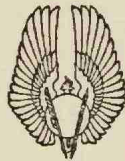


HERE TODAY
AND
GONE TOMORROW

Four Short Novels

BY
LOUIS BROMFIELD



PUBLISHED BY
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NEW YORK

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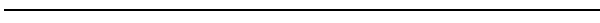
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FOR GEORGE

WHO KNOWS WELL

THE CRAZY 'TWENTIES

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Here Today and Gone Tomorrow

THE house at No. 55 could be at once distinguished from the others in the same street because of its size and because it had a fine wrought-iron grill with the initials D.F.H. in fading gilt. In the beginning, when it was first built by a respectable retired lawyer named Haskell during the 'eighties, it had had a brownstone front like most of the other houses in the block. Then it had been liver-colored on the inside as well as on the out, with heavy mahogany furniture, reddish-brown embossed wall-paper, and a great deal of plush. The lawyer died in the late 'nineties and the house was sold to settle the estate. The purchaser was Daniel Healy, real estate speculator, gambler, politician, big shot, and adventurer who thirty years later would have been known as a racketeer de luxe.

It was Mr. Healy, when on the crest of his fortunes, who changed the façade from brownstone to one of white limestone, elaborate and ornate and reminiscent of Berlin. It was his initials in gilt which ornamented the grill and his full-blooded extravagant character which annihilated the liver-colored interior and installed in its place a strange and brilliant conglomeration of decorations as characteristic of his day as the mahogany and brown had been of the 'eighties. The house was a bargain and it fitted into the ambitious plans which Mr. Healy had for his wife, his small daughter, and himself. It was imposing and not more than a hundred yards from Fifth Avenue and St. Patrick's Cathedral. When he had

finished with it no one would have known it for the same house, and after he left it, the succession of shady tenants did little to change its gaudy splendor. None of them diminished it and Mrs. Triplett added a few ornaments and furbelows in her own extravagant taste.

One entered through the grill into an immense hallway, square in shape, with a huge Renaissance fireplace at one side and a Renaissance stairway of pink marble on the other. The fireplace, like the wrought-iron grill, bore the initials D.F.H. At the back of the hall there was a library, paneled in dark wood in the Jacobean style.

On climbing the wide pink marble stairway one arrived in a gallery lighted from above by a dome of stained glass with a design of grapes woven across it. On the second floor at the front of the house there was a big drawing-room, large enough to serve, if need be, as a ballroom, decorated in white and gilt in the style of Louis XVI, with fireplaces at each end and huge mirrors. On the other side of the gallery was the Italian dining-room—a big square, baroque room all pink and blue, with a domed ceiling painted in representation of the sky. Upon rosy banks of clouds rosier nymphs and cupids took their ease. Among the clouds, nymphs, and cupids there were realistic gilt stars, each pierced to allow the light of the electric bulb behind it to show through.

Abovestairs were the bedrooms, two floors of them, each with its bathroom, mirrored and with tubs of marble.

The house was the result of Big Frank Healy's vigorous creative instinct and of a trip to Europe where he had gone with his newly married wife to get culture. Its details he had picked up here and there, carefully noting them down to be copied by the architect and decorator whom later he sent to

Europe. The stairway came from Rome, the great fireplace from Chenonceaux, the library from Edinburgh, the drawing-room from Versailles, the glass dome of the gallery from a Munich beer-garden, and the dining-room (somewhat adapted to Mr. Healy's more florid ideas) from Palermo. Mr. Healy had "done" Europe. His taste was all-embracing and the house was the monument to his success as a political grafter and the symbol of his rise in the world. He understood, after all, that it was a long leap from South Brooklyn to the Fifties off the Avenue. Something mighty had had to be done to stabilize the change and give him a feeling of permanence and of belonging. No. 55 was the monument which marked the highest peak in the fantastic range of Mr. Healy's fortunes.

But years had passed since Mr. Healy had occupied it. When he nearly went to prison and lost most of his money, he had abandoned it, without much sorrow. It was a monument to florid success and no house in which to live in defeat.

After his disaster it was occupied by a variety of fly-by-night tenants—a notorious lady known as Maude Triplett, a cinema actress, a speculator—and last of all it fell into the hands of Beppo Bianchini. It was Beppo who built in behind the grill a stout wooden door with a peephole.

It was four in the afternoon when Beppo wakened slowly and turned over in the silk sheets to bury his face in the pillow.

His bedroom was on the third floor at the front of the house, just above the Louis XVI drawing-room. It was a big room, rectangular in shape, with high windows completely covered at the moment of Beppo's awakening by the curtains

of dark-green brocade installed by the movie star who had occupied the room long ago. The bed was enormous and gilded, with heavy draperies of the same green and gold brocade. Opposite the bed there was a high mirror in a gilded frame. The wall-paper was gold with a design in black. That much of the room Beppo had gotten when he bought the house. The only things he had added were a series of colored French etchings, each about two feet square, of very pink ladies in various stages of undress. He had bought them in the conviction that they were not only artistic and elegant, but stimulating as well.

Behind the brocade curtains, the windows were tightly closed because Beppo, even during his dizzy rise in the world, could never overcome the belief that night air was bad for the lungs.

He buried his round, curly black head deeper in the pillow, and then suddenly threw back the silken covers, picked up his dressing-gown, threw it round his shoulders, and rang the bell. He slept without pajamas, naked as God made him. Now and then he had made an attempt to wear them, but always he found them uncomfortable. The dressing-gown was of purple satin tied at his narrow waist with a gold cord.

He sat on the edge of the bed until there was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” he said, and a tall muscular Italian with a scar over his right eye came in. He was dressed in a dinner jacket which fitted him perfectly. He had a brutal face, enlivened only by the wary eyes and the enormous mouth. Huge hands hung like clusters of sausages from the sleeves of the dinner jacket. In one hand he carried a single camellia carefully wrapped in waxed paper.

Beppo said, "Hello, Tony."

"Hello."

"Tell 'em to send up my breakfast and turn on the bath."

Big Tony moved into the bathroom to obey, and Beppo, after lighting a cigarette, called after him, "What's new?"

From the bathroom above the rushing of the water, Tony's bull-like voice answered him, "Nothin' much. Estrella called up."

There was a silence during which Beppo rubbed his head. At last he said, "What did she want?"

Big Tony came out of the bathroom. "Same thing. Wants to see you."

"What did you tell her?"

"Said that was up to you. She said she'd raise hell if you didn't see her."

Beppo grinned, showing the gold tooth at the corner of his wide humorous mouth. "Oh yeah?"

"She's gonna call again. Shall I let her in if she comes around tonight?"

"Yeah. Tell her to come."

"I'll make sure she hasn't got a gat."

"She wouldn't use it. She ain't that kind. I ain't worth that much trouble to her."

Big Tony frowned. "I ain't so sure."

"All right."

Beppo got up from the bed and Tony started for the door. As he opened it he turned and said: "What's the matter between you and her? I'd kinda like to know what's goin' on."

“Nothin’. I’m just sorta tired of her. She’s so damned common.”

Then Tony went out and Beppo entered the bathroom.

It was a high-ceilinged room, big and square, with a pink marble tub fitted with silver. The walls were made of mirrors, covered now by the steam that rose from the tub. There was a faint scent of verbena in the air from the bath salts Big Tony had thrown liberally into the tub.

For a long time Beppo lay in the luxury of the hot water, enjoying the odor of the verbena bath salts and thinking among other things that it was good he had a home like a fortress where he could shut himself in and from which he never need go out if he chose not to. It was a protection against women like Estrella when they got out of hand. And he thought how good it was to have this pink marble bath of his own. It was as good as and a lot more private than any of those Turkish baths he had frequented in the old days.

Presently there was a knock on the door and one of the waiters announced that his breakfast was there. He climbed out of the tub and rubbed the moisture from the mirror in front of him so that he might regard himself while he dried his body. It was a narcissistic rite which he always performed each afternoon when he rose, for he was proud of his strength and of his body and of all the conquests it had known. Whenever he grew discouraged and sank into the doubt that he was, after all, only a bum, he fell back upon the assurance of his own strength and good looks.

It was a handsome body, neither too lean nor too fat, supple and young, he thought, for a man of thirty-six. Whenever he regarded it (with the detachment of a connoisseur) he thanked God he hadn’t gone on boxing until

he grew misshapen and out of proportion. He couldn't have been a first-rate boxer in any case, because he was too well built. His legs weren't skinny enough and his chest wasn't flat enough. He had neither the rolling gait nor the rounded shoulders of a worn-out boxer. Just beneath the ribs on the right side there were two pink scars—the souvenirs of a gang fight which had happened long ago in Hester Street. Otherwise it was smooth and unscarred as marble.

As he dried himself he thought about his body as if it were a fine machine which he operated but which was not himself. When he thought about it, it seemed to him that what had happened to it had nothing to do with himself. He thought about all the women he had known and all the drinking he had done before he had the sense to give up drinking for good, and he felt a queer desire to shake off all that colorful, disreputable, and vicious past as if it were a soiled old suit of clothes. The desire came to him more and more frequently of late. He'd like to leave all that behind and step out naked as he was born to begin all over again.

It seemed to him that the Beppo who was proprietor of a swell place like No. 55 with so many fine friends ought to rid himself of the Beppo brought up in the tenements, third-rate boxer, saloon brawler, gigolo, and bootlegger. The episode which shamed him most was the one with Mrs. Triplett, when for nine long months he had lived on her bounty.

Putting on the purple-and-gold dressing-gown, he went in and had his breakfast, but instead of taking up the newspapers as usual to read through the news, he went on thinking about himself.

He wondered what had become of Maudie Triplett. You no longer saw pictures of her as she sailed or arrived from

Europe, and no longer read stories about her jewels and her divorces. It must be, he thought, because she had gotten old. He thought about her age and decided that she must be nearly fifty by now. When they were together she was thirty-nine or forty and that was nearly ten years ago. While he consumed the four eggs and the minute steak on the tray on the gilt table, he kept remembering her as he had seen her in this same room when she had occupied this same house; only the room was done then all in pink and silver. She had been a tall woman, more striking than pretty, with artificial blond hair and a tendency toward plumpness. And she was a good sport.

The older he grew, the more he respected her, not on moral grounds, but on the grounds of intelligence. After all, he thought, if a woman was going to lead that kind of a life she might as well make a good job of it. He saw now that all her jewels, scandals, marriages, and divorces were good business. She understood publicity. She did things in a big way.

And it was Maudie Triplett, he knew, who had roused his ambitions. It was Maudie who had sent him to the right tailor and taught him to have a bath every day, and how to use knives, forks, and spoons, how to be introduced to a lady, and how to walk into a room. When he thought of it, he was grateful to Maudie because she made him see that there were better things in the world than being a third-rate boxer. Oh yes, she had educated him so that he'd be presentable when she took him out with her, but no matter why she did it, she had educated him and he was grateful.

As he sat drinking his coffee, it seemed fantastic that he should own this house where he and Maudie once lived. It was one of those things you read about in the newspapers

—“Errand Boy Becomes Head of Firm”—“Former Dock Hand Now Head of Shipping Line.” Vaguely he searched for a headline to suit his case. Then suddenly he grinned. “Ex-boxer and Bum Now Owner of Exclusive Club.” He laughed out loud and then grew serious. It was funny, but he felt ashamed.

It was queer that it was the thought of the girl with the pale, small face that made him ashamed. He saw her suddenly as he saw her very often of late, sitting in the corner of the big dining-room alone, drinking and watching the others in the place. There was something about her that was different from the other women. He felt sentimental about her. That was the kind of woman he wanted some day to marry—some day soon, he thought, because he didn’t want to be an old man when his kids were growing up. The girl with the small pale face was a lady, and how could she understand about a woman like Maudie Triplett? He thought, “Damn the girl!” But he couldn’t get her out of his head.

At last he rose and began to dress, putting on silk underwear and finishing with an initialed starched shirt and a dinner jacket. When he was dressed and put the camellia Tony had brought into his buttonhole, he regarded himself in the long mirror which had been there ever since Maudie Triplett’s day, and he thought, “I look like a gentleman until I open my mouth—more of a gentleman than some of them swells who get drunk downstairs.” Then he took a hand mirror and, holding it up, he admired himself from all angles, and while he was doing this Big Tony knocked again at the door.

“Miss Jellyman is here,” he bellowed.

And Beppo went downstairs to the room known as the library, carrying the pile of newspapers with him.

In the drawing-room and in the hall below, the life of the evening was beginning. Behind the aluminum bar in the dining-room Frank, the bartender, was shaking cocktails for two girls and a man in a gray suit. Henry, the head waiter, was giving orders and setting the tables in preparation for dinner. Billy, who played the piano at cocktail time, was in his corner, softly strumming, "I'm the One for My Baby and She's the One for Me." Three business men came up the marble stairs talking about the market.

Beppo passed them on the way downstairs, hardly seeing them until one of them called out, "Hello, Beppo." Then he turned and, looking back over his shoulder, said, "Hello, Mr. Morgan," and continued on his way. He hated people calling him "Beppo" as if he were only a waiter. He wanted to be called "Mr. Bianchini."

He crossed the hall and went into the library, where Miss Jellyman was waiting. As he opened the door she stood up.

Miss Jellyman was fifty-four and very tall and spare. She wore a long gray tweed coat of no particular cut and a hat with an ostrich plume. Her face was square and long, with a rather large Roman nose which supported a pair of black rimmed nose glasses attached to her high-collared shirtwaist by a narrow black cord. At sight of him she blushed and said, "Good evening, Mr. Bianchini."

Beppo put down the pile of newspapers on the table and took her hand. She bridled a little and said, "I hope I'm not late."

"No," said Beppo. "I've just dressed. Sit down."

Miss Jellyman sat. "I suppose," she said, "we can go right to work."

"Of course," said Beppo, seating himself at the table opposite her.

Miss Jellyman was born in Yorkshire, the daughter of a vicar, and all her life had been spent in teaching. She had taught history, English, botany, chemistry, political science, arithmetic, algebra—almost everything—in thirty-four years spent in one school after another in England and America.

She said: "I suppose we might just as well begin with the Lausanne Conference. That's the most important bit of news today."

Beppo picked up the Times and began to read aloud to her: "*Discussion regarding a reallocation of reparations was the principal business before today's meeting of the conference.*"

Miss Jellyman leaned back in her chair, watching him. Her face was quite pink now and the little veins in her temple throbbed with excitement. Each day she came thus to sit while Mr. Bianchini went through the newspapers, reading aloud, to be interrupted when she corrected his accent or his pronunciation or explained a word or a phrase or a name which he did not understand. She supplied him with information regarding politics, religion, economics, history, grammar, spelling, social behavior, and a half-dozen other things. Regularly she taught at Miss Prinny's fashionable day school, and at five-thirty, when classes were over, she came secretly to Mr. Bianchini's. It wasn't exactly a respectable job, but she had told no one about it and Mr. Bianchini paid ten dollars a day, which was nearly twice as much as she earned at Miss Prinny's. She was paid to make Mr. Bianchini into a gentleman, and in her heart it wasn't the money that

counted most with her. It was the excitement. At fifty-four Miss Jellyman had a strange premonition that she was beginning to live. Each time she rang the bell and Big Tony peered through the slit in the door before admitting her, a wild thrill of excitement ran up and down her long spine. And she was in love with Beppo!

There hadn't been any man in Miss Jellyman's life since she was twenty-four, when the curate of the next village had proposed to her and had been rejected by her father. Since then there had only been women, armies and regiments of them, it seemed to her at times—old women, young women, middle-aged women, with once in a while a womanish bespectacled schoolmaster. There were times when she thought she would scream at the sound of a female voice. It wasn't that she ever had wicked thoughts about men. It was only that they always seemed nicer to her than women, more straightforward and honest and guileless. And all the women she knew were such ladies and so terrifyingly refined. All of them were middle-aged women trying to make younger women into ladies.

And then, miraculously, she had answered an advertisement in a newspaper which led her to Mr. Bianchini. At first she had thought No. 55 must be a house of ill-repute, and then slowly the truth dawned upon her, and, bracing herself, she had thought: "I will take the job. Why shouldn't I? It will help me to escape a little sooner." And she wondered why Mr. Bianchini, who was so young and handsome, should have chosen anyone so old and homely as herself out of so many eager applicants, never knowing that he had chosen her because she *was* elderly and plain and

therefore, he believed, innocently, incapable of falling in love with him and making complications.

And now she *was* in love with him, not that she thought it would make any difference to *him*. He was vigorous and masculine and not very old, and he was everything that all those refined middle-aged women were not.

At home in her own room, when she sometimes talked to herself in the long lonely evenings, she always called him Beppo.

“Tell me about Lord Robert Cecil. Who’s he?” said Beppo.

Miss Jellyman launched into a brief biography of the life and achievements and idealism of Lord Robert Cecil, and Beppo listened, his eyes wandering idly over the tabloid newspaper which had found its way by mistake among the more dignified journals, and while Miss Jellyman talked there on the front page he discovered a picture which he recognized vaguely. He stopped listening to Miss Jellyman’s account of Lord Robert Cecil and looked more closely at the picture. A stoutish woman sat on the rail of a steamship, holding a bouquet of roses, waving one hand and smiling at the photographer. A pair of stoutish but handsome legs were exposed to the knee.

Beppo’s mind wandered farther from Miss Jellyman’s account of Lord Robert Cecil. Then he recognized the picture. It was Maudie Triplett. She had returned from Europe.

Miss Jellyman’s voice went on and on. “He was,” she said, “one of the leading propagandists for the League of Nations in England.”

But Beppo didn’t hear her. He was thinking how complicated life could be and how difficult it was to shake

off a past.

While Beppo and Miss Jellyman sat together in the Jacobean library the rest of No. 55 grew lively. The long, empty, gray silence of the late afternoon vanished and Big Tony at the grill kept opening and closing the door, admitting architects, musicians, kept ladies, bankers, chorus girls, college boys, women from the East Sixties who drove up to the door in handsome motors. It was the hour of the cocktail and people came to No. 55 to meet friends, to make plans for the evening, to talk business, to make love, to gossip, to plan plays, some to dine, some to go elsewhere, all in search of amusement. Because No. 55 was amusing and it attracted important and distinguished and notorious people, Beppo didn't let in everyone who said he was a friend of Mr. Whoosis or that he knew Beppo when he was something else. No. 55 was exclusive, and Beppo knew that nothing ruined a place so quickly as allowing it to become common and full of riff-raff. When any patron became drunk or noisy he was quietly deposited in the street by Big Tony and one or two assistants. No. 55 was "exclusive" and Beppo was proud of it, even though Miss Jellyman told him that "exclusive" was a vulgar word and that its very use marked a man as common.

Up the marble stairs the procession came and went, bringing and leaving money, which went into Beppo's pockets. In the corner the pianist played what the guests asked of him.

Dinner began, the excellent dinner, cooked in the kitchen back of the library.

In the library Beppo looked at his watch and said: "I've got to go now, Miss Jellyman. They'll be asking for me."

Miss Jellyman pulled the worn fur piece about her neck and stood up. "I've brought you a list of books, Mr. Bianchini." She opened her purse and took out a paper with fifty or sixty names written down. She looked at the empty shelves. "There's plenty of room here," she said, "only I don't see when a busy man like you finds time to read."

"After I go to bed," said Beppo. He moved toward the door, slowly. Miss Jellyman turned red and her horse-like face seemed to distend with some intense and violent internal effort.

"Mr. Bianchini," she burst out.

Beppo turned. "Yes?"

"There's something I want to ask you."

"What is it?"

"I've always wondered what it was like upstairs. I've always wanted to see it."

In her excitement she had grown disheveled and the gray hair hung down from under the hat with the ostrich plume.

She said, "I'd like to have dinner here some night."

Beppo grinned. "Sure. That's fine. Any night you like, but ain't you afraid that somebody might see you?"

"No. I've been thinking about it. I don't think that Miss Prinny or any of my young ladies would be likely to come to a place like this." Again she blushed violently. "I didn't mean anything by that—only what you understand."

"Sure," said Beppo. "Only I guess sometimes you'd be surprised at what nice people come here." He started to say that it was an "exclusive" place and then remembered Miss

Jellyman's admonition and checked himself, "Why don't you come and dine tonight? It's a good night—Friday night. Be my guest at my table."

She bridled again. "Oh, Mr. Bianchini, you're too kind! All I want is just a teeny-weeny corner where nobody will see an old maid like me. I'd love to come tonight because tomorrow's a holiday. But I think I'll go home and change first. I haven't been home all day. I can get back at half-past eight. Will that be soon enough?"

"All okay," and then suddenly Beppo remembered that Estrella had telephoned threatening to come in and make a scene and that Maudie Triplett was back from Europe; but when he looked at Miss Jellyman's face all flushed with excitement he could not bring himself to put her off. He thought, "I'll see Estrella in my bedroom. It won't be the first time she's been up there."

Miss Jellyman gathered up her bag and her books and the two paper parcels she was carrying, and then suddenly she said: "You made a mistake just now. You should have said, '*aren't* you afraid that somebody might see you?'"

He grinned and held open the door for her. She was conscientious even in excitement.

Upstairs in the dining-room with the ceiling where the stars were twinkling among cupids and nymphs, there were gaiety and noise. The row of stools before the aluminum bar was filled and the tables along the wall and in the gallery and the Louis XVI drawing-room where customers were placed when there was no room elsewhere.

In Beppo's entrance there was a kind of triumph. He was greeted from all sides. Girls and elderly women, middle-aged

women and boys, called out, "Hello, Beppo." He stopped here and there, exchanging greetings, making his way at last to the table known as "Beppo's table" in the little alcove which in Mr. Healy's day had been a conservatory filled with palms. From here he could survey the whole room and keep an eye on anyone who showed signs of having drunk too much. Here Henry, the head waiter, could find him if there was an ugly argument about tables. Here Big Tony came when some one on the wrong side of the grill door insisted that if only Beppo were told he would be admitted. People never made trouble in No. 55 unless they were drunk, for Beppo, the ex-boxer, was always sitting there, his muscular shoulders incased in perfect-fitting broadcloth, with a look in his black eyes which welcomed a good fight.

Alone at his table, Beppo felt suddenly tired and lonely. He saw that people liked to be able to say "Hello Beppo" because it put them aside from the others. They were snobs, all of them. Even the most distinguished, rich and "exclusive" people liked doing it. And he wished they would call him "Mr. Bianchini" instead of "Beppo."

While he waited for Miss Jellyman to arrive, people came and went to and from his table, but he paid very little attention to them, for he felt restless and disturbed, not knowing at first why it was. Each time new people came up the stairs he stared at them expectantly, and presently he admitted to himself that it was because he hoped to see the girl with the pale small face come in.

Women came and went. Women of all ages, sizes, and description, but she was not among them, and suddenly he began to ask himself why he cared whether she came in or not. He had not thought about it before, save that he grew

daily more aware of her and that on the evenings when she did not come he had a feeling of emptiness and dissatisfaction. Thinking about her, he saw her in his memory with extraordinary clearness.

She was neither tall nor short, and she dressed quietly in clothes that were expensive but had the look of being a little too worn, instead of being flamboyantly new and opulent, like the clothes of most of the women of the place. He saw her heart-shaped, pale face with blue eyes and generous mouth and the slightly tilted nose and the ash-blond hair. She was not extraordinarily pretty—not so pretty as Estrella or Lily or any of the scores of chorus girls and kept women he knew so well, nor even handsome as Maudie Triplett was in her big way. When he thought of her now, the prettiness of the other women sickened him a little. It seemed to him that in America prettiness was the cheapest thing in the world and that being too pretty always made girls uninteresting. In the end they always bored you because there was no mystery about them, and half the time no brains or any ambition beyond getting as much money as possible out of you. No, considering the matter very gravely, he thought he would trade all the prettiness he had ever known, rolled into a ball, for the expression in the face of the pale blond girl. And she had “class,” too. She had an “exclusive look.” There wasn’t anything cheap about her.

It troubled him that he could find out nothing about her—whether she was married or divorced or a widow, or where she lived. Sometimes she came in quietly for a cocktail, and once she had dined there, aloof and untroubled in the midst of the noisy crowd. He had watched her, wondering at her self-possession and the ease with which she protected herself

against unwelcome attentions. Only a lady, he thought, could manage so well and so calmly. Once or twice a boy of nineteen or twenty had come in with her. Big Tony said her name was Mrs. Willingdon. He did not remember how he had come to let her in the first time, but he knew her face very well. He said she had nice manners and always spoke pleasantly to him when he opened the door for her.

In his alcove in the midst of all the stir and bustle, the sound of cocktail-shakers and piano, a strange thought suddenly occurred to Beppo. It was a thought which had never occurred to him before and which a few years ago would never have occurred to him. He thought, "Maybe this is what people mean when they talk about falling in love. Maybe this is what they write about in the books Miss Jellyman gives me to read." And suddenly he felt sad.

Women were no novelty in his life and there had always been plenty of them, so that whether they came or went, whether they kept an appointment or not, had never been of any importance. If you missed one, there was always another just as good. Thinking about it, he could not for the life of him remember ever having felt this way about a girl. And slowly he saw that it had become to him a matter of importance whether she came to No. 55 or not. On the rare evenings when she came in to sit quietly in a corner, he felt excited and interested, and when she did not come in the evening was flat and heavy. And never before had he experienced this funny desire to protect a woman and do something to make her happy. She seemed so pale and helpless and sad, and she drank more than she should. That worried him, too.

Then in the midst of his reveries he saw Miss Jellyman coming toward him through the crowd under the naked nymphs of the gay ceiling. She was taller than most of the patrons, taller even than most of the men, and now when he saw her coming toward him the uneasiness which had attacked him the moment he had rashly asked her to dine began to leave him. As he rose to meet her, she came toward him swaying above the heads of the many patrons like a dignified gray-headed seal.

She wore a black evening dress with a tiny frill of lace about the neck, and her gray hair, which he had never seen save escaping untidily from underneath her hat, was neatly waved and done low over her ears and in a knot at the back of her head. He thought, "She has been to a beauty parlor since she left." Her face suddenly appeared less square than distinguished. On each cheek-bone she had placed a little rouge and her aquiline nose was powdered. About her throat she wore a string of small artificial pearls. The black-rimmed glasses were missing.

Beppo, looking at her, thought: "She's got class. That's what it is." She made most of the others in the room look cheap and undistinguished. From the chrysalis of a dowdy school-teacher had emerged, not the familiar Miss Jellyman, but a new creature, distinguished and impressive.

Beppo led her, flushed and excited, into the alcove.

"Oh, Mr. Bianchini," she said, "I've never been in a place like this before. I'm so excited I don't know what to do."

He was kind to her and very polite, and as she watched him her heart began to flutter, and recklessly she thought, "He's common and he doesn't know how to speak, but he's one of nature's gentlemen and he is so handsome it doesn't

matter what he is,” and all at once, for no reason at all, in the midst of the room full of noise, smoke, and music, she had a quick vision of herself as a girl of twenty in the rectory at Ashendon-on-Tyne, and the vision frightened her a little and made it seem that what she was doing was even more mad and wicked than she had feared. Suddenly she was terrified and wanted to flee, but, looking at Beppo, she could not go for fear of hurting his feelings, but even more because in her heart she wanted to sit there watching him, and also because things might happen. “Anything,” she thought, “might happen in a place like this.”

She heard Mr. Bianchini speaking to the waiter.

“Two bottles of the Lanson that’s locked away,” he was saying. “Tony will give you the key.”

“Champagne!” thought Miss Jellyman. “Champagne!” She had not tasted champagne since she was twenty-seven, the year Cousin Horace was married at Ashendon to Lady Hibbs’ daughter (the Hibbses who made their money out of a chain of dairy shops. “Drink Hibbs Milk, Pure as the Driven Snow”). No, she had scarcely thought of the Hibbses or of champagne from that day to this.

Then she saw the doorkeeper called Big Tony come across the room and speak with an air of secrecy to Mr. Bianchini. All she heard was the word “Triplett.” It sounded vaguely familiar to her, but she could not quite place it. An odd name, it was.

Mr. Bianchini ordered a cocktail for her and excused himself for a moment, leaving her to face the temptation of the little glass of cold amber liquid. For a long time she regarded it, debating whether she should drink it or quietly pour it into the champagne bucket while Beppo was away. He

was gone a long time and the longer she regarded the glass the more the temptation increased. At last, trembling a little, she lifted it to her lips. It tasted like medicine, but determinedly she finished it, and presently the music sounded gayer and the twinkling stars in the ceiling grew more brilliant, and when a plump, middle-aged man with shiny spectacles and apoplectic cheeks at the table next to her said, "Say, this is a great little joint, ain't it?" she said, "Yes indeed, very amusing," as if it were her habit to come to No. 55 every night of her life.

When Beppo descended the stairs he saw Maudie standing just inside the door, talking to the man who tended the lavatory. He would not have known her but for the old laugh—loud, contagious, and familiar—which she gave out at some sally from the lavatory man. The rest of Maudie seemed gravely altered, but the laugh could never change. She had always been a big, handsome woman, but at first glance it seemed to him that she had grown even taller. He saw at once that she was much heavier and that her hair was no longer blond but mahogany red. She wore a long coat of ermine with three white orchids pinned to the collar. As he came toward her Beppo thought, "She's no longer a chicken, but she still looks like an expensive proposition." And suddenly he was aware that he was glad to see her. There was something special about Maudie which made life seem more exciting and full of comedy. Maudie always enjoyed herself.

Then she turned and saw him, and opening her arms she enveloped him in a cloud of ermine and orchids, crying out: "Beppo, you old bum! I am glad to see you."

At the moment there was no one in the hall to see them but the lavatory man and the two girls who kept hats and coats. They grinned.

“To think,” said Maudie, “that you’re back in No. 55 after all these years!”

“I own it,” said Beppo. “I said I was going to own it some day and I do. Come upstairs and have dinner.”

“Sure you want me?”

“Sure,” said Beppo.

Together they started toward the stairs, and halfway up Beppo said, nervously, “I’ve got another lady dining with me.”

“Mebbe I’d better clear out and give you a free field.”

Beppo laughed, “No, it ain’t that kind of a girl. She’s about fifty-five and a school-teacher.”

Maudie, pulling herself heavily up the pink marble stairs, halted. “Are you trying to kid me?” she asked, in her deep whisky voice.

“No, I’m not kidding you. She’s a school-teacher who gives me lessons every day. I’m trying to get caught up on what I missed when I was a kid.”

“Oh, I see,” said Maudie. She looked at him shrewdly. “Pretty prosperous, ain’t you?” she asked.

“Yeah. Almost prosperous enough to get out and settle down.”

“Something respectable?”

“Yeah. Something respectable.”

Maudie gave him a slap on the back. “Good for you, dearie. I always said you had it in you. I’m glad the good

work's going on.”

“Yeah. You started it, I guess.” And again he was glad that Maudie had come back. She always appreciated him.

They reached the gallery, and as they entered the dining-room a strange thing happened to Beppo. Suddenly he was aware it was not Miss Jellyman he was ashamed of, but Maudie. Seeing Maudie again, he saw that her whole history was revealed by her appearance and by everything she said or did. Maudie was a good girl, a great scout, but she hadn't any class. He was troubled suddenly by the thought of what Miss Jellyman might think of her. Introducing Maudie would be like saying “ain't” in front of Miss Jellyman.

But it went off well.

Pointing out the table in the alcove, he followed in Maudie's wake as she plowed her ermined way through the crowd. He looked at Miss Jellyman in the corner, and she seemed undisturbed save that she had an expression of happiness and expectant curiosity on her long face.

Then he introduced the two women. Miss Jellyman rose and bowed and took Maudie's hand.

“I'm an old friend of Beppo's,” said Maudie.

“He's a nice boy, isn't he?” said Miss Jellyman, enthusiastically, as if she looked upon Maudie as her own age.

The waiter brought caviar and Henry came and opened the champagne.

“No cocktails,” said Maudie. “My figure can't stand 'em. Anyway, I always liked champagne better.”

“What lovely orchids!” said Miss Jellyman. “White ones must be very expensive.” In her gray eyes there was a shining

look of excitement and pleasure. Beppo, watching her, thought, "She's just like a kid with his first dish of ice-cream."

Maudie took off the ermine coat and threw it over the back of her chair. She was dressed in a pink satin gown, cut very low front and back to show her robust, handsome figure. The gown gave a startling effect of nakedness. She wore ten or twelve bracelets set with diamonds and emeralds on her plump arm. Before she sat down she loosened the diamond clasp which held the orchids in place and, leaning over, she fastened them on Miss Jellyman's shoulder.

Miss Jellyman blushed and shook her head. "Oh no, I couldn't. I couldn't," she stammered. "You're too kind. I couldn't." Her face grew very pink.

"Of course," said Maudie. "No nonsense. They look lovely with your gray hair. I'll have the clasp back, but you can keep the orchids."

Beppo poured the champagne elegantly as Maudie had taught him to do long ago. He thought: "It's going to be all right. They're going to be friends." But in his heart he was still troubled, not any longer about Maudie or Miss Jellyman, but other complications. He cursed himself inwardly for telling Tony to admit Estrella when she turned up, and while he kept looking anxiously for the pale girl, he wondered what he would do if she really came. He knew that he wanted to speak to her. He knew that he must find out who she was and where she came from, for the idea kept returning to him that if he really meant to marry, now was the time to do it and that perhaps she was the girl meant for him. And while he listened vaguely to Miss Jellyman and Maudie talking (Miss Jellyman was asking her about England, and if London had been much

changed since the depression, saying it was so long since she had been there that she wouldn't know the place)—while he listened to their talking, he was thinking about a life very different from all this noise and chatter about him, a life in which he could be a respectable private citizen and have a family of his own and travel about and see things. And suddenly he was afraid that the girl might never come back. She might be dead or have gone to Europe or almost anything.

Opposite him Miss Jellyman was thinking: "It's the first time I've ever seen life. I'm seeing a real fancy woman and talking to her and she's given me orchids." After years of meals in boarding-houses and cheap restaurants she was having caviar, champagne, and pheasant. She hadn't thought fancy women were jolly and generous like Maudie. If anybody had told her at eight o'clock that she was going to dine with a fancy woman, she would have run away, not so much out of disapproval as out of terror. It wasn't a bit as she'd expected. Why, Mrs. Triplett didn't even seem bored with her.

Mrs. Triplett was telling about her early life and how she had been brought up in a convent. It was an interesting and sad story. It must have been awful to lose your mother when you were only nine years old and to be sent off to a convent by a stepmother so you wouldn't be in the way. And if she had been a fast woman, you couldn't well blame her if she'd been married against her will to a brute who mistreated her.

"And now," Mrs. Triplett was saying, "I spend a lot of money every year on orphans, trying to make them happier, if you know what I mean. You have to go through it yourself to understand." There was a terrific din in the room, but Mrs.

Triplett was a powerful, healthy woman and she had no difficulty in making herself heard.

Miss Jellyman felt gay and sympathetic. She smiled as she listened and watched.

The music was wonderful and all the people, and Beppo, the dear boy, was so kind and thoughtful. If the evening went on like this, anything might happen. She raised her champagne glass to her lips and felt a reckless desire to have Miss Prinny and all the other schoolmistresses walk in and find her enjoying herself in the company of a fast woman. She thought: "It would do them good. They and their narrow lives! It would make them more Christian and tolerant to see what life's about."

Then she noticed that Beppo wasn't paying much attention to Mrs. Triplett and herself. He kept watching the room, and whenever new people came in he fidgeted and turned this way and that and even stood up to peer at them.

"And so I went on the stage," said Mrs. Triplett, continuing her saga. "I had to make a living some way, and a manager saw me one night in a restaurant and offered me a part. It nearly killed my poor old father, but what was I to do?"

Downstairs, Tony switched on the light and, peering through the door, saw Mrs. Willingdon standing there alone. She looked paler than usual and more tired, and very small in her black suit and worn black fur. He thought, "Beppo'll be glad," and wondered what had gotten into Beppo that he didn't make a bold try for this dame.

Swinging open the door, he said: "Good evening, Mrs. Willingdon. All alone?"

She looked at him and smiled, “Yes, all alone.” It was a smile which began in the wide mouth and suddenly lighted up the whole face, ending in the clear blue eyes. Tony thought, “She’s a nice girl, too nice to be hanging around here all alone.” But she was Beppo’s find and God help anybody who got in Beppo’s way with a woman.

“It’s a cold night,” he said.

“Yes. Very cold.”

He wanted to tell her that she ought not to be out without a fur coat, a soft lady like her, and then he checked himself for a fool. Maybe she didn’t have any coat. He thought her clothes didn’t look any too new.

She went past him into the ladies’ room at the right of the library.

The ladies’ room was empty save for old Mrs. Rizzo, Tony’s mother, who acted as a maid there. She was a broad, squat, old Italian woman with a tanned face covered with wrinkles, and she was neatly dressed in a black alpaca dress with a white apron. She said, “Good evening, Mrs. Willingdon.”

Mrs. Willingdon smiled at her.

“It’s a cold night,” said Mrs. Rizzo.

“Yes.”

“You oughtn’t to be out without no coat.”

Mrs. Willingdon laughed, “Oh, I never mind the cold.” But Mrs. Rizzo noticed that she was shivering a little.

“Some people are like that,” said Mrs. Rizzo. “I can’t bear being cold.”

Mrs. Willingdon took off her hat and ran a comb through her ash-blond hair. Then she powdered her nose and rouged

her lips. When she had finished she put on her hat again. She did it swiftly, setting it at a pert angle with her small pretty hands. Then opening the shabby bag she carried she took out of it a small bottle and, filling a glass with water, emptied the bottle into it. The water turned murky. She raised it to her lips and then put it down again.

“Feeling bad?” asked old Mrs. Rizzo.

For a moment Mrs. Willingdon did not appear to hear her. Then she said, “Yes. It’s something the doctor gave me for my heart.”

Again she raised the glass and put it down. Then she opened her bag and took out some money. Holding it out to old Mrs. Rizzo, she said, “Next week is Christmas, Sara. I may not be coming in again and I want to give you a little present.”

Mrs. Rizzo took the money. It was an odd gift. There were three dollar bills, a twenty-five cent piece, a dime, and three pennies.

“Thank you, Mrs. Willingdon,” said the old lady, “thank you.”

Then Mrs. Willingdon moved away from her and, picking up the glass, drank it down. She made a little face as she put down the glass.

“Taste bad?” asked Mrs. Rizzo, sympathetically.

“Yes, awfully bad.” She picked up her bag and said, “Good night, Sara, and merry Christmas.”

Then she turned and went out, and Mrs. Rizzo went and stood in the doorway, watching her cross the big square hall and climb the pink marble stairs, thinking how small and frail she looked all in black against the heavy marble balustrade.

“She a real lady, that one,” she thought. “Not many like her come in here. God bless her!”

Upstairs, Beppo from his alcove caught a glimpse of her as she came into the big dining-room. She stood for a moment in the doorway, looking bewildered and frightened, and then Henry, the head waiter, saw her and, smiling, crossed the room toward her. Beppo could not hear what he said, but in a wave of jealousy he forgot entirely Miss Jellyman and Maudie (who had reached the cheese course in great gaiety), and rising, he started toward Henry and Mrs. Willingdon. If anyone was to receive her, it was his place. Let Henry keep on his own ground.

He had crossed half the room before seeing that Henry had found her a place in a corner and was handing her the menu card. Something in the sight of this ordinary conventional act made him suddenly see that he was being ridiculous, and he checked himself, filled with an appalling shyness. What, if he suddenly found himself in front of her, would he say? What excuse would he have for suddenly appearing so familiar? Perhaps she would not even welcome the notice of a speakeasy proprietor—a lady like her! The idea of ladies floored him. While he stood there hesitating, he saw Henry write down her order and leave the table. She took off her hat and, leaning back with her head against the upholstery, she closed her eyes. He saw that she was tired and wanted to be alone, and reluctantly he turned back and rejoined Maudie and Miss Jellyman just as Big Tony came through the door again.

This time it was Estrella.

“What d’you want me to do with her?” asked Tony.

Beppo rose and turned his back to Miss Jellyman, so that she should not hear him speaking of such a woman as Estrella.

“I can’t have her up here,” said Beppo. “I’m dining with ladies.”

“Wanta send her upstairs?”

“Yeah. Why not? Did you tell her she’s got to behave herself?”

“Yeah. I frisked her. She ain’t gotta gat.”

“Good. Well, tell her I’m busy, to stay up there till I come up.” He took out a cigarette and lighted it.

“What if she won’t go upstairs?” asked Tony.

“Tell her she can go upstairs or be put outside in the street.”

“Okay.”

Tony started away, but Beppo said, “Wait.”

“What?”

“Is she mad?”

“No. She seemed sorta calm—not so noisy as usual.” Tony grinned suddenly. “I always told you she was a bum. I always told you not to get mixed up with her.”

“Yeah. I heard all that before.”

Beppo returned to the table. He heard Maudie saying: “Yeah, Miss Jellyman, it’s true. I used to live in this house about ten years ago. I’m the one who put the twinkles in the ceiling here. Lights in the ceiling are gay, but twinkling lights are gayer, I always said. Have a cigarette?”

She held out a gold-and-platinum cigarette case. Miss Jellyman looked at it, swallowed, and then took a cigarette.

Beppo held a match for the two of them. Twice Miss Jellyman blew out the flame, trying to light her cigarette. She blushed and said: "I'm sorry. I'm not used to smoking."

At last it was lighted and she puffed at it, holding it between her thumb and forefinger.

"Have some more champagne," said Beppo, filling her glass.

"Oh no! No. I couldn't. I might become intoxicated." But he filled her glass all the same.

"Yeah, Beppo used to come here a lot in the old days," said Maudie. "We had some swell parties here, didn't we, Bep?"

"Sure," said Beppo, thinking, "My God! what's she going to say next?"

"Yeah," said Maudie, "I know every inch of this house."

He wished suddenly that Maudie would be more refined in her talk in front of Miss Jellyman and not use so much slang. Turning, he looked toward Mrs. Willingdon. There was caviar in front of her, but she wasn't eating it. She simply sat holding a piece of toast, staring into space. He tried to decide whether he would speak to her before or after he saw Estrella, and determined that it was better to speak to her afterward when Estrella had been got out of the way. Estrella was capable of anything. You never could tell what she might do.

He heard Maudie saying, "Yeah, you'd be surprised what good friends Bep and I have been all these years," and he took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, asking himself how he had ever got himself into all these complications. He never wanted to see women again, at least none of them but Mrs. Willingdon.

When Big Tony descended, Estrella was talking with the cloak-room girl. She was not tall and she was very pretty, save that her mouth was too small and too well shaped and her whole appearance was too artificial, so that she had the perfectly immaculate air of an exquisite doll just removed from its packing-case. Her hair was the color of fine platinum, shingled and perfectly waved. Her eyebrows were slightly plucked, and where nature had erred they had been corrected with a fine line of blue. Beneath the large blue eyes there were shadows of blue, and the eyelashes were long and caked with mascara. Her finger nails were long and tinted scarlet. At first sight one was inclined to think, "What a beautiful woman! What an exquisite creature!" and then after a little while one became bored simply with looking at so much ingenious artificiality, and became aware of a great void, a colossal emptiness. The arrival of the second impression depended upon the perception and instinct and experience of the observer. With some it arrived quickly, almost at once; with others it came more slowly. Big Tony, being utterly primitive and instinctive, had been bored by her from the first moment, thinking, "Just another moll." She failed even to arouse desire or attraction in him, since her air of being something contrived aroused in him only repulsion. Beppo, being neither wholly intelligent nor wholly instinctive, had been confused and had fallen a victim for a little while.

She was the daughter of a policeman and a scrubwoman. Her voice was raspy and petulant. She called herself Estrella Dawn and said she was an actress, and from time to time she danced in the second row of the chorus in large musical spectacles.

At sight of Big Tony she turned and said, “What does he want me to do?”

Tony grinned, “He wants you to go upstairs to his room.”

“I don’t know whether I will or not. I don’t see why I should be kept standing around the hall like an errand girl.”

“He’s eating with friends.”

“If I had any guts,” she said, “I’d go up and break up the dinner. That’s what I’d do.”

“No, you wouldn’t,” said Tony.

“Why not?”

“Because I’d just pick you up and dump you in the street.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.”

She lighted a cigarette and said: “Oh, I know who’s been throwin’ the monkey wrench right along. I know, all right. I think you’re sorta crazy about him yourself. Just a coupla wop pansies.”

“Yeah,” said Tony. “We been pals ever since we was kids.” She didn’t answer him, and he said, “Well, bright eyes, are you coming?”

“I guess I can walk upstairs alone. I know the way.”

“No. I’m gonna see you up myself, like a gentleman.”

“You’d think I was under arrest.”

“There’s times when you ought to be.”

She started up the stairs and Tony followed her. She behaved properly as they went through the gallery and up the stairs to Beppo’s bedroom. There Tony opened the door and turned on the light.

“There, sweetheart, make yourself at home. He’ll be up in a minute.”

Estrella turned and said, “Get the hell out of here!”

Before Tony closed the door he thrust in his big scarred face. “Any trouble, bright eyes, and out you go.” Then he closed the door and discreetly turned the key, which he removed and delivered to Beppo.

When he had gone she went over and tried the door. Then she pulled the heavy silver-fox fur about her shoulders, went over to the mirror and repainted the cupid’s bow on her lips. She poured herself a whisky, and sitting down in Beppo’s easy-chair looked about her at the familiar brocade, and the big gilded bed.

Twenty minutes passed and when she had finished the whisky she rose and went over to the high mahogany dresser and, opening the top drawer, she took out handkerchiefs and socks and threw them on the floor, opening each folded handkerchief to search inside. Then one by one she went through all the drawers, throwing everything on the floor after searching each shirt and bit of silk underwear carefully. Then she pulled out the drawer of the bedside table and threw the contents on the floor. She searched the pillows and looked through the silk sheets and in the folds of the brocade draperies on the bed and at the window.

When she had finished the search she looked at her wrist watch and went over again and tried the door. It was still locked. For a moment she hesitated, looking about her, and then with decision she took one of the small gilt chairs and, climbing on it, took down one of the colored etchings of nude ladies and threw it on the floor. One by one she removed

them all, turning them face upward on the floor. Then one by one she stepped on each of them, carefully turning on her high heels so that the crushed glass ground into the engraving itself.

Then in turn she took all the handkerchiefs and silk underwear and shirts, and carefully tore them apart, throwing them on the floor. Now and then she paused to burn into them a round black hole with her cigarette. When she had finished with the contents of the drawers she began on the bed. The heavy silk of the sheets resisted her efforts to tear it apart, so she opened her handbag and, taking out nail scissors, she cut gashes which allowed her to make great rips across the surface. From time to time she paused to burn holes in the silk.

There remained only the bathroom. Opening the door, she switched on the light and fell to work. One by one she threw the bottles of hair tonic, scent, mouth-wash, and bath salts into the pink marble bathtub. She took out the shaving-soap from its case and, throwing it in the middle of the thick white wool bath mat, ground it in with her heel. Then she seized the shaving-mirror and threw it with all her force against one of the big mirrors covering the walls. The big glass shattered and fell to the floor.

Turning to look about her, she heard the key turn in the lock. The door opened and Beppo stood looking at her.

For a full minute he stood with his hand on the knob, not seeing her, but looking about at the devastation she had wrought. Gloating, she watched him, knowing how much he cherished all his expensive handkerchiefs and shirts and underwear of silk. Only people who had once worn cheap

underwear and shirts or none at all knew what things of wonder they could be. Estrella herself knew. She knew she had hurt him in the worst possible way. She triumphed in the inspiration which had led her to wreck the room.

Then suddenly he stopped looking at the wreckage and saw her standing in the wrecked bathroom with the great shattered mirror behind her, and when he saw, the expression of astonishment turned to one of rage. She saw his jaw tighten and his face grow white, and because she knew what he was like when he turned white she felt terrified, thinking: "If he tries to touch me I'll shoot him. Nobody's around. I could say he attacked me. Nobody would ever contradict me." And suddenly it seemed a good idea. In a flash she saw her picture in all the papers. She would be photographed and be given theatrical offers. She pulled the fur piece down on her arm and felt it to give herself courage.

Then suddenly he pushed the door shut and the expression of his face changed. He grinned and said, "Been enjoying yourself, haven't you?" and when she saw him grin she suddenly forgot everything else and only wanted him to take her back.

He walked toward her. "You're a nice girl, all right—a regular lady."

