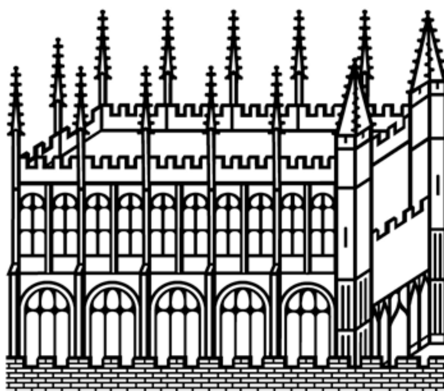

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Nellie Bloom

By

Margery Latimer

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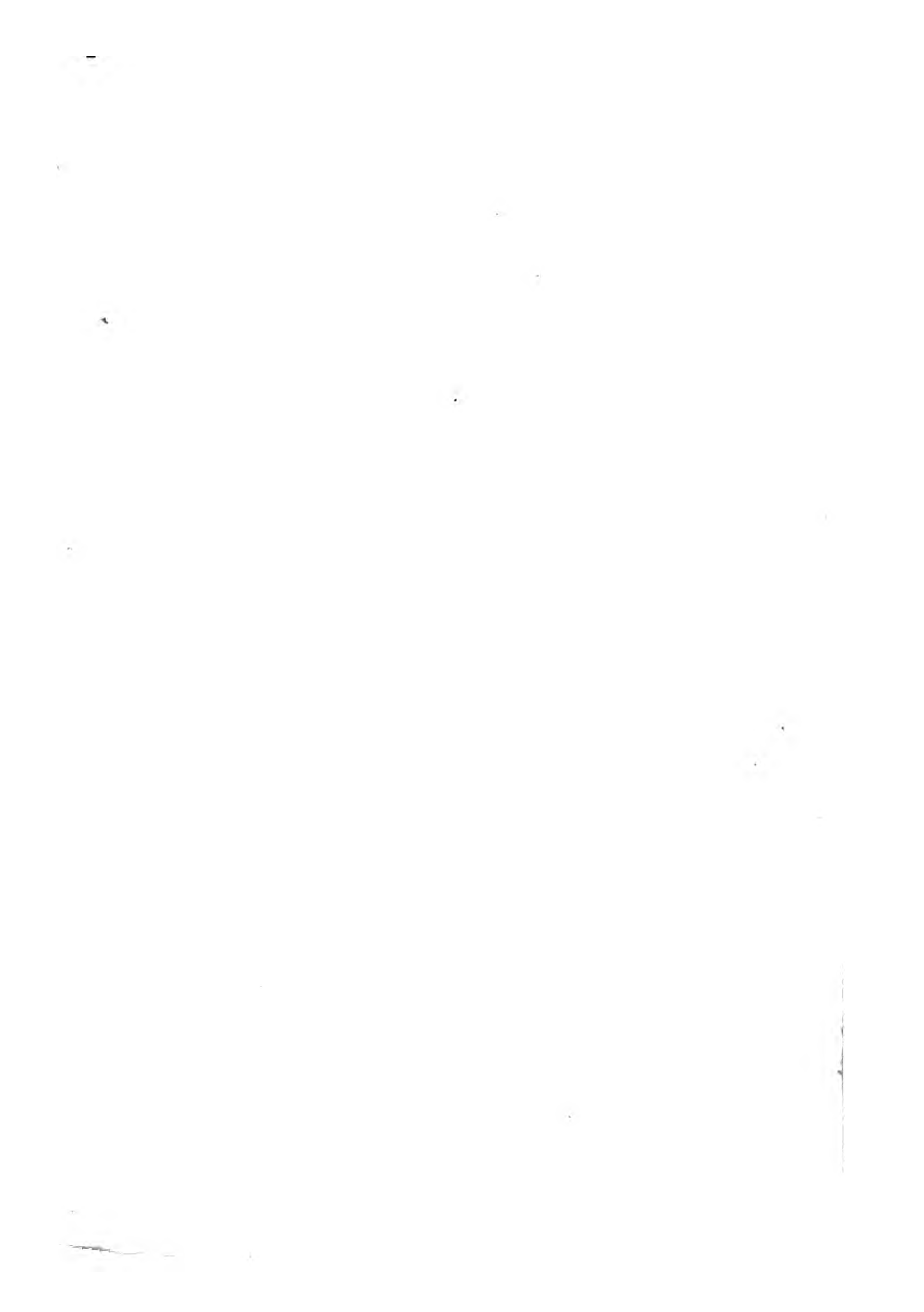

Nellie Bloom

Nellie Bloom

And Other Stories

By

Margery Latimer

Author of "We Are Incredible"

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NELLIE BLOOM AND OTHER STORIES

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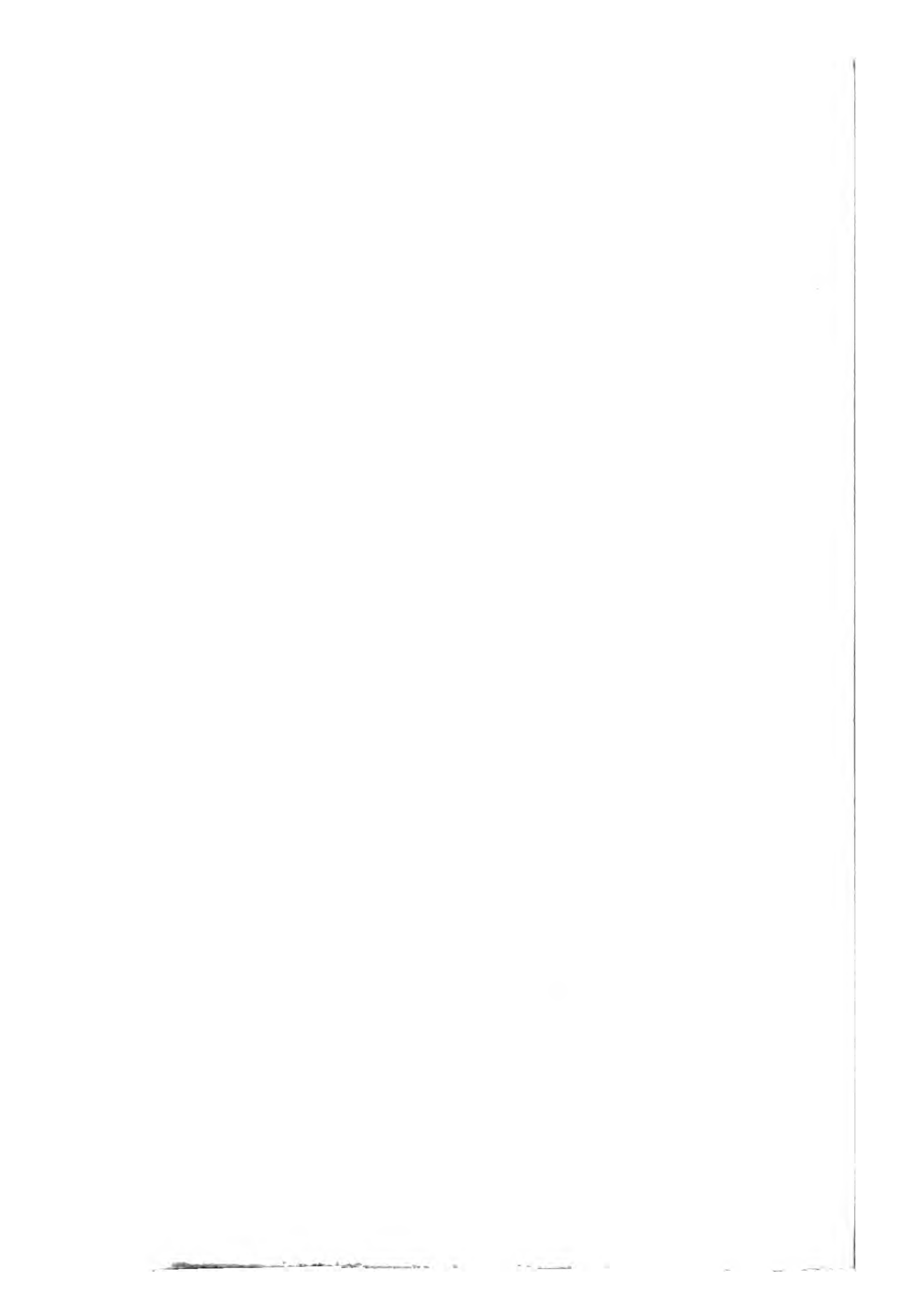

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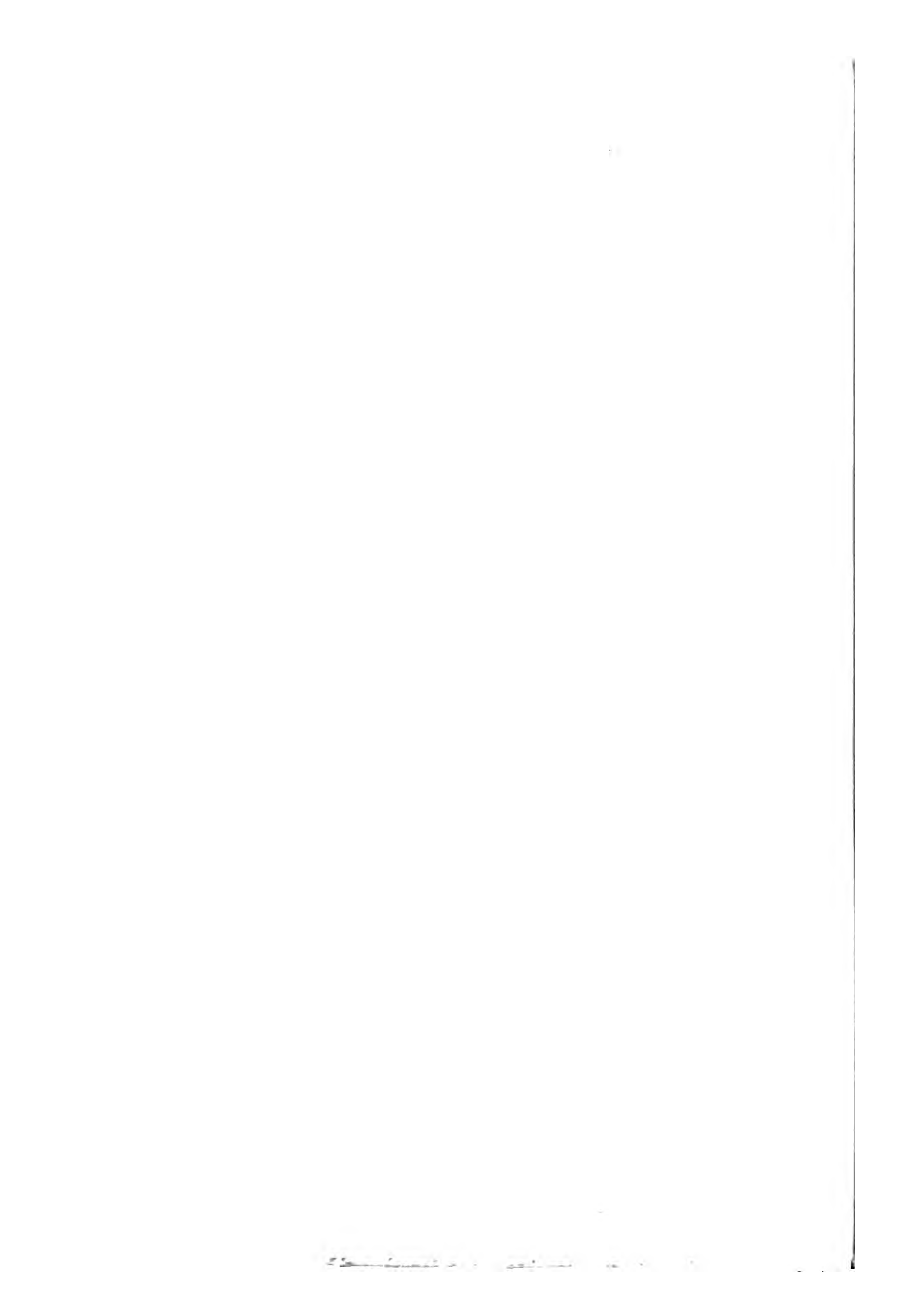
Nellie Bloom



Nellie Bloom

IN Onnowac we take our summer guests to the band concert on Monday night, to the Dells at Kilbourn on the first bright day, to the glen up in the bluffs, but we always save Sunday for showing the town. We pass the old toll gate house covered with vines, rotting, its old porch ready to fall, sagging and swaying under glossy leaves and living branches. An old man used to come out and open the gate for ten cents. Sometimes he would run out at noon with his napkin tied round his neck and a pork chop in one hand. Ten cents in his brown wrinkled hand and the creaky gate would swing open. Click-click-click and the wheels would spin down the road. "Mother, I saw a red-winged blackbird. Teacher said we should tell her every bird we saw. Papa, let me drive. Please, Papa, you promised. Mother, aren't we to Nellie Bloom's yet?"

I said that when I was eleven years old, and I used to say it every time we went out to drive. My grandmother had told me about

Nellie sliding down Puffer's hill in the winter. My father had added some detail about her in church. My mother had said sharply that Nellie had always had a big dejected look in her eyes from the time she was born, as if she considered herself selected for especial misfortune.

This time I had come back to Onnowac sad and desolate and when I walked down the canal road and remembered how I had once looked for birds in the marsh grass I grew sadder and wept a little for myself as I walked along. I thought of Nellie Bloom as I passed the old Bloom place there near the church with the triangle of fruit trees in back of the house and the stone wall. The sun shone on the bright bay windows and the fluted trimmings where sparrows had untidy nests. I looked up and saw queer little cornices and peaks at the top of the house. I imagined they were candles.

But suddenly Nellie Bloom was there among the blooming plants, the porch boards creaking under her light slippers, her sad face bent. There was no time between us, no space. I knew from the arch of her shoulders and her color that we were sharing the same tortured melancholy. But I was flattering myself, as young people will, when I thought that I was sharing anything with Nellie Bloom who had died forty years before. But forgive me, because the world was too much for me then.

I had met only my picture of it. I was lonely and full of shrinking.

I stopped at Mrs. Alverson's window to ask her about Nellie Bloom. "What did she look like? Why did she die? What is the real story?"

Mrs. Alverson is eighty-one and she went to Nellie's christening and to her funeral and to Grandma Sweeney's. I had never heard about Grandma Sweeney before. She told me about Mr. and Mrs. Nimmons. I've always known them. Mr. Nimmons is president of the bank and Mrs. Nimmons is president of the Ladies' Aid. They seem to be quiet and kind, not at all the sort that you could imagine anything romantic or sinister about, just plain, well-dressed people who lead in prayer and whose son is in college and rides a motorcycle.

She showed me Nellie Bloom. She tried to describe how she looked as she lay in a low hammock hung between a flowering plum and an apple, how white her skin was against the sheer lavender of her gown and how black her hair as it poured down over head and ear into a dense coil held with a comb. And she described the narrow black ribbon with the locket, and the feet, one above the other at the end of the hammock, and she tried to explain what was pathetic about those crossed feet.

"We all felt sorry for Nellie when it hap-

pened and we took sides against the Nimmonses but they're good people, too, and I guess they couldn't help it. They've never missed at church and they've lived it all down."

"But what about Nellie?"

"We can't keep on being sad for someone dead forty years."

She went back with her voice and brought me Grandma Sweeney and I saw the strange old creature with her hair like a gray silk cap on her head and her forehead in three deep ridges. Her eyes stared out as if they were looking at something the mouth cannot name and yet which cannot die.

"That winter Grandma's youngest boy broke his head open coasting. And in a short time she buried her husband, too. But he was no good. I remember him sitting out near the woodshed in the sun, winter and summer, with that old pipe of his and his feet up and his hat down. Grandma was taking in washing, mind you. We felt glad when the old fellow passed on and she could put something by for herself. Then she started nursing. They called her the night Nellie fell back on the parlor carpet and they took her for dead. It's my private opinion Grandma kept that girl alive for six years."

I closed my eyes and I saw Nellie Bloom coasting down Puffer's hill with one cautious foot scraping the snow, her face deep in fur,

her eyes looking up and out over the rise and fall of hill to a forest beyond the river. I looked into her eyes, beyond the astonishment of her flying sled on blue snow, the cries and flashing runners, to the deep and tender distress that she held for herself. Then it was summer and I was Nellie walking home from school in a slim white dress. Dark curls warmed my shoulders and the strapped books were heavy in my warm, tired hands. For an instant I could feel the scraping of a garter and a little ache in my flesh where it rubbed the skin. You must understand that this unhappiness of mine, and it was much worse than anything that ever happened to me in the real world, made me want to be another person, made me Nellie Bloom the instant I heard she had suffered. And because I could not live my own life just then I lived hers. I became Nellie Bloom plus myself. I imagined it all and felt it and struggled through her misery and it seemed to me that she had not died and that she would never die.

And now listen to the story that Grandma Sweeney told Nellie after the sad thing happened. Can you hear her voice? Can you hear her saying, as if she were in this room: "There was a crowd of crazy men went into the desert and called themselves the self-tamers because they thought they should be something better than beasts. They called

their instincts the wild beasts and they tried to tame them and make them useful to themselves. Think of those poor fellows leaving their own to go off and die like that!"

And Nellie had a long time to see herself as a self-tamer, six years, and she was lonely enough to have her instincts come out in many forms. But see her now before any of these things had happened to her, just a thin girl with a bent head and white arms bowed in her lap. See her saturated with youthful sadness, her eyes big and stark with pity for herself. Now watch Dorr Nimmons just come to town in a smart straw hat, a big handsome man, rather careless looking, with a paternal manner and darting eyes. There is the market square all crowded with people, girls in white dresses, men with canes tied with ribbons. It is Fair-time. Now—clash! bum-bum, and the band master waving his stick, one hand on his hip.

In the shadow of an elm you can see Nellie and Dorr. Groups of girls drift up and form a white circle of lifted heads while Dorr smokes and assumes that he has heard better bands in his young life. Now watch them walking home, pushing through crowds of farm boys and excited girls waving balloons, Dorr making his way deftly like a city person with Nellie's white hand holding his sleeve, her hair heavy on her neck and her pale green skirt blowing

in the night wind. The wedding announcements have all been sent. The wedding gown is to be fitted for the last time next week. Nellie is to be the wife of Dorr Nimmons.

Here is Bird Brill come down from the city to be maid-of-honor. She is small and plump and her face looks even brighter and more alert because of her smart hat with quills. Slippers like Bird's have never before been seen in that town, the young girls keep bothering Mr. Hogan and Mr. Beard to death trying to find some like Bird's. But there are none like them. There is Bird running down to the corner to meet Mr. Bloom and put her arm through his and look up affectionately, dazzlingly, into his kind face.

The day the organ grinder flapped down the street like a straw man, his monkey grinning and grinding his teeth, Bird ran out and danced in the dust in front of little boys, the icemen on the dripping wagon, and Louis Rasmussen, a good-for-nothing loafer with a hunched back. Inside the house Mrs. Bloom was beside herself, folding her handkerchief into a small bundle, putting her hands on her neck, whispering to herself. Finally she rushed to Nellie.

"A big girl like her. It's indecent. I won't have it. Oh, rolling over the lawn! Exposing herself and people stopping!"

Nellie ran down to her friend, afraid to disobey her mother, yet sensitive on Bird's

account. She shielded the girl's legs from the street and smiled at her timidly. "Won't you come to the dressmaker's with me, Bird?"

"Oh, listen, when I get married my husband simply has to buy me a monkey and take me to Europe."

Twenty minutes late at the dressmaker's and Miss Gunther particularly uppish when city people come to look at her work, tart and cold with pins in her mouth and a pencil stuck through her hair.

"Those sleeves aren't right, Miss—Miss Gunther. Those sleeves aren't right. Oh, Nell, your dress will be ruined if your sleeves aren't right. Darling, they must be right. Oh, Miss, see there, you're missing the whole style of the thing. Put that pleat this way—not that way—like this—do you see?"

Miss Gunther unpinned the wedding gown and folded it in an old newspaper. Then she went into the kitchen and slammed the door.

When Nellie got home she lay down on her bed without crying or speaking, like a stone, until her mother came up with some warm milk and then Bird fluttered in, the folds of her smart taffeta waist like bird wings. Nellie must go to her dressmaker. She must go to-morrow. She must have the gown re-fashioned so that it would have style. Bird went to the telephone and made the arrange-

ments while Nellie lay powerless and Mrs. Bloom wiped her red, peaked nose.

Hear the tremendous rush of steam, the sound of iron wheels, the frightening speed. Watch Nellie get on. Now the train is moving, now the last moment has come and her eyes are suddenly terrified, then blank. Nellie with a big box of candy held against her and the long line of coaches pulling past Dorr and Bird.

They walk away very slowly. Dorr is so tall that Bird has to look up at him sideways and dart looks from under her quills. Now she dances on impeccable, mysterious slippers in front of a gawkish paper-boy. Now she puts her hand on Dorr's arm and whispers to it and tries to take long steps to match his. Suddenly her bright face grows pale and she buries it in his sleeve.

Can you see them that evening under vines on the Bloom porch? Can you hear Bird suggest a walk to the river and does her kiss sound cool as she stoops over Mr. and Mrs. Bloom? And now by the dark water under trees, Bird half lying against the man, gives a tiny cry. "What can I do? I love you, Dorr."

Nellie came back with her gown repaired. They tried to tell Nellie, they showed her the wistful note, but Nellie's blood turned to pain and burned those arms that had held Dorr,

burned the breasts that he had kissed and the white neck where the vague little curl lay, rushed like a burning storm through the long limbs under stiff silk. Her blood burned and moved and poured through that head that had seen herself as Dorr's bride, miserable for fear she had not enough to give or would not know how, breathless for fear she might somehow prove too good for Dorr and some of his ways, even though she felt humble now. Blood washed those images of herself in his arms, melted in love, joined to him forever, to his arms and his mouth and his legs, joined for always, always his from that instant. Blood brought the face of Bird before her and her whole body turned to fire and burned it, burned it into dust, that happy face, those hands, the little quills near her ear. And now her head tightened with iron bands and the back of her neck throbbed and she tried to speak but her nose twitched and she closed her eyes. She tried to drag up words that would express her desolation but she had no words and she sat down on the floor and put her head on her knees and those straight legs turned to wood and wood spread upward, cool and inescapable, and all those dreams that blood had washed went down beyond her reach.

They took her into the spare room and she lay like a corpse, her hair covering the pillow, her face blank and dead white. Grandma

Sweeney came, setting her feet down hard. "Wake up, Nellie!"

Nellie covered her face with her hair and pressed her white hands on it. "Let me die," she said. "I'm all alone and it's dark. I've always been alone."

"Girl, he wasn't the one for you. I've had two; I know." She looked down at the floor. "God, God," she said. "Get something in your stomach, Nellie. Get your legs going or next thing you'll be the town invalid."

"I want to go where it's deep and black in the ground. I want to be planted like a flower, and never be a person any more."

"I'll bet," said Grandma Sweeney.

"When I was little I was always the one to get hurt."

"Nellie, can you feel my arms? I've got hold of you as tight as I held him the night of the accident."

"No."

"Nellie, is this body all there is of you? Can you walk out as you would from the tomb? Can you step into daylight and leave that dark place, Nellie?"

Then Nellie was out every day, walking along with Grandma Sweeney at a pace that made the minister speak to Mr. Bloom about it one evening after choir practice. "Really, Bloom, really, really . . ." But he discovered that Mr. Bloom had been hypnotized by the old

woman because he insisted with tears in his eyes that Grandma Sweeney had brought Nellie from the grave with her own strength. No one could shake Mr. Bloom's faith and it began to anger people. Gussie Jorns started the story that Nellie was hypnotized, too, and that when she was alone she didn't walk so fast nor so far. "I knew it wasn't natural," they all said solemnly. "Nothing spectacular like that is lasting. Poor little Nellie always was a sickly one." Then Grant Nimmons died and left his place to Dorr. Dorr and Bird came home.

"What if I meet them?" cried Nellie to Grandma Sweeney. "Where could I look?"

"Straight at them," said the old woman. "They're people, too."

"I can't—I'll die."

You can imagine that the people in Onnowac waited for that meeting, secretly hoping that Nellie would prove herself no stronger than any of them, half hoping that she would fade into death appropriately. They watched her as carefully as they did Mrs. Bolten who was pregnant for the first time and insisted that it was one thing to be brave when Dorr Nimmons was away but another thing to face him with Bird. They snubbed Mrs. Nimmons, taking sides with Nellie, and were humiliated to find that the woman didn't need them for her parties. "I guess Dorr's got his hands

full," they would say as the Nimmons' motor went past to meet a group of city guests, "I guess he got what was coming to him."

At that time, usually in the morning when pigeons were making their soft coo on the roof, Bird would think of her friend and the shy affection that had been between them and then she would grow sad and confused and tears would come into her eyes but she could not imagine her life without Dorr and she knew deep in her that Dorr had been meant all the time for her and that it had been planned, perhaps in heaven, that Miss Gunther should make a mistake in the sleeves of Nellie's dress.

But she saw her friend's face sometimes, sometimes she held it in her hands and looked down into those eyes and then she would want to rush to Nellie's house and make her understand that Dorr had been hers from the beginning and that Nellie's real love would come sometime. And Dorr rejected the church of his fathers and went to the Methodist church and said that their children would have to grow up Methodists, that it couldn't be helped. He met Mr. Bloom once and the old gentleman gravely took off his hat and said, "How do you do, my boy." He saw Mrs. Bloom hurrying out of the grocery but she lowered her sharp face and her red, peaked nose and Dorr felt less guilty that night about Nellie. But

he always remembered Mr. Bloom's grave, "How do you do, my boy?" and it made him want to explain to the man because he was sure he would understand.

Imagine now a bright Palm Sunday with a clear hard sky and bells ringing. Imagine you are Nellie Bloom passing a little German church. Look up and you will see the procession, the girls in stiff white dresses with sashes and white silk gloves, white slippers; the boys in black with red cheeks and blunt-toed button shoes. The bell ringing, other bells, then the church doors closing behind the last stumbling boy, and organ music slowly rising and pouring out. And as the sounds filled Nellie's ears and the clear air rushed through her, she hurried into church and when they stood up to sing music came out of her as if she were rising from the dead and from her feet she felt herself rise and although she knew her body had not changed it seemed to her that her flesh, her hips, her shoulders, were pushing up, up, and she was all alive like something growing. And when she left the church for the first time she looked at people and spoke to them as if she had no fear of what they said or thought of her and as she passed through the drowsy, nodding groups and touched hands and brushed shoulders, she felt that they were all alive and pushing, like plants or trees, and that if they sang together

the sound would carry through the whole world, through the deep earth to China, and it seemed to her that everywhere people had risen from the dead and were about to sing.

She walked down the street smiling, her face lifted, her arms swinging in strange rhythmic lightness, and all people seemed to be one great moving body, and she walked and walked up the hill to Dorr Nimmons' house and rang the bell. The maid led her into the parlor and raised one of the shades so that sun sifted in over the Brussels carpet and threw a pattern of the lace curtain on the floor. There were the souvenirs from Niagara and Saratoga and the plaques painted by Bird when she was in Miss Sydney's school. And Nellie grew smaller and smaller as she waited, felt herself shrinking down to a pygmy with big eyes and a frightened mouth, and then Bird came into the room on impeccable slippers, a burst of pleats opening at her knee like foam, her white fingers laid together. They looked at each other and they were back where they were before they met Dorr, they were two girls whispering to each other shyly, smiling, half crying, letting their eyes mix. They sank down on the horsehair sofa like feathered people, soft and strange, and then Dorr came in. He stood in the doorway, tall and grave, his cheeks flushed and his eyes frightened. Nellie's bright, lifted

face smiled into his and suddenly he was on his knees with his head in her lap.

Bird's mouth still held the tender friend-smile for Nellie but her eyes were on her, hard and cold, and her fingers picked at the fluted silk in her cuffs. And Nellie's lifted, smiling face seemed like a mask when Dorr got up and walked to the window, his hands behind him. She finally said, "Wasn't it a hard winter?" and flushed, thinking they might misinterpret it, and suddenly in a tone of polite exclamation she cried, "I think your souvenirs are lovely! I wish I could go to Niagara."

And then she wanted to sink to the floor because they must not know that she had envied them or had shed tears over their elopement and they must not dream that she was forlorn again and desolate. So she told them something about the new addition her father was adding to the house so that they could see that her father was rich, too, and so that they could recall his respectable face and remember that she was his daughter. And then she said that before long she was planning to go abroad. "Not for long," she said casually, "but I think it will amuse me for a time."

She got up and shook hands, using that tender smile and uplifted face look at them both, and she urged them to come and see

her but as she walked down the steps she felt her heart pound, "I hate them, I hate them, I hate them. I hope they die. I hope their house burns." And the pain from hate rose thick in her eyes as if she could never shut it out and she felt a shadowy voice in her curse them, invite horrible disasters, and she saw fire take their house and burn them until not even their bones were left, until even the ashes were gone.

And out in the clear air, in that season when all was to rise from the dead, among the early spring sounds and smells, she walked as if she were burning to death. She passed the little brown church and the memory of the morning, the bells, the singing, the clear air, hung all formed and complete above her but she could not bring it back. She could see the girls in their stiff white dresses, the button-shoed boys, and she could imagine the bell clanging and fat country people hurrying around the corner of the church but none of it meant anything to her, it was like a picture.

And then she remembered herself walking to Dorr's house and she shook with horror as if she were recalling an ugly incredible dream. The smart details of Bird's dress smote her and she decided that Bird had won him through a trick, that her clothes always made her more than she was. But no pleasure came from these thoughts and suddenly the morning seemed like a shameful dream that she must

forget, and then like a miracle that could never happen again. Pity came into her throat and terror rose in her eyes and ears as she walked fast to Grandma Sweeney's house by the marsh.

Make them die. Make them die. Oh, God, burn them slowly into dust and when their child comes hang it in front of them and let it burn before their eyes as they burn and let them hear its screams and see its tiny feet curl and its hands wave in torture. Let their house burn and all that is in it and never let anyone speak to them again on this earth except to curse them. Make this happen on an Easter day when all should be rising from the dead, make them lie for three slow days and nights until even their ashes are gone. Let the fire start in their bones and burn outward and let them be conscious of all their pains, even at the end when they are in their last particles. God, destroy then that last spark that cannot be destroyed so that no trace of them can remain on this earth and they may know that they are out forever.

Nellie in Grandma Sweeney's little house by the marsh walking up and down in her new Palm Sunday clothes, walking up and down in the house that is empty now and falling gradually into the swamp where frogs sing at dusk and smoke from the railroad yard spreads and falls into the dry cat-tails and marsh grass. Grandma Sweeney, her forehead in its

three deep ridges, in her eyes that which cannot be named or destroyed, has not spoken or coughed or smiled. She looks at Nellie as she stands before the little mirror looking gauntly at her strange hot cheeks, her burning eyes and the new Palm Sunday hat trimmed with bunches of wheat. She sees her stand back farther and look at the broadcloth suit made by Onnowac's best tailor, noting the careful commonplace lines, the beautiful stitching. And she sees Nellie fling away from the mirror and stand in the middle of the floor, her hands on her throat, saying softly, "I would like to tear Bird's clothes to pieces with my teeth. I'd like to get that black dress and rip it in my mouth and hear it splitting in every seam." And she walked to the wall and stood with her face against it.

God, destroy that last spark that cannot be destroyed so that they may know that from that instant their lives are out forever and that they may not even be earth that gives its life to plants and trees and can feel the soft bodies of lovers lying upon it and feel warm fruit falling in its grass and feel rain stir its substances. Put them out forever on that day when all should be rising from the dead.

And then Nellie ran to Grandma Sweeney who had not spoken and her breasts touched the old woman's knees and she reached up and put her hands on the brown cheeks and pressed

them, looking into the eyes. "It's me that's going to die," she said, "not them."

She sank down then and laid her strange fiery cheek on Grandma's knee and breathed slowly. As her eyes glanced at her white hands and her stiff new Palm Sunday suit they got big with horror, but she said nothing and there were no tears on her face. She put her hand to her head as if she must cool it, comfort it in some way, and then she shaded her eyes as if she were looking off into the distance and must see the farthest object in space and she took off her new hat with the wheat and pressed her hair behind her ears as if she must listen to sounds that had been made in time by people living and dying, and then she listened to the breathing that had moved in time and she heard it like a vast painful moaning. She sank lower, she lay bent over her own knees, no tears on her face, no trembling in her body.

"They went into the desert because they thought they should be something better than wild beasts. They named their violences panther, lion, zebra, snake. They tried to tame them so that they could live together in one body. They fought there in the desert for that one thing."

Suddenly Nellie lifted her face. "He gave me something of himself and it's still in me. I know all his bones. I know his eyes and the

way they look out at me. I can hear him breathing in the night. What do I do with all that? Where can I put it? Do I say to myself, 'Your real intended will come sometime,' and crochet tidies for the backs of chairs? I'm the one he loves. He was tricked away from me." She stood up. "I'm going to his house now and find out what he's going to do about it."

But Nellie walked home along that street past the scraggly orchard and the marsh where I have walked night after night, hurt and frightened, the tissues of my false world bleeding in me, my head hot and strange with visions. I have walked along the brick walk where Nellie went that day and only last week the Nimmons' heir came riding his motorcycle like mad up the cemetery road. It seems strange that he should ride past her grave on that outrageous machine of his and never know that Nellie Bloom wanted Dorr Nimmons' child, that in her were seeds waiting to be fed so that they might grow and make her heavy with life. What did I know of Nellie Bloom and that wish of hers? I was a young girl in my twenties, crazy with hundreds of head-fancies, unconscious of the vast power for happiness in the body, in the womb, in the hands that press a face, in the earth itself, where all things live and grow.

And what did I know of her sensations on

Easter day, a week after she had cursed them until her blood turned black in her body, that Easter morning when she went to her window and looked out into spring coolness. Could I know the angelic brightness that came through her and out on her face or the way she lifted her arms and began to sing as she had sung that Palm Sunday morning in church? But I saw her suddenly run downstairs, I heard her sing on that Easter day as she took the armful of roses intended for her parents up the hill to the Nimmons' place. I followed her down that warm street and the brightness that was in her made her look on everyone, made those eyes look, as it were, on the pain, the secrets, the fallen dreams. I saw her standing on the porch, massed hair shining above pale cheeks, cool roses touching her skin. And now you must be Nellie Bloom in the Nimmons' parlor, holding out the flowers to Bird and Dorr. You must be Nellie as she was at that instant, washed clean of memory and all the darkness that had been done to her and that she had done.

"How perfectly beautiful!" cried Bird in her guest voice.

"It's a fine Easter day," said Dorr and creaked his new shoes.

"I like Easter in a small town," said Bird more informally, her voice a delicate peeping.

And then a quietness came upon them. It

was as if the room were full of doves flying slowly, their bodies brushing. It was as if the small lost voice of each had risen higher and higher until the room was filled with voices never before heard. It rose straight, without effort, above the village bells that began to ring and the feet that scraped the walk outside.

And what did I know of Nellie Bloom and Bird and Dorr in that moment or Nellie five years from that day, Nellie five years older, her body of seeds aching, her mind big enough now to understand the terror of her body's starvation. How could I, young and scornful, holding to the roots of my unreal world, know anything of Nellie Bloom on that warm summer night, sitting with her chin on her arms in the open window by the Japanese plum, her mind on Bird Nimmons who had at last come ripe with child.

In those five years she had struggled to hold to their self-substance instead of the grim figures of her imagination. She had suffered humility and then superiority, and again she would suddenly loathe them or they would have no meaning for her, they would be like pictures on the wall. And again she would boast to them of something her parents had done or buy some smart garment, faintly hoping under her conscious thoughts that it might torture Bird with its slim smartness. But

always on her face was the friend-smile and in her hands, no matter what she felt, lay the friend-substance that she wished to give them. And occasionally it pleased her to see that Bird could not keep up the strain of this companionship and that lines were coming near her little mouth and at those times a big happiness would rise in her like an actual shawled body rising from mud, smoothly dripping. And many times when Dorr was no longer beautiful to her, she could feel him straining toward her, she could hear him saying under his ribs, "You are the one I love. My life with her is hell." And it pleased her then to rise smiling and put out her cool hand in farewell.

But that night in summer, five years after the Easter day when they had met each other nakedly without the distortions of imagination and violence, that night she knew that Bird's womb was about to be fulfilled and in front of her eyes she saw that grow monstrous. And all the life that she thought was dead rose in her to curse them while she sat helpless, struggling occasionally to say, "I love them," while her mouth pulled down with scorn and loathing. And she walked up and down her room as if she had something rotten inside her that she must dig out, and she struggled with that muddy figure of happiness as if it were actual and could be met in combat. Finally she sat down on the floor and pressed her head into

the bed, whispering to it, "I love them—I love them," but all through her and about her were little spirals of laughter, fine and bright as coiled wires.

The baby was over a year old before she went to see it. She went up to the porch and then stopped to see if pain would rise so strongly that she could not go in, but no pain came, only shyness, and when she saw Bird she kissed her on the cheek and for a second she saw the three of them as they had been on that Easter day when they had risen from the dead. The same smile was on her face but inside her it was different, inside her was the darkness and stupor of death and the gestures of death that go through movements without meaning. She forgot about the baby and kissed Bird again. She inquired about Dorr and his business and the new bird bath in the garden.

When Bird excused herself, she looked at the new carpet and the smart hangings at the windows. She recalled the subtle arrangement of tucks in Bird's frock and then began wondering about the new cement walk that was being put in on Main Street past the library. She heard Bird come into the room and she was conscious that something lay soft and heavy in her lap, but she was also aware of not noting these things or commenting on them. She told Bird it would be a good thing if they would put in cement walks all over town.

"Father is on the committee and he's very anxious to put the thing through. He used to be mayor, you know, and they all respect him. He has a lot of influence but I doubt if the city will go into debt even for such important improvements."

"I know," said Bird, her eyes twinkling. "Aren't people stupid about things?"

"Yes, they are. Father says he was up against all the vices of mankind during his term as mayor. He was simply helpless."

"Don't be so hard on them," said Bird softly.

Nellie looked around the room strangely and then down at the child in her lap. "Oh, God," she said faintly and stood up, but Bird had her baby in her arms before it fell.

That evening when Grandma Sweeney got home from old lady Anderson's, she found Nellie sitting with her back against the wall staring at the sea-shell doorstop. It is said that her face was stiff and terrible and that when she struggled to speak it was as if her throat was frozen. She looked up at Grandma Sweeney, but she did not try to talk, and no tears came into her eyes, but she put her hands often between her breasts as if there was something there she wanted to tear out and throw on the floor. And after a time she got up and walked back and forth, her hands on those strange, fiery cheeks, and she kept clearing her throat as if she were trying

for the last time to force herself to say that she loved them, but her throat must have been frozen because her eyes stood out from her head as if she were dumb.

And once she sat down on the floor and looked at her body in horror, at her legs and arms, in such a strange lonely fashion that Grandma Sweeney suddenly crowded her into her lap and they sat there without speaking as it grew darker and darker and the lights of Onnowac went out one by one. The night train came through with its monstrous churring and screaming, but Nellie did not sigh or speak, but lay there against the old woman. When it grew colder and the darkness was thick like felt around them, Nellie pressed her cheek against Grandma Sweeney's and put her arm around her neck. But she made no other sound or movement all through the night.

Grotesque

MY Uncle Sim was no good. He played the flute every chance he got and wore diamond pins in his tie, sometimes two of them, and he had a box of signet rings that he'd collected since he was a boy and he'd spend hours shining them up until anyone would think they were gold. He'd play his flute then and sit looking at that row of rings, his tie pin sparkling like a real diamond. He'd sit in his room that was way up next to the attic and Ma could call her head off but he wouldn't hear. Then she'd say to me, "For heaven's sake, Joe, go up there and tell him dinner's on."

I'd make as much noise on the stairs as I could but it wouldn't shut out that music, no matter how hard I stamped. And like as not some of the gang would be in the empty lot right under Uncle Sim's window and I'd feel like murdering him for being so soft and making me and my mother the laughing stock in Shiloh. And then I'd bust right into his room

and he'd be sitting there, that row of rings in front of him and that blamed flute against his mouth and his long fingers that never did a bit of work pressing the stops. Gosh! Well, we had to put up with Uncle Sim. And he never paid a cent of board or room all the time he lived with us. Twenty years, or something like that.

"Dinner!" He'd lift his eyes. They were light blue and large and he'd keep right on playing, looking at me but not seeing me, and his notes would get me mad, they were so soft, just like him. Uncle Sim wasn't a man and that's what made me so ashamed. All Ma ever had to do to get me crazy was to say, "You're just like your uncle. I don't know what's to become of you."

"Dinner. Dinner! Say, for gosh sakes." He'd get up real slow and lay his flute down and put his rings away. Then he'd wipe his mouth with the back of his long hand. He didn't have a tooth in his head and he was only forty-one. Ma says it was because he was too lazy to chew hard stuff. Ma says you have to chew hard stuff every day if you want to keep your teeth good. But you'd think I wasn't in the room and then I'd hear Ma calling both of us, mad as anything. Uncle Sim would just blink a little, pet his flute, and lay it in the box. I don't know why I didn't smash the darned thing but I guess I was scared to

and I know Ma was. He was soft but you can't never tell what that kind'll do in the long run.

Pretty soon he'd walk down, me following, and we'd go into the dining room. Ma'd be at the table already, half crying. This didn't happen just once. This happened day after day and nobody'd change or give an inch. But Ma usually had something different to say to him.

"Next you'll be writing po'try," she yelled once and shoved the platter of meat at him. "This isn't shaming us enough. You'll have to do something worse and let it get all over town like your crazy flute playing. How do you suppose I feel when I meet my friends? Why don't you get out and do a man's work? Oh, if Jim was living he'd show you. He'd make you get out and do for us instead of living off me the way you do." She leaned over the table toward him, her hair flying in her face, her cheeks awful red. "Yes, act as if you can't hear me. I suppose I'm not worth listening to. But I notice you don't have trouble getting my victuals down."

Uncle Sim'd go right on smashing his potatoes up soft and mixing them with the meat Ma always ground up for him. He'd act as if he was deaf and he'd never raise his eyes until he was all done eating and then he'd look up, but not at any of us or at anything in the

room. It was the darndest funny look. He'd push his chair back and let his hands hang down loose between his legs.

"Now, you're sitting that way again!" Ma'd shout but he'd never even blink. He'd sit there while she cleared off the table and washed the dishes and I'd think how I hated his big awkward feet that were crossed just like a woman's. Gosh, he was a terrible sight the way he'd sit there with his hands hanging down and his feet crossed. I used to clear out for fear some of the gang would come looking for me and see him.

Once I asked Ma why she hated him so much. She was sputtering around the kitchen raising hell about him and so I said, "Ma, why do you hate him so?" She took her hands out of the dishwater and gave me a terrible look. I went out to the shed for something and when I came back I found her upstairs lying in her bed that wasn't made, all mixed up with the quilt and the sheets, on her face, too, and with her shoes on. Then once I asked her if Uncle Sim was anything like Pa.

She swallowed about a million times. "Like your Pa! He was a man. He knew how to provide. If he was living now we'd be in a better house and I'd be doing something besides wash dishes and keep house. We'd be traveling to Chicago and getting respect from people."

"Wasn't they a bit alike?"

"No two brothers in the whole world could have been so different to each other. Your Pa was all good and his brother is all bad. It's too bad the good ones is always taken first."

Then for a long time I didn't pay any attention to Uncle Sim because I got in with the gang again through Ma's buying me a rifle. Gosh, I certainly had my way with them. It used to please Ma to know the gang liked me. But when winter came Jack Mullins got a swell sled and I was out of it. Gosh, I used to imagine being a policeman and arresting the whole bunch and pretending I didn't know them when they'd beg. But it was really Uncle Sim that got them off me because the whole town started talking about him again.

It was that Liza Birnie. Nobody'd have anything to do with her because she wore men's clothes when she felt like it and could swear as good as any of us. The men used to laugh about her and the women just sneered when she was mentioned and Ma used to kind of snort. Liza was about forty, I guess, but she had her hair bobbed and walked all over town like she owned it. When she walked along the street the kids used to holler stuff at her and she'd kind of laugh.

I saw Uncle Sim walk up to her house one day in the beginning of winter. He opened the door and went inside as if he lived there or

something. I ran home and told Ma. She was making mush in the big kettle and when I hollered, "Ma, Uncle Sim's gone to see Liza Birnie!" she dropped her mush stick and the stuff boiled up real vicious. But she didn't say anything. She just looked at me and the whole front of her began to heave. Then she dropped her head and grabbed the mush stick like it was a club.

But Uncle Sim was right on time for supper that night and Ma went for him hot and heavy only she didn't mention names or look at him once. She just talked about people that didn't appreciate anything that was done for them and could let others slave for them and never give a word of thanks and how men never appreciated anything anyway and were worthless devils that ought to be hung, one after the other, instead of feeding on women all their lives like slugs. And all of a sudden she got up and laid both her fists on the table and said so low I shivered, "Shame. . . ." Then she went upstairs.

Uncle Sim looked at me and kind of smiled. Then he took a spoonful of his ground up meat and put it on my plate. I kind of liked him but I didn't let on. When he was finished he shoved back and let his hands drop between his legs and crossed his feet. He never looked up again until it was time to go to bed. And

I heard Ma go downstairs in the night and clear up the dishes.

Then for about a week Ma acted sick and kept saying that she had the headaches and she couldn't sleep. She acted as if she wanted to ask me something but felt ashamed and sometimes she'd get near asking it and then the whole front of her would heave and she'd say, "Something's preying on my mind. It'll pass, I guess. No, don't worry about me, Joe." At meals she'd be like ice and never say anything except to ask for the bread and if it was near him she'd reach over and grab it. But Uncle Sim acted as if everything was as usual.

One night, and it was darned cold, too, he got up real quick and went upstairs. Ma went out in the kitchen and she was as excited. And then Uncle Sim came downstairs in his old overcoat and he had his flute under his arm. Ma stepped right in front of him. "Where are you going?" she said real low. "Tell me the truth!"

