cardboard boxes and dented cans. To someone in back of him he said, "Frieda's down there gabbin' away like usual." The cracked voice of a street singer, who could not be seen, drifted up. When he stopped, pennies wrapped in paper hit the pavement with a dull thud. A sparrow settled on a ledge across the grimy, noisy court. A giant cockroach crawled toward the bird and the bird, without a moment's hesitation, flew away. "Smarter than we are," Susan thought, and turned back into the room.

Eleanor was on her knees straightening the stockings of the little girl. The child was feeling Eleanor's hair. Again Susan looked out a window. A row of withered hanging leaves in old milk bottles on a sill made her blush at a recollection of her Lalique vase with its sweet potato plant. She let her eyes drop until they fell on a fire escape cluttered with a small wooden case used as an ice-box, old shoes, and a broken sled. A small boy behind the jail-like protection rail, which was partially covered by recently washed wet underwear, played a phonograph. A man on the floor below who was reading a newspaper called out, "Shut up, up there." The sensation of blood rushing into her head made her feel faint and she leaned against the wall and gripped each sill for support.

"So, you children have lost your tongues again?"

The children tittered, and the girl sat on Eleanor's lap, formed by the way she crouched on her knees.

"Have you other brothers and sisters?" Eleanor had an arm around the waist of the girl.

"They angels," the girl said.

"Not Pete," the boy said.

"How old is Maria?" Eleanor asked.

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

"Maria. She nineteen," the girl said.

"Where is Pete?"

"He sailor. I be sailor too."

"What sense is there to questioning the children this way?" Susan asked.

"Mom, this is serious, terribly serious. At least the girl is over eighteen, and if we can help these people . . ."

As Susan was about to answer the doctor came into the room. Before he was able to speak the father stood in the doorway of a small bedroom off the dining room. To the father the doctor said a few words in a foreign language. To Susan and Eleanor he said that peritonitis had set in. The father was sobbing. Susan could not look at him; her head ached and throbbed; she had to get into the air or she would faint. "Do everything you can, call in a specialist," Susan said to the doctor. "The girl must be saved. Send the bill to us. Come, Eleanor."

With his head bent low the father let them out. Before he closed the door Eleanor squeezed his arm.

On the way downstairs she said, "Mom, Tim's in a bad spot."

"A bootlegger will have to keep his mouth shut," Susan said.

Without either indicating where they intended to go they walked into the factory.

Susan was relieved to find that Nellie was out to lunch. Tim was writing at a desk which stood back to back with Nellie's drop-top typewriter desk under the windows which looked out into the street. Henry's roll-top executive desk stood in the center of the room.

"Hi there," Tim said when they entered.

"Tim," Susan started, but Eleanor interrupted her to say, "We were just visiting next door."

Tim jumped to his feet.

"That girl is very ill."

"Why didn't she take care of herself? I told her I wouldn't marry her."

"Marry whom?" Henry asked, walking in through the door that led from the factory to the office.

"Daddy, Tim's in a bit of trouble."

"Yes?"

Susan took Tim's hand. She detected the smell of liquor on his breath.

"With the girl next door."

Henry fumbled among papers on his desk. He pulled the roll-top halfway down and then let it spring back again. He pushed his inkwell off the blotter and pulled it back on again. He walked over to Nellie's desk, picked up a notebook that was lying on her typewriter, and shaking it said, "Why don't you marry Nellie and settle down? That girl has waited for you all these years."

"I, marry my father's castoffs!"

Henry put down the notebook; slowly he walked over to Tim. What he intended to do was obvious, yet no one moved. The force with which he slapped Tim's face threw Tim back against Susan. "Ma," Tim cried and rubbed his jaw. Susan shivered. "Slap him back," she wanted to say; instead she put an arm around him and drew him to her. "See here, Henry Bates," she said.

"See here, nothing."

"Daddy. Daddy. A fight won't help. The mess is worse than you suspect. Blood poisoning has set in. Mightn't it be a good idea to send Tim away from all this, until it blows over at least? Clarence is anxious to get home. He feels much better there. Why don't you let Tim come with us? We could leave tonight."

Henry turned his back to the three of them and went over to his desk, where he made an even stack of his papers; then with one swoop of his hand he scattered the papers over the room. "Get him out before I get home," he shouted.

Without looking at Susan, Tim pulled away from her and walked into the narrow hall that led to the street. Eleanor went up to her father and put a hand on his shoulder. He grabbed her in his arms. His body shook with sobs. His face was wet with tears. When he released her, Eleanor went over and kissed Susan, who twirled one of her daughter's short curls around her finger. "Take the coupé," she said. "We can get a taxi."

For some minutes after Tim and Eleanor left, Henry kept changing the position of the papers that had remained on his desk. He picked up those that were scattered about the floor. Finally he said, "Let's get out of here; I can't face Nellie today."

Neither mentioned Maria, yet, as she and Eleanor had unconsciously walked into the factory, so she and Henry both paused outside the tenement. Henry went up the stoop and disappeared into the dark hallway. Susan tried to force her thoughts upon a plan of action. She found herself silently repeating, "Go jerk yaself," after some boys who were playing ball in the gutter had so yelled to a truck driver who had ordered them out of the way. Becoming aware of a heavy catarrhal breathing in back of her, Susan moved over to the steps and sat down and watched the boys. Except to shout abuse they remained indifferent to the vehicles that moved in and out among them until an ice delivery wagon passed; then one of them climbed onto the back of the moving vehicle, chipped off some ice with a pick standing in the large cake, and jumped off again. "We'll get ammonia poison," one of the boys said when he was handed a piece. "Always pissin' about something," another sneered and grabbed the dripping ice. A middle-aged man and woman were leaning on the rail at the top of steps that led to basement quarters. The woman was saying to another in a second story window across the street, "You shoulda seen the blanket, all red roses, 660 of them, 10 for each year. The casket was beautiful, all black enamel with bronze handles." "Well, she lived to a ripe old age," the woman in the window called back. Six or seven small children in bathing suits shouted and laughed as they waded and kicked their bare feet in water that poured from an open hydrant. A group of girls blocked the sidewalk with a game of hop, skip and jump. "But I ain't never seen such a beautiful casket except at Mike the Mugger's funeral." A boy and a girl, both about 13 or 14, sat at the curb writing lewd words and expressions in pink chalk. They were quiet and serious. Sometimes the boy touched the girl's breast; sometimes the girl stroked the upper leg of the boy, trying to hide the movement of her hand with her body. Once, while she sat with her mouth slightly open, the boy pushed her back until her head reached the ground and kissed her. The girl ran her small finger around his ear. In turning she saw Susan facing them and pointed to her. "So many people, so many people, and so few houses; where

do they all sleep?" Susan was thinking. "Let the old bitch drown in her own business," the boy said. The girl sat up and they went back to their writing.