Estrella did not move. "Yeah, just as much as you're a gentleman. Shutting the door on me and throwing my clothes out after me."

Beppo grinned. "That's one good thing about living in a speakeasy. I ought never to have let you back in. Come here. Come here and sit down."

She came timidly toward him and sat down.

He sat on the edge of the wrecked bed and lighted a cigarette. "Now," he said, "what do you want? What did you come back for?"

"You know why I came back."

"Why?"

"I want to stay."

He regarded the end of his cigarette, "Well, you can't. I haven't changed my mind."

"Listen, Beppo. What's the matter? What have I done?"

"You won't get any more money out of me, if that's what you want."

She changed suddenly and sat up straight. "Don't be so damned sure about that."

"Yeah? Well, I am sure. See?"

Suddenly she bowed her head and regarded her scarlet nails. "If I came back I'd be good. Honest I would."

Beppo grinned and looked about him. "Yeah?" he said. "It looks like it."

"You don't understand women."

"I'm about ready to give up trying."

"I kinda lost my head, Beppo. I'm sorry. Honest I am. I only did it because I was jealous and crazy about you."

"A woman who shows her affection the way you do ain't safe to have around. Besides being very expensive."

Still she did not look at him, and at last he said, "I've got friends downstairs. I can't sit here all night."

"Women, I suppose."

"Yeah. One of 'em's about fifty and the other about fifty-five."

“I suppose you think I believe you.”

“Believe it or not.”

She looked at him stealthily and then said, “Who’s the woman who came between us?”

“There ain’t any woman.”

“Go on, tell me. I don’t care.”

“There ain’t any woman.”

She looked at him again, sharply this time, believing what he said. “Then why?”

“Because I got enough of you. You’re too common.”

“Too what?”

“Too common, I said.”

She laughed, and it was a harsh, ugly sound, “Since when have you become such a damned swell? Let me tell you there’s plenty of guys richer than you, and gentlemen, too, who are hot after me.”

“Better take up with one of ’em and stop wastin’ your time around here.”

“Nobody ever said before I wasn’t a lady.”

“You never asked ’em, I guess.”

She rose from the chair, “And what’s more, I won’t stay here to be insulted.”

“I’ve been urgin’ you to go for ten minutes.”

She pulled the fur piece from her neck and held it in her hands, “Beppo,” she said, “listen to me. Please—Honest to Gawd——”

He got up from the bed with an air of weariness. “Listen, Estrella, if you don’t get the hell out of here, I’ll have you carted out. I’ve got company for dinner.”

Then suddenly she pulled the revolver out of her fur piece and fired at him, but he was too quick for her. He ducked and the bullet passed through the satin of his jacket collar just beside his throat. In the next second he dived toward her and together they went down on the floor in a heap. The revolver exploded twice more, but the bullets went wild, to bury themselves, one in the wall and one in the ceiling. Then he had possession of the revolver. He slapped her face and said: "You ain't smart enough, baby. It ain't the first time I been shot at."

The door opened and Big Tony came in. When he saw Beppo safe, standing in the middle of the wrecked room with the gun in his hands, he halted and his big mouth hung open with astonishment. Estrella, still lying in a heap on the floor, began to cry hysterically.

Beppo thrust the gun into his pocket and said: "Yeah, see what our caller's done. A nice little girl she is. Just a nice home girl, a help in any man's life."

"She didn't have any gat," said Tony, "I frisked her."

"She had it inside her fur, just like a movie queen."

Estrella, sobbing, cried out: "Shut up, you big bully! Go on, get me arrested. It's just like you."

Beppo ignored her. To Tony he said: "Give the lady a hand. Help her to her feet and then go downstairs and tell the orchestra to play the loudest piece they've got. She's gonna yell like hell when we throw her out."

Tony put one chimpanzee arm beneath her shoulders and lifted her into the big chair by the bedside table, and left without another word. When he had gone, Beppo sat on the bed and took the revolver out of his pocket. It was tiny and delicate, with a handle of mother-of-pearl. He regarded it for

a moment, grinning, and then said: “You came lion-hunting with a flea-shooter. Where’d you get it?”

Estrella picked up her bag and, still sobbing, took out the little mirror and regarded herself. She was wrecked. Her hat was far too much over one eye and the mascara had run in black streaks down the carefully tinted cheeks. Beppo, regarding her coldly, thought: “She’s no good unless she’s made up all fresh. She looks like a waitress in a bum restaurant. She ain’t got any class.”

Without looking at him, she said: “Look what you’ve done to me. Just like you to knock a woman down.”

Beppo grinned. “Mebbe you wanted me to stand still while you had a little target practice.”

“I think you like beating women. That’s what I think.”

“No. I hate it. I never laid hands on any woman but you, but you’re always askin’ for it.”

Estrella went over to the mirror and, taking off her hat, combed her platinum hair. Then she made up her lips and powdered her nose. Beppo watched her. Presently he said, “Are you gonna walk out of here quietly or have I got to throw you out?”

Quietly she went on making up her face: “I’m not going to stir a step. I’ve got a right to be here. If you throw me out I’ll make such a row you’ll be sorry.”

The door opened and Tony came in, and with him a blast of music. Belowstairs the orchestra had obeyed his orders. The trombone and cornet were doing their worst.

Beppo stood up. “Carry her downstairs,” he said, “as quietly as possible, and put her outside.”

Estrella turned from the mirror with a look of astonishment on her face. "If either of you lays a hand on me I'll scream till you can hear me in Brooklyn."

"Yeah, I expected that," said Beppo. "Nothin' you do is any surprise to me, sweetheart."

Tony advanced toward her, towering above her, all muscle and bone. At sight of him approaching she flew at him, kicking and scratching, giving out piercing shrieks which were lost in the clamor of the orchestra from belowstairs. But Tony was experienced. Bending a little, he lifted her on to his broad shoulder as if she were a bag of potatoes, and with one brawny arm he held her slim silk-clad legs pinioned. With the other he caught one of her wrists and held it behind her. Thus he bore her from the room and down the stairs, screaming with all her strength. "You brute! Help! You're killing me. Police! Police!"

In the gallery two customers in the corner caught a glimpse of the spectacle. But Tony was quick and experienced as a bouncer. He vanished round the corner and descended the wide pink marble stairway. The hall below was empty save for the attendants, but as Tony crossed the tessellated floor Maudie emerged from the ladies' room and stood watching, enchanted by the spectacle.

The cloak-room girl held the door open, and quietly and efficiently Tony deposited Estrella on the stoop outside. Closing the door behind him, he straightened his collar.

Maudie said: "What's the matter? Drunk, was she?"

"No," said Tony. "Just noisy. She's nuts on Bep. That's the only way we could get rid of her. There's plenty of 'em like that."

"What'd she do?" asked Maudie.

“Better ask Bep. He’ll tell you; that is, if he wants to.”

Maudie turned and swept her ermine-clad way up the marble stairs, and one of the cloak-room girls said to Tony. “You’ll have to change your collar. There’s lip rouge all over one side.”

“Yeah,” said Tony. “She kept tryin’ to bite me when she wasn’t yellin’ like hell.”

Outside on the stoop the screaming continued for a little while and then stopped abruptly. Big Tony, peering through the peephole, grinned as he saw Buck, the policeman, send her on her way under the threat of being locked up.

When the shrieks of Estrella had died away Beppo closed the door of his room and regarded the revolver for an instant. Then he grinned, thrust it into his pocket, and looked about the room.

He saw now how thoroughly she had wrecked it. Nothing remained but the chairs and lamps, and those, too, he knew, she would probably have smashed if he had come in a little later. Perhaps she would have shot at him from the dark as he stood silhouetted in the doorway against the light of the hall.

Presently he went over and mechanically, one by one, he sorted all the initialed silken underwear and handkerchiefs into neat piles, not knowing why he did it, because there was not one thing in the lot which would be worth saving. All they were good for now was as old pieces of cloth to shine the aluminum bar and the table-tops belowstairs.

He sat down on the wreckage of the bed and lighted a cigarette. Oddly enough, he wasn’t angry at Estrella, and this fact puzzled him. Once he would have given her a good

beating for having done what she did, but tonight he didn't care. He didn't even mind her having shot at him, although for a moment, when he felt that first bullet sing past his ear and bury itself in the wall, he had been frightened as he had never been frightened before, and he saw now that he was frightened because he did not want to die. Twice before—that time O'Hara had tried to get him and when somebody shot from behind a barrel in West Street—he had ducked and saved himself, automatically, without thinking, like any animal. But this time when he looked into the revolver he knew why it was that he ducked. It was because he had something to live for, but now, sitting on the bed, he could not think what it was.

And he kept on being puzzled that he was not angry at Estrella, that he had not wanted to beat her. Instead, he felt only sorry for her because she was such a damned fool. And presently a thought came to him which was altogether new in his experience. Estrella maybe couldn't help being the way she was. It was the way she was brought up, being let run wild in the streets. She didn't know how to behave. She didn't have the courage or character or ambition to pull herself out of it as he was doing. Miss Jellyman would never try to shoot a man, nor would the girl with the pale face. You could tell that by looking at her. And Maudie would never try, but in Maudie's case it was because she had too much sense. No, maybe Estrella couldn't help it. She just didn't know how to behave. She hadn't any "class."

It was as if a whole new world had opened up before him in which people acted differently from any people he had ever known, and he felt a yearning to enter that world where

everything must be quiet and peaceful and well-ordered and people behaved themselves.

Then he remembered that Maudie and Miss Jellyman were at the table downstairs and he crushed out his cigarette and left the room. On the way downstairs he was worried about the row Estrella had made on the way out. Maybe, he thought, nobody saw her. Maybe there wasn't anybody in the hall and the music of the band drowned her screams. But he was ashamed. If people had seen her, what would they be thinking? They'd think that he was running a common joint, like any other speakeasy, and No. 55 couldn't afford to have scandals. It had to be "exclusive."

In the alcove, Henry brought a third bottle of champagne, and Maudie in her gaiety discovered that she had found a perfect confidante in Miss Jellyman. Miss Jellyman listened to everything she said with passionate interest. She was sympathetic, and believed everything Maudie told her, so that even Maudie, too, found herself believing everything she said, even to the wildest and most extravagant details.

"And that was the way I found Beppo," she said. "He was just a third-rate prize fighter going to the dogs, but I saw there was something good in him. I'm pretty smart about men."

"I'm sure you are," said Miss Jellyman.

"I've had a lot of experience with them—not because I wanted it, but because it was forced on me. You can't imagine what it's like always being chased and annoyed by men."

"It must be terrible," said Miss Jellyman, wistfully.

“It’s always been like that, ever since I was a kid. Never any peace. I had to learn how to deal with them, if you know what I mean. Well, anyway, I saw there was something fine in Beppo, if you know what I mean—something that could be brought out. He was drinking too much and he didn’t give a damn about anything, and I said to myself: ‘Here, Maudie, is a job for you. You’re just the girl to do it. You can make a man of him and put some ambition into him.’ But your glass is empty, dearie.”

“No,” protested Miss Jellyman, “I couldn’t, really.”

But Maudie filled up the glass. “You’ve got to celebrate,” she said. “I haven’t seen Beppo for nearly ten years, till tonight. It’s a big night. I’m kinda proud of my handiwork. When you think what Bep was once and what he is now. You’d be surprised if you knew how many men I’ve reformed.” She offered Miss Jellyman another cigarette and took one herself.

“Well, anyway,” she continued, “I just took hold of Bep and brought him home. It was when I was living in this house. I said to myself, ‘There’s only one way to accomplish what you want to do, Maudie, and that’s to keep the boy right under your eye.’ When I do a thing, dearie, I always do it thoroughly. So I kept him in the house here and taught him to be a gentleman and got him to stop drinking altogether. He told me tonight he hasn’t touched a drop from that day to this. I can’t bear drunks. I can stand almost anything in a man but drinking. When they drink they make such damned fools of themselves. I don’t see how any woman could love a drunk. I could stand anything in a man but drink.”

“No, it’s an awful weakness,” said Miss Jellyman. She had seen and heard so much in these two or three hours, that she

was beginning to fancy herself experienced. The champagne, too, had its effect, and she spoke with conviction, as if all her life had been one long struggle with drunkards and assaults upon her chastity.

“Oh, we were very fond of each other,” said Maudie, “and we still are. I’ve always prided myself on that. No matter what happens, all the men I’ve known have been fond of me. I can see any one of them today and they’ll rush up and call me Maudie.”

In the midst of this speech an odd thing happened to Miss Jellyman. In her fear of missing something she had been listening to Maudie and watching the room at the same time, and then without thinking of it her far-sighted eyes focused slowly upon a figure seated on a high stool at the bar. Something about the face and the tilt of the small head seemed familiar. She ceased to hear what Mrs. Triplett was saying, and looked again carefully, and then slowly she became certain that the small figure on the high stool was Miss Healy, and she recognized her as the same girl who had been dining alone earlier in the evening at a table in the far corner of the room.

The sight of Miss Healy stirred a double emotion in the heart of Miss Jellyman. She had always liked Miss Healy in the days when the girl had been at Miss Prinny’s. She was always gentle and sweet, with none of the airs put on by some of the others whose fathers had millions. No, Miss Healy had always been polite and thoughtful. You never suspected that in her heart she was, like most of the other girls, regarding you as a pitiful old maid, and feeling sorry for you because you were poor. She never had the ill-bred insolence of the other rich girls at Miss Prinny’s. Miss

Jellyman remembered her vividly, all too vividly, and she remembered the row in the school when Miss Healy was asked to leave. Indeed, Miss Jellyman had dared to side with her against even Miss Prinny herself.

Miss Jellyman was glad to see her again after all these years, but she was frightened too lest Miss Healy recognize her. Suppose Miss Healy should say something and Miss Prinny would learn that Miss Jellyman had spent a whole evening in a speakeasy.

Miss Jellyman turned her back and pretended to listen to Mrs. Triplett's saga.

"You can count on Beppo in a pinch," she was saying. "He's full of fine qualities. I always say people can be taught how to talk and appear like gentlemen and ladies, but only nature can make a real gentleman, and that's what Bep is—a real gentleman."

"Yes," said Miss Jellyman, "that's just what I think about him."

Maudie rose and threw the cape around her shoulders. "Excuse me for a minute, dearie. I'll be right back."

While Maudie was gone Miss Jellyman fell once more to studying the pale profile of Miss Healy, speculating on what had become of her since the scandal which drove her from Miss Prinny's. And at the same time she began to feel the pangs of conscience, over having come indiscreetly to No. 55, and even more profoundly because she liked Maudie so much. All her life she had been taught to abhor women like her. Thinking about it, she decided (in the rôle of schoolmistress) that Maudie was common but not vulgar. It was all right to be common. You could be common and still

be a lady, but you must never be vulgar. Vulgarity implied pretentiousness, and that, Miss Jellyman knew, was the unforgivable sin. This differentiation of terms in her present mood seemed to her original and brilliant, and while she waited for Maudie's return she planned a short discourse on the subject of "vulgarity" as opposed to "commonness." She would deliver it on Monday or Tuesday to the rich girls at Miss Prinny's. It was a thing which needed to be explained to them, since so many of them were hopelessly pretentious.

And then she saw that after all some good had come out of her visit to a speakeasy, and that, after all, it would do no harm to remain a little longer. It was quite possible that she would find another subject for a profitable talk.

Just then Maudie returned, full of an exciting story. She had seen Big Tony carry a woman bodily out of No. 55 and deposit her in the street.

"She screamed and kicked and bit all the way downstairs," she said. "I can't imagine what it was all about. I cleared out before anything worse happened, but I guess Beppo will know about it."

Then in groups the crowd from the theaters began to come in, more and more smart and flashy and spectacular people, who excited Miss Jellyman's interest. She tried not to look at Miss Healy, but in spite of anything she could do she kept watching her, filled with a desire to speak to her and know what had become of her since she left Miss Prinny's and dropped completely out of sight. She thought Miss Healy looked pale and ill.

In the midst of the crowd she saw Beppo returning to their table in the alcove. He looked white and tired, and when he

sat down, Mrs. Triplett said: "What's the matter with you? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

Beppo grinned. "A lady tried to shoot me," he said. "Look, that's how close she came," and he thrust his finger through the hole made by the bullet close to his throat.

"Oh!" said Miss Jellyman, terrified. "Oh!" She leaned across the table. "Can't I do something about it?"

"It's nothing," said Beppo.

"Oh!" said Maudie, "She's the trollop I saw Tony carrying downstairs. What's her name?"

"Her name's Estrella," said Beppo. "You wouldn't know her."

"What'd she want?" questioned Mrs. Triplett.

"Nothin' much."

"She must get worked up pretty easy."

Beppo grinned. "I guess she was kinda crazy about me. Anyway, Tony dumped her in the street." He took the revolver out of his pocket, snapped it open, took out the cartridges, and laid it on the table.

"There it is," said Beppo. "I took it away from her."

Maudie looked at it. "I wouldn't touch it for a million dollars," she said. "I hate guns. I got a complex about guns. Once I saw my stepmother take a pot shot at my father."

But Miss Jellyman touched it. Fascinated, she lifted it and examined it. It was the first revolver she had ever held in her hands and it was a revolver which a moment earlier had been used in an attempt at murder. The barrel, Miss Jellyman's fingers told her, was still faintly warm, and there, close to Beppo's throat, was the hole made by the bullet. "Certainly," she thought, wildly, "I am seeing life."

In a hushed voice she said, "You must have an exciting life, Mr. Bianchini."

"No," said Beppo, "not very. It's not like this every night."

"You're just being modest," said Miss Jellyman, in a voice warm with admiration. She leaned across the table and in a confidential whisper said, "You mustn't say 'a lady tried to shoot me.' You must use the word 'woman.' Ladies don't shoot people."

Discretion told Miss Jellyman that it was time to go home, indeed that she should have gone long before now; but she found it impossible to rise and depart. The music sounded so gay and the champagne made her feel so free. Anything might happen. If she went away now she might miss something, and in her heart, even a heart warmed by champagne, she knew that she would never again come to No. 55 save in her worn tweed coat and the hat with the ostrich plume, to sit in the library downstairs and tell Beppo how to speak like a gentleman. Tonight it did not matter what happened. She could not go. This was the one night, the one fling of her whole life. Besides, she was not certain that she could rise and walk in a dignified way out of the room. She took out her powder and patted her hair and set the drooping white orchids straight on her shoulder. She heard Maudie saying, "I told Miss Jellyman all about us, Bep, and she understands."

"O my Gawd!" said Beppo.

Maudie leaned across the table and patted Miss Jellyman's hand. "I can't go on calling you Miss Jellyman when we know each other so well. What's your name, dearie?"

Miss Jellyman gulped and flushed. "Mabel," she said. "Mabel." It had been years since anyone had called her anything but Miss Jellyman.

"All right," said Mrs. Triplett. "You call me Maudie and I'll call you Mabel."

Beppo shuddered a little. He had wanted Miss Jellyman and Maudie to get on, but he hadn't expected it to go as riotously as this. He was aware that he had a new respect for Miss Jellyman. He knew she was a lady, but he hadn't expected her to be a good sport. Here she was flushed and smiling, getting on superbly with Maudie as if Maudie was nothing new or startling in her life. It puzzled him that he had misjudged her. He began to think of himself as the biggest fool in the world. Maybe, after all, you were like that if you had "class." You would be at home anywhere with anybody.

At the same moment he began to feel it was time that Miss Jellyman and Maudie called it an evening and went home to bed. He was glad Miss Jellyman was enjoying herself and he was delighted to see Maudie again, but he wanted to be free. He saw that while they were there a part of his mind would be occupied in thinking of them. A spot on his shoulder began to pain him. It lay just beneath the bullet hole in the coat, and it occurred to him that, after all, Estrella's aim must have been better than he believed. The bullet must have grazed the skin. An inch to the left and he'd have been lying dead upstairs on the gilt bed with the torn sheets.

His head began to ache from the noise and from sheer weariness, and again there swept over him a wild desire to walk out of No. 55 with all its uproar and confusion and complications and hide himself away in peace. All the people

about him suddenly seemed vain and silly and disgusting. Even No. 55 itself made no more sense than a nightmare.

A little way off Mrs. Willingdon sat on the high stool at the bar, regarding her reflection in the huge mirror behind the three bartenders. She saw herself between the necks of bottles. Between two labels—"Gordon Gin" and "Haig and Haig"—she saw a small pale face with a pair of scarlet lips beneath a small black hat, and as she stared the image slowly became blurred and vague and she thought, "That is me—Eileen Healy, Eileen Willingdon. That is me with all my bad luck and weakness and loneliness. I'm setting on this high stool drinking a whisky and soda and all around me are a lot of crazy people thinking they're enjoying themselves."

And all at once it seemed to her that she had a kind of second sight and could see into the very hearts of all the people around her, without even looking at them, and could see their loneliness as she saw her own and their selfishness and disillusionment and their nerves worn to a fine edge with the noise and speed and clamor of their existence. She could see boredom and burned-up youth and restlessness. It was an odd, wild, exhilarating sensation, a little, she thought, as she felt when being given ether, when everything, all thought and sensation, became terrifyingly vivid and swift and exact. It must be the way God saw all these people.

And in the midst of the strange sensation she felt that she was being watched by some one, who in a way had the power of *knowing* her as none of the others knew her or could ever know her. Some one was looking at her who saw as she was seeing. She turned a little and her blue eyes met the black eyes of Beppo. He was staring at her, and as she turned he

smiled a little. She knew who he was, but she had never spoken to him, and for an instant she felt a flash of resentment at his assumption of familiarity; and then almost at once, in the clarity of this strange new vision, the resentment passed. It was as if she saw inside him, and vividly she understood what it was in the faint shadow of a smile that disarmed her resentment. It was the timid smile of one child to another, a faint ghost of a smile, friendly and frail and frightened of being snubbed. There was in it eagerness and sympathy. In the midst of all that phantasmagoria of vanity and foolishness all about her, the smile was simple and direct and honest. And she was aware that for a long time, for years now, she had been searching without knowing it for the things that were in that smile, and she was aware that she was tired to death of clever people and rich people who worshiped success and people who did nothing but make smart remarks.

The impression came to her with incredible swiftness and clarity, and suddenly she smiled back to Beppo and felt in her heart a strange sensation of goodness and satisfaction. She knew that it was the nicest and most honest and affectionate smile she had ever given anyone, and she was suddenly aware that she wanted to live because there was so much to be had from life which she had never known, so much of peace and plenty and happiness and satisfaction which somehow had always passed her by.

Then shyly she turned back again to the reflection in the mirror, and again she saw the pale face and red lips, thinking sadly: "It's too bad. You'll be dead in a little while. It's too bad when you've just discovered how good life can be."

A great drowsiness came over her, and tilting back her head a little she saw the familiar ceiling with all its nymphs and clouds and cupids and twinkling stars which she had seen so often as a child, and the sight of them brought a quick clear memory of her father, so that for a moment she thought she was already dead and that he was with her. Then the noise and the music slowly faded until they were a long way off, and somehow she was in the open and the twinkling stars of the vulgar ceiling were the stars of the sky. She felt herself falling and then darkness engulfed her.

Beppo from the alcove saw her press her hand suddenly against her eyes and slip from the high bar stool to the floor. She slid down easily and lay in a little heap of shabby black, so quietly that before anyone understood what had happened he had crossed the room and was holding her in his arms. Her head fell back a little. Her eyes were closed.

Some one said, "A dame has passed out." A little circle gathered about them and Beppo said, angrily: "She's sick. She's not drunk. Get the hell out of the way and let me get her out of here."

At the fierceness of his manner the ring of people grew quiet and opened a way for him. To the head waiter he said, "Send Tony to me."

"Where? The dressing-room?"

"No. Upstairs."

He saw quickly that he couldn't have her lying out on the sofa in the ladies' room, to be stared at by hard-faced sluts full of cold curiosity who came down to see what had happened.

Alone he carried her up the stairs, and only when he opened the door with a kick did he remember the awful state of the room. He looked about him at the wreckage and saw that there was no other place he could leave her. All the other rooms in the house were bare and empty—all save Tony's room across the hall. He was aware that there must not be any scandal, either, for the sake of No. 55 or of the girl herself. The odd feeling that she needed protection grew stronger.

Carefully he carried her over and laid her down on the vast bed strewn with the ripped and burnt sheets. Gently he loosened the shabby black fur and drew off the small black hat, propping a pillow under her head with the greatest care. Her head turned a little and the ash-blond hair fell about her face. Then he looked at her for the first time, filled with awe and terror. Inside him there was a strange sense of pain oddly blended with delight, as if he had found, when it was too late, what he had been looking for since the beginning. She must not die. She must not escape from him. She had smiled at him.

Gently he laid his big muscular hand on her forehead and found it was cold and damp.

Then Big Tony came in, carrying her handbag, which he laid on the table beside the bed.

“What's the matter now?”

Beppo turned to him. “She's sick. Something's the matter with her.”

Then Tony looked at her and said, “Oh, it's Mrs. Willingdon.”

Beppo said: “Get Doctor Emery. He's sitting in the corner by the bar.” Tony went out, and Beppo called after him: “Tell

Sara to come up. We might need her.”

And then he seated himself on the edge of the bed and took up one of the small, white, ringless hands and began chafing it gently, looking down at her and muttering to himself.

The doctor was a middle-aged man with very bright blue eyes and gray hair. He had had too much to drink and walked a little uncertainly. He was followed by Tony, and a moment later by the wrinkled Sara. The doctor came to the side of the bed, and Tony and Sara stood at the foot.

“What’s the matter?” asked the doctor, a little thickly.

Beppo, looking white, answered him: “I don’t know. She fainted.”

The doctor took her hand and felt her pulse.

“I’d have come up before,” said the doctor, “but I thought you knew your own business.”

“Thanks. She’s not drunk. That’s not what’s the matter. I’ve been watching her all evening. She hasn’t had enough to make a mouse drunk.”

When he had finished with the pulse the doctor looked at her for a moment, and then, pressing back her eyelids, he looked into her eyes.

“No,” he said, “it’s not drunkenness.” He looked at her for a long time in silence, and then said, “I wonder if she took anything.” And Sara said, suddenly: “Yes, sir. She took something out of a bottle when she came in tonight.”

“Do you know what it was?”

“No, sir. She put the bottle back into her bag.”

“Where’s her bag?”

“There,” said Tony, pointing to the table. “Henry picked it up and gave it to me.”

The doctor picked it up and, opening it, took out a small bottle. Beppo watched him as he held it to his nose, took out his spectacles and read the label. Then quietly he said, “I thought so.” Turning to Beppo, he said, “Have you got somebody to go to a drug store right off?”

“Tony,” said Beppo.

The doctor took out his pen and wrote something on a piece of paper. Then he handed it to Tony. “Get that quick—the quicker the better. There’re two things. Tell them it’s a hurry case.” He seemed to shake himself and by an effort of will to grow more sober.

“Go to Sher’s,” said Beppo. “They’ll still be open.”

Then Tony was gone and Beppo turned to the doctor. “What’s the matter?”

“She tried to poison herself.”

For a moment Beppo didn’t answer. He looked at the girl and then said in a low voice, “Do you think you can save her?”

“If we have luck. It’s a matter of minutes.” The doctor put back his spectacles and said, “Who is she?”

“I don’t know,” said Beppo. “Her name’s Mrs. Willingdon. That’s all I know.”

“I suppose,” said the doctor, “things like this happen now and then in your business.”

“No. Not like this,” said Beppo, but the doctor did not understand what it was he meant. He sat back on his chair a little and said: “I wonder it doesn’t happen more often, the

way women live nowadays. A woman isn't made to stand this kind of a life."

Beppo turned quickly. "Oh, she ain't that kind. That's what I don't get. She was always quiet and ladylike. She's not like most of them downstairs." Then he saw the doctor looking about at the wreckage of the room, and he said, "It's too bad the room looks like this, but we had kind of an accident in here tonight."

The doctor was a quiet man and he knew a good deal about life, and he was tactful, too, in his mellow drunkenness, so he said nothing more. But he noticed the neat little hole through the satin of Beppo's jacket collar and he understood suddenly that there was something between Beppo and this girl who lay unconscious on the bed. What it was, he had no idea, and he told himself that it was none of his business.

Then the door opened and Big Tony, panting, with the snow still on his black dinner jacket, came in. Quickly the doctor opened the parcel he brought and took out a little syringe and, charging it from the bottle, he pushed back the sleeve of Mrs. Willingdon's jacket and thrust it gently into her arm.

Then he stood for a moment looking down at her, and suddenly he placed a friendly hand on Beppo's shoulder.

"I think it's going to be all right," he said, and then Beppo's hand grasped his in a powerful grip and the doctor was aware that there was something about Beppo which he liked profoundly and that he had liked him always since the first time he had ever seen him.

"I'll be downstairs when you want me," he said. "I won't go home until I'm sure she's all right. I'll be downstairs. Just send for me."

At the table in the alcove Maudie Triplett ordered another bottle of champagne, and said suddenly, in a burst of confidence to Miss Jellyman: "I wonder why Beppo doesn't come back. Just because a woman gets sick is no reason for his staying away all evening." She looked at her diamond wrist watch. "He's been gone for more than half an hour."

"I don't know," said Miss Jellyman. "Maybe it was something serious."

"We'll give him another fifteen minutes," said Maudie, "and then I'm going to find him. I know this house all right—every inch of it."

Miss Jellyman was feeling a little giddy, and boldness seized her. "I know the woman," she said.

"What woman?" asked Maudie.

"The woman who fainted."

"Who is she?"

"Her name's Miss Healy. I used to teach her in school."

"She looked all right."

"Yes. She was a nice girl. I don't know what she's like now."

Maudie closed her bright blue eyes with a look of shrewdness. "Women ain't what they used to be," she said, energetically. "Women of our generation was different. We know what it's all about." She made a sweeping gesture with one heavy arm. "All these others think they know, but they don't. They're just common sluts."

"Yes. Yes," said Miss Jellyman. "That's quite true," but she had not the least idea what Maudie meant.

Then they fell silent for a time, watching the crowd, and Miss Jellyman began to feel a little depressed because in her gaiety and high spirits it seemed to her that she had lost herself. It was as if the Miss Jellyman who for thirty years and more had risen each morning (except Sundays) at eight to bathe and bolt a meager breakfast and be off to school—the Miss Jellyman who had endured the snubs and insults of impudent young girls whose families had more money than breeding, the Miss Jellyman who had endured the patronizing headmistresses in a dozen schools in England and America; it was as if this Miss Jellyman had been lost somewhere along the way during this gay evening. She felt suddenly liberated and strange, excited and tearful. She seemed suddenly to see that if only circumstances had been a little different she might have been quite a different woman at the age of fifty-four. If only she had had, at the age of twenty-two or-three a little more or a little less money, clothes that were a little more smart, if she had not been the daughter of a vicar, her whole life might have been different. Looking backward, she saw herself as a young woman, and it seemed to her that probably she was just as good-looking at that age as Maudie had been, only Maudie had learned how to make the best of herself. But she saw clearly that it was too late to change now. Most of her life was over and she would never be able to escape. She would go on drearily for another ten years, and at last she would have money enough put aside to go back to England and live in a small cottage in some obscure village until at last she died alone and unmourned. There would be no more exciting adventures like the night in No. 55. Tomorrow she would sleep late (because it was Sunday) and on Monday she would go back again to Miss Prinny's to flush and grow confused and suffer before the sallies of the girls in her

classes and before the bitter sarcasms of that inveterate virgin, Miss Prinny.

And suddenly she wanted to cry, out of self-pity for the dreariness of her life, and the thought of returning to Miss Prinny's elegant school on Monday became unendurable. She was helpless, she saw, because she was a lady. There was no escape for her. She no longer felt gay. In a little while, almost any moment now, the evening would be finished and she would find herself back again in the sitting-room-bedroom on Lexington Avenue.

Then she heard Maudie saying, "It's a relief now and then, Mabel, to see somebody like you that's got real class."

Miss Jellyman was a little bewildered, "Class?" she echoed, doubtfully.

"Yeah," said Maudie, "I always regret that my family was broken up, so I never got the benefit of a refined upbringing. You can always tell a real lady. I can spot one a mile away, and when I saw you tonight I said to myself right away: 'Maudie, there's a real lady. She's got perze.' "

"Thank you, Maudie," said Miss Jellyman. "Sometimes one can be too much of a lady. I think sometimes that I've always had too much poise."

"Never!" said Maudie. "Never! Not if you know how to use it. I'd give anything for a little of that perse you've got, but it's too late to learn now. I'm just Maudie. Everybody calls me Maudie. If I was a lady they wouldn't do that."

"I'd like to forget it for a little time," said Miss Jellyman. "I've always been too stiff and dignified."

Maudie regarded her with a peering gaze, "Stand up," she said, suddenly.

“What?” asked Miss Jellyman.

“Stand up and turn around.”

Without knowing why she did it, except that she had been for so long accustomed to taking orders, Miss Jellyman stood up and turned slowly around.

When she sat down, Maudie said, “Yes, you could do a lot better by yourself.”

“How? What do you mean?”

“I mean clothes and hair and complexion. I wish you’d let me take you in hand.”

Miss Jellyman was silent for a moment, a little bewildered by Maudie’s enthusiasm. At last she said, “What could you do?”

“I’d make you into a different person.”

“It’s too late now,” said Miss Jellyman.

“It’s never too late.”

“It wouldn’t do any good. Not now. It’s too late. Besides it wouldn’t do me any good to spend money on clothes. I never go out any place, and besides I couldn’t afford it. I have to save every penny.”

Maudie raised her champagne glass and drank. Then she said: “Never you mind about that. I’ve got an idea, and when Maudie gets an idea things begin to happen.”

Then suddenly Big Tony was beside them, saying, “Excuse me, Maudie, but Beppo wants to know if you’ll come upstairs a minute.”

“Sure. What does he want? Where’s he been all this time?”

“Well, he’s been having a bad time. It seems that woman who fainted tried to commit suicide.”

“Miss Healy? Suicide?” asked Miss Jellyman, suddenly.

“Her name’s Mrs. Willingdon. That’s all I know about her,” said Tony.

“Maybe I can help,” said Miss Jellyman. “Maybe I could be of use.”

Tony shrugged his shoulders. “He only said Maudie.”

Maudie gathered up her ermine wrap and threw it around her big white shoulders. “Sure I’ll come. Anything to help out Bep. Where is she?” she asked Tony.

“In the front room. The one with the big bed.”

Maudie turned to Miss Jellyman. “I’ll be right back, dearie. Don’t go away.”

When Beppo heard the door close behind the doctor, he took up the girl’s hand once more and looked at it for a long time with a kind of wonder, and he saw that she had begun to breathe less heavily and her eyelids fluttered a little.

Looking down at her, he thought, “I must be crazy to think that a lady like her would even look at me,” and an awful humbleness took possession of him. He thought: “Maybe she isn’t a bit the way I think she is. Maybe she’ll hate me, when she wakes up, for bringing her up here,” and again he felt ashamed of the wild disorder of the room. What would a lady like Mrs. Willingdon think if, when she recovered her senses, she found herself in such a place? Her clothes were a little shabby, but they were spotless and well pressed, and her blouse clean and white and her hands white and smooth and not like Estrella’s hands, which sometimes looked as if they needed washing despite the scarlet lacquer of the sharp nails. And he tried to imagine what her life had been and what it

was like to be brought up as a lady, and he felt a great envy for men who knew how to speak well and who knew how to behave.

Then slowly an awful doubt wakened and began to trouble him. He was alone with her in a bedroom without her permission, without even her knowledge. He had carried her here and sent everyone away without her knowing anything of it. What if, in all that crowd downstairs, there was some one who knew her? What if some one discovered she was upstairs alone in a bedroom with the proprietor of a speakeasy? What would she think when she wakened to find herself here with him sitting on the edge of the bed beside her? What could a lady think finding herself in a situation like this?

The thought terrified him, and again he felt like a fool because he never knew how to behave at moments like this. There was, he saw, only one thing to do, and rising, he went over and rang the bell, and when a waiter came, he told him to tell Tony to send up Mrs. Triplett. Then he turned back again to watching Mrs. Willingdon's pale face, and after a moment or two he found himself doing something he had not done since he was a child. He was praying, neither to God nor the Virgin Mary, but after a fashion, into space, repeating over and over again: "Don't let her die. She's got to live. She's a nice girl. She's got to live. Don't let her die."

He had been sitting there for a long time when he heard some one entering the room, and turned to see Maudie filling the whole door in a tableau of diamonds and pink satin, flesh and ermine. She was staring at the room and the wreckage created by Estrella.

As he turned, she said, "Well, you seem to have been having quite a time up here tonight."

In a low voice Beppo said, meekly, "I couldn't help it."

"It was the one Tony carried out, wasn't it?" asked Maudie.

"Yes."

"I thought so. She looked just like the kind that would do that. She had that kind of a pinched putty face." She came toward him. "I must say it doesn't look the way it did when we slept here."

"No."

Then Maudie looked at the girl on the bed.

"Is she going to be all right?"

"Yes," said Beppo. "The doctor says so."

"Tony says she took something."

"Yes."

Maudie sat down heavily in the big chair. "I wouldn't worry too much about it. There's lots of women are always attempting suicide. It's a regular type. They do it whenever they get mad at anybody, just like the Chinese. I knew a girl once—you remember her, Minna Leroy—she ruined her digestion attempting suicide so often. She always got herself saved just in time."

"She ain't that kind," said Beppo, doggedly, and suddenly he saw that a woman alone, like Mrs. Willingdon, was always in the wrong. People always thought the worst.

"She's a nice-looking girl," said Maudie. "She don't look like the common suicide-attempter, but of course you can never tell."

"She's all right."

Maudie looked at him shrewdly, “Was she mad at you?”

“No, I never even met her.”

Maudie grinned. “Anybody’d think you were kind of intimate.”

“That’s why I sent for you.”

“What do you want me to do—sit here all night?”

“No. I want you to sit in Tony’s room across the hall. I guess when she comes to she won’t want the room full of people.”

Maudie considered the plan for a moment. “What am I going to do to enjoy myself?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t think about that.”

“It won’t be much fun sitting up straight in a chair waiting for daylight.”

“Listen, Maudie, I never asked anything from you before.”

Maudie patted his hand. “Sure, kid, I know. It’s all right. I get you.” She looked at him sharply, “Are you kind of interested in this girl?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so.”

“You see, it’s kind of a funny situation.”

Maudie rose, “Okay. I must say I never expected to see you standing on ceremony, and I never expected to see Maudie Triplett used as a chaperon. I’ll send down for Mabel and two bottles of champagne.”

“Who’s Mabel?”

Beppo turned suspiciously.

“Miss Jellyman.”

“Oh, I forgot. That’s all right. She won’t be noisy.”

“Don’t be too sure about her,” said Maudie as she left the room.

“Ask the doctor to come up again,” Beppo called after her.

The doctor came and looked at Mrs. Willingdon again. He was a little drunker this time, but he said that she seemed all right and that there was nothing to be done but to wait for her to come round; and in a little while Beppo heard Maudie and Miss Jellyman being installed in Tony’s room across the hall. The music and the sounds of shouting and laughter floated up the stairway through the open door, and Beppo, watching, leaned back against the foot of the bed and closed his eyes. He was not asleep. He was thinking in wonder about what had happened to him tonight and how for a long time it had been coming on, slowly without his understanding it. It was kind of like being born a second time. He felt clean and noble and good.

In the room across the hall, Maudie and Miss Jellyman settled themselves with champagne and cigarettes, caviar, chicken sandwiches, and hot coffee. Miss Jellyman looked at her watch, which she wore pinned to the bosom of her black dress.

“It’s nearly three o’clock,” she said, “I ought to go home. I’ve never been out so late before in my life.”

Maudie laughed. “Forget it tonight. If it’s three now you might as well stay up until daylight, unless, of course, I’m boring you.”

“Oh, no!” said Miss Jellyman, “it’s not that. It’s only because I’m not used to it. And when you aren’t used to a thing it always makes you nervous.”

“You’re quite a philosopher, you are.”

But Miss Jellyman kept wanting to cross the hall and speak to Beppo and ask him whether she couldn’t help him or Miss Healy in some way. She liked the looks of Miss Healy and she liked Beppo, and in the goodness of her simple heart she wanted them to be happy.

“I think he’s kind of in love with her,” said Maudie. “He never acted like this before about any girl.”

“Oh dear!” said Miss Jellyman. “I don’t see what can come of it.”

The conversation flagged for a little while and Miss Jellyman fell sadly to thinking of the dreariness which awaited her on Monday morning. The music and the sound of glasses came up the well of the stairway. She nibbled at a chicken sandwich and drank a little more champagne, and slowly she realized that she was feeling very tired, not sleepy, but exhausted and weak. She thought, “All this excitement has been too much for me.”

And while she was thinking, the thoughts of Maudie had evidently been traveling in a different direction, for suddenly she said, “You know, Mabel, I’m a very rich woman.”

“Yes,” said Miss Jellyman, “I imagined so.”

“And I’m not as young as I once was.”

“No, I suppose not.”

“I’m not talking about the inside. Inside, I’m younger than I ever was, but it’s the outside that’s beginning to go. I like food and drink and I don’t see any reason to give them up.”

She paused and picked up another sandwich. “You see,” she continued, “I’m getting to the age where men don’t look at me any more because I’m handsome. They’re glad to see

me, but they want to pat me on the back and say, ‘Good old Maudie.’ You know what I mean.”

Miss Jellyman was not quite certain, but she said, “Yes, of course.”

“There’s no use in my starving myself for their sake, and I was never one of those women who dress and keep their figgers just to show off to other women. That’s my idea of a waste of time.” She took a sip of champagne and continued: “So I’m about ready to give up all that, but what am I going to do with myself? About a year ago I said to myself, ‘Maudie, what are you gonna do, not to be bored in the future?’ And I thought it over and I got an idea and it’s all worked out and under way already.”

“I think it was very wise of you,” said Miss Jellyman, “and very far-sighted.”

“Would you like to hear about it?” asked Maudie.

“Yes,” said Miss Jellyman.

For a moment Maudie was silent. Then she said, “I hope you’re not going to be insulted.”

“No. Why should I be insulted?”

“Because it’s sort of hard to explain what I want to propose to you. I mean it’s difficult to suggest it to a lady like you.”

Miss Jellyman laughed, somewhat bitterly, “I never think about being a lady or not. I’m just an old-maid school-teacher.”

Then Maudie plunged. “It’s like this,” she said. “I looked around me to think what kind of business I could put my money into. I don’t want to sit around and wait for it to draw interest and pay dividends. I’ve got to be active. That’s the way I’m made, if you know what I mean. So I decided to go

into the beauty-parlor business. I said to myself, 'It's terrible how much money fool women spend on things to make themselves look different from what they are, and I might just as well collect a little of what they spend.' Well, I've got two shops going already in London and it's easy money, but not as easy as it is in New York. That's what I'm over here for. I want to take a whole house—a swell house like No. 55—and make it over into what the French call 'Institoot de Bowtay,' with baths and gymnasiums and things. In my day I've had a lot of publicity and that's not gonna hurt the business. And after it's established I want to start one in Boston and mebbe in Chicago and in Kansas City. That's where I was born—Kansas City. I wouldn't want to overlook it.”

“It sounds like a wonderful idea,” said Miss Jellyman. “Only, I don't see what I've got to do with a beauty-parlor.”

“Beauty isn't everything,” said Maudie. “Sometimes class counts for a lot more. Look at some of the plain actresses and the women who know how to wear clothes without being pretty. Sarah Bernhardt wasn't any beauty, but look at what she did. She had class. I was never a beauty myself, but I had other things, and nobody can say I've been a failure.” She reached over and patted Miss Jellyman's hand. “Listen, dearie, this is what I want to do. Now, don't be insulted. I want you to be the hostess of the establishment.”

“Oh!” said Miss Jellyman. “Oh!” and then she was silent for a moment. “I'm not insulted. I'm flattered. Only I don't know what you mean.”

“Well, I'll tell you,” said Maudie. “It won't be hard and there'd be a good salary. You wouldn't have to be there before ten or ten-thirty, because women who patronize beauty-parlors with distinction don't even wake up till noon

and you'd be through by six in the evening. All you'd have to do would be to sit in the reception-room and say, 'Good morning, Mrs. Whoosis,' when they come in. I'm going to have it all done up elegantly by an expensive decorator and I've got to have somebody who looks distinguished to go with the room. You know—simple with a bowl of tulips on the table and a few expensive pictures. All the money is made out of things like Woolworth's or out of things that are so classy and expensive that people think they have to have them. I've noticed that all through life. It's true even about women. It never does any woman good to make herself cheap. You're just the woman I'm looking for, unless you don't want to give up teaching school."

Miss Jellyman laughed, a little hysterically. "Oh, *that!* Give up *that!* I've been wanting to give it up for years."

"Then why not accept my offer? With your hair done right and in smart clothes you'd look like a duchess. You almost do already. That's what I meant downstairs. Just a touch here and there."

"I don't know that I could do it. I'd have to think about it."

"I should think it would be more interesting than teaching school. You see awfully funny people in beauty-parlors and you hear all kinds of funny stories. Women tell you their life histories without any excuse at all. You'd be surprised at the things you can hear in beauty-parlors."

Miss Jellyman listened, troubled by an odd mixture of enchantment, temptation, and fear. She was troubled, too, by the doubt that all this was not really happening and that the whole evening was a dream. All the things she had witnessed and taken part in could not happen in real life in a single evening. But stronger than any of her doubts or misgivings

was a small voice which kept saying: "Then you wouldn't have to go back to Miss Prinny's Monday morning. You wouldn't ever have to teach school again. You wouldn't have to face those intolerable empty-headed little chits. You could tell them all to go to hell."

Aloud she said, "It's all so sudden I can't think what to say."

"Well," said Maudie, "I'm not going to take no for an answer."

Across the hall Mrs. Willingdon's eyes opened slowly in the gentle light of the lamp, and Beppo, still sitting on the edge of the bed, bent toward her. Then the eyes closed again, she sighed a little and shivered, and Beppo, waiting, grew frightened, wondering what he was to say and how he was to explain why he had brought her up here and troubled to save her life. Suddenly he wanted to leave her and call the doctor, so that when she wakened she would find the doctor there instead of himself. The sound of the music and the laughter coming up the well of the staircase sounded grisly and out of place. It was all sour and nervous and overwrought, and it made him see the dining-room with the twinkling stars filled with all the people who called him "Beppo" and for whom he felt only contempt. He heard Maudie's boisterous laugh in the room across the hall. He felt an intense desire for quiet and solitude. He wanted to rise and close the door, but he dared not.

Then suddenly Mrs. Willingdon opened her eyes and looked at him, at first vaguely and then with slowly gathering concentration.

Then quietly she said: "It's you? It's really Beppo?"

He still held her hand and his heart leaped. “Yes, it’s me.”

She pressed one hand against her forehead, “When I first opened my eyes I thought I was dead.”

“No. You’re all right. You’ll be all right now.”

She smiled faintly. “My head feels all fuzzy. You mustn’t let me make a fool of myself. I’m so tired.”

“Just close your eyes and lie still till you feel better. Don’t try to talk. You’re all right. Everything’s all right.”

She closed her eyes and lay still, and then after a moment she said: “You mustn’t mind my calling you Beppo. I don’t know what your other name is.”

“It’s Bianchini. But don’t worry about that. It’s hard to remember. Just call me Beppo. Most people do—lots of people I don’t like. It’s all right if *you* call me that.”

“Thanks,” she said. “You’re awfully gentle and good to me.” Then after a while she said, “Where am I?”

“You’re in No. 55. You’re in my bedroom. It was the only place to bring you. I didn’t want you left in the dressing-room where people would stare at you.”

Still she lay with her eyes closed. “That’s kind of you and thoughtful.” Again she was silent for a long time, and then slowly she said, “Oh, yes. Now I remember. I remember the lights in the ceiling. Yes, I remember now. I remember you smiling at me just before. It made me feel sorry for what I was doing.”

He laughed a little. “Don’t worry about that. I’m glad.”

“You were sitting at a table with Miss Jellyman. It was all like a nightmare, especially with her sitting there, watching me. I saw her looking at me, but it was too late to go away or do anything. I wanted to run, to clear out and die in the street,

but I was afraid I'd never get there. What was Miss Jellyman doing in No. 55?"

"She was having dinner with me."