He didn't say one word. He just stood with his hat on, his flute under his arm, and the lining of his overcoat hanging down around his knees. Then Ma put up her hands as if she was going to scratch him and then she took hold of his flute. I wanted her to bust it over his head but she hollered, "Don't you dare take this flute out of the house."

Gosh, I'll never forget the way Uncle Sim laughed, his lips closed and his eyes right on her as if he saw her for the first time. But he didn't move an inch and all of a sudden my mother put her chin out the way she does when she's fighting mad and went for him like she never had before. When she got through she sat down near the table and put her head on her arm. Uncle Sim opened the door and went out.

"Joe!" she said. "Listen. Do as I tell you. Follow him. He's going to Liza Birnie's. You've got to watch him and tell me what he does." Then the shame went out of her voice and she grabbed me by the shoulder. "You follow him and don't stop looking for one minute, do you hear?"

"Say, do I have to freeze to death on account of that crazy egg?"

"Do as I tell you, Joe Jevens, or you'll never forget what I'll do to you."

"Aw, Ma, have a heart."

"Listen, Joe." Her voice got sweet and she put her arm around me. "Listen, son, I'll get you a sled if you'll promise." And then she added real sly. "But you must go every time I ask you without being cranky."

I jumped into my clothes and beat it. It was cold, too, gosh, it was cold, and the snow was piled high around all the houses and all the shades were drawn. It was dark, too, and

my toes were numb after I'd been out five minutes. Then I saw Uncle Sim turn the corner past the warehouse and go up Liza Birnie's dark street. I beat it after him and reached the gate just as he was going in. I saw her in the door with her bobbed hair flying wild and I could hear her man's voice way down where I was.

"Hello there, old fellow, come on in and get something hot down you."

Then she closed the door and I wondered how the devil I was going to watch them without freezing to death. I waded into drifts up to my hips to get around to the side window and when I looked in I saw the stove and a sofa in front of it and a picture of some wolves but I didn't see either of them. Then I felt kind of disgusted for spying on them but I figured I'd just as soon be a sneak to get that sled. And then I figured that I wasn't really a sneak because Ma had sent me and she wouldn't ask me to do anything that wasn't right. Uncle Sim needed watching and I was doing my bit toward helping him as well as my mother. But none of that made me any warmer.

Then I plowed around to the kitchen window and there he was sitting with his feet in the oven drinking a cup of coffee. She was just cutting a big, thick coffee cake all covered with nuts and sugar and I almost bawled when she handed him a big piece. He looked up at

her and put his hand on her arm and she laughed and kind of flushed up. Gosh, I was stiff and then I remembered the cellar.

She'd cleaned the snow off the cellar door and I went down and found she'd been packing her canned fruit in boxes to keep it from freezing. I kicked some of the straw together and stood on it. It wasn't any too warm down there and I had to wait quite a while before they came into the parlor which was just overhead. Finally they came in, Uncle Sim walking real heavy and Liza Birnie walking heavy, too. They must have sat down on the sofa near the stove because I heard everything She said, "Say, you old scoundrel, my feet are as big as yours!" Then Uncle Sim began to play that darned flute and pretty soon she said, "You'll have to learn some new tunes. I like music with some go to it."

"What day, Liza?" That's what it sounded like, day or way or something.

"How about this Saturday," she said real quick.

"Fine."

"What's the old lady to your house going to say?"

"I'm my own boss."

"And you aren't going to make me miserable the minute the town begins making fun of us?"

"Oh, Liza," he said.

"I mean it."

"Have I ever paid any attention to them?" He said that as if he was proud of it!

"And what do you know about *me*, Sim Jevens?"

"Enough," said Uncle Sim.

"Say, I don't know how to take that. How do you suppose we'll hit it off together? I'm forty and set in my ways and I can see you are, too."

"Don't worry. Nothing to worry about."

"Say, you can't tell. We might fight like cat and dog."

"We won't fight."

It got quiet then. It got so still that I was frightened there in the dark and if it hadn't of been for that sled I'd have pitched out and gone home. Then Uncle Sim said something but it didn't sound like his voice a bit. He always talks kind of squeaky but this was low and thick like I never heard it before.

"I've always had someone like you in mind. A big strong woman that don't nag and knows something and can set down a nice meal in front of a man without reminding him she's worked hard. And I've had a place in mind for my old age, too. The kind of a place you want to be when you die. Lots of palms and water and rocks and a house on the top of a hill. The palms and stuff would be in a cañon and I'd go there to play my flute. I've had a lot more in mind. A glass cabinet for my relics.

Oh, I've been collecting them now for thirty years. And I've thought of something else. I'd like to be able to look at my wife and laugh with my mouth open, hearty, so she'd know I meant it."

That sure knocked me over. I never thought he missed his teeth. Gosh, I had to hold my mouth shut to keep from laughing. Then she began to talk and it sounded kind of sad.

"Well, if it suits you I guess it's all right. I've left off wanting things."

"But it would be yours, too."

"Sure, I know."

"But what could be better than a cañon and a lot of palms?"

"I could think of better but it isn't worth it. You can think of lots of things and when you're forty, if you're fool enough, you can keep on thinking of them."

"That kind of cuts me up, Liza."

"Didn't I say maybe we wouldn't hit it off together?"

Then it came to me that they meant getting married and I could hardly wait to get home to tell Ma. She'd be the happiest she'd ever been in her life to hear that good news. And that darned flute of his had always got her goat. Then all of a sudden I got scared for fear something would happen and they wouldn't.

"I've got it here like I want it but if you came in and wanted it all different. . . ."

"Liza!"

"We've got to think ahead."

"I'm so homely, Liza, I don't know why you want to. Maybe you're right. You'd hate me. I know how I look without my teeth and all."

Her voice got real wild. "But you aren't homely. You're real distinguished looking with your height and your big shoulders." Gosh, I bet she had her eyes shut. "I thought the minute I saw you, That man is not like other men, he's different, much better, he's got something to him. . . ."

It got so still and cold that I beat it upstairs and around to the parlor window. She had her arm around Uncle Sim and was holding him real tight. The back of her head looked humble and kind of lonely and so did Uncle Sim's. And behind them was that picture of those wolves in snow and then the wind came up and I beat it home.

By the time I reached our house I hated my mother. I saw her sitting there at the table the way I'd left her and I gave her a look and never said a word. I was mad all over and then I said, "Well, I'm froze stiff. I hope you're satisfied now."

"Joe, I'm sorry."

"That don't help me. I'm about done up. Forty below. The coldest night we've had and everything drifting."

"I know."

"It's the darndest cold night we've had!"

"Please. . . ."

"Yes," I said, "I suppose it's all right to go snooping round other people's houses."

"Tell me quick!"

"This is the last time I'm ever going to go out like that."

She turned on me as mad as anything. "Next time I'll go myself. I won't ever expect you to do anything to help me. I'll feed you and keep you and never ask anything of you again as long as I live. You needn't come to my funeral. You needn't bother to spend your money on flowers for me or anything that costs a cent. I've gone on this far by myself and I guess I can keep on this way."

"Aw, Ma, don't!" Gosh, sometimes she goes on like that and cries over her own funeral.

"Do you suppose I sent you for my sake in the first place? No, I wanted to save you a lot more trouble with your gang. If they find out about this. . . ."

"Hah," I said, "they're going to hear enough. Listen, Ma, I've got a surprise. You'll be tickled pink. Listen. . . . Aw, Ma."

"I don't care to hear. Stop! Don't you try to tell me one word because I'm not interested. It's too bad about you poor men. Can't step out in the cold without blubbering for an hour. I don't get cold, do I, hanging up your clothes

and taking my hands right out of the hot suds to do it. No. That's all right. Oh, get out of my sight! I'm sick of you and everybody else in the world."

I was scared. Lord. "Ma," I said, "don't worry any more. They're going to get married this Saturday."

"Who?"

"Uncle Sim and Liza Birnie."

She grabbed holt of the chair. "You heard that and didn't try to stop them?"

"My gosh, Ma, why should I stop them?"

Her face turned blood red and a little vein stood out in her forehead. "Haven't you got any sense at all? Are you as bad as him?"

"But you've wanted to get rid of him as long as I can remember."

"You're dumb. Get out of my sight!"

"I'm not either dumb."

"You're as bad as him."

"Say, now, listen, you'll get me good and mad, Ma."

"Oh, go to bed!"

I made up my mind that I'd never speak to my mother again and if it hadn't of been so darned cold I'd have run away but I couldn't make any plans so I went right to bed. The next morning she was so mild and good that I gave in to her and acted natural. I tried not to but I couldn't help it and before I knew it I was acting as if she'd never insulted me or

anything. She ate her breakfast in the kitchen and made me go up and call Uncle Sim.

He was standing in front of his mirror fooling with his mouth. I said, "Breakfast!" real loud and he turned around. "How do you like them?" He smiled and I saw he had false teeth. They were kind of gray and too big for his mouth. Every tooth showed and kind of bulged. "I'm a new man," he said. I didn't dare bust out laughing he looked so serious. "I haven't learned how to manage them yet with my flute. That'll take practice."

"Breakfast's on," I told him and he took them out and put them away. "I'm saving them up for Saturday. I'm going to smile my head off on Saturday." He wiped his lips on the back of his hand and followed me downstairs. Ma was nowhere in sight and we went into the dining room and sat down.

"I always wanted to laugh like other people," he said suddenly, "but I never had the nerve, losing my teeth so early."

"Sure," I said. "Sure. That's a shame."

"I'm a new man now."

"Better get your teeth down and try some of this swell sausage."

"No, they'll be all the better if I wait." He looked out of the window and then he said, "Say, I'm sure going to laugh out on Saturday. I'm going to show every tooth in the set." He lifted his hand and then let it drop on the table.

But it wasn't like a man had done it. Ma can beat him all hollow when it comes to pounding on the table.

But Ma acted the funniest. She stepped around as if she wasn't there at all, just as light and airy, and she made up a lot of good stuff for dinner and then told me to call Uncle Sim. But she didn't eat with us and Uncle Sim didn't even notice that she wasn't there. It kind of got my goat. My mother's all right, she's all there.

That night when he went out with his flute Ma didn't say a word to me about following him and the next night she didn't say anything either. It got me kind of nervous because I was expecting her to tease me to go and I kind of wanted to go but I wouldn't have let on to her. On Saturday morning she looked as if she hadn't slept a wink the whole night and she spent all day cooking. Every time I asked a question she snapped me up and then toward night she got kind of nervous and pitiful. Just before it was time for supper Uncle Sim called me up to his room.

"Something's going to happen to-night and I want you to be present. You're invited."

"Where to?"

"Liza Birnie's."

"Sure," I said. "I haven't got anything else on for to-night."

"She's the best woman in the world. The only woman that couldn't disappoint a man."

"Is that so?" I had to laugh he looked so funny and I never heard him talk so odd before. It made me ashamed.

We ate supper and my mother was nowhere around. Then we got on our galoshes and went. He had his teeth wrapped in a piece of newspaper and he held them in his pocket all the way. "Keep um warm." Then all of a sudden we were on her porch. She opened the door before we rapped and stood there in a black dress with purple birds all over it shouting at us. "Come on in, you fellows. Say, this is a hell of a cold night." Gosh, I liked the way she included me. And when Uncle Sim said, "Liza, this is my nephew," she said, "How are you kid? You look like a good guy. I hope you are." Then she winked at me. Say, she was fine. And she took us right into the kitchen and gave us coffee and cake. Then they went into the other room but I heard everything.

"Cold out."

"Sure, it's a hell of a night. I thought maybe you'd get snowed in."

"Not me, Liza. I'm out in all kinds of weather. Never fazes me. Say I've known worse winters than this."

"That so?"

"That winter I was to Finley studying at

the academy it was terrible. Terrible. Liza, I've got a surprise for you."

"For me? Oh, Sim."

"Guess what it is?"

"You'll laugh at my guesses, Sim."

"No, I won't."

"A ring. A beautiful ring with a diamond in it and pearls all around."

"Nothing like that, Liza."

"A bracelet with a serpent's head."

"I said nothing like that, Liza. You're not even warm yet."

"A red sleigh lined with velvet and two black horses with stars on their foreheads."

"Say, Liza, where could I get the money to buy anything like that?"

"I don't know."

"Can't you think of something I could buy that would make me look better so you'd be proud of me?"

"I want a fur coat," she cried. "A black one with tails around the bottom like Mrs. Tannley's."

"Say, Liza, you make me feel cheap."

"I guess it's the deed for a house and lot, Sim, where we'd live together."

"Liza, I haven't got money. I couldn't buy anything you're talking about."

"Where's all the money your father left you? He was worth quite a bit when he died. Who's name is that property in? You're living in one

of the best houses in town. What happened to his farm? Your family's been worth a lot for years."

"I don't know about any money. Maybe I hadn't better show you the present. Say, I don't see how you could like anyone as ugly looking as me."

"Oh, you're not ugly, you're distinguished looking. I thought that from the first. What is it? I can't wait. I get so few surprises, Sim." She gave a little laugh that made my blood turn funny because I knew what the surprise was.

"You'll have to promise not to laugh."

"Of course I won't laugh. Say, you're a funny guy, Sim."

I saw him put his hand in his pocket and take out the teeth and shove them in his mouth. She put her arms over her face and backed away from him and he stood there with his feet turned out, his hands to his sides, and his mouth spread over those teeth that bulged out square and gray in the light. He stood there in front of her like stone with that blamed grin on him. She took her arms away from her face and sat down in the rocking chair.

"You fool," she said and he kind of winced and shook but he kept that same silly grin on his face. "You poor fish. If you only knew how I hate every inch of you." She looked him over, gosh, she looked him over, every inch.

"I hate your long neck with that Adam's apple that always shows and that simple face of yours that looks as if you didn't have a thought behind it. I hated you the minute I saw you."

His hands kind of fluttered, his fingers, I mean, and he said, "I thought you did."

She made a sound in her throat that was like an animal and then her face got all red. "I thought when I got used to you it wouldn't be so bad but I can't bear the sight of you."

"I'm no better or no worse than anyone else, Liza."

"That's what *you* think," she said.

Somebody rapped on the door. Liza went. It was my mother all covered with snow up to her knees. She must have been peeking at the window.

Those two looked at each other, Liza Birnie and my mother, but Uncle Sim just stood there as if he wasn't seeing anything in the room or any of us. Those gray teeth bulged out between his lips and there were sparkles of water on his forehead and on his green tie were his two diamond tie pins. He had a little package in one of his hands and it came to me that he was bringing her his collection of rings. Then my mother put her hand on his shoulder as if he was nothing but a kid and kind of stood in front of him so's Liza couldn't see him. He moved away and then she whispered something

to him and pointed to his teeth but he shook his head.

"Liza Birnie," she said, "what do you know about the fine things of life? What do you know about art and music? A lot you know about how to treat a refined gentleman and musician and I want you to know that my brother's not going to marry you no matter how hard you try to get him. He's been a decent man so far in his life and he's going to keep on that way."

Liza Birnie went to the door and opened it. My mother took his arm and looked up at him as if he was the whole cheese and Liza Birnie slammed the door. Then she sat down by the stove and looked at it.

But the funniest thing was the next morning. I imagined it would be all different again or something but my mother was more scornful than ever and said a lot about good-for-nothings who didn't earn their board and expected women to slave for them without a word of thanks and didn't have the push to get out and earn for themselves even.

"Uncle Sim," I said, "where's those swell teeth of yours? You'd ought to try them out on this sausage. It's darn good." He didn't say a word and Ma looked at him for a minute and then she said, "Well, for once you've shown some judgment in your life. I've never seen a worse fit."

Grotesque

That afternoon Liza Birnie came down to the gate when I was going past and gave me a quarter and a note for Uncle Sim. I took it back to the house and found him upstairs in his room looking out of the window at the snow and an old tree and some straw. He looked real tired when he saw the note and after he read it he let it fall on the floor.

"What's the matter?" I said. "Bad news or something?"

"Liza's no better or no worse than anybody else," he said, "but I guess I'll let her alone."

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold

NO one knew what Mrs. Arnold believed; she never said much. Mr. Arnold played extravagantly with words but no one knew what he believed. They thought they loved and hated one another but they could never be sure.

"Darling," said Mr. Arnold. "Oh, nothing, nothing at all," he shouted suddenly at her mild face. "I wish you wouldn't wear that confounded cap, please. Oh, wear it if you want to."

From Mrs. Arnold radiated silence.

"What do I care! If women want to wear caps let them." He waved his arms. "Shall I order some of that sweet cider when I go past the store?"

Mrs. Arnold nodded. She removed her cap, smiled up at him, and suddenly replaced it. "Cider is always good this time of year," she remarked.

"I've never had a good glass of cider in my life. When I was a boy, yes, once I did, I

take that back. No, I don't take it back. No one knows how to make cider properly. Oh, the cutthroats that try to do things nowadays. The bloody highwaymen, the grocers, the butchers, the garage men. . . ."

Mrs. Arnold turned her tatting.

"Infernal cowards, all of them," he boomed, "can't face life."

"Can you?" asked Mrs. Arnold, rocking, tatting.

"What's that? Were you speaking to me?" He went to her, kissed her, patted her busy hands. "That's all right now, don't worry about the cider. I'll order it."

"Thank you, dear." She smiled and removed her cap.

"Good Lord, if a woman can't comb her hair, she'd better keep it covered."

"You'll find your umbrella in the hall, dear."

"Umbrella?" His mouth fell open and he stared out at the bright maple leaves on the lawn. "Are you crazy?"

"I am always sane," she said and added in the same voice, "never sane."

"Well, if you want me to take it I'll take it, I'll do anything to please you. . . ."

"Don't take it just because I want you to, take it because it's going to rain. No, I won't let you take it just to please me, dear."

"But I want to take it. Where do you keep

the umbrellas? Can't a man ever find anything when he has to go down town?"

"Here, dear," she said and handed it to him. "You're sensible to take it. I know it will rain."

Mr. Arnold flung the umbrella and pitched out of the house. With respectful precision Mrs. Arnold raised the umbrella to its feet, brushed its coat, and led it to the rack. Then she laughed.

The telephone rang. "Hello, hello, hello!" said Mr. Arnold. "I ordered the cider. Want anything else?"

"No, dear."

"What's that?"

"I don't want anything else."

"Don't want anything after I've gone to the bother of calling you up? Can't even think up something to repay me for the trouble, can you?" He banged the receiver.

Mrs. Arnold took the breakfast dishes into the kitchen and filled the dishpan. She made suds with flakes of soap and watched the water make the glasses clean. Then she wiped the dishes and noted reflections on their surfaces; she wiped the dishpan and hung it up. For luncheon they would have some soup, some celery, hot muffins. . . . Her smile pricked the stiffness of her face. She took up her tatting, rocked until she saw the postman, then put the kettle on.

From the dining-room window she saw Mr. Arnold flying to his food. She covered a plate with a white napkin bordered with hollyhocks, for the muffins. The door banged, a man groaned. She knew her husband was ready for his meal.

"Come into the dining room, dear," she called.

"Don't I always, dear?" he answered.

His skin was sulphur-colored, his face solid, his body big and broad, but his eyes proved him perishable.

Mrs. Arnold tasted her soup. "Will you say it's good?" she asked.

"All soup is good."

Her laughter was neither bitter nor amused. It was a plain flat sound.

"Well, do I have to say that everything you cook is splendid, wonderful, excellent, incomparable? Can't you let me forget that I am eating? Where are you going this afternoon?"

"The club, probably."

"You be careful at the crossings. Now, listen to me. Dear," he cried, rising, bending over the table, "you're going to be run over one of these days."

"I suppose so."

"You can't ever watch where you're going. You expect people to get out of your way and the bandits nowadays won't get out of anyone's way. You ought to know it, dear!"

"Will you have some tea?"

"Certainly I won't! Have I ever been a man to indulge my stomach?"

"I had on my yellow crêpe when I bought this tea." She put her chin on her hand and looked out.

"If I'd known thirty years ago what I know now, I'd have set the world on fire."

The woman tasted her tea and heard him call from the porch, "Good-by!" She examined a dark spot on a silver spoon; shuddered. "Don't forget your umbrella," she called.

He charged back to the doorway. "And make an ass of myself coming home in the snow, I suppose. Yes, you want to make me ridiculous in every way, don't you?"

"It sometimes snows in October." Again she withdrew, into unlimited space, he judged, from her look. "A rather nice little bowl."

"Who cares where we bought it? No wonder I'm a madman living in the same house with you. Not a day can pass that you don't make your remark about that bowl."

"You are looking for cake again?" she asked half sweetly. He rushed from the house.

She lingered at the table and watched the suppressed look of the heavy silver imprisoned there on the white cloth. She moved a spoon close to the sugar bowl and fenced a delicate cup with forks. Then she carried the dishes into the kitchen and filled the dishpan with

water. She would not go to the club that afternoon. It was raining. The grocery boy threw open the back door and set down a jug of cider. She laughed.

It was almost dark when she opened the door to two men supporting her husband. She brushed a bit of mud from his sleeve and placed a pillow in his chair.

"I don't want that there!" he cried, enraged and trembling.

She turned to the men, fastening up a strand of pale hair. "It was very good of you."

"Yes, wasn't it?" gasped Mr. Arnold.

"Knocked the wind out of him all right. Too much careless driving, I tell my wife. Ought to be punished. But he'll be around, this is nothing."

"Oh, nothing at all," sneered Mr. Arnold. "Those highwaymen can do as they please. What if they do knock a decent man down?"

The woman opened the door to the men. She came back to her husband and suddenly kissed him. She took his hands and they looked at each other.

"I tell you I could set the whole world right if they'd only listen." His mouth looked surprised, half-frightened, as though he had formed his last sentence.

His wife moved softly and slowly away. "There's something quite good for supper," she said without intonation.

Possession

A MOMENT ago the pattern of the whole thing took form and I saw it. I can see the way her hair looked that night and how her arms lay on the couch, those lovely shoulders. I can see myself, a very young girl with copper hair blazing on my neck and an exquisite mandarin coat flowing over me like water, the lovely protection she always threw over my awkward clothes. And she placed me so that my feet need not spoil the setting. I know how I looked; I can feel those flowers burning the silk and the cautious way I sat so as not to make wrinkles. There she is opposite me with her head lifted and her eyes in that poignant agony, trying to throw a haze over the real. She turns to me.

"Arvia, it's the far thing again. . . ."

My name was Nellie but I am showing you the cage she built for me.

"Arvia, darling, think of it. Nothing is real but this."

Now I catch that sensitive self that struggled

with definite things, making them vague so that she could pour her own colors over them. But then I sat there, caught in her rhythm, and I whispered as if from her throat: "Yes, the far thing."

She lifted her arms so that gold lace fell back in a pool on her neck. "We're on a desert." Now her voice was pleading, urging those stiff chairs to become fluid, begging the carpet to disappear—just for once, for once—the fire on the hearth to be a magic door that would swing open soon and take us inside.

She had never called me Nellie. Now she—yes, she is the same always, and so am I except for times like this when that girl who had to hide her feet and her dress under a robe comes to me in bloody chunks. I crawl, do you see, down into myself; I rap and something yields; then I am in this hell that shows me both sides of the pattern. Do you know what I feel like now? A lump of mud enameled with dreams that crack and peel as that softness tries to ooze out and dry itself in the sun. That woman painted my cage when I was very young and now—but you can see what I am now.

And then the boy came to our house one day. He was a strange looking person on our back step with an egg beater in one hand and his cap in the other. But he looked into me. Then he smiled and began turning the little wheels and I heard the wonderful whizz it

made and I could see eggs foaming in the yellow bowl.

"How much?"

"Fifty cents."

"I'll call my mother." I turned with my hand on the door and I caught sight of my blue apron, my mouth and the hair that never seemed to belong to me because it was so lavish, so fiery. I was startled at the blaze and then I felt it inside me somewhere, down, down —I can't feel the place any more. "Oh," I cried and whirled around at him. "Oh, I like myself."

"I like you."

"You do?"

"You're the real thing."

I looked at him and he seemed to creep inside me down to that blaze and we burned there together until I caught his mouth with mine and. . . . But don't ask me what he looked like because I don't know. I never knew. You see I was that lump of mud enameled in dreams.

My lady's fingers were deft and subtle but I didn't know then that I wasn't free. That evening I rushed to her over the moss and bricks that stretch a mile between us. She was at the door looking down at me and I was looking up.

"I'm in love," I cried and rushed past her into the large dark hall full of eyes.

"Oh, really," she said lightly, "come and tell me." And she drew the cloak over my shoulders and turned me toward her to fasten it high around my neck. Every little loop had to imprison me before I could speak. Then she caught my hand and led me to the chair. I felt like water, like a fountain with the moon on it, the sun on it, the stars in it. I looked around. What had I said there at the door?

She moved to the couch. "We were on the desert. . . . And we are there now. Those are birds—are there birds in the desert?" She laughed very lightly and set her eyes again in the dream. "I can feel the sand. And look, Arvia, at the sky!"

A great wind stiffened my nostrils with sand and brought mad birds with purple breasts and red beaks into my hair.

"Bring the boy sometime," she said when the sand had stopped whirling. That was all.

That night he was on our porch when I got home. "The boy, the boy," I thought, and smiled tolerantly at him. He put out his hand to me as though we knew each other. I hated him. There was a mole on his left cheek and his hair was flat and glossy. He was just a boy.

"Oh, hello," I said.

"Darling!"

Then I was sitting on the step with him looking at the lilacs that lay in great clusters

of lavender and white on the railing. "How beautiful—beautiful." As I said that I put out my head the way she does and used that sunken voice that spins threads as it falls. I felt that my arms were her arms. I touched them and I thought I was touching her. Suddenly I couldn't endure that boy. He had a mole. I said, "I don't like this very well."

"I love you."

Why can't I hear the way he said it? Why wasn't his voice like milk in my ear? "She wants to see you," I whispered. The thought of her was a trap and I threw myself in. Again I was off in nowhere with the sun beating me into the sand and those mad birds wheeling around my head.

"I love you! Listen . . ."

"Don't," I said. And then, "You are just a boy, aren't you?"

He came again. He was different. There was something about his walk. I felt myself going the same way until his limbs were mine and I was happy in my blood. Then we were on her porch and for an instant we burned together in one substance.

She was in green, the color of stems, and as I looked at her and felt him beside me she seemed to be miles away. I felt rich, the green of grass, the brown of earth mixed together. I was the earth looking up at the sky.

They got into the room some way but I

stopped in the door fighting inside to keep free of the drug her mind was to mine. My blood fought with something between my eyes that throbbed and felt like melted gold. The boy had gone to my chair, was waiting with his hand on it, when my lady swept him to the window. "You must see the view."

I wondered suddenly how I could have thought his legs were mine. His legs! They looked crooked. He didn't belong in this house. He belonged on my porch, an egg beater in one hand, his cap in the other. But as my blood fought it turned me to fire. I rushed to the coat and slipped it on and it flowed over that heat like water until I was drowsy and sank into my chair. Then she turned away from the window. She came to me and touched one of the flowers on my coat. "Exquisite," she murmured and did something to my hair. I was looking up at her. I don't know where he sat, or how he looked, or what he said. I know that we built a new dream that night and its walls have never fallen.

The boy was angry as we walked home. It kept me cool and far away.

"Do you love me?" he whispered.

I looked at him and said nothing.

He caught my arm and tried to make our legs walk together, but they would not.

"Nellie!" he cried and I had to laugh a little to hear him call me that.

"Do you like that name?"

"I'm saying it all the time. All the time. Please love me."

"How about her?"

He shuddered. "I hate her."

"You hate her?" It made no difference to me. "You hate her?" What if he did? "Oh, really?"

"She's got you."

There were lilacs on the railing and the water was dripping from the hydrant into the grass, tapping a little stone as it fell. Those may have been white butterflies on the bushes or they may have been blossoms. It didn't seem to matter what one called them.

"Good-by," I said and closed the door. I went to the telephone and called her. "Isn't he terrible?" "He is." I went to bed.

I think he must have gone to other towns with his egg beaters because it was a long time before he came again. But one day in early June he rang our bell. I opened the door and then I knew how much I had missed him, how he had come into my dreams at night begging, how I had tried to remember those dreams in the day. I leaned toward him without speaking and he toward me and somehow, it was finished.

"We'll get married?"

Something in me drew back. "Oh, we might," I said.

"Say we must!"

I answered. "Let's kiss again."

We walked under our three little fruit trees saying things I have forgotten. But as he left I cried: "Oh, I love that little mole on your cheek!" And I ran upstairs to my mirror and saw myself inside out.

So I went again to my lady for permission to live this life. And an oriole led me into the back garden and it was there that I heard Irene, the cook, pleading with my lady.

"But, Miss, I want to leave. I'll lose my man if I don't. He's willing to marry me."

"Irene, it's nonsense."

"I love him."

"You'll love the next one, too. And the next. There's no limit."

"This ain't the same."

"I've raised your wages. The work here is light. Irene, why do you want to leave me?"

I heard sobs. "But he don't want me to be drudgin' in a kitchen. He wants me for his wife. He's willing. He's asked me already. He wants me for his wife."

"To drudge in his, Irene. To drudge in his. That's the masculine psychology every time."

"I want to work for him, I want to scrub his floors and all."

"You think that now. But look around here—see what you're accustomed to. Does he make good wages?"

"Same as I get here."

"How will two of you live?"

"I don't know, I don't know."

"And then of course the babies, Irene. Oh, of course, the babies. Think what you owe to them. You'd better wait a while, think it over, put him off a month."

"I'm going with my man."

I know what my lady did then. She put her arms round Irene and pled with her as though she were the child already born and Irene the mother. I know that when her lips touched Irene's they locked her cage as they had locked mine long before. But then in the garden I had the key to mine—it lay somewhere in my blood. Irene had, too, but she never hunted.

I looked up at the oriole that had led me into that place, at the trees, a bed of larkspur, a fragment of blue china lying on the hard dirt path. Then my lady's arm was around me, the softness of her skirt pressed me, the scent of her hair imprisoned me, made me drowsy and warm and safe. Her hand was on my hair, my sash, adjusting the ruffles in my cuffs. A flash of irritation shot out of me as Irene's ugly sobbing came into the garden. I moved back from my lady. I made my hair, my sash, my ruffles as they had been. For an instant she was only a sketch I had made on tissue paper. My eyes made ashes of her. Then I ran to the kitchen.

"Get away now, Irene, I'll help you."

"I'm scared to go."

"No! No! Go now."

"I'm scared. . . ." Irene covered her face. "So are you."

"I'm going to make you go."

"Why should I slave for a man?" asked Irene suddenly.

My lady stood between us. I turned to her quickly, hotly, but the scorn I felt changed to warm sand and birds with sharp beaks. I threw her the key to my cage and then the sun was over me, the stars were in me and I was at her feet. I knew then that I was a lump of mud enameled in dreams and that I would never be more.

Winter

THERE was the field of corn, bent by wind, brittle gold. There was the hill, the house close to the road, the barn with squashes piled against the door. A cat with white paws stepped out into the barnyard and played for an instant in the sharp grass. Then, as the man called, she ran toward him lifting her white feet carefully, stopping to smell a withered apple core, stopping to turn a sparrow's wing with her paw. She arched high against his legs as he stroked her and she purred loud and fast, her long white whiskers moving nervously. The wind beat against them but he stood there looking over fields into the mass of trees blended in the haze, a few leaves still blowing forlornly. He looked back at the corn that had stood to his head in late summer, cool and high and green. Now the air was cold and snow would come. There would be birds with dark feathers in a flurry pecking on window sills for crumbs. There would be ice in his pitcher up in the back room.

He turned and went up the road to Effie's house, suddenly eager for her white face, her taut mouth, and her eyes that looked unbearably frightened when it grew dark. But he shuddered as he thought of the moldy, unearthly odor that sometimes came from her as she moved quickly from the broken, sour old couch to the window and stood there looking out at the pear orchard, at the hundreds of tiny leafless trees loaded with black fruit; at the great bristles of the willows beyond flashing from gnarled centers into the cold dark sky. She would turn around slowly, trembling, all the agony in her eyes, her limp dress with its scant sleeves and skirt falling desolately around her, her hair close to her head. Only her eyes lived. They were the life from down deep drawn up to look out half paralyzed at him, at the pear orchard, the hard brown walk that led to the barn.

He rapped. Then he was in her dark room with its solemn pictures hanging crooked and dust on chairs and carpet. This was Effie's house and there was Effie against the door.

"Cold out, Dan?"

"Getting colder."

"Going to snow?"

"Guess so."

"When?"

"Soon."

"Sit down."

He felt the long slim arm of the chair, cool beneath the dust, cool and hard as her arm. He felt her behind him smoothing her hair, straightening the dark folds that fell to her feet, pressing her hands to her sides, afraid to come forward, afraid to stay there.

"Effie!"

"Yes, Dan."

She went to the window and drew back the curtain. Would he shiver and grow ill when that moldy, unearthly odor came to him? Would he rise some day and walk out of her house? He wondered.

"I want to look at something beautiful!" she cried. Then she sat down. She picked a woolen thread from her dress. She leaned forward, her face turned away from him, her hands deep together in her lap.

He thought of mornings when he had walked into the corn and cooled his cheeks in the damp air between the green rows. He thought of that field now, the corn bent low with wind, crackling. Nights would soon be bitter and he would waken in the morning with pains in his legs, with stiff muscles and joints where he had lain drawn tight together. Those sheets, the ice they formed around him as he crept in!

"I hate cold weather," he said.

"Then it's colder outside?"

"Much."

She lifted one shoulder, arm close to side,

and laid her cheek on it. The long line of neck made him hot. He wondered how it would feel to let his fingers slip over that skin, move down to her breast and stop there. He went to her and slowly she moved her head, lowered her shoulder and as he bent to her she lifted her face, moved it backward, slowly, slowly, until her eyes were beating into him, through him, tearing him apart and leaving him there without life. Then from her came that odor. It caught his hands, filled him, stifled and wrapped him.

"Stay for supper," she said and walked to the kitchen. He heard water in the sink. He heard the towel shriek on its roller. A pan fell. Dishes clattered. She came in with a tray. "That table over there," she said.

He lifted the heavy fringed cover saturated with grease. He ran his hands over the dull table top and caught on his fingers a covering of damp dust that seemed as he looked closely to be part of his skin.

"I don't work much."

He went back to his chair. He heard her slow undecided steps in the kitchen and then came the smell of lard snapping in a pan. He heard the roar of wood as she lifted a pot from the stove. A delicious odor tinged the air and then turned to ugly smoke. He heard her open the kitchen door. The wind cleared the room and set him shivering. Was she a mad-

woman? One day he would get up suddenly and walk out of her house.

"Come and sit down, Dan."

On the table was a plate of thick, uneven bread, a dish of fried potatoes, well burned, a platter of sausages in grease.

"Try some of that spread. It's real good. I usually burn it but this isn't burned a bit. Try it." She held the dish of peach butter toward him and he took it. He saw that she had a flower above her ear, caught in the smooth hair that stayed close to her head. It was made of white paper, supposed to be an aster, he thought.

How could he expect to marry a woman that couldn't make a meal fit for a man to eat? Burned stuff. Everything burned. A dirty paper flower over her ear. If she'd pay attention to the stove when she was cooking her meals. . . . What kind did she think he was to set down such a meal as that? What did she think about, anyway? How could she think with that paper thing pinned over her ear?

Her eyes were watching her fork as it scraped bits of black from the burned potatoes and pushed away the grease that was cooling over the sausages. If he went to her and put his fingers round her throat, let them tighten, fit closer, would she look up, could he draw her into him, drain her of life?

"How do you like my flower?"

"Pretty."

"Do you like flowers?"

"Yes."

"Got any at home?"

"Sure. In summer."

"What kind?"

"I don't know."

"Any like this?"

"I guess so."

"This is an aster."

She was trying to make him look at her, he knew. Trying to catch his eyes and devour him.

"You're not making out a meal, Dan."

Would she cry out if he put his fingers around her neck and let them fit close and tight? Would she grow limp and white?

"My side hurts," she said. "Sometimes I have terrible pains here."

That was like her to be sick. Burn up her food and have pains in her side. He heard the wind blowing in dead fruit, rattling dry branches, rustling in leaves at the corner of the porch. Cold had come. It was pressing against the windows now, creeping in through cracks, pushing under ledges, whistling, showing its devilish strength. It could freeze him. It could catch him by the throat and choke him.

"There's pie." She carried the plates away and came back. "More coffee?" She touched

the flower behind her ear. "I like quiet men," she said.

The wind roared, beat the house, rapped on the shutters. Dry leaves crackled against the pane. "It's grown colder," said Effie.

He looked at her finger curled through the handle of her cup, then at her arm in the tight sleeve, her breast, that warm soft place. But he dared not let her eyes draw him into her, leave him foolish and empty. He would fight her first, catch her neck and let his fingers touch and tighten.

She got up suddenly and went to the window. The curtain, stiff with dust, trembled in the wind. Then she sat down on the couch among the sour cushions. The flower behind her ear crackled as she bent to smooth the bow of her slipper. "I guess winter's come," she said.

"I guess so."

"I'll have to stuff up the cracks to-morrow."

"I don't like it cold."

Good Lord. A dirty flower behind her ear, pains in her side, burned food, a greasy house, and then the moldy smell of her. If she said another word he would make an end of her, make an end, too, of the dirt, those acres of blackened pears that she had forgotten to pick, close the door of her house and let winter finish.

He went to the couch and moved back into the cushions. They clung to him. Her long

arms in tight sleeves were pressed between her knees. The flower rustled. She must have thrown back her head. He lifted his hands and laid them on her neck. Her odor came delicately but he tightened his fingers until he felt her heart pounding under his hand. She turned to him quickly and pressed her chin against his chest, put her hands on his shoulders. Then he saw her face, younger, whiter than he had ever seen it, white as chalk in the dark, her mouth a tortured circle, her eyes stark, piercing him, strangling him.

She rose, smoothing the folds of skirt. "I guess winter's come."

He saw her take a rag from the shelf and shove it through the crack in the window. He heard her wind the clock. Then she sat down again.

City

1

I HAVE come to New York to be a great writer but I don't like it very well. And I don't like where I live. It's up four flights of dark stairs in a large bare room with two windows, a hole in the rug, and a chair with pansies. At night a mouse climbs into my wastebasket and gnaws. I throw all my books and when I have decided that it has gone I hear that snattering again, that thin clawing and scratching. I get no sleep. I may die. Not alone from mice, I really believe this, I may die from grief, from this terrible hollowness that I never knew was in me until now when I am all alone in New York.

In addition to this there are three large spots on my new green coat with the gold braid. I have wet the spots with Kleen-All and with tears but they won't budge. They are there permanently and I am as devoted to that coat as I am to myself. This city is getting me dirty.

City

The people push against me until I want to shove them into the gutter. Their faces don't notice me until I feel like crying. Once I did and I looked beautiful too but it is a lonely pastime. Crowds are lonelier.

And I feel old, one hundred years for every day I've been here and there are five of them. During that time I have sat in this room so much that the walls have become personal. They are mean to me. I have held my hands until they feel like strangers, like something apart from me. My legs, too, and my feet, and arms, and head. I'm all chipped up. I don't know what's to become of me, I'm all in pieces. Then I go into the streets. The noise rolls over me and under me and then it goes straight through me as if I am nothing at all. The faces that never see me scratch me like knives. Then it seems to me that I am a sponge soaking up all the misery and bewilderment in the city. I am numb. But nothing runs over me. Nothing grabs me and cuts my throat. Nothing happens but noise and people, people forever passing, in furs, in rags, hobbling, strutting, crawling, eyes ahead. Nothing happens to me.

So I climb four flights and eat a carrot. Carrots are good for grief or loneliness. Suddenly I wonder what I would do if I were worse off, if I were like those girls with hungry white faces that look into windows at food, clutching their jackets together in front, or those men

without collars that stand against buildings, or what if I were that old woman sunk on a dirty step, tobacco juice dried on her cheek, fangs of gray hair standing out under a dusty velvet hat crushed down on top, and the old rain-soaked feather hanging over her ear. What if I were in the streets with nowhere to go? What if I hadn't eaten for days? I could feel that terrible gnawing hunger. I could feel behind everything a substance as indifferent and as blank as paper.

I thought: "Who cares?"

Then I had to laugh because everyone probably says that in loneliness. So I said out loud, "I care. And I am important. Hungry girls, I shall feed you. Collarless men, I shall buy you collars. Old ladies, I shall hold you all in my arms and comfort you."

I felt so eager to do something then that I took a letter of introduction around to the college professor I had thought to see the first day. I'd had my grief. I couldn't go before.

He was so plain in his face and words that I wanted to cry. And he had a red necktie that stuck out in a red line all down his vest. His face was so clean that it didn't seem to be there. I felt that the part of him I might have liked had been washed away long ago. And he was in a little office with walls that pressed us in and made me feel as though we were sitting in a pure white stovepipe.

"What do you want to do in New York?"

I was frightened. He looked so plain. I couldn't think up anything to say. It came out. "I don't want to do anything."

"What's that? Don't want to do anything? I understood you were here in search of a position."

"I don't ever want to work," I cried. "But I want to be independent. I wanted to get away from my parents and all that."

He took out his glasses and put them on. Then he looked through them at me. I held back my shoulders as hard as I could and put my head on one side. He drew his mouth down so that the cords in his neck stood out and each time his whole head jerked back, but he kept looking hard at me and working his nose as if he were angry or sick somewhere.

"What do you mean by taking up my time this way," he said. "I'm a busy man. I have a family to support, an establishment to keep up. . . ."

"Oh," I said, "Oh . . ."

"Well, *what?*"

"Take me home with you," I cried, "Oh, I'd like to go."

He turned his back and then he sat down, but I wanted to cry and I thought of how I intended to be a great writer and of the book I had written and all that, but now it didn't any of it seem possible and when he suddenly

said to me awfully sharp, "What is your objective?" I said, "I want to commit suicide, I can't help it." But I was ashamed. Young girls should be brave in the city. "Say," he said, "does this look like a nursery school? Do you take me for some kind of teacher or infant protector?"

"Oh, no," I said, "and I'm trying to get away from all protection. I want more space to develop in. I can't at home. I—I—well, I had to come here and I hate to think of dying but, I don't know, and I intend to become a great writer such as was never heard of before. . . ."

"Well, if you have any real talent you'll not be above doing anything that presents itself. Work in Childs', work as a model, work in the streets, anywhere where there is life. Nothing has ever happened to you, that's the trouble, you need experience, perhaps you need to be psycho-analyzed."

Then he took off his glasses and looked out the window and gave me a lecture on what a real creative artist was and should be and how he worked, how he got his experience, how he did everything. I wondered how soon I dared go. And then all of a sudden he shrieked out, "There are hundreds of damn fools like you and they never write anything. Oh, I've known them all and they talk just like you."

"You mean that for me? You mean that I'm one?"

"Yes, yes, and a hundred times over and there are hundreds like you, let me inform you right now, hundreds in this one city and they never write a thing. I know them all. They go around taking up the time of busy men and serious men who have dependents and homes to keep up and a million responsibilities and they keep those men from writing what they want to write and should write with their endless infantile questions and stupidities and interruptions."

"Could you give me the name of one?" I was so frightened and I dared not let him know, I was so small, so shrunken, so numb inside. I could only talk out whatever came to me, I couldn't listen to myself, I couldn't talk from down far. But he kept talking, his eyes holding me as if I were a rat, his face shaking as he rung out his words and then drew the cords of his neck so that his head jerked and his nose twitched. But his voice grew fainter and fainter and I watched him harder and didn't blink once. In college I would do that deliberately but this was different, this was beyond my control, it happened. When he had stopped talking he unscrewed the top of his fountain pen and said without looking at me, "Well, do you want to see me again?"

I stood up but I felt empty. "I hope I never see you again."

He seemed to have a little respect for me after that. He got up, too, and acted as if he didn't want me to go now that I was ready and wanted to so much. "Why? Tell me now and no beating around the bush. Why?"

"Because you don't know anything about me and I didn't tell you, I couldn't, and you've made me so miserable—" I shut my eyes then and grabbed hold of the door—"so absolutely unhappy that I . . ."

"Yes," he cried bitterly, "this is the way youth always treats us when we tear ourselves to pieces trying to give it some advice and some of the fruits of having lived." Then he laughed. "Well, it serves me right for trying to be wise."

"Goodbye," I said, and when I looked at his eyes I kind of liked him, I wanted to put my arm around him or kiss him just to show him he didn't bother me so much now. But I was nearly crying, too, and so I said, "Thank you and goodbye."

He followed me to the elevator. "And you don't want to see me again? Come, what horrible thing have I done to you?" But I didn't dare show my face and when the door shot open I stumbled inside and coughed so the passengers would think I had a cold but I couldn't see anything, everything was wavy and many colors and I shook my head and tried to jerk down

my mouth the way he did. Nobody noticed me anyway. Nobody asked me was I unhappy and why and if it was hard to get to be a great writer. No one knew I was there.

I went into a restaurant. An old man with his umbrella wrapped in paper sat beside me, a boy with purple boils on his cheek sat in front of me, the waitress had large hard hands that looked wet and sore. The chair was hard and bleak. The walls also, also the floor. I thought, "I wish I were in love, I wish I were obsessed by some one cruel, I wish I were pursuing several dark men with ragged coats and holes in their shoes."

"I can't eat this," I said to the waitress. "Please move it away. I'm sorry."

She looked so personally insulted and her face got so red that I went out at once and left my precious green umbrella with the ostrich head on the handle and the little yellow glass eyes. And that umbrella means more to me than my coat even. It means as much to me as I do. That's what this terrible city is doing to me, taking off the little I've got, and I've come here to be in love and suffer.

Then I decided to go to the theater. I felt reckless suddenly because I had been hoarding my money, not daring to eat much or anything, and I hadn't any appetite trying to save that way and I was afraid to do anything but sit in my room so I thought I'd start spending.

But I could hardly walk and then I remembered—it came up to me from somewhere dark like dreams come suddenly— "You're a damn fool. There are hundreds like you and they never write a thing. Hundreds, hundreds like you, talk like you, think like you, and they never write a thing but they keep others from writing masterpieces. . . ."