A shout broke from a group of people clustered in a window of the house next door, and something sharp hit Susan's cheek and fell to the ground. She picked it up. It was a grain of rice. A young couple in matching light gray suits came dashing out of the building followed by a woman in a sheer navy blue dress with a starched white collar. Her face had been scrubbed into a red gloss. From their hats and clothes the young couple brushed the rice that rained on them. Just before he could slip out of her reach, the older woman caught the edge of the young man's coat. He turned and patted the woman's hand. "Be good to her," she called as they dashed away. "She's in your care."

When Henry came down he and Susan walked in silence to Second Avenue and got into a cab. Henry slammed the cab door shut and Susan asked, "How is she?"

"The doctor says she has a fifty-fifty chance. Her heart is strong and she is young."

"He was still there?"

"Yes. He said he has known her since she was a little mite and wants to do all he can to pull her through."

"There might be other reasons."

"I doubt it. But they couldn't help us. I told him to bring in nurses, not to spare any expense."

"Did you leave anything?"

"Yes. Two hundred. And I told him to call on me for whatever more they need."

"Of course you had to, but this sort of thing must be common enough down here. I only hope they won't blackmail you."

Henry sighed. "I don't think they will," he said, "but we can't take any chances. That girl must have the best of care." Henry lit a cigarette. He was nervous. He wouldn't smoke a cigarette otherwise.

"That tenement has brought us nothing but bad luck," Susan said. "I think you ought to sell it."

"Why only the tenement? What am I working like a dog for?

For a son who will carry on after me? I could have retired long ago. That's what I'm going to do, sell the whole god-damn business and enjoy myself."

"You need not use such language."

"To hell with my language. I'm going to live. Live. Live. What am I struggling for? What am I building up a business for?"

They were in front of the house and violent laments of Wagner drifted out through the parlor window. "You might have thought of that before you encouraged Arnold to toss a future away. The world can splinter into bits and that child will keep right on playing the piano."

While Henry paid the driver Susan went in through the basement door.

Mary was dusting the dining room table. "They're gone," she said when she saw Susan. "They left a few minutes ago." With the corner of her apron she wiped her face.

"Yes, Mary, they're gone. God knows when we'll see them again or under what circumstances."

Henry's footsteps could be heard coming toward the house. Before he opened the door Susan went upstairs to Tim's room. He had obviously packed in a hurry and had left many things about, shirts that apparently would not fit into his valise, ties, scraps of paper. One fragment in Nellie's handwriting said, "My heart beats and and sighs and prays for you." On the floor was the brass carousel ring. Susan picked it up and let it run around her finger. "It didn't bring you much luck," she thought, and feeling a dizzy spell coming on she sat down on the edge of the bed and held an arm across her eyes, her finger still twirling the brass ring.

1928, November

SUSAN STOOD ON THE BROAD STEP IN THE BLACK SHADOWS OF THE family entrance to a saloon on the corner diagonally across the street from the Taylor residence. An early winter wind cut across her face and she turned up the mink collar of her maroon cloth coat. As the large outdoor clock, set in the flat wall above the sham windows of a warehouse, struck the hour, she counted eleven. The whole neighborhood was changed; over the years automobile repair shops, garages, a dry cleaning factory, stores, all sorts of places of business, had replaced residences on Fourth Avenue; most of the old homes on the side streets had transformed into boarding houses. Except for the Taylors, practically everyone Susan had known on the street had died or had moved away.

A man who came out of one of the repair shops walked by her and tipped his cap. She noticed him too late to return his greeting. Another stepped up into the doorway and said, "Come, mother, come in and join us. Have a beer." She pretended not to see him, not to hear him. "It will cheer you up." She pressed closer to the brick wall and burrowed her head until her collar almost touched the brim of her felt hat. "I ain't gonna hurt ya," the man said and went inside.

Left to herself, impression crowded out impression; the nights she spent alone in her room looking out the window, the day Mary had told her that Margaret Taylor was in the parlor and would like to talk to her and she had instructed Mary to "order that whore out of my house," the visit to a doctor who had told her that frequently women her age are harassed by an inner hysteria which releases itself in unfounded jealousy. She assured herself the doctor was wrong; she was neither excited nor unstrung; she was simply weary, weary and numb. She sighed only because sighing had become a habit. She wondered why she had

come, why she stayed. For a while she paced back and forth in the dark before the door of blue, green, and yellow squares of glass. When the warehouse clock struck 11:30 she went back to the step and leaned against the wall. Somewhat unsteady on his feet, the man who had invited her to join him in a beer came out and stood next to her. He swayed and laughed and said something she could not understand. Mumbling, he took a step toward her. She was frightened, but she did not move. He laughed hoarsely and staggered away.

Close to twelve o'clock Henry's red roadster drove by and stopped in front of the Taylors'. Henry helped Nellie out, kissed her passionately, watched her climb her stoop, and then got back into his car and drove off. Susan saw the light go out in the Taylor hall.