"There was an extraordinary woman with her. It's funny how like a dream it was—a big woman in ermine with dyed red hair. It was so funny seeing Miss Jellyman in No. 55, sitting at a table with you and that woman. Who was the woman?"

Beppo flushed. "She's an old friend of mine. I've known her for years. She's all right."

"She looked nice and jolly."

Her hand still rested in his. She seemed not to notice it was there, and to him it seemed that he was holding the hand of a small child. She looked weak and tired, and he thought, with sudden pleasure: "Maybe she really knows her hand is there. Maybe she wants to leave it there."

Presently she said: "I'm sorry I've asked you so many questions. There's only one more I'd like to ask. How did you come to know Miss Jellyman?"

Again Beppo flushed. Then suddenly he said, "She's teaching me to be a gentleman."

"Oh, I'm sorry!"

"You don't need to be. Why should you be? I don't see anything wrong in it."

Then slowly she opened her eyes and looked at him as she had looked at him from the stool at the bar, and it seemed to him suddenly that in some miraculous way they knew each other and that they had known each other for a long time.

"Maybe you'd like a drink of brandy. It might buck you up."

“Thanks,” she said. “I think I might.”

He freed her hand and, rising, went across the hall into Tony’s room.

When he entered Maudie looked at him. “Well?” she said. “She’s all right. She’s come to.”

He opened Tony’s cupboard and took down a bottle of brandy and a glass.

“Do you want me to help in any way?”

“No,” said Beppo. Turning to Miss Jellyman, he said, “How did she come to know you?”

“She went to Miss Prinny’s school. It was seven or eight years ago.”

“So she’s a swell?”

“No,” said Miss Jellyman, “not quite. Her father wanted her to be, but it didn’t work out that way. But she’s a nice girl.”

“Thanks,” said Beppo. As he went out of the room he closed the door behind him.

“At least,” said Maudie, looking after him, “he might have left the door open so that we could hear the music.”

When he came back again into the bedroom, she was sitting in the middle of the floor. She had put on her hat and fur and she had covered her face with her hands.

At sight of her Beppo put down the brandy-bottle and glass and, lifting her, placed her again on the bed, with two pillows propped behind her. She still kept her face covered.

“Were you trying to run away? You mustn’t do that.” She did not answer him and he said: “You aren’t afraid of me, are

you? You don't think I'd do anything rough?"

"Oh, no," she said, with her face still covered. "I don't know what I was trying to do, but I was too weak. I couldn't walk. I wanted to go away. I don't know where, because there's no place for me to go. I'm so ashamed of myself. People who try to kill themselves oughtn't to live. It's all wrong, coming back to life again, especially when there's nothing to come back for."

He poured a little brandy into the glass and held it to her, but she refused to uncover her face.

"I don't want you to see me," she said. "I look so awful when I've been crying."

"What were you crying for? Everything's all right. Everything's gonna be all right."

"I guess I was crying because you're so thoughtful and kind."

"You mustn't worry about how you look. I know how you look. I've seen you often enough. Besides, at times like this people get to know each other pretty well in a few minutes."

Suddenly she removed her hands. The tears were still on her cheeks.

"Yes," she said, "maybe you're right. Anyway, I'm not afraid of you. I feel as if I knew you very well. I guess it was because you smiled at me."

She took the brandy and drank it, making a face as it burned its way down her throat.

"I'm so ashamed of myself, coming here to No. 55 to do it, but I couldn't do it alone in my room. I wouldn't have had the courage, and, anyway, I'm locked out."

"What do you mean—locked out?"

“They wouldn’t let me in at my hotel. You see, I owed eight weeks’ rent. When I came in this afternoon they wouldn’t let me have anything in the room but some letters I had there. You see, I haven’t got anything but what’s on my back.”

“What hotel is it?”

“No, I won’t tell you that. Maybe they were right. Only you mustn’t believe I won’t tell you because I’m lying. It’s all true. Before God it is.”

“I believe you. Why didn’t you come to me and borrow some money? I’d have given it to you. My God! why didn’t you do it? I’ve been wanting to speak to you every time you came in.”

She looked at him with sudden astonishment. “Why?” she asked.

Beppo grew red. “Because,” he said, “I thought you were pretty swell.”

“I’m not so swell or I wouldn’t have done what I did tonight. You see, I couldn’t kill myself on the street, so I thought, ‘I’ll go to No. 55 and order dinner. There’ll be music and people there and it’ll take my mind off it while I’m waiting.’ And then when I got into the dressing-room downstairs I lost my nerve and I couldn’t do it. I still had three dollars and some change in my purse, and as long as I had that I couldn’t do it, so I gave it all to Sara for a Christmas present, and then I knew that I couldn’t get out without paying for my dinner and that I’d be arrested. So there wouldn’t be anything to do but go through with it. I meant to go down to the dressing-room quietly when I felt it coming on—and then it came too quickly and I didn’t have time.”

Beppo took her hand again. She was sitting now with her knees curled under her, looking at him. "I'd like to see anybody arrest you while I'm around," he said, hotly. "Oh, why in hell didn't you come to me? You might really have died!"

"And I came here for another reason, too," she said.

"Why?"

"Because I used to live here."

He looked at her in astonishment. "Where?" he asked.

"Here in this house. I was happy in this house. It's an awful house to look at, but I was happy here. A boy from the office where I worked brought me to dinner here one night. I didn't know where he was bringing me. I just walked into the hall and suddenly I saw where I was. I had a funny feeling that I'd see my father come down the stairs, only I knew he was dead."

Beppo, puzzled, asked, "When did you live here?"

"It was a long time ago. It was my father who made over the house and put in all the decorations. He had a lot of money then. He wanted to be grand and important and swell, but I guess he was only notorious so far as the world was concerned. My mother died in this house. She died here in this room."

"Oh!" said Beppo. "Was your father Frank Healy?"

"Yes," she said. "He wasn't as bad as people made out. When things began to go wrong, everybody turned against him. When he was rich and lucky he had lots of friends, but they all ran away from him. I think that's what killed him." A look of defiance came into her face. "He was a good man. *I* know how good he was. Big Frank Healy was a good name

for him. He was big about everything—even the way he did over this house.—I loved him.”

Beppo could not think what to say, so he sat still, continuing automatically to hold her hand.

“That’s one of the reasons I came here tonight to do what I did—because this house was friendly. I thought that probably I’d just faint and people would think I’d had too much to drink, and by the time they carried me out I’d be dead. I thought it wouldn’t make much trouble for anybody.”

Beppo looked at her thoughtfully: “Why did you want to kill yourself? Was it just because you were shut out of your hotel? People don’t kill themselves for a little thing like that.”

“No, it wasn’t only that. That was just the last thing. It was the straw that broke the camel’s back. I’d been unlucky for so long and I was lonely and tired.”

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

She gave him a queer oblique look, as if she wondered why he took so much interest and trouble with her. “Why do you want to hear? Do you really want to know?”

“Look here,” said Beppo, abruptly, “what do you think of me?”

She looked away from him. “I don’t know. It’s all so queer—what’s happened. I think I like you.”

“Well, I want to hear. I wouldn’t ask you if I didn’t. I’m not enough of a gentleman to know how to make conversation.”

She smiled, “All people who make conversation aren’t gentlemen, and lots of the finest gentlemen can’t make conversation at all.”

“Mebbe,” said Beppo. “Go on, tell me about it. I guess you don’t believe how much I’m interested. It’ll do you good. Sometimes I’d like to talk about myself, but I’m kinda afraid to. Anyway, there’s nobody to listen to me except Big Tony, and he don’t understand a lot of things.”

“There isn’t much to tell,” she said. “You see, my father was an Irishman who made his own way in the world and I was his only child, and he wanted me to be a lady and have an easy life. He knew he wasn’t quite a gentleman. Maybe he had too much heart. So he built over this house.” She looked about her and said: “This used to be my mother’s room. And, somehow, through friends who owed him money—important friends—he got me into Miss Prinny’s school. He thought I’d meet the right people there and get invited places and maybe make a good marriage. But it didn’t turn out that way. I didn’t know any of the girls, and most of them didn’t even speak to me. They used to go into corners and whisper about me and laugh. You see, they all knew one another and their fathers and mothers knew one another. Even Miss Prinny didn’t want me there. She’s a snob, and having a girl like me didn’t help the school. And then one day all the trouble about my father came out in the newspapers and one of the girls told the others that I was the daughter of Big Frank Healy, and then Miss Prinny said I’d have to leave because everybody knew it. Miss Jellyman was the only one who was kind to me.”

She paused suddenly and said, “I think I’d like a cigarette.”

Beppo gave her one from his cigarette-case of platinum and gold, and when she saw it she looked at it in a delighted way, like a child.

“It’s beautiful,” she said, touching it gently with her slim fingers. “It must have cost lots of money.”

“I’ve got lots of money. I like nice things.”

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen any nice things.”

He held a match for the cigarette. She puffed it dully and said: “Things began to go wrong before I left Miss Prinny’s. We had to move out of this house into a cheap hotel. And then when everything went to pieces and everybody said my father was a crook, he had a stroke, and when he knew he was going to die, he wanted to go back to Ireland. He died three months after he got to Dublin. I didn’t know anybody but some cousins from the west country who weren’t much use, but there was a man staying in the same hotel who helped me to arrange the funeral and to straighten out my father’s affairs. When it was all settled, he asked me to marry him, and I did. I wasn’t very old and I was frightened at being left alone. I’d never been taught to look after myself. His name was Willingdon and he had red hair. I didn’t love him at first, but I came to love him. He was so good to me, except when he had fits of craziness. He had been wounded in the war and sometimes he went out of his head and forgot who he was or that he had a wife.”

Suddenly she put her hand over her eyes and said: “I’m sorry, but I feel so tired. Could I have a little more brandy?”

He poured it for her, saying: “Maybe you’re too tired. You’ve been talking too much. Maybe you oughtn’t to talk any more.”

“No, I’m all right. I’d like to talk, if it doesn’t bore you. It’s been so long since I’ve had anybody to talk to. I couldn’t sleep if I wanted to. I’m too full of nerves. And besides, I like you. I can only talk to people I like.”

“That’s right,” said Beppo. “I’ll look after you.”

“We were married about five years. He had a job which didn’t bring in much money, but we were happy except when he went crazy. We had a baby. We couldn’t afford it, but we both wanted it, so we liked it all the more. And then one night he went out of his head and left the house and never came back. They found him dead in the river a week later. I had a little money and I got a job in a bookshop and left the baby at home with the old woman who lived on the top floor of the lodging-house. And then one day he caught bronchitis and it turned into pneumonia and he died. He was two years old.”

Again she covered her face with her hands and he saw that she was crying silently. Quietly he took her hand and, pressing it, said: “Don’t go on. It’s all right. I understand.”

The music still drifted up the stairs, but the sounds of merriment had faded a little.

“I hate women who cry,” she said. “I don’t really, not often. And I hate women who pity themselves.”

“Listen,” said Beppo, “go on and have a good cry. You can cry as much as you wanna. I’d sit here forever like this, just listening, if you’d let me.”

“There isn’t much more. I came back to New York, but I didn’t know anybody then. You see, I didn’t belong anywhere. I never did. That’s always been the trouble. I’ve never been one thing or the other. I learned to be a stenographer and I got a job, and then six months ago they turned me out. I got work now and then as a model and I still had a little saved up. And I guess sometimes I was foolish because I spent money when I ought to have saved it, but sometimes, after I discovered No. 55, I’d get so that I couldn’t sit alone another evening in the boarding-house and

I'd come around here, partly because I'd been happy in this house and partly because it was gay and I didn't feel so lonely. I could have done other things for a living, but I wouldn't lead that kind of a life just for the sake of living. If I didn't have my self-respect I wouldn't have anything. And I began to think that there wasn't any luck in life for me, anyway, and I might as well die. And tonight when I got locked out, there wasn't anything left to do but die." She looked at him, "Do you understand now?"

"Sure," said Beppo. "I understand everything. You didn't need to tell me. I could tell by looking at you that you were all right."

She sat up and put her feet over the edge of the bed, and pulled the shabby black hat straight over her eyes.

"Now," she said, "I've been enough of a nuisance. I think I'd better be going."

Beppo, startled, looked at her, "Where are you going to?"

"I don't know, exactly, but you needn't worry about that."

"You can't go off like this with no money, and sick and no place to go."

She blushed a little, "If you could lend me a little money—five dollars, maybe—it would help. I've never asked for anything before. I suppose there are places that help out people like me."

Beppo grinned, showing his gold tooth. Then he shook his head gravely. "There ain't any place that could look after a girl like you, not properly. I'm not going to let you go out like that. You might get discouraged and try to do the same thing over again."

"No, I won't ever do it again."

“You can’t ever tell. I’ve been down and out, too.”

“No, I wouldn’t ever want to do it again.”

Suddenly he stood up. “Look at me,” he said.

She regarded him, looking very small and pale on the edge of the wrecked bed.

“Look at me,” said Beppo. “Do I look like a bum?”

“No,” she said. “No, I think you’re very nice-looking and you’ve got such a nice smile.”

“Could you trust me?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said, “I think I could trust you.”

“Well, I’ve got a proposition to make.”

She regarded him curiously, with a look of fear in her blue eyes.

“Look here,” he said. “I’ve got a lot of money. Let me stake you for a while. You need a nice flat and nice clothes and good food.”

She started to interrupt him, but he went on: “Oh, I can see the kind you are. It’s written all over you. You’re a lady, all right. I don’t ask only one thing. I kind of feel I know you pretty well. Things like this draw people together better than months of knowing each other.” Again she started to speak, and again he wouldn’t let her.

“No,” he said. “Now it’s my turn to talk. I’ve always been wanting to talk to you ever since you came here the first time, and I was always scared of you. I know a lot about women. They ain’t any novelty to me, and I’m not gonna ask you what you think I’m going to do. I want to make a proposition. I wanta quit the business and go away, maybe back on a trip to Sicily, where my people came from. I’ve been through the works and I wanta settle down before it’s too late. I wanta be

a gentleman and I need somebody to help me. Do you get what I mean?”

She was sitting with her hands clasped together, looking away from him. “I don’t know,” she said, in a low voice. “I’m not sure.”

“I want to marry you.”

He saw her start suddenly. Still she did not look at him.

“I don’t mean right away. I don’t mean tonight. This is for good as far as I’m concerned. I’d want you to have a chance to think it over and consider the proposition.” Suddenly he blushed under his dark skin. “I’m kinda tired myself and I wanta settle down, but that’s not all of it. I’m kind of crazy about you. I have been ever since the first time I saw you. Do you think you could like me?”

“Yes,” she said, in a low voice. “I think you’re a gentleman already. A great gentleman!”

He wanted suddenly to pick her up in his arms and carry her off down the stairs and away from No. 55—out of this room with all the wreckage left by Estrella and away from the last strains of the orchestra and the silly, tipsy laughter belowstairs; but he did not touch her. He only stood looking down at her, grinning and showing his gold tooth.

“I’m not very bright,” he said, “but I’ve always been right about things. Just dumb hunches, I guess. You’ve been on the down grade and I’ve been on the up. And I kind of feel we’ll hitch up all right. I’m pretty sure about it.”

“Yes,” she said, slowly, “I think maybe you’re right. I guess we’ve both been through enough to have some sense.”

“You don’t have to make up your mind right off. I don’t want to rush you.”

“You’re not rushing me. My mind’s made up.” She looked up at him and smiled slowly. “I guess it was made up before I died—I mean when you smiled at me just before I fainted.” She shrugged her shoulders and smiled suddenly. “Anyway, what could I do if I didn’t ... not that I don’t want to.”

Then suddenly he took her hand and kissed it, and with her free hand she touched his curly head gently.

“I’ve got only one thing to ask.”

“What’s that?” he asked.

“I don’t want to go out of this house—not tonight. I couldn’t bear going off somewhere alone, not even to the Ritz.”

“There ain’t any beds except this one and Tony’s bed, and this one looks like hell.”

“Then I’ll go. I’m sorry. Only No. 55 always brought me luck. I was always happy here.”

“You don’t have to go. I’ll take Tony’s room. You can stay here.”

“No. I won’t do that. It’s all right.”

“It won’t upset nothin’. Tony’s got a girl. He’ll be glad to get a night off. He only stays here because there’s a coupla guys would shoot me if they got a chance, and I thought mebbe some night they might try to get in while I was asleep.” Then suddenly the thought came to him. “But what if people found out?” he said, gravely. “What would people say about you if they found out you’d spent the night in a place like No. 55?”

“There isn’t anyone who makes any difference. Nobody knows me and nobody would care. You see, I never belonged anywhere, really.”

“Then you’ll stay right here.”

She looked up at him gravely. “Don’t think I’m crazy, but I’d like to. You see, it’s sort of funny and frightening to think you’re dead and then come back to life.”

“Yeah, I see that. Don’t you think your staying here is making any trouble for me. If I let you go away I wouldn’t sleep a wink for thinking about you.” He looked about him at the wreckage, and suddenly the sight of all his precious shirts and underwear torn to ribbons and burned full of holes filled him with delight. It seemed to him that, after all, Estrella had brought him luck. The wreckage became all at once a symbol of the end of that other life, wild and disordered and uncertain. Suddenly he felt secure and peaceful.

“We’ll have a swell time in Sicily,” he said. “I got a lot of cousins over there.”

“When shall we be married?”

“That’s up to you.”

“As soon as you like.” She took off her hat. “It’s like beginning a new job.” She smiled shyly.

And then suddenly he felt shy and awkward, and although a little while before he felt that he had known her all her life, now she seemed strange and awesome again.

He became polite and a little stiff in his manner. “I’ll get Sara to help me put the room in order.”

“No,” she said. “Let’s not tell anybody at all. We can do it together.”

The music downstairs had ceased and the last patron had gone away. The house suddenly was silent, and the silence seemed more noisy than the music which had gone.

“You’re too tired,” said Beppo. “I’ll do it.”

And then behind them he heard some one pounding on the door frame, and he called out, "What is it?"

"It's me—Maudie. Fun is fun, but it's nearly six o'clock and I just landed this morning."

"Wait a minute," called Beppo.

He went into the hall.

He saw that Maudie was sleepy.

"Listen," she said. "I've never been a chaperon before, but if it's like this I'll never take it up as a regular job."

"You can go home," he said. "It's all right."

Maudie grinned. "What d'you mean—all right?"

"We're gonna be married."

"Oh yeah?"

"Oh yeah."

"Well, that's swell. You always were a fast worker."

"Where's Miss Jellyman?"

Maudie indicated Tony's room, "In there asleep. She's been asleep for a coupla hours. I guess you'll have to find somebody else to make you into a gentleman."

Beppo looked at her, puzzled. "Why? What do you mean?"

"She's giving up teaching school. She's going into business with me."

"Good. That's okay with me. I already got somebody else."

Maudie moved toward the doorway of Tony's room and called out, "Mabel!"

Through the doorway Beppo saw the wreckage of their supper, the fragments of sardines and remnants of caviar, the empty champagne-bottle. Miss Jellyman lay back in the easy-chair, her head against the back. Her mouth was open a little

and she was snoring faintly. On her shoulder the white orchids, fastened with Maudie's diamond clasp, lay limp and wilted.

"Mabel!" called Maudie, "Mabel!"

Miss Jellyman opened her eyes. "Where am I? What time is it?"

"You're with me," said Maudie, "and it's six o'clock."

Miss Jellyman rose and slowly she assumed her old dignity as if it were a cloak she took down and put about her. Maudie said to Beppo: "Can Tony take us home? I'm not gonna ride around in taxis with all this jewelry at six in the morning."

"Sure," said Beppo. "I'll go downstairs and tell him."

Together the three of them descended the stairs. The twinkling stars of the dining-room were extinguished and a single bulb over the bar threw a dull light over the wreckage of the evening's gaiety. On the floor there were cigarette butts and a soiled napkin or two and the fragments of broken glass. In the lower hall the lights were on, but Sara and the lavatory man and the cloak-room girl had vanished. In the middle of the tessellated floor there was a scrubwoman at work with brush and pail. She was old and bent, with enormous haunches. A fringe of untidy gray hair showed above the collar of the dirty gray sweater she wore. She worked on without looking at them. In the corner by the door Tony's figure lounged on the leather sofa. He was smoking a cigarette and finishing a whisky and soda while he read the *Mirror*.

"Maudie's scared for her rocks and ermine. Get a taxi and take the girls home, Tony," said Beppo.

“Sure,” said Tony. He put on his coat and opened the door and disappeared into the street.

Beppo brought Miss Jellyman’s coat, and suddenly she became alert. “Thanks, Mr. Bianchini. It was a lovely evening.”

“Beppo,” said Maudie. “Call him Beppo. We’re all friends together—Beppo and Mabel and Maudie.”

“It wasn’t anything,” said Beppo.

“How’s Miss Healy?” asked Miss Jellyman.

“She’s all right. She’s fine.”

“I’m glad,” said Miss Jellyman. “She’s a nice girl. I’d like to see her again.”

“Call her up tomorrow,” said Beppo.

“Where?”

“Here. About four o’clock. She’s pretty tired now.”

“Oh!” said Miss Jellyman, and then remembered that only a little while before she had discovered this world in which people were kind and human and understanding.

Maudie yawned, and then the door opened and Tony said, “Here’s the taxi.”

It was a cold morning and still dark outside. The foggy air drifted in at the door.

“Good night.”

“Good night.” Then he called after Tony, “You don’t need to come back till twelve-thirty.”

“Okay,” said Tony.

The door closed and Beppo turned and, walking on his heels to avoid making tracks for the scrubwoman on the floor covered with soap and water, went up the pink marble stairs.

In the hall upstairs he opened the big cupboard and took down two pairs of white silk sheets and two pillow-cases. Then he opened the door of his room.

The light was still full on, and on the floor, in the midst of the torn sheets and underwear, lay Mrs. Willingdon. Her head had fallen backward and a little on one side and her eyes were closed.

He dropped the sheets and hurried toward her, picking her up and laying her on the bed. Her hands and her face were damp and a little cold. Silently he shook her and silently he poured brandy between her lips, but it only ran out again in a little stream, staining the white of her blouse. And then slowly, with a sickening certainty, he understood. He wanted to swear, to cry out to her, to pray, to call her name, to beg her to come back to him. But he did not know her name.

He knew her only as Mrs. Willingdon.

II. *The Listener*

SHE had no favorite corner where, like most solitary old ladies, she chose to sit. Sometimes, after slowly and carefully disposing her books and sewing about her, she settled herself on the terrace, sometimes in the little flagged courtyard under the orange trees. If the weather were bad or there were a mistral or a sirocco blowing, she stayed inside. But even then she rarely occupied the same chair or the same nook of the big, ornate, gilded *salon* overlooking the sea. If one had ever troubled to observe her habits closely one would have said that she was restless, that she liked music but preferred it not too close to her (for she always sat at quite a distance from the orchestra both in the dining-room and when it played after dinner in the *salon*). One would have said that she was solitary and strangely without curiosity, for when she did not appear to be utterly absorbed by her tatting or her book, she would sit gazing before her into space. Her taste in reading was limited and undistinguished. Clearly she liked murder mysteries or novels which were very cheap and romantic and slightly shocking in an old-fashioned way. For a time she would have a different table at every meal, and then suddenly she would change her habits and sit for several days, sometimes for a week or two at a time, at the same place.

She liked to stay up late, for often enough you would come across her long after midnight in a corner, watching the young people dance, or sitting half-concealed by a tub of

laurel on the terrace apparently enjoying the evening, the starlight, and the music. She seemed to have a passion and a genuine talent for making herself inconspicuous. Always she was dressed in neat, rather old-fashioned gowns of gray or black or puce color, as if by instinct she was aware that these shades provided her with protective coloring and made her like a small gray bird, inconspicuous amid the gayer plumage of the women who thronged the Palace Hotel in season. Anyone bedazzled by the furs and jewels and painted faces of the trollops and fashionable women who were forever coming and going from motors and yachts would never have noticed Miss Jenkins tucked away so snugly in her corner behind a screen or a tub of laurel. If you encountered her on a turn of the stairs or in a narrow corridor she would shrink away as if terrified that you meant to speak to her. But she was always safe. People did not come to places like the Palace Hotel to look at quiet, plain old maids dressed in dull colors.

So it was rare indeed that anyone ever noticed Miss Jenkins. If they did look once they never looked twice, because there was really nothing to see. And most people at the first glance were aware of no more than a gray inconspicuous blur. A few, more sharp-witted and observing than most of those who frequent fashionable resorts in season, had noticed that somehow she always seemed to be in the most expensive places at the most expensive moments. But when they asked the manager or the *concierge* who she was, they learned her name, but nothing more save that she was rich. "Her name is Miss Jenkins," the manager or the *concierge* would say. "She is American and seems to be very rich. She has been coming here for a great many years."

It was always the same answer, whether it was given in London, in Paris, in Venice, at Cannes, at Biarritz or Deauville. There was nothing whatever to tell about Miss Jenkins. She was a nobody to everyone save the waiters and the chambermaids and the *concierge*. To them she was important because she was rich and because she was generous. Also she was simple and friendly and with servants she was not shy. With them she would exchange gossip as long as they would talk. Not only was she kind and thoughtful, but she had with servants a deprecating manner, as if each time she asked them to do her a service it was necessary to apologize. If she had not been so rich and so generous, they could not have forgiven her this exaggerated consideration. Because she was so rich there was nothing they would not do for her.

Miss Jenkins' Christian name was Olivia, and her passport announced her age as sixty-seven, a statement which was entirely truthful, since Miss Jenkins had never had any vanity and saw no reason to conceal her age. Indeed, the women of her age who went bathing and wore shorts and stood on their heads on the beach and paid for young men escorts seemed to her silly or something a little less than tragic. They made her feel a little sick and she could not see why they did not give up, as she herself had done at least thirty-five years earlier; for she had given up when she was in her thirties, not because she was old, but because there seemed to be nothing else to do.

The passport also stated that she was the daughter of the Reverend Anson B. Jenkins, clergyman, Protestant, and that she was born in Greenville, Connecticut, U.S.A.; that she was unmarried, five feet four inches tall, had gray hair and gray

eyes and walked with a slight limp. It did not continue with the description by saying that she was plain and timid, nor that she had a turbulent romantic nature, long since suppressed, and that her only experience in life was vicarious, or that she lived through all sorts of fantastic experiences in an imagination which grew steadily more disordered. All of these things, far more important in relation to human society than dates and physical peculiarities, are never set forth in passports.

The Reverend Anson B. Jenkins, dead in the year 1916, had been an invalid. He was a pure product of the nineteenth century and his invalidism had been of that peculiar sort which no doctor had ever been able to diagnose. It was true that he had suffered from asthma, but that alone could not have reduced him to the querulous state of mind which led him to keep to his bed or a chair in the sun during the intervals when he was not moving from one place to another in Europe. Although he had always been selfish and tyrannical, his invalidism only began the year his wife died, the year when Miss Olivia was seventeen. The death of his wife was a blow from which, as he often said, he was never able to recover, and once his wife was buried and he had accepted the fact that she was gone, he left Greenville, Connecticut, and never returned even in death, for he was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome. In dying he had expressed no desire to be buried beside his wife, and Miss Olivia, then a gray, prematurely aged little woman of fifty-six, timid and frightened and alone, had consented to the burial in Rome. Besides, at that time she did not see how she could ever raise the money to have the body sent home.

In all the years of their wanderings her father had never ceased to talk of their poverty and to counsel her above all else regarding the wisdom of saving money. She did not know the exact degree of their poverty, for he it was who always haggled with the proprietors of cheap *pensions* and boarding-houses in Germany and England, France and Italy, for the thirty-eight years of their wanderings. He it was who received the monthly checks and paid the bills. He did not believe that women had the wits to handle money. At the time of his death Miss Olivia had never written a check or signed a paper save the one she had signed when her mother died giving her father the rights over whatever money she inherited. The only spending money she had ever known was the tiny allowance which her father gave her to buy sweets and an occasional cup of coffee in a café. She dared not even buy herself a trinket, because such things were frowned upon by her father. Until she was fifty-six the only jewelry she possessed were an edelweiss made of carved and tinted ivory given her in Switzerland by a paralyzed old gentleman who had admired her, and a brooch of uncut coral she had won at a musical guessing contest at a hotel in Bournemouth.

She was not the sort to have attracted admirers even if her father had permitted such a thing. Now and then when she was younger some one, as in the case of the paralyzed old gentleman who gave her the edelweiss, had been kind to her, but even though the kindness came nearly always from an elderly man like himself, who was ill, it nevertheless aroused an insane jealousy in the mind of her father. It was as if he were a prima donna who could brook no rivals. Just as a prima donna cannot believe that any other living woman is able to sing, so had the Reverend Mr. Jenkins been convinced that the illnesses of other old gentlemen were merely

imaginary and that none suffered as he had suffered. So when anyone was kind to Miss Olivia, whenever she was seen chatting with the same old gentleman two days in succession, they left town at once, the father sulky and indignant.

It was lucky for Miss Olivia that she was the child of middle-aged parents and that she was born when her father was forty-five. Otherwise she would never have escaped, for he only died at last of pneumonia when he was eighty-three, after thirty-eight years of invalidism.

In all those thirty-eight years Miss Olivia had never had any home, nor had she ever seen the inside of a decent hotel, much less an hotel *de luxe*. Always they had lived in boarding-houses and *pensions*, and usually these were only second-rate ones where even the food was none too good and there was never more than one bathroom. Sometimes with luck there would be an English boarder or two, an old maid or an anemic bespectacled young man, but never did she encounter one of her own countrypeople. Always the other *pensionnaires* were of the country—small shopkeepers, professors, schoolmistresses retired and living on tiny incomes; rarely were any of these people willing to speak any language but their own. And so as the thirty-eight years rolled by, Miss Olivia had come to be a linguist, partly out of sheer necessity and partly because learning languages gave her something to do. It must be said that she had a gift for it and that by the time the old man died she was able to speak Italian, French, and German admirably, and she knew enough Spanish to understand and carry on a conversation. It was the only accomplishment she had, so when her father died she planned vaguely to support herself by giving lessons and even managed to procure one or two middle-aged pupils

before the bank wrote to her and she abandoned the old life forever.

In all their wanderings her father had never chosen to frequent small, unknown and cheap resorts, little places hidden away in a cranny of some rocky, sunny coast or in a high mountain valley where there were comfortable lodgings and good plain food for little money. He had always liked movement and people, not because he ever took part in the one or had any contact with the other, but because he took pleasure in what he always termed the folly of humanity, never suspecting that his own bitter, narrow life was the greatest folly of all. And so he and Miss Olivia always frequented great resorts like Biarritz and the Riviera and watering-places like Marienbad and Baden-Baden, living always in some small boarding-house where the rich and thrifty kept their servants. It gave him a bitter pleasure to come across a young man in evening dress dead drunk in the early morning on a bench in the *Kurpark* or to open his newspaper and read that the “casino had claimed one more victim.” He gloated over the pouched and sallow victims of high living who flocked to drink the waters of the cure, never once possessed of any conscious envy of the pleasures which had been the price of their wrecked stomachs and distended livers. His own pleasure, as he grew older, became so perverse and complicated that he came to regard an excellent meal or a glass of good wine as something not only offensive, but inconceivably distasteful.

And so, because he frequented in his half-mad wanderings only the most notorious resorts, Miss Olivia was forever confronted by a spectacle compounded of glitter and gaiety, of extravagant women and shameless young men, of music

and gambling. If she went out in the evening for a stroll it was impossible to escape the sound of music or the sight of pretty women elegantly dressed, accompanied by admirers. It was a spectacle forever before her eyes from which she was forever banished by her poverty, her plainness, and her situation in life. Yet she did not grow embittered; in her simplicity she accepted her position, even while she yearned for the experience of just one evening in that other extravagant world. At the moments when she could escape from the old man she would sometimes sit on a beach or a promenade, watching the men and women who passed her way. She would admire their faces and their clothes and make up stories about them by the hour. Despite her upbringing, she was not innocent. She read the newspapers of four languages and she was able to converse in four languages with chambermaids, and so she had come to know a great deal. Concerning vice and depravity and perversity she knew far more than ever comes to the knowledge of many a mother of children in her own country. This knowledge, because it had been imposed upon a perfectly clean, simple mind without either squeamishes or gloating, she accepted. Depravity and perversity were simply a part of the scheme of things. As an old maid of fifty-six at the death of her father she was unshockable.

Not always were the romances and depravities which she imagined concerned with the elegant passers-by. Sometimes, dreaming, she made up stories of which she herself was the heroine—long and complicated tales in which she was young and beautiful and had lovely clothes and was surrounded by admirers variously bent upon matrimony or seduction. And she came to identify herself with the heroines of the *crimes passionels* which she followed in the *Matin*, the *Tageblatt*,

the *Daily Express*, *Il Popolo*, according to the country in which they were staying. And she saw herself in turn as the heroines of the incredible romantic novels which she read at night after the old man was asleep and no longer demanded her care. Whenever there was an English library in the town she joined it, scraping money to pay for the rental of the books by skimping on sweets and clothes, and she purchased as often as she could afford it the less expensive paper-bound romances to be had in railroad stations. She became an incurable literary romantic and the knowledge of four languages gave her appetite an immense scope.

So presently the life inside her came to be divorced from all reality. The dreary life of the cheap boarding-houses became simply a dream in which she moved about enveloped in an apathy of enchantment, and the dreams of the romantic novels which she invented became Life. Even her father, daily growing more feeble and cantankerous, ceased presently to trouble her. When he died she was scarcely aware of his death, save that it caused a great many people to annoy her with questions and papers.

After he was dead, the tiny income he received was paid to her for two or three months, and even after all the money had become her own she did not change her way of living save that she bought herself a little cheap jewelry and read twice as many novels as before. The idea of returning to America did not occur to her, and if it had occurred she would not have had the courage to face the return. America was no longer home to her. She had come to belong not to Europe, but to that strange cosmopolitan half-world which moved round and round, back and forth, across the face of Europe, rootless and drifting.

So she went on following out the same season-to-season programs which her father had followed for thirty-eight years. The American bank kindly taught her how to write checks and about signing papers, but even with constant advice, she succeeded in committing all the blunders possible. It was not easy to learn such things, suddenly, at fifty-three.

She was in Paris in a little back-street hotel on her way to Le Touquet when the amazing news came to her. There was a message from the bank asking her to call, and she went, filled with timidity and terror, remembering all the dreadful things she had read in newspapers of forgery and overdrafts and swindles and bank failures. But they were kind to her and took her into a big room with marble walls and a thick carpet where she sat down timidly fingering her worn old handbag while the president of the bank told her the story.

At first she could not understand what he was saying and became confused in her head and uncertain whether what he was saying was real or only a part of one of her own fantastic romances.

It was news which was simple enough. It appeared that her father had never been poor at all. He had always had plenty of money, and with what he had put aside during those thirty-eight long years of penury he had died a rich man, and now the income of that money was to be hers for always. He had arranged it that way. The ancient and respectable firm of Watts and Sandover in New York would continue to manage the estate as it had always done for her father. For the rest of her life she would have forty thousand dollars a year.

For a long time she simply sat staring through her glasses at the president of the bank, and then she began to cry, from neither sadness nor joy, but from fright. The words “forty thousand dollars a year” rang in her ears, and she thought: “What can I do with all that money? I won’t know how to spend it. It’s too late now to ever learn.”

Back in the grim hotel bedroom with the iron washstand in the corner she lay down with a wet cloth over her eyes to think. When she thought of her father, she did not hate him. In life she had neither hated nor loved him. She had accepted him as if he were an affliction with which, like her lameness, she had been born; and she did not hate him now. And slowly after she had slept for a little while and wakened again, out of the shock and bewilderment there came a single thought, “Now I can live in fine hotels and go to casinos and live forever among those people whom I’ve watched all my life from a distance.”

No longer would she have to regard them from afar, as on those occasions when her father had been asleep and did not need her and she could sit on a bench watching them pass by. She would live among them and watch them and listen to them to her heart’s content. And at night she would go upstairs in the same hotel and go to sleep in a bed which was like the beds in which all of them were sleeping. Now she would find out if all of it was true. She thought, “Now I can be one of them.” But she never was, because it was too late to learn.

But when the time came to act, she could not bring herself to go boldly to one of these glittering hotels and say that she wanted a room, perhaps even an apartment with bath and sitting-room. No, it wasn’t possible, after so many years of

living in one small room and walking down damp corridors to a lukewarm bath in a zinc tub. She found a small dressmaker and had clothes made for herself, since the ones she saw in shops were all too different from the clothes she had always worn. The new clothes were as simple, nondescript, and colorless as the old ones even though the materials were far more expensive. It was as if the fact of her wealth, unknown to any but herself, made her feel conspicuous. Anyway, she had no desire to make a show; she only wanted to watch, to listen, to look on at the spectacle from the wings instead of from the gallery in which she had spent all her life.

She did not try it all at one leap. She began by taking a room with bath in a "family" hotel in Le Touquet, and next she had a room with bath in a hotel in Biarritz which had been fashionable twenty years earlier and was now a little out of date; and at last in Cannes she attained a room in a hotel de luxe. It was in Venice that she at last reached her goal. There in the Grand Hotel, trembling, she engaged a sitting-room, bedroom, and bath. Once installed, she did not know why she wanted a sitting-room, for no one ever came to see her, but, after all those years of dark narrow bedrooms, it was nice to have plenty of room, and it made the *concierge* and the servants and the manager all treat her with respect. There was something magical about the sitting-room where she never sat and to which no one ever came, and for Miss Olivia the magic was doubly potent after thirty-eight long years of scorn and rudeness from the servants whom her father had forever undertipped. No longer was she compelled to cower before their glances nor hasten past them when she knew they were talking of her. With the prestige of the sitting-room a great peace came into her life.

And presently out of the dazed confusion of her good fortune came a sense of the hard, cold, brilliant magic of money. It seemed to her that money could buy anything. Certainly in the world of Grand Hotels it could buy nearly everything. For a fat tip she could learn from the *concierge* the names, the histories and even the scandals attached to the fashionable rich and notorious people who frequented the new and glamorous world. And so, she could actually see in the flesh day after day the people she had read about in the newspapers for thirty-eight years.

It did not occur to her that money would not buy either friendship or love, perhaps because she no longer had any desire or need for the one or the other. Indeed the desire, small as it had once been, had long since become atrophied. Now and then an old lady of an age near her own would speak to her, seeing in her a companion with whom she might gossip, but always Miss Olivia grew frightened and confused because she could find nothing to talk about, and the innocent sally would end in retreat and frustration. She talked only with the servants, and even with them she did not know how to be really intimate. Where once the shabby tips had made them hostile, now the fat tips and the sitting-room appeared to fill them with groveling awe. And so she had no one.

When the great Beckman came to stay at Sarsavina she had been living there in season for fifteen years, solitary, apart, always listening, leading an existence in which she had no life of her own beyond the routine of rising, bathing, eating, and going to sleep again. It was as if she herself had died long ago and was now only a ghost who haunted the corridors and terraces of Grand Hotels, unseen, unhampered in her passion for eavesdropping.

No one in the Palace Hotel at Sarsavina noticed her and so she could listen and spy as much as she liked. There was no one in the hotel nor in any of the other hotels scattered over Europe who knew as much scandal, as many stories of the clients, as Miss Olivia. She had listened to wives reproaching their husbands for infidelity. She had been present at scenes in which discarded mistresses were sent on their way. She had overheard the slow unfolding of blackmail plots. She knew secrets about statesmen and politicians which could have ruined them. She had seen drugs pass quickly from one jeweled hand to another and heard mothers selling their daughters and daughters selling themselves. She had even heard conversations between politicians which had changed the history of Europe, although she had not understood nor made any effort to understand in the least their significance. Indeed, she was not good at understanding anything outside the realm of romance and melodrama. Of politics and finance she knew nothing at all and about them she had no curiosity. Four times a year ten thousand dollars were paid into her bank account. Whence it came she did not know or care.

One might have taken her for Italian or French or German or American or English. People were forever talking indiscreetly within the range of her hearing, in the belief that she did not understand the language in which they were speaking. Sometimes they even changed languages once or twice in the middle of a conversation, all innocent of the fact that the dove-like old lady in gray could listen and understand with perfect ease, no matter whether they spoke in French, German, Italian, or English. And curiosity made her sly and clever. She came to read the movement of lips as if all her life

she had been deaf. She could sit over her tatting and watch a face in profile and read what was being said in a voice too low to reach her ears. The tatting was a great help. She could always pretend to be absorbed by it, and no one would ever suspect an old lady with her interest fixed on a bit of tatting of listening. Some people, too indiscreet, assumed that a woman of her age must be a little deaf, and when she became aware of this she slyly played upon the suspicions by mimicking deafness when she talked with the *concierge* or the manager.

When Miss Olivia heard that the famous Beckman was coming to the Palace Hotel she showed no interest whatever. She only knew about him vaguely from newspaper pictures and headlines over articles which she never troubled to read and because she overheard from time to time a great deal of talk among the other guests of the hotel concerning the buying and selling of bonds and securities in the Beckman companies. To tell the truth, she got very bored hearing his name. To her the Great Beckman was nothing but a dull fellow, a man who cared only for money, and so he was flat and uninteresting, without the savor of romance or melodrama and without any capacity for them. Any gigolo or broken-down elderly rake was more interesting to Miss Olivia than the famous Beckman.

She knew vaguely that he was the richest man in the world and that he was more powerful than most statesmen. Indeed, she had even heard his name mentioned in conversations between bankers and statesmen which were not meant for her ears, but since it was spoken of always in relation to loans and propaganda and banking, she was not interested and always forgot what she heard, although sometimes they were

secrets for which some men would have paid millions. And when she heard that he was coming to the Palace Hotel she was simply mildly annoyed because she knew that men like him always traveled with secretaries and clerks and that their presence attracted scores of other men like them, as flypaper attracts flies. It meant that more than half the hotel would be occupied by the dull sort of people whose only interest in life was making money, and that the *salon*, the dining-room and the lounges would be filled with them, all talking figures and having dry conversations completely empty of all interest. It would mean a dull time for her because all those deadly clerks and secretaries and bankers would crowd out the vicious, decadent, and romantic people who were interesting to listen to.

She only became interested and even indignant when the hotel manager, a plump, suave old gentleman whom she had known for years, came to her one morning and asked her as a great favor to him to leave her apartment on the ocean side of the hotel for one in the court. He explained that the famous Mr. Beckman would need the two floors on the ocean side for himself and his staff. It would not be for long, he said, as Mr. Beckman had reserved rooms for only ten days. He would give her the suite on the wrong side of the hotel for a very low price. It was difficult, he pointed out, not to oblige Mr. Beckman, since one of his great syndicates owned the hotel.

She wanted to refuse, to become indignant, to threaten to leave the hotel and never return, as she had heard other rich guests do with much shouting and bad language in the office of the manager, but somehow she could not do it. It was very difficult for her to be disagreeable, and the old fear of hotel managers still paralyzed her. So the day before Mr. Beckman

arrived she moved into the suite on the court, and at once she hated the rooms.

It was not because the windows gave on to a dull courtyard and street instead of having a glorious view of the ocean; it is doubtful whether during all the years she had come to the hotel she had ever looked at the view, or the famous sunsets. She had no taste whatever for nature. It was because her old rooms had a wide balcony on which she could sit late at night and listen. The balcony overhung the terrace with the orange trees, and on still evenings she could hear plots and counterplots, plans and betrayals, quarrels and love-making among the tubbed orange trees just beneath her; and she could hear, too, things sometimes strange and terrible and exciting which passed in the bedrooms above, below, and on each side of her. What she heard, sitting in the evenings like a gray moth among the flowers of the balcony gave a sinister interest to the faces she saw each morning when she descended. She would go to the *concierge* and ask who occupied the various rooms, and then fit the morning faces to the things she had learned the night before. It made her life very interesting and exciting. In the new apartment there was no balcony and in the courtyard beneath nothing ever happened save the arrival and departure of motors and baggage.

On the morning of Mr. Beckman's arrival, she would not even have troubled to glance at him save that she had a spiteful interest because he was the man who had turned her out of her rooms. She came down early and established herself in an armchair. When he arrived she was tating, and although she appeared to take no notice of him, she examined him craftily and minutely.

She saw a man of middle height who might have been in his fifties. He had thinning hair, a long nose, and a thick whitish skin. Under the small rather sly eyes, set too near to each other, there were gray pouches. He was thin, but he had a belly. His figure, Miss Jenkins thought, was rather like that of a thin middle-aged woman who had let herself go. There was a certain sexlessness about him, as if whatever there had been of masculinity in him was muted.

She took a final glance, charged with spite, and thought, "If that's what it costs to be the richest man in the world, it's not worth it."

She had been watching people for fifty years and out of all that practice she had come to know things about people just from watching. Like a specialist in diagnosis, she was able to see and interpret signs and symptoms which were hidden from others, and now out of that first brief glimpse of the Great Beckman she had made at least two discoveries and diagnosed two illnesses. It was not the pallid skin and the pouchy eyes to which she gave her attention; those were signs which an ordinary country physician might interpret. All her life she had seen those symptoms in the people who flocked to cures; they simply meant tired kidneys and a liver which worked none too well. What she saw was far more subtle and far more dangerous. She knew almost at once that the Great Beckman was unhappy and that he was tired, horribly tired, with a weariness which in a man of his age could never be shaken off, because it was a weariness not only of the body, but of the soul itself. But most of all, she saw that he was afraid, of what she did not know and could not know, but in his face, even in his sagging body, there was a look of abject fear.

“I suppose,” she said to herself, her lips moving (for in her perpetual solitude she sometimes really spoke aloud to herself)—“I suppose if you’re as rich as that you’re always afraid of being murdered by a crank or something.”

She noticed that Mr. Beckman was preceded, surrounded, and followed by a small army of servants, valets, secretaries, and bodyguards. They were a dull-looking lot, not one of them with any interest, and she made a spiteful grunting sound when she thought that they would all be quartered in rooms which might have been occupied by interesting people.

At the end of the procession, giving orders to *concierge* and porters as she moved along the corridor, came a lone woman. She had rather the air of a sheep-dog barking at the heels of a flock of sheep.

There was nothing remarkable in her appearance. Like Beckman himself, you would never have noticed her in a crowd on the street. She was rather short and dumpy and she moved and spoke with a kind of arrogant decision. It was not the arrogance of birth or circumstance or even of success, but of a small Latin shopkeeper, proud of her shrewdness. She was dark and had a bad figure which even her expensive clothes could not conceal. She was no longer in her first youth. She had hard dark eyes that were almost black.

“French,” thought Miss Olivia, “or perhaps Belgian. But certainly Latin and not Italian or Spanish. No Italian or Spanish woman could be as hard as that.”

She looked, Miss Olivia thought, rather like the proprietress of one of those cheap restaurants where she had gone sometimes with her father long ago. She was no ordinary secretary, for no ordinary secretary could buy the

costume she wore, nor the smart shoes. Miss Olivia knew exactly the shops from which they came and how much they cost. She felt an extraordinary dislike for the woman and experienced for the first time in many years a feeling of hatred for some one. "That woman," she thought, "I would like to destroy."

Immense quantities of luggage followed the procession into the hotel, and when it had disappeared Miss Olivia gathered up her tatting and her book and made her way, limping slowly, toward the beach. There she would sit in front of her cabin tatting and reading and pretending to doze and listen to the conversation of people who were interesting.

Without a second thought she dismissed Mr. Beckman from her mind. If, beyond her resentment at his presence in the hotel, she had any interest in him at all, it was centered in the look of weariness and fear. It did not occur to her that out of her experience of fifty years of watching and listening, she had been able to divine what no one else in all the world had seen—none of the statesmen, nor the Cabinet Ministers, nor the great bankers, nor the brilliant speculators.

Before her cabin on the beach, pretending to doze in the sun, she overheard the plan of a kept woman and a dark young man to blackmail a London banker. With her eyes closed she thought, "Very interesting, but it won't work. The badger game is worn out. Everybody knows about it."

Upstairs two valets unpacked the luggage for Mr. Beckman. Before he had a bath he dictated eleven letters and four telegrams. This was a much smaller number than it was his habit to dictate on arriving from a journey, but because he

was on a holiday he dictated only what was urgently necessary.