The theater was little and you couldn't tell the men from the women and it disgusted me terribly to see so many college boys there because I came to New York to get away from them forever. Those neckties, the round shoes, the full trousers. On my left was a large woman of thirty-five with her hand on a boy of about twenty. I liked him because he reminded me of the ostrich head on my lost umbrella that's gone from me forever and nothing in its place, but he didn't look at me or anything, no one did, they all had someone. I wanted to say to him, "I'm here!" but I felt afraid after what that professor told me.

Suddenly he left and the big woman clutched her breasts, one in each hand and kept her head down until he came back. Then she leaned over him and fed him green candy. Three men sat down behind me and the odor of eau de cologne became pleasant and then suddenly unbearable. They talked in high voices. "Have you seen the new Van Vechten? Oh, absolutely, if you understand his technique. Have you

seen Prancing Nigger? You don't know Firbank. My dear fellow, what's wrong with you. Yes, Balisand is a beautiful book." And all the time they weren't conscious of me. They hadn't noticed anything about the back of my head. Then they began saying rococo and fornication in with everything so I supposed they were intellectuals.

The curtain went up on a play that got blacker and blacker until the end. Long before it was over I was ready to go but I hated to wrinkle my coat pushing out in front of all those people. I felt, too, that the boy might have discovered that I was quite friendly toward him but he didn't. And he's likely sick now after all that candy she fed him. He acted kind of limp, down in his seat, pale, and she all warm and hovering. The playwright let Freud and the scenery do all the work and when I got outside I heard a woman say, "Wasn't it awfully artistic?" And her companion, "Thrilling."

At that instant rain fell. It fell on my green hat, my green coat, my lovely green coat with the gold braid and three spots. I couldn't think of myself then. I started to run. Then I slowed down and got drenched just to show the rain that I didn't care what it did to me. But that wasn't the real reason. I did care. I love my coat and hat.

I took them off and watched the pools they

made on the rug. I sat down in the pansy chair and held my hands. That great aching hollow opened and took me inside, into that terrifying nothing, my limp wet coat, my dripping hat, my self—it took all three of us in. For an instant I touched that palace with gardens and vines outside, that rich place that lies far down and opens when one has been miserable too long. But as it opened it faded and I stood all alone and I saw that I wasn't anything much, that I'd fancied this and that but I really wasn't anything yet.

I began to wonder seriously how one asked for a job. I practiced by myself. I was myself asking and I was an editor answering. But they were all very nice to me and encouraging. I started out one morning. A distinguished writer had given me a letter of introduction to the editor of a magazine. I wondered what he would be like. He walked into the room briskly. I saw the gloss of his face, his suit, the neat shoes and hair. I couldn't remember that I was desperate, that everything depended upon this meeting, that there was no room rent, no food, only carrots, nothing, nothing. I tried to realize my condition but something held me back, something made me feel light and as if it didn't matter and he didn't matter.

He stared at my coat and hat as if they weren't much and I stared back at his eyes. He

rapped on the wicker table with his knuckles and twisted up his face for a second.

"Can you do anything?"

"Yes."

He stared hard at me, moistening his lips, his eyes wide and stern. "What?"

"Nothing."

His necktie trembled. So did I. I felt hungry. My stomach hurt. But I looked back at him as if there was nothing he could do for me.

"There are thousands of young girls like you here in this city. Well-educated, attractive, but can't do anything in particular."

"But I can. I've written a book."

"A book?" said he. "A book. Well, well, and what is your book about, a girl?"

I laughed with him so that he could see that I could laugh at myself but I felt raw inside. "You're making fun of me," I said.

"Well, I want you to know that if I did know of a job I wouldn't send you there because they'd send someone back to me. It always happens that way and I'm bothered all the time with sweet young girls who want jobs. I know nothing about jobs. I advise you to go home, if you have one, and let someone take care of you."

The next that I remember was the park. I was sitting there and I was very hungry. Now that I had no money I had an appetite.

Now I could see and taste all the food I had paid for and hadn't eaten. I ate it in my mind. I devoured the meals I had asked to be taken away. Food that I had never ordered came in to torture me. Great silver platters garnished with green walked in steaming. Wonderful salads rushed in on flowered plates. A roasted chicken hopped past. Grapes, bunches of grapes, and large red apples. Then trees of apples. I had only to put out my hand to know that they weren't there.

I closed my eyes. I felt a million hungry feet inside me. A million hungry mouths. A million people, eager, disappointed, raw, numb. Then they left me alone and I was a child, younger than a child, younger than a baby, unable to speak, blind, deaf, unable to walk. I looked hard in front of me at the dried grass and the worn shoes of the people passing. I looked at the air. "This must be what they call life," I thought.

2

I went out of the house and down Sixth Avenue. I carried a milk bottle. It was cold. There was wind. I was hungry. My feet wanted to be walking home to Wisconsin to a fireplace and muffins and chocolate there in the nice circle of blaze, to a comfortable bed and a dresser with a pineapple and two cherries

painted on it, to my little Persian cat who plays the piano sometimes before he retires. I wanted to sit on my mother's lap, too, even though her lap is not large.

"Oh, go to hell," I said shortly to tears that came and then I wanted to go there with them. It would make a nice vacation, a nice rest. It would be warm. They might even give me a red suit, a pointed cap and a dinner of scalding pudding and fire wine. "No, no, no," I thought, "no, I intend to starve."

I had to laugh then and opened the door to a delicatessen shop. It is the one where they have only to look at me to know that they can give the wrong change.

"Have you any milk?" I asked.

"No. All gone."

"But I have to have milk," I said.

"Try that grocery across the street."

The grocery looked mousey. I am never sure that it isn't. You feel that mice link tails and dance over the fruit in the window, that they dance quadrilles on the canned goods and pray on the scales. I tiptoed in feeling as though I ought to excuse myself. Then the wind pushed me from behind the way it does when I'm pretending to be awfully nice and it seemed to split open my coat and leave my back bare.

"Have you any milk?"

"No milk left, lady."

Suddenly I was glad. I thought how hor-

rible it would be if no one had any. I hoped no one would. I carried the bottle closer and walked very fast in that sharp hateful wind. I entered the delicatessen where they always forget I am returning the bottle and said defiantly, "Have you any milk?" I prayed softly, "Don't have any, let me suffer, let me go mad, don't have any, let me be one of the most miserable, the most wretched, the loneliest in the world to-night, don't have it."

"Sorry, Miss."

I put the bottle on the counter as if I had misunderstood. I tapped my foot.

"Haven't any left. Sorry."

"Oh, really, oh, how hideous."

"I beg your pardon but I think you will find milk at that corner store two blocks down and to the right." He took off his hat and looked solicitous. I never had anyone look at me that way before. Then the grocer hopped out from behind the counter and pointed solicitously. "Down there," he said. "That red store. Hope you get some."

"Yes," said the other man. "I hope you are fortunate."

"Thank you so much!"

I thought they must think I had a baby at home. Suddenly I felt different toward them, toward the awful noise and confusion and rush of the city. I walked very fast as if I were an anxious mother with a baby who needed me,

who needed its bottle. Now I belonged with the people, now they noticed me, now I was at home in the crowd. I wanted to shout, "Thank you, thank you, I love all of you now," but I didn't.

Shopkeepers were suddenly nicer. They had never bowed before or gone to their doors to point. Never had they looked so clean and intelligent. I went into the last little shop. I thought, "I must have it. My baby." When my turn came I coughed, cleared my throat, and then— "Have you any milk left?"

"Yes, ma'm. Pint or quart?"

I felt flat and conquered, foolish. "No, quart," I said. "I don't believe I want any." But he didn't hear. He walked airily back, his pencil stuck behind his ear, probably the father of babies, probably he could wheel them when he got home.

For a second I heard my baby crying with the firelight on his fat little back and the gold pins gleaming. There was his little face matching a face that had never been found, dark hair, large eyes that looked deep into me, fat little fingers stretched apart. There was the table drawn up to the blaze and the chocolate pot, the bowl of cream, the muffins under a fringed napkin. Two cherries and a pineapple bumped in the door and rolled up on a chair, knocking at each other. Then the man held out a cool bottle of milk and I walked back to

where I lived and up the dark, dark stairs to my room.

3

"You belong with the Peterkins," my friends said to me, "you belong with Eliza who played the piano through the window or the little boys and their rubber boots. You're absolutely crazy." They went into gales over my story of how I had lain in a dark room for three days trying to sleep, trying to forget the hideous pain in my eye that was nearly swollen shut, trying to overlook my cold and my three fever sores and my feeling of my side pointing north instead of east.

I had lived in the city three years trying to be a great writer. I was in love, I had experienced most of the emotions I wanted to experience—being utterly happy, desperate, obsessed by another person, sitting in a chair and grabbing hold of it to keep from pulling out my hair and eyes, in love with the city, no longer afraid of it, and I had leaned out of my small dark window and felt as if doves were flying out of me.

Now I faced myself and no longer fancied I was my hat and coat. I had to face other problems, food, lodging, small dark women who attracted the man I loved; love, warm and choking me, so that his heart lay in my hands,

so that I said over and over, "I love your heart, I love your body," and saw him pick up the morning paper and light a cigarette. I had it all. And I fell sick and there was no one to bring me a glass of water, ask me how I was feeling, offer to raise the shades in the daytime.

It was this way. My room was small and dark looking onto a hard cement garden and an old stable with one star window high up where on Sundays a horse would stick his head out and bob at me. Early in the morning I would hear the sound of hoofs on boards and shouts, early, early as they led the horses out, my horses. Next door to me was a laundry where odors came, warm, moist on the air, mixed with manure from the Boarding Stables and the delicious smell of pastry from the Hudson Street Bakery.

But in my room were sea green curtains to the floor, my large black fireplace, my picture of a fat girl with a modest lamb and clover, the old broken chest of drawers and my table and chair. When he was in love with me or when he knew I was in existence, then my room was beautiful, then I shouted to the horses behind the brick walls and ran to the corner to buy food for my beloved who usually fell asleep or broke something during my absence. But this day I was sick. I was alone. I had lived three years in the city still believing I was to be a

great writer, still looking at the dark figures I had created and saying more and more that I would make bright figures that had never before been seen, bright people who thought it was grand to be alive and breathing in air, strong men and women, happy children in sand. I was to write so that every one would want to live, wake up, adventure, do the things they had been afraid to do.

When I thought of it I would feel close to everyone, I would start my story out loud, talking it out as if all the people in the world were there, close to me, and me in love with all, each one, giving myself from head to foot to each, giving not only words but my self forever. Then they would go away changed, never again the same, new men and women, the thought of death making them quick, pain making them strong, truth giving them love for everything created and uncreated. Those were the thoughts I had in that little room whether he loved me or not.

At night I would see our child in the dark, after he had gone and it was silent and thick, no horse hoofs from the stable, nothing but thick deep black, then I would reach out my hand and touch our child. I could close my eyes and see it. I could draw a picture of it, I could talk to it day and night. The more I loved him, the more I was enriched by him, the stronger our child became until I would

speak out in the dark seeing it so close, feeling it, and I would give a little scream sometimes knowing that if it did come into reality I would be deserted, I would have only it, not him, because he would go far away from me then, far away to those dark women, those all-women.

"Now, if you're going to try to change me and reproach me and say the same thing over and over then I'm going," he would say.

"Oh, never leave me, let me sit by you, let me feed you, never go, please, anything, anything but don't go, let me sit near you, let me touch your sleeve."

But it seemed as if I must be a mother first, a writer second. And what if my books and stories did keep coming back? Why should anyone read the dark things I created, the dark knotted words, the defeat, when all my body was waiting for another creation, for the bright child that would make me eternal in flesh. Who was I to write about life, about children being born, about death, love, the spirit of existence that is tasted in the throat, seen with the eye, felt in a room with eyes shut tight, heard with ears? Why couldn't I bear loving and not being loved? It had always been turned around before. Now I knew, now the bodies of those who had loved and wanted me hung from my neck. I wanted to hunt for them, I wanted to say to them, "Now I know what it meant, what you meant,

how you suffered." But the real story is how I went to the free clinic when I got sick.

I lay for three days with no one to get me a glass of water, my eye sending down tears and feeling as if a small branch were caught in the lid. My skin was dry and slowly turning to dust. My mouth tasted thick and bitter, my tongue was spread with gall. I thought over the diseases I might have, I was sure blindness was coming from some internal derangement. One day I would wake up blind, the branch in the lid of my eye would be gone and darkness would be there. I put on my clothes, I felt old, older than ever before. I went into the sun. Snow was melting in the warmth. Snow water ran into my shoes. My stockings squeaked as I walked.

I held one hand cupped over the worst eye and crossed the streets without watching, one ankle sunk deep in gutter snow-mud. I thought of a man who might help me across or take me in a taxi without my having to pay the fare. I passed four men, two lying stretched out asleep, the others silent, their caps down, their faces gnarled up, pipes out, hands in pockets. I thought of the man I loved and how he was probably asleep, his rent due, his mail waiting for him under the telephone in the hall—a stack of rejected manuscripts. A cat with muddy paws and a hole in its coat dragged past me to the garbage can. An

Italian woman passed, her child swelling out so that her coat did not meet. I hurried, I closed my eyes, I walked near her to be close to the unborn, to pretend that I too was going to be a mother.

But my closed eye, in spite of the dream behind it, ached as if coal were stuck in it, sharp fine pains that spread up. I held it open. I dared not even wink. Then I realized that I didn't care how I looked, how my coat dragged on one side, how my stockings were damp and twisted so that the seams came in front. I passed the red house where my beloved lay sleeping and then I wondered where I had got the idea that because you love a man he ought to be your staff and joy, your helper and sufferer, water carrier, food lugger, father, husband, lover, brother, mother, sister, all in all, son. I went into the clinic.

"Where would I go to see about my eye?" I asked the nurse.

"We have no eye clinic here. You will have to go over to Avenue E."

"Dying," I thought, "yes, I'm dying for want of a tough mind, a strong stomach, a hard clear eye." I felt like dropping down and yet I thought, "There is a way of writing that will change people, change me too. There is a way that will bring them out of dark into light, out of death into birth, up out of the body fear-bed into the world." But all the

time I was busy with memories, my mother's hand on my head and me looking up at her, my father bringing a present when I was sick, my sister picking the bachelor buttons.

I went into a roomful of people, women holding cheeks on one side, men grabbing canes on the other. I said to the guard that was pacing back and forth, the jailer. "Where would I find out about my eye?"

"One o'clock."

"But where?"

"One o'clock. Go and sit down."

He had on a black shirt. He was well developed, fat shoulders, fat hips, black trousers. His face was white and hard, his voice came out when he drew his mouth down on one side. I squeezed in between two large warm women. I felt someone twitch my collar. A face was near my ear. "Ain't it awful the way they treats us? You'd think they was the doctors themselves."

The jailer was pacing now, his hands held as if he had a long curling whip and would use it on anyone who spoke above a whisper. Behind at the desk were two women, one with dark hair arranged on top in a potato, a red pencil under it. She had glasses with a gold chain and button and a small waist. The other was blond, indifferent, a rose on her. She wrote lifting her face occasionally to stare over the heads of the mute watching people.

There were about fifty women, some with shawls, some with handkerchiefs tied over their heads. An old lady came in, her shoe tied on with a rope, a crutch under one arm, all her teeth gone.

"Sul you sul fun. . . ."

"One o'clock. Go and sit down!"

She stood solid. "Sul you . . ."

He shoved her toward the chairs where the women were. "One o'clock."

She looked at him with the same expression. She didn't sit down and so he pushed on her shoulders. She sent out a long animal groan as she met the chair.

"Ain't it terrible the way they treats us?"

I saw myself going to the jailer, jerking him around by the shoulder, setting my toe in his seat. "What do you mean by treating these people this way? Don't you know you aren't good enough to lick their rags or the soles of their shoes? Has it ever occurred to you, you dirty dog, that you're the most inferior, low down rat that ever scratched across this black earth? Damn you anyway! Isn't it enough to be poor and sick without being treated like a dog?" But I didn't get up. I was afraid. I was horrified at the thought of my fingers bringing blood out on the black shirt that fitted so neatly across his shoulders. I thought of how he would kick me out the door, howling

after me. I thought of how he, too, was earning his salary.

"How grand we are in imagination," I thought, "how just, courageous, how strong." I huddled in my coat closer, made myself smaller all over, and looked at my damp shoes.

A young boy ran in leading an old man. The man had one hand clapped over his throat and his upper teeth all showed. His cheeks stood out purple and round as if he hadn't swallowed for a long time. His black hat was in his other hand and the ends of his thick overcoat dropped down stiff and humble in front.

"A doctor quick! He's got something in his throat. Can't swallow." The boy pointed to his own throat and then jammed his fists on the desk.

"One o'clock."

"Say, for God's sake, he can't swallow!"

"Go and sit down!"

The woman with her hair in a potato stood up and handed the boy a card. "Well, then take this!" she screamed. "Wait in the other room. My gracious, the doctors have to eat, I'm sure. Keep still. I'll have you taken care of as soon as I can." She pushed them away with her hands and when they did not move she fluttered her fingers in their faces, the boy shaking his fist at her, the old man gripping his neck, standing bent and rigid.

"I've done all I can, I said, and don't let me see either of your faces again." They disappeared, the boy growling, leading the stiff old man.

"For heaven's sake," said the woman, "these people think they can say anything to you and get away with it. How much do they expect to get for nothing anyway. And what do they care about us? Did you hear that young fellow abusing me?" She sat herself down hard.

"But the doctors are just lovely," said the woman behind me. "It's just these that treats us this way."

A young man in his vest ran in, both hands pressed over one eye. "Glass!" he cried and hopped.

The woman rose. "The doctors are at lunch. Go and sit down. I'll do what I can for you. This is a bad time to come, just at noon when they're eating."

As the clock struck everyone stood up. The man in black threw out his arms. "Sit down! Those without cards first. Stand up. Red cards sit." We made a line. "You've got a card! What are you doing here with that red card! Sit down!" It came my turn. The lady with blond hair and the rose, a pad of paper.

"Occupation."

"Writer."

"How much do you make a week?"
"Nothing."
"What?"
"Nothing."
"Married?"
"No."
"Parents?"
"Yes."
"Could they pay the doctor bill?"
"Yes, I suppose so."
"Why don't they?"
"They live in Wisconsin. They need their money. I take care of myself."
"We can't take you here." She shoved my quarter back at me. "If you have parents that can pay we can't take you. This is for the poor."
"But there aren't any poorer than I, really."
"Sorry. I'm a writer myself and I can sympathize with you, but we can't take you. Go up to the Grandgent Hospital. They don't care up there. They ask fifty cents—we're a quarter."

It came to me then that I should have said my parents were dead or junk dealers. But the thought of saying they were dead frightened me—they might die if I said that, I might be punished by having them die suddenly for lying about them. "Oh, God," I thought, "my eye, I'm sick, I'm lonely." I remembered our family doctor leaning over my bed. He

always let us choose what color pills we wanted. He would open his black case and let us point to the red or the lilac or apricot and then he would call for half a glass of water please and let it dissolve. Papa would ask his little girl what she wanted from down town, Mama would hover, sister would read. The room would be cool, darkened, the dolls all in bed, the lamb with the sore leg standing in his little shed near the radiator. Surprise jelly with two pills concealed. "Oh, Mama, please sit by me, please, oh . . ."

At the Grandgent Hospital the line extended to the stairway. I stepped into it. Twenty minutes later I found it was the wrong one and stepped into another that went upstairs. I drew nearer.

"What does your husband do?" *"Tin peddler." "Junk dealer."*

I paid fifty cents after stating that my parents were alive. "Yes," said the nurse, "this is the eye clinic, but we don't open until three o'clock."

"Someone must do something for me now."

"Three o'clock." She started telephoning.

I sat on a shiny bench, my hand over my eye. What if I would have to wear glasses, pay for them, pay to be made hideous? What if some disease was making me blind? What if the income I had from reading manuscripts would have to stop because of weak eyes? I

waited. An old lady was wheeled past me in a chair, her cheeks fire red and hot high on her cheek bones, her feet in slippers.

"My son is not at home. My daughter, she is not home. They don't know I am come here for operation."

She was wheeled into the elevator. A pretty nurse passed. "Hi, doc." She waved her white arm and then ran down the hall, looking back at him, rings of dark hair curling down her cheek from her little white cap. How different it looked to her, benches of people with their heads tied in pillows, feet in sacks, clothes tied on with rope. The sores, the wounds, the bent limbs, burst organs, gall bladders, gall stones, diseased kidneys, tonsils. No. 300798. No. 000005782. Room 4. Bad eyes. Deafness. Burst appendix.

"It's just a cinder," the doctor told me, "but it should have come out before. Hold still. Now, this isn't anything at all."

I walked out into the air free. I laughed back at all the moments before this great easy free moment in life. I told my friends. "But all that trouble," they said. "And spending fifty cents and all that time and bother. Any druggist would have taken it out for nothing."

My beloved spoke up. "Once I had three dollars. That was a long time ago. I got a terrible earache. I went to a clinic and they put me into a pit with one hundred Italian

men with head sores and nose tumors and all sweating and yowling every language on earth. I was scared and escaped, beat it, and went to a doctor and was relieved of my three dollars."

"But where was I? I would have gone with you."

"I don't know," he said.

"But it's hideous to go through all that alone."

"Everyone has to some time in his life."

"Well, there are some women who never do things alone, they have . . ."

He stood up. "If you're going to start reproaching me . . ." He grabbed his coat and slung one arm in.

"Well, the amazing thing," said my friend from Harvard, "is that you took such an extraordinary way of getting that cinder out. Now, I'm almost certain that any good doctor would have been enchanted to remove it for nothing."

"Not from me," I said, "not from me. I always pay."

4

I have become Donna. He has become Arlo. Her face is thin now and city-white. She looks anxious and eager, worn but not diminished. Pyjamas and stockings and bloomers constantly dry on the backs of chairs. Mice

nest in her masterpieces at night. She writes her parents every day, "Darling Mama, Darling Papa, I love the city. My first story is to be published in The Harp." Later—"The Harp has been discontinued. . . . Why do you always ask what I eat? I have plenty to eat. Thank you for the beads. I'm glad you had such a nice ride on Sunday. It is so good of you to send me postage stamps. It's a bother to have to run out for them." There is a sharp knock and the milk bill finally slides under the door. Her pale straight hair falls down her back as she examines it and then she goes swiftly to the dolorous couch and arranges herself for grief. "Darling Parents, This is a marvelous world. I'm getting along wonderfully. There is such a lovely horse in the stable . . ." She crosses that out. They wouldn't understand her living near the Boarding Stables. "Yes, I will remember what you said about religion and laws and all that . . ." Now Arlo comes in. Imagine them there, white faced, ragged, slender. Imagine the subways beneath them, the river beside them with grunting sooty barges and swan ships. Imagine the elevated above, airplanes above, stars. Listen to him speak:

"Yes, that's the way you want to appear," he said to her, "you want to feel abused and abandoned, humiliated, all the rest of it and all the time you're locked up in your cell—

your self. You can't *think* of anyone else even. It's all love, love, love with you until a man goes out of his head. You don't *think* about anyone. And it's always you loving, never you being loved by me, always you, you, everything you. No one else in the world is sad or wretched or wants a different world. You've got a copyright on all of it."

As he spoke, gripping his pipe in one hand, his dark eyes straight on her, her bright lips opened slightly and she peered at him through her hair. She got off the couch and crouched down on a little box at his feet, looking up at him, her lips still parted, her eyes opened soft. Her neck stretched out toward him, her hands reached up, she blinked and sighed.

"Please keep on criticizing. Don't stop! It makes you so much better than I am. I'm just nothing. Oh, Arlo," she cried and kissed his ragged knee. "You're the only one in the world that I can listen to. . . ." She pressed her cheek against his leg and then she put her arms around it. But he was sad, withdrawn. He pushed some tobacco into his pipe and then laid the pipe down on top of the chest.

"And don't call me Monkey in front of people."

She started up in reproach, her eyes big and hurt, her mouth closed tightly and down at the corners.

"I said no and I mean it. You want to

make it appear that I'm your pet plaything, or something. You're always making me out small."

"I am not! I'm always trying to make you bigger than you are but when I need a father sometimes when I haven't any money and my foot hurts you let me walk along in the snow saying "Papa, Papa, Papa," over and over and you don't do a thing. You never even let me fall against you."

He burst out laughing and took up his pipe. Then he stared at the match darkly before he struck it. His black thick hair fell on his white forehead, he was thin and small boned, delicate and ragged in his dark clothes and she stood near the open mouth of the big fireplace, her chin on the ledge staring up at a picture of a boy with fat bare legs watching the sunset.

"Women have to be mothers, companions, whores, brothers, cousins, fathers, and servants to men but men don't have to be anything but themselves all the time. Oh, it isn't fair." She turned and threw herself against him, flattening his delicate back against the hard chair, squeezing his head in her arms and pressing tighter and closer, kissing his hair with little groans and letting her weight down on his knees, her head against his shoulders, pushing farther and farther into the cold space between his shoulder and his ear.

"Do you feel like loaning me a buck?" he asked and when she looked at him he smiled mysteriously. "This seems the right time to ask. I'm good for nothing and we know it and so it's all right to hand over your last cent—we're perfectly honest and you'll get it all back some time, anyway."

She ran to her purse and took out the money, radiant as she pressed it into his hand.

"Now the first time you get mad at me you'll remember this," he said.

"I'm horrible. I know it. But now I love giving it to you—I love it—I want to give you everything I've got." She bent over his hand and then she laid her cheek on it. "You've given me everything," she murmured, "you've changed my life, you've made me happy, you're the only one on earth that I really respect. Oh, you darling!"

"No more darling and no more Monkey, please."

"But you'll pretend you own me a few times to-night won't you—just in front of the people, please. I want them to see how I feel but you never do—you always look at me as if I'm a stranger."

"I know it, damn it all," he said.

"If you really love me . . ."

He jumped up and pitched over to the chair where his overcoat hung. "All right," he

cried, "I'm going. I told you I'd go if you started that again."

"But I'm not ready yet. Oh, you wouldn't let me go all alone. Oh, I won't go without you—I'll stay here and it's my party—I will. All right, go." She closed her mouth firmly and sat down, smiling faintly, her eyes on the boy and the sunset. But her soft body looked as if it hadn't heard her words. Her whole body spoke differently, her hands, her throat, her legs, just her face was held firm and sad. Through her dress her warm curves showed, happy, thick, he saw her warm neck, her breasts, her opened hands.

"Oh, you never let me be with myself," he cried and sat down beside her, his cold white hands moving awkwardly around her waist, his eyes worried. "Who am I? Nobody unless I'm insanely in love with you every minute. What good am I? None at all unless I forget myself every minute and contribute to you and your foolish ideas about what women should be and what men should be. First it was how good women were and how bad and dominating men were, and then it it was turned around and men were sterile or something if they didn't dominate and damn it all. . . ."

"But I was different before—before you were my master, Arlo," she said sadly. "Of course it was all different then."

"Well, I liked it better then."

She jerked up, her hands clapped over her face and ran into the bathroom. He finally got up and knocked on the door, but she made no answer. He sat down again, staring hard at the floor, his forehead wrinkled up and his eyes sad. He could hear her terrible sobbing. The vibration lifted the small cozy room and dropped it, up painfully, down, like horrible death breathing in an accident, blood breathing, then lonely cries for help as if no human voice or flesh were near, as if the world was cold, frozen, and only she could tear herself apart with cries, breathing, as if only she lay hunched in peril.

"It was a lie," he cried at the door. "I didn't mean it."

"That's the lie."

"I swear it wasn't true."

"That's the lie."

"No. I swear, I swear."

"Take all my money, take my furniture, everything, my coat, everything, and go away."

His shoulders sank down and he stared at the floor. The heel of one brown shoe was gone and the other was without laces. "Donna!" The name wrenched out of him and he waited. It seemed to him that he heard her stop breathing, that he could see her through the door with her chest held, her eyes big, waiting. A chill went down him.

Ever since he had called her Donna that time, *Donna*, as if he had found her at last, and she had looked back at him, shy, in awe, frightened, never since that time had he been able to call her Donna again.

He heard the sound of the elevated like the tumble of ocean water and then the departing sound of water curling, foaming up and up on the beach. He heard silence then and saw all the lighted windows in the darkness outside and in one a man was shaving. He saw the dark mammoth wall of stable with the star window high at the top and the lower windows of another building with shafts of glass gone as if rusty bats flew in and out, as if batwings caught and made the blackness in the silver ashed windows. He turned his back and looked about the bright cozy room, the jolly teapot with pansies on it, the cups, the little men on a cherry tray, the orange cheese box and the checkerboard opened in front of the fireplace. He stepped over to the door again.

"Listen, you don't want to get soft. Listen, the truth's the best."

She opened the door then and looked at him. "I know it," she said and looked into his eyes, her brows arched above, her hair pushed back from her face.

"No sense in being alive if we didn't try to be honest."

"I know it," she said.

"I feel as if I'd made you."

"You did," she said.

"Damn it all, I'm no good. Of all the worthless, lazy, damned God forsaken . . ."

"No, no, you aren't that. You're never that."

"We'll get something to eat," he said. "I've got a buck."

"All right, I'll dress."

He sat down again. Then he moved over to the couch and dealt cards. He didn't look up at first when she came back in her evening frock. It was pale and thin, like billowy transparent silver stuff and all over it were large sunflowers gazing out of it, their petals thick and the yellow color beating out of the cloth. The brown soft centers were thick and curved out and her slippers were brown and her pale hair was back, back from her forehead, her ears, and there was her Donna-face, strong now, patient, looking back at him, not melting as he looked, not with the head on one side, but older, patient, older, the cheeks shining where tears had washed down, in a little, not so bright and healthly. And there were the warm soft arms, not clutching him, but hanging white at her sides, hidden partly by the thin gauzy stuff of her gown. He held her coat and they went out into the street.

"This is happiness," she said. "I'm thinking of you." She did not look at him and there

was no pulling at him, no sudden sinking against him as if he must carry her whole weight along the street. They passed under the black heavy tracks of the elevated, through the mud at the curb, and on. She did not look at him, she looked ahead. She did not walk her feet with his feet but independently, and yet they seemed to be walking together. They did not speak. In the cafeteria he brought a plate of roast beef sandwich and she did not reproach him for eating no vegetables.

"Thank you for the meal," she said, and smiled.

They walked along the hard gray pavement, passing quickly over the thick deep rubber feeling avenue where cars flashed by and busses lurched.

"Perhaps you would rather walk alone," she said.

"No," he answered, eager to walk with her now when he was offered something else. "No, it's swell to walk with you."

He rang and they climbed the stairs. The room was very long. It was many rooms of her small one, many windows, higher, wider. A fire was burning. The floor was dull and smooth. An orange cat was curled on the velvet couch. Three men sat on a peasant chest, a man and a woman sat on another peasant chest, Gloria had on a low cut red velvet gown. The punch was bicardi and fruit

juices. Blacklock who owes his publishers money for his first book sat hunched like a lonely penguin. Beautiful Mary was there, her black hair in coils around her head, her long body in blue, gold stockings. Uncle Tom, Alan Woodside, Saul with his accordion.

"Hello, Donna! Hello, Arlo."

Arlo went swiftly to the punch, letting his body out of the coat and dragging the garment a few yards until it fell on the floor, one arm ahead, the other bent and lopped in the hairy goods. He drank off a glass. "Say, this is swell." He drank off another. He filled a glass for Mary, for Norval, for Alan. "Swell." He filled a glass for Donna who held it up before she drank and stood high on her toes looking at it as if she must reach up in all her bones and flesh before she could taste it. With the first swallow her face looked startled, as if the warm stuff were burning and glowing out of her ears, and then she patted her bright hair as if flowers were in it, heavy bunches of fruit around her neck, fruit in her hands. She drank again, her eyes slowly closing, her chin lifted. Arlo filled the glasses. Gloria began dancing with Uncle Tom.

"Hey, Donna, dance a while between drinks. You don't want to pass out."

The room looked large and bright to her. She loved it with her body as she walked across the floor, the soles of her feet pressing

down as if she had never walked before. Something seemed to spread out of her pores, go out from her to the walls and the furniture, and then she saw the faces, each special, each in an individual light, the eyes all different, the hands, the shoes. She rushed toward them, her arms out as if angels were flying out of her, such an angelic smile spreading her lips that she thought she would swoon down as she floated. Her body felt incredibly light, no heavier than her dress that swept softly behind her, and she was all love for everyone, for the room, for the people, the floor, the same for all. Her warm hands were gentle on their cheeks, some red, some brown, gray, white, the feeling of their soft cheeks melting against her hands made her talk as if her tongue were light and free, and then bend to kiss the mouth. Alan, Saul, John, her self rose up from her toes to their lips and they filled her, but she moved away from their hands and their voices, love in her face, in her hair.

"You think I'm drunk," she said.

The bell rang sharply. The bodies that had grown soft in the couch, soft on the hard peasant benches, soft in the floor, raised up and looked. Roxie entered. She was dark and small, with white face and hands, small red mouth, black brows arched over the all-woman eyes, the all-woman body and feet

small and nestling, walking now with little trip steps, the scarlet cape held tightly in front, her black hair in a long smooth coil on her white neck and in front smooth and dark over her brow. When she saw them all looking at her she gave a little laugh and huddled in her cape for a moment until Alan stepped forward and Homer and Guy. Each held a part of it for her like scarlet wings and she stood still with her head back and her large eyes looking far away. Then she stepped forward, her slim gown tight fitting, tight over breast and hip and knee. They seemed to flow up behind her and support her to the couch so that her tiny soft feet barely touched the floor.

"That dumb-bell Roxie," said Arlo, drinking another.

But Hugo would not move toward Roxie, neither would Harlan or John or Frank. Gloria smiled and lighted a cigarette. Mary asked where the dressing room was, she had forgotten, she said, and it seemed a long time since she came. Donna stared at the dark woman. The little laugh fluttered through the room, the white raised hands, "No, no, no, you mustn't touch me, no, no."

Donna sat down. She turned her face away from Roxie. Would Alan remember the kiss she had given him, would Harlan remember, would they all remember and leave their wives and sweethearts to go alone for eternity, to

sit in contemplation of that instant when she had moved over the floor to them, angels springing out of her, her eyes deep in their eyes, that sharp soft movement upwards when all in her went to each. Tears sprang to her eyes and she made a little sound in her throat, twisting to the side in her chair, holding one wrist tightly and pressing her lips together. She jumped out of her chair and pushed it over backwards. Then she rushed to Alan, shook him with all her strength, crying in her throat. "You mustn't forget. You must remember and be changed forever." She let go of him and looked into his eyes, "Me, *me*," she said sharply.

"At last she's tight," someone cried. "How about some chess. Damn dull."

She saw Arlo standing by the punch bowl filling his glass. "Arlo, Arlo," she cried and rushed to him, "it hurts me loving everyone the same, it's straining me and breaking me open, I can't hold it—each the same, as if its done up in packages the same size." She put her hands up, her eyes stretched wide. "Arlo, save me."

"You're passing out," he whispered. "I told you not to drink it all at once. Go on and sit down for a minute."

"They're all walking through me—they're walking in me forever—they don't stop—they don't see me—Oh, when I kissed them, couldn't

you have minded?" She turned to the room, blinking now, a large spot on the front of her skirt. "You're all inside me," she said, a peculiar smile on her face. She wet her lips. "All of you in me, never leave me, this till my death."

"You'd better try to vomit," said Arlo in her ear. "Come on and try. You're making a fool of yourself. They're all laughing." He tried to lead her away, but when his fingers touched her hand she began to smile and she rubbed her cheek against his. "Lead me now," she said, "as if I don't know where to go, lead me off, lead me . . ."

She sank down, down on the bed, far down as if it were close to the floor, and she heard a door close and it was dark and still, a ray of gold under the door. Her head pitched back and forth on her shoulders and then the bed rose up higher and she clung to keep from falling off at the side. She slipped off pleasantly on the floor, her face against the scarlet cape, and suddenly she was horribly sick and her mouth was wrenching open on little Roxie's evening cloak. Arlo helped her back, but not a kiss. Arlo cleaned off the cape. "She'll never know." Then darkness.

"Frankie and Johnnie were lovers,
God, how they could love."

The door opened. Alan, Uncle Tom, Hugo,

were all squeaking around the bed, all asking her how she was, what she wanted, if she'd like some more rum—"For God's sake, are you crazy?" She felt warm kisses on her head, hands on her hands. "Get a wet cloth. Get a bromo."

"When I open my eyes I get dizzy."

They laid the ice cloth over her hot head and closed eyes. "I want Arlo to put it on," she said. They tiptoed out on their large shoes. The door was closed again. Stillness.

"But she got her man,
'Cause he done her wrong . . ."

The music swung near and far, feet swam near and far on the dull soft floor. The door jarred open so that gold light sifted in, sound poured in as if it were swinging from far off to near, then far away, almost out. She heard Arlo's voice, the tone he used only for her, the strained, intolerable voice he used once with her when he loved her, "You're beautiful—Say, damn it, listen to me, I'm talking to you—you're beautiful."

She heard the sound of Arlo's feet on the floor pushing against soft small feet.

"Fix my slipper, Arlo," said Roxie. "Heeeeee. You know, I'm physically drunk but intellectually sober. I'm physically drunk but intellectually sober, I said, fellows. I'm intellec-

tually sober, isn't that what I said, and physically drunk. No, I didn't say intellectually drunk and physically sober, I said physically drunk and intellectually sober, my feet may be drunk, I said, but my head's sober, that's what I said, fellows, my mind's not drunk."

"*Mind*," hollered someone as the feet swung past the door.

"I detest women without mentality," said Roxie.

"You're beautiful—you've got to listen to me—you're beautiful——"

> "She got her man,
> 'Cause he done her wrong . . ."

"You're *beautiful!*" Arlo's voice was like the shriek of a small boy overwhelmed and borne down, the body he loved agonizingly beyond his hand, out of his sight forever and ever.

"Arlo, Arlo," she called, "you can call her beautiful—I can just stand it—go on—I——"

She didn't know whether he had stopped talking or whether it was the echo of his voice in her head, the memory of that time when he had used the same tone with her, when "beautiful" had come out with that frightened, strained scream as if he couldn't bear it. He had caught hold of her with his cold awkward hands like something wild and hurt that has fought its way home.

"Oh, roll me over gently,
Roll me over slow. . . ."

The door was pulled shut. Darkness again, thick darkness and stillness, but outside the room the sound of murmuring and scraping feet and sudden sharp cries, sounds rocking soft and loud against the wall of the room but never entering.

"You've killed your man
'Cause he done you wrong."

Now his voice and eyes wandered in her, slipping through her veins, twisting and following. Now all his body was melted and flowing through her, she tasted him between her teeth, he was in her fingers, behind her eyes, slowly, slowly he rose up in her throat and she raised herself up, pressing her hands against her neck. Now she had just strength enough to breathe, the weight of him in her chest forever and ever, his body her blood, his mind set in her like a jewel, his voice tearing up and down in her.

"What the hell!"

"Why, you're worse than married. . . ."

"What the hell—what the hell——"

"Why, you're . . ."

She remembered the sound of launches coming down the river at home. When her little cats curled up in two chairs and put their

chins on their white paws, it sounded like launches when they purred together. She opened her eyes and watched the light come over the factory next door. As light struck it the stones changed, they grew definite and hard. She watched light strike the big bleak panes and silver them, make the dark roof gleam. Pigeons would rise when the sun came warm and walk proudly on the ledge and pouch on the chimney. She heard Arlo's feet, she felt him beside her. He put his arms around her, his cheek against her breast.

"Do you remember that time in the country when we saw the duck come floating down the little hill to the pond and all her small ones after? First she drank with her head way back, letting it run down, and then they all did exactly the same thing, making big with their feet."

"I don't remember," he said.

"That man in the red sweater was so funny when he gave us the dipper."

"I don't remember."

"If I ran away would you hunt for me?"

"What the hell?"

She took hold of his hand, but it stayed cool and firm and her warm hand merely surrounded it. Now she saw the glitter of frost on the factory roof and the air was frost-air, like soft smoke puffing up from earth. Darkness poured slowly in from the other

room where shades were down. She strained up, brushing back her hair. Her gown had slipped off her white soft shoulder and the gauzy skirt was stretched tightly around her body in a thousand long wrinkles. As she looked at him her face seemed to come out of the grayness new and fresh, her smile came. She pressed his white cheeks.

"Wouldn't you hunt for me a little?"

"I wouldn't miss you enough." A shudder went down him.

"Never mind."

"Damn it, anyway, that's the truth. It's hell for me." He jerked up and went over to the window, his hands deep in his pockets and his shoulders up as if it were cold and nipping.

"I know," she said very low. Her voice sounded deep down beyond tears and groaning and begging. "I never give anyone peace. My hands are always out making everything mine. I don't blame you—God, God."

He swung round sternly and looked into her face. Suddenly he dropped down on the floor, straining his arms around her, pressing his cold face into her warmness. "I want you for my skin, but I won't be so damned weak. I treat you rotten, but I'm not ashamed any more. I don't feel guilty now." He pressed his hands over her bare shoulders. "I feel as if I'd made you."

She pushed her head against his chest, but it was hard and bony and she pulled on his neck with her crossed arms to draw him closer to her, but he kept his head firm, looking down into her eyes. She stopped struggling and gazed back at him. "I'll never mention love, I'll never demand or reproach or ask where you've been or complain. I'll forget myself, I won't think of myself at all, I'll just try to understand you, not me, just *you.*"

"You'd better be a great writer instead," he said and smiled.

Tears came into her eyes and she wiped them away with his hand. "I want to live," she said, but he did not look at her, "I don't want to die and write and go insane and blind and deaf and dumb for my characters. I want to be alive, I want to live. . . ."

He shook his head quickly but he saw her staring with that same hope in her face, the dumb, intolerable hope that always brought him down, made a slave of him whether he showed it or not. He felt her dumb waiting, the soft mute body that never accepted his words, the white hands holding his coat. He glanced down at her hands, his coat crushed in them so tightly that the knuckles were white. "You've given me everything," he cut in harshly, "but I don't want to give anything to you. You can't believe that and I can't myself. You've been absolutely generous, good,

and you've trusted me, and you're more beautiful than most of them, but I can't. . . ." His eyes looked out at her frightened, as if they didn't understand. "I'd give anything I possess right now, my soul, my last cent, the clothes off my back, to any beautiful woman I might pass in the street, but not to you and damn it, that's the whole truth." He walked out quickly and closed the door.

The Family

1

THE instant Mr. Beale entered the house Mrs. Beale drew up her right shoulder and blinked three or four times. Then she poured boiling water on the tea and told him dinner was almost ready. The little Beale ran into the garden, her sad startled eyes on the rhubarb, the radishes and onions, the straight rows of flowers. She walked with her hands clasped behind her, looking from right to left stiffly as if she thought she was being watched and must show how honestly she was inspecting every leaf and how great was her appreciation of the garden.

"Come right along in and eat your dinner!"

The little girl swung round, her fingers on her shoulders and marched slowly and gravely up the stone walk to the house. She slid into her chair and tied her napkin round her neck all by herself, looking up at her father and mother between her fallen hair.

Mr. Beale looked straight ahead of him, as if his eyes were seeing something far, far off, as far away as the Baltic Sea or the Indian Ocean, and he held up his knife and fork dripping with gravy. "I try to make everyone happy," he said gruffly, "I try to do good to everyone. I try to think right and talk right and do right. Who ever does anything for me?"

"Please, you're dripping," said Mrs. Beale gently.

"I haven't got a friend anywhere." He couldn't help but remember his mother and the way she held him on her lap once after his brothers had chased him through the timber tract trying to get his watch away from him.

The little Beale stopped eating. She took hold of the red string tie on her sailor suit and stared at the buffet with the rows of tumblers on top and the watermelon picture just above. She seemed to fold up and grow smaller, her lips, her cheeks, shoulders, arms, all but her eyes and they grew fixed and big. She seemed to have stopped breathing and then when her mother bent to serve the pudding she let her finger move up toward her neck, over her cheek to her eye and then her mouth jerked down and she let her head sink to her chest.

Mr. Beale half rose, one hand jammed on his napkin, the other pointing toward his only child. "Now, what are we going to do with

you? You're a coward, you haven't got any digestion, and I don't know what's to become of you." He sank down again and took a piece of bread. "I suppose we'll have to let you grow up into an invalid like Irma Hoar, always hanging to your mother, weak livered and not worth anything at all to humanity."

He pulled out a large white silk handkerchief and began pushing it into his ear. His eyes were far off again and suddenly he said, "We live so our children can do something more than we have, so that they can do better, think better, and be better men and women than we've been, and so they can leave the world better." He turned his sad eyes toward the window, swinging his chair around and shoving his dishes away with his elbow. Over the neat grass plots children were leaping and screaming, tumbling over dogs, tearing at each other's hair ribbons and thrusting out tongues. They began throwing sticks for the dogs to run after and they set up a great screaming when one little girl rolled backwards into a bed of zinnias. Old lady Peppen ran out then with her umbrella and children and dogs galloped off down the cement,

"Those are *children*," he said. "They know enough to get out and play and have a good time while there's a chance.

"There's been a flood in Ohio," said Mrs. Beale.

"There's been a *what* in Rio?"

"A *flood*," she brought out with great effort, all her pleasure gone.

"Well, I can't do anything about it. I'm sorry for all the unfortunate people in the world, but I can't stop the rain or the snow or any of the things that cause human suffering. If I could I'd do it, but I can't . . ."

"Stop, stop, *stop!*" cried Mrs. Beale with both hands pressed over her face. Her hair was arranged in a small vace on top of her head and drawn low on her forehead. Now she was leaning forward against the table, her arms folded in her lap, and her young eyes on the brown glazed teapot. When her husband stopped talking she let her shoulder sink down so that the ruffles on her collar brushed the white lobe of her ear. Her forehead and face grew placid and sweet as if she were thinking of soft white hens in hay or waterfalls of silk displayed on a shining counter. She poured herself another cup of tea, holding the cover with her forefinger. "Gizzie," she called, looking toward the door into the kitchen, "more hot water, please."

Gizzie burst in, setting an old straw hat with a buckle in front on her head. She always wore this hat in serving and kept it on a hook just inside the pantry door where she could jerk it in a hurry.

"Yes, Mrs. Beale," she said and rolled her

dark glossy eyes at Mr. Beale who had turned away from them and was sitting with his head in his hands, his legs far apart. The room seemed full of his breathing. He seemed to be breathing out something that settled and congealed on them until they were small and still under the coating.