Without haste Susan walked toward home. In the dull darkness of the night the brick flats she passed were hardly distinguishable from the brownstone fronts further up the hill. Here and there a light still burned. Before each one Susan paused for a moment and peered into the windows, but she was in a semistupor and remained unaware of everything she gazed at. Suddenly she realized she was passing the graystones of her neighbors. To go into the house was out of the question; if only she had someplace else to go. Unaware of the sharp bites of wind, she crossed the street and turned back into Eighth Avenue. "Fool. You old fool. You had to sell the factory. Now, you really don't know what to do with your time," she muttered. As she had constantly of late, she imagined card parties and dinners with Henry's old business associates, she planned various ways to keep Henry entertained, ways she never mentioned to him. "We have reached the time of life when we might enjoy ourselves, enjoy each other." She throbbed with desire for him; if only he would look at her, see her, touch her. "Why, why couldn't Nellie leave us alone? A twenty-nine-year-old girl running around with a married man. What could he mean to her?" The wind had stopped and a thin snow was falling. She held her coat close to her body. Her eyes fell on the round brass clock in a jeweler's window. For over an hour she had been roaming the

streets, muttering the same hopes, repeating the same questions. She was about a mile from home. A trolley was in sight, but she made no attempt to hail it. Instead she walked back slowly, looking into the shop windows along the avenue without noticing what was in them. When she let herself into the house she was completely chilled.

The next day, saying she felt a cold coming on, she remained in her room. She ate nothing and passed the hours sitting at her window looking down into the street. Early in the afternoon she saw Henry leave the house. Involuntarily her head bobbed up and down. "Patience," she said almost aloud. "Patience." By dinner time the walls of the room closed in on her; she had to get out somewhere, anywhere. With care she went through her wardrobe and selected a gray silk dress with a deep V neckline and matching gray suede pumps. Her legs were still well proportioned and, in spite of her chubbiness, she looked quite attractive in the skirt, which barely covered her calves. She dabbed some powder on her nose and relieved the nakedness of the neckline with a gold and pearl necklace Henry had given her on her forty-fifth birthday, six years before.

Arnold was already at the table when she took her place. She wanted to say something pleasant, but her tongue was too heavy, so without speaking she poured two plates of pea soup from the tureen.

After some seconds Arnold asked her, "Aren't you going to taste your soup, mom?"

"What's that? Oh, yes, of course." She let her spoon run around the edge of the thick green liquid. A slight click distracted her. Henry's key was turning in the basement door.

"I'd like to talk to you, Susan. Please don't leave the house before I do," he said and went upstairs.

"Where would I go?" she said more to herself than to Arnold.

For a while she sat staring at her plate. When finally she raised her eyes she looked around the room. A small radio, with an old phonograph horn that Arnold had attached to it to serve as a loud speaker, stood on a bamboo table in the corner near

the door leading to the kitchen. The old scratch in the sideboard, made years before when Henry placed the electric box on it, was still there, but the large cut glass punchbowl and bon-bon dishes had been replaced by a silver tea set and candlesticks. Much about the room seemed strange and unnatural. The sofa was gone; a wing chair covered in chintz with a black background and red and yellow flowers held the place between the windows. Two boards had been removed from the table, which now was small and square, too small to stand in the center of such a large room. I'll have to put it against the wall, she thought. One of the four chairs around the table was standing at an angle. She thought of asking Arnold, who was sitting opposite her, in front of the fireplace, to straighten it. Her glance fell on his plate, and she realized he too had not eaten. "Arnold, you haven't touched your food," she said.

"Mom, what do you suppose he has on his mind?"

Her mouth twitched. "I don't know. I don't know."

"Mom," Arnold reached over and put his hand on hers, "whatever it is, take it easy."

She let the side of her small finger run along the narrow white scar that extended from his thumb almost to his wrist; then she patted his hand. "I will, Arnold. Don't worry, my son, I will."

To swallow anything was impossible so she went upstairs. Heavy-hearted, with a calm that was taut and ready to snap, she kept cautioning herself to be patient. For half an hour she sat listening to drawers opening and shutting; to Henry moving about his room. When his door opened her temples began to throb, her pulse to beat. She tried but could not stifle a sigh as he walked into her room.

She was sitting at her window looking out into the darkness. For several seconds Henry paced up and down in back of her; then he leaned against the dresser and lit a cigarette. Susan heard the paper match hit the dresser marble top, she heard him take a step away into the room, move back, crush out his cigarette, strike another match.

"I don't know where to start, Susan," Henry said at last.

She swayed slightly and put her palms flat against the window pane to support herself. "Yes." Her voice was low.

"But I'm going away."

"Away."

"Yes, I'm going to South America on a cruise; when I get back I'll settle in San Francisco. I think that might be less awkward for you."

Her hand which now gripped the lace curtain shook so violently the curtain quivered. "Why awkward?"

"I'm taking Nellie with me."

She jumped up and faced him. "Are you mad?"

"No, I adore her."

"That's the trouble with you. All your life you've adored first one woman, then another, but you've never loved any of us."

"I can understand you might feel bitter."

"Bitter. What do you think she is interested in, your youth?"

"Nellie and I understand each other. She's not a youngster any more."

"But she's young enough to be your daughter. You knew her when she was a tot. And Tim. It's incest."

"Now look here, Susan."

"It's only because you're flattered that at your age—"

"I'm not interested in having my emotions dissected." He dropped his cigarette to the floor, stepped on it, and lit another one.

"Henry, Henry, what do you want in a woman; what do you look for?"

He puffed hard on his cigarette.

"How will a man your age satisfy a young girl?"

A harsh laugh broke from Henry's lips. "There are ways."

Susan gasped. "They aren't fair," she said.

"If she doesn't like them she certainly puts on a good act." His laugh was coarse. "Anyway, do you care whether or not I'm fair to her?"

Susan sat on the narrow window ledge and pinched the pearl-tipped gold drops of the necklace she was wearing. "Henry."

The appeal in her voice drew his eyes, which had been shifting here and there to hers. "What happened to the affection you once had for me? Whatever did I do to deserve this?"

Henry looked away again. "I don't suppose it was your fault, Susie. You've been a devoted wife, and a devoted mother, in your way. Susie, you've always been a good woman. Just the brute in me, I guess; too much vitality. You know I tried to take an interest in other things. Remember how I used to struggle to lose myself in chemistry and botany?" The cigarette dropped to the floor and he crushed it with his toe.

"But is your affection for me so completely dead that after all these years of marriage, thirty, Henry, you should want to walk out, leave me?"

"That's a rather crude way to put it. But Susie, I'm bored." The words had slipped out and he added quickly, "You see a man has different needs, requires different things, different loves at different ages."