The sitting-room was filled with flowers and in one corner had been placed a large table with two telephones. It was the woman looking like a cashier who seemed to manage everything—the valets, the flowers, the typists, the chambermaids, even the secretaries. She did it all very efficiently with the confidence and certainty of a small shopkeeper in his shop. She it was who occupied Miss Olivia’s suite, for Mr. Beckman was installed in what was known interchangeably as the “Royal” suite and the “Veronese” suite, because the ceiling of the bedroom was said to have been painted by Veronese. There was much ornate gilded carving about the cornices and the fireplaces, and the walls were hung with vermilion and gold silk damask. The two apartments were joined by a low passageway. In the midst of the coming and going, the dictating and the general hubbub, Mr. Beckman addressed the woman as Madame de Jongh, but when they were alone together for an instant he addressed her as *Élise*, although there was no particular change in his manner toward her. He uttered both names in the same flat, tired voice.

Once the room was settled and the letters signed and sent to the post, Mr. Beckman dismissed the servants and typists and secretaries and told one of the valets to prepare his bath. When left alone in the flamboyant room he turned to Madame de Jongh and looked at her without speaking.

“Tired?” she asked, in French. She spoke in a matter-of-fact voice without any inflection of tenderness.

“No, but I’m going to have a bath and then sleep.”

“What time will you want to wake?” She had a husky voice, low and not unpleasant.

“In time for lunch.”

She came over to him and he kissed her. It was a cold, impersonal kiss, as though it were done by habit while his mind was occupied by more important things.

When she had gone he dismissed the valet and told him not to return until one o'clock. Then he locked the doors concealed beneath the great curtains of Venetian damask. Twice he made the rounds of the room, feeling his way along the curtains to make certain that there was no door behind them which had escaped him by which anyone might enter unannounced. When he had made certain, a curious change came over him. The weariness and the furtive, worried look went out of the small pale eyes. The change in manner was like that which comes over an animal, half-wild and nervous, which finds itself suddenly safe and hidden in its own dark refuge. Beckman's refuge was solitude and secrecy. He was alone.

For a long time he lay in his bath, and when at last he left it he poured himself a strong drink of whisky, lay down, quite naked, on the bed, and fell asleep at once.

Mr. Beckman was able to sleep only because he was alone in a room with all the doors locked. At that moment solitude was the one thing in all life which he desired most, far more than the money and the power which long ago he had achieved. Half an hour earlier, while he sat surrounded by a dozen people, trying to keep his tired mind clear to dictate the letters and telegrams which meant so much, he would have given all the money and the power in exchange for some rocky cave in which he could hide in solitude and rest

forever, unknown, unsought by bankers and ministers. Lately there had been moments when he felt that he could not go on, that somehow, in spite of all control, in spite of stimulants, in spite of sleeping-draughts, this machine which was himself would certainly fly suddenly into bits. The idea that his body and even his brain were machines which no longer had anything to do with him, lately had come to be an obsession. They worked, they went on working and worrying and thinking in spite of anything he could do. They had become monstrous things over which he no longer had any control. And at such times the only way to halt their whirring mad activity was to lock himself into complete solitude. But even that was not always easy to do because always, even when resting as he was now supposed to be doing, he had to be in some place where the world could find him. He had made himself the Great Beckman and now he could no longer escape or hide. People sought him out, people who wanted to be rich or save their careers and ambitions, no matter where he went. And there was always Madame de Jongh. There were times when her constant presence, her care of him, her persistent thoughtfulness, her reckless, unscrupulous advice, made him hysterical, yet he could find no way to escape her. In his weariness he had lost the power of dismissing her even for an hour or two a day. He wanted never to see her again, yet when he had decided that she must go, he could not face the prospect of continuing without her. And he was afraid, too. There were good reasons why he could not disown her.

The curse of loneliness had been on him as far back as he could remember. Long ago in that little Dutch village on the borders of Holstein he had been a lonely little boy, always going his own way, playing lonely games and imagining a time when he would be rich and famous and powerful, so that

the other boys in the village would envy him. Playing alone in the white dunes, he had pictured the day when the poor widow Beckman's boy would return in a dazzling carriage drawn by white horses, like the one in which the queen rode. But after he had become rich and powerful and famous the desire died. He had never had time to return even if he had any longer desired it.

All through the years when he had wandered in America, working at whatever he could find in order to feed himself, washing dishes, digging ditches, carting stone and cement, he had been lonely. Never in all his life had there been companionship or love. Once or twice in youth he had deliberately drunk himself into a stupor, not with a crowd of jolly companions, but in solitude and despair, only to find that there was nothing in it but a headache. The only love he had known was paid for and enjoyed half bitterly with women he never saw again. And throughout those years when sometimes he had gone hungry, the brain which had come to go faster and faster and faster until it gave him no rest had been at work with plans which he told to no one.

Even his miraculous success had brought him no release from that awful solitude. Alone he built, planning, launching companies and subsidiaries, issuing stocks and bonds in the invincible name of Beckman. There were men who worked for him in America, in France, in Germany, in Italy, in England, in Greece, in India, but he never took them into his confidence and few of them knew one another or even that the others existed. Toward the end he found that there were times when it was lucky they did not know one another and doubly lucky that he had never taken them into his confidence.

Madame de Jongh had come into his life seven years before he came to the Palace Hotel to drive, unknowingly, Miss Olivia Jenkins from her rooms. She had come modestly to seek work as a typist and she would have been sent away without ever having seen him save that he noticed her in the anteroom. Dressed smartly all in black, she was sitting on a gilt chair in a corridor of the Hotel Meurice with her feet drawn in neatly, her skirt tight across her knees. It was the posture of a workingwoman, of a small shopkeeper. There was in her manner the pride and the self-reliance of a woman who can make her own way; especially was there in her attitude and appearance the self-respect of a small Parisian *bourgeoise*, and Beckman liked that. He had no taste in women and indeed no very great interest in them save at moments when he regarded them as necessary, like purgatives. So the fact that her eyes were shrewd and narrow, and her feet were ugly and her figure rather thick, did not disturb him. Somehow she gave him a feeling of confidence and of assurance that here was some one he could rely upon. And he had chanced to come upon her in one of those moments when he was tired and lonely. There was something about her which reminded him of his mother at the time his father died, when he was three years old.

And so he engaged her, and after three months she became his mistress. He had a terror of blackmail and of breach-of-promise suits, and of all the women—smart, pretty, and fashionable women—who wanted to marry him, awkward and unromantic though he was, for his money. Madame de Jongh was safe. She was a widow. He paid her well, and after she became his mistress he was generous with her. He did not know quite how it had come about, except that she was

always at hand, brisk, efficient, affectionate in a brisk, efficient way.

But even as his mistress she only succeeded partly in shattering the awful wall of loneliness which shut him in. He confided in her. It began quite simply by his asking her advice, and he found that she was shrewd without being clever, reliable and full of common sense without being brilliant, in short that she had many of his own qualities as well as a solidity and fearlessness of which he had need at certain times. And then one day he discovered the unscrupulousness of her small shopkeeper's mind was very like the unscrupulousness of a mind which manipulated scores of companies and corporations of half the countries of the world. It amazed him that the difference was only one of scope and degree. And so silently they came to understand each other and he no longer hid from her things which he had hidden from all the world. But his soul, the thing that was Beckman, he never permitted her to know.

The change in their relationship came about imperceptibly, he did not quite know how. They had never spoken of it. She alone it was who had permission to open his telegrams and his letters before himself. She it was who looked after his frail digestion and sat up with him when he could not sleep. She was his mistress and she was in a strange sense a partner in all he did, and yet in a terrifying way there was no intimacy between them. Even when she lay at his side he had no affection for her. There was always a part of him, the part which would forever be lonely, which kept withdrawn and aloof, distrustful and unhappy, a part of him which at times regarded her from a great distance, with weariness, wondering how it was that she had ever come to share either

his bed or his secrets. There were times, too, when, withdrawn and alone, he hated her. But he was unable to dismiss her. If ever she divined the thought he refused to reveal, she made no sign.

Often enough the loneliness and taciturnity and passion for secrecy had been a great aid to him. They gave him a dignity and an air of assurance which otherwise a man of his origin and adventurous life would never have had. They inspired confidence in men who would have been distrustful of frankness and cordiality. He knew that frequently men whose whole lives had been concerned with money were curiously childlike and easy to deceive. Bankers and Ministers were impressed, and again and again they took the word of the aloof, rather silent man on facts, on figures, on declarations, for which they would have demanded the statements of accountants from men of an easier and more open temperament. Perhaps they were deceived, too, by the sorcery of the very name Beckman. Whatever Beckman touched turned to gold. Beckman was a man who could not go wrong—not Beckman who could lend fortunes to whole nations. Beckman was the greatest living genius of finance. Bankers said so, and merchants and newspaper editors.

He could remember columns of figures without the least difficulty, and produce statistics for the asking. It was more than ten years now since any banker or broker had doubted his word. Not one among them in London, in Paris, in New York, in half the world, had seen in his face what one lonely old maid saw in a single glance above her tatting. Perhaps the moment when Beckman passed through the corridor of the Palace Hotel a dozen feet from Miss Olivia the loneliest man and the loneliest woman in the world encountered each other.

They were lonelier than any hermit, for both had lived all their lives alone in the midst of people. Beckman knew it, but Miss Olivia had never had the remotest idea that she had ever been lonely. Both of them had a kind of second sight, but with Miss Olivia she never used it for anything more profitable than the satisfaction of her curiosity. With Beckman it was different. For thirty years it had given him power over other men. There were moments when it allowed him to hypnotize them in a strange fashion.

Asleep, alone, naked, in the vast gilded bed of the Royal suite, the Great Beckman had a different face. The lines went out of it and the look of fear and suspicion. It was almost as if, behind the locked doors hidden by the tapestries, he had become young again, believing in himself and in decency, the ambitious village boy with all the world before him. The nose seemed less long and the eyes less close set. Suddenly the face was like that in the photograph which stood a little way off in a silver frame on the vast carved and gilded table. It was a photograph of Beckman as a boy of twenty, and in it the face was frank and almost innocent, young and clever and charming.

One day passed, and then two and then three, and slowly the hotel grew accustomed to the excitement of having the Great Beckman as a guest. The *conciierge* and the employees became used to the flood of telegrams and letters, the telephone calls to Paris and London, Stockholm, Berlin and Prague and New York, and even to the rather peevish demands of Beckman himself and the shrill, ill-natured complaints of Madame de Jongh. The servants did not like her and they would never come to like her no matter how

much money she threw about, because in their hearts they knew that she was really one of them, no better than they were, who had been more shrewd and unscrupulous and immoral. And so they resented her and gossiped about her, and when they could find no gossip they made up tales.

Miss Olivia tried to get used to the presence of Beckman and to the dullness of her rooms on the court, but she did not succeed very well. In all the fifteen years of her life in luxurious hotels she had never been so baffled and upset and uncomfortable. She told herself that her whole season was ruined and slowly she began to be what she had never been, vengeful and plotting. But having had no experience whatever with vengeance, she did not know what to do about it, and that made her feel even more confused and unhappy. And so she took to gossiping a great deal with the hotel servants in an effort to find something interesting about Beckman or Madame de Jongh or somebody in the party which surrounded them. From her chambermaid Serafina she learned that it was Madame de Jongh who occupied her old rooms which adjoined the Royal suite. She also learned that Madame de Jongh went back and forth freely through the day and night. When she heard this Miss Olivia began to take an interest. Until then she had believed both Beckman and Madame de Jongh incapable of any romantic feeling or experience. Now suddenly they were human.

The next day and the day after she placed herself in the great hall where she could see Beckman and the woman as they went in and out of the hotel. This happened only once each day, when Beckman and Madame de Jongh descended to go for a drive in the expensive discreet black motor or when, descending the terraces on the ocean side, they

embarked from the pier on his yacht for a sail down the coast and back. Even these excursions, Miss Olivia remarked, they did not make for the sake of relaxation, since they always carried with them two or three dispatch-cases filled with papers. When they went out in the motor Miss Olivia could not spy upon them, but when they went aboard the yacht she was able to watch them through the glasses which she carried in her little black satin bag, until the yacht slipped round the distant pine-clad promontory out of sight. She noticed that they were always working. No sooner were they seated beneath the awning on the deck than Madame de Jongh opened the dispatch-cases and took out letters and telegrams. She made notes and Beckman dictated, but, try as she would, Miss Olivia could not read lips at so great a distance. When the yacht had turned the promontory, she always felt exhausted and in a bad humor from the effort.

The rest of the time they were never seen, at least not by daylight. They had their meals in their rooms and there they received the procession of important men who arrived by train and yacht, motor and plane, to talk with the Great Beckman. The more she watched them the more interested Miss Olivia became. She could not say why, save that the face of Beckman, so tired, so wrecked, so secret, fascinated her. She had never in her life fallen in love with anyone and certainly she was not falling in love with Beckman now. It was perhaps that she read in his face intimations of all sorts of fascinating things which no one knew but himself. She felt a passionate desire to know what it was that terrified him. As he passed her day after day, going in and out, the look of fear and weariness did not leave him, and once or twice she fancied that for a moment she caught a sudden glimpse of madness in the small gray eyes. There was something about

him, some quality which she had never before encountered. Slowly she began with craft to find a way of spying on them.

This was not easy to do, but Miss Olivia, from long experience, knew that there were moments in the lives of the most suspicious and cautious when it was possible to catch them unaware. With most people, eavesdropping was easy because they were careless and indiscreet and placed themselves within easy range of her hearing, in the belief that she was deaf or did not understand the language they were speaking or simply because they did not care. Beckman and his woman were a test, a challenge, and because life in the hotel was very dull and because she resented their presence in her room, she determined to take up the challenge.

Her friends the servants told her, gladly, whatever they knew and a great deal they did not know, and so she discovered among other things that the pair did leave their rooms after nightfall. When it was quite dark and the terrace by the sea was completely deserted, they would descend by the servants' stairway and make their way through the shrubbery to the edge of the water. They would walk up and down, up and down, or at least so the servants supposed. They could not know for a certainty, because Beckman had given strict orders that none of the domestics were to go to that part of the garden after nine o'clock in the evening. It was a windy place and the spray of the sea sometimes blew across it. No guest of the hotel ever went there after sunset.

When the servants told her this bit of news, Miss Olivia made no observation, but during the day she casually investigated the terrain and made her plan, and when it was quite dark she carried it out.

Groping her way along in the darkness, limping and stumbling along the border of flowers, she came to the end of the garden, and there after some difficulty she found the wicker chair which she had placed during the day in a clump of oleanders close against the stone wall of the sea terrace. The spot was sheltered and warm and she found it not at all disagreeable to sit there quietly, her eyes closed, digesting her dinner and listening to the faint slap-slap of the waves on the beach beyond the terrace.

Lately there were moments when she suddenly felt tired, when she would have liked to rest in her room. She told herself resentfully that if she had been in her old rooms she could have rested, but it was impossible to rest in those strange new rooms overlooking the courtyard. It was an explanation which was not altogether honest; the truth was that she could not rest because her obsession would not permit her. If she stayed all day in her bed where she could neither hear nor see, all sorts of exciting things might happen, all sorts of conversations take place which would be lost to her forever. Now, sitting hidden by the oleanders, she was able to rest because she was waiting to spy upon the pair who had thrown her out of her rooms.

Presently she felt herself slipping into a doze, and with a great effort she roused herself. She did not fall asleep again, for a moment later she was aware of the sound of footsteps. The drowsiness left her and all her practiced senses became alert. She had no need to peer through the oleanders because her sharp hearing told her that the footsteps were those of a man and a woman and the pair were coming toward her across the garden. The light footsteps were those of a woman who wore short-vamped shoes with very high heels, so that

she tottered a little as she walked. It was the walk of a Latin woman. No German or American or English woman ever walked like that. She knew that what the servants had told her was true. It was Beckman and Madame de Jongh.

She listened for the sound of their voices, and presently almost above her head on the terrace she heard Beckman say: “That’s foolish. It’s perfectly safe to talk. No one comes out here after dinner. Look, all the chairs are piled against the tables.”

He spoke in French and Miss Olivia closed her eyes, knowing that with the eyes closed one hears better. It was a trick she had learned long ago. Sometimes she did it even while tatting, bending her head over the work so that no one could see that her eyes were closed. She had learned to tat quite well without looking.

But the hiding-place in the oleanders was not so satisfactory as she had hoped. The pair walked rapidly up and down the terrace over her head and a good deal of their conversation was lost. The sea was noisy and there was a wind. Even so, she heard quite a lot, but what she heard was disappointing.

Their talk seemed as unromantic as possible. It was of stocks and bonds and names which sounded stuffy—Amsterdam Finance Corporation, Northwestern Utilities, Société Anonyme d’Acier et Chromium—big, pompous-sounding names which to Miss Olivia were less interesting than the complicated loops of her tatting. Only the timbre and pitch of their voices conveyed any meaning. They were excited in their different ways. The voice of Madame de Jongh grew high-pitched and sometimes shrill. The voice of Beckman sometimes wavered upward into a falsetto.

She heard Madame de Jongh say, “You were a fool to have done that.”

Beckman answered, “Under other circumstances you would have called me a genius.”

It was not the kind of romantic conversation she had expected. It was odd that two people, a mistress and a lover, should come off to a romantic spot like this wind-swept, deserted terrace to talk of stocks and bonds.

For an hour they strolled up and down, now slowly while Madame de Jongh argued and used great names, now rapidly and in silence. She heard Beckman say: “At least, try to be optimistic. I can’t go on with you hammering at me like this. I can’t go on.”

Madame de Jongh answered: “I don’t know what’s come over you. You seem to have lost your nerve. Where’s your courage?”

“I’m tired.”

“Well, you can’t rest now.”

And then quite suddenly they came down the steps and went into the hotel and Miss Olivia was alone in the darkness, regretting she had wasted her time and wondering what interesting conversations she had missed by leaving the *salon*.

The next night Miss Olivia was tempted to abandon her plan, but in the end, perhaps because of that unaccountable interest she had discovered in Beckman’s flat, colorless face, she went back again to her hiding-place in the oleanders. She had to know what it was that could possibly frighten the richest man in the world.

This time the sea was more calm and there was little wind, so that she was able to hear much more. With her eyes closed she again heard them talking of great names, of men and banks and corporations. They spoke of telegrams and letters, and once Madame de Jongh even laughed. “My God!” she said. “It’s unbelievable what fools men like that can be.”

Miss Olivia didn’t know who the men were nor what Madame de Jongh had meant by her observation, but a moment later she heard something which interested her. She heard the voice of Madame de Jongh again. It had a singular penetrating quality and she was able to hear it when the peculiar flat voice of Beckman was lost.

This time she said: “It’s those Italian bonds. If you wanted to do a forgery, why didn’t you do a good one? Why didn’t you tell me? I could have done it at least passably. Any fool could see they’re a fake.”

“I never gave any fool a chance really to examine them. Anyway, I had to do the best I could. I had to have them quick. They had me in a corner.”

“We ought to do them over again.”

“We can’t do it now. Not here. We’ve got to go back to Paris.”

They were gone again and she heard no more. But two things interested her—the word “forgery” and the phrase “we’ve got to go back to Paris.” Forgery at least was interesting. It might, after all, be worth her while to return and listen. But why should the Great Beckman have to commit forgery? What interested her more was the suggestion that they might be going to Paris. That meant that the hotel would be cleared of all the dull money people and she would have her suite back again with the balcony from

which she could learn what went on beneath and in the rooms all about her.

Then on the terrace above her the pair returned again and she heard Beckman saying, “The Dictator is coming to see me, but for the sake of his dignity I’ll have to go out in the launch to his yacht. It must look as if he came here by accident. He’s got to keep up appearances.”

Then they went into the hotel again, and when it was safe Miss Olivia gathered up her tating and made her way casually back to the ballroom, where she sat in a corner half hidden by a screen and heard a woman of sixty quarreling with a boy of twenty-two.

The next day disaster came. Miss Olivia went, as usual, after dark, to the wicker chair concealed in the oleanders. There, hidden and sheltered, she waited. Twenty minutes passed and then a half hour. Miss Olivia grew sleepy and fell into a doze. How long she slept she did not know, and when she was wakened by the sound of voices she was chilled and stiff. The voices were Beckman’s and Madame de Jongh’s and the woman was talking rapidly and shrilly in excitement. Clearly something had gone wrong. Something had kept them from descending to the terrace at the usual hour.

“No,” Miss Olivia heard her saying. “You’ve got to stand firm. You can hold out.”

And then the voice of Beckman: “No, I can’t. Not much longer.”

“Storiano can help us.”

“How can I ask him without showing my hand. No, it’s worse than that. I’ve got to give him what he wants just to

keep up a front. That's the only thing to do." Miss Olivia was aware that they were no longer walking up and down. They stood still above her and she saw them in her imagination. Beckman tired and baffled, his head bent, facing the shrewish woman.

"Storiano!" she thought. "Storiano, the Dictator!"

Then she heard Beckman's voice again: "I have to do it. I've got to gamble everything. Once the papers announce that I've loaned seventy-five millions to Storiano, no one can doubt me."

"It's desperate."

"It's the only way."

Then the voices were silent again, as if they had moved away, and Miss Olivia felt suddenly old and tired and dizzy. What was it they were talking about. "Seventy-five million"—"Storiano"—"forged bonds"? What did it all mean? For a moment she had a vague feeling that what was happening to her now was the most important thing that had ever happened to her in all her life. And she did not know what it meant.

And then clearly, just above her head, she heard the voice of Madame de Jongh: "Do I see properly? Do you see what I see in those bushes?"

There was a silence, and suddenly Miss Olivia was aware that one of them had turned an electric torch full upon her. She did not move, but with her head bent forward on her bosom she continued to breathe heavily, as if she were sleeping.

The light switched off and she heard Madame de Jongh say, in a queer, still voice, "What do you suppose it means?"

“It doesn’t mean anything. She’s asleep.”

And then the voice of Madame de Jongh, “It’s very queer.”

“You’re always suspicious.”

“Sometimes it’s good that I am.”

Then the light was flashed on again but Miss Olivia had been too clever for them. She knew the tricks of listening too well—she had not stirred.

“She *does* seem to be asleep,” said Madame de Jongh, and then Miss Olivia heard their footsteps as they descended the steps and walked toward the hotel. But she did not rise at once. She waited more than an hour because she knew that Madame de Jongh would be watching. When she returned to the hotel there was no sign of either Beckman or Madame de Jongh. The lights in the windows of the Royal suite and of her old rooms were out.

But the next morning Madame de Jongh sent for the manager and made a scene in the sitting-room of the suite which had once belonged to Miss Olivia. She wanted to know why the hotel allowed its guests to eavesdrop upon her and Beckman. It was rather a disgusting scene, considering that the manager could scarcely have known anything about Miss Olivia’s activities at every moment of the day. It was born clearly of nerves, and during the ten minutes it lasted Madame de Jongh revealed herself in all the vulgarity of her low origin.

The manager tried to reassure her. He explained that Miss Olivia was a harmless old woman who had a habit of hiding herself away to doze. She had been coming to the hotel for fifteen years. It would never occur to her to spy upon people. In fact, he thought she was a little deaf. At times she did not appear to understand what was being said to her. More than

that, he continued, it was his opinion that Miss Jenkins was a little cracked, and he made a gesture to indicate wheels whirring in his head.

Madame de Jongh was a little pacified. "In any case, Mr. Beckman has a right to privacy, no matter where he is. You understand that? He's not a man to be trifled with. As to your American old maid, maybe you're right. I'm not sure. Sometimes crazy people are the most dangerous. They get an idea and stick to it and then anything can happen."

At first when they failed to come down in the evening to the terrace Miss Olivia felt baffled, and then slowly she became indignant, asking herself what right Madame de Jongh had to interfere with the one simple pleasure left to a harmless old woman like herself. She told herself that her eavesdropping was a harmless diversion. She had never gossiped and she had never betrayed a secret, although her brain contained enough scandal to dynamite the lives and careers of hundreds of people. She meant no harm. Why couldn't they leave her in peace? It seemed to her that "that Beckman woman" (as Miss Olivia now called her in those long interior monologues which took place more and more as she grew older) plotted to annoy and spite her.

Then when her indignation waned a little she began once more to plot, this time taking into her confidence the Italian chambermaid, Serafina. These were tactics which she had never before employed and she descended to them now only because her resentment at Beckman and Madame de Jongh and her curiosity about them had become a kind of insanity which occupied her mind all day and kept her awake at night.

For thinking of them she could no longer take any interest in other conversations in the hotel and on the beach.

The chambermaid, a plump, good-natured woman who hated Madame de Jongh, told her that outside the Royal suite there was a balcony half concealed by the cornices of the heavy façade where Miss Olivia might conceal herself and listen. Unless some one walked to the end of the corridor and peered out of the doorway, a person would never be observed. During the day the chambermaid placed a small chair well back against the cornice. For all this Miss Olivia rewarded her with a hundred-franc note.

Storiano, the Dictator, arrived in his yacht and the Great Beckman went out to welcome him. The two famous men lunched together and two days later in the great cities of the world newspapers announced that Ivan Beckman had loaned seventy-five millions of dollars to the Dictator to carry his country over one of its recurrent crises.

At almost the same moment there were new issues of bonds and securities in Beckman corporations and subsidiaries in half the countries of the world. But somehow they did not sell as such offerings had done in the past. It may have been that people all over the world—in Europe and America, in Asia and Africa—began to have a vague suspicion that no man could be so powerful and so brilliant as Beckman was, or it may have been that over the world thousands of men and women, widows and trustees and investment companies, sensed vaguely that something was going wrong with the world. In any case, they did not buy as they once had done. Only the great bankers seemed not to

lose their confidence in the genius of Beckman. Perhaps that was because they dared not lose it.

And in the Palace Hotel the apartments of Beckman were bristling with activity. Immense numbers of telegrams were received and sent. They came from Geneva and Amsterdam, Berlin and Paris and London.

Miss Olivia waited.

For two nights, wrapped in knitted shawls, she sat cramped and miserable on the stiff chair outside the Royal suite. For two nights she was unrewarded. Each time she sat there until at last the lights were put out in Beckman's rooms and she knew there was no longer any use in waiting. Then cautiously she made her way along the corridors to her rooms on the courtyard, to lie awake, filled with resentment and bitterness, her peace devoured by her strange obsession. People who passed her in the hall were startled by the wild half-mad look in her eyes.

The third night she was rewarded. It was nearly eleven o'clock when a window was opened suddenly at the far end of the balcony, and as it was opened she heard Madame de Jongh say: "Don't drink any more. Some air is what you need."

Miss Olivia closed her eyes in order to hear more clearly, and presently she became aware that Beckman and Madame de Jongh were awaiting a telephone call. She heard Madame de Jongh's voice in French: "Yes, I'm holding the wire.... Yes, but who is calling from New York?... Yes." Then from the tone of her voice Miss Olivia knew that Beckman's woman had turned away from the telephone to address Beckman. She spoke in broken English in a low voice, "It's Watts and Sandover."

“Watts and Sandover.” The names struck recognition in the brain of Miss Olivia. Watts and Sandover were the ones who looked after her money and sent her checks, and sometimes wrote to her letters about bonds and investments which she did not understand.

“Don’t lose your head,” she heard Madame de Jongh saying, “Bluff! Bluff! Bluff! Nobody knows how better than you, if you keep a good hold on yourself.”

And then Beckman’s voice: “If I can hold out a month longer, I can swing it. Just a month.”

“Keep your head.”

A kind of wild delight swept through Miss Olivia’s withered body. It was a still, hot night and with the window open she could hear even a whisper. She fancied she could even hear Beckman’s heavy, weary breathing. She could almost see Madame de Jongh, hard, unscrupulous, staring at him, *willing* him with that tough, unscrupulous will of hers to fight.

She heard him say, scarcely louder than a sigh: “I’m so tired. If they’d only let me alone. If I could only get some sleep.”

And then Madame de Jongh’s voice: “Hello! Hello!... Yes!... New York, all right.”

Then she turned away from the telephone and in a low, fierce voice said: “Get hold of yourself. It’s no good my talking. They won’t believe me. Remember if you keep them doped for a month you’ll win, and then you’ll be the greatest man in the world.” Again a second’s pause, and then the voice of Madame de Jongh, “I’m going down to keep an eye on that operator.”

The door closed and she was gone and Miss Olivia heard Beckman's voice, a new voice she had never heard before. It was almost as if Beckman were a ventriloquist who had kept one voice concealed.

"Hello! Hello!" he said, "Yes. Beckman speaking.... Hello! Hello! Sandover?"

The new voice seemed fresh and confident and almost young. It was full of vigor and decision. The weary falsetto timbre was gone. For a moment Miss Olivia felt dizzy and tricked, wondering if the voice she heard could be Beckman's, after all.

"Yes. Yes. Fine.... Lots of sun. Fine weather. I'm having a fine rest."

Silence again.

Then Beckman laughed, the first time Miss Olivia had ever known him to laugh. "Oh, *that!*" continued the strong, confident voice. "Why of course! Do whatever you like about it." Again it was the voice of a strong man, secure and vigorous. "The Italian bonds? Of course. They're in Paris in my bank.... Yes, the best thing is to send your agents to examine them. Why, of course. I'll telephone them tonight."

Silence.

Again Beckman laughed. "I never deceived you yet, did I? Of course I understand. Oh, the market will be up again in a few days higher than ever. It can't stay up all the time. Don't worry. It'll be booming in a week."

Silence again, and then Beckman's hearty voice: "Well, I'm glad. A fellow doesn't like to have his word doubted. Beckman, least of all. But if you want to check over the bonds, wire me and I'll have them sent over to your agent...."

Of course. Certainly I understand. Remember the bonds. Anything you want to see is open to you always. Good night.”

Miss Olivia heard the receiver dropped back sharply onto its stand, as if the hand which held it was hopelessly weary. She still felt dizzy and confused by the change in Beckman’s voice and manner. Others before her had seen him act without knowing that it was acting. They had seen him give great performances, but none had ever seen a performance as spectacular as that to which Miss Olivia had listened.

She heard the door open and Madame de Jongh say, “Well?”

In answer came the old tired voice of Beckman, “I think it worked,” and then almost in a whisper: “It was the Italian bonds they were after. I bluffed him into believing me. O my God, I’m tired! If they’ll only leave me alone for another month.”

“It’s all right if nobody else gets suspicious.”

Then there was a long silence broken only by the gurgling of whisky and water being poured into a glass, and suddenly with horror Miss Olivia heard Madame de Jongh saying, “There’s some one on the balcony.”

“It’s your nerves.”

“I’m right. I know it! I feel it. There’s some one there!”

Miss Olivia knew that this time it was no good pretending that she was asleep. She knew suddenly that the only thing to do was to escape, to run as fast as her poor old legs would let her. But before she could move she heard the door open, and as she stood up to escape she found the entrance to the long corridor blocked by “Beckman’s woman.”

The face of Madame de Jongh was white and her eyes staring.

“What are you doing here? You old spy! You old bitch!”

She moved toward Miss Olivia and struck her in the face, screaming: “I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you!”

Miss Olivia fell to her knees, dropping her stick and the little bag in which she carried her tating, and Madame de Jongh began to kick her. She might perhaps have killed her but for Beckman, who appeared suddenly, and seizing Madame de Jongh by both wrists, held her powerless while she screamed abuse. Beckman, too, was very white.

Miss Olivia felt faint, but beneath the faintness she wanted to answer back to Madame de Jongh. Somehow she could not. In her terror and confusion the strength born of her hatred for “Beckman’s woman” was suddenly gone out of her, leaving her weak and ashamed. Madame de Jongh had suddenly become the apotheosis of all those servants in the second-rate hotels and *pensions* of her youth who had screamed insults and abuse at her father and herself. The whole procession of those awful women who had hounded her for thirty-seven years now arose to confront her. She could not speak.

Stumbling, she managed to regain her feet and pick up her stick. Beckman had placed one arm around Madame de Jongh, pinioning her hands, and with the other he covered her mouth. As Miss Olivia hobbled along the corridor she heard above the half-stifled abuse of Madame de Jongh the voice of Beckman calling after her: “Tomorrow I’ll pay you. Tomorrow I’ll pay you well, whatever you want.”

She did not understand what he meant. She only wanted to escape—to get away to those bleak unfamiliar rooms on the

court to which the presence of Beckman and his woman had exiled her.

She managed to undress herself and climb into bed, but sleep was impossible. Her mind seemed to move with fantastic speed, and then for a time the whirring would become so intolerable that it seemed to her she was either mad or in the midst of a nightmare. All the vile names Madame de Jongh had called her kept returning, and the weak, feeble voice of Beckman calling out, "Tomorrow I'll pay you.... Whatever you want." She could not see what he meant by that. And she kept hearing Beckman's stage voice over the telephone as if it were another man talking.

She rose and managed to find some sleeping-tablets. They did not make her sleep, but they stilled the shaking of her body and eased the whirring in her brain, and slowly she was able to think a little more clearly. Beckman had said that he'd bluffed the people in New York and that he was going to stay on in the hotel for another month. That meant that she would be exiled for another month to the dreary rooms from which she could see or hear nothing. She remembered his saying that if he could hold out a month everything would be all right. What was it they were afraid of? And then she remembered Watts and Sandover. For some reason they were afraid of Watts and Sandover. And the Italian bonds—the forged Italian bonds. Waves of hatred for Beckman and that common woman swept over her. If she could only get them out of the hotel, she could be happy again and peaceful in her old rooms. Perhaps, she thought, with venom, she could send them direct from the Grand Hotel into prison.

And then all at once she knew how to do it.

The idea came to her after daylight and it was nearly eight o'clock when at last she rose and dressed herself. She had to be secret about it, so she waited until the corridor belowstairs seemed to be empty, and then hurried out through the side door which gave into the alley used by tradespeople. Along the promenade by the sea they were washing the asphalt and irrigating the beds of flowers. It was a sultry, uncomfortable morning, and as she walked waves of faintness swept over her. But the idea gave her all the strength of a fanatic. She had to do it. Nothing else in the world mattered. She had to keep up until she got as far as the Bureau de Postes et Telegraphs.

At last she reached it, and pushing through the door she pulled out a telegraph blank from the container. The pen scratched and her hand trembled, but at last after three attempts she managed to print the telegram legibly.

It read:

*Watts & Sandover
160 Broadway
Suggest you investigate
Beckman especially Italian
bonds.*

She passed the form through to the woman inside.

“Fill in the name and address of the sender.”

“Must I?”

“We can't send it otherwise.”

Miss Olivia took the pen and thought quickly. Out of her consciousness came the name of her aunt, a respectable old lady, dead for the quarter of a century.

Savina Janeway she wrote at the bottom of the telegram, and then *Villa Corona*. There wasn't any Villa Corona so far as she knew, but so much the better. It was the name of a cheap boarding-house in Stresa where she had stayed long ago with her father.

Quickly she pushed the telegram through the grill. Quickly she limped out of the office. When she reached the street she was shaking and felt suddenly that she was going to be sick. "I can't faint. I can't be sick," she thought, hysterically. If she fainted now they could find out easily who had sent the telegram. "I must get away." Her bones had begun to ache and there was a pain in her side. "That," she thought, "is where that trollop kicked me."

It was only nine o'clock, but already the sun was burning the moisture from the freshly washed road. A little way from the telegraph office she found a fiacre. The swarthy driver had to get down and help her into it. She sank back on the dirty lace which covered the seat, and said, "Casino."

She thought, "If I say the hotel, they might be able to trace me. I can walk from the Casino, if I can only make it." She closed her eyes and began to feel a little stronger. The pain in her side grew worse, but at the moment she did not mind. If she could only get Beckman and his woman out of the hotel, everything would be all right. If only she could get back into her own rooms, life would be pleasant and peaceful again. Then suddenly she was aware that the fiacre had stopped. She heard the driver saying, "The Casino, madame." She opened her eyes and pulled herself painfully to her feet.

It was nine o'clock in the morning of August 26th when Miss Olivia's telegram was delivered to the telephone

operator of Watts and Sandover. The date was important because it became historic. But to the operator at that moment it was nothing more than a number on the calendar before her, and the telegram no more than another yellow envelope in the little pile of yellow and blue ones at the side of her switchboard. She placed it on the little pile. She kept them there until Mr. Henry Sandover himself or one of the Watts brothers came in. There was a rule in the office that no one was to open telegrams save one of the partners—a rule which had been in force since 1870, when the firm was founded. In the 'seventies a telegram was still a telegram and therefore considered sacred. Long ago this rule, like so many others in the firm, had become tradition. Watts and Sandover was no ordinary fly-by-night brokerage house which lived by speculation accounts—it was an old and solid conservative firm. For more than sixty years it had made no mistakes worthy of discussion. For three generations Watts and Sandover sons and grandsons had carried it on. The house was a rock of security. It sponsored only bonds and securities of impregnable value.

It was Henry Sandover, middle-aged, plump and genial, who arrived first at the office that morning, so it was he who opened the telegrams addressed to the firm. He had breakfasted well on the speedboat which brought him each day from Long Island to the city, and he was smoking one of the cigars which he had made for himself specially in Havana.

The market was falling. It had been falling for several days, but this knowledge did not disturb him. It couldn't always climb. The wavering of the market had nothing to do with a firm like Watts and Sandover. Anyway, America

would be prosperous forever. In the speeches he sometimes made (for he was the partner who addressed conventions and banquets) he always pointed out that no matter what happened in Europe, America would always be prosperous. There were plenty of reasons for this. He would name them off one after another. And when he sat down all the bankers and brokers and investors who had listened to him felt better and more secure. It was a great relief to hear such words of confidence from a partner of Watts and Sandover, a firm which had never been wrong in seventy years.

Now as he sat smoking and opening telegrams, Henry Sandover thought how lucky it was that his forbears had had common sense and stuck to safe business. The market could do what it liked. Other houses might fail, but Watts and Sandover was secure on the rocky foundation of conservatism.

The telegrams were not very interesting—just instructions to buy and sell, an inquiry or two for advice, two invitations to address bankers and investors, one from Chicago, one from St. Louis. There were several orders to buy Beckman stock. That pleased him. It showed the public had not lost confidence in Watts and Sandover, Beckman's American agents. These orders would help the market to recover. The sun streamed through the windows. It was going to be hot.

Miss Olivia's telegram was the fourteenth which he opened. He read it with his mind working lazily, for the rising heat had set him to thinking of his place in Maine and the knowledge that at the end of the week he would leave to spend a month in fresh cool air, scented with pines, by the rocks and sea. It took a moment or two for the words of the telegram to penetrate his consciousness.

Then slowly he sat up and put down the half-smoked cigar. He blinked and read again.

*Suggest you investigate
Beckman especially Italian
bonds.*

Savina Janeway.

He looked for the address of the sender. The telegram came from Sarsavina. That's where Beckman was staying on his holiday.

A sudden wave of sickness came over him, as though for a moment his whole body had ceased to live. It was as if the blood had ceased to circulate in his veins, as if his stomach had stopped digesting his excellent breakfast, as if his brain no longer worked. Then it passed and he thought: "Savina Janeway. Savina Janeway. Who is Savina Janeway?"

Then slowly he began to live again. The telegram he saw now must be a joke—some rowdy, stupid joke played by a fellow broker. He wanted to laugh, but he couldn't. He read the telegram over and over, stupidly, and then pressed the button set in a block of malachite (the gift of one of his admiring widowed clients). As he pressed it an odd thing happened to him. He had a sudden unwanted vision of the woman who had given him the block of semi-precious stone. He saw her, Mrs. Allison—Harry Allison's widow—seventy-one or-two, she must be, tall, gentle, kindly, trusting. She had given it to him as an expression of confidence. By investing most of her money in Beckman stocks he had tripled her income.

But Miss Williams was already standing there before him, neat, crisp, efficient, the ideal secretary. He did not notice her

at first, so after a moment she said, "Yes, Mr. Sandover."

He looked at her. "Will you ask both Mr. Herbert and Mr. Wilbur Watts to come in, please? Say it's urgent, please."

"Yes, Mr. Sandover."

"When will my brother be back from his holiday?"

"Next Monday, I think."

"Will you ..." He thought for a moment, and then said: "Never mind. That's all."

She turned in the doorway. "Shall I have the conditioned air turned on, sir?"

"No, never mind. Just get them quick for me."

Why had she asked about the conditioned air? It must have been because he looked ill or white. He thought: "That can't be. I've got to pull myself together. I can't let anyone suspect anything. Not even Miss Williams."

He looked again at the telegram, trying to make himself believe that it was a joke, but again he failed. The door opened and the Watts brothers came in. They were both over forty and looked extraordinarily alike, smooth, well dressed, well mannered, prosperous, confident. The world had been handed to them on a silver platter and they had managed to keep it there. Nothing had ever gone wrong for them, and so in the world they had the reputation of being shrewd and able fellows. They believed it themselves, and this gave them a certain smugness of manner, complicated only in the case of Mr. Herbert by a slight congenital nervousness and tendency to hysteria.

Wilbur sat down first and said, "What's up?"

Henry Sandover said nothing. He simply pushed the telegram across the table. Wilbur Watts read it and passed it

to his brother. With each of them there occurred that same awful moment of sickening silence. It was Wilbur Watts who spoke first. He was the more genial. He took life easily and knew a great many stories. Now he grinned, an old grin, as if the muscles of his face were partly paralyzed.

“It’s a bad joke!” he said.

Herbert Watts said, “Nobody but an idiot would make a joke like that. Or somebody who had it in for us.”

“Or for *him*. More likely *him*.”

Henry Sandover said, “I can’t believe it. I talked to him myself last night. He sounded in the pink and confident.”

He pressed the button once more, and when Miss Williams came in, he said: “Bring me in the lists of our clients—all of them. I mean all the lists.” She went out and he turned back to the brothers. “I think the first thing is to find out if we have a client called Savina Janeway. So far as I can remember we never had anyone by that name. Anyway, it sounds phony to me. Nobody has a name like that nowadays.”

Miss Williams brought in the files, and nervously the three men went through them all, but nowhere could they find any trace of Savina Janeway. When they had finished Herbert Watts looked up and said, “Well, that settles that. It’s a hoax.”

But Sandover was frightened. “It doesn’t prove anything. Maybe it’s somebody who has a grudge or knows something we don’t know.”

“We can trace the telegram,” said Wilbur Watts.

Sandover ignored him. When he spoke, it was slowly, in a strange dead voice that only increased the nervous panic of the other partners. “At the moment the point is a simple one. It has nothing to do with whether the telegram is a joke or

not. It has to do with us and our responsibility. The terrible thing is that such a calamity *could* happen, even if it hasn't. It *could* happen because we've been fools. Suppose the telegram is no hoax. Then what? Where are we? What have we let ourselves in for?"

The Watts brothers had been trying all the while to push this thought from them, to overlook it, to make themselves believe that the whole thing was nonsense. But that was not Henry Sandover's way. For a second, while he had been speaking, he hated these two partners seated opposite him. For a second he had a wild sadistic pleasure in rubbing their noses in their folly.

Herbert Watts, the hysterical one, said, "Well, there's no use hanging ourselves until the noose is ready." It was exactly the wrong thing to have said.

Henry Sandover turned in his chair and sat looking out of the window over the harbor. One hand kept fingering the block of malachite idly. His cigar burned out quietly, forgotten. The other telegrams remained unopened in a neat pile. The three partners were all doing the same thing. They were trying to collect their thoughts and bring order into them, but everything seemed jumbled together in a mad confusion. They could not sell Beckman stocks. They could not rid themselves nor their clients of all those securities. If the world suspected that Watts and Sandover was unloading Beckman stock it would be the end of everything. There was no way out. If Beckman had betrayed them, if that telegram was not a bad joke and the ruin of their clients, it was the end of Watts and Sandover. It all depended.

"What did he say last night?" asked Wilbur Watts.

Henry Sandover repeated the conversation of the night before. They knew it already, so hearing it all again was of no help.

Then suddenly, in a weak voice, Wilbur Watts said: "Maybe we're getting excited over nothing. That telegram sounds pretty fishy."

"Unfortunately, we can't take any chances."

Sandover said, "There are telegrams here to buy the new Beckman issue. What are we going to do about that?"

Neither of his partners answered him, but they, like himself, were aware that suddenly they were squarely faced not only with possible disaster, but by an awful moral responsibility as well. If they filled the orders they would be betraying those who trusted them, their fathers, and their grandfathers. If Watts and Sandover suddenly ceased to buy or sell the securities of a man for whom they had stood sponsors, the world would find it out and disaster would follow.

Presently Sandover said, "Boys, we can't carry out those orders till we know."

He was the toughest of the three, and now on his bald head there were little drops of cold sweat which did not come of the heat. For a moment he experienced an odd sensation of utter bewilderment in which his thoughts churned about without co-ordination inside his head. He kept thinking. "It's all so silly. All this over a telegram from somebody we've never heard of, which may only be a hoax."

And then slowly, as he pulled himself together with a terrible effort, he began to understand the situation; but understanding it made it no better. Only worse, if anything. Maybe the telegram *was* only an appalling joke. Even so, that

didn't make everything right. That didn't cancel out their own negligence and laziness. He saw now that they ought never to have trusted Beckman or any man the way they had trusted him. Joke or no joke, he saw that from now on they would have to treat the Great Beckman the only way it was possible to treat men in business. Never trust 'em. Behave like a business man. From now on they must stiffen their backbones. Business was essentially crooked. Why pretend otherwise, the way Sandover and Watts had been doing for seventy years?

But that realization brought him no peace, because behind it there lurked a terrible fear. Perhaps if they asked Beckman for proofs, if they investigated all those books and accountings, they would only bring into the light fraud and bankruptcy and ruin. They dared not investigate, but they would have to do it even though it ruined them all. Now, cold with fear, he did not see how they had allowed themselves to get into this awful hole where they placed themselves at the mercy of a single man who might be nothing more than an adventurer.

While these thoughts kept rushing through his mind, he was aware that the Watts brothers were both talking and saying nothing whatever. Herbert was inclined to be jumpy and made extravagant, hysterical statements, and Wilbur was just plain stupid. He wondered why he had never considered these facts before. He had always known them, far back in his mind, but he had never done anything about it. Herbert and Wilbur had always been there, and their fathers and grandfathers before them. Everything had always gone well, so there wasn't any need to make a fuss. But they were fools, both of them. Watching them, trying to listen to all the futile

things they were saying, he kept thinking what silly faces they had. It struck him that he had never really seen them before. He was aware suddenly of a sharp sense of division separating him from them. They were his enemies. They had always been. They were fools.

In that clear, blinding light which seemed to illuminate everything, he saw other truths, bitter and unpalatable. He knew suddenly a million things he had never known before. They kept whirling round his brain in spite of the terrible effort he made to keep his head.

He saw now that the firm had been lucky and secure for too long a time. He saw that not one of them knew very much when they were up against a man like Beckman. They were gentlemen who had gone to the right colleges and belonged to the right clubs and always knew the right people. It was a pity they hadn't known more men like Beckman. He suddenly saw that they really didn't know anything about finance or the world or anything at all. They had been hypnotized by Beckman, a cheap adventurer who had been a dish-washer, a prospector, a promoter. If only they had been men who had made their own way they would never have trusted Beckman. He saw that in a crisis there was no place for gentlemen in business. That was the trouble. They had been soft and behaved like gentlemen toward Beckman. And now the brothers, Herbert and Wilbur, were going to be no good. Herbert had turned very white, as if he were going to have one of his heart attacks. They were soft. He himself was soft. They were all fools. There descended on them all a terrible, white, blinding light which revealed everything—the past, the present awful moment, and the horror which in his

heart, in spite of all the hopes he tried to raise, he knew lay before them.

Herbert was speaking suddenly, "If there's anything to that telegram, Beckman is the biggest confidence man in the history of the world."

"So what?" said Sandover, in a dead voice.

"And we're the biggest fools," said Wilbur Watts, "and we can't waste another second."

"I'm glad you noticed that," said Sandover.

He pressed the button set in the block of malachite, and the figure of Harry Allison's widow appeared again in his terrified mind. He found himself wondering if that block of malachite could be sold and the money sent to her.

When Miss Williams appeared, he said, "Please telegraph at once to my brother. Say '*Urgent return necessary. Beckman complications.*' Get the Paris office on the telephone. I want to speak to Morrison. Find out the first sailing of a fast boat to Europe. Bring that bottle of rye and a glass for Mr. Herbert. He's feeling ill. I shan't leave the office. Have lunch sent in."

Miss Williams, having noted all these orders, looked up. "The same as usual?"

"The same as usual."