"I want you to fill the teapot, Gizzie," said Mrs. Beale faintly.

"Awh, Mr. Beale," said Gizzie and then ran into the kitchen snuffling. "He's the best hearted man in town," she told her friends. "Always bringing a present home, raincoat or something expensive. Mis' Beale is nice, too, but she's too educated or something to make over him and he's gotta be made over. But I stand up for the both of them. It's that little kid that gets me going. They'd be larks if it wasn't for her."

Mrs. Beale drew a long breath as if air were hard to get and she had to draw against a great dark substance or mass that was pressing on her. The little Beale sat with bent head, staring out at her father through her hair, tears glittering on her long fair lashes.

"Did you like the pudding?" asked Mrs. Beale.

"Do I like what?"

"The pudding."

"No," he said, "I don't like anything."

Mrs. Beale jumped up and burst into the

kitchen where Gizzie was standing over the kettle, the teapot in one hand. "Give it to me, Gizzie," she cried as if she were smothering. "Give me the teapot. Oh, I know you think I'm crazy," she said staring into the girl's face, "but I can't help telling someone. I want to roll my eyes round and round and then seize my nose and wind up my face, just as if it's a clock," she cried in horror, shaking so that the teapot lid clattered. "I want my face to strike my death." Then she laughed. "Pour on lots of water," she ordered. But Gizzie couldn't get over it. "You watch Mis' Beale," she told her friends. "There's something out of the ordinary there."

Mrs. Beale took her place again. Mr. Beale put his spoon into his pudding. "It's all right," he said and ate slowly, his head down. Mrs. Beale knew that in a moment he would go to the pantry and pull out an old cook book of his mother's and begin reading over the receipts. "One cup butter, one cup figs, one half ounce raisin juice, seventeen eggs . . ." But he shoved his plate away. "Nothing tastes rich," he said. They moved into the sitting room. The little Beale sat down under the dictionary stand, fearing her father would suggest a game of ball when he saw how sad and frightened she was.

But Mr. Beale couldn't even play a game of ball with her because when he threw she would

cover her face with her arm and stand there a martyred figure, nine years old in Buster Brown oxfords and a white sailor suit with a red string tie. No matter how often he told her she was a coward she would always automatically throw her arms over her face when he threw and when the absurd game was over she would dart to her mother with little whines of fright in her throat, her hair falling over her cheeks. But their joint suffering came when she was called upon to speak a piece at the church for the Christmas exercises. She would go about like a dead girl for days in advance and on the night of the celebration she would have no voice left in her. When it came her turn she would have only strength to get up in front of everyone, under the glittering tree with paper angels and stars, and stand gazing idiotically, water coming out on her forehead and sparkling in the tender fuzz around her lips.

"Her baby work is driving me crazy," cried Mr. Beale. "Where is she? Dorrit, come here!"

She came out from under the stand, bumping her head something frightful, and looking at them with her lips trembling and her sad eyes opened full upon them in terror and helplessness. Sometimes she was led down the street and pushed into a crowd of children and ordered to play. Other times, unexpec-

tedly, she would be tested as to how much she knew in arithmetic or how well she was doing with her piano lessons or lectured on her bad handwriting.

Mr. Beale pounded into the hall and came back with a large mysterious box. Mrs. Beale trembled as he raised the lid because she knew it was another present and when he brought presents there was "no living with him," as she put it. It was a net dress for their only child, trimmed with silk rosebuds and ribbon edged ruffles. He shoved the box at his wife, ordering her to dress Dorrit, "and don't be all day doing it, either. When I get home I like to see something of my family and not have them leave the room and stay away a couple of hours." Then he put his head in his hands, his legs far apart. "Awh, Mr. Beale," called Gizzie from the dining room, "don't you want some of my cucumber pickle?" but he didn't look up or answer. He wondered why he couldn't make his family like him better than they liked themselves. When the little girl came back he did not move.

"Say, Mis' Beale," called Gizzie cheerfully, "Mis' Beale."

"What is it, Gizzie?"

"I guess we're going to have a rain. The walk's all covered with toads in back."

Mr. Beale rared up. "Of all the freaks,"

he cried, scowling darkly at his wife, his voice husky, his hands shaking and spread open.

"Shame. Control yourself."

"Always got to fill this house up with freaks. Confound it, anyway."

He saw his only child then standing squarely in front of him, her fair hair tied on top with a monstrous bow and hanging in soft light curls on her shoulders. She looked beautiful, her white baby skin, her bare dimpled arms, the firm legs and shining eyes. He took out his glasses. Something rushed hot behind his face and fell thick in his throat. He stared at her, one large hand held over his cheek.

"Stand back so I can see!"

She moved back timidly but with more spirit than they had ever seen in her, and when she was ordered to turn she even gave a shy hop on one leg.

"Stand still like a Christian." Then he blurted out without wanting to, as if the words were saying themselves, something about "she would be crying before night, anyway."

"Awh, can I see Mis' Beale?" asked Gizzie, her head hanging in the door. "Awh, say you wouldn't know her." She knelt on her stiff knees by the child, her great squeaking button boots stuck out behind her, one side of her dark hair rolled up in electric curlers. "Run and kiss Papa," she whispered to the child. "Throw your arms round his neck." She fell

back on her heels and threw out her arms to show the child. "This way," she said and smiled largely. "Oh, if I had a nice Papa like that I'd thank him and let him know. I'd show him I was grateful and that he was the best Papa in the whole world."

The child's nose twitched and her eyes got big and frightened. She clutched her dress with both hands and stood as if she could never move, her eyes watching her father, following him as he paced up and down. Once or twice he snorted so that if his child finally did rush to him impulsively, throw her arms around his neck, and at last act like this only child, it would not be because of the present but because of him, of his love that he could not talk or act or let out, of the foolishness in him for both these people, his wife and child, that could only come if they would first do their part.

"My, my," said Gizzie, "my, what a bad little girl. Run along to Papa and thank him."

"You leave this room," broke in Mr. Beale. "And let me tell you right now," he cried, glaring into her face, "I never expect anyone to make a fuss over me and I don't care what she does or what her mother does. I give and I don't expect any return. I work my head off and I don't expect any thanks, and I'd have you know that you ought to be locked up for your infernal meddling in other people's

affairs." He began shaking his finger at her, his eyes by now wild and hurt. "I don't want her to thank me, can you get that through your crazy head?"

The little girl darted out of the room, they heard her stumbling quickly up the stairs, her slippers clattering on the bare steps, and finally when she had reached the top they heard a sharp scream, as if she had been holding her breath for a long time and now the cry came down on them, cutting through the room, desperate and lonely. Mrs. Beale ran and Mr. Beale knew that now he was farther away from them than before, he knew that now his wife would fold the little girl tight to her breast and rock and rock, her face pressed gently against the soft long hair, and perhaps all her own loneliness would go as the child's arms went tight around her neck and clung to her for help and love.

"I know you don't mean half you say," said Gizzie, shrinking back from him as if she expected a blow. "My uncle Harry Needles was just like you only he was a musician, he played the flute. It was solid gold and I used to clean it for him with vinegar and ashes."

He pushed her aside impatiently and went back through the house to the kitchen and then out to the garden where the corn was. He pulled ear after ear from the drying stalks, looking up mutely at the roof of his house.

Then he leaned over and pulled up a turnip and began eating it, the sand grinding against his teeth as he chewed. He thought of the additions he could make to his home, the dazzling sun parlor where birds would fly in and out and flowers would grow all winter. That would make it the best house in town. He felt proud of the way the roof sloped down to the clean boards and the roses and vines over the screened windows made it all look inexpressibly quiet and peaceful. The grapes were already formed on the arbor at the side and in the fall the heavy blue clusters would hang rich and full almost to his head. He looked back at the roof and saw an imaginary observatory rise and glitter on the very top. He saw himself inside looking out at dark spaces and whirling planets that revolved in the deep endless dark, gold stars and comets and meteors, all close to his head.

"It's good to be alive on such a day," he called to Mrs. Hoar who came out to water her flowers, holding her starched dress away from the leaky watering can. He walked nearer and nearer, his head slightly bent in respect. "Those asters of yours are the best I've seen this year."

"It's too much responsibility" she replied shortly. "I sometimes think we'll have to give up the garden. There's so much to do in the house and cellar."

"Nonsense," he cried. "You don't know a thing about it. Nothing's better than fine flowers." He stepped over into her garden plot and began walking up and down between the rows of plants, telling her how she could change everything around and improve it vastly, knocking the head of flowers that he did not like or thought were in the wrong places. "Now then, throw out all those vegetables and simply fill this in with flowers."

It seemed to him that she answered tartly. She turned her back and pulled up a weed, the wind swinging her skirts round her legs tightly. Then she walked up to the house, her weight going over on her right side, the crazy blue dust cap flapping its ends in her neck. He felt disgust run through his gums and out on his mouth. He stepped back into his own yard, certain now that his wife had done something to offend her, and then he thought of his mother who was friends with everyone in the town, who went where the sick were, who sent large loaves of bread to the poor and always gave largely when a family was burned out or had sickness. He stared at the sickly bushes in the side yard and he remembered vividly his daughter scuttling behind one of them when she saw him coming, then crouching, her eyes closed, a small beaver hat set on top of her fair hair. That one time he had been overcome by her abject, mute

cowardice and had passed by, but other times when she considered herself hidden from him he would force her out to stand before her maker.

The wind raised up his hat and he reflected that the winds and storms of God could lay waste to the land and the fury of waters could wash everything away, all traces of homes and gardens and miserable lives. He felt as if he had been struck over the head with a mallet and as if the shock went down to his toes. Now a deep murmur of thankfulness went all through him and he heard himself thanking God for his child, his wife, for his home that he loved and the safety and warmth inside. He rushed in. "The fact of the matter is, with all our faults the United States is the greatest nation the world has ever seen. We stand above them all. We stand for democracy, right thinking, for right living, decent living, and we live for the next generation, that's our religion, that's our whole life, the next generation that is to make humanity better, leave it with higher ideals and hopes, a bigger conception of life than we have ever known. . . ."

"I know it," said Gizzie, holding up a knife covered with snowy lard, "I know right thinking is everything. Now, Mr. Wilgrub got cured of seizures, he had them every time Mrs. went to Milwaukee and he was cured with Christian Science and Theosophy."

"I've practiced all those religions all my life. There's good in all religion. But the important thing is to live up to the constitution of the United States."

"That's just what Uncle Harry Needles was always saying, every time it'd come night he'd begin and if I'm educated at all I owe it to my Uncle Harry because he was the smartest in books of any in our town, they all said so and he had things in the paper and . . ."

Mrs. Beale moved into the kitchen, her face stiff and remote as if she were far away.

"Got toothache?" he asked.

She shook her head and then shuffled away in her soft slippers. He remembered her bright face above the set of furs he had given her, the eyes as he handed over all his money to her. She could have anything he had, he would save her in a fire or a wreck, he would always take care of her and he had already given his life to her, first to his mother and sisters and then to his wife, he had sacrificed himself from the time he could remember to a pack of ungrateful women who were always at his heels. He took the whetstone out and spit on it. Then he began sharpening his knife blade.

"Now it's on," said Gizzie, but he did not look up. "Better eat while it's hot," she said but he paid no attention. Finally he went into the dining room but his wife was not

there in her place. He started to shout for her wildly and then went to the window instead and jerked up the window shade, letting it roll to the top with a bang and then flop over the roller, winding the pull tightly. He turned around and faced the table under the large bright shade that made the cloth dazzling white and the plates with their gold bands shine and gleam. He saw the pickles in a fluted glass dish with sprays of flowers and he leaned over and took one, hiding it when Gizzie came in.

"Ain't you down yet?" she asked. "Where's Mrs. at?" She went off through the house on her squeaking shoes.

He paced heavily so that his wife in the room above would know that he wasn't eating, that he couldn't eat if she wasn't there to hand him things and talk. He wondered about his child. "She'll have to be a teacher," he thought, "no one will want to marry her." But a teacher would know how to change the next generation, make it better, nobler. He felt the sweat stand out on him as he thought of his girl leaving a spiritual mark on everyone.

"Do you want gravy, Mr?"

He turned to Gizzie. "When I take a day off from the store I expect to be entertained, I expect to have a little consideration shown me and look at this!" He waved his hands over the loaded table and the empty chairs.

His heart felt so sore and open that he could not speak. Then he heard Gizzie snuffle and her squeaking boots trod back to the kitchen. He remembered the day his father took him to see Dick Bacon's sick bull. He could see the mud, the flies stuck in it and circling above, singing like hornets. Home in the wagon, buckwheat cakes for supper, a lamp in the center of the table. He bent his head lower. "Pass the bread, if you please." Plates piled with bread white as snow, platter heaped with hot sausages, his father saying the blessing, freckles on his mother's hand seen through eyelashes in the lamplight, in the peace, amen.

(*Interval*)

1

In the night Mrs. Beale got up and went to the open window. She leaned out and smelled the cool dark air, she felt as if she were wandering under the trees down there in the dark garden with face lifted and head empty, heart empty, all young and happy. Tears started to her eyes and she said to herself sternly, "I am not unhappy. I am a wife and mother. I am respected in town wherever I go."

But she saw the Mrs. Beale who had stood by the open window thinking of her baby that was not born yet, she saw that Mrs. Beale as clear as day. She had on a wrapper with

pansies in it and her hair was in a bang just above her brows and done in a knot at the back. Below that pale brown hair was the face which looked as if it was all open with wonder and large, inarticulate understanding and anticipation. She saw it all, the sun on everything, the dog licking her puppies all over, and she saw the warmth and understanding that had streamed out of her to the dog, the garden, as if it had been something tangible. She could see it streaming from her eyes, her arms, her whole body. It went into the small fruit trees just coming into bloom, it seemed to blaze down on the ground and fertilize it and make it thick and sharp with green sprouts, and it seemed to be making the blossoms on the trees open out.

That day she had thought of all the dogs and cats and lambs just born into the spring-world, all the colts and calves and chickens and pigs, all the blossoms being born from buds and the buds from stems and seeds. She seemed to strain up out of her pansy robe, out of herself toward everything growing and expanding, as if this was a moment she would never forget and she had closed her eyes as if it should be even more important, more sharp, since she was never going to forget any of it all her life. It had seemed easy to her that day to go into the warm garden, or to drop down on the earth in the sun, and while those

buds were opening and the dog was licking her puppies to let her child be born. She remembered the way she had sank back in her chair at the thought, trying to experience it, head back, feet stretched out, toes stretched. She had smiled mysteriously, her eyes very large and glittering, and her hands had fallen open on her lap.

"Where's the hammer," Mr. Beale had cried from the cellar, and she had called back gently, "I think it's in the kitchen drawer, dear." And then he had appeared, "Where did you hide that confounded hammer anyway? I wish you'd get some system and order about you." She could see the long gray cobweb hanging off the end of his glasses. His lips had trembled, his breath coming through clenched teeth.

Plate of meat. Dish of sauce. Dish of potatoes. Plate of bread. Tablecloth clean on Sunday. Napkins clean on Wednesday and Sunday. Bed of petunias. Jack Miller passing in new car. Mrs. Peppen watering grass. Two sisters from the Sacred Heart passing in black robes.

"Women like that should be shot."

Would God punish a woman who married someone she didn't really love? Would He wait until she got along in years and then deal some dreadful blow? Oh, that day in her pansy dressing gown with her hands fallen

open on her knees, her baby in her, *in her*, she had thought of the cemetery in winter, she had seen her mother with a velvet band around her neck and a coffee cup in her hand. If a woman did the best she knew how, if she was brave in childbirth and endured all of it, would that be paying God back for the wickedness she had done? If she endured it all without a shriek or a moan would God overlook her not loving her husband?

"They are a menace to all right thinking men and women. Such women should be beaten in the streets. What good are we as human beings if we can't raise children and leave the world better than when we came into it. All through the history of mankind these women have been a menace to the home, to biology, to sociology and to the real purpose in living. It's a serious question and one that is beginning to stir the minds of men all over the globe."

She had put her face in her hands and looked out, her eyes wide and bright. She had made a soft sound in her throat as a man went by leading a little child. She saw her own child and thought of the miracle of having it out in the world, of placing it in a chair, running toward it with arms out, catching it up while its gold curls shook over its happy pink face, watching it stoop uncertainly to pick up a speckled hen's feather from the path.

"Aaaaah, there he goes, the dirty thief to charge me twelve dollars for that job of cleaning. I'll let every tooth in my head rot and fall out before I go to him again to be robbed. . . . Oh, well, be a thief in this world and you'll be rewarded, you'll get the good things of life, everyone will smile at you if you're only thief enough. . . ."

She had struggled up out of her chair, her nose twisting idiotically, her hand on her throat. She had looked startled and anguished, as if she felt she were swaying dangerously and would eventually hit the floor. "Well, anyway, I feel happy to-day."

"You're always happy when you don't have to see much of me."

"That's not true, that's a lie. I love you. It's a lie. I love you. That's a lie, that's a lie." Her voice was low and hard. "Lie," she said with a heavy thick tongue.

She started upstairs, taking them slowly, Mr. Beale following, begging to do something, asking if he should call the doctor, Gizzie, Mrs. Hoar, asking if she didn't want some ice cream or if he couldn't get a rig and take her riding out to the point where she had such a good time that Sunday after they were married. He had shaken the sleeve of her dressing gown, twisted it in his fingers, pulled it, demanding that she tell him what was the matter, what he should get, swearing he would do

anything in the world for her if she would only tell him what to do, what she wanted, what had made her so sick.

She had sat down in the same chair by the window, her lips shut tight, fear and nausea all through her. Then she had looked into his face, he was so frightened, his hands on her, his mouth twisted, and he had put on his glasses so that he could see her better.

"I'm nothing but a toad!" she cried. "I'm a snake. Oh, I want to come out, I want to drop off my skin, Oh, you, too, your snake skin, Oh, God in heaven, don't forget me. . . ." Then she had unbuttoned her slipper and rubbed her swollen ankle.

Mr. Beale shot toward the door. He did not turn as he spoke but kept his hurt face away from her. "It's a shame I don't gamble and drink and use bad language. That's the way to make a woman love you—that's the way to succeed in this world, be a thief and a devil and disobey every one of our Lord's commandments."

She had made herself lie back, saying that no one in the world was completely happy and that it was better to have a man who was steady, didn't smoke or drink or carry on, than to be dragging around after someone you would love insanely for a year, say, and then cease to love. Wouldn't it be better to live quietly, wouldn't God at least respect a

woman more who took a man who was good and honest and had a fair business than to live wildly in the flesh? And yet she felt guilty. Her ears roared as if tides of blood were rising and she managed to get out of her room and down the stairs, calling wildly to her husband who came running, his glasses glittering on his vest, his gold chain glittering.

She closed her eyes and threw herself against him as if he were a wall, and cried, "I love you—I love you—I love you." Then she began to moan as if all those dreams that had settled in her since childhood had come back, the face and body of the ideal man who was to love her, the one made for her in heaven, the one they had ordered her to wait for, wait, wait. "Oh, help me," she cried and turned her eyes to him in panic and dark remorse. "Oh, tell me anything that's true." He had to get the doctor.

The dark still air blew onto Mrs. Beale and she stared into it as if it held all her life that had gone, as if the Mrs. Beale in a pansy robe was somewhere in the dark, imperishable but unknown, unrelated to her now, and as if that child in the womb, so perfect, so loved, was also unknown, unrelated to the little girl she loved and who had cried herself to sleep in the other room.

In all the dark houses all over the world, she thought, are people who once were happy,

who knew a day that was above all days, and now they can't remember how they felt or what it meant or what it was for. I am Mrs. Beale, a wife and mother, respected by the doctor, the dentist, our butcher, in the electric office, in the gas, general coal, trusted by the egg man, the vegetable man and in the fruit market. I can charge wherever I please. Our credit is good. No one needs to know what I think or feel about anything. That is my own. I can nod, no matter what is said, whether I believe or not, and know in myself what I really believe and I don't care what anyone in the world believes just so I can have peace and quiet and no one drips on the clean cloth. I will ask Mrs. Grouse to-morrow how her hip is and if they have to operate.

But by the time she got back into bed all her emotion had slipped out of her, she felt vacant and strange but not unhappy. There was nothing in the world to be tragic about, she thought. People were as pleasant as they knew how to be, and yet she had a queer image in front of her eyes that would not go. It was a dog rooting in autumn leaves, smelling with his moist warm nose over dry, imperishable leaves, each different, each vivid and crisp, and it was so sharp in her mind that tears came in her eyes but she felt no sadness, only a little shudder in her arms because she

understood so little and didn't begin to know the why of anything on earth.

2

Everyone in town thought it was remarkable that the little Beale girl should pass in school each year because from reports she never answered a question that was asked her, never worked her problems at the board, and when the examination papers were passed she always sat staring idiotically at the teacher who was writing the problems in big clear figures in front of them all. The little girl simply sat with her hands clasped in front of her on her desk and looked helpless, as if she knew she couldn't even work them wrong. She would have been sent to an institution some said if it weren't that her parents were of good family and well read, they took all the magazines and had beautiful flowers. The Hoars told everyone that the little Beale was passed from year to year because of the gorgeous bouquets she took to her teachers.

In any event Mrs. Beale was always overcome with pity and anger whenever she paid a visit to the school. Once she was humiliated by watching a spelling down and witnessing her daughter being left until the last when they were choosing sides and the teacher hurriedly pushing her over to the group where she be-

longed, the indignant leader being unwilling to call her name. The child stared at them all as if she had no notion of where she was and when she was called on for a word she simply opened her mouth but no sounds came out and her eyes got bigger and bigger. Another time Mrs. Beale saw her snowballed in the school-yard, pelted with snow, and yet unwilling to run, afraid to run perhaps, and walking sedately along, pretending to be oblivious, her large eyes straight ahead, her mouth twitching.

"She's not like any of my family," said Mr. Beale.

"Honest," Gizzie Needles told her friends, "that little kid gets my goat. They give her the world and all and she just stares at them stupid. Can't even tell time and her Papa bought her a watch and all for having the measles."

Year by year she rose in school, through the grades, into the high school finally, and each year she seemed more death-like, her eyes strained far open and her mouth drawn small and firm. They sent her off to college, "far away" was all she could reply when they asked her where she wanted to go so they made it five hundred miles from home. "Don't it beat all what they'll take in now," Gizzie Needles said, "and she's begging to come home. I always read her letters early in the morning before they're down. She's begging."

Now Dorrit thanked her father for all the gifts he had ever given her, for the net dress, the little watch, everything, she thanked him with words that seemed to pitch out of her and burn and crack. She thanked her mother, she thanked her for bringing her into the world, she begged them both to let her come home. In every sentence was love, love, something about the fires and pains of love as if she had been torn out of their bodies and lay dying.

"If she comes back she'll be an invalid," said Mr. Beale. "No, I set my foot down. She has to stay. No more baby work."

But they wrote back to her with strange fire, meeting her love, her loneliness, her despair, but telling her she must stay and then after a time she began sending them pictures in her letters, great colored flowers that would never rot, flowers that were full of life that never changed. Mrs. Beale pinned them up in her clothes closet, she didn't want Gizzie to see. Mr. Beale looked at them privately and shook his head, he knew that if he said they were good he would be partial and dishonest.

They didn't let her come home for Christmas, it would be too far and business was bad, but she could come for the summer. They met her at the station. She got off the train gravely, her eyes filling with tears as she looked around her. She had on a small hat with a white

rose over the ear, a soft rose that pressed her fair hair, and she wore a strange dress of no particular period, all folds and much too long, to the ankles, and everyone in town had hers short.

"Good heavens, girl," cried Mr. Beale, his hands nervous and his face screwed up.

"What?" she asked.

"Why, nothing," he said, laughing, "nothing but that confounded dress of yours."

"Oh," she said.

Mrs. Beale began twisting up her nose and mouth and rolling her eyes around, even sighing in little gasps. She took hold of her daughter and kissed her many times. Then her head suddenly began to shake as if she couldn't help it and the cords of her mouth and neck stretched tight and her eyes went shut. She had a crisp new handkerchief in her gloved hands with a B done in blue.

"Why, Mama," said Mr. Beale reproachfully because the station platform was crowded.

But his daughter was facing her mother as if her hands were tied, saying over and over, "Mama! Mama! Mama!" and yet not touching her mother or seeming to see her. The next day Gizzie Needles told over town that Dorrit was still a freak but she answered now when she was spoken to and was improved in small ways. "But she's got the funniest dresses

you ever see. I looked over everything last night. They went to the show."

The first morning at home Dorrit went up to her father with mysterious pride and dignity. "I have something to show you." The tight-waisted dress with the full skirt made her look frail and she had a bunch of field daisies pinned on her. Her hands were very white and she held them out from her, open. Her head was back and her large eyes were looking deeply into his.

He got up laughing. "Well, let's have it over with," he said good-naturedly.

She led him to her room and then stood in the middle of it, her face flushed and proud, the mysterious smile on her lips, her lids almost closed.

Mr. Beale looked around nervously. "Well, what is it?" he asked, his voice cracking. "What have you got to show me? I'm busy this morning."

"Can't you see?" She was laughing now, little gay laughs that darted out of her and she kept moving her hands toward the walls.

He put on his glasses and looked around. "I can't see a thing except these walls that need going over."

"How do you like the pictures?" She dropped down on the bed as if her legs had given out, her hands clasped between her knees and her whole body rigid.

He went up to them and took off his glasses. "Why, they seem to be all right. I never could get much excited over painting, though. Where did you get them?"

"I made them."

He looked at her with his mouth fallen open.

"I painted them."

The walls were covered with pictures of happy families, the father, the mother, and the child, painted in bright sun among flowers and birds, painted with love in their faces and hands, love in their hands and arms that touched each other, and all three in some strange way were entirely separate and yet interchangeable, as if they understand each other's parts, as if they understood so well that they need not speak. And here there was no love withheld, it was all over them, it was part of the bright light that came from their flesh and their deep happy eyes. Each was a picture of a family, but a family that had never appeared upon the earth.

He sat down heavily beside her. She did not look up at him, but stared at her shoe, moisture coming out on her forehead. He straightened his shoulders and set his tie right. "Well, I'm no judge," he said in a high voice, "but I do know one thing. A good painter has to know the laws governing every move. He has to learn them and stick to them. He has to know anatomy. He has to know how

to paint his object so that it looks like the real thing and if the real thing was put beside it the painting would look more real. This is done through a knowledge of law. Just as the universe is run and governed by law, created through law, so is painting and everything else. Look at the laws of the United States. What is there to compare with them in the whole history of mankind? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. We are unique. We stand to-day a unique and powerful people. We have banished liquor and brought the home up to where it now stands. The fact of the matter is there is no nation that has ever attained the dignity, the power, and the glory of the United States of America. Your ancestors made this country what it is and remember that as long as you live. Your blood is in these institutions, the blood of your ancestors is there. When this was a vast wilderness . . ."

Mrs. Beale came in nervously. "Aren't they lovely?"

"When this was a vast wilderness your ancestors came here and with their brains and their bodies they created a world that was absolutely new in every feature and law, they startled the rest of mankind, they . . ."

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Beale, "aren't they good?"

"Well, if she's going to paint she has to know the laws." He began pacing. "The

thing to do is to get a safe profession and then go into this when you're sure of taking care of yourself some other way. Now, this is fair enough. You teach for five years and make a success of it and we'll let you take up painting and give it a try. Of course, if you were a genius that would be different, but as it is you'd better make a success in some other field first."

Mrs. Beale pushed the moist hair back from the girl's forehead. "I think Papa's being fair enough, don't you?" she asked gently.

"Now if you could ever get to where you could make pictures for magazines or advertisements," he began.

"I wouldn't do that."

"Well, listen to me, young lady, if your painting is any good you ought to get money for it and let people see it."

She sat with her face lowered in that habit of childhood, the hair falling over her eyes and her hands clasped tightly. All of a sudden they heard Irma Hoar call her mother into the house.

"Aaaah, those two are enough to turn a man's stomach. No, you learn how to support yourself before you do any funny stuff like this. Well, I said they were all right but I don't know a thing about it. What do your teachers in college think?"

"They don't like them." She raised her head and stared straight into his eyes.

He stopped short. "I suppose you think they don't know anything. Well, let me tell you a thing or two. They've learned the ropes, they know the laws, and don't you suppose they can tell the difference between a painting that shows promise and one that doesn't?"

"No," she said shortly, her cheeks red as fire and water standing out around her mouth.

"Well, what are we sending you to school for? What do you think you're there for if it isn't to study and learn from them?"

"Let's stop right now," said Mrs. Beale. "Let's forget all about it and if you'll tell me what you want for dinner, Dorrit, I'll have Gizzie tend to it. She likes to know ahead."

"I intend to know why you think we're sending you to college?" He stood squarely in front of her but she did not look at him or answer. "You listen to me for once in your life, young lady. I want you to learn how to support yourself and I want you to make a better job of it than I've been able to do. It's time you braced up and faced the world the way the Lord intended us all to do, with courage and backbone. At this rate you're going to be just like Irma. . . . Oh, Good Lord, what's the use of talking? What's the

use of anything?" He leaned toward one of her paintings. "Is that a dog or a bush?"

She stood up on the bed backed against the wall, her arms, her skirt covering the picture. Her white hands were opened above her head and she looked up at the ceiling, her mouth drawn small, her eyes large again, strained far open.

"You always liked apple dumplings and we've got lots of cream to-day," said Mrs. Beale, swallowing and choking. "Let's make up our minds we're going to be happy even if everything isn't just as we want it," she said very low.

Mr. Beale closed his eyes as if they hurt him. "You think there's a lot of people in this world that don't know anything and that you're too good to tell them anything. You're on the wrong track. People aren't the fools that you think. And, Good Lord, if you can't paint a dog so that it looks like a dog and not like a bush, I'd say you weren't much of a painter and never would be. You've got a lot to learn, my young lady, and some day when your father is dead you may think things over and learn to respect him and decide that you could have learned something from him after all.

Dorrit began to shake her head. She shook it steadily, her lips pressed in a white line and the wet strings of hair beating her cheeks. Then she put her hands over her face and stood

motionless in front of them, one side of her skirt hem loose and dipping down, a small run in her stocking. Mr. Beale drew the wind up through his nostrils in a tremendous snort and left the room.

"Come, sit down, relax. Why, Dorrit, nothing is as bad as you think," said Mrs. Beale. "You know what good dumplings Gizzie makes and if you can't think of anything you'd rather have I'll go down and tell her it's to be dumplings. Why, Dorrit, why, my little girl," she said as she saw her daughter sag and fall down on the bed, her arms out limp, her hair tumbling down in her neck.

"I thought he'd understand," she said, pressing her white hands on her cheeks. "They mean something. I thought he'd see. Oh, I painted them for both of you. I thought—Oh, I thought——"

"Everything's different from what we think," said Mrs. Beale and stroked her daughter's hair. "Nothing is like what's in our heads."

"Nothing," she choked out.

"I know Papa's unreasonable but he knows the world better than you do and he's lived longer than you have. I think you ought to show him some consideration and make him feel that you respect his opinions even if they are different. Why should *you* be right? Nobody's right, maybe, and it doesn't matter anyway." Her head was thick with memories

but they turned about in her so fast that she couldn't examine them. "Listen, dear, we must tell Gizzie what we want for dinner because if dinner is late then the dishes will be late and that will spoil the whole day."

"But what are they for?" cried Dorrit. "Why did I paint them and what do they mean and what difference does it make what they mean and who cares anyway—you're right—who cares. Well, I'll tell you one thing," she said very low, sitting up and wiping her eyes. "I care—do you hear me—I care and I don't care if I'm the only one in the world that does—I *care!*" she shouted.

"All right," said Mrs. Beale gently, "but don't wake the neighbors. You'll have them all wondering what kind of home this is and what sort of people we are." She clasped her brooch that had come loose. "I think you're getting to be a great deal like your father," she said reproachfully and went out.

3

On the following Sunday Mr. Beale walked with his wife and daughter over to the cove across the river. They went slowly, cars passing and leaving dust on their shoes and faces, they followed the small paths through the woods where birds whipped out of low bushes and flew to the branches above. Mr. Beale

protected them from a large snake that hissed under some leaves. He raised his stick to strike and then in good humor let it slide away.

"You thought best not to kill it?" timidly suggested Mrs. Beale, not wanting to criticize but thinking how she would fear those dry leaves on the path and the small sounds from the deep grass all around.

"If we mind our own business we won't get hurt." He went on ahead, his hat off, bending to go under the branches and then holding them back for his women.

"Finest place in the world for a nice house," he finally said. "How's this for a garden?" He pointed to masses of pink flowers in the swamp ahead.

"Oh!" they cried and plunged forward not noticing that their heels were enormous with mud and grass and bits of dried dung.

Birds sang unexpectedly and made soft sounds among the leaves as they flew out and rose, descended sharply, lighting to preen, swinging themselves on a tender branch. The Beales wandered over to the edge of the water and sat down in silence, lifting their heads. Mr. Beale threw his hat down with force and took in long noisy breaths of the cool shady air. Mrs. Beale was smiling and vacant, her face all light gold and her soft eyes on the moving water. She broke little twigs in her fingers and made houses with the pieces. She

hummed as she built and once she gave her daughter a little pinch on the ankle.

Dorrit looked at a young leaf that was spread on her knee. "I'm going to wade," she announced.

Mr. Beale flushed. He saw both his women in the stream holding their dresses above white indecent thighs, laughing foolishly, exposed and ridiculous. "Don't be a fool. Sit down like a decent girl with your parents."

Mrs. Beale leaned toward Dorrit and put her arm over her shoulder, her wedding ring flashing, and whispered something. Then the two hung together in sun, their faces set sadly on something far off, beyond him, out of his reach. Their feet lay crossed girlishly in the grass. The girl, her head on her mother's shoulder, seemed to fit into the curves, the softness of her side.

He walked away into the woods, cutting a young green twig and chewing it, stepping high over violets and young grass. It seemed incredible that he had ever been worried, irritated or angry with any one. He made plans for his observatory. He would buy his wife something nice and then be satisfied when she didn't make a big fuss over him. He would buy his daughter something. He'd like to get a fur coat. He could see her in grey squirrel with a velvet cap and a little soft thing on top. He would never be angry with them any more for

not being impulsive with him and warm and glowing, even though his way was right.

No, all people had their rights, all people were free and no one should put out a hand to hold them. He would give Mrs. Hoar something nice, after all she was a mother. One night, in the farm house, in the darkness, in his bed—Oh, the pure winter air that had poured over him then, the pure sheets, white and cold, the light soft blankets above, his brothers snickering over Minnie Predd. "God intended all of us to be happy like this all the time. It's our own fault when we let our ugly dispositions get the better of us."

He hurried back to where they sat. He tried to join them, touch them in some way, enter their lives. "This is what I call having a good time," he began in a loud voice. "It's the only decent, right minded way of doing it. Some men have to smoke or drink or run wild with women to have a good time but this is what I call simply ideal in every feature. And isn't it a lot better than ripping through the country in a car, running people down, making a big noise?" But he did not stop for them to reply. "Isn't this doing the world a whole lot more good? Now take tobacco. Tobacco has done more harm in the world than anything else except liquor and wrong thinking. Liquor is the curse of humankind. It turns men into dirty beasts with no respect for women, no

respect for civilization, and no respect for the conscience that has been put into us by God and kept in us through generations of honest, decent, Anglo-Saxon people. The time was when we were all as savages, and some of us are still in that state or not far from it, but today we stand in the most glorious period of mankind, the most fruitful period the world has ever known. Just the conception of the League of Nations shows that. America today is the most important nation in the world. She won the war, she has the money, the ideas, the ideals, and the courage to spread them far and wide, all over the planet to the dirty foreigners, even, with their false ideas about women and the home and government, on to the stars." He leaned back against a tree, his eyes damp and fixed. "The fact of the matter is, we are a great people, the greatest the world has ever known. No influence equal to ours has ever come upon this globe in the history of the race. No country . . ."

Dorrit jumped up, her head thrust forward, and started away into the woods.

"Where are you going?"

"Away!" she cried.

He went after her. "Come back here!"

"I won't!"

"I said to come back!" He plunged through the bushes until he came up with her. He caught her arm and jerked her around, facing

him. Her eyes were large and wild, she was stiff with resistance, she bared her teeth in his face and pressed her head closer to him, straining up from her shoulders, then panting, unable to form words with those frozen lips.

"Have you gone crazy?"

"You've ruined my mother's life."

He shook her slender wrists and his eyes half closed. He could see the crumpled organdy dress with ruffles and a dragging soiled sash. Hair in strings. Breasts rising and falling as she gasped and knocked herself against a tree. He heard his wife coming through the grass. The silence, the sun in broad streams, a bird singing. Outside his rage he saw the slender girl, her teeth chattering now like an idiot, her hair falling in the old fashion over wrists and face. The bushes parted.

"Oh, can't we have peace?"

"No!" cried Dorrit. Her feet bruised the ferns as she ground her heels in to hold herself up.

"What are you quarreling about anyway?"

"Our quarrels are over for good!"

"What do you mean?"

The girl backed off, not looking at either of them, her face turned toward the trees in sun, the dazzling patch of yellow flowers in the distance. "I'm never coming home any more. I'm never going to see you again." She held her chin grimly.

"Damn your foolish talk anyway. Don't you owe anything to your parents? Isn't it about time you repaid them for their worries with a little kindness and consideration? Isn't it up to you to live for them instead of for yourself?"

"Who do *you* live for?"

"My family—society—the next generation."

"Well, you're a fool to do it."

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Beale. "I won't go into that line of thought. It doesn't do anyone any good. Stop now, when I say so."

"I'll say it a million times. Anybody's a fool to live for a society as rotten as this and for homes that are rottener. What business have you to live with my mother? You're not her husband or my father, you've never loved her as she deserves, you've never spent a real hour together in your whole lives and you never will. Don't I know the quarrels that went on before I was born, and they're going to go on until I take her away from you. Yes, I'm going to take her far away and love her as she deserves so that she can be happy for once. Oh, the nights I spent, the dreams, the . . ."

"Some time your father will be dead," said Mr. Beale.

"Good! Die—*now!*"

"I'll be—dead." He turned to his wife who was holding her skirts above her high laced

boots that were flecked with damp. She evaded his startled hurt look and kicked up a bit of sod with her toe.

"Don't expect me to enter this," she said coldly. "I've tried to please every one and keep peace. I've tried all my life to have it quiet and smooth and I can't do a thing with either of you, there's no handling you. . . ."

"Yes," said Dorrit, "he'll always be a tyrant and you might as well admit it."

Mr. Beale looked quickly at his wife as if he expected her voice to suddenly rise in his defense, to shame his daughter, to remind her of the things he had done, the way he had sacrificed, the way he had toiled for them all his life and only once ordered a tailored suit for fifty-five dollars. Those eyes of his wife's should look at him now in trust and respect, they should be lost in him, her whole being lost, his prisoner forever. But she kept pushing her toe under the bit of sod and her head was shaking as if she were trying hard to hold back something. He could not speak. He waited for those words that would justify his life. He waited for his wife to prove that she was loyal, as if now she would be proving it to the whole world.

"Well," Mrs. Beale finally said looking sadly around her and dropping her skirts on the wet weeds, "now that we're all thoroughly miser-

able we might as well go home. All of our happy times end this way."

He went on ahead, seeing nothing, his legs guiding him without his mind around the soft mud slides and ooze pockets. He heard their damp feet squeak in their shoes. Then Dorrit spoke in a strained desperate voice. "Why do you always have to play safe, Mama? Can't you choose between us? Oh, my God, how can I make you see the evil you're doing in staying with him."

4

At home, when his daughter came down with her suitcase, Mr. Beale got back his voice. The sight of her there defying him gave him new strength and courage. He ordered her to stop. She dropped the suitcase and looked at him from a stony face, her arms stiff at her sides, the air of a stranger about her high heels and street suit, her creased gloves. Even her scarf looked new and different and he had bought it for her, bought her everything, shoes, suit, hat, and all that was under. This angered him all the more.

"*Now* what are you trying to do?"

Her expression did not change from the dark impersonal stare. Her mother sat near the table mending a long run in a white silk stocking. She did not look up and she sat as if her ears were plugged shut and she was listening

small and nestling, walking now with little trip steps, the scarlet cape held tightly in front, her black hair in a long smooth coil on her white neck and in front smooth and dark over her brow. When she saw them all looking at her she gave a little laugh and huddled in her cape for a moment until Alan stepped forward and Homer and Guy. Each held a part of it for her like scarlet wings and she stood still with her head back and her large eyes looking far away. Then she stepped forward, her slim gown tight fitting, tight over breast and hip and knee. They seemed to flow up behind her and support her to the couch so that her tiny soft feet barely touched the floor.

"That dumb-bell Roxie," said Arlo, drinking another.

But Hugo would not move toward Roxie, neither would Harlan or John or Frank. Gloria smiled and lighted a cigarette. Mary asked where the dressing room was, she had forgotten, she said, and it seemed a long time since she came. Donna stared at the dark woman. The little laugh fluttered through the room, the white raised hands, "No, no, no, you mustn't touch me, no, no."

Donna sat down. She turned her face away from Roxie. Would Alan remember the kiss she had given him, would Harlan remember, would they all remember and leave their wives and sweethearts to go alone for eternity, to

sit in contemplation of that instant when she had moved over the floor to them, angels springing out of her, her eyes deep in their eyes, that sharp soft movement upwards when all in her went to each. Tears sprang to her eyes and she made a little sound in her throat, twisting to the side in her chair, holding one wrist tightly and pressing her lips together. She jumped out of her chair and pushed it over backwards. Then she rushed to Alan, shook him with all her strength, crying in her throat. "You mustn't forget. You must remember and be changed forever." She let go of him and looked into his eyes, "Me, *me*," she said sharply.

"At last she's tight," someone cried. "How about some chess. Damn dull."

She saw Arlo standing by the punch bowl filling his glass. "Arlo, Arlo," she cried and rushed to him, "it hurts me loving everyone the same, it's straining me and breaking me open, I can't hold it—each the same, as if its done up in packages the same size." She put her hands up, her eyes stretched wide. "Arlo, save me."

"You're passing out," he whispered. "I told you not to drink it all at once. Go on and sit down for a minute."

"They're all walking through me—they're walking in me forever—they don't stop—they don't see me—Oh, when I kissed them, couldn't

you have minded?" She turned to the room, blinking now, a large spot on the front of her skirt. "You're all inside me," she said, a peculiar smile on her face. She wet her lips. "All of you in me, never leave me, this till my death."

"You'd better try to vomit," said Arlo in her ear. "Come on and try. You're making a fool of yourself. They're all laughing." He tried to lead her away, but when his fingers touched her hand she began to smile and she rubbed her cheek against his. "Lead me now," she said, "as if I don't know where to go, lead me off, lead me . . ."

She sank down, down on the bed, far down as if it were close to the floor, and she heard a door close and it was dark and still, a ray of gold under the door. Her head pitched back and forth on her shoulders and then the bed rose up higher and she clung to keep from falling off at the side. She slipped off pleasantly on the floor, her face against the scarlet cape, and suddenly she was horribly sick and her mouth was wrenching open on little Roxie's evening cloak. Arlo helped her back, but not a kiss. Arlo cleaned off the cape. "She'll never know." Then darkness.

"Frankie and Johnnie were lovers,
God, how they could love."

The door opened. Alan, Uncle Tom, Hugo,

were all squeaking around the bed, all asking her how she was, what she wanted, if she'd like some more rum—"For God's sake, are you crazy?" She felt warm kisses on her head, hands on her hands. "Get a wet cloth. Get a bromo."

"When I open my eyes I get dizzy."

They laid the ice cloth over her hot head and closed eyes. "I want Arlo to put it on," she said. They tiptoed out on their large shoes. The door was closed again. Stillness.

"But she got her man,
'Cause he done her wrong . . ."

The music swung near and far, feet swam near and far on the dull soft floor. The door jarred open so that gold light sifted in, sound poured in as if it were swinging from far off to near, then far away, almost out. She heard Arlo's voice, the tone he used only for her, the strained, intolerable voice he used once with her when he loved her, "You're beautiful—Say, damn it, listen to me, I'm talking to you—you're beautiful."

She heard the sound of Arlo's feet on the floor pushing against soft small feet.

"Fix my slipper, Arlo," said Roxie. "Heeeeee. You know, I'm physically drunk but intellectually sober. I'm physically drunk but intellectually sober, I said, fellows. I'm intellec-

tually sober, isn't that what I said, and physically drunk. No, I didn't say intellectually drunk and physically sober, I said physically drunk and intellectually sober, my feet may be drunk, I said, but my head's sober, that's what I said, fellows, my mind's not drunk."

"*Mind*," hollered someone as the feet swung past the door.

"I detest women without mentality," said Roxie.

"You're beautiful—you've got to listen to me—you're beautiful——"

> "She got her man,
> 'Cause he done her wrong . . ."

"You're *beautiful!*" Arlo's voice was like the shriek of a small boy overwhelmed and borne down, the body he loved agonizingly beyond his hand, out of his sight forever and ever.

"Arlo, Arlo," she called, "you can call her beautiful—I can just stand it—go on—I——"

She didn't know whether he had stopped talking or whether it was the echo of his voice in her head, the memory of that time when he had used the same tone with her, when "beautiful" had come out with that frightened, strained scream as if he couldn't bear it. He had caught hold of her with his cold awkward hands like something wild and hurt that has fought its way home.

"Oh, roll me over gently,
Roll me over slow. . . ."

The door was pulled shut. Darkness again, thick darkness and stillness, but outside the room the sound of murmuring and scraping feet and sudden sharp cries, sounds rocking soft and loud against the wall of the room but never entering.

"You've killed your man
'Cause he done you wrong."

Now his voice and eyes wandered in her, slipping through her veins, twisting and following. Now all his body was melted and flowing through her, she tasted him between her teeth, he was in her fingers, behind her eyes, slowly, slowly he rose up in her throat and she raised herself up, pressing her hands against her neck. Now she had just strength enough to breathe, the weight of him in her chest forever and ever, his body her blood, his mind set in her like a jewel, his voice tearing up and down in her.

"What the hell!"