She leaned against the wall. "A man. A man needs. What, just what do you want in a woman? What do you hope to find in Nellie that is different, that will satisfy you? What happiness can you expect to get from this, this affair?"

"Affair is an ugly word for it."

"Whatever you call it, what happiness do you expect to get?"

"Happiness? I'm in ecstasy. I'm smart enough to know that it may not last forever, but Susie, who has known happiness for any length of time? If I get five years of it, I will feel that I have been enriched, that I have known more happiness than any other man who has ever lived."

"You've thought it all out, haven't you?"

"Is that all you have to say?"

"You just can't give into every whim this way, pull out without understanding your responsibilities."

"I've made ample provision for you and Arnold. And you may always call on me for anything you want."

"Anything I want, Henry, anything?"

"Why yes, of course. Anything, anything your heart desires."

Susan partially stifled a sob. "When do you leave?" she asked.

"Right away. We sail on the 'Vestris' in the morning. I'm taking some things with me. I'll let you know where to send the rest of my stuff later." He started toward the door, changed his mind and went over and offered Susan his hand.

She threw her arms around his neck. "Henry, Henry, don't do this to me; not this. I've been patient, I've taken all I can, I can't take any more. I know I'm not young any longer, I know I'm not the smartest woman who has ever lived, but I love you, I understand you, I'm right for you. I have always closed my eyes to everything you did, hoping, hoping, hoping—"

He threw her from him with such force she fell back against the window, and he rushed out of the room.

The front door closed. Arnold was beside her; with her he stood at the window and watched Henry, who carried a large valise, go down the street to Eighth Avenue, where he hailed a taxi. Neither spoke until the taxi drove away; then Arnold led her to the Morris chair. "He never said good-bye to me," he said.

She sat down and Arnold sat on a stool at her feet, his long legs stretched before him. "You know, mom," he said, "I love to picture you in this chair. Somehow it fits you. This is where you mended and darned our clothes. When you sat here and read or talked you were so sweet, so beautiful, I used to look up and worship you."

Susan winced.

"I know, mom, everything has gone blooey for you," he went on. "I wish you would try and take an interest in what I am doing. You might get a kick out of it."

"Oh, Arnold," she cried and bent forward and kissed his lips.

In the morning she left the house before either Mary or Arnold were up. Chilled by the damp, penetrating air, she walked rather fast under the snarled naked branches of the trees along the park. Her body throbbed; each step knocked at her brain. She slowed her pace and was about to rest for a moment on one of the faded dark green benches when a taxi drew up alongside the curb. "Cab, lady?" the driver called.

When she said, "Yes," and climbed in, the driver chuckled with surprise. "Where to?" he asked.

"I want to see some people off on the 'Vestris.' Do you know the pier?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, find out."

On the pier she leaned against a steel pillar. She saw men roll a long table into the center of the floor and set up a wooden fence that enclosed the table and the gangplanks. She watched stevedores hoist bales and crates onto the ship. She stared at a stack of baggage as if she sought a familiar piece. About ten-thirty passengers began to arrive, and she receded into the shadows of some large wooden cases. Each time the door of the glass enclosed lounge on the top deck opened, the otherwise muffled sounds of the exhilarated playing of a jazz band could be clearly heard. Close on to eleven o'clock Henry and Nellie came along. Nellie wore a straight, long-waisted bright red suit that gave her body a box-like shape and was so short her large bony knees could be seen. Pinned at her shoulder was a corsage of violets and small pink roses. Henry wore a long racoon coat. His hair, streaked with gray, was about the same color as the coat. "You collegiate fool," Susan muttered. "You hatless collegiate fool."

Henry checked in at the long table and then with his arm in Nellie's went up the gangplank. Susan wanted to run up and tear him away from Nellie; she wanted to shout that he was her husband, that he belonged to her. She wanted to fall to the ground in a faint, but she remained where she was without moving. For ten or fifteen minutes they were out of sight, and then Susan saw them on deck, walking up and down, Nellie's hand in Henry's. Henry said something; Nellie laughed, and Henry kissed the palm of her hand. Henry pulled Nellie's tight helmet-shaped hat over her eyes; she laughed; he grabbed her, pushed her head down and kissed the back of her neck. The mad roar in Susan's head intensified; she heard nothing else, and except for Henry in his racoon coat and Nellie in her square suit standing at the rail watching passengers and freight, turning toward the Jersey shore which was partly obscured by a filmy drizzle, laughing, chatting, kissing, bobbing their heads in time

to the jazz rhythms, she saw nothing until the gangplank went up and the shrill whistles of departure shocked her into an awareness of her surroundings. The ship puffed into the river. She ran to the edge of the pier and watched the ship fade into the mist. As its phantom shape disappeared an impression that the ship tilted penetrated her foggy mind.

"Lady," a young man tapped her arm, "we're locking the doors. You have to come in."

She left the pier and wandered along the waterfront. Jagged cobblestones caused her feet to blister; her ankle kept turning over until it ached. Her bun became undone and she pushed the loose hair under her hat, leaving stray ends that blew across her eyes. She walked dangerously close to wagons and motor trucks going to and from the piers. When the screech of the brakes of a truck made her jump and the driver swore at her to get out of the way, she went over to the sidewalk. All afternoon, with the sensation of having lived through all this before, she continued to roam past the haunts of seamen, peering into illy lighted lodgings and resorts. She could not shake off the feeling that she must enter one of these gloomy places to find that which she sought, but she stubbornly resisted the impulse. The longer she walked the more keenly she felt she had been on these streets on other occasions, yielding to the same heavy bewilderment, the same dark craving.

She peered into every face she passed, but saw no one. Although she saw no one, everyone noticed her, some even stopped to turn and stare after her as she walked on. The thin mist neither chilled nor refreshed her, she remained unaware that darkness settled in the dampness, and she might have gone on throughout the night in this same numb state if her high French heel had not caught in a cellar grill. In trying to pull it out it broke. Limping over to the curb she hailed a taxi. All the way home she huddled in the corner, suppressing a desire to reach out and grab something in the air before her, something that would save her, something that would bring her happiness.

Neither Mary nor Arnold asked her where she had been. Ex-

cept that Arnold stayed close to her all evening, both he and Mary acted as if nothing unusual had happened.