When she had gone he turned to the brothers. "Nobody must have a hint of this. One of us has got to go to Europe. And now we've got to find out if this telegram is a grisly joke."

They did not leave the office for lunch or for dinner, and Henry Sandover spent the night there dozing on the leather sofa between transatlantic telephone calls. He knew now that

everything was up to him. All of them in Watts and Sandover had been fools, but he was the only one who was not soft. There were calls to Paris, London, Amsterdam, and Rome. At three in the morning they received the reply from Sarsavina that no one could be found called Savina Janeway and there was no such house as the Villa Corona. But it did not matter then who sent the telegram, for they knew by that time that the Italian bonds were very likely all forged and that the Great Beckman was a fraud.

At the Palace Hotel in Sarsavina the chasseur on duty found Miss Olivia lying unconscious in a little heap inside the main entrance to the hotel, a little while before Henry Sandover opened the telegram in his office on lower Broadway. They carried her up to her room (those dreary rooms on the side next to the courtyard) and there the fat maid managed to take off her clothes and get her into bed. When the doctor finally came to examine her they found her thin old body covered with bruises which were turning purple. Otherwise he could find nothing wrong with her, but it was impossible to bring her back to full consciousness. She would moan and toss and now and then cry out, "Don't! Don't!" but it was impossible to make her speak.

Her old friend, the proprietor, was alarmed, as he always was by anything which threatened to be a scandal. A great deal that was scandalous happened in his hotel and usually he knew all about it. He didn't care what happened so long as it was not found out. Now he was alarmed because no one seemed to know where Miss Olivia had been since she was last seen about ten o'clock on the evening before. No one had seen her leave the hotel. No one knew from what adventure

she had returned beaten and unconscious. He was alarmed, too, because his wife's horoscope predicted disaster for the months of August and September.

About ten o'clock a large basket of flowers arrived addressed to Miss Olivia Jenkins. It was placed beside the bed where she lay unconscious, and the fat chambermaid who removed the flowers from their wrappings discovered a card. It was that of Ivan Beckman.

A little later the proprietor was summoned to the Royal suite. There he found Beckman and Madame de Jongh waiting to receive him. They asked him a great many questions about Miss Olivia, and Beckman finished by asking the proprietor whether he thought Miss Olivia would accept an invitation to lunch with him. It was then that Beckman learned how she had been found unconscious at the entrance to the hotel.

When he heard the news he was silent for a moment, and then said: "What a pity! Will you see that she has flowers every day—splendid flowers, lots of them, with my card? Here." He opened his wallet and took out a dozen cards and handed them to the manager. "Every day until I leave, please. Good day."

At four o'clock, while Beckman and Madame de Jongh were taking their daily drive, there was an urgent telephone call from Paris, and then another from London, and two calls from New York. When they returned, an under-secretary gave them the news and handed Beckman a packet of cablegrams. At the sight of them he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, and then dismissed the secretary.

When they were alone, Madame de Jongh locked each door behind the heavy brocades in turn. When she had

finished she looked at Beckman. He was still standing in the middle of the room, holding the unopened telegrams like a man enchanted. Without saying anything, she crossed the room and suddenly shook him violently.

“Don’t do that!” she cried. “You can’t! Do you understand? You can’t!”

“It’s finished,” he said, simply.

“Finished nothing. They can’t let you crash. They can’t ruin you, because they’ll ruin themselves. They’ll all collapse—all of them—in New York and London and Paris and Amsterdam.”

“It’s too late. They can’t even save themselves by saving me.” The telegrams slipped out of his grasp and he covered his face with his hands. “If they had only let me alone I’d have pulled through. Now they’ve finished us all.” Then in a half-moan, “I’m so tired.”

Madame de Jongh gathered the fallen telegrams. Then she pushed him on to the bed. He fell back like a man who had been hit, and lay, sprawled out, with his eyes staring into the carved and gilded ceiling.

“Leave it to me,” said Madame de Jongh. “Stay in bed. See no one. I’ll fix it with the doctor to say you’ve collapsed. They’ll have to save you to save themselves. I’ll answer the telephone and the telegrams. The skunks! They’ll all turn on us now when something goes wrong.”

He still did not move, and she began opening the telegrams. Suddenly, in the midst of tearing them open, she stopped and turned, “Could it have been that old witch? Did she tell anyone what she heard?”

For a week, no one saw the Great Beckman. He had three nurses and the doctor came twice a day to see him. The newspapers all over the world carried bulletins which were issued hourly as to his condition. There were leaders and editorials in papers in the capitals expressing confidence in Beckman and belief in his recovery. If there were doubts, no one had dared to express them. In one way or another, nearly all of them were mixed up with the Great Beckman. They had stocks and bonds, securities, shares, indentures, *placements*, in the Great Beckman companies. They had all believed that he would make them rich. Now they dared not doubt him. Beckman had counted on that.

But strange things began to happen here and there in the world. Suddenly there seemed to be almost no market for the new issue of securities. The position of Dictator Storiano, who had borrowed seventy-five millions from Beckman, grew daily worse until there was talk of his overthrow. Then the price of securities and stocks of other Beckman companies began to fall, not simply with a falling market, but faster than the market, ominously. In Amsterdam, the president of a Beckman subsidiary hanged himself in a cupboard. In Geneva the treasurer of another company simply vanished. In New York, the offices of Watts and Sandover were never closed day or night and there was always at least one partner there all through the night.

It was Henry Sandover who sailed for Europe, because in that burst of terrible illumination which came upon the morning he opened the telegram, he knew that none of the other partners could be counted on to deal with Beckman himself. They would only be hypnotized all over again. He arrived in Sarsavina at the Palace Hotel six days after the

telegram, to find the hotel already full of men from every part of Europe and America who had come to see Beckman; so he had to stay at the Albion near by, which was full of men like himself and newspaper men whom he detested. That night he wired Watts and Sandover to issue a statement of confidence as the representatives of the Beckman interests. The statement appeared in the New York papers in the four-o'clock editions, and the final edition printed the news from Sarsavina which brought the collapse.

Nine days after they found Miss Olivia in the hallway, she opened her eyes and for the first time was conscious of where she was. At first everything was confused and in her dizziness the room whirled about her. It was not easy for her to find herself again, because in the weariness of her nine-day delirium she had been living in the past, moving again through the whole procession of cheap hotels and boarding-houses where she had lived with her father. Now, on waking, she had to remember that she was rich and that she was living in the Palace Hotel and that servants could no longer be rude to her. But when she looked about her she was puzzled at first not to find herself in her old rooms above the terrace and the sea. Then she remembered about Beckman and how she had been put out of her rooms, and slowly she remembered that last evening of consciousness when Madame de Jongh had fallen upon her and beaten her.

But one thing puzzled her, and no amount of trying to remember could explain it. The room was filled with flowers, some growing in pots and others arranged in baskets and looking a little brown and withered. She saw that some one had tried to keep them appearing well, because the dead

blossoms of the lilies and the gladioli had been carefully stripped from the stems, leaving only the fresh rather feeble blooms. That must have been the good-natured Serafina.

Who, she wondered, could have sent her all those flowers? In all her life no one had ever given her so much as a single violet, and now her room was filled with flowers.

The door opened and a nurse came in, who said, brightly, in French: “Good morning. So at last you waked up?”

“How long have I been asleep?” asked Miss Olivia.

“Nine days.”

She tried to raise herself up in bed, but found herself too weak. The nurse gave her some milk and orange juice, but her bright remarks could not induce Miss Olivia to talk. She did not know this strange woman, and her presence made her feel both shy and suspicious. When she had finished with the milk she said: “Will you ask Serafina to come in? I want to talk to her.”

When the plump chambermaid came bustling into the room, beaming and chattering in her excitement over finding Miss Olivia “waked up,” Miss Olivia asked the nurse to leave the room. When she was alone with Serafina she asked if her old friend, the proprietor, had sent the flowers.

“No,” said Serafina, “They’re from Beckman—lots and lots of them every day in pots and baskets. They came up till three days ago. Oh, such a lot of things have happened since you were ill, signora.” She grew serious and shook her head. “The hotel will have a bad name. My husband says we won’t come back next year. It’s a place with bad luck.”

Miss Olivia tried to listen, and her bewilderment only increased Serafina’s chatter. Presently she managed to

interrupt the maid.

“Why did Mr. Beckman send me flowers?”

“I don’t know,” said Serafina. “He gave orders that you were to have flowers, lots of them, until the day he left. He left three days ago. He shot himself!”

With all the skill of a Latin gossip Serafina waited for a moment for her statement to make the proper impression; she had held it back, waiting to drop it like a bomb at the proper moment. She sat (as she always did when she gossiped with Miss Olivia) bolt upright, rather breathless, eager and expectant, like an actress with one eye on her audience.

Somehow the news failed to create the sensation she expected. Miss Olivia merely seemed dazed. For a long time she was silent, looking at the coverlet.

Then suddenly she said, “Then I can have my old rooms back, now that he’s out of the way. We must move back into them today, Serafina.” She showed no interest at all in the Great Beckman’s suicide.

But Serafina told her that couldn’t be. The body of the Great Beckman was still lying in the Royal suite and Miss Olivia’s old rooms were full of trunks and boxes. Serafina went on breathlessly with her gossip, aware that at any moment the nurse might enter and send her away. And she had so much to say and usually Miss Olivia was such a good audience. Only today she didn’t seem to take her usual interest. She seemed dull and dazed and listless.

It was unusual, Serafina said, to keep a body lying in state in a hotel, especially the body of a man who had shot himself; but the Great Beckman was an exception. He was the owner of the hotel, or at least until he shot himself he was the owner. Since then nobody knew whether he owned it or

not, or whether he had a right to anything in the world, even to the clothes in which he lay dressed in his coffin. He was bankrupt.

Serafina continued. All the men who had gathered from all over the world in Sarsavina were gone. She said they had all flown away the moment they heard that Beckman was dead, by train, by airplane, by motor. Beckman had sent his night nurse on an errand, and while she was gone he had risen and locked all the doors hidden behind the brocade curtains, and then taken a shiny little pistol and shot himself through the heart. When they broke down the doors to invade his loneliness, they found him on the bed, looking calm and peaceful, as if he had been asleep. In the end, when he came to die he had been alone, as he had always been.

And he was alone now, continued Serafina. As soon as he died, everyone—all those whom he had made rich and then ruined—had run away, leaving only a valet and an under-secretary. No one had claimed the body. There was nobody to give directions. The proprietor had called in an undertaker and now he was worried for fear he would have to pay for the burial. They couldn't keep the body much longer, said Serafina, wagging her head ominously, not in this weather.

In the bed Miss Olivia stirred. She had been listening, after all, for suddenly she asked, "What about that woman?"

"Oh, *her!*" said Serafina, her deep voice colored by scorn. "Madame de Jongh. *Her!* She was the first one to clear out. He shot himself about midnight and she was never seen afterward. In the morning they discovered she was gone. She took everything loose she could lay her hands on, even his picture, I suppose because it had a silver frame. They traced her part of the way. She left by motor and then took a train at

the frontier. They think she's gone to Budapest. She was a bad one. I always knew it. You remember, mademoiselle, I warned you about her. All the servants hated her."

Serafina would have gone on and on, but the nurse came in and said that she must not tire Miss Olivia any more by talking.

It was Miss Olivia who objected. The gossip with Serafina had done her more good than eggs or orange juice or medicine. She had begun to live again. Once more she was listening to life. She demanded that Serafina return in the afternoon to tell her more.

When the chambermaid had gone, Miss Olivia took her medicine with an absent-minded air and, closing her eyes, lay back among the pillows. But she did not sleep. Instead she lay there struggling with enormous effort to recover the whole chain of events which had taken place since the arrival of the Great Beckman. Slowly she remembered everything—the fragments of conversation she had had, the vile names Beckman's woman had called her, how Madame de Jongh had kicked her and Beckman offered her money. She remembered clearly the whole painful trip to the telegraph office. "Well," she thought, "they are gone—Beckman and his woman," and then she fell asleep.

It was three o'clock when Serafina returned. Again she was excited, for again she had garnered news. Some one had claimed Beckman's body. It was a Dutch woman, small and fat, who looked like a chambermaid, Serafina said. The woman said she was Beckman's sister. Anyway, they were taking the body away about four o'clock. "At any minute," said Serafina, breathlessly.

She placed herself at the window where she might look down into the courtyard while she gossiped. She kept one eye on Miss Olivia and one on the courtyard. She had been talking for a long time, when suddenly she said, "Look! There, they've come for it."

Miss Olivia grew suddenly excited. She pushed the bedclothes back with a feeble gesture. "Help me," she said, "I want to see."

So Serafina, enormous and strong, half-carried the old lady, clad only in her old-fashioned cotton nightgown, to the window. Below in the courtyard the black hearse was waiting, and in a moment six men, clad in rough clothes like laborers, came down the steps, carrying the black coffin. It was plain to the point of shabbiness, for in the crash of everything the proprietor had been cautious. The handles were of brass. There was not even a flower to break the harshness of its dead black.

Miss Olivia, held on her feet by the strong arm of Serafina, felt dizzy and weak. She thought: "The Great Beckman! There he goes!" and she remembered how he had come into the hotel, surrounded by servants and secretaries and bodyguards, with that awful woman bringing up the rear and giving orders. Well, they were gone now. Beckman in a cheap black box, his woman with the police on her trail.

The six roughly dressed men shoved the black box into the hearse, carelessly, as if it were an old trunk. It bumped and jolted. Suddenly Miss Olivia said brightly, "Well, we can move back into my rooms right away, this afternoon. I'll sleep better there. I'll get well quicker."

And then the hearse drove hastily across the courtyard and out the gate. She gave a sudden chuckle, almost inaudible,

but so wicked and mad and perverse that the fat Serafina looked at her quickly in alarm.

She had laughed because suddenly she had thought of something funny. All at once she saw herself as a little girl seated among the other children in the ring of chairs in the infants' class of the Sunday school in Greenfield, Connecticut. And she was hearing for the first time the story of David and Goliath.

“Me—David,” she said, aloud, and gave another wicked chuckle.

“You’d better go back to bed, mademoiselle,” said Serafina.

In her old rooms Miss Olivia began to recover quickly. Serafina brought her the gossip twice a day, and there were moments when, lying in her bed, she could overhear fragments of conversations which took place on the terrace below and on the adjoining balconies. There weren’t many guests in the Palace now because the season was drawing to a close and the scandal of Beckman’s suicide had driven off a good many people who had planned to stop at the Palace. Serafina complained that the tips of herself and her husband were far below what they had always been at this season.

But Miss Olivia didn’t mind very much the emptiness of the vast hotel, for she had a new diversion. It was reading the newspapers, not only the news of blackmail, murder, elopements, and *crimes passionels* which she had always read, but everything, every scrap which had to do with the Beckman collapse. She read papers in four different languages. This took up most of her day. It was as if the whole story had become her own, something which she had

made up herself, the way she had always made up stories about people. It was the triumph of her whole life. There was plenty to read, for the collapse of the Great Beckman had carried disaster with it even to such far-off places as Cape Town and Bombay and Singapore. There were records of investigations which took place in Rome, in London, in Amsterdam and Berlin, in Paris and New York. It had been a colossal bubble, and, strangely enough, no one out of all those hundreds of bankers and investors and speculators had ever doubted Beckman—no one but Miss Olivia herself, who did not know she was an investor.

Storiano, the Dictator, and his government fell, and with them disappeared Beckman's seventy-five millions loaned as a bluff. Banks crashed in America and Europe, investment houses failed. Not a day passed without new suicides or prison sentences, or bankruptcies born of the Beckman collapse somewhere in the world. In New York, the house of Watts and Sandover ceased to exist, and one day Miss Olivia read in the papers that Herbert Watts (the nervous one) had shot himself accidentally in a duck-blind in Maryland, although it was not the season for ducks. And in the course of the investigation she read of the mysterious telegram sent from Sarsavina to Watts and Sandover, which had started the ball a-rolling. They could not discover who had sent it, but concluded that it came from some one, a secretary, perhaps, very close to Beckman, who had betrayed him because of a grudge. There was a widespread belief that it had been sent by the mysterious Madame de Jongh herself.

It was all very exciting. For the first time in her life, Miss Olivia knew that she was important. It did not matter to her that no one else knew it.

But there was one other person who knew. In Budapest, in a café, Madame de Jongh, with her hair dyed and her sharp bulging eyes hidden behind spectacles, hungrily read every word in the newspaper accounts of the investigation about the mysterious telegram from Sarsavina, and suddenly she understood everything.

The season came to an end, and Serafina packed Miss Olivia's trunks for the journey to Biarritz, where she was to spend a month before going to Paris. She was the last guest to leave the hotel, and she was not sorry to leave. It would be pleasant to be in a new place with new people, new scandals, and new stories. And she liked the luxury of the big hotel overlooking the Bay of Biscay.

On the day she was to leave she received two letters, one from the bank and one from Watts and Sandover. She never had any other letters, and she felt no surprise now, since her quarterly deposit slip was already overdue. So while Serafina packed she opened the letter from the bank.

She did not look at the check and read the letter instead. It began:

*Dear Miss Jenkins:
We are enclosing your
quarterly deposit slip and
regret to call your attention to
the fact that it is smaller than
usual....*

She read on to the end of the letter and then read it through again as if the news it contained had hypnotized her. Dazed, she tore open the letter from Watts and Sandover. Its first sentence also contained the phrase, "we regret to say." It was

signed, not by one of the firm, but by the name of a strange lawyer. Her thin, blue-veined hands began to shake so that the letter slipped from them and fluttered to the floor. Slowly she picked up the check. But something had gone wrong, something dreadful. Instead of the usual comforting figures, instead of reading a sum which began with the figure ten and ran into five numbers, she saw written plainly the sum, "*Four hundred and sixty-four dollars and eighty-two cents.*"

She had never known anything about business and now she did not know in the least what the letters meant. It was all so complicated and confusing, that her head reeled. The only thing she understood were the figures on the deposit slip—the withered sum written both in figures and spelled out so that there could be no mistake. Four hundred and some dollars. That multiplied by four made only a little more than twelve hundred dollars a year.

She asked Serafina to give her a little brandy, and when she felt less shaky she rose and went down the stairs to the office of her friend, the proprietor. He would understand. He could explain it all to her, as he always did. If what she thought was true, the bank must have made a mistake.

She found him behind his desk, smooth and neat, as he always was, but touched by the strange melancholy which had settled over him since the Beckman scandal. In a feeble voice she told him what she wanted and held out the letters. Slowly he read the two letters through to the end, and as he read, she saw, with her experienced, sharp old eyes, that the color went slowly out of his face. Before he had finished she cried out: "Tell me! Tell me what it all means!"

The proprietor looked at her, swallowed once or twice, and then in a low voice said, "It means, mademoiselle, that most

of your money is gone. It means that it went in the Beckman crash.”

She stared at him in silence with a terrible vacant look in her eyes because she wasn't seeing him at all. She was seeing all those untidy, shabby boarding-houses and *pensions* where she had spent most of her life. They rose before her now in a panorama of horror—all the dark, narrow passages, the gloomy bedrooms, the zinc bathtubs, the dreadful food and the insolent servants. She had driven Beckman from her rooms, but somehow, in a way she did not understand, she had driven herself with him.

“I, too, lost everything in the world,” the proprietor was saying. “I haven't a sou, not a sou. All that money is gone—all that money I had saved to buy a hotel for myself. I even had to pay the undertaker.”

But she didn't hear him or answer him. She began suddenly to laugh. It was a horrible witch-like chuckle, so shrill and so mad that the proprietor looked at her with new fear in his eyes.

“It doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense,” she cackled. “I was wrong. I wasn't David. I was only Samson.”

Then suddenly, before he could reach her, she pitched forward on her face, her stick and the little bag in which she carried her tatting falling with her.

The Paris *Herald* printed a line or two about the death and burial of Miss Olivia Jenkins in the Protestant Cemetery of Sarsavina. Bankers must always be respectable men; it is a part of their business. And so they saw to that. But to the newspapers and their readers, so busy with the great business

men who had been duped by Beckman, it meant nothing at all. None of them had ever heard of Miss Olivia Jenkins. Only to Madame de Jongh, hiding in Budapest, could it have meant anything, and she had quite forgotten the old lady's name. When she thought of her, it was as The Listener.

III. *Fourteen Years After*

AS she laid down the last card and took in the final trick of the rubber it seemed to Mona that something strange had happened to the smoking-room and to all the people sitting about her. All the harsh and brittle atmosphere of the gaudy room was suddenly muted and even the glittering light from the chandeliers turned gray and dim. It was not, she knew, that anything had gone wrong with the whirring dynamos or the great shining engines far belowdeck. She knew dimly that the grayness came from inside herself and that it was born neither of seasickness nor of having drunk too much. The ship was still as a skyscraper and she knew all about how it felt to be drunk.

This curious isolated moment of disillusionment was a new experience rather like something happening in a nightmare, especially when she looked at the other faces about her and saw them change as if in each case one mask had been slipped off and another donned to take its place, subtly, quickly, almost with malice. In the dimness she saw old Mrs. Williston's smooth, enameled, expressionless face grow sharp and haggard, voracious and cruel, above the tiny band of black velvet which encircled her sagging, withered throat—old Mrs. Williston who had once been so famous as a beauty that people had stood on chairs to look at her when she came into a ballroom. Violet Williston, whose whole life had been a succession of triumphs, was suddenly a bitter, defeated, shrewish old woman. And Tom Sayres, sitting there

beside her, returning from Carlsbad from the cure he had taken for the last time, not because he expected to recover, but because he expected to die. His handsome face had gone soft and sagging and empty and frightened.

And opposite him, Pat, too, appeared to have undergone a change. His ravaged good looks seemed all at once depraved and empty, and the weak mouth which was his one bad point appeared to encompass all the weakness and indulgence in the world. But of them all, Fanny was worst. In her the sudden change seemed to have concentrated itself in her eyes. They had grown hard, Mona thought, like the agate marbles she had played with as a little girl, and they had a queer empty staring expression which was terrifying. It was worse when Fanny looked at Pat. So, Mona thought, with a mind which suddenly saw and understood everything, the Sphinx must have regarded her victims. It was a strange look in which misery and fear and insatiable desire were all mingled together.

“A hungry look,” thought Mona. “That’s what it is. A hungry look!”

They all had it, all those smart, middle-aged women who for fifteen years had been rushing about over the face of Europe, through the corridors of the Ritz in Paris, into ballrooms in London, hurrying back and forth across the ocean on huge glittering ships like the *Atlantis*. For a second she had a vision of them in armies with glittering eyes like rats hurrying this way and that. And then all at once she felt sick.

The moment of clairvoyance and revelation passed and she thought, “Am I going to be ill?” and then it seemed to her that she could endure the brilliance of the lights no longer,

and leaning back in her chair, she let the cards fall to the table and pressed her hands over her eyes.

At the same time she heard Pat's pleasant, good-natured voice saying: "What is it, Mona? Are you ill?" and something in the sound and quality of the voice made her want to cry. She answered him with her thin hands still pressed against her eyes. "No, I don't think so."

And then the dead, polite voice of Mrs. Williston. "Perhaps we had better stop playing. We've only begun the new rubber." It was the voice of a mummy.

"No. I'll be all right in a moment."

Pat rose and pushed back his chair, and with her eyes closed Mona knew exactly how he looked and how Fanny looked, watching him hungrily.

"I think you ought to have some sleep. You haven't been to bed until dawn since we sailed," said Pat. "Come along. I'll go with you."

Before she could answer him, she heard Fanny saying in her sharp, common voice, "No, I'll go with her."

Fanny must not go. That she could not endure—having Fanny patronize and paw her. She thought, "Am I going to be ill?"

"Have a drink!" said Tom Sayres. "That'll make you feel better." She heard him lifting the champagne from the bucket and she felt a swift impulse to push over the table and, seizing the bottle, to strike him full in the face with it. Something in what he said and in the sound of his voice was insulting and full of implications, of all the things she had done, and all the things which she knew were said of her. He had spoken as if she were a street woman. The contempt was

there, hidden away beneath the ice of his politeness. Tom Sayres was a gentleman of the old school, and she knew what that was with the same sudden clarity. It meant arrogance, intolerance, stupidity, hypocrisy, ignorance of life outside his own little protected circle.

She thought: "I must count ten before I speak. It's always my tongue which gets me into trouble and I'm so tired I don't want any trouble." And for a moment she waited quietly. Then she let her hands fall into her lap and said: "I think I *will* have to stop. I'm all right." She rose and said: "You needn't come with me—any of you. I'm all right. Tired, that's all. I haven't been sleeping well." She wanted to look at Pat in order to reassure him, but she dared not, on account of Fanny. Those hard, expressionless eyes were watching them both.

Clinging to the back of the chair for support, she said: "Will some one find Janey and say that I've gone to bed? She's probably somewhere with that Allen boy."

"I will," said Pat, and Fanny interrupted. "No. I want you to play piquet with me." Mona thought: "Fanny's a fool! Why doesn't she leave him in peace," and aloud she said: "Good night. I'll be all right in the morning," and in a strange fashion she heard her own voice as if she heard it for the first time—low and rather hoarse—"a whisky voice" Pat called it. She could not remember when he had said it, but she remembered where it had been said—in a speakeasy with flat doors that were gilded and covered with mirrors.

Then she gathered up her bag and gloves and forced herself to smile a smile which seemed to break her lips and face as if they were glass instead of flesh, and went out of the bar along the passage which led to her cabin, wondering what

they would say of her, now that she was gone. Every sound seemed to touch her nerves, and she heard sharply the faint swish-swish of the black satin she wore as she walked along the passage. It would be all stained and dirty around the hem, but she did not care. She had a feeling that in any case she would never wear it again.

In her cabin she found her maid on her knees before the open wardrobe trunk, delicately wrapping her clothes in tissue-paper. The trunk stood open in the middle of the floor, and on the gilt chairs of the little sitting-room lay undergarments and blouses, little bundles of handkerchiefs and scarfs. It was a modern room, flat and plain in its lines, but ornate in the design of the paneling and the upholstery, glittering with mirrors and chromium. It had the overdone air necessary to a *suite de luxe*. The maid was a thick Frenchwoman of middle age, with a big solid bosom and a plain face, written over with common sense. She had the beginnings of a mustache and a hairy mole on her chin.

When Mona opened the door and saw her at work, she again experienced a faint sense of dizziness and thought: "I must be crazy. We aren't landing tomorrow." She felt a sharp necessity to know that she was not completely lost in confusion and she said, "We aren't landing tomorrow." The woman answered her in French without looking up, "Yes, madame, if there's no accident. We have broken a record. We're due in tomorrow morning. I've left out the gray suit and everything you'll need with it. I shan't close the trunk."

"It's too fast. I don't want to travel that fast. I can't bear it."

“It’s all right to go slow if one likes the sea,” answered the maid. “For myself, I’m always terrified. The crossing can’t be short enough.”

As she walked over to the mirror, Mona thought, “She’s never complained in all these years. She’s crossed the ocean thirty times with me, and every time she was terrified and never said anything.”

Regarding herself in the mirror, she wondered whether it was the glass itself or her own weariness which made her face seem so tired and yellow and ill. “I’ve never looked like that before,” she thought. “What can be the matter with me?”

Turning, she stood for a moment regarding Jeanne’s back and something in its solidity and strength roused in her a sudden emotion compounded of gratitude and envy. It occurred to her all at once that Jeanne was at the moment the person nearest to her in all the world. Out of the hundreds and thousands of people she knew, among all the “friends,” Jeanne alone and Jeanne’s broad, solid, quiet back were alone *real*. Jeanne she could always count on, but who else was there out of all those hundreds and thousands of people she knew? All the rest was a phantasmagoria of ghosts and shadows out of which she seemed tonight to have emerged into a dreadful loneliness. This solid figure kneeling on the floor, wearing cotton underwear, with a roll of money fastened into her stocking just below her garter, was real, like the wind and the sea beyond the window of her cabin. Jeanne *knew* her, the good and the bad in her, all that was mean or generous. For more than ten years Jeanne had known her, through all the things which had happened to her. She thought: “There must be something decent in me or Jeanne wouldn’t have stuck to me all the years. I can’t be completely

lousy.” And now Jeanne had to be sent away. “And I’ll have nobody,” she thought—“nobody.” And she was ashamed that she had brought the maid with her on this last trip. Now, terrified, Jeanne would have to recross the Atlantic on a slow boat to return to France just because she, Mona, could not bear to pack for herself.

Envy of Jeanne swept over her, not corroding, bitter envy, but a gentle, pathetic envy of the simplicity of Jeanne’s firm character and the quiet order of her existence. What peace one must have who knew order and quiet, and was content with it.

In the midst of her thoughts she saw the maid turn her broad back slowly, as if she were aware of Mona’s scrutiny, and look at her. Then slowly she rose from her kneeling position.

“You look ill, madame.”

“I know.”

“You ought to go to bed.”

“Yes.”

“I’ll help you undress.”

Mona made no resistance and Jeanne pulled the dress over her head with gentle, sure hands. Mona thought, “Day after tomorrow she won’t be here to help me any more. There will be no one to press my clothes and help me to dress and pack and unpack.” And she experienced a kind of nausea at the thought of her own helplessness and the squalor of living without a maid; but she could not help thinking, half-humorously, that once long ago the idea of a maid would have seemed fantastic to her, that once she had done everything for herself even in a pinch to washing her own

stockings. “Long ago”—the phrase fastened itself in her brain, echoing there. It was long ago, ages ago, centuries ago. And it was different then. Now she was too tired and too corrupted and too old to do without a maid. “Long ago”—then life had been solid like Jeanne’s life.

She knew that she ought to break the news to Jeanne that she would have to go, but she could no more do it now than she had been able to a month ago. The longer she waited, it seemed, the more difficult it became. It wasn’t fair to Jeanne, and unless she did it tonight she would have to break the news tomorrow. That was the limit, the very end of the voyage. It was the finish of the old life and the beginning of—what? That she could not answer.

There was, she knew, only one way of keeping Jeanne, and while Jeanne pulled off her thin stockings she kept trying to decide whether it was better to have Jeanne and the thin stockings with old Ainslee or to take the jump into the dark, alone and free.

“I’m not going to bed,” she told Jeanne. “I can’t sleep, and if I try it’s worse. I’m going to stay on the chaise-longue until I feel sleepy.”

“I’ll get some bromides,” said Jeanne. “You haven’t any left.”

“Thanks,” said Mona, and Jeanne went out to fetch the bromides from her cabin belowdeck.

When the door had closed behind her, Mona rose and returned, as if fascinated, to the big mirror to regard herself again in the hope that she did not look so badly. But the image returned, the same image she had seen so surely a little while before. It was the face of a woman on the verge of middle age, not yet old, but no longer in her first youth when

it did not matter whether she was tired or not. There were lines in it, little lines about the eyes, little bitter lines about the mouth. The dull red-gold hair was soft and lovely, but the face—she looked sharply into the reflection of her own eyes, searching, without knowing it, for something of which she was terrified. At the moment it was not there and she told herself it must never come, never, whatever else happened. Never that desperate look, empty and restless and ravenous and unhappy, which changed women's eyes into little round marbles. The look that was in Fanny's eyes must never come to her, the look that was in the eyes of so many women she knew. "The hungry look"—that was it.

"I am thirty-six," she thought. "I ought not to look like this." Thirty-six was a good age for a woman in these days, an age when she should know what she ought to know, when she was free and still had her looks. "No," she thought, "I ought not to look this way."

Long ago—how long was it, fourteen, fifteen, nearly sixteen years now, since the war had ended? For fifteen years she had had a good time.

The door opened softly and Jeanne came in, bringing the bromides. Her mistress did not even hear the door opening. She was standing as if enchanted before the glass.

The smoking-room shook with the vibration of the ship's motors. They were being driven to make the new record, and the paneling creaked and from time to time the card table trembled as if seized by a sudden attack of palsy. "Haste!" said the quivering ship, and "Time!" Time was passing, second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour. "Haste!" said the huge quivering ship. "Haste, for time flies past us!"

For a moment, after Mona left the smoking-room, there was an uneasy silence about the bridge table, and into the silence the faint creaking of the driven ship forced its way loudly. Old Tom Sayres stared before him, seeing nothing, silent in the fierce secrecy of his own cold, disciplined nature. Fanny lighted a cigarette and made up her face for the tenth time during the evening, examining it scrupulously and boldly. She talked too much and had the fidgety air of a woman who never dared to be alone nor to remain still, lest reality steal up and take possession of her. She was always lighting a cigarette or making up her tired face or shuffling the cards or arranging her dyed hair. Pat rattled the champagne-bottle in the bucket and poured himself another drink. Old Mrs. Williston sat silent and upright in the impregnable Edwardian hypocrisy which revealed nothing, an ancient fortress taken and retaken countless times, but still standing, grim and gray.

It was old Tom Sayres who broke the nervous silence. "My God!" he said. "They needn't shake us to pieces trying to beat a record by minutes."

"It's business," said Mrs. Williston, sourly. "Always business. It's *chic* to take a fast boat. If she can make it in four days flat, all the fools in creation will want to cross on her." She raised her champagne-glass, and her voice faded into nothing as if she were so bored that she did not care how the speech she had unwisely begun should end, as if nothing which she or anyone else had to say could be worth listening to.

Pat poured another drink, and Fanny raised her slightly withered hands, covered with too many rings, to take the glass from him. The face she could preserve after a fashion,

but the hands were old. Nothing could be done about the hands. There was always a shock when one's gaze wandered from Fanny's face to the dry, wrinkled hands.

"Don't, darling," she said. "You've had enough. You'll only feel worse in the morning."

Deftly he evaded the thin hand. "There's always more in the morning," he said, "where this came from."

She started to speak, and then stopped abruptly, turning away to pick up another cigarette. Mrs. Williston's shrewd old eyes noticed her face and divined what it was she had meant to say and dared not, because she dared never to threaten Pat. Mrs. Williston knew, for she had passed that way herself, long ago, not in the brazen fashion of Fanny, openly dragging a younger man through hotels, liners, and resorts, flaunting him before all the world, but discreetly, although none the less painfully, in a small house in Culross Street. To keep a man like Pat you had to be careful all the time. Marriage, after all, was better in some ways.

"Well," said Tom Sayres, "I'm going for my walk. I don't know why we're sitting here. You'd think it was a wake." He rose painfully, opening up his great length rather like a carpenter's rule, each joint creaking and painful with arthritis. He turned to Mrs. Williston. "Are you coming with me, Violet?"

"I might as well." She rose, and it was a brisk, brittle rising. She was rather like a grim old bird, very thin and burnished. She slipped her thin arms through her old-fashioned fur jacket and gathered the feather boa about her throat. "Is there a wind?" she asked.

Tom answered her, sourly: "Of course there's a wind. We're at sea."

She took out a bit of chiffon and wound it with maddening slowness about her carefully waved hair. "I can't bear to be blown to bits," she said. She had all the irritating indifference to the convenience of others which belongs to a woman who has always been rich and once was beautiful and spoiled. Old Sayres had been seized with a sudden panic to escape, and here she was keeping him there among those people he hated while she arranged the folds of a veil to satisfy her vanity.

No one answered her. Fanny was not listening and Pat was a little drunk.

"Good night," said Tom Sayres.

"Good night," said Pat. Fanny did not answer them. She was dealing the hands for piquet. With a mocking gallantry old Tom helped Mrs. Williston through the door on to the deck. There was something oddly old-fashioned about the gesture. The musicians in the *salon* beyond stopped playing and began putting away their instruments.

The two hands were dealt and Fanny picked hers up. She regarded it, arranged it carefully, and then looked at Pat. He had not touched his cards and was staring at his glass. For a long time she sat watching him, but he appeared to be utterly unaware of her. At last she said, "Are you going to play or not?"

Slowly he turned his handsome, dissipated face and regarded her. For a moment she was silent. Then he pushed the cards away from him.

"No," he said.

"Very well."

She threw down her cards and presently said, "What's the matter with you?"

“Nothing.”

“I know why you’ve changed.”

Again he was silent, and she continued, “I needn’t ask.”

“Oh, Fanny, let me alone, for God’s sake!”

“Let you alone! Do I ever bother you? Do I ever ask anything of you?”

He did not answer her with words, but only raised his blue eyes and looked at her. Then slowly he laughed.

“You are a swine!” she said.

“I know it, Fanny. Tell me so again and again. I’d like it. I’m so God-damned sick of everything.”

She rose and slipped the cards into their little case. They made a sharp little click and the sound had a curious effect, as if she had said something cruel and biting.

“I’m going to bed,” she murmured.

“All right.”

“Don’t sit here all night, getting drunk.”

“I can’t sleep.”

Suddenly she leaned over him, “I’m sorry, Pat. I’m sorry if I lose my temper sometimes.”

“That’s all right. It’s my fault, too. I’m fed up, fed up, fed up.”

She looked about her, and when she saw that the smoking-room was empty, she began to stroke his head with her thin, dry, faintly wrinkled hand. At the touch he started, and then, closing his eyes, he submitted.

“Why don’t we go away somewhere?” she said. “To Africa, to India, all alone, just you and I.”

He laughed and she said, “Why do you laugh in that ugly way?”

“At the idea of our being alone anywhere. If we were in the middle of Africa, you’d be giving dinners for cannibal kings and their most notorious citizens. In a week you’d know all the leading trollops and swindlers—everybody whose name got into the papers.”

“I wouldn’t, Pat. I promise.”

“Besides, I don’t want to be alone—not unless I went into a cave somewhere and built a wall up behind me.”

“You’ve been drinking too much.”

All at once he drew away from her. “Let me and my drinking alone. I’ll do as I damned please.” She did not answer him and he stood up. For a moment she watched him. Then she said, “It’s spoiling your looks.”

“I wish to God I was as ugly as sin. I wish to God I’d been born ugly and humpbacked. I’d have been a lot better off. I wouldn’t have had a lot of women running after me from the moment I was old enough to get into bed. Let me alone, Fanny. For God’s sake, let me alone!”

Slowly she picked up the cards and her vanity case, and without looking at him she walked out of the bar. When she had gone, he sat down again and, after pouring himself a fresh glass of champagne, closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair.

Outside on the deck Tom Sayres and Mrs. Williston began their promenade in silence. The wide deck was inclosed by glass, but now and then a gust of wind whipping round a corner cut across them, throwing them for a moment off

balance, so that Mrs. Williston, who was a dry thin old lady, fell against Tom Sayres, clinging to his arm for support. She weighed nothing. She was like a feather. Each time the wind struck them the bony hand rose to press the veil closer to her head. It was a gesture as old as herself, which long ago had become a part of her manner and her very soul—never to be seen with a ruffle crumpled or a hair out of place; never to betray herself before the world, no matter what she did in secrecy. She had been brought up to believe that even her soul must be kept in place, and so she had lived for nearly seventy years. It was as if the whole of her were embodied in that single flattering gesture.

They walked in silence, thinking, twice round the long deck, and then slowly a sense of uneasy embarrassment took possession of them, troubling their silence. It was not because they were strangers and felt the nervous obligation of polite conversation. They had known each other for fifty years. They had even crossed on the same ships half a dozen times.

Mrs. Williston felt a desire to speak, but she could not think how to begin, reflecting that after a long lifetime of teas and dinners and receptions, a lifetime spent largely in chatter, it was odd she should not know how to begin a conversation. The vibration of the great ship, driven to the limit of its power, seemed to pass through her own thin, small body. It was as if she, too, were trembling and creaking like the rigging, the woodwork, and the metal. It was an unendurable sensation, like a long-drawn note which sets the teeth on edge. When a gust of wind, tangy with salt, swept across their path, she shivered. "Haste!" the whole ship seemed to say. "Faster and faster!"

At last she said: "You needn't run, Tom. I'm out of breath. Besides, it's not too good for your heart."

He coughed. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize."

"You've been going faster and faster. You won't arrive anywhere. You're only going round and round a deck."

"I forgot how long my legs are."

"That's the trouble nowadays with everybody—always rushing round and round, never getting anywhere."

They fell into silence once more, making two rounds of the deck before her nerves cried out again that one of them must speak, that in some way her loneliness and Tom's must be invaded, that somehow communication must be established between these two creatures so incrustured by the conventions and hypocrisies of a lifetime. And presently she was aware that an old desire had returned to her which she had not known in forty years. It was the hunger to *know* Tom, a passion to get inside him, to be a part of him. That had never happened, even long ago when he had come secretly to Culross Street to share her bed. For the first time since then she was again aware, sharply, that in all her affairs, even with Tom, whom she had loved most of all, she had never known what love was. Even when she had lain in his arms they had been two individuals terribly troubled and separated by consciousness of self, of indecorousness, and of guilt. For a second it occurred to her that maybe it was better to be like Fanny and shamelessly flaunt your lover in the face of the world. And then she remembered the haunted look in Fanny's eyes. That, after all, was not love, either—lust and possession—but not love. You only had to watch Fanny and that dissipated boy to know what it was. Her fastidious nature withdrew again, shuddering, and again the need to

communicate, to melt herself somehow into Tom's personality and very soul, returned to her sharply. Long ago the need had come to her through love for him. Now it was born of coldness, loneliness, and fright.

It was more than forty years since she saw him for the first time at Cowes, and they had never known each other.

"What are you thinking about?" she said, suddenly, aware at the same time that this was the stupidest of all ways to gain what she wanted. He was on his guard at once and only answered, after they had turned the corner of the deck:

"Mona," he said, and she knew that he had evaded her again.

Without thinking of it, they slackened their pace a little.

"Yes," said Mrs. Williston, "she's gone to pieces badly."

"She's tired. You can't lead that kind of life and not get tired."

"They say she has lost all her money."

"All her alimony must be gone, with her first husband dead and Eddie bankrupt."

Half maliciously and with satisfaction Mrs. Williston said, "She isn't as young as she once was."

"She must be well on her way to forty."

"What do you think she'll do?"

"Marry again, I suppose."

"It's not so easy the third time, at her age."

"She could marry an older man."

This remark Mrs. Williston considered for a time in silence, and presently she said: "I don't think an older man

could put up with her. I don't think he'd want to marry her ... not a flibberty-gibbet like that."

"She's traveling grand luxe in the best cabin of the most expensive ship in the world."

"It's a pity. She was a nice little girl once."

Old Tom laughed. "We were all nice once. Even the most disagreeable."

"At least children have some nice qualities in the beginning," said Mrs. Williston. "We can try to keep up appearances. We needn't act like kitchen maids in public. Look at Fanny—dressing like a girl of twenty, dyeing her hair, having her face made over, running after that Allison man and making scenes in public. She must be fifty if a day."

"Forty-eight," said Tom Sayres. "Anyway, Mona can't behave like that. It takes money—as much money as Fanny has—and Mona hasn't got it any longer."

Mrs. Williston halted abruptly. "Look," she said. "There's a ship passing."

They went to the edge of the deck and stood in silence, watching. It was another liner, brilliantly lighted, bound eastward for France. The big searchlight of their own ship suddenly revealed her tiers of decks and the French flag.

"It's the *Ile de France* homeward bound."

"There's something sad about ships," said Mrs. Williston, in a low voice.

"Yes, sad and beautiful."

The other liner slipped slowly away into the darkness until her hulk was no longer visible, but only the lights glittering like tiny diamonds against the horizon. For a second, as the ship passed, they were near to the thing Violet Williston

desired, and then slowly she knew that the moment had passed. It was a thing you could not force. And now it was gone.

Slowly they resumed their walk. “When do we arrive?” she asked.

“Tomorrow morning, if we keep on at this speed.”

“I hate it.”

“Why?”

“I’m too old to be in such a hurry.”

“The older I get the more I want speed. There’s so little time and so much to do. We’ve wasted so much time and done so little, Violet.”

Mrs. Williston laughed and pulled the veil more tightly about her hair. “Let’s not have regrets. It’s a waste of time.”

Beneath the speech she was thinking that what she had suspected must be true, that they had told him in Vienna that he had to die, and that no ship would ever take him eastward again to France. Suddenly she wanted to cry, but no tears came. Her eyes felt dry and burning. Years, years had passed since she had wept.

Slowly she was aware of Tom’s voice saying words which she would have said were impossible for him to utter or for her to hear. “One thing I never regretted, Violet, was what happened to us.”

She tried to speak and failed, and when at last she had found control of her voice it sounded far off and strange and hard, and not at all as she meant it to sound.

“Yes, it was good. I know that now.”

“The best thing was that nobody ever knew.”

“Yes.” She pulled the veil half over her face. “Let’s not talk about it.”

“Sometimes I’ve thought it would have been better if you’d divorced, and married me.”

“No ... no. But let’s not talk about it.” Abruptly she said: “I think Fanny’s young man is casting eyes at Mona. It’s a good thing we’re landing tomorrow.”

The moment had come near for a second time, and now it was herself, terrified, who had destroyed it.

“You’re wrong. It’s Janey he likes.”

“Maybe. I don’t think so. Fanny’s jealousy fixes on the girl just because she’s young. Fanny hates her for that. It’s Mona, I tell you. I wasn’t born yesterday. It must be hell for Fanny, always frightened of every woman younger than herself.”

They passed the doorway of the main stairway, and Mrs. Williston halted. “I’m cold, Tom. I’m going to bed.” There was no use going on. She knew that she had not the courage. It seemed to her that she was like a young girl eager to excite and seduce a man, but terrified when she succeeded.

He took her hand and kissed it. “Good night, my dear.”

“I like you tonight, Tom. It’s the first time I’ve seen you in twenty years when you’ve been like ... like the old Tom.” She was aware agonizingly of the presence between them of the ghost of an ancient physical intimacy, decayed now and futile. It was as if Tom was all that was left of her old life, as if when he were gone there would be nothing.

He did not answer her, but only pressed her hand again to his thin old lips. That was not what she had wanted. She felt a sharp, painful desire to return, to go back and live her life all over again. It was as if she had a sudden vision of herself,

moving along the high narrow corridor of the years alone, empty, outwardly respectable and a little hypocritical, selfish and shallow, growing older and older.

“Good night, Tom.”

“Good night.”

The door closed behind her and she made her way down the great chromium-plated stairway and along the passage to her cabin, thinking how pleasant it would be if Tom could have returned with her, and that he could not, not because it would be scandalous, but because, if anyone discovered them, it would be ridiculous. She only wished not to be alone, not to think about herself and the vanity and emptiness of her long life.

In her cabin she unwrapped the veil from round her head, and undressed slowly. Then she carefully massaged her face with cold cream and wrapped a bit of chiffon round her hair to keep the neat waves in order. She regarded her own face, which had once been so beautiful and now was so old and bitter. She thought, “If only I had been ugly, I would have been luckier.”

At last she put out the lights and lay down, but she did not sleep. The great ship groaned and creaked and the throbbing of the engines shook her tired body. She wasn't any longer a selfish, bitter, fashionable, domineering old dowager who had lived all her life selfishly for pleasure. She was just a tired old woman, empty as a waiting tomb.

When she had gone old Tom Sayres turned and began again the monotonous pacing round and round the quivering, driven ship, and he kept thinking of what Violet had said about going round and round and always arriving in the same

place. And slowly he came to see that this aimless marching was very like their lives. They had gone round and round, terrified always of being bored, terrified of being alone, and all the time life had been hurrying along like this driven ship, until at last they were near the end of the voyage, knowing it when it was too late.

He did not know how much longer his own voyage would last, but he knew that he must soon come to the end. Perhaps it was a matter of days, perhaps of weeks, perhaps even of months, but even one year—no—that was too much to hope for. And now as he neared the end of the voyage he felt a cruel desire for it to go on and on. Now that it was nearly over he no longer need hurry in order to make more money, to find more pleasure, to keep always a little ahead of all the others. Walking endlessly round and round the quivering ship, he felt a passionate hunger to live, not in order to live over all the things he had done, but to live another life, which included the things he had not done. What good was it, he thought with bitterness, to be rich, to be powerful, to have lived always in the great world, since none of that could you take with you into the grave. Looking back in the far past, he had been told, when he was a boy, that ambition was a virtue, that success was everything in life. Now when it was nearly over he knew that he had been told lies, bitter corroding lies.

Now, forty years too late, he saw that there was a time, a moment when he might have turned. It was that moment of which Violet had said, almost with passion, “Let’s not talk about it.” She could not really say anything with passion, for long ago whatever passion she had known had been squeezed out of her, until now at the end she was dry as a withered apple.