"Why, you're worse than married. . . ."

"What the hell—what the hell——"

"Why, you're . . ."

She remembered the sound of launches coming down the river at home. When her little cats curled up in two chairs and put their

chins on their white paws, it sounded like launches when they purred together. She opened her eyes and watched the light come over the factory next door. As light struck it the stones changed, they grew definite and hard. She watched light strike the big bleak panes and silver them, make the dark roof gleam. Pigeons would rise when the sun came warm and walk proudly on the ledge and pouch on the chimney. She heard Arlo's feet, she felt him beside her. He put his arms around her, his cheek against her breast.

"Do you remember that time in the country when we saw the duck come floating down the little hill to the pond and all her small ones after? First she drank with her head way back, letting it run down, and then they all did exactly the same thing, making big with their feet."

"I don't remember," he said.

"That man in the red sweater was so funny when he gave us the dipper."

"I don't remember."

"If I ran away would you hunt for me?"

"What the hell?"

She took hold of his hand, but it stayed cool and firm and her warm hand merely surrounded it. Now she saw the glitter of frost on the factory roof and the air was frost-air, like soft smoke puffing up from earth. Darkness poured slowly in from the other

room where shades were down. She strained up, brushing back her hair. Her gown had slipped off her white soft shoulder and the gauzy skirt was stretched tightly around her body in a thousand long wrinkles. As she looked at him her face seemed to come out of the grayness new and fresh, her smile came. She pressed his white cheeks.

"Wouldn't you hunt for me a little?"

"I wouldn't miss you enough." A shudder went down him.

"Never mind."

"Damn it, anyway, that's the truth. It's hell for me." He jerked up and went over to the window, his hands deep in his pockets and his shoulders up as if it were cold and nipping.

"I know," she said very low. Her voice sounded deep down beyond tears and groaning and begging. "I never give anyone peace. My hands are always out making everything mine. I don't blame you—God, God."

He swung round sternly and looked into her face. Suddenly he dropped down on the floor, straining his arms around her, pressing his cold face into her warmness. "I want you for my skin, but I won't be so damned weak. I treat you rotten, but I'm not ashamed any more. I don't feel guilty now." He pressed his hands over her bare shoulders. "I feel as if I'd made you."

She pushed her head against his chest, but it was hard and bony and she pulled on his neck with her crossed arms to draw him closer to her, but he kept his head firm, looking down into her eyes. She stopped struggling and gazed back at him. "I'll never mention love, I'll never demand or reproach or ask where you've been or complain. I'll forget myself, I won't think of myself at all, I'll just try to understand you, not me, just *you*."

"You'd better be a great writer instead," he said and smiled.

Tears came into her eyes and she wiped them away with his hand. "I want to live," she said, but he did not look at her, "I don't want to die and write and go insane and blind and deaf and dumb for my characters. I want to be alive, I want to live. . . ."

He shook his head quickly but he saw her staring with that same hope in her face, the dumb, intolerable hope that always brought him down, made a slave of him whether he showed it or not. He felt her dumb waiting, the soft mute body that never accepted his words, the white hands holding his coat. He glanced down at her hands, his coat crushed in them so tightly that the knuckles were white. "You've given me everything," he cut in harshly, "but I don't want to give anything to you. You can't believe that and I can't myself. You've been absolutely generous, good,

and you've trusted me, and you're more beautiful than most of them, but I can't. . . ." His eyes looked out at her frightened, as if they didn't understand. "I'd give anything I possess right now, my soul, my last cent, the clothes off my back, to any beautiful woman I might pass in the street, but not to you and damn it, that's the whole truth." He walked out quickly and closed the door.

The Family

1

THE instant Mr. Beale entered the house Mrs. Beale drew up her right shoulder and blinked three or four times. Then she poured boiling water on the tea and told him dinner was almost ready. The little Beale ran into the garden, her sad startled eyes on the rhubarb, the radishes and onions, the straight rows of flowers. She walked with her hands clasped behind her, looking from right to left stiffly as if she thought she was being watched and must show how honestly she was inspecting every leaf and how great was her appreciation of the garden.

"Come right along in and eat your dinner!"

The little girl swung round, her fingers on her shoulders and marched slowly and gravely up the stone walk to the house. She slid into her chair and tied her napkin round her neck all by herself, looking up at her father and mother between her fallen hair.

Mr. Beale looked straight ahead of him, as if his eyes were seeing something far, far off, as far away as the Baltic Sea or the Indian Ocean, and he held up his knife and fork dripping with gravy. "I try to make everyone happy," he said gruffly, "I try to do good to everyone. I try to think right and talk right and do right. Who ever does anything for me?"

"Please, you're dripping," said Mrs. Beale gently.

"I haven't got a friend anywhere." He couldn't help but remember his mother and the way she held him on her lap once after his brothers had chased him through the timber tract trying to get his watch away from him.

The little Beale stopped eating. She took hold of the red string tie on her sailor suit and stared at the buffet with the rows of tumblers on top and the watermelon picture just above. She seemed to fold up and grow smaller, her lips, her cheeks, shoulders, arms, all but her eyes and they grew fixed and big. She seemed to have stopped breathing and then when her mother bent to serve the pudding she let her finger move up toward her neck, over her cheek to her eye and then her mouth jerked down and she let her head sink to her chest.

Mr. Beale half rose, one hand jammed on his napkin, the other pointing toward his only child. "Now, what are we going to do with

you? You're a coward, you haven't got any digestion, and I don't know what's to become of you." He sank down again and took a piece of bread. "I suppose we'll have to let you grow up into an invalid like Irma Hoar, always hanging to your mother, weak livered and not worth anything at all to humanity."

He pulled out a large white silk handkerchief and began pushing it into his ear. His eyes were far off again and suddenly he said, "We live so our children can do something more than we have, so that they can do better, think better, and be better men and women than we've been, and so they can leave the world better." He turned his sad eyes toward the window, swinging his chair around and shoving his dishes away with his elbow. Over the neat grass plots children were leaping and screaming, tumbling over dogs, tearing at each other's hair ribbons and thrusting out tongues. They began throwing sticks for the dogs to run after and they set up a great screaming when one little girl rolled backwards into a bed of zinnias. Old lady Peppen ran out then with her umbrella and children and dogs galloped off down the cement,

"Those are *children*," he said. "They know enough to get out and play and have a good time while there's a chance.

"There's been a flood in Ohio," said Mrs. Beale.

"There's been a *what* in Rio?"

"A *flood*," she brought out with great effort, all her pleasure gone.

"Well, I can't do anything about it. I'm sorry for all the unfortunate people in the world, but I can't stop the rain or the snow or any of the things that cause human suffering. If I could I'd do it, but I can't . . ."

"Stop, stop, *stop!*" cried Mrs. Beale with both hands pressed over her face. Her hair was arranged in a small vace on top of her head and drawn low on her forehead. Now she was leaning forward against the table, her arms folded in her lap, and her young eyes on the brown glazed teapot. When her husband stopped talking she let her shoulder sink down so that the ruffles on her collar brushed the white lobe of her ear. Her forehead and face grew placid and sweet as if she were thinking of soft white hens in hay or waterfalls of silk displayed on a shining counter. She poured herself another cup of tea, holding the cover with her forefinger. "Gizzie," she called, looking toward the door into the kitchen, "more hot water, please."

Gizzie burst in, setting an old straw hat with a buckle in front on her head. She always wore this hat in serving and kept it on a hook just inside the pantry door where she could jerk it in a hurry.

"Yes, Mrs. Beale," she said and rolled her

dark glossy eyes at Mr. Beale who had turned away from them and was sitting with his head in his hands, his legs far apart. The room seemed full of his breathing. He seemed to be breathing out something that settled and congealed on them until they were small and still under the coating.

"I want you to fill the teapot, Gizzie," said Mrs. Beale faintly.

"Awh, Mr. Beale," said Gizzie and then ran into the kitchen snuffling. "He's the best hearted man in town," she told her friends. "Always bringing a present home, raincoat or something expensive. Mis' Beale is nice, too, but she's too educated or something to make over him and he's gotta be made over. But I stand up for the both of them. It's that little kid that gets me going. They'd be larks if it wasn't for her."

Mrs. Beale drew a long breath as if air were hard to get and she had to draw against a great dark substance or mass that was pressing on her. The little Beale sat with bent head, staring out at her father through her hair, tears glittering on her long fair lashes.

"Did you like the pudding?" asked Mrs. Beale.

"Do I like what?"

"The pudding."

"No," he said, "I don't like anything."

Mrs. Beale jumped up and burst into the

kitchen where Gizzie was standing over the kettle, the teapot in one hand. "Give it to me, Gizzie," she cried as if she were smothering. "Give me the teapot. Oh, I know you think I'm crazy," she said staring into the girl's face, "but I can't help telling someone. I want to roll my eyes round and round and then seize my nose and wind up my face, just as if it's a clock," she cried in horror, shaking so that the teapot lid clattered. "I want my face to strike my death." Then she laughed. "Pour on lots of water," she ordered. But Gizzie couldn't get over it. "You watch Mis' Beale," she told her friends. "There's something out of the ordinary there."

Mrs. Beale took her place again. Mr. Beale put his spoon into his pudding. "It's all right," he said and ate slowly, his head down. Mrs. Beale knew that in a moment he would go to the pantry and pull out an old cook book of his mother's and begin reading over the receipts. "One cup butter, one cup figs, one half ounce raisin juice, seventeen eggs . . ." But he shoved his plate away. "Nothing tastes rich," he said. They moved into the sitting room. The little Beale sat down under the dictionary stand, fearing her father would suggest a game of ball when he saw how sad and frightened she was.

But Mr. Beale couldn't even play a game of ball with her because when he threw she would

cover her face with her arm and stand there a martyred figure, nine years old in Buster Brown oxfords and a white sailor suit with a red string tie. No matter how often he told her she was a coward she would always automatically throw her arms over her face when he threw and when the absurd game was over she would dart to her mother with little whines of fright in her throat, her hair falling over her cheeks. But their joint suffering came when she was called upon to speak a piece at the church for the Christmas exercises. She would go about like a dead girl for days in advance and on the night of the celebration she would have no voice left in her. When it came her turn she would have only strength to get up in front of everyone, under the glittering tree with paper angels and stars, and stand gazing idiotically, water coming out on her forehead and sparkling in the tender fuzz around her lips.

"Her baby work is driving me crazy," cried Mr. Beale. "Where is she? Dorrit, come here!"

She came out from under the stand, bumping her head something frightful, and looking at them with her lips trembling and her sad eyes opened full upon them in terror and helplessness. Sometimes she was led down the street and pushed into a crowd of children and ordered to play. Other times, unexpec-

tedly, she would be tested as to how much she knew in arithmetic or how well she was doing with her piano lessons or lectured on her bad handwriting.

Mr. Beale pounded into the hall and came back with a large mysterious box. Mrs. Beale trembled as he raised the lid because she knew it was another present and when he brought presents there was "no living with him," as she put it. It was a net dress for their only child, trimmed with silk rosebuds and ribbon edged ruffles. He shoved the box at his wife, ordering her to dress Dorrit, "and don't be all day doing it, either. When I get home I like to see something of my family and not have them leave the room and stay away a couple of hours." Then he put his head in his hands, his legs far apart. "Awh, Mr. Beale," called Gizzie from the dining room, "don't you want some of my cucumber pickle?" but he didn't look up or answer. He wondered why he couldn't make his family like him better than they liked themselves. When the little girl came back he did not move.

"Say, Mis' Beale," called Gizzie cheerfully, "Mis' Beale."

"What is it, Gizzie?"

"I guess we're going to have a rain. The walk's all covered with toads in back."

Mr. Beale rared up. "Of all the freaks,"

he cried, scowling darkly at his wife, his voice husky, his hands shaking and spread open.

"Shame. Control yourself."

"Always got to fill this house up with freaks. Confound it, anyway."

He saw his only child then standing squarely in front of him, her fair hair tied on top with a monstrous bow and hanging in soft light curls on her shoulders. She looked beautiful, her white baby skin, her bare dimpled arms, the firm legs and shining eyes. He took out his glasses. Something rushed hot behind his face and fell thick in his throat. He stared at her, one large hand held over his cheek.

"Stand back so I can see!"

She moved back timidly but with more spirit than they had ever seen in her, and when she was ordered to turn she even gave a shy hop on one leg.

"Stand still like a Christian." Then he blurted out without wanting to, as if the words were saying themselves, something about "she would be crying before night, anyway."

"Awh, can I see Mis' Beale?" asked Gizzie, her head hanging in the door. "Awh, say you wouldn't know her." She knelt on her stiff knees by the child, her great squeaking button boots stuck out behind her, one side of her dark hair rolled up in electric curlers. "Run and kiss Papa," she whispered to the child. "Throw your arms round his neck." She fell

back on her heels and threw out her arms to show the child. "This way," she said and smiled largely. "Oh, if I had a nice Papa like that I'd thank him and let him know. I'd show him I was grateful and that he was the best Papa in the whole world."

The child's nose twitched and her eyes got big and frightened. She clutched her dress with both hands and stood as if she could never move, her eyes watching her father, following him as he paced up and down. Once or twice he snorted so that if his child finally did rush to him impulsively, throw her arms around his neck, and at last act like this only child, it would not be because of the present but because of him, of his love that he could not talk or act or let out, of the foolishness in him for both these people, his wife and child, that could only come if they would first do their part.

"My, my," said Gizzie, "my, what a bad little girl. Run along to Papa and thank him."

"You leave this room," broke in Mr. Beale. "And let me tell you right now," he cried, glaring into her face, "I never expect anyone to make a fuss over me and I don't care what she does or what her mother does. I give and I don't expect any return. I work my head off and I don't expect any thanks, and I'd have you know that you ought to be locked up for your infernal meddling in other people's

affairs." He began shaking his finger at her, his eyes by now wild and hurt. "I don't want her to thank me, can you get that through your crazy head?"

The little girl darted out of the room, they heard her stumbling quickly up the stairs, her slippers clattering on the bare steps, and finally when she had reached the top they heard a sharp scream, as if she had been holding her breath for a long time and now the cry came down on them, cutting through the room, desperate and lonely. Mrs. Beale ran and Mr. Beale knew that now he was farther away from them than before, he knew that now his wife would fold the little girl tight to her breast and rock and rock, her face pressed gently against the soft long hair, and perhaps all her own loneliness would go as the child's arms went tight around her neck and clung to her for help and love.

"I know you don't mean half you say," said Gizzie, shrinking back from him as if she expected a blow. "My uncle Harry Needles was just like you only he was a musician, he played the flute. It was solid gold and I used to clean it for him with vinegar and ashes."

He pushed her aside impatiently and went back through the house to the kitchen and then out to the garden where the corn was. He pulled ear after ear from the drying stalks, looking up mutely at the roof of his house.

Then he leaned over and pulled up a turnip and began eating it, the sand grinding against his teeth as he chewed. He thought of the additions he could make to his home, the dazzling sun parlor where birds would fly in and out and flowers would grow all winter. That would make it the best house in town. He felt proud of the way the roof sloped down to the clean boards and the roses and vines over the screened windows made it all look inexpressibly quiet and peaceful. The grapes were already formed on the arbor at the side and in the fall the heavy blue clusters would hang rich and full almost to his head. He looked back at the roof and saw an imaginary observatory rise and glitter on the very top. He saw himself inside looking out at dark spaces and whirling planets that revolved in the deep endless dark, gold stars and comets and meteors, all close to his head.

"It's good to be alive on such a day," he called to Mrs. Hoar who came out to water her flowers, holding her starched dress away from the leaky watering can. He walked nearer and nearer, his head slightly bent in respect. "Those asters of yours are the best I've seen this year."

"It's too much responsibility" she replied shortly. "I sometimes think we'll have to give up the garden. There's so much to do in the house and cellar."

"Nonsense," he cried. "You don't know a thing about it. Nothing's better than fine flowers." He stepped over into her garden plot and began walking up and down between the rows of plants, telling her how she could change everything around and improve it vastly, knocking the head of flowers that he did not like or thought were in the wrong places. "Now then, throw out all those vegetables and simply fill this in with flowers."

It seemed to him that she answered tartly. She turned her back and pulled up a weed, the wind swinging her skirts round her legs tightly. Then she walked up to the house, her weight going over on her right side, the crazy blue dust cap flapping its ends in her neck. He felt disgust run through his gums and out on his mouth. He stepped back into his own yard, certain now that his wife had done something to offend her, and then he thought of his mother who was friends with everyone in the town, who went where the sick were, who sent large loaves of bread to the poor and always gave largely when a family was burned out or had sickness. He stared at the sickly bushes in the side yard and he remembered vividly his daughter scuttling behind one of them when she saw him coming, then crouching, her eyes closed, a small beaver hat set on top of her fair hair. That one time he had been overcome by her abject, mute

cowardice and had passed by, but other times when she considered herself hidden from him he would force her out to stand before her maker.

The wind raised up his hat and he reflected that the winds and storms of God could lay waste to the land and the fury of waters could wash everything away, all traces of homes and gardens and miserable lives. He felt as if he had been struck over the head with a mallet and as if the shock went down to his toes. Now a deep murmur of thankfulness went all through him and he heard himself thanking God for his child, his wife, for his home that he loved and the safety and warmth inside. He rushed in. "The fact of the matter is, with all our faults the United States is the greatest nation the world has ever seen. We stand above them all. We stand for democracy, right thinking, for right living, decent living, and we live for the next generation, that's our religion, that's our whole life, the next generation that is to make humanity better, leave it with higher ideals and hopes, a bigger conception of life than we have ever known. . . ."

"I know it," said Gizzie, holding up a knife covered with snowy lard, "I know right thinking is everything. Now, Mr. Wilgrub got cured of seizures, he had them every time Mrs. went to Milwaukee and he was cured with Christian Science and Theosophy."

"I've practiced all those religions all my life. There's good in all religion. But the important thing is to live up to the constitution of the United States."

"That's just what Uncle Harry Needles was always saying, every time it'd come night he'd begin and if I'm educated at all I owe it to my Uncle Harry because he was the smartest in books of any in our town, they all said so and he had things in the paper and . . ."

Mrs. Beale moved into the kitchen, her face stiff and remote as if she were far away.

"Got toothache?" he asked.

She shook her head and then shuffled away in her soft slippers. He remembered her bright face above the set of furs he had given her, the eyes as he handed over all his money to her. She could have anything he had, he would save her in a fire or a wreck, he would always take care of her and he had already given his life to her, first to his mother and sisters and then to his wife, he had sacrificed himself from the time he could remember to a pack of ungrateful women who were always at his heels. He took the whetstone out and spit on it. Then he began sharpening his knife blade.

"Now it's on," said Gizzie, but he did not look up. "Better eat while it's hot," she said but he paid no attention. Finally he went into the dining room but his wife was not

there in her place. He started to shout for her wildly and then went to the window instead and jerked up the window shade, letting it roll to the top with a bang and then flop over the roller, winding the pull tightly. He turned around and faced the table under the large bright shade that made the cloth dazzling white and the plates with their gold bands shine and gleam. He saw the pickles in a fluted glass dish with sprays of flowers and he leaned over and took one, hiding it when Gizzie came in.

"Ain't you down yet?" she asked. "Where's Mrs. at?" She went off through the house on her squeaking shoes.

He paced heavily so that his wife in the room above would know that he wasn't eating, that he couldn't eat if she wasn't there to hand him things and talk. He wondered about his child. "She'll have to be a teacher," he thought, "no one will want to marry her." But a teacher would know how to change the next generation, make it better, nobler. He felt the sweat stand out on him as he thought of his girl leaving a spiritual mark on everyone.

"Do you want gravy, Mr?"

He turned to Gizzie. "When I take a day off from the store I expect to be entertained, I expect to have a little consideration shown me and look at this!" He waved his hands over the loaded table and the empty chairs.

His heart felt so sore and open that he could not speak. Then he heard Gizzie snuffle and her squeaking boots trod back to the kitchen. He remembered the day his father took him to see Dick Bacon's sick bull. He could see the mud, the flies stuck in it and circling above, singing like hornets. Home in the wagon, buckwheat cakes for supper, a lamp in the center of the table. He bent his head lower. "Pass the bread, if you please." Plates piled with bread white as snow, platter heaped with hot sausages, his father saying the blessing, freckles on his mother's hand seen through eyelashes in the lamplight, in the peace, amen.

(*Interval*)

1

In the night Mrs. Beale got up and went to the open window. She leaned out and smelled the cool dark air, she felt as if she were wandering under the trees down there in the dark garden with face lifted and head empty, heart empty, all young and happy. Tears started to her eyes and she said to herself sternly, "I am not unhappy. I am a wife and mother. I am respected in town wherever I go."

But she saw the Mrs. Beale who had stood by the open window thinking of her baby that was not born yet, she saw that Mrs. Beale as clear as day. She had on a wrapper with

pansies in it and her hair was in a bang just above her brows and done in a knot at the back. Below that pale brown hair was the face which looked as if it was all open with wonder and large, inarticulate understanding and anticipation. She saw it all, the sun on everything, the dog licking her puppies all over, and she saw the warmth and understanding that had streamed out of her to the dog, the garden, as if it had been something tangible. She could see it streaming from her eyes, her arms, her whole body. It went into the small fruit trees just coming into bloom, it seemed to blaze down on the ground and fertilize it and make it thick and sharp with green sprouts, and it seemed to be making the blossoms on the trees open out.

That day she had thought of all the dogs and cats and lambs just born into the spring-world, all the colts and calves and chickens and pigs, all the blossoms being born from buds and the buds from stems and seeds. She seemed to strain up out of her pansy robe, out of herself toward everything growing and expanding, as if this was a moment she would never forget and she had closed her eyes as if it should be even more important, more sharp, since she was never going to forget any of it all her life. It had seemed easy to her that day to go into the warm garden, or to drop down on the earth in the sun, and while those

buds were opening and the dog was licking her puppies to let her child be born. She remembered the way she had sank back in her chair at the thought, trying to experience it, head back, feet stretched out, toes stretched. She had smiled mysteriously, her eyes very large and glittering, and her hands had fallen open on her lap.

"Where's the hammer," Mr. Beale had cried from the cellar, and she had called back gently, "I think it's in the kitchen drawer, dear." And then he had appeared, "Where did you hide that confounded hammer anyway? I wish you'd get some system and order about you." She could see the long gray cobweb hanging off the end of his glasses. His lips had trembled, his breath coming through clenched teeth.

Plate of meat. Dish of sauce. Dish of potatoes. Plate of bread. Tablecloth clean on Sunday. Napkins clean on Wednesday and Sunday. Bed of petunias. Jack Miller passing in new car. Mrs. Peppen watering grass. Two sisters from the Sacred Heart passing in black robes.

"Women like that should be shot."

Would God punish a woman who married someone she didn't really love? Would He wait until she got along in years and then deal some dreadful blow? Oh, that day in her pansy dressing gown with her hands fallen

open on her knees, her baby in her, *in her*, she had thought of the cemetery in winter, she had seen her mother with a velvet band around her neck and a coffee cup in her hand. If a woman did the best she knew how, if she was brave in childbirth and endured all of it, would that be paying God back for the wickedness she had done? If she endured it all without a shriek or a moan would God overlook her not loving her husband?

"They are a menace to all right thinking men and women. Such women should be beaten in the streets. What good are we as human beings if we can't raise children and leave the world better than when we came into it. All through the history of mankind these women have been a menace to the home, to biology, to sociology and to the real purpose in living. It's a serious question and one that is beginning to stir the minds of men all over the globe."

She had put her face in her hands and looked out, her eyes wide and bright. She had made a soft sound in her throat as a man went by leading a little child. She saw her own child and thought of the miracle of having it out in the world, of placing it in a chair, running toward it with arms out, catching it up while its gold curls shook over its happy pink face, watching it stoop uncertainly to pick up a speckled hen's feather from the path.

"Aaaaah, there he goes, the dirty thief to charge me twelve dollars for that job of cleaning. I'll let every tooth in my head rot and fall out before I go to him again to be robbed. . . . Oh, well, be a thief in this world and you'll be rewarded, you'll get the good things of life, everyone will smile at you if you're only thief enough. . . ."

She had struggled up out of her chair, her nose twisting idiotically, her hand on her throat. She had looked startled and anguished, as if she felt she were swaying dangerously and would eventually hit the floor. "Well, anyway, I feel happy to-day."

"You're always happy when you don't have to see much of me."

"That's not true, that's a lie. I love you. It's a lie. I love you. That's a lie, that's a lie." Her voice was low and hard. "Lie," she said with a heavy thick tongue.

She started upstairs, taking them slowly, Mr. Beale following, begging to do something, asking if he should call the doctor, Gizzie, Mrs. Hoar, asking if she didn't want some ice cream or if he couldn't get a rig and take her riding out to the point where she had such a good time that Sunday after they were married. He had shaken the sleeve of her dressing gown, twisted it in his fingers, pulled it, demanding that she tell him what was the matter, what he should get, swearing he would do

anything in the world for her if she would only tell him what to do, what she wanted, what had made her so sick.

She had sat down in the same chair by the window, her lips shut tight, fear and nausea all through her. Then she had looked into his face, he was so frightened, his hands on her, his mouth twisted, and he had put on his glasses so that he could see her better.

"I'm nothing but a toad!" she cried. "I'm a snake. Oh, I want to come out, I want to drop off my skin, Oh, you, too, your snake skin, Oh, God in heaven, don't forget me. . . ." Then she had unbuttoned her slipper and rubbed her swollen ankle.

Mr. Beale shot toward the door. He did not turn as he spoke but kept his hurt face away from her. "It's a shame I don't gamble and drink and use bad language. That's the way to make a woman love you—that's the way to succeed in this world, be a thief and a devil and disobey every one of our Lord's commandments."

She had made herself lie back, saying that no one in the world was completely happy and that it was better to have a man who was steady, didn't smoke or drink or carry on, than to be dragging around after someone you would love insanely for a year, say, and then cease to love. Wouldn't it be better to live quietly, wouldn't God at least respect a

woman more who took a man who was good and honest and had a fair business than to live wildly in the flesh? And yet she felt guilty. Her ears roared as if tides of blood were rising and she managed to get out of her room and down the stairs, calling wildly to her husband who came running, his glasses glittering on his vest, his gold chain glittering.

She closed her eyes and threw herself against him as if he were a wall, and cried, "I love you—I love you—I love you." Then she began to moan as if all those dreams that had settled in her since childhood had come back, the face and body of the ideal man who was to love her, the one made for her in heaven, the one they had ordered her to wait for, wait, wait. "Oh, help me," she cried and turned her eyes to him in panic and dark remorse. "Oh, tell me anything that's true." He had to get the doctor.

The dark still air blew onto Mrs. Beale and she stared into it as if it held all her life that had gone, as if the Mrs. Beale in a pansy robe was somewhere in the dark, imperishable but unknown, unrelated to her now, and as if that child in the womb, so perfect, so loved, was also unknown, unrelated to the little girl she loved and who had cried herself to sleep in the other room.

In all the dark houses all over the world, she thought, are people who once were happy,

who knew a day that was above all days, and now they can't remember how they felt or what it meant or what it was for. I am Mrs. Beale, a wife and mother, respected by the doctor, the dentist, our butcher, in the electric office, in the gas, general coal, trusted by the egg man, the vegetable man and in the fruit market. I can charge wherever I please. Our credit is good. No one needs to know what I think or feel about anything. That is my own. I can nod, no matter what is said, whether I believe or not, and know in myself what I really believe and I don't care what anyone in the world believes just so I can have peace and quiet and no one drips on the clean cloth. I will ask Mrs. Grouse to-morrow how her hip is and if they have to operate.

But by the time she got back into bed all her emotion had slipped out of her, she felt vacant and strange but not unhappy. There was nothing in the world to be tragic about, she thought. People were as pleasant as they knew how to be, and yet she had a queer image in front of her eyes that would not go. It was a dog rooting in autumn leaves, smelling with his moist warm nose over dry, imperishable leaves, each different, each vivid and crisp, and it was so sharp in her mind that tears came in her eyes but she felt no sadness, only a little shudder in her arms because she

understood so little and didn't begin to know the why of anything on earth.

2

Everyone in town thought it was remarkable that the little Beale girl should pass in school each year because from reports she never answered a question that was asked her, never worked her problems at the board, and when the examination papers were passed she always sat staring idiotically at the teacher who was writing the problems in big clear figures in front of them all. The little girl simply sat with her hands clasped in front of her on her desk and looked helpless, as if she knew she couldn't even work them wrong. She would have been sent to an institution some said if it weren't that her parents were of good family and well read, they took all the magazines and had beautiful flowers. The Hoars told everyone that the little Beale was passed from year to year because of the gorgeous bouquets she took to her teachers.

In any event Mrs. Beale was always overcome with pity and anger whenever she paid a visit to the school. Once she was humiliated by watching a spelling down and witnessing her daughter being left until the last when they were choosing sides and the teacher hurriedly pushing her over to the group where she be-

longed, the indignant leader being unwilling to call her name. The child stared at them all as if she had no notion of where she was and when she was called on for a word she simply opened her mouth but no sounds came out and her eyes got bigger and bigger. Another time Mrs. Beale saw her snowballed in the school-yard, pelted with snow, and yet unwilling to run, afraid to run perhaps, and walking sedately along, pretending to be oblivious, her large eyes straight ahead, her mouth twitching.

"She's not like any of my family," said Mr. Beale.

"Honest," Gizzie Needles told her friends, "that little kid gets my goat. They give her the world and all and she just stares at them stupid. Can't even tell time and her Papa bought her a watch and all for having the measles."

Year by year she rose in school, through the grades, into the high school finally, and each year she seemed more death-like, her eyes strained far open and her mouth drawn small and firm. They sent her off to college, "far away" was all she could reply when they asked her where she wanted to go so they made it five hundred miles from home. "Don't it beat all what they'll take in now," Gizzie Needles said, "and she's begging to come home. I always read her letters early in the morning before they're down. She's begging."

Now Dorrit thanked her father for all the gifts he had ever given her, for the net dress, the little watch, everything, she thanked him with words that seemed to pitch out of her and burn and crack. She thanked her mother, she thanked her for bringing her into the world, she begged them both to let her come home. In every sentence was love, love, something about the fires and pains of love as if she had been torn out of their bodies and lay dying.

"If she comes back she'll be an invalid," said Mr. Beale. "No, I set my foot down. She has to stay. No more baby work."

But they wrote back to her with strange fire, meeting her love, her loneliness, her despair, but telling her she must stay and then after a time she began sending them pictures in her letters, great colored flowers that would never rot, flowers that were full of life that never changed. Mrs. Beale pinned them up in her clothes closet, she didn't want Gizzie to see. Mr. Beale looked at them privately and shook his head, he knew that if he said they were good he would be partial and dishonest.

They didn't let her come home for Christmas, it would be too far and business was bad, but she could come for the summer. They met her at the station. She got off the train gravely, her eyes filling with tears as she looked around her. She had on a small hat with a white

rose over the ear, a soft rose that pressed her fair hair, and she wore a strange dress of no particular period, all folds and much too long, to the ankles, and everyone in town had hers short.

"Good heavens, girl," cried Mr. Beale, his hands nervous and his face screwed up.

"What?" she asked.

"Why, nothing," he said, laughing, "nothing but that confounded dress of yours."

"Oh," she said.

Mrs. Beale began twisting up her nose and mouth and rolling her eyes around, even sighing in little gasps. She took hold of her daughter and kissed her many times. Then her head suddenly began to shake as if she couldn't help it and the cords of her mouth and neck stretched tight and her eyes went shut. She had a crisp new handkerchief in her gloved hands with a B done in blue.

"Why, Mama," said Mr. Beale reproachfully because the station platform was crowded.

But his daughter was facing her mother as if her hands were tied, saying over and over, "Mama! Mama! Mama!" and yet not touching her mother or seeming to see her. The next day Gizzie Needles told over town that Dorrit was still a freak but she answered now when she was spoken to and was improved in small ways. "But she's got the funniest dresses

you ever see. I looked over everything last night. They went to the show."

The first morning at home Dorrit went up to her father with mysterious pride and dignity. "I have something to show you." The tight-waisted dress with the full skirt made her look frail and she had a bunch of field daisies pinned on her. Her hands were very white and she held them out from her, open. Her head was back and her large eyes were looking deeply into his.

He got up laughing. "Well, let's have it over with," he said good-naturedly.

She led him to her room and then stood in the middle of it, her face flushed and proud, the mysterious smile on her lips, her lids almost closed.

Mr. Beale looked around nervously. "Well, what is it?" he asked, his voice cracking. "What have you got to show me? I'm busy this morning."

"Can't you see?" She was laughing now, little gay laughs that darted out of her and she kept moving her hands toward the walls.

He put on his glasses and looked around. "I can't see a thing except these walls that need going over."

"How do you like the pictures?" She dropped down on the bed as if her legs had given out, her hands clasped between her knees and her whole body rigid.

He went up to them and took off his glasses. "Why, they seem to be all right. I never could get much excited over painting, though. Where did you get them?"

"I made them."

He looked at her with his mouth fallen open.

"I painted them."

The walls were covered with pictures of happy families, the father, the mother, and the child, painted in bright sun among flowers and birds, painted with love in their faces and hands, love in their hands and arms that touched each other, and all three in some strange way were entirely separate and yet interchangeable, as if they understand each other's parts, as if they understood so well that they need not speak. And here there was no love withheld, it was all over them, it was part of the bright light that came from their flesh and their deep happy eyes. Each was a picture of a family, but a family that had never appeared upon the earth.

He sat down heavily beside her. She did not look up at him, but stared at her shoe, moisture coming out on her forehead. He straightened his shoulders and set his tie right. "Well, I'm no judge," he said in a high voice, "but I do know one thing. A good painter has to know the laws governing every move. He has to learn them and stick to them. He has to know anatomy. He has to know how

to paint his object so that it looks like the real thing and if the real thing was put beside it the painting would look more real. This is done through a knowledge of law. Just as the universe is run and governed by law, created through law, so is painting and everything else. Look at the laws of the United States. What is there to compare with them in the whole history of mankind? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. We are unique. We stand to-day a unique and powerful people. We have banished liquor and brought the home up to where it now stands. The fact of the matter is there is no nation that has ever attained the dignity, the power, and the glory of the United States of America. Your ancestors made this country what it is and remember that as long as you live. Your blood is in these institutions, the blood of your ancestors is there. When this was a vast wilderness . . ."

Mrs. Beale came in nervously. "Aren't they lovely?"

"When this was a vast wilderness your ancestors came here and with their brains and their bodies they created a world that was absolutely new in every feature and law, they startled the rest of mankind, they . . ."

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Beale, "aren't they good?"

"Well, if she's going to paint she has to know the laws." He began pacing. "The

thing to do is to get a safe profession and then go into this when you're sure of taking care of yourself some other way. Now, this is fair enough. You teach for five years and make a success of it and we'll let you take up painting and give it a try. Of course, if you were a genius that would be different, but as it is you'd better make a success in some other field first."

Mrs. Beale pushed the moist hair back from the girl's forehead. "I think Papa's being fair enough, don't you?" she asked gently.

"Now if you could ever get to where you could make pictures for magazines or advertisements," he began.

"I wouldn't do that."

"Well, listen to me, young lady, if your painting is any good you ought to get money for it and let people see it."

She sat with her face lowered in that habit of childhood, the hair falling over her eyes and her hands clasped tightly. All of a sudden they heard Irma Hoar call her mother into the house.

"Aaaah, those two are enough to turn a man's stomach. No, you learn how to support yourself before you do any funny stuff like this. Well, I said they were all right but I don't know a thing about it. What do your teachers in college think?"

"They don't like them." She raised her head and stared straight into his eyes.

He stopped short. "I suppose you think they don't know anything. Well, let me tell you a thing or two. They've learned the ropes, they know the laws, and don't you suppose they can tell the difference between a painting that shows promise and one that doesn't?"

"No," she said shortly, her cheeks red as fire and water standing out around her mouth.

"Well, what are we sending you to school for? What do you think you're there for if it isn't to study and learn from them?"

"Let's stop right now," said Mrs. Beale. "Let's forget all about it and if you'll tell me what you want for dinner, Dorrit, I'll have Gizzie tend to it. She likes to know ahead."

"I intend to know why you think we're sending you to college?" He stood squarely in front of her but she did not look at him or answer. "You listen to me for once in your life, young lady. I want you to learn how to support yourself and I want you to make a better job of it than I've been able to do. It's time you braced up and faced the world the way the Lord intended us all to do, with courage and backbone. At this rate you're going to be just like Irma. . . . Oh, Good Lord, what's the use of talking? What's the

use of anything?" He leaned toward one of her paintings. "Is that a dog or a bush?"

She stood up on the bed backed against the wall, her arms, her skirt covering the picture. Her white hands were opened above her head and she looked up at the ceiling, her mouth drawn small, her eyes large again, strained far open.

"You always liked apple dumplings and we've got lots of cream to-day," said Mrs. Beale, swallowing and choking. "Let's make up our minds we're going to be happy even if everything isn't just as we want it," she said very low.

Mr. Beale closed his eyes as if they hurt him. "You think there's a lot of people in this world that don't know anything and that you're too good to tell them anything. You're on the wrong track. People aren't the fools that you think. And, Good Lord, if you can't paint a dog so that it looks like a dog and not like a bush, I'd say you weren't much of a painter and never would be. You've got a lot to learn, my young lady, and some day when your father is dead you may think things over and learn to respect him and decide that you could have learned something from him after all.

Dorrit began to shake her head. She shook it steadily, her lips pressed in a white line and the wet strings of hair beating her cheeks. Then she put her hands over her face and stood

motionless in front of them, one side of her skirt hem loose and dipping down, a small run in her stocking. Mr. Beale drew the wind up through his nostrils in a tremendous snort and left the room.

"Come, sit down, relax. Why, Dorrit, nothing is as bad as you think," said Mrs. Beale. "You know what good dumplings Gizzie makes and if you can't think of anything you'd rather have I'll go down and tell her it's to be dumplings. Why, Dorrit, why, my little girl," she said as she saw her daughter sag and fall down on the bed, her arms out limp, her hair tumbling down in her neck.

"I thought he'd understand," she said, pressing her white hands on her cheeks. "They mean something. I thought he'd see. Oh, I painted them for both of you. I thought—Oh, I thought——"

"Everything's different from what we think," said Mrs. Beale and stroked her daughter's hair. "Nothing is like what's in our heads."

"Nothing," she choked out.

"I know Papa's unreasonable but he knows the world better than you do and he's lived longer than you have. I think you ought to show him some consideration and make him feel that you respect his opinions even if they are different. Why should *you* be right? Nobody's right, maybe, and it doesn't matter anyway." Her head was thick with memories

but they turned about in her so fast that she couldn't examine them. "Listen, dear, we must tell Gizzie what we want for dinner because if dinner is late then the dishes will be late and that will spoil the whole day."

"But what are they for?" cried Dorrit. "Why did I paint them and what do they mean and what difference does it make what they mean and who cares anyway—you're right—who cares. Well, I'll tell you one thing," she said very low, sitting up and wiping her eyes. "I care—do you hear me—I care and I don't care if I'm the only one in the world that does—I *care!*" she shouted.

"All right," said Mrs. Beale gently, "but don't wake the neighbors. You'll have them all wondering what kind of home this is and what sort of people we are." She clasped her brooch that had come loose. "I think you're getting to be a great deal like your father," she said reproachfully and went out.

3

On the following Sunday Mr. Beale walked with his wife and daughter over to the cove across the river. They went slowly, cars passing and leaving dust on their shoes and faces, they followed the small paths through the woods where birds whipped out of low bushes and flew to the branches above. Mr. Beale

protected them from a large snake that hissed under some leaves. He raised his stick to strike and then in good humor let it slide away.

"You thought best not to kill it?" timidly suggested Mrs. Beale, not wanting to criticize but thinking how she would fear those dry leaves on the path and the small sounds from the deep grass all around.

"If we mind our own business we won't get hurt." He went on ahead, his hat off, bending to go under the branches and then holding them back for his women.

"Finest place in the world for a nice house," he finally said. "How's this for a garden?" He pointed to masses of pink flowers in the swamp ahead.

"Oh!" they cried and plunged forward not noticing that their heels were enormous with mud and grass and bits of dried dung.

Birds sang unexpectedly and made soft sounds among the leaves as they flew out and rose, descended sharply, lighting to preen, swinging themselves on a tender branch. The Beales wandered over to the edge of the water and sat down in silence, lifting their heads. Mr. Beale threw his hat down with force and took in long noisy breaths of the cool shady air. Mrs. Beale was smiling and vacant, her face all light gold and her soft eyes on the moving water. She broke little twigs in her fingers and made houses with the pieces. She

hummed as she built and once she gave her daughter a little pinch on the ankle.

Dorrit looked at a young leaf that was spread on her knee. "I'm going to wade," she announced.

Mr. Beale flushed. He saw both his women in the stream holding their dresses above white indecent thighs, laughing foolishly, exposed and ridiculous. "Don't be a fool. Sit down like a decent girl with your parents."

Mrs. Beale leaned toward Dorrit and put her arm over her shoulder, her wedding ring flashing, and whispered something. Then the two hung together in sun, their faces set sadly on something far off, beyond him, out of his reach. Their feet lay crossed girlishly in the grass. The girl, her head on her mother's shoulder, seemed to fit into the curves, the softness of her side.

He walked away into the woods, cutting a young green twig and chewing it, stepping high over violets and young grass. It seemed incredible that he had ever been worried, irritated or angry with any one. He made plans for his observatory. He would buy his wife something nice and then be satisfied when she didn't make a big fuss over him. He would buy his daughter something. He'd like to get a fur coat. He could see her in grey squirrel with a velvet cap and a little soft thing on top. He would never be angry with them any more for

not being impulsive with him and warm and glowing, even though his way was right.

No, all people had their rights, all people were free and no one should put out a hand to hold them. He would give Mrs. Hoar something nice, after all she was a mother. One night, in the farm house, in the darkness, in his bed—Oh, the pure winter air that had poured over him then, the pure sheets, white and cold, the light soft blankets above, his brothers snickering over Minnie Predd. "God intended all of us to be happy like this all the time. It's our own fault when we let our ugly dispositions get the better of us."

He hurried back to where they sat. He tried to join them, touch them in some way, enter their lives. "This is what I call having a good time," he began in a loud voice. "It's the only decent, right minded way of doing it. Some men have to smoke or drink or run wild with women to have a good time but this is what I call simply ideal in every feature. And isn't it a lot better than ripping through the country in a car, running people down, making a big noise?" But he did not stop for them to reply. "Isn't this doing the world a whole lot more good? Now take tobacco. Tobacco has done more harm in the world than anything else except liquor and wrong thinking. Liquor is the curse of humankind. It turns men into dirty beasts with no respect for women, no

respect for civilization, and no respect for the conscience that has been put into us by God and kept in us through generations of honest, decent, Anglo-Saxon people. The time was when we were all as savages, and some of us are still in that state or not far from it, but today we stand in the most glorious period of mankind, the most fruitful period the world has ever known. Just the conception of the League of Nations shows that. America today is the most important nation in the world. She won the war, she has the money, the ideas, the ideals, and the courage to spread them far and wide, all over the planet to the dirty foreigners, even, with their false ideas about women and the home and government, on to the stars." He leaned back against a tree, his eyes damp and fixed. "The fact of the matter is, we are a great people, the greatest the world has ever known. No influence equal to ours has ever come upon this globe in the history of the race. No country . . ."

Dorrit jumped up, her head thrust forward, and started away into the woods.

"Where are you going?"

"Away!" she cried.

He went after her. "Come back here!"

"I won't!"

"I said to come back!" He plunged through the bushes until he came up with her. He caught her arm and jerked her around, facing

him. Her eyes were large and wild, she was stiff with resistance, she bared her teeth in his face and pressed her head closer to him, straining up from her shoulders, then panting, unable to form words with those frozen lips.

"Have you gone crazy?"

"You've ruined my mother's life."

He shook her slender wrists and his eyes half closed. He could see the crumpled organdy dress with ruffles and a dragging soiled sash. Hair in strings. Breasts rising and falling as she gasped and knocked herself against a tree. He heard his wife coming through the grass. The silence, the sun in broad streams, a bird singing. Outside his rage he saw the slender girl, her teeth chattering now like an idiot, her hair falling in the old fashion over wrists and face. The bushes parted.

"Oh, can't we have peace?"

"No!" cried Dorrit. Her feet bruised the ferns as she ground her heels in to hold herself up.

"What are you quarreling about anyway?"

"Our quarrels are over for good!"

"What do you mean?"

The girl backed off, not looking at either of them, her face turned toward the trees in sun, the dazzling patch of yellow flowers in the distance. "I'm never coming home any more. I'm never going to see you again." She held her chin grimly.

"Damn your foolish talk anyway. Don't you owe anything to your parents? Isn't it about time you repaid them for their worries with a little kindness and consideration? Isn't it up to you to live for them instead of for yourself?"

"Who do *you* live for?"

"My family—society—the next generation."

"Well, you're a fool to do it."

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Beale. "I won't go into that line of thought. It doesn't do anyone any good. Stop now, when I say so."

"I'll say it a million times. Anybody's a fool to live for a society as rotten as this and for homes that are rottener. What business have you to live with my mother? You're not her husband or my father, you've never loved her as she deserves, you've never spent a real hour together in your whole lives and you never will. Don't I know the quarrels that went on before I was born, and they're going to go on until I take her away from you. Yes, I'm going to take her far away and love her as she deserves so that she can be happy for once. Oh, the nights I spent, the dreams, the . . ."

"Some time your father will be dead," said Mr. Beale.

"Good! Die—*now!*"

"I'll be—dead." He turned to his wife who was holding her skirts above her high laced

boots that were flecked with damp. She evaded his startled hurt look and kicked up a bit of sod with her toe.

"Don't expect me to enter this," she said coldly. "I've tried to please every one and keep peace. I've tried all my life to have it quiet and smooth and I can't do a thing with either of you, there's no handling you. . . ."

"Yes," said Dorrit, "he'll always be a tyrant and you might as well admit it."