"It's Saturday, Arnold. Haven't you a date with young folks or a girl?" Susan asked.

"Tonight you're my girl," he said. "My bestest love." She was sitting in the black chintz chair and he stroked her hair.

"Oh, Arnold, Arnold," and she buried her head in his coat.

"Let's have a game of cribbage," he suggested and set up the board at a corner of the dining room table.

With Mary watching they played and, save to call the cards, they did not speak. The dampness in the air had affected Mary's leg, and she kept rubbing it. Eventually Susan said, "The ship has a list."

Neither Mary nor Arnold answered her; they did not even ask her what ship.

"I hope they drown," she said.

Arnold took her hand in his. "You don't really, do you, mom?"

"No, I don't. I don't. I want him to come back to me. I want him to take me on a trip. He promised to." And she cried like a child.

Mary went into the kitchen. She puttered around the stove for a few minutes and came waddling back with a cloudy drink in a tall glass, which she handed to Susan. "Drink this here toddy, Mrs. Bates. It'll settle your nerves."

"Thank you, Mary." Drying her eyes, Susan sipped it slowly, and she and Arnold went on with their game.

Sunday was miserable and damp and Susan and Arnold and Mary remained indoors all day. In the evening Arnold asked his mother to listen to a short piece he had composed, and she and Mary went up to the parlor with him. After playing the piece Arnold leaned on the piano keys and looked questioningly at his mother.

"I seem to prefer sweet music."

"Mom, art in any form isn't only honey and sugar. It's pepper and salt and vinegar, too. It's seeing, hearing, smelling, asking. It's living, mom, and telling about it. It's feeling and trying to

get other people to understand what they feel; it's thinking and trying to get other people to think."

"I guess I never saw it in that light before. I always thought about it as decoration or entertainment, something to dress up life, to make it gay and cheerful. He's very smart, isn't he, Mary?"

"He's always been," Mary said quietly.

Arnold wiped away the sweat that had gathered on his forehead. "Anyway, I should have played something less brutal for you. Let's go to town. Mary, how about singing us an Irish tune."

Mary cleared her throat and stood upright in the curve of the grand piano. "I heard in the night the pi-geons a-stir with-in their nests. The wild pi-geon's stir was tender like a child's hand at the breast. I cried O stir no more! My breast was touch'd of tears. O pi-geons, make no stir, a child-less woman hears."

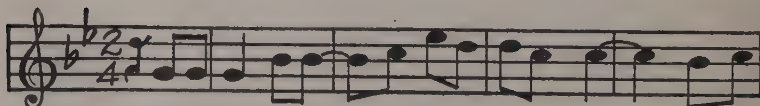
Arnold and Susan looked at one another and smiled. "Let's try another," Arnold said.

"How's this?" Mary asked. "Down by the sal-ly gar-dens my love and I did meet; She pass'd the sal-ly gardens with lit-tle snow-white feet." *

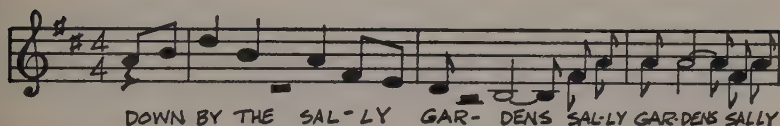
"Yes," Arnold said falteringly.

"There's ne-ver the equal of Johnny O'Reilly. From Cavan to Carrick, from Carrick to Boyle; The bravest and wisest are rating him highly—"

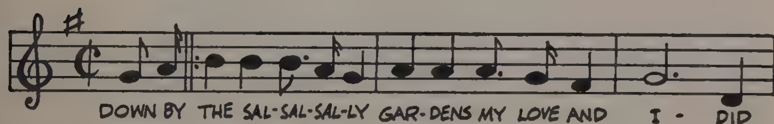
"Dee dee dee dee," Arnold broke in. "Now, let's see, 'There's never the . . .' Let's go back to the gardens." Arnold ran over the keys. "Played as a Negro spiritual, Sally Gardens might sound something like this:

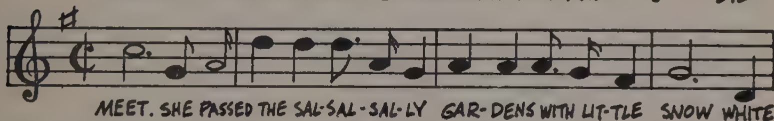


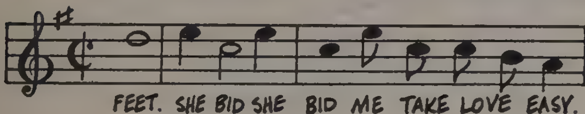
"If the Hawaiians were to beat it out for the wax, this is what it would probably be like:



"And on Broadway:







"Mom, you look tired."

"You're so bright, Arnold, so bright. I never realized it before." Susan stifled a yawn. "I'm sorry, I didn't sleep well last night."

Arnold blew a kiss to his mother and played "Good night, Sweetheart."

Weary though she was, Susan could not sleep. She listened to Arnold trying "Sally Gardens" in various rhythms, and long after he stopped and went up to bed she was still awake. She tossed until her body ached. The quiet of the night had an eerie weightiness and occasional steps on the sidewalk were welcome sounds. When she could no longer stand the strain she

rose and looked out the window, but, because of a heavy black fog, she was unable to see anything. She put her hand out into the dampness. The hollow, lonely clang of a milk wagon made her aware it was early morning, and she got back into bed. Finally she dozed. In her sleep sharp needles of rain pricked her skin; her bed began to rock. It went from side to side until she felt queasy. She moved to the edge so that she could lean over and vomit, not over the side of a bed but over the rail of a ship. The ship rocked until she could hardly hold her balance. The water rose and hit her face and forced her back. She leaned against the wall of the saloon. Inside people were singing, "Tea for two. Tea for two. Tea for two."

The motion sent tables and chairs in all directions. A mountainous wave filled the deck with water. The ship rolled wildly; water was knee deep, and men pumped in cabins and down below. While they pumped they sang, "Death is due. Death is due," and Susan ran around looking for Henry. She couldn't find him anywhere. Her stomach ached from retching, and she went back to the rail. The roll of the boat caused her to lose her balance. A wave hit her with great force and carried her into the sea. The ship began to sink. In the water she floated around and watched it go down. Men and women stood at the rail screaming, waving their hands. Henry waved his racoon coat. "Good-bye," he called. "Good-bye, Susie." "Good-bye my love, my only love." And the coat disappeared.