Forty years ago they might have thrown everything to the winds and run off together, but neither of them had dared to do it. No, it was even worse than that! Neither of them had wanted to do it, for then they had loved the world better than they had loved each other. He was not willing to risk ruin and she was not willing to give up being Mrs. Trevor Williston and live without Williston's great fortune. And so they loved secretly, keeping sordid rendezvous, hiding their passion shamefully, not because they were ashamed of it, but because if the world had ever discovered it they would be ruined. And now he was an old man, rich, successful, honored by people who thought money the most important thing in the world (and for those people he had only contempt now); and she was a virtuous and respected old woman, the widow of Trevor Williston, living always in luxury, immensely fashionable, but a dry shell. They had had what they wanted, and he knew now that it was worth nothing. For no reason at all there returned to him the sudden vivid memory of a delirious night spent with a street woman in Paris when he was a young man—a shameless night of depravity. He could not remember her name or what she looked like, but he knew now that that night had been better than all the years with Violet because it had been shameless and direct and primitive and sensual. Even in his memory of it there was a reality which made his blood course a little faster in his tired, brittle old veins.

He tried to feel the peace and the resignation which he had been told came to men on the eve of death, but it would not come to him. In its place came only the bitter desire to live, not to go on as he had always lived, but, like Faust, to begin again, a young man, knowing what he had learned, and only come to understand at the very end, aboard this hurrying ship.

The ship plunged into a huge wave, and in a gust of wind the spray of salt was driven across his tired face. It was damp and wet and alive, and he thought: "Perhaps if I go to the hurricane deck in the open wind it will make me feel better. Perhaps then I shall sleep."

He climbed the steep companionway, wondering whether he had the strength to face the gale on an unprotected deck, and when he reached the top the wind struck him full in the face, taking his breath away and driving him against a lifeboat. But it did not frighten him. In spite of his age and his weakness, he felt rising deep inside him a strange sensation of life. It seemed to begin at the core of him and to spread outward and outward. It was a curious, mystical feeling in which he felt that he, Tom Sayres, a doddering old man, no longer existed as an individual, but only as a minute part of the night and of the universe, a little part of the sky and the stars and the sea. Death, he thought, must be like that. It was not an unpleasant feeling. This world, this universe, all those people belowdeck would go on never missing Tom Sayres, forgetful that he had even existed with his troubles and ambitions, vanity and worries. To the thing that was Tom Sayres he was important, a moment ago so important that nothing else in the world existed, but in the plan of things he was nothing at all. And suddenly he understood how profoundly wonderful it might be to be a person of no importance, with no ambitions and no selfishness and no hunger for pleasure and no need to vindicate oneself either to oneself or to the world.

He was glad now that he had come to the hurricane deck. When he recovered his breath, he set out to find a sheltered spot where he might sit quietly, forgotten and alone, looking

up at the sky. That, he thought, must be the very beginning of resignation and of peace. It was instinct—like an animal searching for a place to die alone and in peace.

A hundred feet down the deck he found the corner he sought. It was sheltered by a huge ventilator and an enormous box which he supposed contained life-preservers. And some one had left a steamer chair. He stretched himself out and closed his eyes. There was peace here, away from all the rich and frivolous and noisy people belowdeck, the silly people for whom this great ship had been built, for whom it was now hurrying, driven till the rigging sang and the steel plates creaked.

“A traveling anthill,” he thought, “filled with ants on a hurry to make money or because they’re fashionable or because they’re fools!” Why was he hurrying? He did not know, except that he was aboard the great new ship out of habit. All his life he had lived and traveled thus. Why? For what? That he could not answer.

For a long time he lay dozing, more asleep than awake, and presently he heard voices. Without opening his eyes, he lay quiet, listening, for he knew one of the voices. It was the voice of his great-niece Janey, young and fresh, and the voice of a young man. He thought, “They will pass me and go on their way if I don’t speak,” for he did not want to be discovered. If he was discovered he would not know what to say, nor how to explain why he was here alone at one o’clock in the morning.

They did not discover him, but they came very near. Without opening his eyes he knew where they were. He heard them laughing and knew that they had spread a blanket and put down cushions a few feet from him just on the other side

of the ventilator. He could not move now. He could not rise and escape without passing them.

He knew who the boy was from his voice and his accent. He knew the rolling R from the Middle West. It was the boy who kept following Janey around, in love with her like a moon-calf—a great uncouth boy, rather untidy and solitary, who never frequented the bar, because he had no money. He had a free passage for writing an article about the great ship and her maiden voyage. He had a square jaw and blue eyes and wore spectacles with steel rims. His name was Hank.

As he listened to the voices, anger took possession of him—anger because Janey had come up here to the hurricane deck away from everyone, with this boy, when she knew that he, her uncle, who spoiled her and planned to leave her half his fortune, disapproved of the boy—anger, too, which he did not clearly understand, because they were young and he was old. Why should she waste herself on this boy who was a nobody, who had nothing, when she could have her choice among young men with money and background.

He heard her saying, in her warm voice, “It’s cozy here.”

“You happy?” asked the boy.

“Yes. You?”

There was a little silence, and then the boy answered. “Yes. In one way.”

“What’s the other way?”

“I’d like it better if I was playing on the square with your uncle.”

Tom Sayres, listening, thought this speech a point in his favor. He could not hear every word they said because of the vibration of the ship and the sound of the wind in the rigging

all about them. He felt uneasy and a little frightened at what he might hear, now that they were talking of him.

“Why does he dislike me?” asked the boy.

Janey laughed. “He doesn’t dislike you. It isn’t that.”

The boy Hank said something which Tom Sayres could not hear, and then he heard Janey’s voice: “It’s not like that. Only for him you don’t exist.”

“How? What do you mean by that?”

“Well, you see, he has a fixed idea of the kind of man I should marry. And you aren’t like that.”

“A rich fellow, I suppose.” And in Hank’s voice there was a trace of bitterness.

“Yes—but a lot more, too. He’s a snob, Uncle Tom. He’s nice in his way, but he’s limited. He’s frightened if he’s faced by anybody who’s not in his own world.”

“Wasn’t he ever poor and young?”

Janey laughed. “No, he was never poor. He had money to begin with, and he was never poor—not like you. And with what he had he made millions. You see, he always had luck all his life.”

“He must have been young once.”

She didn’t answer at once, and Tom Sayres, behind his closed eyes, knew that her brow was wrinkled with thought. He knew her so well that from the tone of her voice he knew her change of expression.

“I suppose he was young once, but it’s hard to imagine. He’s always been so safe. He always liked safe people.”

Again the howl of the wind drowned their speech for a little time, and presently Tom Sayres heard the boy saying, “Do you love me enough to marry me?”

“I don’t know,” said Janey, slowly. “I think so.”

“I think you’d find it was all right,” said Hank, gravely.

Janey laughed, “Three days. That’s pretty quick to decide a thing like that.”

“If your uncle said ‘no,’ what would you do?”

“It wouldn’t make any difference.”

“He’s a damned old fool to think he can interfere,” said the boy, hotly. “He’s an old man. What right has he to interfere with us?”

Behind the ventilator old Tom Sayres found his anger mounting rapidly. Who was this young cub to treat him, Tom Sayres, so scornfully? He was a young fool who knew nothing about the things that mattered in life. It was all right to be scornful of money, but let Janey do without it and she’d see how she liked it. Then he heard her saying: “I wouldn’t mind giving up things like this ship. I’m sick to death of things like that—things that cost lots of money—and I’m sick to death of people you meet where there’s lots of money. Look at the people on this ship! I wouldn’t mind living on seventy-five dollars a week. I think I’d like the change. God! Why is it that very rich people are always such bores?”

Hank answered, more wisely than he knew, old Tom had to admit, “It’s because they don’t know the value of anything.”

Behind the ventilator old Tom Sayres thought: “You talk big, my young lady, but if you didn’t have money you’d talk out of the other side of your mouth. And if you marry that young bounder you may get a chance to find out what it’s like to do without money.”

“We wouldn’t need to have children right away,” said Hank.

“No, I suppose not. I wouldn’t want to wait too long. Sometimes, if a woman waits too long she never has children.”

“I expect to get ahead pretty fast, if I get a break now and then.”

Again the wind swept their words away from Tom Sayres and he felt a desire to draw his steamer chair nearer so that there would no longer be these tantalizing gaps in the conversation, but he dared not do so, for fear of betraying his presence.

Then the wind died away a little and he heard Janey saying: “No, you needn’t worry. I’ll never be like Fanny or Mona. I’d rather die young. It’s not really poor Mona’s fault. She’s like a lot of those people who were in the war when they were young. She’s been on the loose ever since—fourteen years—and I guess there have always been unhappy women like Fanny.” There was a silence, and then Janey said, “We were lucky, Hank.”

“Why?”

“We were only kids when the war finished. People like Mona—all that generation—thought they knew what everything was about, but they didn’t. They just went crazy and tried to be different from everything that went before. Now she’s getting old.”

“How old is she?”

“She must be thirty-five or-six.”

“I suppose that is getting old in a way. Anyway, it’s not being young any more.”

In his hiding-place old Tom Sayres thought: “Old! O my God! These two talking about being old!” He was cold now

and uncomfortable and a little sleepy, but his will did not soften. He saw that somehow he must bring Janey to her senses. She could not throw herself away on this young nobody about whom she knew nothing. No, it was all right to be romantic, but in the end you couldn't live on romance, and Janey, for all her big talk, wasn't meant for that kind of life. She didn't know anything about it. Bitterness and anger swept over him again, a strange blind bitterness, too subtle and too complicated for him to fathom if he had sought to fathom it. It was as if the two hidden in the corner near him were aware of his presence and were mocking him deliberately. He had not meant to eavesdrop on their conversation, but there was nothing left for him to do. It was impossible for him to escape now.

While he listened he came slowly to see that these two, so near him and yet so remote, belonged to another world, different from his own and that of Violet Williston, just as people like Mona and poor Fanny belonged to another world; and looking backward, examining his memories, he saw that none of them, except perhaps Fanny, was old enough to have known what life was like before the war—that old life, he thought bitterly, when one was secure in the faith that nothing could shatter a well-ordered world in which people behaved like ladies and gentlemen and appreciated a good dinner and understood the value of good stocks and bonds. Fanny and Mona belonged to those who had helped to destroy that pleasant agreeable world, and Janey and this crude young bounder had never known what it was like.

Suddenly he wished that he were twenty years older, in order that he might have known twenty years more of that world which had existed before the war. If he were twenty

years older he would be dead now, and no longer would he be hurt and made indignant by the indecencies and extravagances of all this dreadful “modern” life.

“In my day,” he thought (and he meant in Violet’s and his day), “women like Fanny would not have been received or spoken to, women who bought young men for lovers and exhibited their shameless vices publicly.” But nowadays no one seemed to care. Fanny went everywhere. Nobody seemed to care what she did. And Mona, divorced twice at thirty-six, looking old and tired in the very prime of a woman’s life, because she seldom slept before dawn and often drank too much. “Mona,” he thought, bitterly, “who lives in luxury on money paid her by two divorced husbands.” But he felt a sudden warm glow of satisfaction over the gossip that Mona no longer had any money. What would this female grasshopper do now, without money? Where would she end? Perhaps Fanny’s money would vanish, too, the way money had a habit of doing nowadays. What would become of her? She was nothing but an elderly street-walker who happened to be moderately well-born and have money. Oh, it was all right to mock at money, but where were you without it?

No, his world and Violet’s had been the better one. In it there were ladies and gentlemen, and everything wasn’t all mixed up as it was nowadays. In their day they wouldn’t have been forced to sit at the same table with Fanny and her gigolo, a fellow named Pat, about whom no one knew anything. No, he and Violet had been right forty years ago. They had behaved as ladies and gentlemen should behave. No one had known anything. There was never even a whisper of gossip.

And through the disconnected, vague thoughts he kept hearing the conversation of Janey and that bouncer of a boy, talking and talking, happily planning about their future and their sacrifices and arranging about having babies. It made him sick to hear Janey talking earnestly in her warm young voice about things of which a girl of twenty should have known nothing, using words which Violet or himself had never used in mixed company or even between themselves in all their lives.

“If I got a job,” he heard Janey saying, “we could save everything I earned and have a baby in about three or four years.”

“Don’t worry about that,” said the boy. “If you’ll marry me, it will make a great difference. I’ll get ahead much faster that way. Anyway, I wouldn’t live on your money even if the old man *did* leave it to you. We’ve got to get off on our own. It’s the only way I want to get ahead. I wouldn’t live on your money.”

He understood that they were talking about him as if he were already dead and out of the way, and he wondered if it were possible to return after death and listen, as he was listening now, to what people said of you. “Perhaps,” he thought, wildly, “I am already dead.” But the thought passed quickly, for one of his legs was aching and he could hear the wind and feel the awful trembling of the driven ship.

He heard Janey saying: “Uncle Tom isn’t bad, really. He just doesn’t know what it’s all about. He belongs to the old generation who never faced the truth. I guess they must have been awful hypocrites when they were young. They never cared about anything but appearances. When I’m with people like him and old Mrs. Williston I always feel that they’re

playing a game, a kind of complicated game which is going to save their own faces and the faces of everybody around them.” The wind tore a gap in her speech and then he heard her saying: “I don’t see how people like Uncle Tom and Mrs. Williston could ever be in love or know what love is like. They’re so stiff and empty and complicated.”

Then the howling wind intervened again and he heard no more until the boy said: “Don’t worry about your uncle. We can get on without him. I’m going to be rich and famous.” And then, “Kiss me before you say good night.”

The silence which followed was unbearable and at last he heard them laughing, and presently he knew they had picked up the blanket and cushions and then they were gone.

He was glad that they were gone. Left alone under the clear sky, the tenseness went out of his tired old body and he began to plot maliciously, like an old spider, deciding that whatever happened, Janey would never become the wife of that unknown young upstart. Tomorrow he would talk to her and tell her that it was impossible. He would take her with him far away from the boy, and she would forget him. He would tell her that if she married him she would never have a penny of inheritance. In his bitterness he even thought of hiring some one to investigate the boy’s life and past. She was not to marry him and ruin all the security and background which was hers by right, the inheritance of his own life and of that world which had existed before the war. Violet could perhaps help him. She was a clever woman. She could think of many ways.

After a little while he grew more calm and came to one decision. Day after tomorrow they would be in New York and he would go to his lawyer and make a new will. Janey would

not receive a penny so long as she was married to that young upstart.

The decision brought him a kind of peace, as if somehow he and old Violet Williston still had in them the power to strike. They were not yet dead, nor was all decency and breeding and tradition.

The wind blowing in gusts around the ventilator chilled his thin body, but he did not rise and go to his cabin. It was peaceful hidden away in this corner, surrounded by the sea and the night. He drew his knees up toward his chin, folding his lean arms over them, as if in a gesture of defense. Thus in the position in which he had lain, nearly seventy years before, in his mother's womb, the old man fell into a doze.

Belowdeck, after the stolid maid had gone away, Mona did not sleep. She turned out the light, and when she was alone in the dark, restlessness and fear took possession of her and she felt a desire to dress herself and go back to the bar, where she would find people and lights and perhaps music. For fifteen years she had scarcely ever been alone. For fifteen years she had lived in the midst of gaiety, or at least of noise and excitement, and now, although crowds of people bored her and the noise put her nerves on edge, she was drawn back to all that as if it were a kind of punishment from which she would never escape.

She was, she knew, perhaps a trivial woman, but she was not a stupid one, and if there was any strength in her changeable character it lay in the fact that at rare and isolated moments she had a sudden, clear, honest understanding of herself which occurred in a kind of lightning flash. It was not a pleasant experience, and it left her depressed and filled with

a leaden disgust which had the power of destroying in her all desire to go on with life. It was as if everything she did, everything she planned, everything she touched, became ashes. "Why should I move? Why should I stir myself? What is there that could possibly interest or amuse me? What is there that is worth doing?" The questions had a way of buzzing round and round in her head—nothing with which she could annihilate the horrible sense of dullness and the conviction of her own futility.

There was, she had known for a long time now, no way out, save suicide or alcohol. For suicide she had not the courage, since always in the bottom of her heart, even in the blackest moments, there lingered that ghost of curiosity which drove her to go places and to see people even when she was tired—that ghost of curiosity which in honesty she knew was a fear of missing something. Alcohol was the easy way out. A drink or two and she felt more cheerful. Alcohol made her forget herself and find an interest in other people. It was better to be drunk than to think of a self which disgusted you. Alcohol gave her a false energy and even brought back the wit for which she had always been known, the cynical and flippant wit which she hated when she was alone and sober, because it was a part of all the cynicism and triviality which disgusted her. And so she drank more and more.

The bromides the maid brought her had done no good. For a little time in the darkness she struggled against her one weakness, knowing that, once she took a drink, the battle was lost and that in half an hour she would find herself once more in the bar, where she would stay until after daylight, doing and saying things which made her, even when intoxicated, hate herself. In the darkness she fought the desire, because

she knew that each time she lost the fight the whole thing was worse than before. It was a circle; the movement went round and round faster and faster each hour, each day, until at last her nerves creaked like the great liner itself. Faster it went and faster.

She pressed her hands against her eyes and bit her lip, but nothing could drive away the horror of being alone and the terror of thinking. There was no way to put an end to thinking. It went on and on like the drops of water falling upon the bare neck of a prisoner. And presently she began to cry silently. In the darkness she felt the tears run down her face. But while she lay there she knew that all her struggle was for nothing, and she thought: "If only I were not alone. If only there were some one to be kind and decent to me." But there was no one, and her pride made it impossible for her to ask for pity or for gentleness. Whenever she was aware of a gesture of sympathy or a shadow of understanding, something deep within her grew hard as flint and she thrust it from her.

Slowly at last she rose, and without turning on the light crossed the small *salon* into her cabin. Still in the darkness she groped her way to the bed and there beneath the mattress she found the bottle which she hid from Jeanne because she was ashamed to have the maid know that she drank when she was alone. She was aware of what she was doing, and she knew that she willed not to do it, yet she could not help herself. It was as if she were enchanted, and she kept thinking: "I'll only take a little drink. It will make me feel more cheerful and I'll be able to sleep. I shan't be afraid any more."

She found a glass and poured two fingers of whisky into it, holding the glass against the moonlit cabin window, telling herself: “That’s all I’ll take. It won’t make any difference. It will only cheer me.” Yet when she raised it to drink, she was aware of a horrible feeling of finality, as if in a way she was finding that other way out for which she had not the courage. She thought: “This is the slow way, I suppose. Slow or fast, it’s the same thing.”

She shivered a little, and the liquor burned her throat, but in a moment it had a magical effect, for presently regret left her. It was done, and now she would feel better and not be afraid.

Slowly the horror of being alone with herself in the darkness began to leave her, translating itself into a slowly increasing desire to dress once more and go to the bar. In the bar she would find Pat, at any rate. Craftily her mind began to work.

Fanny, she thought, must have gone to bed by now, and Pat would be alone in the bar drinking because he would not go to Fanny’s cabin; and even if Fanny were still up she could outstay her because Fanny, at her age, could not afford to stay up all night. Once Fanny was out of the way, she and Pat could drink together and amuse themselves. They understood each other. They liked a big time, and you couldn’t have a big time with Pat when Fanny was about, watching hungrily.

Slowly she began to feel the warmth of the whisky stealing through her body, and slowly, with the gesture of the enchanted, she slipped off her peignoir and nightgown. By the moonlight which came in at the window she found her underwear, thinking, with a bitter laugh, “When it’s gone I shall never have any as good again.” She could not turn on

the lights, because somehow she felt safer in the darkness. One Mona was battling with the other now, and she was afraid of the lonely Mona. She dared not face her in the mirror. That other Mona was a prude and spoilsport. She couldn't keep her from going back to the bar, but she might follow her about all the evening, corroding all her fun with the acid of doubt and fear. No, she meant to enjoy herself now.

Another little drink would put the other hated Mona out of the running. She would vanish as if she had never existed. Clad only in her underwear, she went back once more to the bedroom and took the whisky-bottle from under the mattress. Once more in the moonlight she poured two fingers into the glass; and as she put down the bottle she heard a knock at the door of the *salon*.

The muffled sound struck at her taut nerves, so that her hand started violently and a little of the whisky ran out of the glass on to her chemise. Then the knock was repeated, gently, as if the person knocking thought her asleep and was apologizing for disturbing her. Yet the errand must be urgent, for the knocking continued, and then slowly she heard some one open the door softly and enter, and she thought, "It must be Pat."

For an instant she was angry at the thought of his daring to come uninvited to her cabin, but the anger passed quickly, and she thought: "What if it is Pat? Let him come! Let him spend the night with me! It's better than being alone!" But she knew that they must be careful on Fanny's account. Fanny was capable of anything.

In the little *salon* beyond the cabin the intruder turned on the light, and Mona, drinking the whisky quickly to steady

her nerves, took a glass of water and hid the bottle beneath the towels. And as she turned to enter the cabin a strange thing happened to her, something which she had never imagined possible.

She was glad that Pat had come to her. In a swift wave, pity and something akin to love swept over her and was gone. Mixed with it was a curious flash of intuition in which she saw herself and Pat together, set apart from all the other people in the world. Bitterly she thought: "We're both down and out. We'll understand each other."

Then she pushed open the door and passed through the cabin to greet him. But instead of Pat, Fanny stood there.

She was standing facing the mirror, with her back to the door. She was still dressed in evening clothes, with a green cloak thrown around her. From the doorway Mona saw the reflection of her face in the mirror. With her finger she was massaging the tired flesh about her drooping mouth, trying, Mona knew, to wear away those hard lines which betrayed all her greed and selfishness.

Then Fanny saw her and turned quickly, with a look of confusion in her hard eyes.

"I'm sorry to break in on you," she said. "I thought you wouldn't be asleep yet."

Mona felt herself making a great effort to control her nerves. "No, I wasn't asleep yet."

"I *had* to see you," said Fanny. "I couldn't help myself."

"Do you want a drink?"

"No."

"Sit down."

Fanny sat down, and Mona saw that she was trembling. There was an odd, awkward silence, and at last Mona said: "What is it? Can I help you?" All her distaste for Fanny, all her scorn for her greediness and folly, rose in her, frightening her, for she was, she knew, a trifle fuddled and might lose control of herself. And worst of all she hated Fanny because she suddenly saw herself as Fanny in a few more years.

"What can I do to help you?" she repeated.

Then Fanny began to cry silently, her face contorted with the effort to stop her tears, and when she cried she looked old and ugly.

"Yes, you can help me. It's about Pat."

"What's he done now?" Mona felt herself sitting upright, tense and rigid in her chair, as if by great force of will she was forcing another person to self-control.

"It's just one quarrel after another. I've tried and tried. Now he won't even speak to me any longer."

Mona was silent for a moment. "It's because you let him know you care for him so much."

"Maybe that's true," said Fanny, "but I can't help myself. I've never been any good at hiding my feelings." She leaned forward a little toward Mona, holding out her tired hands. "You've got to help me. You've got to. I'll go crazy or I'll kill myself."

"That's not so easy," said Mona, coldly, "at least not for people like you and me, Fanny. We'll never kill ourselves, because we always think something will turn up. What do you want me to do?" She looked away from Fanny because the look in Fanny's marble eyes made her feel ill. "The hungry look!"

Fanny wiped the tears and said: “You’ve known Pat a long time, haven’t you? Longer than I have?”

“I don’t know,” said Mona. “I’ve seen him about here and there for a long time—mostly in bars and hotels and speakeasies.”

“He doesn’t drink so much any more. At least I’ve done that for him. It’s women—always women.”

Mona gave a short, bitter laugh: “That’s not his fault. He can’t help being the kind women run after. God made him that way.”

“Oh, I know all that.” Fanny rolled her handkerchief into a damp ball. “We’ve got to be honest, Mona. I’ve got to be. You’ve got to tell me the truth.” The marble eyes stared at her. “There was never anything between you and Pat?”

For a moment Mona hesitated, aware hazily that she must be on her guard. “No, there’s never been anything. We’ve been good friends, now and then, when we’ve seen each other. That’s all.”

“That’s why I came to you. I thought you could help me.”

Before Mona could say anything there was a knock on the cabin door, and before she could answer it Fanny said, “Wait; let me go into your cabin,” and rising, she disappeared.

“Come in,” said Mona, and the barman entered, carrying a note. He was a short little Frenchman with bristly hair. He said, “I’m to wait for an answer.”

Quickly she opened the bit of paper and read: “*May I come to see you? I’ve got the jitters. I’ve got to talk to you or go out and jump over the rail. I’m serious. For God’s sake don’t refuse me. I love you. Pat.*”

She felt the blood mounting to her face. If she permitted him to come, she knew that he would stay. It was the kind of thing she had never done before in all her life, and so it was not easy to make the decision. Even through the whisky she saw clearly enough. If she let him come, it was one more step toward chaos and damnation. For a moment all thought suspended itself. She pressed her hands against her eyes, and at the same time heard some one as he passed along the deck outside her cabin, drunkenly singing a song in German about Lola and a pianola. She felt the vibrations of the driven ship passing through her own body, and at the same time she kept seeing the note with its message written in a shaky hand like that of an old man. Suddenly she thought, "We might as well go to hell together as separately." And opening her eyes, she asked the funny little barman for a pencil. Turning the note over, she wrote: "*Yes, we might as well go to hell together as separately. But not for half an hour. Fanny's here.*"

Then the barman left, and at the sound of the closing door Fanny came out of the cabin. She had made up her tear-stained face all over again and was looking at Mona questioningly out of her greedy eyes.

"It was a note from Janey."

"Janey Winters?" asked Fanny.

"Yes."

"She's been chasing Pat, too. Every time I go on deck she's with him."

Mona said nothing and lighted a cigarette.

"I want you to talk to Pat," said Fanny.

"About what?"

"About other women. Silly little flappers like Janey."

Again Mona laughed. It was a perfectly dead, mirthless laugh. “Janey isn’t a flapper. There aren’t any more flappers. They’re all getting middle-aged. Flappers belong to my generation, Fanny. They’re all on the edge of middle age now. They’ve got to begin making sense, whether they want to or not.” Again she laughed. “In my day I was queen of the flappers. I invented them.”

“I don’t know what you call her—flapper, chit, anything you want, but she’s got to leave Pat alone”—Fanny straightened her thin body suddenly—“or I’ll kill her.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“You’ve got to talk to her and to Pat.”

“What’s the use? We’re landing tomorrow.”

“We’ll all be in New York. There are plenty of places for them to meet. It’ll be all the easier.” Fanny came over and took her hand. “Listen, Mona. We’ve known each other all our lives, haven’t we?”

“Yes—more or less.”

“You don’t hate me, do you?”

“No ... no.”

“Pat will listen to you. I can’t speak to him. It always ends in a quarrel.”

“I suppose so. Why don’t you marry Pat?”

“I’m not that big a fool.”

“Then why do you complain?”

“I want you to make him see how well off he is, and all I’ve done for him.”

Mona was silent, and Fanny went on pressing her, pouring out a torrent of hysterical talk, until at last it seemed to her

that if Fanny did not leave she would go mad.

“I’ll do it,” she said, dully. “I’ll do whatever you want. Only get out.”

Then Fanny sat on the chaise-longue, put her arm about her, and kissed her on the cheek, and Mona shuddered. She pushed Fanny away from her and stood up.

“Please go away, Fanny. I can’t bear it. Haven’t you any sense or any dignity?”

“What do you mean?”

“It makes me ashamed of being a woman.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Mona opened the door. “Please go,” she repeated, “I don’t want to say other things. Please go ... please!”

Fanny was standing very straight now. “I won’t go,” she said, “until you explain yourself.”

“Can’t you see that it’s no use? Pat’s sick of you. A thing like that can’t go on forever. Face it and buck up. Tell him to go to hell. Anything is better than what you’re doing.”

Fanny took hold of the back of one of the gilt chairs. Suddenly the hard look went out of her face and it turned silly and old and empty, all but the eyes, which remained hard and staring.

“I think you’re drunk,” she said, slowly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” And slowly she went out of the little *salon*, leaving the door open behind her.

When she had gone, Mona stood for a moment staring at the open door, and presently she began to laugh. It was mirthless laughter, born of hysteria and nerves over which she had no control. It was painful laughter, too, hurting her

because she had no desire to laugh. The impulse was born at the moment Fanny stiffened, and her tired face grew hard. There was in her look something horrible and grotesque, as if she were not Fanny at all, but a female comedian on the stage, giving an impersonation of all women like her.

Leaning against the big trunk, Mona laughed until it was physically impossible to laugh any longer. Then from weakness she lay down on the chaise-longue, burying her face in the pillows. Even the false mirth left her now, and she was aware again only of her nerves. It seemed to her that in some fantastic way her nerves and the frame of the trembling ship were in some way united, as if she, like the ship, was being driven beyond endurance.

As she grew a little more calm she began to think of herself with horror and distaste, shuddering at the memory of the scene with Fanny, and slowly she began to wonder how it was that two women like herself and Fanny could ever come to a state where it was possible for them to behave as they had done. She felt dizzy, and at moments her tired thoughts strayed away from her, but she did not grow sentimental, nor did she pity herself. It wasn't as if she and Fanny were women brought up in sordid surroundings, never having learned how to behave properly. In a way they had had all the luck in the world—perhaps, she thought, too much luck. Where, she wondered, did one go from here? What became of women like herself and Fanny when they came to the place where they no longer had either dignity or sensibility?

She thought: "Maybe it's this damned ship. Maybe it's the vibration and the creaking that's getting on all our nerves." And suddenly she, too, asked herself: "Why are we hurrying? Why does it matter that we cross the Atlantic in four days

instead of ten? What will any of us do with the six days we have saved?"

Out of all the scene with Fanny, she could remember only one thing in which she found satisfaction, and this was the speech about flappers. "I was the queen of flappers. I invented them. They're middle-aged now, whether they want to be or not." Of that she saw the truth. There weren't any more flappers. Girls like little Janey had sense. And now when she thought of it, it seemed to her that she was separated from little Janey by much more than the fifteen years that separated them in age. It was as if there were curtains between them. When the war was finished Janey was a little girl of five. What did she know of all that? She could never possibly guess what it was like.

Slowly there rose in her a sense of physical pain, as if there were a lump where her heart should have been. It was a sensation that once she had known well enough, but for a long time now, for years now, it had not come to her. It hurt her in a new way now, as if she suffered not only over the loss of some one she loved, but over the loss of herself as well, for in the queer muddled state of her brain it seemed to her that long ago, fifteen years ago, she had been another person, who was dead like Alec, and had nothing to do with this Mona who lay on the chaise-longue, her nerves quivering with every vibration of the ship.

"Ah," she thought, bitterly, "what could little Janey ever know of all the pain and hysteria and excitement? How could she ever know what it was like to be in love and not know whether the one you loved was alive or dead? Not to know for weeks and for months, only to know at last beyond all doubt that you would never see him again."

And suddenly she was sick and ashamed, with the feeling that she soiled and defiled all that happened so long ago even by thinking of it. It was wrong that she, this Mona who lay on the chaise-longue, should ever think again of Alec or of that other Mona, long since dead and forgotten. And this damned self-pity. She told herself that she would not think about it, but it was impossible to drive the memories from her, and at last she rose and, looking at herself in the glass, said: "You're finished, old girl! There's nothing for you to do but have another drink." And now for the first time she wanted to drink not merely to quiet her nerves and make her feel cheerful and drive away forever the horror of boredom she found in everything she did, but to drive consciousness from her. She thought, "If I really get drunk, perhaps I'll feel better when it's over. Perhaps it will leave me clean and new."

As she passed the little gold traveling-clock she saw that an hour had passed since the note came from Pat, and she thought, "Maybe he's not coming, after all." And now she wanted him to come to her. She thought, grimly: "If I'm to end like Fanny there's nothing to be done about it. I might as well make the best of it."

She found the bottle where she had left it beneath the towels.

When Fanny walked out of the cabin she leaned for a moment against the inlaid paneling of the passageway. It was as if she had become temporarily blind. Feeling that she had not the force to go on, she closed her eyes and gave herself up to rage. She hated Mona. She hated Pat. She hated herself. This fool ship, always straining and groaning and creaking,

was unendurable. Then the rage passed and left her weak and cold and reasonable.

From the end of the passageway she heard the sound of music, and listening for a moment, she understood what had happened. This was the last night out and some one had tipped the band to play in the bar until daylight. Above the sound of the music she heard laughter. Now that the indignity of the scene with Mona had gone from her a little, she felt old and tired and filled with a desire to return to her cabin and sleep. She turned away from the music, but before she had gone a dozen paces she halted.

Why, she asked herself, should she go to bed now? Why should she miss the party? Why should she bore herself while Pat was in the bar, having a good time? If she weren't there people would think she was old and tired.

"I'm not old," she told herself. "I'm not tired. I'm not undignified. I don't run after Pat. Mona was drunk. That's why she said all those things." And suddenly she understood. Mona was a secret drinker. She had left the bridge table to go to her cabin and drink herself insensible. Why had she never thought of that before? She was filled suddenly with a sense of deep satisfaction, thinking what a good story she could make out of having surprised Mona alone, intoxicated, in her cabin.

The idea justified, in a way, her own behavior. Pat was a lesser vice than drunkenness. Who was Mona, to dare to judge her?

With renewed energy she went down the passageway, entered her cabin, and after she had bathed her face in cold water and carefully made it up once more, she turned out the

light and went off, hurrying, toward the sound of music in the bar.

It was crowded, and as she entered she saw at the far end of the room a woman standing on a table, with her skirt drawn high above her knee. She held the skirt with one hand and kept the other pressed against the low ceiling of the bar to keep herself from falling. On one knee she wore a black silk garter. She was tall and very pretty and young, and Fanny recognized her suddenly. She was the *mannequin* who was the mistress of Vernier, the dressmaker. Vernier himself was seated a little way off, watching her proudly. Beside the table stood a fat German manufacturer who was acting as auctioneer. He stood with a glass of champagne in one hand, shouting in broken English, “Fife dollar an inch. De lady will move de garter up an inch every time fife dollar is bit. Come on—do I hear bits? Fifty-fife—fifty-fife—sixty! Goot! Sixty is bit. Sixty-fife?”

The pretty *mannequin* moved the garter two inches higher. It was high above her knee now. The crowd in the bar had begun to cheer.

“Sixty-fife—seventy! Goot!” shouted the fat German. “Fife dollar an inch.”

Then Fanny saw Pat. He was sitting at a table with little Janey and the boy Hank and a dark man from Buenos Aires called Carvalho. Pat was staring at the *mannequin* with a dead cold look in his tired blue eyes.

“Seventy-fife!” shouted the German. “Eighty! Goot!”

Then the *mannequin* laughed, dropped her skirt, and cried out, “*Rien ne va plus!*” and jumped down from the table. Slipping off the garter, she gave it to the fat German, who in

turn presented it to the successful bidder, an American of middle age. He wanted a kiss as well from the *mannequin*, but Vernier, the dressmaker, rose and forbade it. The drunken American wanted to quarrel, but the dressmaker turned away, pushing the girl mildly before him. Then the orchestra began to play loudly, drowning the ugly language of the American.

When Fanny looked again at the table where Pat was sitting, his head was slumped on his chest and he was staring at the table. Little Janey caught sight of her and signaled to her to join them.

The bar was hot and blue with smoke and smelled of stale champagne, and as Fanny crossed the floor, worming her way between the hot perspiring bodies of the dancers, she felt suddenly ill and desperately tired. But she could not turn back now, even if she had desired it. She was determined not to leave Pat alone with little Janey. Beneath her feet she felt the ship trembling.

The dark Argentine, Carvalho, and the boy rose and offered her their chairs. Pat, staring at the table, did not see her. Carvalho kissed her hand and insisted that she take his chair, and then Pat's blue eyes turned slowly toward her with a look in them which frightened her. It lasted for a second only. It was a swift glance, yet it was terrible in its intensity and nakedness; there was in it nothing of pretense or even common politeness. It was as if he had been caught unaware, unguarded in the profound depths of his own disgust. Then swiftly, automatically, the veil of old habit covered the look and a shadow of the old hard mocking smile appeared on his white face, but for an instant even Fanny, so long lost in a confusion of stupidity and vanity and greediness, divined that the two of them had been perilously close to truth, and

experienced in a flash of intuition that everything was finished between them.

Pat said, "I thought you'd gone to bed long ago."

"I heard the music and came back."

"You should have gone to bed."

Because of the music and the tipsy laughter all about them they were forced to shout a little so that their words appeared to have in them a sinister importance which both sought to conceal.

There were no more chairs and no space in which to place a chair, so Carvalho was forced to remain standing in the corner behind Fanny. His hands rested on the back of her chair. Once, leaning back, she felt the contact of his lean dark fingers against her flesh, and bending forward again, she said, "I'm sorry." But the contact happened a second time and a third, and then she did not trouble to escape it.

"Have some champagne, Fanny," said Pat.

"You know I never drink."

"You can't come cold to a party like this." And ignoring her, he filled a glass and placed it in front of her.

Little Janey and the boy seemed unaware of what was happening at the table. They were watching the crowd. They were still young enough to enjoy the show for itself.

Belowdeck old Mrs. Williston could not sleep. The sound of the orchestra mingled with the wind came to her in rising and receding waves broken occasionally by a gust of laughter or drunken singing. She could not have slept in any case, but as she lay there, unable to keep herself from thinking all the things she preferred to forget, she found the orchestra and the

gaiety a convenient pin upon which to hang the whole mantle of her frustration. The path of her thought wove round and round, always coming back once more to its beginning.

She hated the ship. She hated all the people on it, save perhaps Tom, and in gusts of discontent she hated even him. She hated the noise and the newness and the decorations. She hated the kind of music which came to her distantly. She hated the vibration and the faint whir of dynamos which, communicated through plate after plate of steel, appeared to traverse the whole ship, ending at last by passing through her own nervous old body. The path of her thoughts led always to the same end. It was not like this in the old days.

Before the war life had been secure and comfortable. Before the war no one had been in this incredible hurry. Men and women were not merely raw men and women, but ladies and gentlemen. Why, she asked herself in the hot darkness, did people nowadays make so much noise? Why were they in such haste? Why were they unable to sit quietly and talk? What was it that they expected to find just round the next corner which would escape them if they did not hurry? Was it money or love or forgetfulness? Perhaps, she thought, they were all the driven instead of the pursuers. Perhaps they lived at this mad pace to escape from something. What was it? Were they running from memories or from some vague sense of impending calamity? Did they feel without understanding that they had come to the end of something and that the whole world was falling into ruin all about them? Live for today, tomorrow——?

In the darkness, the vague terrors of her insomnia began to assume fantastic forms and slowly it seemed to her that her thin old body was an unwilling passenger on this fantastic

groaning ship, and that it was hurrying thus for a port at which it would never arrive. It would simply go on forever, straining and groaning, forever and ever through time and space. It was a new idea, a kind of hell of which Dante had never bethought himself.

At last she could bear it no longer, and, rising, she put on a wrapper, rang the bell, and took another tablet to make herself sleep.

The steward came, half asleep, in answer to the bell, and the sight of his drowsiness filled her with fury. She complained of the noise, complained that she had spent seven hundred dollars in order to have a quiet cabin, complained that she had taken the voyage for a rest and that now it was impossible to sleep because of the noise made by a few drunken passengers.

The sleepy steward bowed and smiled and promised to go abovedeck to stop the uproar, and when the door was closed on him she felt a little more calm. In a moment he returned, a little more awake, to say that he had delivered her message abovedeck and that he hoped she would now be able to sleep. It was difficult, he explained, in broken English, to do much because half the ship was in the bar. It was the last night out. It was always like this.

When he had gone she turned off the light and lay down once more. The noise went on, carried toward her cabin by the gusts of wind outside, but she seemed not to mind it as much, as her thoughts were more quiet and more what the thoughts of an old woman should have been. She fell to thinking about her life, which she saw was drawing to an end, so that it did not matter to her what happened to the world. There was no need for her, like the others, to hurry for fear of

missing something. What she had missed, she reflected bitterly, she had missed. It had passed her by forever, and brooding over the past would not bring it back so that she might mend all the errors and follies. And slowly the desire to have Tom with her returned. Reflecting, she counted the years and discovered that nearly forty had passed since their affair had come to an end, when they could no longer continue because it was too dangerous for either of them. It was incredible that nearly forty years should have passed so quickly and so emptily, for now when she looked back over them it seemed to her that nothing had happened in those years. Nothing at all. Always the same houses, the same hotels, the same people, the same gossip.

And now she wanted him back, here beside her, because she was lonely and afraid. It seemed to her that she and Tom were the only ones of their kind on the ship. Indeed, in the whole world there were not many of their kind left. They must stick together now. Then all at once it became clear to her what she meant to do, and it seemed strange that it had not been clear long ago. There was but one thing to do, only one course in which there was dignity and, what was more important than dignity, peace. All the denials of her long life, she saw now, had been moving toward this end.

She no longer heard the music or the laughter in the bar. Slowly she rose and, putting on her wrapper, once more switched on the light and went to the little writing-desk, where she took down the telegraph forms and began to write. One after another she wrote a half dozen telegrams, canceling her rooms at the Ritz, saying that she would not be in New York nor in Newport nor in Palm Beach. "*Plans unavoidably changed,*" she wrote, "*am writing.*" Unconsciously she found

herself underscoring the words “unavoidably changed.” She wrote the words now in the middle of the night because she knew that in the morning everything would be different. All the old vanities and distractions would return, to confuse her and muddle her decision as they had always done all her life. In the daylight, when she was no longer afraid and lonely, she would not see clearly as she now saw in the darkness.

When she had finished she put the telegrams in a little pile on the desk and returned to bed. A sense of great peace came over her, and for a time even the desire for sleep left her. She no longer *fought* to sleep, because she wished to enjoy this peace which had come over her with the decision she had made—a peace which in a way she had always been seeking and which came now only when she had given up the struggle and was resigned. It was, she thought, like the peace which must descend upon a woman who has entered a convent.

She would go with Tom to South Carolina, abandoning all the invitations, the gaieties, and the people she had always known, and she would stay with him until he died. For he, too, was lonely and afraid. Together they would find peace for a little while—as long as Tom lived. Perhaps, too, at the end they would find that intimacy, that sharing of each other which they had never known.

As she fell asleep she could not see why it was she had ever wanted to go to New York and Newport and Palm Beach to see the same people and do the same futile things she had done all her life. It was like staying at a ball until dawn when nothing new happened and the gaiety had grown tired and bedraggled. The fun of the ball was over long before, and she only knew it now.

Although Mrs. Williston slept in peace, no longer hearing the music and the laughter, the bar was not silent. The gaiety was gone now, translated by weariness and alcohol into a wild artificial excitement. The orchestra played more loudly, as if in desperation to preserve or to recapture the gaiety with which the evening had begun. At the tables more champagne was ordered and more, because the party had to be kept going until morning, and obviously it would be kept going only by more and more alcohol. And presently all pretense of dignity was gone from the small paneled room filled with hot, stifling air, and there remained no longer any individuals, save one or two in whom alcohol induced only melancholy and who sat apart with sad, brooding faces, unwilling to disappear. There were no longer any individuals, but only a mass of men and women welded together without decency by alcohol and greediness and terror of a vast emptiness. One by one they abandoned dignity and put aside fears and shynesses and reticence and all qualities which mark one human creature from another. And some were freed for a little time from themselves. They were no longer aware even of the straining of the great ship.

At the table in the corner, little Janey grew quietly more and more sleepy. Since she was young she needed not to drink in order to be amused, but because she was young she could not resist the desire to sleep which stole over her. And presently she said: "I'm going to bed, Hank. Stay if you want."

Hank looked at her through his steel-rimmed spectacles and grinned. "I'm ready," he said. "It's all the same thing over again, anyway."

Together they bade the others good night, and when they had gone Fanny settled back in her chair with relief and Carvalho took Hank's chair, which was beside her. Pat paid no attention to them, but only sat drinking and staring at the crowd which kept pressing and bumping against his chair.

Then Carvalho asked Fanny to dance. She was not used to drinking and she felt dizzy, and as they danced she pressed close to him for support, watching him at the same time through a haze and noting his smooth good looks, the brilliance of his eyes and his sleek black hair, his long dark eyelashes, the curve of his nostrils, and the way his ears sat close to his head. He was young, and in her bewildered weariness she felt a great hunger for youth, believing in a vague way that by devouring youth she could herself become young once more.

"It's fun tonight," said Carvalho.

"It's wonderful," said Fanny, and with a great effort she feigned a nervous animation.

Fat men jostled them, and into the odor of cigarette smoke and champagne rose the odor of sweat. The music ceased for a moment and they went back to the table where Pat rose unsteadily and seated himself again.

Fanny no longer took any notice of his sulking. She talked slowly to Carvalho, forcing her tired face into a mockery of animation and enthusiasm. They arranged a meeting in New York and wrote each other's addresses on a bit of paper borrowed from the barman. Pat appeared not to see them or hear what they were saying, and Fanny felt a sudden glow of triumph at the intrigue carried on before his dulled blue eyes. Then suddenly she felt Carvalho's hand on her knee and her own hand, as if by its own volition, slipped from the table

and grasped the hand of Carvalho. Something in the gesture made her feel young again, but with the feeling of youth there came also a sensation of sadness. Hazily, she thought: "I'm not a bad woman. I'm only lonely. I only want some one to be kind to me." It was an odd sensation, like that at her first ball long ago, when a boy had seen her sitting alone and asked her to dance with him. It was, too, a feeling of gratitude, as if the gesture vindicated her before the acid realism of people like Pat and Mona. Some one was being kind to her. A man, young and attractive, was drawn to her. While she sat there, her head a little dizzy, she was almost happy. She forgot to speak. She closed her eyes as if at last peace had come to her for a little time.

She sat there for a long time, and presently the thought came to her hazily that perhaps she looked foolish sitting thus in the midst of so much noise and agitation, and slowly she opened her eyes once more. What she saw was not a room full of people jostling, dancing, and sweating, but only Pat. He was sitting opposite her, watching her, and the dull dead look had gone out of his blue eyes now. He was grinning. He did not say anything, but in the expression of his eyes there were insinuations, bitter and searing, born out of their intimacy. It was as if he had suddenly compelled her to regard herself through his eyes, forcing her for the first time in her life into complete honesty.

It was a sensation which passed in a second, confused yet sharp and clear, and her reaction to it was immediate and violent. All sham, all hypocrisy, even all decency, deserted her. She picked up her glass of champagne and threw it, glass and all, into his face.

It happened in a second. The look of amusement left his eyes and lips, succeeded by a look of astonishment. The glass fell to the floor where it broke with a faint tinkling sound lost in all the bedlam of noise. Slowly, without looking at her, he took out his handkerchief and wiped his face and the stiff front of his shirt where it left pale golden stains. All the while she watched him, fascinated, wondering hazily when his quick temper would assert itself. She wanted him to strike her, to drag her from the room. Only a violent scene could ease the tension of her nerves. She longed for violence and afterward the reconciliation.

But Pat merely rose quietly from his chair, put away his soaked handkerchief, and balancing himself unsteadily looked at her and said, "You needn't behave like a common tart."

Something about his calmness infuriated her so that she lost all control, for she felt suddenly that she must be vindicated, that the scene had not come to an end at all, but had been left suspended in midair. She began to weep, noisily, so that people who had not noticed the scene of the champagne-glass now looked at her. But Pat did not turn back. He quietly disappeared through the crowd and she was left alone, fruitlessly making a scene, with Carvalho, agitated and uneasy, trying to quiet her.

When he left her he went out of the bar to the promenade deck, a little drunk and immensely confused by his own emotions, so that he circled the whole speeding ship twice in the cool air before he was able to think clearly at all. The first time he passed the windows of the bar Fanny was still screaming, but by the second time she was silent.