Mr. Beale looked quickly at his wife as if he expected her voice to suddenly rise in his defense, to shame his daughter, to remind her of the things he had done, the way he had sacrificed, the way he had toiled for them all his life and only once ordered a tailored suit for fifty-five dollars. Those eyes of his wife's should look at him now in trust and respect, they should be lost in him, her whole being lost, his prisoner forever. But she kept pushing her toe under the bit of sod and her head was shaking as if she were trying hard to hold back something. He could not speak. He waited for those words that would justify his life. He waited for his wife to prove that she was loyal, as if now she would be proving it to the whole world.

"Well," Mrs. Beale finally said looking sadly around her and dropping her skirts on the wet weeds, "now that we're all thoroughly miser-

able we might as well go home. All of our happy times end this way."

He went on ahead, seeing nothing, his legs guiding him without his mind around the soft mud slides and ooze pockets. He heard their damp feet squeak in their shoes. Then Dorrit spoke in a strained desperate voice. "Why do you always have to play safe, Mama? Can't you choose between us? Oh, my God, how can I make you see the evil you're doing in staying with him."

4

At home, when his daughter came down with her suitcase, Mr. Beale got back his voice. The sight of her there defying him gave him new strength and courage. He ordered her to stop. She dropped the suitcase and looked at him from a stony face, her arms stiff at her sides, the air of a stranger about her high heels and street suit, her creased gloves. Even her scarf looked new and different and he had bought it for her, bought her everything, shoes, suit, hat, and all that was under. This angered him all the more.

"*Now* what are you trying to do?"

Her expression did not change from the dark impersonal stare. Her mother sat near the table mending a long run in a white silk stocking. She did not look up and she sat as if her ears were plugged shut and she was listening

to other sounds, she looked as if she were seeing other things—then the room, the lamp, the books on the shelves, the blue crockery stand for umbrellas in the hall.

"All right," said Mr. Beale, "how far do you think you can get? You're still afraid of the dark. Twenty years old and afraid to cross the locks, always get dizzy in the middle when you look down at the water. You'll be a nice one out in life, you will. You'd better see which side your bread is buttered on and try to please your parents just a little." He opened his evening paper and adjusted his glasses, looking over them gravely at his wife. "Charlie Utter's got the grippe. Well, can't you be neighborly and telephone and see how he is? I don't see why you never want to do what's right."

The girl stood there, still dark and defiant, her eyes wandering over the room she had always known as if she knew it would never leave her mind, as if the row of books would always be there, the lamp, the picture of a squirrel with his paws up. Then she looked in shame at the floor, frightened perhaps at the memory of the locks and the time she had trembled there in the middle, clinging to the iron rail, and her scotch cap had blown away into the dark ugly water.

"Have you no respect for your mother?" he cried.

"Stop!" said Mrs. Beale. "Stop right now." She did not look up but stayed bent over her stocking, taking small even stitches, her needle gleaming as she pushed it through the fine silk.

"I want you to look at your poor mother," screamed Mr. Beale. He jumped up suddenly and threw the paper over his head so that it opened and rattled down to the floor. "For the first time in your life think of some one besides yourself. Think of your mother who has sacrificed her life for you."

The girl put her hands over her stomach as if she were being drawn down by a heavy sudden pain, a strained, piercing look in her mouth and eyes. "If I could only forget you both," she brought out. She bent forward, closing her eyes. "You're in me. I've suffered more over your lives than you have. I've thought of you more. Oh, I want to lose you, I want to get rid of this rotten world, too, where people do everything by chance. They marry. . . ."

"What do you know about marriage?"

"Too much. Too damn much. They all marry by chance and children come by chance and it's all run that way—I've seen it."

"Hah, a lot you've seen. You're awfully wise, aren't you, telling your parents about life. Get some sense in your head if that's possible and learn to think for yourself instead

of copying all the crack charlatan thinkers of the day."

"I'll show you—you'll see—you'll find out what I really am some day."

"So you're going to show us what a big gun you are, well, that's very nice of you, I'm sure."

"God," called Mrs. Beale in a strange voice as if she were speaking for help. She put her head on her arm. In her hand was the white stocking, the needle sticking through it.

Dorrit seemed to stretch out toward her mother, she put out her arms and all of her body curved toward her. "Please come with me."

"I've done the best I knew how all my life," said Mrs. Beale. "I couldn't have done it any different. I don't know any other way."

"But, Mama, I'm going to take you away with me, we're going together and you'll see how happy I'll make you. We'll be together all the time, just the two of us, all alone, and we'll be so happy. You'll never need to worry or cry or anything. It's going to be wonderful if you'll only come."

Mrs. Beale covered her face and began rocking in her chair, making the animal sound that had come from her when her daughter was born, only not making it so deep. These sounds were more like frightened animals in the cold. Dorrit ran to her, knelt in front of her trying to pull the hands away from the eyes, pleading

with her, kissing the hands, the little curl in her neck, begging her to come, to go far away with her forever. She tried to pull the covered face against her, tears coming down her cheeks, and she tried to fold the woman in her weak protecting arms against her breast.

"Yes, you women. Well, stick together, both of you. Oh, get out of my *sight!*" He plunged out of the room.

Mrs. Beale gave a shriek and went after him, slipping on the little rug between the two rooms and striking her head against the sharp corner of the door moulding. But she ran after her husband, a trickle of blood on her temple, and when he suddenly turned around, his shoulders heaving, she dashed at him and clung, her eyes closed with blood running over them, and her mouth saying over and over, "Husband, husband, husband."

5

Gizzie Needles told every one about Dorrit's leaving home. Those she couldn't see in person she telephoned and when she got new information she added that eagerly. "Awh, Mr. Beale," she would say to herself when she thought of him, "always did good to everybody, you did, and now look where you're at." She told about his business that was failing because he would rather win an argument than make

a sale and she described Mrs. Beale and Dorrit. "That girl, say she's absolutely crazy. Something not quite plumb there. You should seen her dragging those pictures after her. She'd leave her good grips and lug them pictures instead. And they're all of what I'd say were the insane. Nobody ever saw anything like them in this world and in her grip she had one of people without a stitch on. Oh, she'll come to a bad end. You can't go on that way and have all the good things fall your way all the time. No, she'll go crazy herself before she's through."

But Mr. Beale looked more wild and hurt than ever before and when he took off his hat he had a noble aloof gleam about him that made Gizzie catch her breath. Now that she had lived longer she saw that she was the one to have made him happy, she was the only one who knew just how to make over him and get things going nice. She was the one, not Mrs. Beale—too cold, too educated—she told herself, pressing her hand hard against her chest and wrinkling up her face. She thought once of suicide but she couldn't bear to go without telling him, without rushing up to him and showing him once and for all her feeling, then knowing when she went into the dark cold water that she would live forever in his mind, in his strange cruel head. "I'll be insane," she often thought.

The Family

When Mr. Beale heard that Dorrit was living at Mrs. Utter's rooming house on the corner of Mac and Franklin Streets, he went to his wife.

"Mama, we've got to do something."

Mrs. Beale raised her head and looked out of the window. He began pleading in a demanding, helpless tone, half whispering finally, but she would make him no answer. She stared at the men who were lined up across the street watching in dumb fascination dirt being thrown up by the shovelful out of a pit. Then Mr. Beale walked up and down, that stark look of grief and anxiety all over him. "Mama," he said, "you've got to get her back. Put on your hat and coat and go after her. You can't stand this."

Mrs. Beale wet the corner of her handkerchief and rubbed one of her finger nails. "You know you won't sleep a wink tonight if you don't go. Better go now. Oh, I've never seen a woman like you. Never want to do what's right, never on time, never ready to be generous."

"I don't want her to come back here," said Mrs. Beale pulling a small shawl over her shoulders.

He fell back on his heels staring at her, a white silk handkerchief fluttering from his fingers. "Haven't you got any instincts that are human?" he said hoarsely. "Aren't you a mother in any sense of the word?"

"I suppose not."

"You don't want your own child in her home."

"This is my home," said Mrs. Beale. "From now on I'm going to have peace in this house. There's not going to be jangling and turmoil every half hour and I'm not going to put up with nagging and the rest of it. I'm going to have peace."

"Shame on you," he cried. "You'd turn your daughter into the streets. . . ."

"I haven't turned her out. She can keep on in college. I'm willing to keep on giving up so that she can be there but if she ever does come back both of you must do as I say. I won't have any more shameful arguing and quarreling at my time of life. . . ."

Gizzie Needles came in looking rather sheepish and took the salt cellars off the table. Mr. Beale did not look at her but sat with his elbow on the window ledge looking out at the smooth rolling lawns and the bushes at the side of the house. The little girl had hidden from him there, her beaver hat set high on top of her long fair curls.

"I've got a pain under my right shoulder blade," said Gizzie.

"Pain under what?" said Mr. Beale.

"My right shoulder blade," she repeated.

"Well, I guess there's one thing I'm not to blame for," he cried. He jumped up and waved his arms over his head. "I've always had a pack of ungrateful women at my heels and all

I can say is go to a doctor and send me the bill."

"Awh, I ain't that bad off, Mr. Beale. Say, if I was that bad off I'd not a peep outen me. I wouldn't upset you for anything in the world."

"I suppose not," he said, "and don't leave the furnace door open again."

"Well, we've been burning the garbage," said Mrs. Beale indignantly. "I told her to leave it open to cool off."

"I'd like to know what the city collects garbage for, I'd like to know why you can't be like other people for once and do as others do. Is there any law prohibiting you from setting it out in the garbage can like a Christian or do you always have to be doing something special? Are there any ropes on either of you that are keeping you from acting like rational women?"

"We have reasons for burning the garbage and you wouldn't understand if I told you," said Mrs. Beale quietly.

"Oh, you fiend!" he cried and left the house.

He rang the bell at Mrs. Utter's and finally Dorrit came into the little parlor. They breathed in the red plush that was everywhere, the red satin paper on the wall, the red door of the stove. Everything was red and thick and close to them, pressing them together, and every time they looked up eyes disappeared behind the folding doors.

"Dorrit, I'm real awfully sorry." He stared straight ahead of him, his gaze set far off, far away beyond them both. "Your mother sent me to tell you to come back," he brought out uncomfortably, not meeting her eyes. "She's about out of her mind. I left her in a bad state."

He saw that she wasn't going to speak, and that she was probably going to sit and stare at him with her large eyes, her hands folded on that crazy, no fashion dress, the fair hair low in her neck. As he looked over her head at the thick red paper he thought he saw all the daughters in the world and it seemed to him that they all loved and respected their fathers, that he was the only one who had an ungrateful, disobedient child. But she sat there in front of him, her hands folded, nothing in her face to show that she was his child, no fires of love anywhere in her or her mother.

"Your mother's in bad shape. I'm worried about her."

But the girl did not move. He pulled a chair close to her and tried to look into her face for a while, thinking that something might come to him that he could say that would change everything all of a sudden. But he couldn't. He got up and grasped the back of the chair, pitching his voice to the tone he used in lecturing people, but as he spoke his face twisted horribly.

"We're in a wonderful world, a *wonderful* world. We have everything, every opportunity to do good, every chance to help humanity. Everything in life is *right*. We're given chances, great opportunities, even living is a privilege. If we don't naturally like living we must make ourselves. We must conquer weakness. We must strive to know God's purpose for us and live up to it. This is a happy world but happiness is not foremost, truth is foremost, and honor, and decency and the constitution of the United States. There's vast opportunity for all of us but at the time we don't see it and when we do see it's too late, we can't go back. I don't know about others but I regret every damn thing I've done in life from the beginning. I've done it all wrong but I can't help it. Do you hear me—*I can't help it!*"

Dorrit looked at her father but she did not move, she made no gesture or sound of understanding him, she merely stared with large eyes at his nose. She did not suddenly jump up and put her arms around his head as he sank down on the red plush and she didn't even reach out her hand to touch his.

"Get your hat and we'll go," he said firmly.

"No." She stood up very straight, her hands at her sides. "You tell Mama goodbye for me."

"Listen," he said very low, bringing out the words through his strained lips, "it's going to

be different now, everything's going to be different at home."

"It can't ever be different," she said.

"Now, now," he said, his teeth clenching together, his lips drawn apart. "You be a good girl and keep on with school and you'll come out all right."

"Of course I'm going back," she said briefly. "I'm going to stay with the Lorski's until I finish."

He looked as if he had been cracked open by lightning and now he drew his mouth together terribly and his eyes turned toward the floor as if he could not, dared not think of her leaving them now, going into the world—away, away from them forever, never to see her again, his little girl, the child he had loved all his life and lived for and brought presents to and tried to bring up right.

"Are they good people?" he said shortly.

"I suppose you wouldn't think so."

"You know good people as well as I do," he bawled out. "Anybody knows a good honest person when he sees him. There's no question about that, but if you're planning to live with a lot of common low down foreigners and thieves I tell you right now that . . ."

She drew herself up as if she expected a blow from somewhere. "I'm going to be a painter," she said.

"Well," he answered with infinite pleading,

"can't you be that at home where it's safe? Gizzie's a freak but she's good help and you won't need to do anything. Mama's going to be sick in bed if you don't come. And you can keep to yourself as much as you want. I don't know how Mama's going to pull through this."

"I understand Mama now."

She seemed more distant than ever from him and when he watched her folding into herself and withdrawing more and more he suddenly shouted, "Go to the devil then and I don't give a damn. I've tried to do good to everyone, I've tried to think right and talk right and be right, and you can all go to hell from now on." He went blindly to the door and ran hard against Mrs. Utter who was standing in a dark corner near the folding doors.

6

Now when Mr. Beale was mentioned everyone had a good laugh. He hadn't talked the arm off any one since his daughter left home and all he would say no matter what was said, was simply, "Well, I'm sorry but I can't help it." Mrs. Beale appeared more often at the clubs and now she wore younger clothes. Gizzie Needles told her friends that it had been Dorrit who selected her mother's costumes. "Yes, sir, and just like her, too, to trig her out like a widow and all. Mis' Beale looks ten years

younger now and she doesn't buy a stitch without my looking at it first. Sends everything home."

Mr. Beale was often seen inspecting the locks or the bridge and after supper at night he was always bounding up out of his chair. "Someone at the door."

"There's no one at the door."

"Someone at the door," he would mumble and go into the front of the house, throwing the door wide open. Then he would stare out into the blackness, take off his glasses and peer into the bushes and frozen vines. He would begin mumbling to himself, his head sunk down between his shoulders.

"We can't afford to heat the outdoors," Mrs. Beale would cry. "Do come in!"

"Someone stepped on the porch."

"Well, then let them ring the bell."

He would finally be closed out in the darkness, feeling around the frozen shoots and frosty branches, stumbling over wire netting and fallen trellises. One night after feeling around in the dark, trying to make out that figure, listening for the voice, he stopped still, his white forehead gleaming in the dark, and he didn't put out his hands to feel any more and his eyes were no longer squinted in desperate searching but came wide open. He looked ahead of him, his face set, as if he knew something and had always known it but could never

make it come true. Gizzie Needles came to the door.

"Awh, Mr. Beale," she cried, "come in. You'll catch your death out there."

"Good Lord," he thought to himself, "don't a man's intentions count for anything?"

"Mr. Beale, Missus is having a fit."

"Well, I didn't tell her to, did I?" he said.

He went further into the cold yard, surprised that he wasn't stumbling, walking where the ground was frozen and uncertain but keeping his balance as if all were smooth. He walked over the frozen flower beds at the side of the house and the dead bushes scratched his hands as he passed. He felt a roar inside him, as if all his nature were loose and tumbling and rolling inside him, he felt dizzy as if all of him now were loose to pitch and boil in giant waves and whirls that brought his eyes shut and made him reach out for support.

"I was marked," he gasped, "no one wanted me in the world and when I got here I couldn't make any one want me." And then in the center of the tumult he felt a fine spiral gnawing, as if sharp teeth were in his flesh and bone, as if his nature that had always had its own way was now destroying him, slowly gnawing him to pieces while he could only wait in horror. "And damn it," he said aloud as if he were justifying himself in front of a roomful of people, "I knew the right way, I knew all the time

what was right, but something wouldn't let me do it."

He stared up mutely at his house. There were giant shadows over it, dead vines rapped the windows, the roof spread down and made eaves where bits of hay stuck out, but there in the dark and the cold the whole thing looked alive and warm, like something he had built that could never die. Just as it was, without the observatory on top, without the sun porch with birds and flowers, without any of the additions he had made in his head for it, without anything but just what he saw in front of him—this was his house, his home, and there were warm lights in the windows as if it had life inside and as if when the storms of God had carried it away something of it would remain, something would always be there.

Inside Mrs. Beale was holding her glasses to the light and breathing on them, then rubbing them. She kept shaking her head as if she didn't know she was doing it but her face was placid and sweet. "Gizzie," she called, "bring my other glasses. They're in the top drawer of the sideboard."

Gizzie was in the pantry, her head against her straw serving hat, her cheek near the large tarnished buckle in front. "I'd tell a lot about this buckle if I'd a mind to," she often said mysteriously. "It's been in the Needles family for generations. Sir Henry Needles gave it to

his bride in Wild Rose Castle, Needles, England."

She went into the living room. "Yes, Mis' Beale," she said. Then she waited, all her weight on one large black button boot. "But I do think I'd ought to call Mister."

"No," said Mrs. Beale quickly. "He's happier where he is.

7

Dorrit Beale never came home for another vacation and when people, just for fun, asked Mr. Beale how she was he would stare over their heads and say, "Very well but busy." They would repeat it at home when shades were drawn and snow was piled high at the windows. "Very well but busy." "And why didn't you say 'What keeps her so busy?'" someone would ask and then they would throw back their heads, their hands on their sides, and all laugh heartily. The little children would laugh because their mother was laughing and everyone would eat more.

But a big surprise came when Alma Utter came home from Chicago one evening and called in all her friends. She had gone to the Art Institute that morning "because I never could get enough of art and anyway I'm always interested in the different lines of thought people have." In one room were paintings by Dorrit

Beale. "The backgrounds of them were fine," she told her friends, "and the 'tetnic' was perfect, only the Dutch to compare to, there's no question about that."

"But what were they *of?*" Mrs. Boots asked emphatically.

"Oh," said Alma, looking at her husband for help, "you say, Will."

Mr. Utter burst out laughing. His face went pink all over. "Don't ask me to describe them because I couldn't look at them. Made me feel funny."

"Well," said Alma, "I think the world and all of Mr. and Mrs. Beale. We've traded there all our lives and we think highly of them but I don't know what I'd say about those pictures. Of course hanging up on the wall like that with other masterpieces and all, you don't feel in a position to criticize exactly, but what they are supposed to be of and what story they're telling. . . . Oh, go on away," she said to her husband and when he went into the woodshed she explained that the pictures were of naked people and "you couldn't tell which was which hardly." She flushed and looked confused and offended. "I don't see the point in that. Well, anyway, they were all active," she explained, "but I was simply wild about the backgrounds. The figures didn't mean one thing to me. Honest, I can't see the sense when we have such nice clothes now in not painting them on people.

How would we all look going that way and if none of us does why does she paint that way. Why, I was upset over it. Of course, there are statues and all that and proper in their place but to have her from our town, I don't know. But the backgrounds were just fine. If I could have one with just the background I'd even hang it up somewheres."

"When they's such pretty scenes to paint all around, houses and the marsh and the country, cows, flowers, my I don't see," said Mrs. Niman.

"Why, yes, something that's good to look at that we all know and that's *real*."

"Well," said Alma sadly, "those weren't like nothing we've ever seen or would want to see or think about even. Some folks there were making over them but I just couldn't even though she is from our town. And don't tell, I don't want it spread around, but Will was taken sick to his stomach. He had to leave even if we did pay."

The one reproduction Mrs. Beale saw in a city paper made her shake with grief and fright. It made her think of their position in town, of the butcher and the postman and the clerks everywhere. When she bought anything or paid a bill there was always the glowing respect that a good name brings and the low voice, "Anything else, Mrs. Beale?" "Nothing else, thank you, Mr. Butzlaff."

Mrs. Beale met Mrs. Utter on the street and tried to evade her but Mrs. Utter began urging her to come into the house and have a chat. "Now, that's a shame, Mrs. Beale. I don't see anything of you any more. How's Mr. Beale?"

Mrs. Beale had a soft startled look on her face. "He's having some bridge work put in."

"Well, I said to Mr. Utter yesterday, I said, 'The Beales are as happy a couple as we have in this whole town,' I said."

"I guess we are," said Mrs. Beale.

She started walking home very rapidly, holding her head higher than usual. Her face was rigid with the expression of placid joy she had made for it and had held on all afternoon in front of her friends. She pulled her scarf close around her neck and bowed pleasantly to old Mr. Grouse who was wheeling his lawn mower back from the repair shop. She kept imagining herself in her bedroom, taking off the gay face that was over her real one, taking it off as she would her hat and putting it away in the darkest corner of her closet until she should have to go outside again. She would not dare look in the glass at her real face, at the dark horrible lines of disappointment, the cheeks sunken with shocks of all kinds, the head dented and dark with worries. She gave a little shocked cry of self pity and wiped her nose. Oh, to lie

down deep, to rest, to die, to be buried in the peace of the quiet earth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Evans, lovely day. Yes, quite well, thank you. He's having some bridge work put in. No, I must hurry home and keep him company. He's restless without me."

She found Mr. Beale pacing the floor. "I'm going to Chicago," he said.

Mrs. Beale sank down. "Well, I hope you aren't planning to send Dorrit any money because I can hardly get along as it is. Your charity always comes out of me in the end."

"Well, say," broke in Gizzie, the pearl buttons on her calico gleaming, "I heard that one of those pictures of hers sold for, I think it was two thousand or something like that."

Mrs. Beale's mouth dropped open but Mr. Beale made no sign that he had heard. He stared at the sparrows on the lawn.

"But I said to them, 'Say, did you see the check?' and they said, 'No, but it's straight all right,' and I said, 'Well, you wait until you see the check and have it in your hand, then's time to believe.'"

"Please bring me a glass of water, Gizzie," said Mrs. Beale.

"Say, and if I was you, Mr. Beale, I'd pull every last one of them pictures down from the walls and have done with the foolishness. You've a right. You're her father."

"Who taught you that a father has rights?"

She began to giggle and went off for the water.

"Maybe I can get them taken down," said Mr. Beale as he left for the station. "I'll do what I can."

When he reached the city he went straight to the gallery and when he got inside and saw his daughter's name printed on a booklet he held it up as if the name was a new one to him. Then he walked through the room where her pictures were hung, trying not to see them, his hat in his hands, horror and guilt on his face. He went back slowly, forcing himself, his head sunk down between his shoulders and his stomach out.

He drew up in front of the first, a naked woman in sand. Bright sky and water. Two enormous gulls with opened wings. A huge happy baby seated squarely on the woman's stomach and the woman's head pushed deep in the sand, chin up, a look of such definite animal delight in her face that he shivered. He went on until the room seemed to fill up with the happy naked figures of men and women and children, until the sun was there behind him and his shoulders were hot with intense gold light. Sea gulls were in the room, you heard their enormous wings, the ocean was there, and everywhere he looked he met one of the supreme bright looks of radiant bliss. He wanted to sink down, he wanted to sneak

out in shame, and he felt guilty, as if the people in the room knew that this was his daughter, the child who was to make humanity better, his only child who was to make the world grander, fulfill God's purpose on earth, leave a spiritual mark on all. The sweat came out on him as he imagined himself saying aloud, "My daughter painted these freaks that have never been seen on earth. I brought her up right but my wife spoiled her."

But the dramatic touch came from Irma Hoar who went around the world with her mother the following year. A friend, Mr. Coburn, promised to show them Paris and one night at dinner Irma asked to be taken to the Latin Quarter. Mrs. Hoar was happy that it was Irma who asked because she was eighty-two and didn't want to appear eager. So when Mr. Coburn turned to her she pretended to be giving in and indulging Irma.

"But, Mother, *you* say," said Irma, her eyes glittering.

"Well," said Mrs. Hoar, putting one hand over the other, "it doesn't matter to me just so I'm on the go."

"Now, isn't that wonderful?" cried Irma. "Oh, Mr. Coburn, she is interested in everything, more interested than the young people we see over here."

"As I said before," Mrs. Hoar broke in, "I have no preferences. I did want to see Shake-

speare's birthplace on account of the club at home but I've seen that and now I don't care what I see." When Mr. Coburn left that evening Mrs. Hoar said to Irma, "I never thought Jim Coburn amounted to much when he was around at home, but I guess he's real well to do."

The next night, seated in a restaurant in the Latin Quarter, Irma could hardly see from her excitement and the tumult of associations she imagined for all the people. One man she was certain took dope, he had the look of Edgar Allen Poe in his face, and there were women there that she knew had no moral sense. She tried to imagine what that meant and what it would be like. It even seemed all right to speculate about such things now that she was in Paris. It startled her strangely to find that here one could do anything and at home one couldn't even imagine doing anything. She wondered what part she might have played in the wild life of the underworld and then had to take herself in hand as barriers in her gave way.

Mrs. Hoar's eyes were wide open, darting here and there, gathering details for the clubs at home. She saw a long haired man who reminded her of Jeff Boots in Rio and while she was staring at him Mr. Coburn tapped her arm. "You're missing something," he said and indicated a table toward the center of the room.

"Why, they're all drunk," whispered Irma, staring sharply.

"And a woman with them," said Mrs. Hoar.

The five men were ragged, indolent and foreign looking. They pounded the table from time to time and then threw themselves back in their chairs howling with laughter. Irma eyed the girl more closely. She felt a jolt go down her as she recognized the hair and eyes, the startled mute look. She pressed her mother's hand so tightly that the woman chided her and licked the place with her tongue, staring at it through her glasses. Irma watched the girl's movements and occasionally when her voice rose she caught a sentence.

"The fact of the matter is, America is the greatest nation the world has ever seen," and, "in the history of mankind there has never been an influence as far reaching, as profound, as religious, as that of the United States of America."

The girl clasped her hands behind her back and puffed out her cheeks, letting her voice sink down in her throat. "Indeed America is teaching the world how to live, she is showing the dirty foreigners how to respect womanhood, how to make homes, how to live always for the glorious next generation and how to turn it into honest, God fearing men and women. . . ."

She paused and the men at her table pounded with their feet and their fists until she started

again, pursing her lips and scowling as if at a formidable audience. And then she suddenly stopped short, stared at them all, her mouth twitching, and laid her head down on the table, her arms still clasped behind her back.

"See," said Irma, feeling a deep exultation, "she isn't happy."

"How can *any* of these people be happy?" asked Mrs. Hoar.

Irma felt chills go up and down her as she stared at the head lying on the table and thought of how dramatic it was, her mother not knowing it was Dorrit Beale and no one in New Bedford knowing that she was seeing all this and watching the girl who had been brought up among them.

"How *can* such people be happy?" asked Mrs. Beale again, more severely.

"I was just wondering," said Irma.

Werwolf

1

I WAS only a girl on the farm, about fourteen or so, when I delivered a jar of peach-butter to the old Mariner place on Grove Street and Edmonds. It was the grandest mansion in the village at that time and I wondered if I should go to the front or the back door; but I remembered that we went to the same church with the Mariners so I decided on the front. While I waited for Mrs. Mariner to get her purse I could see into the big double parlors with Brussels carpet on the floor and handsome horsehair furniture. The whole thing made me tremble in my clothes. I don't know why, but I think it was the beautiful roses in the rug and the glossy sofa.

I was a long time there in the hall, clearing my throat at every sound and trying to look neater and more fashionable in jerks. Then suddenly a beautiful girl came toward me, but she seemed a lady, her hands were so white and

her voice so low, and she walked different from anyone. When she handed me the money I wished I could have her for a friend and come to see her in the double parlors to talk about foreign countries and styles. I wanted nothing beyond dressing up and walking down the street with her three times a week. When we each of us got married, I thought, we'd name our children after each other, and suddenly I looked at her and smiled.

"To-morrow I'm going away to New York to boarding-school."

I didn't have any voice to answer, so I just smiled again, but I felt like crying.

"It's a long way off, isn't it?"

I nodded, still smiling and knowing I looked like a goose, standing there in my stiff clothes and her in silk with kid slippers on and her hair in a net. But when I got home I went up to my room and sat there wondering why I hadn't said, "Yes, it's very fine you're to go to boarding-school, Miss Mariner," or, "Isn't it fine your parents can spare you from home," but neither of them sounded right, and I was glad I hadn't said anything. But as I sat there on my bed it occurred to me that the indescribable look on her face came from her brows. It came to me suddenly that they were like an eagle's wings, only smaller.

At Christmas-time I caught a glimpse of her in a sleigh tucked in with robes, a whip in her

hand and a black horse stepping over the snow. She had on a fur cap, and her face looked bright and sharp even against the white all around. She was like the bells, somehow, clear and then gone.

"Have you seen Dolly Mariner?" I heard them whisper around church Sunday. "She's home with a bustle and the Grecian bend."

"I can't abide her," I heard another say, and I flushed even though they weren't talking to me. "She's got too good for any of us. Oh, sure, she always felt above us, but now she— That's her!"

I saw her come in the door, pause with her chin on a tiny muff, and then mince down the aisle toward us. As she came closer I could see that Dolly Mariner was grown up at fifteen, and then I saw she was reaching for my hand, reaching past the well-to-do girls that I had supposed were her friends, to me.

"I'm glad to see you," she said, and I felt as though every one in the church had seen and heard. It pleased me very much.

"Do you like boarding-school?"

"I like my vocal lessons and the needlework."

"I suppose you've made some beautiful things for your parlors," I said quickly.

"Yes, I have, and won't you come and see them sometime?" she added, nodded to the others, and went down the aisle.

I saw that nearly every one in the church was

talking about her, and as I slipped into my seat Grandma Briggs said to Effie Danish, "Isn't it a fright the way that girl's matured?" and Effie answered in a terrible tone: "Well, soon ripe soon rotten."

I heard Agnes Oakely say that Dolly was engaged to a man from away, much older than herself, and some one else said that she was too young, only fifteen, and so on till we stood up to sing.

2

At sixteen Dolly Mariner married Roderick Gordon and I heard that she'd painted mottos for their new house and a fruit piece for the dining-room. He was an odd fellow, and so was his father. They were the lonely kind that look wrinkled and sad at an early age and have weak eyes and futile hands. Every one said that Roderick would make a poor husband, and I guess he did, because the week before Dolly was to be confined he went back to his old home to the shed where his father had died of hemorrhage and shot himself. It appeared, later, that he left only debts, so his wife went home to her parents. Dolly's boy was three years old when Mr. Mariner died and his brother took charge of his estate which, after he was through with it, dwindled to nothing except the old mansion and a little money.

"Isn't that like Dolly Mariner!" the women all said at Aid. "Send one to suicide with her extravagance and the other to heart-failure."

But their voices had a happy ring as if they would relish seeing Dolly in their kind of clothes instead of furs and silk, her feet in stiff shoes instead of kid slippers, and her hands not so white nor so pink at the nails. When I went to see Dolly that afternoon she acted no different from before. She looked as if she kept her sorrow shut up somewhere until she was alone, as though even then when it rose to strangle her it would leave no mark. She took my arm and led me into the double parlors, and we sat down on the horsehair sofa. My feet were on the Brussels carpet, and four paces behind me were the embroidered lace curtains which stood out from the windows stiffly and lay on the carpet.

"I'm going back to school to teach," she explained.

"How about your little boy?"

"He's been something of a problem."

"Would I be the one to take him?"

I took the child, but she made me set a price; and when the year was up I had saved enough to buy a beautiful dress almost as fine as any Dolly had ever worn, and I had it made up with style. I had me some kid slippers and a pair of gloves and a bustle. I suppose I looked foolish sitting up on the wagon with

all that finery on but I didn't have a carriage. Dolly had been home for half a day and I went straight to the Mariner place. I had her little boy with me and I must say that he looked as well and handsome as I could make him look. He was a sickly child to start with, and he had those long, useless hands of his father's, and a pitiful voice if you could watch his eyes as he talked.

When Dolly came into the double parlors the little fellow looked at her and then ran under the piano. She thanked me for caring for him and when I inquired for her mother she said that she wasn't well.

"Is her shoulder bad again?"

"She says it is, and she's the sickest she's ever been."

Then she told me about her youngest brother who wanted to go to Alaska to explore and how he needed money and her mother mortgaged the house to let him have it. They hadn't heard from him since and now they would have to give up their home. "Mother thought of course he'd discover gold He was always so lucky."

"Maybe he will."

"I hope so."

At Mrs. Mariner's funeral every one was talking about Dolly and saying that even now when she'd killed her mother she still held her head high. "And her poor brother," someone

said, "the poor fellow couldn't even live in the same house with her, and Heaven knows *where* he is now."

Dolly was in black velvet and her hat had a long pink plume that curled over her shoulder. They all said it was disgusting to see her in such a get-up but I thought she looked beautiful. She was the only one there who didn't cry and who never held her handkerchief over her face once. Afterward she asked me to ride home with her and spend the night but even when she got home she didn't give way. While I was resting in the guest-room I wondered what she would do with her house gone, her family, everything gone but that sickly little boy who had developed spasms during the last week. And when I thought of all that has happened to her I cried, but when I thought of her face I stopped. Then she came in to tell me supper was ready.

"Dolly!" I said.

She didn't say anything, and I looked at her until I had to close my eyes.

"Don't you want to die, too?" I asked.

"No."

"Don't you feel you've had too much trouble?"

"No."

"But it isn't fair!" I cried.

"Shall we go down-stairs now?" she asked and put her arm through mine.

We walked down without speaking and it wasn't until Annie brought in the roast that she looked out the window and said, "I never think about fairness."

After a while we went into the double parlors and the roses in the carpet were bright and the sofa was smooth and cool. She looked around and then she said, "I've never been happy or unhappy and I really don't mind when people die."

I couldn't see much sense in what she'd said so I remarked that I'd always just loved the rug and the sofa and the curtains, and while I was talking Dolly went outside, and I never knew why because it had started to rain and she was in her good clothes from the funeral. When she came in she was so cool and clear looking that I felt odd, and even today I can't figure out why her face looked like that. It was sharp and clear like that time in the sleigh with the bells; and she looked as if—and God forgive me if it's blasphemous of me to say it —she looked as if death could never strike her down.

But they've never stopped talking about her here in the village. They tell about how she was seen in New York in a gold evening wrap with grapes in her hair, and how someone saw her in San Francisco in red velvet with bands of fur, and then in Pittsburgh in black satin, with a gold hat on her head and a diamond pin

bright as a star between her breasts. They always end up with how she killed her husband and her father and mother and how she made her brother run away and get lost and how her little boy had fits, three in one day, and then died, and hasn't even a gravestone to his head. But I let them talk. It don't seem necessary to put in anything.

Two in Love

WE decided after much argument and debate that we were really in love in spite of our physical attachment. Since then he has telegraphed me every two weeks asking permission to come and see me, and has followed my invitation with: "But do you really want me?" and that, an hour later, with the time of his arrival. It is very nice.

"Hello," he always says at the station. "How are you?"

And I always answer: "Very well, thank you," in spite of my painful stomach disorder.

"You got my telegrams?"

"Yes, Ronald, thank you."

Then he laughs and lights a cigarette and I am glad that my uncle isn't there to see him because he calls every cigarette smoker a dirty dog and I wouldn't want Ronald insulted by anyone but me.

"Dear," he said suddenly as though he had practiced it. "I haven't had my trousers pressed since the last time I was here."

Then I look at his knees and they look so funny that if it were anywhere but Ashland I would feel proud.

"They were bulged in the beginning in the interests of love so you don't mind, do you?"

When we reach home my heart falls through to stone and lies there helpless. I realize that I must discover him all over again. I realize that we are not as wonderful as our letters led us to believe. It is a sad affair.

Then Ronald goes to the big chair where my mother sits and shakes hands with her and acts as though he knows her better than he does me. But he doesn't. And she doesn't like him very well because she's deaf on one side and he speaks low. Suddenly the air falls apart and I want to fall into it and never see any one connected with love again. It is a frightful moment and one that I hope I can never forget. So I always start laughing because it doesn't do to let a moment see that it can make you miserable. Oh, I know. I've knelt to those horrid moments and had them simply beat in my head with their sleeves. So I just laugh as loud as I can.

And my mother says quietly: "The china closet, dear."

That's where my medicine is, but it doesn't do me one bit of good and I may die soon. I don't care though.

"Mother, Ronald brought you a box of

candy, but he's too bashful to give it." Then I pretend that I am Ronald giving it and I stumble around the way he does only I can't look as silly. Now that I think of it he is silly looking and I don't like him very well even though we are in love.

Well, that's the kind of terrible time we usually have and he's perfectly unknown to me. I know every one better than I do him and it isn't that exciting kind of unknown-ness but that other. The kind that makes your eyes feel wide open and as though you've been deluding yourself for a good long time. That's the terrible kind of unknown-ness that I've had to contend with. We know then that we're complete strangers so we have to act as though we aren't. Then when my mother isn't around he comes near my chair and acts like one of those furry cats that he knows I like and I pet him but we don't get worked up or anything. Then my mother comes rushing in and sits down between us. I pass the candy.

"Ronald, this is good candy," says my mother, looking at the hair I've upset. If she only knew that it wasn't one bit of fun doing it, I always think. After that she doesn't leave us alone for one minute and we live through a dreadful afternoon. Ronald grows more and more silent until I have to play the piano to keep from bursting into tears. I look at him sometimes with his lips stuck

out an odd way and his feet just crazy and I always know what he is thinking. He is saying it over and over. "All of our troubles come from sex." If that means anything I haven't found out yet.

Then we have to eat dinner and that's just awful because I am a vegetarian, due to my painful stomach disorder, and Ronald eats almost nothing but meat. To have to watch him chew the flesh of animals and swallow it, is more than I can endure, so I don't watch. But I see it just the same. I'm that way. And then we move into the living room. We *move* in. No one walks in our house, or runs, or does anything active. We move as if we have trains and my mother sits down in her chair, on guard for the evening.

In those hours after dinner I always miss my father. He died. Sometimes I wish my mother would, too, because she keeps me from kissing Ronald when I want to and now that I think of it I'm sure that she is to blame for all our trouble. Ronald and I would probably be in love all the time if it weren't for her. Well, she ought to die. But I might not say that to-morrow. And I think she is fond of me.

The doorbell rings. In walk the Gaulsen girls and behind them the Briggs girls. In Ashland any unmarried woman of good family is called a girl until death. Annie Gaulsen keeps widening her eyes at Ronald all the time

and it reminds me of the way city men go at me when I look at them too long. But Annie is a protected woman and doesn't know about such. Then Nellie tries to pretend she thinks that Ronald is just as good as any of us.

"Well, Mr. Manchester, what do you think of our little village?"

"To tell you the truth," says Ronald, "I never see it."

Nellie turns to my mother. "Annie made the most delicious pudding for dinner today. It was perfectly delicious."

"Annie is always doing something interesting," says my mother.

"Isn't she though!" This from the Briggs girls. "That hat she made your mother is too charming for words."

"And now," says Nellie, "she's making one for me."

"How ingenious of her," cry the Briggs girls. Then they start talking about Europe. They went when they graduated from high school thirty years ago, and they always tell about it in a delicious abandoned way as if no one else had ever been. Ronald loved it.

"Stick around Paris much?" he asked.

"Tell me, dear," said Laura Briggs to my mother, "tell me where you got that perfectly darling little rug over there. I've seen such rugs in the House Beautiful—yes, we've taken

it for years—and it is exciting to actually see one."

While they are examining it I grab Ronald and drag him into the library. We light the candles and sit down in the same chair. It begins to be nice.

"Ronald, I've been awfully angry with you."

"Not really angry. You couldn't be angry with me *now*, could you *now?*"

"No, no!" And I kissed him but I felt like meat.

"We aren't ever really angry any more."

"But I don't know you," I said.

"Let's take that for granted."

He seemed much older than a college boy and not at all like one. I ought to say that I would be in college, too, if it weren't for my painful stomach disorder.

"It's nice," he said suddenly, "that you kiss me even though you are bored."

"But I'm not!" Again I felt like meat. It must be that I always do when I lie.

"But you love me, anyway, I'm sure of that."

I didn't want to think and all of a sudden I felt as though I was him. It wasn't necessary to tell him so and we just sat that way for a long time. I had just time enough to get in another chair when my mother appeared.

"It's a shame," I told her, "to leave two young people alone like this—unchaperoned. I shall never be the same again."

She sat with us the rest of the evening and it made me furious because I knew that if I were in love with a minister or a lawyer she would let us be alone most of the time. So I went to bed early and dreamed about trees and flowers and it was hardly light when I woke up, but the sky was beginning to be lovely, and the roofs looked as close as the branches. I put on my slippers and my negligee and walked right into Ronald's room.

"Hello, Ronald!" I said.

He reared up and then remembered where he was. "How do I look in bed?" he asked, offhand, but I knew he was surprised.

"Better than I thought."

"Well, well," he said, and put out his hand. "Kiss it!"

I did.

"You're cold. You're shivering. Why don't you get in bed with me?"

"Oh, no," I said and did at once.

For a moment we were lifted into something strange and timeless but that's all I know about it. I said: "I like being in bed with you." Then I went. And all the time I was drawing my bath I wanted to tell some one about it. I couldn't think of anything else and I knew if I told my mother she wouldn't be able to either, so I didn't have any one to tell. Wasn't that pitiful? But that moment has hung above me like sound and color and scent.

Breakfast was different. It was a pleasant meal and I felt handsome and Ronald looked it. It was as though we were existing in a delicious space just inside the one my mother was in, a space she knew nothing about. I felt rather sorry for her. Then I reached under the table for Ronald's hand and there seemed no doubt about our love.

"Isn't there something awfully amusing in this room?" I asked my mother, but she looked very cross and shook her head. "Ronald and I are going walking," I said. "We can't stand this laughter here. Something is laughing at us."

How terrible that I didn't know then that I was the one who was laughing. I—but we went on walking and came to a fallen tree as soon as they do in the movies.

"Darling," said Ronald, "I'm yours. I've said it before but this time I mean it."

"I shall always love you," I said and then I was kneeling to him and I could feel a crown on my head and wonderful jewels on my neck and yards and yards of velvet and fur falling around me. I laid everything before him. But he tried to kneel to me and to do that he had to fall flat on the ground, so we had to laugh.

"Come on," he cried, "we're going to elope."

I felt sharp and definite all of a sudden.

"We're going to Paris to-night."

"Wouldn't we have to go to New York

first?" I asked. "And what about our clothes?"

"You really sound human," he said. "God, I'm glad to know that you are."

Such terrible sadness ran through me that I could hardly speak—and laughter. I thought: "We're only pretending. Love isn't like this. It's something else." I said aloud: "I can't believe that we're really in love. Love is different."

He moved away from me as if I were poison. "You're afraid. You're going to fail in this too."

"I never fail in anything," I cried. But that laughter was running up and downstairs in me.

He was quiet for a long time. "I love you," he said finally.

"You don't know what love is."

He began to laugh. "I understand you," he said.

"No, you don't. I don't myself."

Then he fell into an unseemly rage. "You're a coward that's afraid to step out of her own dooryard. You're afraid of reality. I've tested you. The tiniest things can set you way off. I know perfectly well that if I had come here with my trousers pressed everything would have been different. But I don't mind that so much," he said, "only I thought when you were sure that you loved me it would be different."

"You're taking what I say under emotional excitement as being true. You can't do that."

"Oh, rot!"

"I can say that I love you for eternity and know that I do but all the time something can tell me there is no eternity."

"If you're really in love time doesn't matter."

"I know. Oh, kill me! Kill me!"

"Nothing doing," he said brutally. "You'd enjoy it too much."

"I thought life was a holiday," I said wistfully, knowing that I was being deliberately child-like.

"How will you ever know what it is?"

There seemed to be no tissue between us, no blood in common, nothing. The agony of that sudden separation was like death. But I laughed. "This is real," I thought. "We ought to stand alone like this."

"If I fit into your picture of me, you love me. If I don't you have no use for me."

"Ronald," I cried, "I never do that!" But I saw the blood of that lie drip into the grass.

"I love you in spite of it," he said. "But try to see *me* sometimes. Will you?"

"Oh, I will," I said and kissed his knees.

"This is no time for that," said he and the day was one of misery.

He took the early train the next morning and on the way to the station he told me his dream. "I was in the gutter weeping, with my head on a dog. Some theatrical people passed and a woman with a large hat and a

patent leather belt gave me a ticket for the show. I went and sat in the first row balcony and I felt better. Then suddenly, for no reason, I began weeping again and every one looked."

"Oh, Ronald!" I began to cry. But I didn't mean it. And I waved to him as the train went out. On the way home I decided to clear away all the images I had of him and find out directly what he was like. I cleared for days and spent my nights nursing the clearings. I knew that pity must not remain, that kissing was only a palliative, that love to endure must strangle sentiment. I knew all that and I used that knowledge as a whip.

He came again and he had as much existence as vapor. I knew that something in me was making him unreal. I think it was the laughter, but I was helpless.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"I think my mind or something has killed our love."

"Don't say that!" he begged. "Minds make it better."

"Mine didn't."

"Damn it all, pretend anything you want to about me just so you love me—pretend anything—I don't care."

"I can't."

"But you can! We don't have anything to say about this."

"Why do you ask me to try then?"

He tried to kiss me and then he moved away. "You look like Miss Muffet," he said and stared at his hands for a long time.

"Oh, it's untrue, I love you, I love you!" I felt as though I were talking in my sleep with that laughter self a shadow. I wondered suddenly what it would be like to really love. It hurt me to wonder that. "I love you," I said again. Then I waited for something to happen, for that delicious space to open and let us inside, for us to be changed back again with the tissue between us firm and our blood the same. But nothing happened. He stood there as empty and vacant as the moment itself.

"I wish you would stop bothering me," I cried, and laughed when he looked hurt. "I mean that!"

And now I am alone.

The Child

SOMETIMES she would look out in the yard where her little child was playing, the bright hair hanging in puffed curls over her shoulders, her eyes large and trustful, her body deliciously formed. She would rush out there and catch her up, kiss those bare knees, those ankles where the little socks had rolled, touch the incredible dimples in her elbows. She forgot the child's name then, forgot that she was hers, and stood back to look at the bright hair, the eyes, the beautiful smooth body. A terrible clumsiness always overcame her, then pride: "I was right. My head made her." And the child would skip over the circular path around the fuchsia bed, swinging her red rope with the yellow handles so fast that Roger would come to the door crying: "Not so fast there, not so fast!" and the little girl would run to him with: "Did you see me?"