Susan awoke; she was on the floor. "It was a dream," she cried. "A dream." She shivered convulsively. "A dream? No, there are no dreams. There only is what is. What am I saying? I'm mad. Mad." Her head spun around. She rolled over and leaned against the wall. The house was dark and quiet. She put her hand out the window. A drizzle stung her fingers. For some time she remained on the floor before she rose and wrapped herself in a heavy woolen bathrobe and sat in the Morris chair. After a while the Morris chair began to sway. Unable to stand the sensation she dressed and went into the street. The drizzle had stopped but a mist still veiled the graystone houses. She

walked around until she felt tired and came back to the house as the sun rose through a thin fog. Its rays were not sharp, but were bright enough to light up the windows so that all the panes of the house were a shimmering gold. She laughed and said aloud, "A phoney golden shell. You are as empty and dead and decayed as the Faulkner and Watson houses. Inside you are a tomb, the grave of lifelong dreams. And I always said the life, the roots of a family were in a house."

The mist thickened and the golden panes turned gray. Susan went inside. Mary and Arnold were still asleep. Before she went into the kitchen to prepare coffee she turned on the radio. The static was so annoying she was about to go back and turn it off when the word "Vestris" came through loud and clear. She ran to the radio. " 'Oh, please come. Hurry. Hurry,' was the last plea from the sinking vessel," the announcer said.

"Arnold, Arnold," Susan cried. "Arnold, Arnold," and she started upstairs. "Arnold. Arnold."

Sleepily he called over the banister, "Yes, mom."

"Your father is drowning. Your father is drowning."

Two steps at a time he started toward her. She dragged him to the radio. Bolts of static screeched in their ears.

"You're upset, mom. Nothing is on the air."

"Oh yes. Oh yes," she said.

He reached to turn off the key, but she put her hand on his to stop him and through the static came the words, "S.O.S. calls started at four this morning. The boat reports it sent up flares all through the night."

A long blast cut off the announcer. He came back on again with, "Men are risking their lives to fly over the water in an attempt to locate the exact position of the 'Vestris,' to bring her a sign of hope, but darkness and fog completely conceal her. Nine ships battle their way through heavy seas, but it is doubtful that they can reach the stricken vessel for many hours."

For a while nothing was reported. Even so neither Arnold nor Susan left the radio. She sat on a small stool before the cabinet. Quite some time Arnold leaned on the box before he

brought over a chair for himself. When Mary came down she threw a woolen scarf over Susan's shoulders. Until then Susan had not realized she was chilled.

The fog lifted and they all felt a little easier. "I'll make breakfast," Mary said.

Before she left the room the voice on the radio was back. "The frenzy of the calls," it said, "has intensified. The ship is caught in a trough of the sea which causes an alarming roll. Everything is in disorder. Passengers are buried under loose bedding, displaced furniture and broken pottery. The men at the pumps are knee deep in water. It is impossible to set the ship on an even keel. The cry 'Please come' is constant. We know how anxious those with friends and relatives on the 'Vestris' are, and we will broadcast news as fast as it comes in over the wireless. Please do not telephone for information. We must keep our wires clear."

"Arnold, call one of the newspapers."

"Mom, didn't you hear what he said?"

"Yes, yes, but call anyway."

"Now, mom, what good will it do?"

"I don't know. I don't know. But call."

Mary dragged the rocker over and insisted that Susan sit in it. "No, Mary, no," Susan pleaded and leaned forward, her elbows on her knees, her head covered by her hands.

Mary signaled to Arnold, each placed a hand under Susan's arm and raised her from the stool to the rocker. It swayed as she sat down and she screamed. They let her go back to the stool.

Mary went into the kitchen and put some coffee on a low light. Arnold smoked one cigarette after another; he walked up and down in back of his mother.

"The high wind and rough sea still hinder rescue possibilities. Fliers returning to shore are exhausted and discouraged."

Mary emptied an ashtray filled with butts and said, "Nolly, you'll be sick. Those cigarettes ain't any good for your lungs."

Susan looked up at Mary when she spoke and then buried her head once more in her hands.

Shortly after noon the announcer said, "The tilt is so bad no one can stand upright without holding onto something for support. The operator is strapped to his chair. Mountainous waves have flooded the decks. The men have been separated from the women and children, who are about to be put in small boats. Some cry. Some pray. Everyone considers his life-belt a shroud."

Susan shook. Mary insisted that she drink some coffee. Susan had the cup to her lips when the announcer said, "We just received a flash that the 'Vestris' may not be able to send through any further messages." Dead silence followed. Neither Susan nor Arnold nor Mary moved. When the announcer came back he said, "The boat's operator has just radioed a final 'good-bye.'" The cup fell and the coffee spilled over Susan's lap. She felt the hot liquid trickle down her skirt and her skirt cling to her leg.

A heart attack made it necessary for Susan to remain in bed for weeks. Olive came East to visit her. "Olive," Susan said when she saw her sister-in-law, "you are beautiful, more radiant than ever."

Olive laughed. "Why, my hair is white."

"But your face and your figure. You are so graceful, you walk like a goddess. You have the secret of everlasting youth."

Olive sat on the edge of the bed and held Susan's hand.

During the next few days the two women spoke of many things. They spoke of the days when they were young before they had married; they spoke of Eleanor, who was going to have a baby, and of Tim who, after an argument with Olive, had left for the Philippine Islands, but they both avoided any mention of Henry until finally Susan said, "Often lately I have thought of a psalm my mother used to recite to me from the Songs of Solomon, in which Solomon asks God for an understanding heart, and God answers, because you asked only for an understanding heart I will give you honor and riches as well."

"I don't quite follow you, Susie."

"Look, Olive, how freely you gave of yourself without asking anything in return, and how the family I suffered to hold together flocked to you."

"You're wrong, Susie. Very wrong. I demanded the right to live as I wanted."