Half an hour earlier he would have come on to the deck to throw himself over the rail into the dark sea gleaming with phosphorescence which swept quietly by the ship. Half an hour earlier he had been sitting in the hot bar, fascinated by the image of the dark running water, planning how he would slip quietly over the side to disappear forever, as if he had never existed. Brooding, he had imagined the mystery such a disappearance would raise. He invented it all, drunkenly, a little fascinated by his own ingenuity and by the all-important fact that the story he created concerned himself. He could see Fanny hysterically searching the ship for him. He could see old Tom and Mrs. Williston side by side in deck chairs, drinking their consommé and discussing the disappearance, fascinated because they were both too old to be touched directly by life and secretly, but even so respectably, triumphant over the suicide because it vindicated them. It showed at what an end these people of another generation could arrive. He could see later the notices of his death in the newspapers in London and Paris and New York—"It is unknown whether the disappearance was an accident or suicide." In bars and hotels and night clubs they would say he was a good fellow because that would cost them nothing, and they would sigh less on his account than because his end had raised up disturbing doubts about themselves. And then he would be forgotten, leaving nothing behind him, as forgotten as if he had never lived. Certainly no one on the ship would think of him twice—no one except perhaps Mona. Thinking of Mona led him into thinking of himself, and the thought occurred to him that if long ago he and Mona had met each other, long ago before he had gone completely to the dogs, something glorious might have come out of it. In spite of everything there was something sporting and straightforward

about Mona. But as he sat brooding over his drink he saw that it was too late now. There was nothing left for him but the dark water rising and falling beneath its filigree pattern of phosphorescence.

An hour earlier, indeed until Fanny had returned to the bar, he had thought only such thoughts, but now, as he walked round the deck, they were gone from him. It was his anger which had saved him, the wild anger which somehow he had managed to curb when his whole body was filled with a desire to slap her and drag her from the bar. Now that the scene was finished, the memory of it still surged back upon him, filling him with a sensation of choking; and when it had passed a little he saw how wise he had been, without ever calculating his wisdom. Because he had controlled his anger, everything with Fanny was finished. No longer had she any hold upon him. She might seek him out and attempt a reconciliation, but that would do no good. He was free because he had kept his temper.

Free! Free for what? And what good was this freedom?

For a moment the thought of suicide returned again, but this time he was frightened of the black water. In his imagination it was no longer cool and inviting. But he did not know where to go or what to do unless he returned to the bar to drinking once more. Twice more he circled the long deck and then vaguely he remembered that he had written a note to Mona, asking to come to her cabin. At first he could not remember whether he had written it tonight or the night before or many weeks ago. He knew that he had written it out of loneliness.

Slowly and with a great effort he managed to exert a kind of control of his consciousness. Standing by the rail, he

grasped it hard with both hands as if he could thus draw strength from the quivering ship itself. The wind whipped across his face, and beneath him the dark water slid by, rising and falling. Watching it, he became fascinated and hypnotized, feeling no longer a desire to throw himself into it and so into nothingness, but instead experiencing a sudden awareness that life was good, indeed even that there was something magnificent simply in the privilege of feeling the wind and watching the angry sea.

And presently he felt a desire to talk and a hunger for a companionship which was sympathetic. He thought, "If I could find some one who was interested in *me*, in my soul!" and almost at once he laughed aloud at the thought of himself, Pat Allison, even thinking that he possessed such a thing as a soul.

But he remembered that it was tonight, an hour or two earlier, that he had written the note to Mona, and he decided suddenly that he would go to her cabin in the hope that she had not yet given him up and that she would still be awake.

Slowly and carefully he made his way through the doors by the grand stairway. For a moment he stopped, dazzled and blinded a little by the glare of the brilliant lights. Then he turned along the corridor, looking carefully for No. 26, filled with a terror that he was so intoxicated that he might open the door of a wrong cabin. At last he found it and saw that there was a light shining beneath the door and a great sense of gratitude swept over him that she had waited so long. He knocked. There was no answer, and he knew that he should go away again, but he knew suddenly that he could not go away. If he went away, where was he to go? Whom was he to talk to?

He could not sleep, and he was afraid now of himself and afraid to be alone.

Again he knocked, and this time when there was no answer he turned the door handle and gently opened the door. Then he saw why it was that there had been no answer.

Mona was lying on the chaise-longue, and when he first saw her he was frightened. Then he thought, "I'm drunk, but I needn't be a damned fool!" She was not dead; she was breathing quietly, sleeping. She lay with one arm thrown across her eyes.

For a long time he stood leaning against the half-packed trunk, looking down at her. His thoughts flowed obscurely, confused in a haze of champagne, but out of the stream his consciousness managed to arrest and fix certain impressions.

The greatest of them was an awareness of how different she seemed, lying there quietly, unconscious of his presence, from the way he thought of her, and then suddenly, with a clarity which never came to him when he was sober, he saw that, although he had known her for years, he did not know her at all. This woman was a stranger whose face he knew but of whose character and soul he knew nothing whatever. It was as if she had always worn a disguise, confected of cynicism, of wit, of nerves, which now in sleep had slipped from her. The lines and all the look of weariness had gone out of her face, so that she seemed young and childlike.

Again he thought, "I ought to go away." But he could not go.

He had no desire to waken her. Indeed, it seemed to him much pleasanter to be with her thus. He was not alone, and there was something infinitely peaceful in her presence. He was afraid that if he waked her, this nice girl who lay

sleeping quietly would turn again into a hard woman, amusing and a little bitter. He was sick to death of the word “amusing.” He hated “amusing” people and amusing things and amusing remarks. “Amusing” was a word which Fanny was forever trotting out at the least excuse. Everything, for Fanny, was either amusing or boring. She had no shades of discrimination. She had no subtlety. No one in their world had subtlety, because subtlety implied intelligence and standards by which to judge things, and in their world standards had long since been abandoned and intelligence stifled.

He wanted to be dull. He wanted desperately to surround himself with dull, honorable people. And he thought: “I’m being damned clever. It’s because I’m so drunk. I’m never clever when I’m sober.” And then the doubt came to him that he thought he was clever only because he was drunk.

And so all at once he was aware again of the vibration of the ship. It appeared to rise from the floor of the cabin and pass through him from foot to head. It was unbearable. “Why don’t they stop the damned ship and let her rest for a moment.” If only for a second there could be stillness.

Then he sat in the chair opposite the chaise-longue, thinking that he would be content to remain thus until morning. When daylight came he could go back to his cabin and pack his bags. Now he was afraid to go back. Here in the chair, with Mona asleep near by, he felt secure.

He did not know how long he remained there staring at her, but presently he was aware that she had moved her arm and cried out in her sleep. Then slowly she opened her eyes and looked about her as if she did not know where she was. Then

she saw him and her expression changed. She frowned and said, "So you did come, after all?"

She sat up, frowning.

"Are you angry with me?"

"You might have wakened me. I hate being watched when I'm asleep. It's like being naked."

Then neither of them found anything to say and Pat began to feel uneasy, because somehow the thing was going all wrong. Vaguely he knew that what she had said touched them both in an unpleasant fashion. She took out her lipstick and, rising, regarded herself in the mirror.

"May I stay?" said Pat, and when she did not appear to hear him, he said, "I'd like to."

Still she did not answer him. "I think I've been fond of you for a long time. I think I've been ..." His thoughts grew a little hazy and he searched for words. "I've been concentrating. I mean I've been discovering you."

She answered him without turning, "I don't suppose it would make much difference to anyone."

"I think it would be awfully good of you to let me. I'm trying not to get sloppy, Mona. I know you hate that. Forgive me if I can't say what I want to say. I'm drunk."

"Yes, I know that," she said in a low voice. "It's pretty hard to tell, nowadays, when you're drunk and when you're sober. You didn't use to be like that."

"No, I didn't use to be like that."

Then she turned and said, looking down at him, "What about Fanny?"

"Don't worry about Fanny. That's all over."

"You've said that before."

“I’d rather go jump over the rail of the ship than go back to Fanny. Look,” he said, pointing to the stains on his shirt front. “She did that. She threw a glass of champagne, glass and all, in my face. She made a hell of a scene. No, I’m all washed up with Fanny.”

“I’m glad that’s how your shirt got stained.”

“Why?”

“Because I was afraid you’d spilled it yourself. I’m used to men who aren’t always sober, but I hate men who are drunk and get sick and spill things.”

“I’m never like that, am I?”

“You might be. Drunks get to that state eventually.”

He began to laugh, softly, but not so softly that the bitterness was not apparent.

“What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing that’s very funny. It just strikes one as so silly.” He made a little gesture. “This scene—this silly conversation.”

“It is pretty silly, only it’s worse than that,” she laughed. “I never thought I’d come to the place where it seemed to make no difference whether a man spent the night with me or not.”

He looked at her sharply. “Any man, Mona? Any man who walked in the door?”

“No—not so bad as that. I’m fond of you, Pat. There was a time when I might have fallen in love with you.”

“Perhaps we still might make a go of it.”

“It’s too late to fall in love. Too much water has flowed under both our bridges.”

He was silent for a moment. He took out a cigarette, and without looking at her he said, "I suppose you think I'm a bum on account of this business with Fanny."

"No."

"Oh, I know people say he's being kept by Fanny Williams."

"I don't give a damn what people say."

"No, I suppose not."

"I wish I did. It would be better for both of us if we cared a little more than we do." Slowly she crossed over to him and put her hands on his shoulders. "Listen, Pat," she said. "I'm not such a lily myself. Things have been happening to me lately." She sighed. "I don't think I'm good enough to judge anybody."

Suddenly he seized her hands and pressed them against his hot face. "Thanks, Mona," he said.

She was aware that he was trembling and she said: "What is it? What's the matter, Pat?"

Still holding her hands over his eyes he said: "Nothing. I've got the jitters."

"You're frightened of something."

"Yes."

They stayed thus, silent for a time, and presently Mona said, "Pat."

"Yes."

"When you said you knew I hated being sloppy, it wasn't true."

"No?"

“No, my God! I’d like to be as sentimental as a schoolgirl. I’d like to feel romantic. I’d like to be sloppy. I’m so tired of being hard. I’m so tired of belonging to a generation which daren’t be sloppy.” She laughed. “Only I can’t be now, ever again. It’s too late.”

All at once he stopped trembling and pressed her hand against his lips.

“Thanks,” she said, bitterly. “Thanks for trying to help me, but it’s no good.” She withdrew her hands and lighted a cigarette. “Pat,” she said, “what do you want of me?” He looked at her, puzzled, not knowing what she meant. She went on: “I mean, why did you trouble to come down here? It can’t be just to spend the night with me. There are plenty of other women younger and more attractive than I am, and certainly more sympathetic.”

“I don’t know,” he said, dully. “I had to come.”

“You’re afraid.”

“Yes, I’m afraid.”

Again she laughed, “Well, you’ve come to a broken reed. I’m scared, too, scared as hell.”

“I guess I must be in love with you.”

“How much?”

“Enough so that I just want to be near you. I’m not asking anything more. If you’ll let me stay, I’ll sit up all night in a chair.”

She smiled at him a little sadly. “Be careful, Pat, we’re getting sloppy.”

“Don’t do that,” he cried out. “Don’t always mock. Don’t be always hard, for God’s sake!”

“All right, I’ll try.”

“What are we going to do about it? It’s no good asking you to marry me. Why should you? I’m broke. I haven’t got a job.”

“I’m broke, too.”

He looked away from her. “That makes it better and it makes it worse.”

“I’ve got enough to live on for about a month. After that —” She shrugged her shoulders.

Then she saw him pick up from the chair a little sodden bit of chiffon. Slowly he unfolded it and looked at it. It was Fanny’s handkerchief, all damp and crumpled. He recognized the monogram and, tossing it on the table, looked at her.

“Yes, Fanny was here. She made a scene about you. Only her information was all wrong. She didn’t know there was anything between us. She was jealous of little Janey. She asked me to go to Janey and make her stop running after you.”

“Oh!” He picked up the handkerchief again and looked at it. “What did you tell her?”

“I told her as gently as possible that she was a little crazy.”

He still stared at the sodden handkerchief, and into the silence there came the sound of footsteps coming along the corridor—the light, quick footsteps of a woman. They both listened. The steps came to the door and stopped there. Then some one knocked, and Mona made a quick gesture for him to go into her cabin. They were both thinking that Fanny was outside the door.

When he had gone, she called out, “Who is it?” and a voice answered, “It’s Janey. May I come in?”

The door opened and Janey came in. She was still dressed, and it struck Mona with a pang of envy that even at this hour of the morning she looked fresh and young and eager.

“I saw a light under your door,” she said. “Chuck me out if you want to go to sleep.”

“No,” said Mona. “I don’t want to sleep, at least not at this moment. I thought you were in bed long ago.”

“I wanted to talk to somebody—a woman,” said Janey.

For a moment Mona felt boredom coming over her. She thought: “Good God! What is there about me that makes women want to confide in me? First Fanny, then Janey. I suppose it’ll be old Mrs. Williston next.” She hated women who talked about themselves.

“I won’t stay long,” said Janey, “just long enough to have a cigarette. Only, it’s very important.”

“Sit down,” said Mona, and she herself sat again on the chaise-longue.

“It’s about getting married,” said Janey. “You see, I’m in love and I don’t know what to do about it.”

Mona laughed. “Why?”

“Well, I’ve never been in love before. And because it’s all wrong. It seems I’m in love with the wrong person.”

“Hank?”

“Yes.”

“What’s wrong about him?”

“He’s poor. Nobody ever heard of him.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

Janey lighted her cigarette. “Nothing, so far as I’m concerned. It makes a difference to Uncle Tom.”

“Are you sure you’re in love?”

“Oh yes.”

“You seem very sure.”

“I don’t see how I could be any more sure.” She didn’t smile. She was very serious.

“It’s easy to think you’re in love.”

“I suppose so,” said Janey. “You must know about it. It’s the first time I’ve ever been in love.” Her voice lowered a little. “And I’m afraid to wait, even on account of Uncle Tom. I’m afraid something might happen to spoil it, and then I’d be sorry for the rest of my life.”

“Yes. If you’re really in love you needn’t be.”

“You know Uncle Tom is dying. He might die tomorrow and he might live for months and maybe even years. He’s been awfully good to me.”

“Yes, I know all that.”

Then they both fell silent and some of the gaiety and life seemed to go out of little Janey. “I wish it wasn’t so difficult.”

Mona smiled. It was on the tip of her tongue to say something bitter, but she did not speak at once. Presently she said, “I know,” very softly.

“What do you think I ought to do?” said Janey. “Uncle Tom won’t even talk to Hank, and if I marry Hank he won’t leave me any money. I’d like money because money makes things easy, but if it was only that I wouldn’t wait for a minute.”

“How much does Hank make?”

“When he gets to America, he’s got a newspaper job. Fifty dollars a week.”

Mona laughed. “Fifty dollars. That’s not very much.” She thought, “I spend that much lunching out and having my hair done.”

“Oh, I know that, and I know it’s silly and romantic to talk about its being enough.” She blushed. “But I like that. I’d like to make it a go on fifty dollars a week. That’s one of the things that attracts me. I could get a job. I would because I want to save enough so we can have children while we’re young.”

For a moment Mona was silent, drawing her hand over her tired eyes. At last she said, “Why did you think I could give you the right advice?”

Janey hesitated and said: “Because you’re older. You’ve had two husbands. You know everything about life.”

“I don’t know a damned thing. It’s all got to be learned.” She leaned forward and touched Janey’s knee. “My advice is not worth a damn, but I know what I’d tell you to do.”

Janey looked frightened. “What?”

“I’d marry Hank the first possible moment.”

“Oh,” said Janey, “I’m glad! I thought you’d say the other thing.”

“What other thing?”

“That I ought to marry some boy we all knew who had money.”

“I might have said that a little while ago. Listen, Janey. Don’t worry too much about Uncle Tom. I don’t think he’s the one to know what’s best to do. He’s old and his life hasn’t amounted to much. He’s got money, but a lot of good that’s going to do him in the grave. I suspect that he’s missed out on

everything all along the line, and now it's too late to do anything about it. What's worse is that he knows it."

Suddenly Janey said, "I like you, Mona."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It's something I feel. In spite of ..." She blushed and hesitated, and Mona finished the sentence: "I know. In spite of having made a mess of everything, there's something decent about me."

"Yes, that's it."

"I hope so."

Janey had picked up Fanny's sodden handkerchief. She recognized it suddenly by the elaborate monogram worked into the chiffon. Raising her eyes, she said: "Fanny's been rude to me for the whole voyage. Do you know why?"

"She's jealous."

"I thought that was it, but I couldn't believe it."

"Wait till you're as old as Fanny and as desperate."

"I won't be," said Janey, "ever. I'm going to put out anchors against that."

"What anchors?"

"Children and Hank and things like that."

"Fanny came in here tonight. She asked me to make you let Pat alone."

Janey laughed. "Let him alone! That's funny. The shoe is on the other foot."

"What do you mean?"

"He's been pursuing me. He made love to me and even asked me to marry him."

Mona looked away. "When?"

“Yesterday.”

“If you weren’t in love with Hank would you think of it?”

“No, of course not.”

“Why?”

“Why? Why should I marry a middle-aged disreputable man with nothing to offer.”

“Pat’s only thirty-six or-seven.”

“Yes, but it’s all over.”

“What?”

“I don’t know. It’s as if he were dead. Besides....”

“Besides what?”

“Nothing. Pat’s a friend of yours.”

“Besides,” said Mona, “he’s been kept by Fanny.”

“Yes,” said Janey.

Mona rose suddenly. “You’d better go and get some sleep, my dear.”

“I’m not going to bed. It’s the last night out. Hank and I are going to see the sun rise.”

“Yes,” said Mona, “I think that’s a good idea.”

Janey stood up and crushed out her cigarette. “I’ve finished my cigarette. I’m going now.” She took Mona’s hand and for a moment it was as if she were the older woman and the more clever and that it was Mona who had come to her seeking comfort and advice. “Look, Mona, I want to see you. Where are you going?”

“I don’t know what I’m going to do. When I land I don’t even know where I’m going.”

“Write to me, at Uncle Tom’s place in Carolina.”

“All right.”

“And thanks for letting me keep you up.”

“That’s all right. You haven’t kept me up.”

“Will you come to the wedding?”

“If I can.”

“I’d like it.”

“Good night.”

“Good night.”

Mona did not see her go, but with the closing of the door she was aware that in a strange way the room seemed darkened, as if a radiance had gone out of it. Suddenly she was aware that she was horribly tired. She pressed her hands against her eyes, and then, after a minute, opening them, she called out, “Pat,” and the door opened and Pat came out of the cabin.

He stood in the doorway, looking sober and a little sheepish and apologetic.

“You heard what she said?” Mona asked, in a cold voice.

“Yes.”

“Is it true?”

“Yes.”

She was silent for a moment. Then she said: “I’m glad you said ‘yes.’ If you had said ‘no’ I wouldn’t have believed you.”

“If I had said ‘no’ you would have believed Janey?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Why not? Why should she invent the attentions of a middle-aged dissipated man?”

“Middle-aged,” he repeated, slowly. “Middle-aged.”

“We nearly are. We soon will be.”

“Middle-aged bums,” said Pat.

She went over and threw herself down on the chaise-longue. “I want a drink, Pat. Get it for me. There’s a bottle in the bathroom. It’s behind the towels.”

He looked at her and she said: “Yes. I hid it there on account of my maid. I don’t want her to know I’m a bathroom drinker.”

He brought the bottle and two glasses and poured them each a drink. Then he sat down and stared at her. For a long time neither of them said anything. It was Pat who broke the silence.

“If you hadn’t let me stay I was going to commit suicide.”

“Don’t let’s be melodramatic. That’s what Fanny does. It’s just another way of deceiving ourselves.”

“Well what are we going to do about it?”

She laughed. “You came down to spend the night with me, and instead of jumping into the hay we’ve embarked on a moral symposium.”

Suddenly he rose and came over and sat on the foot of the chaise-longue. He took both her hands and said, “Mona.”

“Yes.”

“Look at me.”

“If you like. I’d rather look at you than at the decorations.” She looked at him and he did not turn away.

“Mona.”

“Yes.”

“I’ve got to get through.”

“Get through what?” she asked, softly.

“I’ve got to make you stop doing an act. See? You’ve got to be yourself. Not, Mona, the life of the party. You’ve got to

be yourself. See? And I've got to be *me*, and not Pat the bum—Pat, Fanny Williams' gigolo. See?"

"I see."

"Can you do it?"

She answered him in a whisper: "I don't know. It's been so long since I've been myself. It's been so long since I've had time...."

She drew her hands away from him and put her arm across her eyes. She made no sound, but her thin body was shaking.

Quietly he moved a little nearer and put his arm about her.

"That's better," he said. "That's the kid. Go on and cry."

"It's no good crying. That's just another way of dodging it. Pitying ourselves won't do any good."

"It's not a bad way to begin."

"The awful thing is that I want to talk about myself. I want to tell somebody everything. I've never been like that before. I hate it."

"Go on. Tell about yourself. I'd like it."

"I'm scared."

But after a little time she began to talk of herself, sitting apart from him, her face turned away as if she were ashamed. It was difficult. She could not think why she should want to explain herself to Pat, of all people, except that it seemed to her that he might understand what it was she was trying to explain. She cried for a time and then talked some more, and in all she said, in all the confidences she gave him, there were no excuses, but only bare, plain facts, told as dispassionately as she was able to tell them. It was as if a dam had given way and all the emotion, the sorrows, the disappointments and the

bitterness held for years tightly locked inside her were pouring out.

She told him of her first husband and a headlong marriage made in Scotland because he was in love and she thought the escapade would be “amusing,” and of the second, whom she married in California when they went off together in a motor through the mountains. And how both marriages had come to an end in boredom. There was never any time. In all her life since she was twenty-three there had never been any time. One had had to be amused and be entertaining. One had to go faster and faster.

“I can’t go any faster,” she said. “I can’t! I can’t! The damned machine has run down.”

She had covered her face with her hands and Pat sat quietly watching her. He felt more sober now. The buzzing and confusion had gone from his head. Presently he said, “What are you going to do now?”

“I don’t know. Only God knows. I’m broke. I haven’t any place to go except to old Ainslee.”

He did not answer her at once, and after a time he said, “I suppose you’d have everything you want if you went to him?”

“I don’t mean that I’d be kept,” she said. “He wants to marry me. He’s wanted to marry me for three years—whenever I’d say the word. I don’t know why. I suppose he wants somebody who knows everybody to run his house and his yacht and give parties.”

“Could you bear it? An old bastard like that.”

“I could bear him. He isn’t a bad sort. But I couldn’t bear the life and the people. I’d rather kill myself right now.”

He looked at the bottle of sleeping-stuff on the table beside the chaise-longue.

“You weren’t thinking of it tonight?”

“Yes. I thought about it, but I hadn’t the nerve. And when I tried to I thought there might be something waiting just round the corner—some way of working it out. I thought I might miss something.”

Suddenly she uncovered her face and looked at him. “What about you? What are you going to do? I’ve done nothing but talk about myself.”

“Me?” He took another drink. “God knows.”

Shyly she said: “Do you want to talk about yourself? I don’t mind. I’d like to listen if it’ll help.”

“There’s damned little to tell. I’m just a bum. I suppose it’s too late to be anything better now.” He laughed. “We’re a fine pair, we are. The lame leading the blind.”

She lay back in the chaise-longue, closing her eyes, and presently he said: “I heard everything you and Janey said. I couldn’t help myself.”

“No, I suppose not.”

“I want to ask you something, but I’m afraid to. I’m such a lousy rotter I feel as if I oughtn’t even to speak of it.”

“Go on. Speak of it. What?”

He waited for a moment and then said, “You ... you talked about a fellow who was a flier in the war.”

“Yes,” said Mona, in a whisper.

“I flew, too. That’s how I got started being a bum. My father was a clergyman and I was brought up properly, only I got off the track. I suppose I’d never have been any good, anyway, but when I was flying I was nothing but a kid, and

when I was in the air I used to think that I might be dead any time, in a minute, in an hour or a week, and when I got leave I raised hell. And I got mixed up with a Frenchwoman—a nice woman—and I was in love with her, but she was married, and when the war was over it had to come to an end. And by that time I had the jitters and didn't give a damn about anything. I had about two hundred dollars a month and people liked me and I was the life of the party and the worst of all—women liked to have me about. So I stayed in Paris, trying to go on painting the town red. And I've been trying to go on for fourteen years. But it's no good."

His voice fell to a whisper and when he had finished he sighed.

Into the silence came again the distant throbbing of turbines and the creaking of the driven ship. At last, without looking at her, he said: "Maybe I knew him. What was his name?"

"Pendleton," she said, in a whisper. "Jimmy Pendleton."

"Yes, I knew him. He was a swell guy. Sometimes we flew together. I knew he had a girl in America, but I never knew it was you."

"Fifteen years ago," she said, and laughed. "Do you remember when there were flappers and whoopee girls? They're out of fashion now. They've all gotten old."

"He used to talk to me about you. I never guessed you were the girl. He was a swell guy. I loved him."

"Let's not talk any more, Pat. Let's just sit quietly."

But presently she said, "Pat, why did you ask Janey to marry you?"

He hesitated for a time and then said: “I don’t really know. Honest to God, I don’t—except that she’s young and I like her and I thought maybe it was a chance to pull myself together, out of the gutter. I didn’t think she’d have me. It was like throwing a banknote on a roulette table and letting it lay where it fell.”

“You made love to me. You never asked me to marry you.”

“I was too humble to think you’d marry a fellow like me. I wasn’t in love with Janey. It’s not the way I feel about you. I’m awfully fond of you.”

She spoke without opening her eyes, “I’m glad you didn’t use the word love.”

“Why?”

“Because it hasn’t got anything to do with us. It never can have again.”

He did not answer her, and for a long time they sat without saying anything. It was an odd, comfortable silence, like the silence between a man and woman who have long lived together, knowing each other intimately, in which there was no need for talk and no need to explain or to justify. With her eyes still closed, Mona thought: “After all, we understand each other. We know the worst. There is nothing to discover about each other except pleasant things.” And an odd thought began to be born in her head.

Presently Pat said, “I’ve been fond of you ever since the first time I saw you.”

“I don’t remember when that was.”

“At a bar. Sitting on a high stool.”

She smiled a little. “Yes, that’s more than likely.”

“And you improve on knowing.”

“Yes, in spite of everything there’s something nice about her. I’ve heard that a good many times. And a hell of a lot of good it’s done me!”

Suddenly Pat rose and crossed the sitting-room and stood looking out of the window. Presently he said, “It’s nearly dawn.”

“Another day,” said Mona. “Just like all the others.”

And after a time Pat said, “There’s only one thing for us to do.” She did not answer him and he said, without looking at her, “I haven’t the nerve to ask you to do it.”

Mona opened her eyes and looked toward him. He was still standing at the window with the glass of whisky in his hand, looking toward the east.

“What?” she asked.

“Hook up,” he said.

“You mean get married?”

“Yes.”

She smiled, and as he turned he saw the smile and said, “I know it’s funny.”

“I suppose if we’re going to hook up,” she said, “we might as well get married, because if it fails there’s nothing left, anyway.”

“It’s a funny sort of proposal.”

“No. I think it makes sense. It’s one of those things which make sense because nothing else in the world does.”

“There’s land ahead,” said Pat, turning again to the window. “I see lights.”

“It must be Sandy Hook.”

“I guess they’ve made their damned record,” said Pat, “even if they did shake the passengers to pieces.”

She rose and went over to the window, standing beside him. He took her hand, almost with shyness.

“I’m glad we’re not getting off at this hour,” said Mona, “with a lot of bags.”

Outside, the lights came nearer and nearer and against the faint yellow-gray sky they could see faintly the low distant line of the shore.

“Is it a go?” asked Pat, in a low voice.

“Yes,” and after a moment, “I don’t see what we’re going to live on.”

“I’ve got about two hundred a month.”

She laughed, “Two hundred a month—that’s fifty dollars a week. That’s what I used to spend on lunching and at the hairdresser’s.”

“I can get a job,” he said.

“So can I. I can sell things in a shop. I know everybody who is anybody—all the people who spend money.”

Suddenly he turned and kissed her on the cheek, gently. “I think it might work,” he said.

“It might. It’s got to—or else——”

Then they were aware that there was all about them an overwhelming silence, as if suddenly the world, the whole universe, had suddenly stopped, frozen into immobility. No longer was there any creaking or straining. No longer did the neurotic vibration of the turbines transmit themselves through the plates of steel. The ship had stopped. She was still now, like a great rock emerging from the water.

“Go to bed,” said Pat. “I’ll sleep on the chaise-longue.”

When Jeanne came in at ten she found them both—one in the sitting-room and one in the cabin, sleeping quietly.

At eight old Mrs. Williston waked and had breakfast in her cabin. She had slept well and felt rested, and inside her there was a profound sense of peace that was like the moment when the ship stopped. She saw the little pile of telegrams she had written in the night and, oddly, there rose in her with daylight no desire to destroy them. She would send them all and go away quietly with Tom. There would be no more dressing and undressing, no more silly talk, no more hurrying, but only peace and rest.

When she had finished breakfast she rose and, untying the veil which kept her wave in place, carefully remade her hair and her wrinkled face, thinking all the time the pleasure she would have in telling Tom of her decision. And when she dressed she thought how different it would be from now on. Neither of them need be tired or lonely again.

When she had finished, she rang for the stewardess, and when the woman came she said “Good morning” to her so brightly and with such kindness that the woman’s dull expression was startled into astonishment.

Then she said, “Will you go to Mr. Sayres’s cabin and tell him that I’ve gone up to the deck and will be waiting for him there?”

The woman did not answer her for a moment. Then she started to speak and halted, unable to find words.

Old Mrs. Williston grew irritated. “What is it? What do you want?”

Then the woman found words, “He’s not there.”

“What do you mean he’s not there? He can’t have flown away.”

The woman flushed. “I’m sorry, madame. He’s not there. He died last night.” And she told in broken English how he had been found, dead in his sleep, on the hurricane deck by a sailor who went up at dawn to scrub the deck.

Old Mrs. Williston did not answer her. She shut the door suddenly, and when she was alone she sat down weakly in the chair before the little writing-desk. For a long time she sat there, staring in front of her, wanting to cry out, to weep. But no tears came. Long ago she had lost the habit.

The steward, knocking on her door to fetch her baggage, roused her. She admitted him, and when he had gone she took up the little pile of telegrams and tore them into tiny pieces and thrust them out of the porthole. They fluttered away like flakes of snow, and the wind carried some of them into the porthole of old Tom’s empty cabin, where the steward was packing the things he would never use again.

At New York it was Hank who took charge of the old man’s body, and Janey went with him. Fanny got off the ship among the first, and Carvalho, sleek and dark, was with her. Mona and Pat waited in order not to meet Fanny, and old Mrs. Williston went ashore alone, to keep all her engagements.

The *Atlantis* had broken all records. She had established herself as the fastest, most luxurious liner afloat, and when all her passengers were ashore she steamed off again to fetch a new cargo de luxe. The newspapers next day reported her victory and noted the death of Thomas Sayres. “Otherwise,” read the accounts, “the voyage was uneventful.”

IV. *Miss Mehaffy*

SHE lived in a small house between the Cherokee Garage and the delicatessen shop of Mr. Petersen, whose daughter was an actress in New York. The house stood back from the street, with a strip of grass and a few lilac trees for a dooryard, the last relict of a long row of houses built of wood and painted gray which had once filled the whole of Beaver Dam Avenue before the slate-mines were discovered and the town had its boom. Shut in on the one side by the long blank wall of the garage, and on the other by the business block erected by Mr. Petersen on the former site of his own gray house, the grass and bushes in the front yard languished and grew a little thinner each year despite all the efforts of Miss Mehaffy to make them appear lush and abundant. She did not complain either to Mr. Petersen or to the Durant family which owned the Cherokee Garage, because she was a friendly person and the Petersens and the Durants had been not only her neighbors but her friends for fifty-one years. She chose to live on in the last house on Beaver Dam Avenue because it was a good location for her bakery and tearoom and because she had never lived anywhere else since she was four years old. At fifty-five she could remember very little of those first four years of her existence save that her parents had moved about a great deal and always seemed to be in and out of trains, wagons, and buckboards, and that they had had a great many friends who as people were more exciting than anyone she had encountered since. And then when she was four years

old they had come to settle down in Winnebago Falls because it wasn't safe for Two-gun Joe Mehaffy to stay any longer in Colorado or Nevada, not, at least, if he wished to save his neck.

She was a big woman, a fraction of an inch over six feet tall, with big hands and rather small pretty feet, a big generous mouth, and small bright-blue eyes, and there was no one in Winnebago Falls who did not know her or her tearoom. A few of the older citizens remembered when she came there as a child with Two-gun Joe and Big Annie. The middle-aged ones had grown up with her, and the younger ones had seen her as far back as they could remember. Most of them, even the younger ones, knew that she was the only child of Two-gun Joe and Big Annie, and Winnebago Falls was near enough to Colorado for the legend of Two-gun Joe and his wife to have traveled eastward and fixed itself in the traditions of the town. In the old days, when Two-gun Joe still sometimes showed himself in the streets, people would point him out to visiting relatives and strangers as the last of the bad men, and Joe did not mind being pointed at and whispered about, especially if people said he was bad enough. He was one of those who could not live without notoriety, and toward the end, when the town began to boom and he was a little lost and overlooked, he simply faded slowly away of a malady which might have been diagnosed as *ennui* complicated by disappointment. Toward the end he moaned a good deal about the good old days and the fact that the country wasn't a man's country any more, but a place for women, not even big, strong, tough women like his own Big Annie, but for puny women who sat in rocking-chairs and read women's magazines and went to picture shows for their romance and excitement.

The bakery business had been inherited by Miss Mehaffy from her mother. When Two-gun Joe and Big Annie came to the town they hadn't any money, and since Joe was simply unable to do honest work, Big Annie had supported him, from then on until she died, by making pies, cakes, and sandwiches for lazy or incompetent housewives and by "accommodating" when there was a death or a marriage. It wasn't a prideful thing for a woman like Big Annie, who had run the Eldorado Hotel and Dance Hall, to do, but somebody had to feed herself and Joe and their daughter Gladys, and she knew that she couldn't depend on Joe in a community where hold-ups and shootings were considered events of importance. She died when her daughter Gladys was sixteen years old but not before Gladys had learned the secret of her lemon pie and her chocolate cake and her raised biscuits, so Gladys simply took over her mother's burden of supporting Two-gun Joe and continued bearing it until the old man died thirty years later.

For twenty of the thirty years Joe had lived in a wheel chair, sleeping in the room back of the parlor and spending his days at the bay window watching the passers-by and talking with one or two old men who could remember the days when men were free and women knew what they wanted. In the morning Miss Mehaffy would wash him and help him to dress and push him into the parlor, and there he would stay while she baked in the kitchen until the evening, when she would push him back to his bedroom, undress him, and put him to bed. No doctor could find anything the matter with him. He just seemed to lack all ambition. He could not even make himself walk. And as he grew older he came slowly to dissociate himself from the present and the future and to live wholly in the past. He wasn't any great trouble to

his daughter, save that he prevented her from using the parlor as a tearoom, an ambition which she was forced to suppress until he died. She did not mind the long stories he would tell hour after hour to her when there was no one else about to listen. She had long ago come to know them all by heart, and like a child who has listened to the same story over and over again, she could correct him when his sprightly imagination led him astray. She would look at him and say, quietly, "No, it wasn't five men, it was only three you got that night in the Mesquite Canyon," and old Joe would shake his head and pull his shaggy mustaches and admit that perhaps she was right, but that he could not remember all the details because it had happened so long ago and there were so many exploits that sometimes he got them mixed up.

She knew the story of Mesquite Canyon, and the night he killed a bad man who tried to hold up Big Annie's place, and the way he did in four men who cornered him in the alley back of Heineman's saloon. And she knew two or three hundred others. And so as she grew into womanhood and middle age and finally stood on the verge of being an old lady, Miss Mehaffy had come to lead two lives, one concerned with her pies and cakes and her oven, and the other with shootings and scandals and riots in Meeker's Gulch in the days when there was silver in the mountains all about and the town was wide open. It was a kind of dream life into which she retired when she felt hot and exhausted by the heat of the oven and the Iowa summers, and now and then in the evenings after Joe had been washed and put to bed she would lie in the room overhead, between consciousness and sleep, living again all the adventures which she had heard her father and mother recount so many times. And there were moments when, feeling old and tired, it seemed to her that

she could no longer bear the simple monotony of an existence in which nothing had ever happened. And presently she came to understand why Two-gun Joe, with the old life gone, refused to make any compromise with a dull, respectable, law-abiding place like Winnebago Falls. She could understand his simple refusal to walk and his refuge in the past.

Most of the older citizens in the town had a tradition. Some of them came from New England by way of the Western Reserve. Some of them were of German descent, and a few families had come long ago from the mountains of the South. All of them were aware of those traditions, cherishing them and living their own lives according to their dictates. They had home-comings and family reunions and corn roasts when they all came together and talked about ancestors and old family stories. All that was easy enough for *them*. They had all belonged to a race of builders and they simply went on settling and building. It was easy enough for a New Englander to go on living as his ancestors had lived, or for a German-American to go on being a Lutheran and having big, heavy family dinners. But for Miss Mehaffy it wasn't so easy. How in such a world could her blood and tradition assert itself? How could that hidden spirit which was forever stirring in her find a way of release? Joe and Big Annie were Irish and Roman Catholic, and their ancestors came in with railroads from the south counties. They had spent half their lives in saloons and bars and got roaring drunk and lived wildly and freely, wandering here and there always in search of adventure. How could you carry out such a tradition in a town where everybody was respectable and local option had long ago driven out bars and saloons? All that lay behind Miss Mehaffy. Nature had even given her a big strong body

like Big Annie's. It had equipped her by blood and inheritance and physique and even perhaps by temperament for what Joe always called "living in a big way," and then fate had placed her in a hot kitchen in the midst of the dullest and most respectable of communities, where nothing ever happened but birth and death in bed.

Miss Mehaffy wasn't sure about the temperament. There were long periods when life flowed smoothly along and she was content with her baking and old Joe sitting in the parlor in his wheel chair, and, after he was dead, with her kitchen and the tearoom which finally took his place with its chintz curtains and its chairs and tables painted orange and black, each with its little vase of flowers picked from the garden and thrust in stiffly, three or four in a bunch. The tearoom she had created herself, like her pies and cakes, with a few suggestions from the women's magazines, and she was proud of it, but somehow it was not enough. There were times when Miss Mehaffy, alone in the house, could not sleep at night and felt that she would burst if something exciting did not happen to relieve the horrible strain of dullness and monotony. There were moments when she felt that she must get up and dress herself and take down old Joe's pistols from the wall and run down Beaver Dam Avenue, shooting them right and left, shattering the windows of all the respectable stores and flats on either side of the street.

But she knew she could not do anything like that or they would shut her up for being crazy, and she knew she wasn't crazy. It was only that the people in that dull town could never understand that there were times when you needed a little excitement. They wouldn't understand that you really didn't mean anything by such behavior and that you meant

harm to no one. They wouldn't understand that there were times when you *had* to have some excitement. So she suppressed the desire, but it returned to her again and again, so often that presently she became terrified lest she should give way, seize the pistols from the wall, and run out of the house without knowing what she was doing. And so when those wakeful, restless spells overtook her she fell into the habit of drinking a glass or two of cooking-sherry or some brandy, and presently her big, tough body would relax and she would fall asleep, and when she awakened the next morning the desire to shoot up the town would be gone. Sometimes she would have wild dreams about the Eldorado Hotel and Dance Hall. She had never seen it, or if she had seen it she could not remember it, but somehow in the dreams which came after the cooking-sherry, Miss Mehaffy would see the dance-hall and barroom very clearly, all decorated in red plush and gold paint, with women and miners about, and in the midst of them the dashing figure of Two-gun Joe and Big Annie. In the morning it was never very clear to her what had happened, but she awakened with a sense of relief and of satisfaction, as if, somehow, at last, something had really happened to her.

But she never spoke of her yearnings for adventure to anyone in the town, not even to Nettie Petersen or any of the Durant family who owned the Cherokee Garage, because she knew that such feelings would be looked upon as strange and improper. So no one ever guessed that inside the big, strong body behind the plain rather kindly face of the proprietress of the Lilac Tea Shoppe the spirit of the great days still lived.

There was one story concerning Two-gun Joe which he never told but which his daughter, Miss Mehaffy, knew well. She heard it for the first time when she was eight years old and a woman called Mrs. Cadogan came from Nevada to spend three days visiting Big Annie. Mrs. Cadogan was a small, rather tough woman a little past middle age, who liked plumes and bangles and wore a big bustle and enormous puffed sleeves. Miss Mehaffy remembered having seen her take out a small pearl-handled revolver from the bustle and show it to her mother. Even at the age of eight Miss Mehaffy knew that her father did not like Mrs. Cadogan and was uncomfortable when she was in the house, but although the visit did not last long, it worked a wonderful change in Big Annie. When it happened, Miss Mehaffy's mother was already suffering from the illness of which she died at last, and something of the old spirit had gone out of her. Like Joe, she too had suffered from the dullness of Winnebago Falls and it may have been that she was ailing in spirit as well as in body. Under the influence of Mrs. Cadogan and her merry ways Big Annie's spirit had seemed to freshen again. Her voice grew loud once more and her manner boisterous, and for hours at a time while she worked in the kitchen, with Mrs. Cadogan helping her, dressed in black taffeta, with a clean gingham apron thrown over her, they would laugh and drink beer and talk about the old times. It was then that little Gladys Mehaffy, dazzled by the presence of a woman so worldly and expensively dressed as Mrs. Cadogan, heard the story of her parents' marriage.

It happened in Meeker's Gulch when Big Annie was running the hotel and dance-hall left to her when her father was shot. She was in love with Two-gun Joe, and when she found he had got her into trouble she asked him to marry her.

He agreed, but somehow the ceremony was always being put off for one reason or another until Big Annie felt that the delay was no longer a joke and that something had to be done. It was a shotgun marriage, but as Big Annie had no father to hold the shotgun, she held it herself. One morning she suspected that Joe was going to make a get-away by the three-forty-five, the only train that passed through Meeker's Gulch, and, armed with a shotgun and a priest, she went to the railway station and hid herself and Father McCloskey in the privy near the station. For half an hour they waited, and at last, sure enough, down an alley behind the railway station came Two-gun Joe, looking, as Mrs. Cadogan said, "like Simon Legree after his hounds turned on him." Big Annie waited, and as the train drew in she stepped out of the privy with Father McCloskey and the shotgun, and the train waited while the ceremony took place. "Joe," she said, "was mortified, but it served him right." He never tried to escape again, and when he had his trouble over shooting Blackjack Simmons, it was Big Annie who spirited him out of the county under the nose of the sheriff himself. Somehow the incident broke the spirit of Two-gun Joe. It was the first time a woman ever got the drop on him and he was never the same afterward.

They made a song out of the story, Big Annie told Mrs. Cadogan, and after a few glasses of beer and a little urging she sang it for her guest. Some of the song Miss Mehaffy had forgotten by the time Joe died and she turned the parlor into a tearoom, but she remembered some of it as Big Annie had sung it that day in a loud voice and as she sang it afterwards again and again as a lullaby to make little Gladys sleep the time she had scarlet fever. She remembered:

Annie was an orphan who ran a house of song,
And Joe, a two-gun fighter, was the man who done her wrong.

and she remembered the chorus, which ran:

She got him at the depot
Awaitin' the three-forty-five.

When Mrs. Cadogan went back to Nevada, all Big Annie's high spirits seemed to collapse again and eight years later she died, bored to death. Miss Mehaffy never heard the story or the song again.

When Miss Mehaffy was forty-six and Old Joe was dying they made a trip to Meeker's Gulch and she saw the depot where the marriage had taken place. The trip cost them almost everything Miss Mehaffy had managed to save from the bakery after paying off the mortgage on the gray house, and it wasn't easy getting the old man on and off trains what with the wheel chair and two or three junctions on the way, and Miss Mehaffy was a little nervous about that vague trouble Joe had had with the sheriff more that forty years before; but both of them thought the trip was worth the money and the trouble, and so they went. It was the only place Two-gun Joe wanted to see before he died, and in Miss Mehaffy's middle-aged heart there was a feeling that she might find in Meeker's Gulch that excitement she had craved all her life.

It took them nearly forty-eight hours to make the trip, what with the junctions and trains that stopped at every crossroad and the fact that nothing at all stopped at Meeker's Gulch save a combination freight and passenger train which came in

at five-thirty in the morning; but at last they got to Meeker's Gulch just as the sun was beginning to come up over the top of the mountains that encircled the old mining town.

From the moment Miss Mehaffy stepped off the train she knew that what they had both come to seek was no longer there. The roof of the depot had fallen in and the famous privy where Big Annie must have hidden herself with Father McCloskey was no more than a heap of rotting boards overgrown with thistles and morning-glories. On the main street the shops and houses stood slowly rotting away, with gaping windows and doors. The squeaking of the wheel chair echoed from one decayed building to another as Miss Mehaffy pushed Joe before her over the weed-grown road. They looked in at the doors and windows for some sign of life, and there was none until at last they saw what appeared to be a woman in a calico dress and a sunbonnet standing beside the old pump in the square. But when they drew near Miss Mehaffy saw that it was only an old store dummy propped up there by some passing tourist as a joke. At the head of the street they found the Eldorado Hotel and Dance Hall, but it had fared no better than the other buildings. The roof had collapsed and not one pane of glass remained in the windows. Across the front there were still a few faded remnants of ancient lettering done in red paint, and over the door the name of Annie McCoy was still legible. It was only on the flatland side of town that they came upon any evidence of life, and there they found one of the old stores occupied by two old men and a donkey. They were old-time prospectors who passed their days poking around among the ruins of the worked-out mines. The two old men sheltered them until a train arrived the next day, and Old Joe sat up until midnight drinking whisky and talking about the old

times. The next morning they made a melancholy departure, with the two prospectors at the station to see them off, and on the way home Two-gun Joe went to sleep and never woke up again.

It was Miss Mehaffy's only journey in search of adventure. For ten years after old Joe died she never left Winnebago Falls. It was only after the tearoom, growing more and more prosperous as the town boomed and Beaver Dam Avenue became established as part of the Lincoln Highway, filled her bank account higher than it had ever been before that she began to grow restless again and wonder whether she was still not young enough to find the excitement of which she had dreamed. She knew now that it wasn't to be found in the West, and she thought that perhaps New York might be an exciting place. It was Baby Petersen who had a great deal to do with her decision.

Nettie Petersen and Miss Mehaffy had been friends ever since the day when Two-gun Joe and Big Annie arrived with their daughter Gladys to live in the gray house on Beaver Dam Avenue. Nettie at that time was four years old and the same age as little Gladys Mehaffy. It was a friendship which had survived even the opposition of Nettie's parents, who in the beginning treated Joe and Annie as if they were carriers of the plague. They played together as little children and they went to taffy-pulls together, and Gladys Mehaffy was the maid of honor when Nettie married Nils Petersen, a big Swede, handsome and slow moving, who opened the delicatessen shop in Winnebago Falls. When Nettie's parents died it was Miss Mehaffy who consoled her and helped with the laying out, and when Baby was born it was Miss Mehaffy

who took over the household and comforted Nils (who took it all very calmly) and washed the baby and dressed it. Nettie Petersen, like Miss Mehaffy, had never lived anywhere save on the same plot of ground, for when the town had its boom and business overtook Beaver Dam Avenue, the Petersens simply pulled down the old house in which Nettie had been born and built a business block with a flat overhead, where they lived in rooms faintly and perpetually scented with the odors of garlic and liverwurst and sauerkraut. While the old house was being pulled down and the business block being built, Nettie and Nils and Baby just moved over into Miss Mehaffy's house and stayed there.

Miss Mehaffy would have liked being married, and she would have liked a family of ten or twelve children, but luck seemed always to be against her. She was a spinster, she always said with a certain pride, not from necessity, but from choice. She had had opportunities, but always they were ones which did not appeal to her. She would have loved and married a big man in the wild tradition of old Joe, her father, but no such man ever offered himself. In all her fifty-five years she had proposals from only three men and none of them did she consider worthy of her, for they were all small, meek men who had been attracted to her by a desire for protection, and although Miss Mehaffy was a simple, motherly soul, the feeling did not extend to mating. What she desired as a husband was some one as big, as energetic, and as friendly as herself, who could set out adventuring with her. What she wanted was a kind of pal prospector, and somehow in the senseless workings of nature, no such man was ever attracted by her big strong body and her big plain face. On the contrary, they seemed frightened by her and ran after pretty little blond things with no sense at all. In turn Miss

Mehaffy rejected the organist of the Baptist church, Mr. Winterbottom, who was assistant to Winnebago Falls' leading undertaker, and Mr. Peabody, who was related to rich New Englanders and was a clerk in Salesby's drug store. Always she kept hoping, with the incurable romanticism come down to her from Joe and Big Annie, for the man who would carry her off to find excitement. But after the age of thirty-three she had no more offers, and by the time she was forty she had come to the conclusion that the man she wanted would never appear and so she settled herself to the business of living for and through other people.