"Yes, darling."

"Watch me!" And she would jump high, get close to the ground, laughing, touching the

bent fuchsias, picking up a leaf, a little flat stone. She would throw up her arms and try to turn somersaults over the thick grass, try to be a growling bear, a snapping dog, a clown in the circus, until a frenzy would catch her; screams then and despairing cries of fright as she seemed to see the bear, the dog, the clown, towering above her, growling and biting.

They had told her she must never have a child, her mother, her father, both had told her that, and the doctor had talked to her gravely before she married Roger. "But my head's all right!" she cried at them. "What if my body is peculiar?"

Her mother wept. "You would never come through it."

Her father walked with hands clasped behind him, his pink cheeks full, his blue eyes watching sparks from the fire make sprays of gold wisteria on the black chimney. He touched his white moustache with his fine fingers but did not speak.

"It is doubtful if you could have a healthy child," said the doctor. "I cannot advise it."

"But my head's good!"

She had turned to them hotly, certain that they were trying to hold her back, deprive her, all for their own satisfaction. She had heard the unsympathetic creak of her mother's black silk as she leaned back in her chair, as if she were taunting her—"Head good, and indeed,

what does that mean." The snort from her father, his pink nostrils puffing out, one hand smoothing his thin hair. What did *he* care? Then the doctor acting so healthy and smooth, so clairvoyant, as if everything had been seen and he had written it down on a card.

Now for five years her parents had been whispering to her slyly: "But is she *really* all right?" And her mother was always hovering as if the next day would bring some odd disease or ghastly illness that would seize the child in a sudden spasm and tear her apart. All Roger ever said was, "Don't let any one frighten you." But sometimes she loathed Roger. He had never understood her wanting the child so desperately, or how she felt when it came, or how she felt now, torn between heaven and hell. Roger was always calm, always polite, always ready with excuses that prevented quarrels.

They watched her go to school one day in her yellow smock and new slippers, a big tablet under her arm with a grandma on the cover peeling turnips. They saw her cross the road and go into the school-yard where children were playing. Then they caught a glimpse of her yellow smock as she stood against the brown wall watching.

"I hope she gets along," said Roger.

"She will," promised the woman eagerly.

"You should have let her play with other children before."

"Shall I have a party for her?"

"Why don't you," he said. "We don't want her to get queer."

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "We want her to be like other children."

At two o'clock the child came home with a large lamb drawn on each sheet of her new tablet. She gave it over to her father with frightened pride, justifying the absence of a leg, the mysterious glitter of an eye, pausing to explain the amazing dissimilarity of her lambs. Suddenly she climbed into his lap and put her head under his coat. They heard her nervous sobbing, saw her body tremble.

"Darling," said the woman getting down on the floor, "you're going to have a tea party out near the fuchsia bed with your little table and chairs and your best tea set. Won't that be nice?"

"Wouldn't you like that?" asked the man.

Two grandparents came in suddenly with their impressive creak and rustle. They surrounded the child with groans and pleadings, with promises of strawberry tarts, roller skates, a piece of the precious almond cake in the bottom cupboard. The little girl came out suddenly from her father's coat and looked at them gravely.

"Now, come to Grandmother."

"Come to your best friend." The grandfather turned his blue eyes upon her critically.

"Tell us about the party you're going to have," urged her mother. "Oh, come now, tell us darling."

The woman watched her child look at them as if she had not heard, sit as if wrapped in felt, wondering not so much why she was there as where she was, who the large grey woman with the piece of lace hanging down her could be, the old man with the pink skin, the woman with her hands pressed tight between her knees, the man whose knee she was upon, whose hand was over hers. Suddenly she ran out of the room.

"Not well," said the grandmother.

"Getting peculiar," said the grandfather.

The woman jumped up and walked across the room. She snatched up the cat and began petting him so rapidly that electricity shot and cracked out of his fur.

"It worries us because she has never played with children," explained Roger. "We've been awfully silly about her, watching her all the time. God, it's a wonder she isn't sick."

"But the child is *not* well," repeated the grandmother.

"Mother!" cried the woman. She dropped the cat and walked back to her parents rapidly, her eyes above them. "Didn't I tell you that the doctor examined her again on Monday? He told me that she was in perfect condition," she half screamed. She went over to the table

then and crouched over the books, wondering why she was always fighting the three of them, always justifying her child's existence as if she were illegitimate, pleading with them, pretending she wasn't afraid of their influence that stood over her waking and sleeping like a volcano.

"Well," said the grandfather, "I think she is getting decidedly peculiar."

"You're going to have trouble with her yet, I'm afraid," said her mother complacently.

"Mother!" she cried sharply.

She saw her mother rise, heard her say good-bye and take her husband's arm, watched them bow as she and Roger begged them to come again soon. As they hurried down the path she saw her mother's skirt spread out as if a small bush had caught under it, heard the gate fall shut and the impressive creak and rustle dim.

"Mother drives me mad!" she cried and covered her face.

"But the child is peculiar," began the man.

A sharp quiver went through her. "Doesn't the doctor know?" she asked angrily. "Didn't he say . . ."

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, "but she does seem rather strange at times. Oh, don't let's start having a scene over it, though," he said as he saw her face darken and set. "Come, now, sit down and be a human being for a

while. Really this atmosphere you create around everything makes me feel odd myself."

She wondered if his face really had that look of accusation on it or if she, fearing it so much, saw it there, or if she actually wanted to be accused. Then she looked at him assuming a kind of indifference, an unearthly calm, as if she had no fears. But she was sick with fright.

During their supper they planned the tea party, determined to have the ice cream covered with spun sugar and told the details to the child who sat eating her bread and milk from a lustre bowl. On the way to the glen she thought of the children she would invite, just shy children, she decided. But after spending a week trying to find shy children she learned that shyness had become a rare thing, an abnormality, and she saw that she was the one ill at ease with the perfectly poised little girls who answered questions with polite gravity. "I was just a tot in Paris at that time, wasn't I Mother." "Oh, a party will be great fun. Isn't it ripping." Their speech had a rational flavor, their manners an air of artificial simplicity, utter and permanent.

Suffocation closed her throat as she thought of the tea party with her child, the hostess, frightened, hiding somewhere, the calm, self possessed guests reasoning among themselves, or suddenly becoming boisterous and merry, playing, she thought bitterly, as children should

play. They would be in bright frocks with clever paper hats on their heads and the imitation tea would be in rosebud cups on a faint pink cloth. For an instant she thought she could never go through it. She would shield her child from everyone even if it ruined them both. She would never submit her to comparison with these smart cool children. Then she thought of the presents, the explanations, Roger, her parents. She saw the beautiful Napoleon cake all white and sticky with icing, filled with cream, waiting for the garland of red berries and green leaves.

She dressed the child in a sheer white frock embroidered in buttercups and tied a narrow yellow ribbon over her bright hair. The socks rolled down over her straight legs and she stooped to kiss them, reached out to touch the white kid slippers with their precise bows and suddenly, half crying, pulled the little girl into her lap, saying over and over, "Do you want to go to the party, do you want to go, my precious?" But the child pulled away, clapping her hands and crying, "It's my rosebud tea set!" Then she whirled very fast. "It's my party and my little table and my chairs." As she jumped up and down the woman thought that the child seemed free for the first time of the stupor that seemed to enclose her like felt, that hung from her even when she was active in intangible webs.

"Come," she said gaily, "let's look at the cake." Happiness so piercing that it was pain shot through her. She took the child's hand and they went to the kitchen to look at the gleaming white cake surrounded by red fruit and green leaves. As the child put out her finger to touch the icing the woman felt another flow of happiness sting her. "Not yet," she said, and they went into the yard.

Up the street came two groups of children. The woman met them at the gate, noticing suddenly that she did not resent their party manners, a casual mixture of gaiety and aloofness. Roger came to the door with his clap of "Well! Well!" that he reserved for children and she laughed aloud as she watched them tolerate his clumsy playfulness until he left them for the club. And her child, like some undreamed of miracle, walked among them. She put her arm through a little girl's and together they danced toward the fuchsia bed.

Later she watched her pour the imitation tea gravely into the rosebud cups, saw her clap her hands and shout as the mound of ice cream came in melting under a dazzling network of spun sugar, and just behind it the gleaming white cake with its rich garland. She noticed that the children, confronted by such food, abandoned their fastidious manners and ate ravenously, shaking strawberry juice and cream off their red lips while they reached for cake.

Then, as the others grew hilarious, she watched her child quiet down, shrink back in her chair as a curious stupor seemed to gather, waiting to enclose her like sleep, saw her lean forward half terrified as the children tore caps from their heads, mashed pieces of icing with their spoons, and broke into shrieks of laughter when some one upset the tea. The eyes grew slowly sober and dull and one sticky hand was stretched far out on the pink cloth.

The chidren, drowsy with food and exertion, began to play on the grass in their crumpled frocks until some one proposed that they sit in a circle and tell stories. Instantly there were indignant counter proposals. "No, let's run. Let's play tag. Let's make angels on the grass." But finally they arranged themselves in a sober circle.

"Where's Susannah's place?" asked the woman, remembering Roger's instructions. "Where is Susannah going to sit."

"Oh she can sit here by me," said a little girl. "I'd just as soon."

But the child sat at her place by the table, her little legs out in front of her, her head sunk stupidly as if she had eaten too much.

"Come on, Susannah," they cried.

The child got up and walked over to the fuchsia bed. Then she began running slowly round and round it, her head up and her arms at her sides.

"Darling," she called. "Come, come over here."

But she ran faster and faster, singing something shrill, and then she flew like a golden bird and the woman watched as if only her eyes were left. Suddenly she stopped and caught her hands about her throat as a piercing cry stretched open her mouth. The children scuttled over the grass as the scream broke into a strangled caw and the child fell backwards into the flowers.

She lifted her into her arms and pressed her against her body but the head flopped over her arm and the little arms dropped down. "Doctor" she screamed as if her voice would reach him where ever he was. She ran over the grass to the house, the children folding in after her, some fluttering at her side like little birds, a boy with curls falling behind and crying. One little girl was level with her and she kept saying over and over, "Mrs. Trayle, her face is all blue, isn't it."

Picnic Day

NONE of us church people mistrusted Louise Markle when she began using red on her mouth. There were some that talked, of course, but Heaven sakes, we thought we knew that girl through and through. She'd been raised in our church and her mother before her. She was brought up with all the fine things of religion around her and she sang in the choir from the time she was fourteen. But when her mother died and she began to do typing at the courthouse I noticed that she sta ted to act kind of free and easy. No, that wasn't until the Horace McConkles came to town.

They were an elegant couple. Mr. sold insurance and Mrs. was one of the sweetest little bodies in our town with her three children and another on the way. They went to our church, of course. All the big business men go there. Our minister, Dr. White, says it's an inspiration to him to have most of the splendid men of the town in his congregation. But they

always tell him that he's the inspiration.

First thing we knew Louise was thick with Mrs. McConkle and always talked with her after service. And on the days Louise sang in the choir Mr. used to come and we all laughed and joked Louise and Mrs. in front of him. But he was good natured, kind of big and hearty, and he wore his hat tilted and walked important. Then Louise began going to their house to do special typing for Mr. McConkle, she said, and after Mrs. was back from the hospital she went there to see the baby. She was there so much that we all joked her about it and said that next thing she'd be living there. But nobody could get a word out of her then and I noticed she was getting thinner and paler all the time. All of a sudden the McConkles moved away.

I guess it was a month later that Louise came to see me. I was real pleased because she hadn't been to my house since her mother died and when she was little she'd always been such a one to come. It was awkward the way we sat there in the parlor, me asking her all kinds of questions about her work, the McConkles, her clothes that she always made herself, anything I could think of to ask her. But she looked so stiff and white that I wondered if she was out collecting money for something.

"Well," I said, "Louise," I said, "it's good

to have you here even though I do see you every Sunday at church."

"I hate church," she said. "I don't think I'll go any more."

I couldn't imagine what had come over her to say such a thing, a girl like her, twenty years in the church. Her mother carried her in before she was a year old.

"I guess you aren't feeling well, Louise," I said.

She shook her head and I suggested that the weather had been trying and that she had to work pretty hard but that she ought to take her troubles to the church, she ought to go there and pray, I told her, and tell our minister, do all those things that I'd done all my life. "Try that," I said but she shook her head again.

Then I told her that maybe her friends, the McConkles, going away had affected her and she began talking about something way off the subject just as if she hadn't made that blasphemous remark about our church. And she stared at a picture of her taken when she was about four with her hair up on top of her head and a little locket round her neck. I always thought that was the dearest picture that ever was even though she did look kind of peaked and scared.

"Well, Louise," I said and pointed to the picture, "when you were that little girl you used to like church."

"I liked it until the McConkles came," she said.

"They're gone now," I said, "can't you like it again?"

"No."

"Well, we all get our spells, I suppose," I told her.

"But I'm glad it happened," she said.

I looked at her eyes and her thin neck and arms. She looked burned out, as if her whole life was done. "Louise," I said, "are you eating right? Do you get enough of sleep? You know I feel responsible for you, Louise," I said, "since your mother's gone."

Then she told me. She was in love with Horace McConkle. (Just think—that nice girl—as nice a girl as we have in our church!) "But what difference does it make," he told her, "when we love each other. What difference does anything make? This is ours. My wife has nothing to do with it."

One night his wife was taken to the hospital and Louise stayed there in the house with him. They put his children to bed and laughed and joked with them and Louise stayed. In the morning they took flowers to the hospital.

"I'll never regret it," she said, real defiant, "but I can't keep it any longer. I have to tell it. She didn't even know. And I wanted everyone to know. But he kept saying, 'This is

between us. Just us. It would be common to tell.'"

When Mrs. McConkle came home she and Louise went everywhere together, to church, to the movies, and when Mr. was away Louise sometimes stayed with her to keep her company. Other times she went to the country with him to a meadow. But on Sundays she had to be back to sing in the choir and to teach her Sunday school class and anyway, they didn't dare to stay away for long.

All of a sudden she couldn't endure singing her hymns any more. She wanted to sing about her own life right there in the church in front of all of us instead of her special solos or Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow or Count Your Many Blessings. She said she wanted to sing about her hatred for his wife and children, especially the little baby that McConkle liked to watch while it nursed. And nights she would go home in the dark and wonder what she would do if she had a child, imagining herself standing there in the choir before all her mother's friends, and then she would shake with fear, you can imagine, picture death, long for it, but something would make her love him all the more.

One day she got up her courage—he was so awfully grand acting—and said, "What if I have a child?" and he answered, "Well, then, we'll run away to the moon. How's that?"

After that she was afraid to live or die but he always told her, "Life is wonderful when you know the secret."

"I'm not afraid when I'm with you," she said. "Oh, how can you stay there with her?"

"Can't you two be good friends?"

"I can't stand her not knowing!"

"Be reasonable, Louise. It's no concern of hers what we do. That concerns ourselves."

"How about me?" she cried. "What do I get out of this? I'm left out!"

"Aren't you satisfied to be giving me everything?"

Then she would hate herself for not understanding his love and she would go to his table and talk with his wife and kiss his children and she would invite them all to the movies even if she didn't have much money. "I used to think I'd die or scratch her to death," she said. "And when I had time I'd go down in our cellar and practice my solo for church with the words I wanted to sing to it."

One day he told Louise they were going to move to Glendale. I can imagine how she stared at him and when she begged him to take her far off somewhere, far away from his wife and children he said, "Funny little Louise. Be reasonable. You shall come to us for a long visit, I promise you that. Do you think that anything can take away what we have had together? Why no!" And when she looked

at the branches of apples almost touching the ground and felt a cold wind on her face she let out a scream, she said, and threw herself against him. All he said was, "Louise, have I ever given you reason to suppose I was an ordinary man?"

So the McConkles made their plans for moving and Mrs. said she would miss Louise because she had been such a good friend to her and added that the children would miss their "second mother" as they called her. And McConkle, too, would miss her, she always said, laughing at him roguishly and shaking her finger; he would miss Louise.

The first time Mrs. McConkle said that Louise cried, "Oh, but I'm afraid he won't!" and Mr. looked sober and said, "We'll have to see about that," while his wife just beamed at him and stroked his cheek. After that Louise never said anything to Mrs. McConkle's jokes.

"Dearest," said Mrs. McConkle just a week before they went, "I want to do something for Louise. She has been so very lovely to me. Can't we have a party or something? Don't you think so, darling? Don't you think so, Louise? Of course. A picnic's the thing!"

They went on a bright cool day in September and McConkle who knew only one quiet meadow in the country that was quiet enough for a family picnic took his wife, Louise, and his four children there. They stepped out of the car and he went on ahead to the only safe

place in the meadow that he knew. Behind him came his wife with her baby at her breast and the three little boys begging for pickles. That reminded McConkle that he had promised his three little boys a good spanking if they teased Mama for pickles. But he led them on to the lovely spot and Mrs. McConkle, spreading out the robe, cried, "Oh, look! Apples and everything. Why, even the grass has been prepared for us. *See!* Oh, darling, you know all about picnics and lovely meadows and things."

He agreed that he did and wished that they had brought sunshades for the sun, offered a newspaper to Louise for fear she might spoil her dress on the weeds, and asked Mrs. how soon the baby could go on prepared food. "Oh, not for six months yet," she said blushing. "Do forgive us for being so domestic and intimate," she begged Louise who didn't know where to look. "But we always consider you one of the family." And then Mr. went off to the woods in that grand way of his with his three little boys hopping behind him.

Louise looked at the branch of warm apples that almost touched the ground but she didn't speak. And even when they stopped a few days later on their way to the station she didn't say anything. She only looked at them and shut her eyes when Mrs. kissed her and made the little boys do the same. But when

she held the baby up for her to kiss Louise kind of groaned and put her hands over her stomach and McConckle said real quick that he had to telephone and took her back to the house.

Then he put his arm around her and shook his head. "I'm disappointed in you, Louise," he said and patted her on the back. "But you're as reasonable as a woman can be, I guess."

She leaned against him with her arms hanging straight, her head down, but she didn't make a sound. Then the little boys began shouting for Papa and Mrs. started calling and the baby began to cry so McConkle brushed his coat and went. Louise watched the car go down the street with the little boys hanging out the sides waving their straw hats and when she heard the train pull in she sat down by the window. Then it pulled out.

"Never mind, Louise," I said. But I couldn't look at her long, she looked so white and stiff and finished. "You keep on with your solos and don't give up church. You'll forget about it sometime, Louise."

Wind

WIND poured in the door and the postman handed her a letter. She smiled, not too self-consciously, and only glanced at the thick envelope. Then she closed the door and stood against it. A letter from Ronald and only the night before she had said goodbye to him at the bus. His face at the window, then dust, and the lonely streets. She wanted very much to open the letter but she didn't. Instead she looked at the place near the radiator where he had stood, the chair covered with cretonne where she had sat, their conversation.

"Don't talk Emerson to me. I hate mystics. I despise impracticality."

"Ronald, you're nothing but a child."

"That's no way to argue."

"Of course it is. If you're a child you can't be expected to understand."

"Inconsistent again. God!" Then he had rushed to her and kissed her but she had hated his collegiate necktie. "Darling, don't let's

quarrel. Please. Won't you ever know that I love you?" He looked at her with his cheeks flushed and his eyes suddenly wild, but she was stone. "Don't let's ever talk any more," he begged. "Let's just kiss."

"You're nothing but a collegiate cynic," she threw at him, "nothing more."

"Well, I'm ready to argue," he had said, "only explain your position and try to do it intelligently." His mouth was very stern. "At least fortify yourself with some kind of reasonable arguments."

"Oh, you make me sick!"

He flushed. "Look here, Megan, I believe only where I have proof."

"Well, I begin where there can be no proof."

He shrugged. "God, I knew you'd say something like that. You insist upon being uncomfortable all the time. If I want to kiss you then you want to talk Emerson and argue about nothing. When I want to argue then you call me silly."

But at the bus she had suddenly been unhappy and the streets were lonely and so was the house. She looked again at the letter. His "e's" were snarling lions and his "n's" were peasants kneeling to pray. She kissed the letter.

Last night she had said that he was superficial and stupidly masculine. She had gone hopping to bed and later, coming through the

hall in her velvet robe and satin mules, she had met him pounding his pipe where he shouldn't.

"May I look at you twice?" he had asked.

He looked very bewildered suddenly and kissed her foot where no slipper came. "Your foot is very soft. I should think you'd kiss it all the time."

"I do," she had said and stamped into her room, slamming the door. But she felt the place at once and it was soft.

The envelope yielded with a long crackle. Ronald wrote that she had somehow hurt him. "I don't know how you came to, but you have." Something about her foot, her hand, his love. "I can't write poems and you won't let me love you and I can't help it. . . ." She read it again.

Her mother called her to lunch. As she opened a baked potato she said: "I'm going over to Portsmouth," and looked out doors.

"But, darling, Ronald was here yesterday!"

"I know it."

The train was abominably slow and the old man who sold gum looked at her so sadly and held his box so persistently that she had to buy. Ronald might be dead; no one ever knew what he might do. She saw him in his coffin. She had to laugh.

At last a taxi and crowds of students dressed alike; the familiar buildings that looked so

gray and cross. She got out at the restaurant where he was sure to be drinking coffee. Not there. She ran to the telephone and called his house. Not there, either. One other place where he might be. She ran through the cold streets.

At a table, alone, one hand making his hair eccentric, sat Ronald. He looked pouty and half foreign. He struggled up, almost upsetting the small table, his napkin in one hand. Intelligence promptly fortified his amazement and he closed his mouth.

"I'm miserable," she said, her mouth jerking. "I don't mean it now."

"You came just to see me?"

"I did."

He smiled. "I thought you might."

"What's that?"

"I thought you might come. I could see you reading my letter. I always know what you'll do."

"Don't say that!"

"But I do! That's why I love you."

"Oh, stop!"

"Megan, now do you know that I love you?"

"Oh, Ronald . . ."

"Look here," he said, "I'm in a damned mess. They called me a scoffer in class this morning and old Hines is going to kick me out of his course. I hate this damned sterile place, anyway. Let's go to New Orleans," he said

suddenly and grasped both her hands. "We'll live in a garret. Come on, it'll be great. I got my allowance today."

"It would be so transitory."

"Well, I don't mind that," he said. "One of those houses with balconies and a good cook in the basement."

"You said a garret."

"We could find a garret in such a house, most likely."

"Garrets are too adolescent for me," she replied.

"You know I love you," he cried. "Here, waiter, some coffee!" He turned to the window and looked helplessly into blackness.

"Ronald," she said softly, reaching for his hand, "I do love you."

"I thought you'd say that," he said quickly. "Will you go? I said I wanted coffee!" he shouted at the waiter.

She burst out laughing and immediately his face became mournful. He balanced his forehead on his palm. "I can't even write poems, damn it."

She raised up in her chair, tears starting out of her eyes. "I can't *bear* to hear you say that, Ronald. Oh, I can't live when you're so miserable."

"This place is sterile without you. Sometime we'll realize what we're missing by not being together now."

"I know it."

"Sometime we will," he said again. "Will you go?"

"Yes!" she said deeply and grabbed hold of the table.

He looked at her quickly as if he were trying to make himself realize that she was actually there. He tried to smile, then he caught his head. "We'll go to a show first," he said. "Then we'll start."

"New Orleans will be warm," said Megan. "There won't be any wind."

"Do you like it warm?"

"Love it."

"Let's get to the show," he said.

They saw the comics twice and then sat through a long picture whose hero shot himself and turned up a tragic face for the laughter of students. On the way down the street Ronald lingered before another theater. "Want to see this? Our train won't go for a while yet."

"Mine goes in half an hour," she said, turning her face away. "I told Mama I'd be home to-night."

"We can make it," he mumbled and called a cab.

They were silent until the train came in and they began to laugh.

"You came all the way to see me," he shouted to her from the platform. "You are good."

"Goodbye, Ronald."

"*Megan!*"

But she went inside and the train began to move. Little boys munched Graham crackers and made their way toward the water cooler. She saw a hat like a little brown cup with two quills for a handle perched on a familiar head, but she did not speak. At the last seat she hesitated, turned, saw Ronald standing behind her.

"Is my life going to be nothing but this?" she asked him coldly.

"May I sit down? Could I have stayed there, Megan?"

"You're always absurd. . . ."

He turned to the window and stared out, his arm on the narrow shining ledge, his cheek against the glass. "I can't even write poems."

She put her hand to her throat. "That makes me perfectly miserable. Oh, I can't bear to have you unhappy."

"You know that I love you?"

"I think so."

"Listen, listen," he said, "listen. Do you know that I'm your slave?"

They burst out laughing suddenly and the train went faster and faster.

Confession

WHAT do I care for the years that pass when I am not moving? Why should I bother about morning, then noon, then night, and weeks, months, and years when I am not moving? My bones are changing, my face is slipping, my skin is changing its pores and tanning. But I am not growing as weeks and months and years grow. Something inside me is strange and steady, like a body there beyond my ribs. Perhaps it looks out through my ribs sometimes, seeing through the minute blood cells and skin cells into outdoors. Perhaps it doesn't care to look outdoors.

But this is what I want to say. I do not grow. My body grows. Weeks and months grow to years, but I, this curled, deaf I does not grow. It is not a presence. It is not like the pressure of air moving in colored folds about me. It is not something that can be seen or smelled or touched. I only know that it is there and I imagine it lies curled up and demands food and I hate it, I hate it, I hate it.

Its food is not bread and meat and wine. It has other food.

I must tell you about this deep rotten knot in me because now my blood and my skin cells and my tears are revolving in remorse. I can feel a straining through my legs up to my shoulders and my head, beyond my eyes, in my ears, to see and hear this monster and drive it out so that I may inhabit my body and make it my own house and be at peace in all its intricate rooms and halls.

I tell you I am not to blame. This curled up thing makes me act. The first time I realized it was not myself that did the work I felt happy, then when I saw that I couldn't push the monster out I pounded my head. Let me show you what this thing does to me. If you can imagine a girl twenty-eight years old with large set eyes and bright hair and a small mouse-mouth, you will have something of me from the outside. Now pretend you are in a basement room with a boarded up fireplace, an India rug on the floor with the tree of life in amber and jade birds flying in the branches.

Imagine, too, a Persian screen and beyond it a green glass bottle hanging from the wall. See the couch with the striped silk cover and the spoke of a bannister in a corner, left by a drunken friend. See the little white duck floating on the wooden stretch of book case

top; her feathers are purple and red and green. Behind her is a tea set with lost ships rocking in a snowy sea. There are two chairs that have shiny seats and glossy bodies. Their legs are thin and bulging at the knee cap. One expects them to hop across the room.

Now feel at home in this room and look around at the people, most of them men. It is ten o'clock. Outside is snow and cats are using their paws like hands at the shutters, pushing and clattering, trying to get in. Carlo is sitting upright in a camp chair. He is small and his black suit is too large for him. His face is beautiful and ecstatic, no matter what is said, and when he talks he pushes out his red lips and pauses before a large word which he always pronounces wrong. His face is in perpetual wonderment. I like Carlo. On the floor near the door sits Evan. He has light hair that makes his head, in some lights, look like a polished egg. His hands are long and white and he wears glasses without bows. Sometimes the light catches his glasses and then he looks very odd, like an aluminum man in his grey suit and glittering head and eyes. Gertrude I won't describe because I don't like her. She is one of those harsh people who laughs like this—a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a—quickly like sheep or a train. She thinks I'm a hypocrite. I don't like Gertrude, she has no imagination.

Come to the other side of the room. In the

red chair is Robin. He is twenty-two and is very small. His tiny hands and feet and his small head, like a glossy acorn, make me very happy. Robin is a seven months child. He came out too soon. I'm always trying to make it up to him as if I were to blame. Florida is sitting on the floor with his head against the jade curtains. He looks very beautiful, I think. You may not like him. He is colored and his face and eyes look as if he is standing on a mountain top singing, "Little David Play On Your Harp." I think he believes that angels live in the sky even though he has several degrees. He feels at home now but when he first came he talked about how educated he was and how many colleges he had been vice-president of and how many lectures he gave. He thought they didn't accept him. He thought right. Max Gold—I suppose you can tell he's Jewish. Once he got drunk and put his head on the table and cried, "I'm a Jew. God, God, they all hate me." There's the Armenian. He had a beautiful name and he changed it to John. His family were all murdered and his village was burned. Once he said, "Even if I had money to go back nobody would be there, and no houses, not even the store."

Perhaps now you begin to see what I'm driving at. But look at me. Please look at me. I am walking to the percolator that bubbles behind the screen on a shining white

table. My hair is straight across my forehead and under the light it looks like gold. My ears show and the back of my hair is like a golden bush. From the side and with imagination I might be Alice in Wonderland. My dress is blue with sad white flowers and bands of blue velvet. I walk across the room on velvet slippers with slanting heels. I hear the slish of my skirts and I nod my head and feel quite-quite.

No one has seen the monster yet. No one even suspects that it lies curled up between my ribs, looking out with its dreadful eyes, reaching with its arms, its manifold of arms. I serve the coffee. I try to decide which shall have the largest cup, Florida because he is colored or John because his parents were slaughtered and his village destroyed. Carlo has just mispronounced gigantic, automaton, and adamant—all in the same sentence. Every one is laughing at Carlo so I give him the largest cup. He keeps on talking and mispronounces Spengler, Epicurus, Ulysses, and rococo. Now he is going on, just because they are laughing, and he calls horizon wrong and occurs something very strange. They are all shrieking and the dreadful, unimaginative Gertrude is going a-a-a-a-a-a-a.

I am ashamed to describe what happened inside me. It hurts to think that I am not rare and wonderful, as unique as the golden

bush of hair at the back of my head or the quite-quite walk on velvet heels. Perhaps Gertrude saw me truly and that was why she shrugged and pulled her horrid mouth down at the corner. Now I am telling, now I am revealing myself. When I looked at Carlo I heard his brave voice challenging those wolves in snow, those beasts that were laughing at him. A gash opened between my breasts and then I seemed to be all breasts, millions of them up and down, great warm breasts for him to hide his face between and they were filled with myself and with the living substance of trees and flowers and earth. It was as if I was in blossom. I hadn't said anything or done anything but as I looked at Carlo it seemed to me that he knew part of what I was feeling and then when Max said something cutting and brutal I felt that I had gathered him into me and that he was lying safe behind my ribs.

They call me Angelica. My real name is Hertha. They call me Angelica for some unfathomable reason. They are none of them sentimental and they all seem to know their position and importance on this earth and the position of this earth among planets. I know that they like me and yet sometimes I feel that in the farthest corner of themselves they despise me as Gertrude despises me. And here I am with eyes that see waves of snow and in the next instant clouds of fruit blossoms and

always the faces of people moving over this earth with all its changes, moving over the body of earth, eating and being eaten.

Let me show you another night. Florida suddenly begins to talk about how important he is. His dark face is strange against the Persian screen and his teeth are kitty-white. I ache with shame and torture for him as he expands and insists upon his importance, demands attention and homage from the white faces all around, those wolves in snow, ready to tear him to pieces. I cannot bear it. I can see him hiding behind his talk, frightened, small. I can see him on a mountain top singing, "Little David Play On Your Harp." I despise the way Carlo shrugs and turns his back. I hate Gertrude for her a-a-a-a-a-a-a and Max and John and Evan, aluminum again in the light. There were distances between them and this colored boy who was trying to prove his equality. Rivers and walls and houses and rocks were between. Impenetrable substances, invisible and infinite, shut off their bodies. Then his blood was my blood and I wanted him to see that between us there were no stones or rivers or walls or death-substances. I went over to him before them all. I looked into his face and put my hands on his cheeks. He was shining, rich singing filled my ears. I leaned over him and kissed his mouth lightly so that he could know there were no walls

between. I was in flaming sun, I was wrapped in rich, deep music, my stomach was a rose.

Some one said, "You're a good sport, Angelica."

Another said, "I didn't know Angelica drank."

And another, "God, I'm tired."

Evan yawned. "I always wanted to see Angelica tight."

Their voices were soft and solemn. I saw them look at me covertly as if they considered me treacherous. Gertrude's a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a— cracked like a whip in my ears. Florida ran from the house.

Look into this beautiful night. It isn't winter any more. It is spring and the park is full of babies and stomachs resting on spread knees and every one is smelling and tasting and hearing spring-air, spring substance from earth and branches and birds. The curtains blow into my room on sun and wind and Robin is on the couch. His glossy acorn face is sober and his hair makes a little fringe around his head. Robin is the seven months child, you remember. He came out of his mother's body too soon and he has never felt at home here except with me. Suddenly he screwed up his forehead and said, "People get so old and tattered after you've known them a while. Don't they?" For some reason he began to talk about his childhood. He told me about his father and how he would come home drunk

and fall onto his bed and lie until Sunday morning. On Sunday he would be up early, bathing and shaving, filling the house with hymns. He would put on his fine black clothes, kiss the children that he had beaten, kneel before his wife, and then pick up his stick and stroll to church in the warm sun. One day he bought a plaid suit for Robin and then on Sunday mornings he would make him put it on and wear it to Sunday school. Robin hated the suit. As he told about it his mouth fell at the corners, "I despise anything conspicuous." But he made him wear it and Robin could feel crying in him all day and crying with the memory of it and with the anticipation of that hideous plaid suit.

Suddenly I knew that I didn't want to be listening and suffering with Robin or making him suffer by my big gaunt look. I knew that I wanted to lead him out of that ugly knot into the outdoors, into clouds of fruit bloom and clear sky and let him feel the breathing and flowing of the body of earth, our life, our God. I wanted to lead him out of those stagnant layers of pity and gloom. "That is not you any more, Robin," I wanted to say. "Leave the little sad boy, let him die, let him be buried like a boy in a book."

But all the time I was walking slowly toward Robin and suddenly I sat down and put my arms around him and pressed his head, that

glossy acorn head, between my breasts, and then I was holding him on my lap and my flesh was spreading over and around him, like feathers over an egg, and I was singing something down in my throat.

Days are making weeks and months and years but I am not growing. I am not letting others grow. I am letting them drain off their poisons and now they like it, they like to tell about their miseries and the cruelties and violence of their childhood. I am not showing them that their poison is food for my ugly black knot, the curled I lying behind my ribs, the monster. I am not making them see that they should move up out of death and stagnation-mud into light and do the mysterious and magical things that men can do.

Examine my name. Angelica. Look into my face. See the large set eyes, the white cheeks, the mouse-mouth. I am twenty-eight years old but that means no more to me than four or six or fifty. I do not grow. See the folds of my cashmere dress and look at the lilac sprays all over it and the sandals on my feet. My hair is like gold wires, all blurring together in sun and it makes a fantastic bush behind my white ears and my forehead is covered with hair to my brows. Don't let me tell what happened with Max and Evan and John. It is the same story, all the same story, all my life the same. I need not tell.

Finally I met blackness. I was deep in its soundless, infinite roar, far in its mouth filling sorrow. It was as if I must push away bolts of black. I must struggle as I had never struggled and push away black bars miles high and deep as the ocean and wide as our earth, this body we move upon. I put my head in my hands. I lay down on my bed and pressed my face into the pillow and my body into the mattress. I was all blackness, wrapped tight in blackness. I had no thoughts. Suddenly I had no emotions. My pores opened and let the darkness in and it spread inside and moved through me. And then I seemed to turn into earth, and then I was clay and then a monster with tiny wings, wings the size of a fly's or a mosquito's rose from my neck.

I opened my eyes and looked at the monster. I saw the face. It grew smaller and smaller as I watched. Blackness rolled away from me like ocean water. Then I seemed to be in tight clothes. I was strangling, without air, sick. The monster grew smaller and smaller and suddenly tears poured out of me, out of my pores but it was not I who cried—I don't know who was crying. Images wrenched out of me. I was a little girl again in body. I was sliding around on a little pond. A boy came. He picked up a black frozen branch and beat me with it. His snarls flung round my head. I felt no pain, only dumbness and wonder. I

felt no pain the day I looked up and saw what appeared like a strange revolving bird in the air and was struck in the eye with it and knocked unconscious. A teacher grabbed my long hair and shook me back and forth by it in front of the whole school. I was rising into the sky. I was looking at clouds I was on the back of a soft white bird. I was looking into the face of Christ.

Then I felt blows on my cheeks and my head revolved and I fell against the desk and cut my chin. A-a-a-a-a-a—came from the children. It burned me with wounds inside. I did not cry. Days later at dinner I was given a dish of steamed dates and cream. I got down from my chair and ran upstairs into the dark end of the clothes closet. There I wound myself up and began to cry, there my body awoke and throbbed with sores. Then the butcher-boy an ogre, the ice man a wicked devil who meant me harm, Mary in the grocery a glittering cruel witch, my parents ice-images who never met my hopes, my sister—my sister. This is what she said one day, "Other girls have nice little sisters but you—you're impossible. Scared of everyone. And don't know anything. Didn't pass in school this year. And can't tell time yet even though Papa did buy you that nice watch."

It was that little girl who lay curled up behind my ribs. It was she who kept me

feeding her from the wounds of others and kept myself and others young while time was mixing with my curtains and my walls and my body but not with me, while days were making weeks and months and years. It was not Evan's sorrow that I arched over, or John's burned village, or Florida, or Robin, or Max or any of them. It was this entombed child who had never been happy or praised or had a friend. It was this baby, curled behind my ribs, who was making me all breasts, all tenderness and sorrow. It was she who filled my body so that I could not inhabit it and it was she who kept those others from their bodies and this is my confession and this is my shame. I do not grow. I do not make others grow. There is no way to shove the monster out. My body does not do my bidding. Haven't I proven to you that I am not to blame? And days are making weeks and months and years. Robin and Evan and the others are here. I am not old and neither are they. Time is rolling up our lives while we sit, pouched over living children with arms that stretch out and mouths that are hungry and hopes that have never been fulfilled.

Spring

HER nose turned up a little and her lip came after showing a triangle of wide teeth. The chin had a dimple and she wore basket hats trimmed with fruit, dangling cherries, pears browned on one side, grapes in clusters that weighed the hat down and cast shadows on her yellow neck. Her whole face was yellow and her hair a timid brown that shone over her ears and gleamed with amber pins in a little roll on her neck. She was very very thin and wore calicoes, sometimes yellow sprigged with black, or tan with red, or a dark blue with white pansies. She had a black dress for church with a white basket hat and a band of velvet ribbon on it. It was the kind of hat she had worn as a child, one hand in her grandfather's and the other holding a stiff bouquet for old Mrs. Clemm who was dying.

There was still something about her nose and eyes that suggested that child who had become so happy at the thought of a party that for days she would dance sideways through

the house, going on tip-toe many times during the day to the spare room to stare in awe at her party things. The white dress stretched out on the big bed with the sash beside it, the patent leather slippers standing below on the floor, the star buckles sparkling, the white cotton stockings spread beside the dress and above the white basket hat. Once she snatched the black sash up and kissed it hard. But the day of the party she was always too exhausted to go and she would lie on her grandfather's lap, her thin silky hair caught in his vest button, and she would cry a little as he read her something out of the Bible Society Record. He was a life member of the Bible Society.

Now she was the only Graham left in the house. Now she never looked ahead to parties but she went to them and was polite to all, listening to descriptions of cancers, ulcers, accidents, child deaths, coffins, bad plumbing. She listened to recipes, stories of how much coal was needed, how a certain party was stealing from the city, or how Miss Irons who was losing her mind had built a room with no windows so she could bathe without people seeing. Miss Graham's eyes would grow full of pity and when she got home she would go to the piano and tinkle something where it was high and flat and then she would arch down to the base and—*bum* a *bum* a *bum* bi *bum* bo—her slim foot in her patent leather shoe

with the gunmetal buttoned top pressing the pedal.

Mrs. Dates told her mother one morning that it was a pity Miss Graham didn't adopt a child, but she suggested this only in her own home because every one knew that Miss Graham was forty and that it would not be the proper thing to mention such a thing to her until it was too late for her to have one of her own.

"Now you keep out of it, Lily Bell," said old Mrs. Dates. "She may up and marry any day and Sadie Peeper was forty-five and had a child—he's a queer one, but it's possible."

"Oh, Mother," said Lily Bell, "Una Graham's almost dead a'ready with cancer. I've seen the whole family . . ."

"Yes, they all had it and I've never known smarter folks in my life or kinder folks to the poor and the sick. Mr. was a life member of the Bible Society, too. The only one in town."

"No, she's certainly not going to be with us long now," said Lily Bell, browning the chops in a big skillet. "I always see her when she empties the garbage out and she looks poorer every time."

"Well, I guess she had a bad spell yesterday because she didn't pull her shades up until afternoon."

"Why, Mother, why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, you worry so when you know a thing

like that. Maybe she wanted to be alone." Mrs. Dates had on a flannel dressing gown and she wore a black yarn hood with tabs on top shaped like radishes. She was constantly knitting stockings for the heathen. They were all alike, like sticks of peppermint candy—thick pure white and a scarlet stripe. She wore glasses and had a mole on her left cheek. When her grandchildren came home they ran to her and explained everything that had happened in school and what dress teacher had on and how for twenty-five cents you could buy a magic pencil that could copy *any* picture.

"Oh, and never a peep out of her, never a word to Aid or anywheres."

"The Grahams were never ones to talk about themselves, they never annoyed any one that way," said old Mrs. Dates. "I think I'll put a Bible verse in this stocking. I suppose they never even mend them," she muttered to herself, "let alone see the quality and the work and all."

They heard something that sounded like wild ponies on the walk and then a bam at the back door and the spring air blew in, sun, warmth, smell of opened earth. Myra galloped to her grandmother too excited to speak and Phillip followed, panting.

"Gramma!" he cried, "we got to sell flower seeds. . . ."

"We're going to win a little pony and cart

selling flower seeds," said Myra, hanging to her grandmother, her bright face pressed close to her flannel gown, her little hands up on the old cheeks. "Gramma, we'll take you a ride. Oh, Mama," she screamed, "if we sell enough we get the cart and pony. You gotta," she said defiantly, her feet spread apart.

"Get ready for dinner, now," said their mother.

"You gotta!"

"You gotta!" cried Phillip.

"I got four to sell," said Myra. "Oh, you *gotta!*"

"Well, you try Miss Graham," said old Mrs. Dates, "she always has nice flowers. She'll buy some of you, see if she don't."

Myra ran through the house. "Oh, the pony, the pony, the pony, Oh, the little wicket wagon, the little wagon, the wheels—Mama, where's my report card?"

"Gramma'll buy a package," said old Mrs. Dates.

"What'll the pony eat?" asked Phillip, hanging on the arm of his grandmother's chair. "Can we feed him like cats? I'll get right up in his back Gramma, you see, I'll get right up high in his back and I'll have me a little red whip like they have Fair-time and I'll—" He began galloping around the kitchen, clucking and slapping his thigh.

"My lands," said his grandmother, "did

your mother put your summer on you a'ready?"

"Me, too, Gramma," cried Myra running to her with her skirt up. "See, it's my light and I'm the first in school. Grace's going to get hers on this noon. Oh, it's *hot* out. It's awful hot. I'm not going to take my hat this noon."

"Well, I guess you are," said her mother. "Now, *come!*"

They rushed out to Miss Graham's, gravy still on their mouths, and Phillip's napkin flying from his neck. "You better go back with it," said Myra, hopping on the dirt walk and gazing anxiously toward the Graham house. "You go back or you'll get it."

Phillip threw his chin up and began to run, crying and looking back at her to see if she was going to wait, and when he reached the screen door he threw himself against it and found it had been fastened. He sank down on the step then, crying and rapping with one hand. "Gramma, Gramma," he screamed, "quick, Gramma!" Then he ran back laughing to Myra, the tears spinning off his lashes.

Miss Graham looked cold and she stuck her head out the door only a little.

"Want some flower seeds?" asked Myra. "I've got aster and pansy and verbenya and four o'clock."

"Goodness, child," said Miss Graham, "where are your rubbers?"

"I don't have to wear them any more. I

got my light on too. Ma put it on us this morning." She stuck out her leg. "See!" She jerked her little brother forward. "You show yours, Phillip," she commanded. "And we ain't a bit cold. Gee, it feels good. Oh, it's awful hot out, Miss Graham."

"But it looks so *veddy* wet," said Miss Graham.

"And we're going to get a pony and cart, Miss Graham."

"Yes'm," said Phillip, "and—" He turned away shyly as she looked full at him and then he ran to the corner and bumped his face into it. He looked around in a minute but she had gone, the door standing open a little.

"Got to get her pock-a-book," whispered Myra. "Maybe she'll buy two off me."

"I'm veddy fond of pansies," said Miss Graham with her big black purse in one hand. "I shall have to have the pansy. And the verbena." She stared over their heads, her large teeth showing and a little tendril of warm hair on her cheek. "Yes, and aster and—Oh, I'm veddy fond of flowers."

Myra pushed the pansy packet at her. On it was a large purple pansy face with one golden eye. Then the pink fluted verbena came. The aster with crisp white leaves. Then a four o'clock. "I'll take that, too," said Miss Graham. "Miss Collins had beautiful ones last year."

Myra jumped up and down. "All sold!" she cried. "Now we'll get the pony and we'll take you the first ride, Miss Graham. It's going to be a Shetland our teacher says."

Miss Graham leaned out the door and even put out a yellow hand toward Phillip who was standing mute, as if hitched, in the corner. "And what have you to sell?" she asked him. He stumbled forward, his hands closed over a small brown envelope. He put up his hands, smiling shyly at her.

"But what is it you have?"

Myra began picking his fingers apart. "He's got Old Maid's Pincushion," she said. "I'll slap, Phillip," she threatened. Suddenly he opened his hands and Myra snatched the damp wrinkled envelope and handed it up to Miss Graham. "He only had one."

"I'll take it," said Miss Graham. "What are you going to name the pony, Phillip?"

"Flight-feet," said Myra, "and the wagon's going to be Sylvia."

"And who will drive?"

"Me," said Myra. "Gee, Miss Graham, you look sick. I was scared maybe you wouldn't buy any seeds off me because Ma said you couldn't last long."

"Did not," said Phillip.

"She did, too, and she said maybe Miss Graham wouldn't even have a garden this year because it wouldn't pay."

"Well, my Gramma said you'd buy off us," he insisted and began to cry.