"That was not too much to ask. Everyone loved and respected you. Whoever met you knew that you could understand anything, that you would help where you could, that you would cast no stones. Henry told me he would settle in San Francisco."

"Yes, he had written me that he intended to, but I want you to know, Susie, I forbade him to see me."

"You really shouldn't blame Henry for what has happened to me. Remember, Olive, a long time ago you advised me not to be a fool, to look life more squarely in the face. Now you can say, 'I told you so.' To hold onto my husband all these years did me no good; I lost him long ago."

"Don't reproach yourself, Susie. Each must live according to his temperament."

"You were right before, Olive; each must live his own life. To cling to someone else, to ask someone else to fulfill our dreams, to impose the burden of our happiness on someone else is wrong. It is a sickness. I am so ashamed. As I look back it seems to me I was a leech that wanted to suck Henry's blood. Only he broke loose. I guess the thing that hurts me most is that I keep thinking if I had died he never would have missed me."

"Susie, you always wanted to travel. Why don't you come back to the Coast with me?"

Arnold, who was on the sofa going over a score, looked up. His eyes went from his mother to his aunt but he said nothing.

"I'm too old a dog to run around now."

"Silly, what have you to keep you?"

"Arnold."

"Don't stay on my account, mom. If you want to go, you should, by all means."

"Don't you want me either, Arnold?"

"Oh, mom." He ran over, knelt on the floor, and buried his head in her quilt. "Oh, mom, I have always wanted you. I need you."

Susan drew him close and something sharp dug into her breast. She reached down into the pocket of his shirt and pulled

out a small child's tooth, the tooth Mary had saved to bring him luck. She closed her hand around it.

Olive moved up from the foot of the bed where she was sitting, and let her hand fall on Arnold's arm. Tears were in her eyes. "Arnold, you always seemed so self-sufficient," she said. "Why do you need your mother?"

"I just love having her around. She's so self-sacrificing, so loyal. She has never complained, Aunt Olive, never, and she is so willing to forgive. Besides, she can help me."

"Help you? How?" Olive asked.

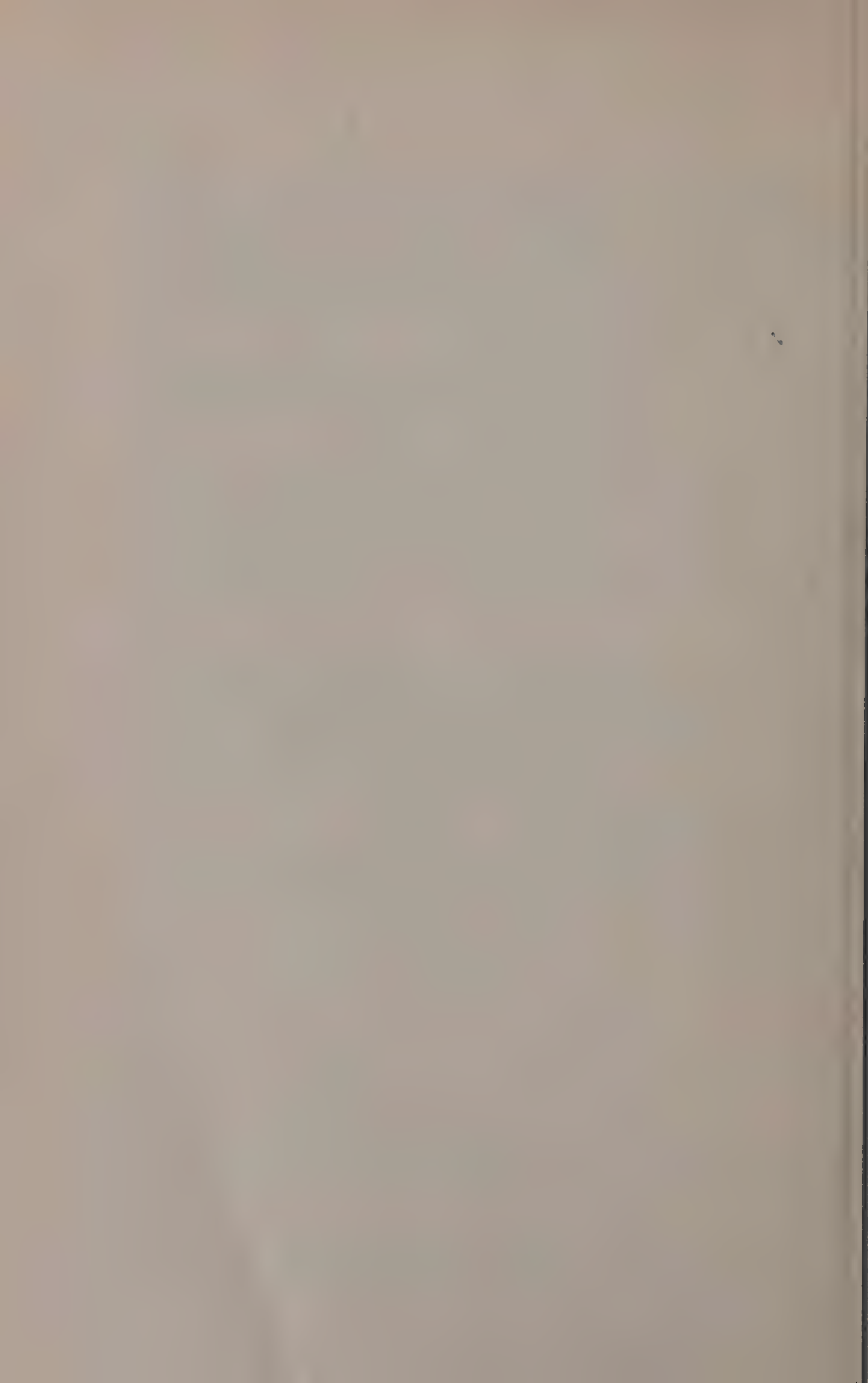
"When I was a kid pop said something to me I never forgot. He said a family is like a symphony, with all sorts of movements, gay and sad, all sorts of desires, all sorts of dreams. He said that in a family there is harmony and discord, light moods and heavy."

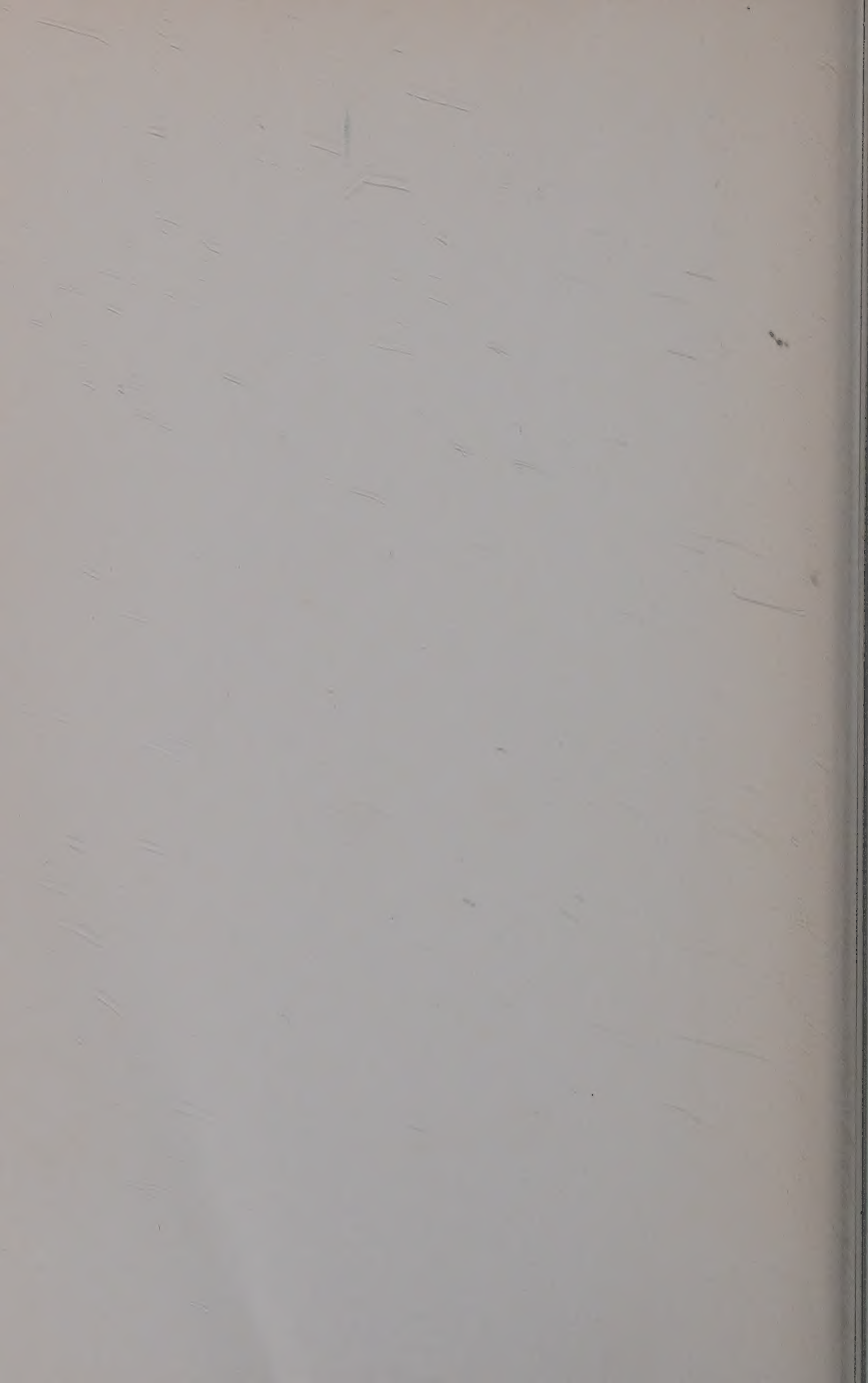
"Yes."

"Well, you see, Aunt Olive," Arnold shifted uneasily, "mom can help me interpret the various moods." His eyes dropped modestly as though he were about to say something he did not expect her to believe. "I am about to begin work on a symphony which I will call 'Family, Happy Family.'"

Olive turned her face away.

"Don't look away from me, Olive, don't hide your tears. Cry. I should cry too. This is much more than I deserve."





Susan Bates' husband, Henry, for instance, is the handsome business man of every urban or suburban neighborhood throughout the country. He is the man who has never grown up as far as women are concerned. He cannot resist flattery; indeed, he cannot resist disrupting his life and those of the people around him to get that flattery. This is Susan Bates' problem—forgiveness, or a clean break and a new start in life—and it is also the basic problem of thousands of women in our society. Her solution and that of Olive (Henry's sister) reflect the understanding and knowledge Gertrude Jobes has achieved before undertaking her first major work.

Broad in scope, ONE HAPPY FAMILY embraces widely differing personalities as it rushes inevitably along the road of American life. There is Nellie Taylor, the typical neighborhood girl known to everybody. There is Arnold Bates, the third child in the Bates family, the atypical child whose character is drawn so perceptively by the author. There is Eleanor, who supplies the most poignant episode in this fine, full-bodied book.

ONE HAPPY FAMILY ends on an unusual note, symbolized by Arnold's great creative work—a modern symphony that describes not only his family with all its foibles, follies and flashes of nobility, but many another American family today.

Jacket design by Dave Lyons

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gertrude Jobes is a native New Yorker who now lives, with her husband James Addison Jobes, on the shore in Milford, Connecticut. She has studied under such famous teachers as Ralph Bates (author of *The Olive Tree*); Ellis St. Joseph, playwright and producer of *King's Row;* Hollis Alpert, critic and short story writer; Ashley Montague, the anthropologist; Vivienne MacLeod, the poet and writer; — all of these being at New York University — and Horace Gregory, poet, of the New School. She is also studying at the New School for Social Research in New York. She has written articles for newspaper publication, and she has lectured on art. Late in World War II she crisscrossed the United States and Canada, handling the exhibitions of the famous Abbott Collection of War Paintings.

These diversified experiences seem to have been leading Gertrude Jobes inevitably to the production of a strong work of fiction. She is a polished, mature writer: ONE HAPPY FAMILY is a polished, mature novel.

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