"There's the bell—Oh, I'll be late. Thanks, Miss Graham. . . ."

Phillip turned at the screen door and said awkwardly, looking at the floor, one small hand twisting the knob of the screen. "My mother's going to a party to-morrow."

Miss Graham went into the house and back to the kitchen. It was warm and light there and she could see into the garden where lilac buds were unfolding and currant leaves were fluttering like little green flies on the branches. Her speckled hen was pecking near the roots and in the corner, near the telegraph pole, was a pile of wet brown leaves that Dan Bolt had raked off the rose bush.

She went stiffly into the dining room and now she let her eyes examine the china cow on the sideboard. Her body was large and hollow for milk, her brown tail curved for a handle. Next was the setting hen with her white china feathers spread over a large dish, her red crop brilliant. There was the best coffee pot on a silver mat. There was a ship on the mat, a willow tree touching water, cruel waves.

"I can't go to the Cheerful Workers this afternoon," she thought. "I'm not feeling veddy well."

She went to the window and suddenly threw

it up. Then she put her head outside, her arms. She knew she was catching cold but she had to breathe in the warm spring day, the earth smell and the sky smell. The stiff white curtains scratched her neck and as the warm air came up to her from the earth she moved her nose a little so that the broad teeth showed in a triangle. She shut her eyes as the warm spring air blew over her, the tiny leaves fluttering like green wings, the earth rocking and opening in the heat, sending up its moist fragrance. She could taste something queer in her mouth, back where her tongue started.

There were the pine trees that had looked so cold and black in winter, bent with snow and cedar birds. Now they were green like the grass, like the leaves that were untwisting in spring air. Now a vapor was rising from the earth over in the next garden where Dan Bolt was ploughing. Seeds would be dropped in the earth. They would push and push.

"I'm veddy odd to-day," she thought.

She went to the mantle for her flower seeds. From the mirror her thin brown face smote her, the large black discs under the eyes, the brown lips that were as ghastly as the cheeks. She turned cold for a second, then hot, and sweat poured out of her. But she smoothed her silk hair and went into the garden, stretching a long smile on her face. Three days ago she had paid Dan Bolt a dollar for doing that

little job of spading and raking. A dollar to that lazy fellow for a job she could have done better herself. She began re-raking, stooping to pick up tiny stones, bits of old sod, the top of a tin can thick with rust. "I'll never hire that careless fellow again." She opened a package of seeds and began to sprinkle them like dust in the rich earth.

"Hello, Miss Graham, it's good to see *you* out again." Mrs. Jenkins stopped on her way to the garbage can. "So you're planning another garden. I'm glad to see that you felt you wanted to this year." She shook her finger gaily. "But don't tire yourself. Your family wan't any of them strong. I've known all of them."

"I'm quite all right to-day," said Miss Graham and wet her lips.

"Now don't presume on that too much. Maybe it's only up one day and down the next with you. Take care of yourself. You'll be having rhubarb before any of us I see. Land, how that garbage does get to stinking. I'll have to jerk up Paul Pratt again—he's never on hand. Every time—well, you know his habits—and he neglects the garbage something shameful. Oh, that reminds me. Did you hear about Miss Raimer? The poor body passed on last evening. It was a blessing though. If a person hasn't her health then I always say she might as well be gone. And what a one she always was for work and for church. Never

could do enough, could she." She lifted her pail and started back to the house. "Well," she called from the door, "we all have to come to it. Might as well make the best of it, I suppose."

Miss Graham covered her seeds with earth. She cleaned her rake on the dry sod and set it in the corner of the shed. She put her seeds in a neat pile in the box and set it next to the vegetables on the top shelf. Then she went to the door and sat down. She got up, swept off the worn steps with the old broom, and sat down again, lifting her stiff skirt.

A bluebird lighted on the bare rose trellis and sang. A robin drinking at a puddle in the soft sod, began a song. The sun came down like hot gold and everything was sharp and bright. A terrible cry tore out of her and she lay, face downward on the new grass, clutching the soft blades, the little twigs and bits of stick. She cried as if for the first time as she saw her body there, dead in a box, Mrs. Dates, Mrs. Jenkins, Miss Bart—all bending over and staring. "Didn't she look pretty, didn't she look peaceful——"

She could feel her arms as they would be, her eyes seeing nothing but frozen lids, her lips together never to be forced open, her hair, her hair. She jumped up and felt the moisture that had soaked through her dress but she did not chide herself. She went swiftly through

the house to the hall where her long beaver coat hung. She put on her billowy white scarf, then her drooping velvet hat with the holly, then her long black beaver coat. She locked the door.

"No, I can't go to the Cheerful Workers," she thought again.

"Why, how do you do, Miss Graham, it's good to see *you* out. How are you these nice days?"

"I'm veddy well to-day, thank you."

She went on, a long black figure in her tight coat that flared out at her heels. The soft hat drooped over her face on one side where the holly lay and the other turned up to show the silky hair pressed and gleaming over her ear. There were fewer houses and the fields were in brown waves that broke softly, pushed in little ripples and then ran swiftly, swiftly to the dark trees. The sun spread down and she pulled her collar closer and made a muff of her sleeves, her hands touching like friends inside.

The big red barn, sloping over at each side into pens and runways, the incline between at its stately opened mouth, stopped her short. That was the place her grandfather had come one time for a good milker, she remembered. "How veddy strange that I should think of that." A cat ran out of the barn and down the incline to her. It arched high against her soft fur coat and she picked it up and pressed

it against her, the warm electricity of its body beating into her hands. He began licking her sleeve eagerly, throwing back his head and working hard with his tongue until a stretch of fur lay flat and damp. She let him down and went on, but when she glanced back she saw he was following, his tail high and his long white whiskers shaking foolishly.

"Come, little mew-mew," she cried, crouching down suddenly, her warmth and understanding of the little animal making her ache in her arms. But he darted off in the other direction.

She went on again. Now there were long stretches of ploughed earth on both sides of her, waiting to be seeded. She could taste something strange again on the back of her tongue. Suddenly she bit her lower lip hard with her two broad upper teeth. Her hands clutched against her as if she must tear herself open to the light. She dug deeper with her fingers into the soft fur, her face gone yellow under her drooping hat. The spring wind came softly, and softly, rippling the manes of the dark horses in a field who tossed their heads and sprang.

She jerked to the side of the road and then plunged down the grassy ledge, as if she were going to close her eyes and fall down, stretch out on her face, her hands pinned under her breast and lie there forever, wind blowing over, snow. And then she was like a rabbit whose

desperate brown face is straining out of a flopping hat, ears back, eyes bulging, and mouth bared. Her hands dug into the clumps of dried grass and weeds and she pulled herself up, dragging one side over the moist dirt, and then half sprawling on the hard black road. She looked behind her for a moment with a little quick turn of the head, and then clapped her hands over her face and ran, flew, faster—faster.

She stopped. She looked all around her. She looked at the sky, looked all around. She saw her tiny moment on earth. It was sharp, she saw, but she did not understand. She looked, her eyes calm and fixed, but her mind could not stretch round what she saw. All the seasons were in it, the snows, the openings of earth, summer, the winds, the dreary rains. All of it was mixed in her, all of it was outside her, too, driving against her. All human beings were in her, she carried them, they carried her.

She was cold with calmness as if now all her self had risen at last. She saw how she had lived, a small brown bird, a meek sparrow pecking at frozen crumbs, flying for safety, hiding, drawing into the warmth from the cold earth dampness. She could only look, the wind tossing strands of her silky hair, whizzing through her ears in cold teasing spirals. She could only swallow and look.

Original Sin

I FIRST got the idea of human beings as sheep at the University of M——. The way they went in droves up the hills, each following a leader, later sitting in rooms listening to professors who were each following a leader. The winter of 1924. Gersa Kimball. A cold day, the first snow of the year, me in the crowds after classes. I had never seen her before, but I have seen her lately in a strip of print—a woman riding an elephant, the same woman with wolves leaping beside her and later with a lion chained to her wrist. Sometimes she appears with a large star above her head and a swan in her arms. One of her hands lies in its pouched feathers and her cheek is against its bill. Her eyes have a lifted, indescribable look and the sun outlines her body under a robe. Again you see the legs and breasts striking out of the robe as she plunges ahead, her face controlled, and yet her whole body strained toward something utter.

I can rouse some enthusiasm for her printed

on cloth but to have her in real life. My God, what man would want her? Let her stay in the woods with her wild beasts and her absolutes. I haven't the power to describe the relief in being free of her, in seeing her no more except in my mind. If I believed in action I would throw up my arms and yell. Here I am free to enjoy everything that is offered without questioning or dissatisfaction, free to sink and sink with the droves of restless sheep into acceptance of all. An ordinary cigarette, a cup of coffee, a soggy bed in an attic room—these things are paradise after such a woman. To sleep, to walk aimlessly in the streets flicking your trousers with the morning paper, free, empty, contented with all, with rain or sleet or the derelicts that flap by with tortured bodies and glazed eyes, the girls who hurry from work, their faces hard and changing gradually into wrinkles and brown dust, children lost and shrieking, crazy hats grown too small on matted hair, arms raised over hollow faces, a dirty petticoat dragging over grotesque bowed legs. I am at home in the streets now. I dare walk, indifferent, and smoke and laugh a little, or I dare be sightless.

That first day Gersa put her hand on my arm as if it were hers, she looked into my face as if that, too, would be her possession, and said, "Walk out with me!" I had no desire to walk with her or oblige her but I went. I

followed her down the slope, down the side of the hill to the lake where she stood very still looking at the ice. Her black hair came out in curls against the squirrel cap. The wind and snow beat and wrapped her. I put my lips together hard. I can taste her body even now, electric, precious, more purely flesh because she tried so hard to give her soul to me.

Get excited, Roger Maddox, quake, long to see Gersa in that chair, her face between her hands, her elbows on the arm of the chair, her eyes staring at you—at *you.* Roger Maddox, the famous young painter, determined to be famous by thirty. All alone in this room the night you made the vow. A pile of dirty shirts there in that corner with neckties and broken shoes. Up there in my head, here in my chest, the secret hope that I am envied by my school friends who could do no better for themselves than to write advertising or sell insurance. Maddox, famous young painter. To-night I cannot seem to make myself the apple of my eye. I am crowded outside into the world with other sheep, or dogs, each exactly alike, each roaming haphazardly over the hills and gulleys, living as best he can, being pushed closer to slaughter with each dawn, one no better than another as they crowd together under black clouds and rain. Gersa imagined in each a fire that could be vast and leap in the eye and make of each a man.

Last March on a Thursday morning, three years after that meeting on the ice, she stood in this room after kicking and pounding my door. She stood over me, her teeth bared between taunts, her arms falling in a passive, helpless way that was new to her, committing me to hell for my cruelty which began, she claimed, on that first meeting in the snow when I failed to crush her in my arms, hold my lips on hers and swear eternal fidelity, declare to the falling snow that we had been sent together by the Gods or fate (which always kept us in mind, apparently, we two out of all the world) and then swear in her eyes that we were never to be separated, never to cease loving, and never to suffer one dark lost hour of remorse.

"Every particle of happiness that we have had, Roger Maddox, has been at the expense of my dreams and my better self." She sat on that broken chair, one hand on her throat, the other tightly closed and beating her knee. She dragged over to the window and leaned out.

I stared at the ceiling, there's a place up there that I always stare at, and asked her where she wanted to eat and if she felt like paying for me. Of course I appeared like a villian but she had no reality for me then in her extreme of feeling, she had absolutely no meaning or significance with all that crying and pounding and denouncing. No one on

earth could have answered her so I left her alone in her desperation and wildness.

She came back to me and took hold of my cheek, twisting it, letting her weight sink down on that hand until I screamed, "Cut it out, you savage!"

"You've made a beggar out of me. I've lost my pride. I've lost everything. I have to come to you. I have to take any little thing you care to give me."

Desperation agreed with her. Her eyes were brilliant, startling, she was majestic crouched down like a slave, her face wet, mouth shaking, but in the proud chin and brow hatred for all her softness.

"I want to worship you. I want you to tell me what to do." She was looking up at her dream of me, her hands clasped under her chin. "You're utterly good, honest, strong, sympathetic, tender—tell me what to do. Shall I go with Lucien to-night? It would hurt you? You would rather I didn't? You would kill yourself if Gersa went out with another man? Then I won't—I won't—I don't want to—I want to love only you forever. You know what's best for me. You're strong."

Then her fists came down on my head. She tore the covers away and dug her fingers into my cheeks. She tried to shake me. She wanted to be strong enough to make my teeth rattle and my bones clank. "Be what I want. Be

great so that I can worship you without being ridiculous and hating myself. O God, you're weak and sly."

"That will do," I said.

She withdrew and fastened her eyes on me as if I had blackened her, betrayed her. "Ever since I've known you I've been a dog, Roger Maddox. I've run after you through the gutters, hanging to your heels. I've never stood upright on my feet since the first instant I looked at you. I've been going on all fours. And my back—there's something on it I can't shake off."

Could I comfort her? Could I hold her against me and murmur things in her ear and feel her lose herself in me, see those eyes close in peace? I put out my hand to stroke her hair and she pulled away from me glaring, her hands clutched about her. She was always describing herself in the most tragic terms and then defying any one on earth to pity her, to dare to pity her or try to understand or comfort her. I remember the way she straightened up, her whole face inexpressibly sad and quiet. "I want to be a real woman," she said, "like the ones I always see in the street car."

What did she know about a morning three years before when I had wakened with her in my mind, in my bones? Day after day she was in me, eating me, devouring my freedom, my pleasures, until I was a dog licking her

feet, trembling at the mercy of her whims. I knew how she felt but I said nothing. I stared at the ceiling, happy that I was no longer that dog, that never again could I be a dog for any one, or tremble at the wilfulness of any tongue. But her life. Well, what do I care for her life? It was made before she ever met me. Why should I worry about the hope that I took out of her and the pride and the bloom that was like the bloom of a tree bent ripe with apples to the grass. I took the sun out of her. I dare admit that to-night even though I appear monstrous and cruel. I took the sun out of her. Why not? Me or some other man. Did any one ever believe that a girl remains beautiful and desirable? Could any one but Gersa, a romantic fool, ever believe that love is eternal? Could any one but Gersa believe that there is a sun in each person that burns and burns in endless streams through the chaos and horror of planets and space?

Now I am through with it and Gersa has gone somewhere and I know I should spend each waking hour, according to her notions, trying to find her, asking forgiveness, swearing eternal devotion and humility to her whom I am supposed to have so hugely wronged. I don't want even the good part back, the times when she used to say my name over and over in awe, her eyes on me, her hands crossed on her throat. She could never be quiet, there

was never calm acceptance of anything in her, not even of happiness. She must be wild, like a beast, with both delight and terror. She could take nothing rationally.

Just thinking this over tightens my nerves. Oh, let me digress, let me now insert a hymn to be sung to "The Star Spangled Banner" or "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean" or any other grand tune. Now, all ready! All you who long for romance, you business men with placid card playing wives, you dried intellectuals who fear and hope at once, be thankful for what you already have. Kiss the feet of the placid, contented wife who makes no demands on anything but your purse and your good nature, serve her who struggles to keep your meager love instead of demanding always more and more of what cannot, dare not, be given. Sing to those docile women who bore you with their devotion and their emptiness and praise heaven and earth that no Gersa has crossed your path. . . . Gersa in an orchard under an apple tree, her feet crossed, her lap piled with fruit and those eyes set strong on the sheep and the moving leaves. Gersa near a stream in the woods, "I wish I could carry you across, Roger," and meaning, "Roger, roll up your sleeves and carry me. Prove yourself a man in all ways, Roger." And then as I did not offer to be gallant, tears coming in her eyes, her head lifting to the trees. "I wish

I could hold you against me forever. I wish I could be melted into you and never be Gersa Kimball again."

Free, free to walk though the streets alone, to accept all—all, to shrug when young boys kill themselves—I don't know them, do I?—free to read of injustice without a quiver. I can speak of earthquakes where thousands are covered like glistening earth worms without distorting myself with sympathy that I do not honestly feel. No, even this face is free now from all pumped up distress and pumped up love for people I have never seen.

"Carry me. Prove yourself a man." Yes, indeed. I know all about that. I got over it, too, when I was eight years old. She lived up the street from us. Bessie Feaks. I would lie on my stomach and squint out of our front window at her. Passing quietly in snow. Bunches of violets in beaver hat. Fat, long curls beating thick coat. Suddenly hoisting into a little run pretending to drive a nettlesome colt, one mittened hand outstretched. My mouth would drop open, my eyes would go blind with awe, and then she would be sedate again, lifting her legs minutely, switching, nodding on all sides at the smooth snow. She passed with our washwoman's boy. I seemed to crack all over, everything broke into this and that. I ran out of the house as if I were an athlete, I sprang high over the crusted,

hilled snow, I leapt the snow clogged gutter, I passed them, like a famous runner, with my head up and my elbows pumping. But today I don't even have to buy a dinner for a girl. The girl invites me and is honored to watch me eat ravenously and insult her politely. She flushes and giggles, hoping her friends and enemies see her with Maddox, the young painter.

Gersa's hands soft on my cheeks, her body between my knees, her breasts touching me—rot! Her gifts (I used to sell the books second-hand within a week and the handkerchiefs, the socks and God knows what, I would hand out in exchange for a meal or tobacco. She was thoughtful about the tobacco, though, particularly after a tantrum). Then the suitable expressions for my face, the concern, the constant attentiveness, the sympathy that must swell my cheeks and knot my noble brow, the soft voice. Yes, she wanted me to be all things to her in payment for her trying so hard to be all things to me. It was one of her many ideas. She got them from books.

"If you are really in love, Roger," or "Never eat two starches at one meal," or "It shouldn't be that way, I won't accept it." Then with the morning paper, her face screwed in terror, "Think of them dying like that!" Her face closer, her nose in the print, "One thousand . . . one thousand. They had lives like any one else. They had homes, children, dreams.

They went to work in the morning. They put up their hands to brush their hair and drink coffee and tie their ties. Some one shined their shoes. Each of them breathed. Each of them spoke. . . ." She jumped up and began walking. "How can any one accept death, how can we be thankful for this miserable moment on earth when it takes eternity to know anything. O God, speak to me . . . O Christ, how can you let us die?"

Some of you are already under the delusion that a person like that is pleasant or interesting to have around. But all that hysteria and ignorance was much less irritating than when she began to catch on to things and was insane with bitterness and remorse. I did hate her for ignorance though. I had met her, oh, perhaps we had been friends for two months, and one night we were translating Splenger and having an awful discussion about time, space and duration. She leaned across the table and said, "How do you get a baby?"

Naturally I thought she was joking. For a long time I was certain that it was some new pose or other that she had read about and was trying out on me—she had some theory about playing rôles—My God! But I know now that it was honest. That girl was ignorant—there is no comparison. It is a crime for parents to let such a girl loose in the world. I have tried to imagine her parents. I can't. For a long

time she pretended she was an orphan. When parents were mentioned she would lift her eyes tragically as if hers had been taken away. Once I said right out, "Say, Gersa, are your parents living?"

First a marble whiteness from her neck to her cheeks and forehead, then her lids dropped and finally her chin set and she threw back her head. "I have renounced my parents," she said. She wouldn't explain.

"Sex," she said once, "I suppose you know all about it." She began pacing up and down the room. "But I don't see how women can let men support them. I guess they think they give up something after it happens. Now what has the ordinary woman to give up? It's absurd. It should be an ideal exchange, each should be richer and more free. That's what we want, Roger—freedom." She would sit by the lake at night, during that strange spring, looking at the stars and murmuring, "Freedom." I was mad about her. I had to hold my hands together to keep them away from her. How was I to know that the more she talked about freedom, time, space, her eyes on the stars, and the more energy she put into those abstractions, the more she wanted me.

"Let's live together," she said one day.

I looked at her suspiciously. I thought she might be planning some trap for me—men have to be careful—but she looked so honest and

generous and foolish that I knew she was simply ignorant. It was touching and because she was so unconscious of convention and "the duty of man" I asked her to marry me. She turned to me instantly. "But why?" she asked. I had supposed she was from an ordinary middle class home and her whole attitude rather shocked and delighted me.

"Love—love," she said, "is the only thing that can hold me. If I thought I was held through law like all the wretched respectable people in the world I would run away—I couldn't love you. This must be just us—the world is out of it!"

It seems ironical that three years later I used her same arguments on her when she demanded that I pump myself up into wanting desperately to marry her. I told her that I was not monogamous to begin with and that marriage would be like a refrigerator, that the only possible way she could hold me would be to let me be free.

"And what about me? Why aren't you trying to find out how to hold *me?*"

"I don't need to," I said, "you're mine."

At first her outbursts and accusations used to come every two months, then every month, later every week and finally every other hour she would change. At first there would be her terrible angelic tenderness, her illusion of perfect understanding. "I'm happy. I under-

stand. I feel like a vine around you. I love this—this being owned by you." But her face would hold that ghastly joy and terror as she said it and tears would come down. She would throw herself at me, press her mouth on my hands, dig her head into my chest. "I'm happy—I'm complete—I love you." Sinking down with her cheek pressed against my knee. "I've given up Dick and Lucien. I'm not going to see them any more."

At times I had felt jealous of her two friends, even though the relationships were obviously platonic, but I didn't speak about it. I didn't want her to have that power over me. As long as she saw that I was mild and generous about them she couldn't raise them over my head to win a point. I expressed a slight interest in her having given them up.

"I want only you forever."

"And you have me," I said sharply.

"If you loved me you'd do noble things."

"My Lord, we've passed the medieval age."

"If you loved me you'd do noble things."

She would grow stiff and remote all over, her face hardening and sharpening. She would back off from me as if I were something horrible, her hands closed over her mouth. She would back herself stupidly into the wall and then throw her arms out and her head up in terror as if she were imagining, or hoped I would imagine, that she was pinned to the cross.

The red sash at her hips was supposed to be the blood from her heart, the blood of her life and her hopes, pouring down.

Once she jumped up like a rocket in an argument. "I feel my own will. I feel like a person." She stood over me, too excited to speak, her eyes wild with hope. "I—I—I have power now." She put out her hands and something in me shook. "Please," I said, "please don't." "I can force you now. I have the strength. It's easy. I haven't any pride. I can get what I want. It's easy. You're going to marry me, do you hear?" She looked down into my face, her hands on my shoulders. "You're going to make me a mother." She began rushing around the room, she walked sedately with bowed head as if she were going up to the altar, then she suddenly sat down on the floor and began rocking and singing, "Oh, baby, baby. Oh, bears in the woods. Oh, doves that come to peak at my baby. No, no, don't cry, you must make me worship you." I was frozen, half fascinated, I would have done anything for her. Then the tears, the accusations, the hysteria.

"Roger Maddox, I've given you everything."

"Just what have you given me?"

"Oh, you don't even know. O God, I want to die. I want to kill myself. Oh, I know now how the world is run."

The more intense her understanding and ap-

preciation of me, the more she renounced for me, the more ghastly became her desire for payment. A wealthy chap tried to marry her. She tried to make me tell her that she shouldn't marry him. I refused. I was sure of her. She came home perfectly radiant. "I'm so happy—I want just you forever—I'm so happy." I know she expected me to rise to the occasion and beg her to marry me. Only Gersa could have been so ignorant of human nature. What other person in the world would have supposed that being generous ever inspired another person? No, I must admire the ordinary shrewd girl for her success in dealing with a man. If she wants him she gets him, usually through something base but she gets him. Gersa loved herself too much. She loved her pride and her grand lady airs about nobility. Why didn't she tell me she was going to marry the man? Not Gersa. Honesty first, pride next, nobility over all. But her fanciness got her. She couldn't hold up for long.

"You selfish, worthless, loathsome person. Yes, I'm the sort that has to go into the streets and beg men to make me a mother. I can't expect what any silly shrewd girl gets as her own right. I'll have to humble myself and beg some man to give me a child and then support it myself and never have any kindness or love or protection—never. Oh, I love my parents. I love them now."

"Yes, and some time when you've known a real hard boiled man you'll love me."

She doubled up as if a pain had caught her in the stomach. Then she rolled over toward the fireplace, her hands on her throat. Her mouth wrenched open as if she were going to vomit and she shook and coughed, her mouth drawing down bitterly.

"Poor little lost girl," I said.

"Then you think I'll know other men? You don't think you're the only one? Oh, my God!" She stretched out on the floor, holding tight to the carpet.

"This can't last forever, Gersa, we're too different."

She beat her head on the floor. She lay quiet and helpless, her legs drawn up as if she had colic. I can't remember anything she said, but it came out like one of those everlasting death agonies that opera singers have. Her voice had an edge like ice and yet it was deep and rang through me. She got up, trying not to look ashamed, attempting to be proud, and she began patting her mouth as she spoke, her voice moving on and on, something about a baby, parents, a dog grovelling on its stomach, herself going through the world unmated, alone, never receiving what others got as their right. Suddenly she stopped short in her tumult of complaint and panic. I have never before seen universal pity come on any face, she seemed

to see herself swallowed up in the lives of millions, folded in their rags, held to their breasts, mixed with them and yet apart. She gave me a kiss. She put her hands in that queer position between her breasts.

"One day you were like a bird in me. You flew through me like a bird. I didn't want anything from you—you lived in me. It was a happiness that left no pain. That day it seemed as if people all over the world joined hands and the animals and birds came and spread all over the land in the sun. And now they've turned black and empty, like a lot of ugly animals, and I wish I could drive them all from this earth. O God, make a new race!" Then in a shock that went down her and made her close her eyes she seemed to sense for the first time the poison in herself and she said, "Make *me* new."

I recall this often. It does not move me. While it was happening it struck me cold and dumb. I saw into her sentimentality and half-baked romanticism. I saw into the pathetic dreams of the race. And that night she went away and I have never seen her since. All the tumult and straining that she started in me for a new world and a new man has gone. No world is better than this. Give me this world with its war and murder and rape and greed, let me walk through its streets a free, irresponsible man, and I'll ask for nothing more.

Penance

THE river was ice, frozen in ripples and crests, touched with amber. Beyond rose the hill, blue at night, crusted with snow, and on its incredible arch, the house. Close to the snow, close to the brick walls, the arched windows, grew red berries hanging like drops of blood from the black twigs, burning like a sullen fire around and around the house. And inside was a woman in a blood red gown, her face and hands too white, under her eyes shadows like the half-moon, her hair smooth and black as a bat's wing. She walked to the window and closed her eyes until the ice spread out as far as she could see, vast and permanent, and as she stood there she heard the wind come past the island, past the length of timber, over the snow in a sharp high sweep.

She turned suddenly and walked down the long room toward the fire which burned cone shaped, a golden bush set in a hollow. She went closer and stared into the blaze, put her palms to it and laid her cheek on her shoulder,

her eyes looking back at the white fields, the stable sagging under snow. It had no door and some hay hung from a pale rafter looking warm and strange in that empty place. One day she had run in there to read a letter. She had hidden it first in her blouse and then in the hay.

She threw the cushion on the floor and sat down, waiting for the wind, for the lonely sound it made in walls and chimney, imagining she could follow it back past the island, up the hill to the cemetery where the pine trees were weighted with snow, up then, into the sky and on. Then the sound came, clear yet remote, and she felt a veil of air pass her face and heard the berries in the deep bowl crackle on their stems, saw the portieres ripple slightly, swing into the hall and back. She got up and her gown hung rich and full in red folds from the tight bodice. She stood very still, one hand at her throat, looking down the empty road.

He might suddenly appear, plunge into smooth crusted snow, a black figure shuddering in his coat, a fur cap, black and sleek, drawn to his brows. He might even now be opening the heavy oak door and stepping into the hall, leaving fresh snow behind him as he walked. That instant he could say if he pleased, "Greta, I'm a fool."

It was darker now and over the white slopes, the frozen river, came lights from a more frigid

shore; the hotel, little farm houses and stores and then deeper darkness, so dense and soft that all outlines were absorbed, even the wilful fence posts and neglected wagons were gone, and closer, the maze of netting that bound an old chicken yard near the barn was a blur. Everything was gone except light from the deep black, that steady yellow shine and all around the snow, the still night, and then the wind again from far down the river, sharp and vast. She went upstairs and into a room saying, "What is it? What do you want now?" Then she turned on the light and went over to a bed piled with quilts. It was a little boy who answered, "I woke up."

She looked at him sternly and put his arms under the covers. "I told you not to wake up until you saw the light in the windows. You've been in bed only an hour."

"Oh, Mother," he said pressing his head back in the pillow, "why do I have to always be sleeping?"

She tapped her foot. "Ssssh," she said.

"Is Leonard down there?" he whispered. "Is he silly and wobbly again?"

"No," she answered sharply. Then she leaned over him, her cold white hand on his hair. "Whose boy are you?" she asked.

"Bob Ravel's boy."

"And what's your name?"

"Robin Ravel," he answered shortly.

"And where is Bob Ravel?"

He shook his head. "I don't know," he answered stubbornly. "I don't know."

"Tell me where he is!" she cried and shook his arm.

"I don't want to."

"Tell me!"

"Mother," he began pettishly, "why do I always have to tell you that?"

"Because," she said, "just because . . ."

"And you know where he is because you told me that time. You did. It was at Uncle Gregory's right near my birthday," he said eagerly, half pulling himself out of bed. "It was too, Mother."

"Yes, I know. But where is Bob Ravel now? Answer me, Robin."

She shuddered as she said the words. It seemed so cold and strange to be asking her child where his father was, plaguing him when he scarcely remembered the man, and yet she enjoyed his embarrassment and the way he would finally whisper, "He's dead," very shyly and flush. She looked down at him. "Never mind," she said. "You needn't tell me."

"Well, I liked him a lot better than Leonard or Uncle Gregory. They were awful fathers. Leonard won't ever help me dress and I hope he never comes back here. I never want to see Leonard again."

"But Leonard's your father now."

"Only since Christmas. Why can't we get rid of him the way we did Uncle Gregory? He was my father for a while but we ditched him."

"Divorced him," she corrected.

"And Uncle Gregory was just about as silly and wobbly as Leonard is."

"I know it," she answered and drew her brows together.

"Then why can't we live alone? We'd have lots of fun, Mother, just me and you. Listen, Mother, let's."

"No," she answered and looked down at the red points on her hands, the narrow binding of silver that glimmered at the edge. "You must go to sleep."

"I won't ever like Leonard again after yesterday."

"You'll forget all about that," she said faintly and stood up.

"No, I won't. I hate Leonard because he hit me once when I couldn't get my shoe on. And then he hit me because I cried and he told me I was nothing but a baby. I wish we could get away from him, Mother. He's a bad fellow. Madie said so down in the kitchen yesterday. She heard."

"I told you not to tell any one about that."

"I didn't tell, Mother."

"Tell me exactly what you said."

"I said that all the noise came when Leonard knocked you on the floor."

"Oh, Robin! What did I tell you!"

She saw him flush. "But she knew all about it and she said Leonard would be in better business if he'd do a little work instead of . . ."

"Never mind, never *mind!*" she cried. "Now go right to sleep!"

"Mother!" he cried as she turned off the light. "Oh, Mother, please don't get mad with me."

"I'm cross with you," she answered from the head of the stairs and went down, her hands in the thick warm folds at her sides, her head back so that the coil of hair in her neck touched the silver lace collar that rose like an open fan.

She wondered in dismay why she should torture the child, why it had always pleased her to assume a grievance with any man no matter what his age might be. She felt that coldness come over her as she remembered her ancient delight in quarrels, those rages, when she had paced the floor and Bob Ravel had pleaded and finally won her by getting on his knees. But he, too, had been playing, she remembered somberly. And then, before Robin was born, those dreadful months when they moved to New York and Cricket Gregory became her best friend.

She went to the window and shaded her eyes but she saw only white stretches that

swept down to the river, lights from a black shore, and in the distance a bridge. She heard no sound, saw no marks in the snow, but as she looked closer she saw the stark tree at the gate, and as she watched, saw it rich and dark with leaves, with the moon on it, heavy with yellowed tassels, and sweet, too sweet. She saw the great warm night, the strange road, and before her the eyes of Bob Ravel softening as they looked at her, his shoulders bending, curving, his hands moving closer. She was stiff with disgust at the memory of her swooning, her long sigh that was for the thick sweet odor, the man's adoration, the anticipation of their flight. She had repeated that word flight to herself during the two days on the train, during the weeks when her mother, that town, the old house, were not even like a dream, when all those things had completely vanished and she was bright and complete and happy in his arms, his wife, "the only woman I could ever love," she remembered bitterly.

And then in the chasm that followed their union, in that long, monotonous dream when she had watched herself in tears, in rage and resentment, then she had realized that she could never reach her mother again, that they were cut apart, and that her mother was gone, her image empty and dry. Even the little girl who used to skip around the house with garlands of flowers on her arm and smooth stones

in her pocket, even she was gone, and then she realized that her world was dim, less intense, deeper, so deep it was hard to reach, so hidden she ached and cried but she could never draw up her words or understand. She remembered how she had sat dumbly, her hands on her swollen womb, thinking of nothing, appalled at her dullness. Cricket Gregory had appeared. She could see the bright hair, the bitter mouth, the smart suit. But the fine slimness of her had made her turn to the window, her throat hot and sick, waves of pain in her arms and eyes. They had quarrelled politely, under the discreet gay cover of friendship and finally she had said to Cricket sharply, "Thank God, I don't need to worry about my husband. He's mine and he's never been any one else's." She heard Cricket's laughter again and saw the bitter pitying line of her mouth, she felt her hands on those shoulders, and then, again, as the words seemed to fill the air she felt that dull, deep ache in her stomach.

She went back to the fire and warmed her hands, moved up a chair and sat down. Then suddenly she went to the window and drew the shade, drew all the shades, even the high ones in the dark hall, until she was closed in where no one could see her. She laid more wood on the fire and then, in weakness, covered her face but she could only feel loathing for the girl who had wept all that night, waiting

in her chair like a fool for her husband to come home. And the shrill accusations, the screams, when he looked dark and his brows drew together.

"Then you believe a fool like Cricket Gregory before your own husband?"

"Yes, I do!"

"You don't trust me? I suppose you think I've lied to you all along."

"Yes, I do. And I saw the whole thing the instant I met Cricket. I knew then that there was something between you. I could feel it. I felt it today when she came into the room. Oh, I tell you, you've done something dreadful to me. . . ."

But he had known how desperate she was to be told that it was all a lie, a monstrous crazy joke, she reflected. It was she who had made him add to the lie, assume the grieved tortured look of the wrongly accused, the martyr, until in an agony of emotion she had thrown herself at his feet, kissing his knees, begging his pardon and pleading with him to trust her again, to love her as he had at the beginning there under the tree. He had looked like an angel as she gazed up at him from the floor, his face distraught, the eyes soft with pity, his hands in her hair. She could hear him whisper, as he drew her up to him, "Promise to trust me!" and then in sudden anguish. "You *must.*"

She remembered the photograph they had taken a few months later, she and Bob and Robin, sitting near the fire in their living room, her face turned toward her husband's, smiling, complacent in its mask of trust and adoration, her arms plump and secure. She narrowed her eyes as she remembered the smile she had made for him, the gay talk when he came into the room in the evening, his face masked and set for hers, his eyes with their trick of softness beaming on her kindly as he praised some detail of her gown. And beneath it her fear of discovering them, Bob and Cricket, of finding them in some revolting situation from which she could never escape. And she had found them and she had buried the image in deep, black water somewhere inside her, far and distant, silent like death. She felt the curious dizziness come over her, the sharp, intolerable anguish which had no meaning that made her put her hands to her breast for an instant, mutely.

The wind came then, closer, closer, over the snow, around the house, shaking the trees, the bushes, creaking the hinges of shutters and doors, moving away down the river in its big lonely sound.

And her husband had confessed, he had abased himself before her, swearing that she was the only woman in the world, that Cricket was an accident, a perversity, the downward

pull that he could not resist. "I have to go both ways," he said in anguish. "Up and down. I don't expect you to understand. I have to destroy myself and then save myself. No," he corrected, "you must save me."

Then she had sought a way to wound Cricket Gregory. She had plotted, always watching for a vulnerable place in the woman. They were friends again, their arms twined and their voices more gentle, more tender than before. "You are so beautiful, Greta." And "Oh, Cricket, look at yourself!" She could hear that tone, feel the quiver of affection that had gone through her, the deep loathing. And then, by chance, she had discovered Cricket's dependence upon her husband, Gregory, her need of him which she tried to hide with flippant words and slights.

She tried to recall Gregory and remembered only the back of his neck, his cane, and the drawn look about his mouth and eyes, as if he were expecting to be wounded. His brisk walk and deep secure voice had never entirely concealed this acute shrinking. She opened a book and glanced at the page intently, as if to break her mood, but she knew what was coming, she could feel the long, tortured picture of that day rise in her, the moment at the telephone when she heard that Bob Ravel had been killed in a motor accident, her laughter as she went through the rooms announcing to her guests

that her husband was dead. She saw their stiff, horrified faces lifted to hers. She saw herself that evening dancing with Gregory, radiant, like a girl, and later sitting on the edge of her bed, a glass of poison in her hand, facing that warm night, that tree all heavy and yellowed in the moon, the dim, poignant face of Bob Ravel.

Perhaps that was some one stumbling up the steps; Leonard, probably, cold and gruff. She hurried to the door and opened it but there was only the unbroken white all around, the arcs and coils of frozen water, and beyond, the lights, the deep black. As the wind came she shut the door, pressing her face on the dark panelled wood, one white hand on the latch, the other high above her. Disgust for that girl on the edge of her bed stung her, then fear and nausea as the illness seemed to return in its deathly pain.

She walked up and down the hall, her eyes lowered as if other eyes were upon her in the dark, faces that she could recognize, bodies that she would know. Then they were far off again, dim, as irrelevant and grey as a dream; Cricket pleading with her for Gregory, weeping, begging; Gregory the day they were married, his large uncertain gaze on hers, the peculiar smile as if he, too, were punishing Cricket.

She went up to her room and turned on the light, shivering with cold, tense as she took

down her hair and laid pins in a china tray. Leonard would come back, he would forget about their quarrel, she decided, and slipped on an old red satin robe, richly quilted. She lay down on the couch and lighted a cigarette, one white arm behind her massed hair, and looked about the room, staring into dim corners, gazing coldly at the dark rafters, the full curtains that touched the floor. She thought of the way she had tortured Gregory about his excessive drinking, masking her desire for power under a sweet, hurt voice, staring at him as if he were a stranger when he tried to defend himself. She remembered the set expression he had finally manufactured for her, the assumed alertness, the honest, searching stare.

Leonard might be plunging through the snow now in the clear cold, his cheeks between his shoulders, his hands deep in his pockets. His head would be down and the black cap would make him grotesque there in the night with the white all around, with the river beyond and the little town. He would be all alone there in the drifts near the tree where she and Bob Ravel had stood, near the porch then, where all the members of her family had been carried in polished caskets down to the hearse that always stopped under that same tree, all bleak now and bony. But the way she had waited that night for Bob Ravel, how she had wanted to punish him, make him miserable for

what he had done to her. And she had wanted to punish Gregory for that same wound given her through his wife. But the night Gregory saw her with Leonard Farley she had felt joy as she watched the torture fall from his eyes to his mouth and she had known his misery as he gauntly measured himself with the man in that instant there at the corner, much as she had measured herself with Cricket. Then those jaunty steps going off past the cigar store, crossing the street, lagging then a little. But she could never make any of them feel what had been done to her, fresh from this house, these fields, that tree all rich and dark in the moon.

She would never want to go back to the little girl who had stood at that same mirror and looked in, smiling, turning to the side, making angel faces, angel smiles, putting slim white arms over her head, tying ribbons on her hair and imagining in an agony of delight the warm, rich life far off where the wind came from. She closed her eyes to shut out that face, the vague eyes in their large anticipation, even the sound of slippers on the stairs and following the soft pad of her cat, his tail proud and high, like a feather. Somewhere in her mother's room was a motto she had once made, bending intently over cardboard, writing in crayon: "Do Unto Others As You Would Have Others Do Unto You."

But Leonard must come back. She could never make alone the life they had planned, the fine clear outline of themselves free from hate, from jealousy, revenge, safe for all time from the inner branching rot that was growing, taking their lives, leaving them dull and crippled and hideous. He had promised that they would be new, clean, beautiful, and in those first weeks everything had been as he said.

"Greta, we're going to forget our pasts. You needn't ever tell me. I won't tell you. I have been wicked, too, but I was dead. Now, I'm alive. God, all the blackness is gone from me. . . ." That strange intense look in his eyes as he lifted her face to his, the stern cruel mouth, the arched nose, his eyes glittering now, then her body meeting his as his arms enclosed her, making her new, washed clean. She had turned away from him, too shy to say that she wanted to sing, feeling that it would be insignificant to tell him that a thick black crust had broken in her and that she was outside, in the light.

But she was always taking her child away into a corner to ask him who his father was and gradually Leonard grew strange, withdrawn, so isolated that she felt she must draw him closer by telling him everything that had ever been in her life, by sweeping herself clean before him, giving him all that she had been. And then, before his long silences, his sudden

acute glances, the events of her life had begun to unwind and that deep mute anguish had come to the surface. They had been at breakfast and she had been trying to tell him, afraid to open her past to him and yet half sure that he would understand, bless her, pity her misfortunes, and then they would go beyond to another even brighter higher place. And without knowing she had turned to him and called him "Bob." He had thrown his head back and stared at her, his cheeks slowly flushing, his neck growing red and full above his collar, and then he jumped up and threw his napkin on the table.

"Leonard!" she had cried, going toward him.

"Don't come near me!" His lips had drawn tight and yet his eyes were surprised at his rage, as if even now he might laugh gently.

"Please let me tell you. Then we'll be free of it. Don't you want to know everything about me?"

He laughed aloud. "Don't you suppose I've seen your past a million times in my head? You want to torture me and make a thousand stupid mistakes with my name and keep all those men before me so that I can die a hundred times a day. . . ."

"But I'm free—you freed me, Leonard."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"But none of them mean anything to me now."

"Yes, that's your fine memory. You'll forget me, too. I'll be the next, won't I?"

"Leonard, Oh, my God, don't!"

But her only thought as his hand struck her mouth was the cook and then Robin had run in as Leonard was standing close to her, his hands clenched, and when he saw the boy his words had come out with anguished wrenching and grinding. "The boy belongs to you . . . the house . . . car . . . money. Everything around here is yours. What do you want from me, that's what I want to know, and you tell me!"

As she had fallen, her cold hand on the blow, Robin had screamed in his high frail voice, "Ooooooo, that hurt me!" and she had heard the sound of his feet running down the stairs, and had irreleventlly compared that tapping to the days when her cat had followed her, his tail proud and high like a feather.

So it was Leonard who, promising to burn her past away, had made it more important than the present, he who had given her a fevered loathing for all her actions when before they had stayed in her dumbly, rising sometimes in hate or in a desperate need to return, to live it again, just as it had been. She drew her robe closer, glanced down at the frayed sleeve, and felt her blood ripple hot, then cold, as she remembered the day Bob Ravel had taken her to New York and helped her select

that robe, this robe, she reflected, and looked closer, this robe that Gregory had admired too and other men whom she must not remember, those faces which must not come, those voices. . . . One day she had sat down in the meadow in deep green, her cheeks against the cold grass, her empty vague head bound with a ribbon and her feet stretched out before her, a little mud on her stocking. Once she had embroidered a turkey on a handkerchief for her mother. One day she had sat at a window, her hands on her swollen womb. That was Leonard's step now, he had opened the door and was coming up stairs slowly, but not softly so that he might not waken Robin. Why need he be cruel to Robin? Why did he return at all? Let him stay away and never come back! She looked up into his face.

"Hello, Greta."

"Your feet are snowy," she reminded him.

"I know, Greta." He was on his knees before her, his head lowered. "I understand what you've been through. . . . I—I've . . ."

"You can't possibly understand. You don't know what it is to trust a person and wait for him all out of shape and then . . ."

"My God, are you back at it again? I'm not referring to your past. I've told you that I don't want to know anything about your disgusting intrigues. Damn it, your innocence is beyond endurance. Don't look at me that way!"

Now it seemed to her that she was slipping back so fast that she could never stop herself, that she had no desire to stop, no need except to fall down deep as far as she could go into the treacherous river that made her cruel and dull.

"Yes, your past is so important that you think of nothing else. I've watched you from the beginning. Are you happy now that you've made me your victim?"

She saw him throw himself down in the chair and catch hold of his head. As she stood there like a stone, waiting for that deadly flow of words that would pierce him, tear his flesh, she saw a look as distraught as Bob Ravel's come over his face. She had knelt to Bob, she had kissed his knees, begged him to forgive her for misunderstanding him, and now as she watched the softening in Leonard's eyes, the despair, a groan rolled out of her and she shut her eyes, her hand grasping the chair.

"I'm not thinking of myself. It's you, Greta. I'm not jealous. I don't care what men you've loved. I tell you it's not me—it's you. I'm thinking of you. It's all for your good. Are you listening? You don't believe me. I can see you think I'm lying. I swear to you that I'm not jealous." But when she made no response she heard him beat his fists on the table and then his head, crying, "God, God, you can read me. You know. How do you expect me to forget? I tell you we're rotting

from the inside like vegetables. Haven't I told you it starts inside us, not outside. Yes, play the virgin now, you make a fine one."

That peculiar emptiness came over her, the dizziness, and she said slowly, "Before my past didn't seem to mean anything to me but now I'm all surrounded. I can't ever escape. I don't want to. Even that was better than this."

"Haven't I said you never wanted to? That's the trouble, that's the point of all this. But what difference does it make to you—me or someone else? And all the time I thought you saw me."

She saw the swollen flushed look in his face, the mute eyes as if he were as helpless as she, caught in the dark twisted branches. But she dreaded the softening, the sullen struggle and the generous pardons. And now that high, bright place was gone, as dim to her as the little girl in meadow grass, as faint as the tree below her window that was once dark and rich with the moon, heavy with odor, sweet, too sweet. And running through her and over her was the muddy water, washing away pain and joy, drowning all that had been in its darkness.

She went forward and laid her hand on the man's head, crowding back reproaches, and then as she remembered that once Bob Ravel had stood with his hands in her hair, she went quickly to the window and looked out.