Because nothing had ever happened to her, she came to live through the Petersens and the Durants and through all the children in the neighborhood, whom she came in a way to adopt. There was hardly a child in the whole town whom she did not know, for Miss Mehaffy's ice cream was admitted to be pure and perfectly healthy and children were brought to the Lilac Tea Shoppe on the occasions of great treats; and the children of the neighborhood were in and out of her kitchen all day, having cookies warm from the oven or bits of baked pie crust rolled up with butter and cinnamon. A good many of them went home in the evening without proper appetites, to be accused of having been "eating stuff at Miss Mehaffy's" and some had their digestions deranged throughout adolescence, but when it came to spoiling children Miss Mehaffy had no scruples; she was all generosity. When they grew up and married, Miss Mehaffy baked the cakes and supplied the ice cream for their weddings, and when their children were born she went to the christenings carrying the fresh baked cakes with her, arriving a little early so there would be no anxiety about their delivery. She was a big, simple woman who always expected the rest of humanity to

be as generous and as straightforward as herself. People could count on her, and she had never been known to have a quarrel in all the fifty-one years of her life in Winnebago Falls. In all those years her simplicity and her faith had been proven, and in the whole town there had never been a workman or tradesman mean enough to cheat her. You might cheat and swindle other scamps and scoundrels like yourself, but it wasn't possible to cheat a woman like Miss Mehaffy and get a good night's rest afterward.

Almost everyone knew Miss Mehaffy, but not one ever guessed of those secret sips of cooking-sherry or brandy or of those long nights when Miss Mehaffy lay awake wondering if anything would ever happen to her and whether she would ever know that moment of excitement which was her right by blood and tradition.

From the day the Petersen baby was born and Miss Mehaffy dressed her in the garments she had made herself in spare moments, the child was known as Baby, and in spite of every effort to the contrary she never had any other name. It was a name which suited her perfectly, a name as inevitable as the rising sun. From the moment she was washed for the first time she was a pretty baby, never having rashes or red color or any of the marring ailments which disfigured other babies. Somewhere in the background of the big lumbering Nils there must have been a Swedish beauty, for Baby was clearly a throwback. She had no relation in appearance to Nettie Petersen, who was big and blousy and red-haired, nor to the fat, good-natured Nils, save in her blondness. When she was a year old she had large blue eyes, blond curls, a small lovely mouth, and a complexion like the petal of a rose.

She was Baby Incarnate, the kind of child mothers dream of. And by the time she was a year old she had already won first prize in the baby contest held during the county-fair week. By the time she was three she had won first prize and an honorable mention in a state contest, and her photograph with testimonials for talcum powder and baby food and baby pants, written by advertising men and signed by Nettie, had appeared in a half dozen women's magazines. Cut out and framed they all hung in Miss Mehaffy's kitchen.

It was almost as if Baby were Miss Mehaffy's own child. Nettie Petersen, who was a bad housekeeper and could not bear being alone, was always running in to have a game of pinochle or talk while Miss Mehaffy did her baking, and when Nettie went downtown or to a euchre party or a dance of the Eastern Star, she always left Baby with Miss Mehaffy. It was not only that Miss Mehaffy looked upon Baby as her own child, but also that Baby seemed to her everything she herself had never been and never could be. From the day she was born Miss Mehaffy was big and ugly, and as a little girl she had dreamed of having big blue eyes and blond curls. Even after middle-age she kept dreaming of how different life would have been if she had only looked differently. But that, like her desire for excitement and the cooking-sherry, was a thing which she never spoke of. Not even Nettie Petersen had ever guessed what went on a large part of the time inside Miss Mehaffy's head.

On the opposite side of the house there was another child who seemed almost as much her own as Baby. It was Willie Durant, who was born a month or two before Baby. He was no beauty, but he had a quiet charm of his own. His hair was just hair colored, and his eyes were an honest blue-gray color,

but there was an appealing sturdiness about him. He had two brothers and a sister older than himself, but none of them was old enough to care for him when the Durants went out in the evening, and so he was sometimes left with Miss Mehaffy. Both Mrs. Durant and Mrs. Petersen belonged to the Eastern Star, and on the occasions of a dance Baby and Willie were put to sleep side by side on the bed in the spare room above the room where old Joe slept. As they grew older they came to Miss Mehaffy's kitchen and they played in the garden and in the Mehaffy barn (for Willie was not allowed to hang around the Durant livery stable, on account of the bad words he might hear) and together they listened to some of Two-gun Joe's big stories. And sometimes Miss Mehaffy entertained them by singing old songs like "After the Ball" and "The Baggage Coach Ahead." Together they learned about life, and together they went to school and together they went out riding behind Willie's father when he bought one of the first automobiles in the town and began remodeling the livery stable into the Cherokee Garage and Filling Station.

In her heart Miss Mehaffy thought how nice it would be if they married each other, and that was an arrangement to which neither the Durants nor the Petersens had any objections to offer. It was the most usual and natural thing. Such a marriage would be like most of the other marriages in the town, quiet and happy and uneventful, the working out of the slow destiny of people in such a sleepy town as Winnebago Falls. And Willie thought of it, too, and by the time he was a big gawky boy of sixteen going to high school with Baby, he even suggested it to her and she made no objections. She merely smiled and accepted the tribute and said, "Maybe it's a good idea."

But the element all of them forgot to consider was Baby herself. Sometime, long ago, perhaps when she had vanquished all those other babies at the county fair and at Des Moines, she had come to understand not only that she was a beauty, but also that beauty had power, and in her heart, without saying anything to anyone, she determined to use it. By the time she was three there had come into her baby face an expression best described as a look of corrupted innocence. Nature had given her a face, a coloring, and a manner which until she reached the age of a hundred could never be described as anything but innocent. It was a simple matter of physiognomy. She had the coloring and outlines which the human race had come centuries before to regard as fresh and innocent, and none could change that tradition. It was only those few unhappy individuals of great discernment who saw behind the outward bloom and detected something which was not innocence at all, but knowledge—knowledge as old as time itself. The great mass of mankind was only aware of something that lay behind the face and the expression which they did not understand and which they found exciting. Even in those early baby contests it was always that something which set Baby apart from children, some of them even prettier than herself, and caused the judges to bestow the blue ribbon upon her. She was “cute.”

And as she grew older nothing occurred in the narrow field of Baby’s experience to dampen the confidence which lay behind her childlike expression. Born after her parents were married eight years, at a moment when they despaired of having any children, an only child, not only of the Petersens, but of Miss Mehaffy as well, spoiled by Willie and all the neighbors, and run after by all the boys, Baby had come to believe that there was nothing in life she might not have for

the asking. At home her mother never allowed her to do any housework, for fear of spoiling her beauty, and at Miss Mehaffy's Baby sat in a comfortable chair while Miss Mehaffy scrubbed and scoured and baked. In adolescence she did not grow fat or awkward or self-conscious like most girls. She remained poised and confident, slim and pretty. She had plans for herself of which she said nothing, and oddly enough Nettie Petersen cherished the same plans, although she never mentioned them to her daughter.

But one day when Baby was seventeen Nettie came into Miss Mehaffy's kitchen to play a little pinochle, and after the two of them had talked of a great many things, Mrs. Petersen said, "I hear they're going to have a beauty contest for the fair this year."

"How nice!" said Miss Mehaffy.

"They're going to elect the prettiest girl to be Miss Putnam County. What do you think about having Baby entered in it?"

"She'd win it," said Miss Mehaffy.

"You don't think it would be too vulgar or anything, do you?"

"No," said Miss Mehaffy. "What's vulgar about it?"

"I mean showing off a girl that way. I won't have her walking around in one of those one-piece bathing-suits."

"Mebbe they'd let her wear a skirt."

For a long time they talked of this possibility, and Mrs. Petersen, who had only come in to be persuaded anyway, *was* persuaded. "Who knows," she said, "it might lead to all sorts of things for Baby?"

What Mrs. Petersen meant by "all sorts of things" was quite as vague as the expression itself. She, too, in her sloppy,

lackadaisical way, had secret yearnings for a life more exciting than the one shared with her husband and Baby in the flat over the delicatessen store. What she wanted most was money, and two or three servants so that she might spend her mornings in bed, her afternoons at the movies, and her evenings playing five hundred, with the spare moments occupied by reading movie magazines. If Baby got to be Miss Putnam County—and there wasn't much doubt that she would—she might go into the movies or become a famous actress, or maybe become so celebrated that she would find a rich *good* man for a husband. Nettie Petersen knew that there was something wrong and shameful in these vague wandering thoughts which came to occupy her mind more and more each day, but she had not the strength to resist them. It was not only that she lacked the strength, but also that Baby had somehow got possession of her and Nils and made them do whatever she wanted. In Mrs. Petersen there was no resistance, because anything which required great effort was too much for her. Her husband might have resisted, but long ago he had given up struggling against his wife and daughter and buried himself in the delicatessen business and simply went to sleep when he came home in the evenings. Mrs. Petersen suffered from the vague temptations, but she did nothing about them.

When Baby came in from school that evening, Mrs. Petersen spoke casually of the beauty contest, and Baby said: "I've already signed up for it. I didn't tell you because I thought maybe you wouldn't like it."

"I guess it'll be all right," said her mother, "if you wear a skirt."

It was a great relief to her because somehow the decision was shifted from her shoulders. She told Miss Mehaffy, "I just couldn't have kept Baby from doing it, anyway." It was just fate, and Mrs. Petersen never felt strong enough to resist fate, even if she had wanted to.

For two days before the contest Miss Mehaffy and Mrs. Petersen suffered a constant excitement. They worked over Baby's curls and her nails and Mrs. Petersen even allowed her to touch the perfect curve of her lips with a bit of rouge. She wore a bathing-suit with a skirt and her hair in tight blond curls falling over her shoulder. She was elected Miss Putnam County and her photograph appeared in both the town newspapers, although the face was one already well known to everyone in Winnebago Falls. She won a silver cup and a complete costume from Barkley's department store, but when the contest was finished and the prize awarded, Baby found no great satisfaction in it. She had known all along that there was no other girl in the town so pretty as herself, or with a figure so perfect, and so there was not even any excitement. It left her vaguely discontented and gave birth to a new desire. She found no distinction in being chosen the prettiest girl in Putnam County. Indeed, she looked upon the whole affair as rather a waste of time. Her real desire was to conquer all of Iowa, and after that all of the United States, and at length to become Miss Universe.

For Nettie Petersen it was enough that her daughter had been officially called the prettiest girl in Putnam County. The prospect of further triumphs suddenly took all the vagueness out of her dreams of a fortune attained through Baby and terrified her. Each time she regarded the silver cup, it was

with pride, but each time she had, too, a faint awareness that it was a menace and a threat which might lead anywhere, into any sort of calamity. As for many people, the first half of the road was easy going and on the second half she lost her courage and became suddenly Mrs. Nils Petersen, the respectable wife of a solid citizen in that sleepy town which Miss Mehaffy found so dull.

She had Willie Durant as an ally. He became indignant and quarreled with Baby over exposing herself on a platform at the county fair. His protests had no effect, save perhaps to make his success with Baby the more impossible. She told him that he should mind his own business and implied that she had a future into which he could never hope to penetrate. Why should she care what he thought when boys like Herbert Brandt, whose father owned the waterworks, were crazy about her? The threat of Herbert Brandt did not move Willie very much, for he knew that Herbert was puny and pimply and that when Baby was not quarreling with him she made fun of Herbert.

It was, oddly enough, Miss Mehaffy who betrayed both Mrs. Petersen and Willie. It was not that she was hypocritical or double-faced in the matter. When she was with Willie or Mrs. Petersen she understood perfectly that Willie didn't want his girl, whom he intended to marry as soon as he was twenty-one, showing off her charms in public, and she understood that Mrs. Petersen as a mother might be afraid that her daughter's head would be turned and that simple vanity might lead her into the most awful pitfalls. It was Miss Mehaffy's own nature which in turn betrayed her and made her seem to be a false friend. For when she was alone with Baby she understood the girl's vanity and ambition. Baby,

like herself, had a craving for excitement and a desire to adventure into the world. Perhaps that, too, she inherited, like her beauty, from some remote Viking ancestor. Miss Mehaffy's inheritance was direct and in no way weakened by discovering vicarious satisfaction through Baby. Baby was in appearance what she had always yearned to be, and now, after Baby's triumph, it was as if Miss Mehaffy came to identify herself in some strange psychological fashion and seek to find her excitement through Baby. And she could refuse Baby nothing. The one element which made her sad was the instinctive knowledge that when Baby was chosen Miss Putnam County Willie's suit was lost. Although neither she nor Baby ever spoke of it, they both knew it in their hearts and each knew that the other knew.

So when Baby quarreled with her parents or grew restless and discontented and ran away from home to come and sit in Miss Mehaffy's kitchen, Miss Mehaffy, in spite of every good determination to the contrary, encouraged her. In spite of every attempt to give Baby good sensible advice she found herself agreeing with Baby's desire to go out into the world and enter the movies or become an actress. It was as if the Miss Mehaffy the whole town knew as a respectable quiet woman deserted her big frame completely and was replaced by the Miss Mehaffy who took sips of brandy and could not sleep at night for her craving of excitement. When Baby said that life in Winnebago Falls was dull and awful, Miss Mehaffy could not deny it, since she herself had known it for fifty years. When she said that her mother was lazy and sloppy and dull and only wanted to get her married off respectably in the town so that she wouldn't have to worry any longer, Miss Mehaffy kept her silence, because since the day that she first met Nettie Petersen as a girl of four, a part

of her had always known that these accusations were true. Even when Baby said scornfully that Willie would never be anything better than a garage proprietor Miss Mehaffy could not deny it, because she knew it was true. And because of all these things Baby came more and more frequently to sit in the kitchen and receive encouragement. At home she would go for days without speaking to her parents and pass hours studying the movie magazines. Her tastes grew more extravagant and she even wanted to have her curls done twice a week by a regular hairdresser. She made life so dreadful that there were times when Nils Petersen did not care whether she spent the rest of her life participating in beauty contests and thought that anything, even things worse than death, was better than having her about the house.

And so when the time drew near for the choice of Miss Iowa at the state fair, Baby was among the contestants. Again she wore a skirt as a compromise with her mother, and again she wore her hair in tight curls falling to her shoulders and tied at one side with a large pink bow.

But this time she did not triumph. She received an honorable mention, but she failed to be chosen as Miss Iowa, and when she returned to Winnebago Falls she wept until, with a shrewdness which had come to her in those early baby contests, she began to search for the reasons why Miss Salem County had defeated her. In the end she came to the conviction that it was because she wore a skirt and had her hair in tight curls with a pink bow at one side. So one day she returned home with the curls cut shoulder length and all the kink taken out of them. Her hair fell in natural waves even with her shoulders. Her mother cried and her father

threatened to disown her, but Baby had her way, as always, and she continued to do her hair in the new fashion.

She finished high school that year, and until the late summer she simply waited sullenly, going daily to sit in Miss Mehaffy's kitchen, drawing confidence and strength from Miss Mehaffy. It was not always that she appeared simply a spoiled, silly, vain young girl full of unformed ambitions; there were moments when she was pathetic and touching in her desire for something bigger and richer than the town could offer her, and at such moments she gained complete domination over Miss Mehaffy, for Miss Mehaffy understood only too well Baby's feeling. All this Miss Mehaffy tried to explain to Willie when he came over from the garage in his blue overalls, his big hands covered with oil and grime, to complain to her of Baby's behavior toward him. She was not very eloquent, and what eloquence she had made no impression upon Willie, who could not understand why Baby shouldn't be satisfied with a good home, a husband who was kind to her, and as much money as any sensible wife would want. Miss Mehaffy understood why Willie, who was one of those meant by nature to live in perpetual satisfaction and contentment, could not fathom Baby's restlessness. Some people she knew were made one way and some people another, and without both kinds the world wouldn't work. And so she tried to compromise by telling Willie that if he really wanted Baby so much, he must wait a little while until the wildness was gone out of her and she settled down. She tried to make Willie see that there were other girls in the town, maybe not so pretty as Baby, but much nicer, who would make far better wives. But it wasn't any good, because Willie was what Miss Mehaffy called in those internal dialogues with herself "an average male," and an average

male was just a nice kindly animal with no sense and no perception and nothing to guide him in life but physiological instincts. Things only went from bad to worse. Baby wouldn't allow him to kiss her any more, and more often than not she refused his invitations to the movies. And meanwhile everybody was miserable—Mr. and Mrs. Petersen and Miss Mehaffy and Willie and Baby, and even the Durant family.

They were all so miserable that when the time drew near for the new competition to select Miss Iowa, only a few feeble protests arose over Baby's determination to enter it. On the whole, opposition rather faded away, but there was one obstacle which could not fade, and that was the matter of money. It was the year the mortgage fell due on the new business block, and Nils Petersen had to rake and scrape every penny in order to meet it. There just wasn't money to buy Baby new clothes and pay her railroad fare and hotel bills in Des Moines. But Baby had set her mind upon it and there was no stopping her. She arranged to stay with a cousin in Des Moines, and it was Miss Mehaffy, weakened again by the strange feeling that it was herself in the person of Baby who was having all this excitement, who produced the money out of her savings for Baby's railroad ticket and new clothes. If she was chosen Miss Iowa her expenses to the national contest at Atlantic City would be paid. It was her great opportunity to be free.

This time she took no chances. She wore her hair flowing wild and free and a one-piece bathing-suit which was as tight as possible, and she bought a new pair of slippers with the highest heels she could find in Des Moines and used to the limit that look of corrupted innocence which she understood

too well. And on the third day her mother received a telegram which simply said: “Success. I’m it.”

It was the last time any of them saw her for months and even years to come. She went to Atlantic City. She was not chosen as Miss America, but it did not matter to her so much this time, for there were other opportunities—the kind of opportunities she really wanted. A theatrical producer named Joyce wanted a new sensation for his revue and he came all the way to Atlantic City to make a contract with the new Miss America to ride on a white horse clad only in her hair (or a wig if the hair was too short). But the new Miss America was a Southern “home girl” from Georgia and her mother would not allow her to go on the stage, much less to appear in so scanty a costume. She was a large and powerful woman whose husband had a prosperous coal business, but, worse than that, she had religious scruples and so neither money nor blandishments could move her, and in the end Mr. Joyce abandoned the idea and set out to find a second best among the other girls. Not one of them had a chance against Baby. As soon as he saw her he knew that he had found the girl he was looking for. He recognized at once the value of that look of corrupted innocence, especially when mounted on a white horse and clothed only in a flowing blond wig. He divined what it would do to an audience composed of what Miss Mehaffy silently and scornfully called “the average male.” It would do to them just what it had done to Willie and to the judges of the baby contests long ago.

And so he engaged her. Baby did not ask for her parents’ permission. She simply wired them that she had been engaged as an actress, and when Mrs. Petersen received the

telegram she became hysterical and very nearly fainted and had to be comforted by Miss Mehaffy. That she did not faint was due to the fact that somewhere in the back of her mind there still hovered the thought that, after all, in spite of *everything*, this might be the beginning of that opulence of which she had dreamed through so many long hot and sleepy afternoons. Perhaps it would be all right. Perhaps Baby would become famous and rich. She knew that Baby was not a stupid girl and that she was more able than most girls to look out for herself. As for Nils Petersen, he didn't think much one way or another. He only knew that since Baby was gone a great peace had descended upon the whole neighborhood.

In Miss Mehaffy excitement bubbled over (secretly, for she dared betray to none of the others the strange emotion it gave her to know that Baby had escaped and that exciting things were happening to her). She sang over her baking, and patrons of the tearoom were surprised at the gaiety which seemed to have taken possession of her. Only Willie took it hard. He came in the kitchen and cried and said that now he wouldn't marry anybody. He'd never marry at all. He'd wait for Baby.

Miss Mehaffy tried to hint to him that there wasn't any use in waiting for Baby, and she said that marrying anybody was better than just running around, but Willie couldn't see her arguments. Somehow Baby had become a kind of symbol to him of all that was beautiful and pure and worthy of man's respect.

At first they had a letter almost every day from Baby. No matter which one received a letter, they all had to hear it and the letters were read again and again in Miss Mehaffy's

kitchen. They knew the big salary Baby was getting, and they knew she had found a girl friend called Lettice Vollmer and that they were sharing a room in a hotel in the Forties in New York, and that Baby was working hard at rehearsals and in one scene she held the center of the stage on a white horse, and that New York was wonderful and that she was really happy for the first time in her life. And they knew also that she had changed her name and was now called Gloria Dupont. It was a name suggested by Mr. Joyce, the producer, because Baby couldn't think of any which wasn't too fancy.

She called herself Gloria Dupont, and so her name was written on the programs where she was listed in the rôle of Lady Godiva. But nobody called her by that name. To everyone who knew her she remained Baby. There had been something terribly right in the instinct of the Petersens and Miss Mehaffy.

One year passed, and then two and then three. The letters from Baby grew more and more rare. Sometimes she was in Atlantic City, and sometimes in Philadelphia, and sometimes in Newark, but she never went very far from New York. She got work in two other shows, not such good parts as in the first, but still very good. She had been promised several chances at big things, but something had always gone wrong at the last moment. Now and then she wrote of returning home on a visit, but something always prevented it, and then one morning Mrs. Petersen dropped in at Miss Mehaffy's with a letter from Baby which said that she was singing in a night club.

Neither Miss Mehaffy nor Mrs. Petersen was very sure what a night club was, and Mrs. Petersen did not like the

sound of it. But the question of the night club astonished them less than the news that Baby was singing. Miss Mehaffy and Mrs. Petersen both believed that in order to sing, and especially to sing in public, one must have a voice and know how to sing. One had to have lessons. One had to have a talent for it. And the Baby they had always known was not only untutored, but had, it seemed to them, no voice and no talent whatever for music. In the beginning Mrs. Petersen believed there had been some mistake or that she had not properly read Baby's writing; but after she and Miss Mehaffy had studied the letter for a long time they came to the conclusion that there could be no mistake. Baby wrote that she was singing, and once Miss Mehaffy accepted the news for a fact, her admiration for Baby increased. It seemed to her that if Baby could sing she could accomplish anything she set out to do. And suddenly a desire which had long been rising vaguely in her consciousness began to take definite form. She wanted to see Baby on the stage. She wanted to hear Baby singing. She wanted to taste for a moment that exciting atmosphere which, to judge from Baby's letters, clearly surrounded her. "Perhaps," thought Miss Mehaffy, in the wakeful hours—"perhaps this is my chance. Perhaps this is the way I shall find excitement."

She told Willie about Baby's newest accomplishment, but he received the news without enthusiasm. He knew what night clubs were. He had seen them in the talkies, and they were not places for Baby to be frequenting either as a performer or as a guest.

"It's not like Baby to do that," he told Miss Mehaffy. "Why doesn't she come home and settle down? You said she would when she got all this stuff out of her system."

“It’ll take a little longer, I guess,” said Miss Mehaffy, but she did not tell him what she had come to believe in her heart—that Baby had so much of it in her system that she would never get it out of her if she lived to be a hundred. Miss Mehaffy had begun to suspect that Baby was of the same breed as Big Annie and Mrs. Cadogan, and so, in a way, as herself, although no one had ever suspected it.

She said, “Look here, Willie. Why do you go on waiting?”

“I’m gonna marry Baby.”

“She won’t be the same girl that went away.”

“I guess I could handle her.”

At this remark Miss Mehaffy kept silent, for there seemed to be no answer to a statement based upon an ignorance of Baby’s character, which was so complete.

“Why don’t you marry a nice girl and forget about her? That’s better than running around,” she asked.

“Who says I’m running around?”

“Well, you ain’t going regularly with a nice girl, and I don’t suppose you’re sitting home in the evening listening to the radio, at your age.”

“No. I’m gonna wait.”

There wasn’t anything to be done. She gave him a piece of elderberry pie and a glass of root beer, and he went back to the garage. It seemed to Miss Mehaffy that suddenly life, which had always been so simple, save for that craving for excitement which sometimes attacked her, was becoming complicated.

The craving overtook her again that night after she had gone to bed. She thought, “I’m fifty-five years old. If I don’t

see a little of life now I never will. I've got a few hundred dollars in the bank. Why shouldn't I go traveling a little bit."

But when she came to think where she would go she could find nothing to guide her. She did not care for sights. When Nettie Petersen sometimes said to her, "Why don't you go and see things, now you're so prosperous? Why don't you go to Denver or Chicago?" Miss Mehaffy couldn't find very much interest in such excursions. She always said, "I can imagine what they're like." It was people who excited Miss Mehaffy. She didn't want to see a different sort of town. She didn't want to be stunned by skyscrapers. Things like Niagara Falls she had seen in the movies and they didn't stir her. It was a different sort of people she wanted to see—people who weren't like the people in Winnebago Falls, the Petersens and the Durants and all the good respectable ones whose lives just ran along in comfortable grooves.

In the middle of the night she rose and took another sip or two of cooking-sherry to quiet her restlessness, and then suddenly an idea came to her. Why shouldn't she go and see Baby for a few days? Baby must know exciting people. Maybe she wouldn't mind having her around for a few days. Maybe with Baby she'd find the excitement which was always troubling her.

She slept very little that night, and in the morning she ran in to see Nettie Petersen and tell her the news.

Mrs. Petersen wasn't very enthusiastic. She said, "When do you plan to go?"

"Right away, as soon as I can put up a notice and tell my regular boarders I'll be gone for a week."

"You could get somebody in to run it for you," said Mrs. Petersen.

“No. Nobody could run it right but me.”

“Well, maybe you’re right. But I guess you ought to write to Baby first and see if she’s going to be there.”

“In her last letter she said she was all fixed for the spring with a new job. I’d kinda like to surprise her.”

“Maybe she wouldn’t like it.”

“I guess she wouldn’t mind seein’ Miss Mehaffy for a day or two.”

They talked on and on, but Miss Mehaffy was unmoved. She wanted to surprise Baby. It was the thought of surprising Baby which troubled Mrs. Petersen. In spite of her laziness and her easygoing ways, she had interludes of intelligence, or at least of a kind of instinct which approached intelligence, and for a long time now her instinct had told her that Baby had not been writing all that was happening to her. What it was that was going on, Mrs. Petersen did not divine very clearly, nor did she attempt to do so, but she had a vague feeling that perhaps Baby was not behaving as she had been brought up to behave and that what was happening to her was what Mrs. Petersen in dramatic moments had sometimes referred to as “worse than the grave.” She did not like either truth or the necessity of facing it. It was part of her philosophy that what one didn’t know could not possibly damage one, and if Miss Mehaffy went unannounced to visit Baby she might find out things and turn ignorance into knowledge. What it was she would find out was not very clear to Mrs. Petersen, but she suspected that there were a good many things to discover.

What she did not know was that Miss Mehaffy shared her suspicions. In fact, with Miss Mehaffy the suspicions were practically certainties, and her only fear was that Baby would

disappoint her. For Mrs. Petersen know nothing of those ancient cravings for excitement, nor Miss Mehaffy's desire to live wildly and freely, nor anything of the kitchen sherry and the brandy. In fact, there was a whole side of Miss Mehaffy which Mrs. Petersen didn't know at all. So she never suspected that Miss Mehaffy wanted to arrive at Baby's as a surprise so that Baby would not have been warned beforehand and try to behave during her visit like all the people in Winnebago Falls. That was the last thing Miss Mehaffy wanted. If that happened, the visit would be no better than staying at home, no better than the pathetic visit made long ago with old Joe to Meeker's Gulch.

The knowledge that Nettie Petersen failed completely to understand what was going on in her mind made Miss Mehaffy already feel wicked and secretive and even heightened her excitement over the departure. At last she was going to be free. At last, for the first time, save during those wakeful nights and the strange dreams which attended them, she was going to be herself. Mrs. Petersen thought about sending a telegram to warn Baby, so that she might put her house and herself in order, but when the impulse came to her she was in a rocking-chair, reading a picture magazine, and the effort of rising and going to the telephone was too great for her; so the telegram was never sent.

The train arrived in New York at five minutes before eight in the morning, but two hours before that Miss Mehaffy was already dressed and looking out of the window, not because she had any great interest in the countryside, but because it was impossible to sleep. In a strange way there was something symbolic in the journey. It was the West returning

to the East, the wild West which was no more, the blood of Big Annie and Two-gun Joe seeking new worlds to conquer, and the only world lay in the East. And with Miss Mehaffy returned much of the simplicity of the old West. She had no awe at the thought of arriving in New York alone. In her own simple friendliness she knew that most people were friendly and that if you became lost or wanted anything, all you had to do was to ask and some friendly person would set you right. There was no real shyness in her. So when she got down from the train she told the porter she would carry her own suitcase. It was made of straw and it wasn't very heavy, since all it contained was her two best dresses, three nightgowns, an extra pair of shoes, a little old-fashioned cotton underwear, and a tooth brush. Those things were all she could possibly need for a trip around the world, and she did not see why she should have brought anything more for a simple trip to New York.

In the vast waiting-room she was a little confused at first by its size and by the number of people all scurrying about in a great hurry, but after a moment she saw that all of those who came off the trains were moving up the ramps and stairways and common sense told her that these must lead to the city outside. So she followed them and presently she found herself on a street corner. It was a wet morning, and after looking about her she raised her umbrella to protect herself until she should decide what to do. No one noticed her, for which she was thankful, believing that she did not look as countrified as she had feared. She wore a hat with a high crown trimmed with two roses, a long black coat, and a worn bit of fur which she had had ever since Big Annie died. All about her she saw people hurrying, and presently she saw that a little farther down the block there was a place where

taxicabs kept arriving and moving off with passengers. She was about to pick up her valise and go there (for she had not the slightest idea how to find Baby's flat alone) when a motor stopped just before her and the man driving leaned out and said, "What's the matter, mother? Lost?"

At first Miss Mehaffy did not answer him, and in the second of silence all sorts of thoughts flashed through her head in violent succession. She remembered stories of girls who had disappeared forever in New York and all the things she had read in the Sunday supplements in her long search for excitement. And then she thought, "I haven't got enough money to make me worth robbing and nobody would want me for a white slave." Besides, this sort of adventure was what she had come for. The man was young and had a rather narrow face, with eyes set a little too close together and a hard jaw and mouth. He wore a tweed cap pulled over one eye. He reminded her of some one, but for the moment she could not think who it was.

"If you're lost, I'll set you straight. Get in and I'll take you wherever you're going." Again she hesitated, and he said: "It's all right. I'm not gonna kidnap you."

"I'm not lost yet," she mumbled. "I've just arrived. I guess it's all right."

He got down and lifted her bag and put it in after her. It was a handsome automobile, all fitted on the inside with shiny things and deep seats into which Miss Mehaffy sank comfortably.

"Where do you want to go?"

She gave him Baby's address written on the back of an envelope, and after glancing at it a minute he said,

“Nobody’ll be awake in that house yet. Better come and have a cup of coffee with me. Ain’t had your breakfast, have you?”

“No.”

“Well, you’d better have some. You’ll never get any at that number at this hour of the morning.”

He climbed in and started off. Turning round, he said, “I’ll drive kinda slow and you can look out the window and see the sights.”

They went through a narrow street and turned into a wide avenue lined with enormous buildings. Turning round, the driver said, “These is mostly hotels and flats where all the rich and swell people live and the best kept women.” There was a pause and he said, “Now you’re coming to St. Bartholomew’s Church, the swellest church in New York, famous for its Romanesque Byzantine style and its front doors.” Another pause and he turned and said, “Now if you lean out the right side and look back you can see the Chrysler building.”

Miss Mehaffy leaned out and looked, but she was not very impressed. In the first place, such wonders didn’t interest her much, and in the second place she had seen lots of pictures of the Chrysler building. She was far more interested in what was happening to her and in the man who was driving her about in such a handsome motor.

They turned presently, and then again, and suddenly the car stopped before a restaurant which had large glass windows and a sign in white letters, “Lenox Cafeteria.” Through the glass Miss Mehaffy could see rows of chairs with swollen arms and she felt a sudden twinge of disappointment because it wasn’t any different from the new cafeteria just opened on Beaver Dam Avenue at home.

Her driver said: "You can leave your things in here. Nobody is gonna steal anything out of Teeny's car in front of the Lenox."

So, thought Miss Mehaffy, his name is Teeny. It was, she thought, not a very good name for a face so hard, but then he might have been a pretty baby and acquired the name before the face had become so forbidding.

As they entered the door he said: "Don't worry, mother. We ain't gonna eat here. We're gonna eat where we're waited on."

He led her through the innocent, white, shining front room to a room at the back which was quite different. Instead of being white and clean, it was dark and old and worn. To Miss Mehaffy it looked like the back room of the Court House Saloon in Winnebago Falls as she remembered it in the good old days before local option when Two-gun Joe took her there as a little girl for a glass of beer. There were tables around the walls, and five or six people at one of them. It was dark, and at first Miss Mehaffy couldn't make out the faces very distinctly. Then she saw that there were four men, three of them with faces as hard as Teeny's, and one who was wall-eyed and had no chin and reminded her a little of Mr. Peabody, the drug-store clerk who had wanted to marry her long ago. The woman was young. She looked about seventeen—very pretty and frail. As they sat down, the five looked up and said, "Hello, Teeny."

"Hello," said Teeny. "This is—" He turned to Miss Mehaffy. "What's your name, mother?"

Miss Mehaffy told him.

"Mehaffy," said one of the men. "Well, that's a good old Irish name."

“She was goin’ to 195. I told her nobody’d be up there before eleven. She’s gonna have some breakfast first.... Who you gonna visit there, mother?”

“Miss Gloria Dupont,” said Miss Mehaffy.

The eyebrows raised a little in the hard face. “Oh, Baby! Well, Baby won’t be up yet, so you don’t need to worry. She won’t be about before one.”

Then suddenly he took up an empty gin-bottle and began to pound the table violently. At the frightful noise, one of the men from the other table turned and yelled, “Hey!”

Teeny ignored him. Turning to Miss Mehaffy, he said, “That’s the only way to get service in this jernt.”

Then a door opened on the opposite side of the room and a middle-aged woman thrust in her head and shoulders.

“What the hell’s the matter? Joe told me you was here. I’m gettin’ you ham and eggs.”

“Can’t you see I got a lady with me?”

“Oh. Joe didn’t tell me nothin’ about that.”

The shoulders and touseled head advanced through the door, followed by a big body and an immense bosom. As she approached the table, Teeny said, “Meet Anytime Annie, Miss Mehaffy.”

“How d’you do, Miss Mehaffy, and what’ll you have?”

“How d’you do? Some coffee and the same,” said Miss Mehaffy. The woman disappeared again through the door.

Miss Mehaffy took off her black cotton gloves and leaned back against the wall. Something very odd was happening to her. She herself did not quite understand what it was. She only knew that, far from feeling shy or frightened, she felt at home. She liked the low dark room, rather sordid and rough,

which was so unlike her own neat tearoom. She could not think why, but she even liked the hard faces and the empty gin-bottle and the sawdust on the floor littered with cigarette butts. She liked the big, blowsy woman Teeny addressed as Anytime Annie, and suddenly she saw that Anytime Annie was like her memories of her own mother. The way she put her head and shoulders through the door and swore at Teeny was exactly the way Big Annie used to open the door from the kitchen into the dining-room and yell at Two-gun Joe. All these people made her feel comfortable. She couldn't quite explain it, but it was as if she'd been living for years among strangers and was at last among friends. It all made her feel as if she wanted to take off her corsets and go about comfortably the way she did when she was alone at home. There wasn't any time wasted on politeness here. You got to know people right away, directly, the way it was nice to know people. It all made you feel easy and relaxed.

Anytime Annie brought the ham and eggs, and she brought Teeny a glass of whisky with them.

“Have a drink?” he asked Miss Mehaffy.

“No. It's too early.”

Teeny bolted down the ham and eggs. When he had finished the whisky he called for coffee, and while he drank it he turned to Miss Mehaffy and said, “I guess you kind of wonder why I picked you up and took you under my wing.”

“No,” said Miss Mehaffy, “I wasn't surprised. I always find people are nicer than you expect them to be.”

“I thought maybe you'd heard a lot of stories about people getting their pockets picked and murdered.”

“Well, I haven't got enough money to make it worth while. There's advantages to being poor.”

Teeny lighted a cigarette. “You know I kind of fell for you because you look just like my old mother.” For a moment the hard face crumpled and Miss Mehaffy thought he was going to cry. “I was sittin’ there feelin’ lousy and wonderin’ what I was gonna draw for a fare. I don’t work much at taxi-driving. I ain’t a regular taxi-driver. I’m a special de luxe. No, I don’t work much at it—just enough to make it look respectable. When I can’t sleep or haven’t got nothin’ better to do I pick up fares. You’d be surprised what you pick up sometimes. You’d be surprised what you run into.”

Miss Mehaffy thought he was going to tell her some exciting stories, but he didn’t. He went on as he had begun. He called for another whisky to finish off the coffee, and continued: “I was sittin’ there feelin’ lousy and suddenly I seen you standin’ there lookin’ kinda lost. I couldn’t see you very well, because I was kinda half asleep, anyway, and I said to myself, ‘I’ll be damned if it isn’t the old woman herself,’ but I knew I must be nertz, because the old woman passed away about five years ago. It kinda shook me up at first, and then I sez to myself: ‘I’ll look after that old lady. It’s the kind of thing the old woman would like.’ See?”

“Yes,” said Miss Mehaffy, “I understand.”

The granite face grew pulpy again. “She was a wonderful woman. She was always doin’ kind things. We had a flat over on Ninth Avenue—the old woman and us five kids. She kept it together till she died. After that the family broke up. There was something about her that kept us goin’ straight. Now they’re all bums—all of ’em but me. The rest is all failures. I’m the only one she could be proud of. I’ve been a success. There was somethin’ wonderful about her and she had a bad time with the old man. My Gawd! but he could stow it away.”

Then suddenly Teeny pulled his cap over his eyes and said, “Well, come on. I’ll take you over to Baby’s and then go and get some sleep.”

On the way to Baby’s Miss Mehaffy sat on the front seat beside Teeny.

Baby lived in an old brownstone-front house which had been made over into flats. As he drew up to the curb, Teeny leaned out and looked up.

“I guess she’s in, all right. All the windows is open.”

On the third floor the curtains bellied damply in and out. At the door of the basement areaway appeared a large woman with a red face, wearing a gingham dress, with a wool shawl thrown over her shoulders. Rather with the air of a hostile animal she peered through the railings as Miss Mehaffy climbed heavily out of the taxi, and Teeny took down the bag. As they crossed the sidewalk she said, “What do you want, Teeny?”

“It’s for Baby.” He looked at Miss Mehaffy as if making up his mind about something. Then he decided and said, “It’s her aunt come on a surprise visit.”

“Well, she ain’t in,” said the woman, flatly. She had the tired, malignant look of a woman who had spent most of her life in basement flats and felt that she deserved a better fate in life. It was the look of a woman who disliked everybody.

“What about the key? You got the key?”

“I can’t let anybody who comes along just walk into my flats.”

Teeny let the valise fall with a bang. “Come on now, Sadie. Don’t be a bitch.” He pointed dramatically to Miss Mehaffy.

“Look at her. Ain’t she respectable? Don’t she look like an aunt?”

“It ain’t her. It’s you. Baby’s got a lot of valuable stuff in that flat.”

The remark did not seem to be taken by Teeny as an insult. He said, “Well, I’ll stay down here and you can let her go up alone.”

The woman with the red, discontented face took a long look at Miss Mehaffy. By nature she sought to make life as difficult and complicated as possible for everyone. By nature she had an almost insane curiosity. While she looked at Miss Mehaffy she was reflecting how she could make the most trouble, and as she looked she came to a decision, born of the unimpeccable respectability of Miss Mehaffy’s appearance. She thought to herself, “I guess if I let Baby’s aunt see that flat the way it is this morning, it’ll raise hell for Baby.”

Aloud she said, “All right,” and then, dubiously, “If Baby makes a stink, I’ll tell her it was your fault.”

“Okay,” said Teeny.

The woman disappeared to fetch the key and Teeny carried the valise up to the front door. In the vestibule he put it down and, taking off his cap, said: “If you ever need any help, just call on me. I kinda like you.”

“Thanks,” said Miss Mehaffy. “But I don’t know your name.”

Teeny took a card out of his pocket and handed it to Miss Mehaffy. On it was printed “Mr. Joe Haggerty, Esq.” and a telephone number.

“If you ever want me,” he said, “just call up that number. It’s Anytime Annie’s place where we was this morning.

Annie generally can find me pretty quick.” He looked at her again, “My Gawd,” he said, “but you’re like my old woman!”

Then the sour woman appeared with the key and Teeny drove away.

Upstairs the janitress with the red face turned the key in the lock, flung open the door, and said, “I guess she’ll turn up sometime during the day. Sometimes she does and sometimes she don’t. Just make yourself at home. I guess it don’t look very tidy just now.”

Miss Mehaffy closed the door and looked about her. It was a fair-sized room with two windows at the far end, and a “suite” of stuffed furniture upholstered in tapestry scattered about. In one corner stood a small grand piano, and on top of it stood a vase filled with roses which once had been pink but were now brown and withered because there had never been any water in the vase. In the middle of the floor stood an umbrella opened to dry, and near it an empty gin-bottle and a few fragments of broken glass. Here and there lay cigarette butts, and at the end of the sofa the contents of an ash-tray. What the janitress had said about tidiness seemed to Miss Mehaffy an understatement.

It had begun to rain again, and with the rising wind the rain blew in at the open windows. Miss Mehaffy went over to close them, and in the far end of the room she discovered further damage. The curtains were soaked and on the floor just inside there were pools of water. On the top of the piano a cigarette had been left here and there to burn itself out, and inside the piano there were more pools of water. On the piano bench some one had left a metal bowl filled with cigarette butts which had burned themselves out, and when Miss

Mehaffy lifted the bowl she found a deep hole charred in the wood underneath.

When she had made a tour of the room she sat down on the stuffed sofa to reflect, and as she did so her hand came into contact with some object which was not a sofa cushion. Drawing it out, she identified it as a pink rubber corset. Exploring further, she found some pink silk underwear, one black satin slipper, a lipstick, and an empty glass. When she had assembled these articles into a pile, she rose and opened the door of the bedroom. In it she found a dressing-table, two small chairs, and a large double bed in a state of disorder. It was a very ornate bed with basketwork at the foot and head, overlaid with plaster garlands of rosebuds painted pink and white. At some period the garlands had met with rough usage, for there remained only fragments of them here and there. Beside the bed on the floor stood a tray which held a glass with a little whisky in the bottom, the remnants of a grapefruit, and an empty coffee-cup partly filled with the soaked ends of cigarettes. Near it lay a broken garter. As she moved into the room she saw that in the middle of the unmade bed lay an object which she could not at first glance identify. When she went nearer and examined it she found that it was a peach pit.

Whatever her hunger for excitement had been, it was reconciled somehow in Miss Mehaffy's nature with a passion for neatness and order. It may have been that the latter characteristic grew out of her long uneventful life when so often, even in the midst of baking and running a tearoom, there were hours when she had nothing to do but "straighten up." Long ago before she had ever planned to visit Baby, she

had divined that there was something disorderly in Baby's way of living, but she had never imagined anything like the wreckage which surrounded her. Clearly, Baby needed some one to "straighten up," and while she sat amid the wreckage the idea came to her that she might stay on with Baby and have an exciting time for the rest of her life. If these rooms were anything to judge by, Baby certainly had no lack of excitement. The spectacle bewildered Miss Mehaffy a little because she had never encountered that special kind of excitement before save in the tales of Two-gun Joe, her father, and in the dreams she sometimes had at nights, and so she sat for a time, perfectly upright in one of the gilt chairs in the bedroom, trying to decide what to do. She thought of leaving at once without even seeing Baby, but there did not seem to be much sense in that, and, anyway, Teeny would tell Baby she had been there. The open umbrella, the piano filled with water, and the peach pit awed her for a time, but in the end she reached a decision. It was one consistent with a character which had always been given over to action rather than reflection. She set about to clean house.

She took off her coat and hat and hung up her spare dresses in the cupboard among all the silks and furs of Baby, but when she tried to find an apron, all she could discover in the wrecked kitchenette was a wisp of organdie trimmed with lace and already soiled, which had more the air of a theatrical costume than an apron. So she solved the problem by pinning one large bath towel over her bosom and another about her waist, and after she had put a cloth over her head she set to work.

Work always cheered her and cleared her head, and after an hour every trace of bewilderment and doubt had left her

and she was singing as she swept up cigarette ends and mopped up the water out of the piano. A sense of unreality still clung to her, so that while she worked she kept asking herself if this was not simply one of those dreams which she had had so frequently, and whether presently she would not waken and find that she had not come to New York at all and was only imagining that she was putting Baby's flat in order. Suddenly she realized how terrible it would be to wake up when the alarm clock went off and find that after all she was still in Winnebago Falls and had to get up and start the fire in the kitchen.

For two hours she worked, until the flat, if not thoroughly cleaned, was at least put in order, and then as she surveyed it she was aware that she felt tired and in need of the sleep she had not had on the journey, so when she had taken off the towels and the cloth about her head and washed her face and hands she lay down on the bed. If what Teeny said was true—that Baby wouldn't be coming in until one o'clock—she could snatch a few winks of sleep. But when she tried to sleep she couldn't, for wondering whether Baby had changed and what she would be like when the door opened and she walked in. She did not know how long she had been dozing when she was wakened by the sound of some one moving about in the sitting-room. Her first impulse was to call out and tell Baby that she was here, and then she thought it would be a better surprise if she simply remained on the bed, pretending she was asleep until Baby opened the door and walked in to find her.

With her eyes closed she lay listening until Baby opened the door of the bedroom and came in. She heard Baby moving toward the bed, and still she pretended to be asleep,

and then suddenly she heard a voice, which was certainly not Baby's, say, "I'll be damned." Then she opened her eyes.

Beside the bed, looking down at her, stood a big swarthy man. He was grinning, and the expression gave his ugly face an agreeable look. He was about forty and fat and had thick wavy black hair and rather small beady black eyes. His close-shaven jowls were blue. He wore a suit of black-and-white-striped material with a yellow handkerchief in the breast pocket. He did not take off his derby hat. Miss Mehaffy, rather startled, sat up on the bed.

"Where's Baby?" asked the man.

"I don't know," said Miss Mehaffy. "I thought you were Baby."

"Well, I guess it was April fool for both of us," replied the man. "Where is she?"

"I don't know. I just arrived on a visit. I haven't seen her."

Miss Mehaffy got up from the bed and began smoothing her hair and her dress. The man lighted a long cigar and said, "Who are you?"

At first Miss Mehaffy didn't answer, not knowing exactly how to explain herself and her presence to a stranger who seemed perfectly at home in Baby's flat. Then she thought of Teeny's explanation. "I'm Baby's aunt."

"Oh!" said the man. He turned toward the kitchenette. "Any liquor in the house?"

"There's some gin and some whisky. I found it when I was clearing up."

The man grinned. "Quite a job, wasn't it?"

"Things were in a pretty bad shape."

“Baby can’t give a party without wrecking the place. Let’s have a drink. Some whisky.”

Miss Mehaffy went to fetch the bottle, still wondering who the man was and why he had been able to enter Baby’s flat so easily. She couldn’t make up her mind whether she liked his looks or not. When he grinned he was all right, but when he stopped grinning there was something brutal and mean about his face. And she didn’t like the way he ordered her about, telling her to go and get him a drink. Before she returned to the sitting-room she decided that he was a bully.

When she entered the room he was sitting on the sofa. He was still wearing his derby and he didn’t get up when she entered. He told her to put down the bottle and glasses on the table beside him. As he poured out a drink for each of them, he said, “My name is Finelli. I’m a friend of Baby’s.”

“Not too much for me,” said Miss Mehaffy.

“Yes, I’m quite a friend of Baby’s. She owes me quite a good deal, and she ain’t gonna get out of what she owes me, either.”

Miss Mehaffy tasted her drink cautiously. “Baby’s a good girl,” she said. “She’d never try to cheat anybody out of a cent.”

“It ain’t money I’m talking about,” he said. He looked at her fiercely and said, “Where was she last night?”

“I don’t know,” replied Miss Mehaffy. “Spending a night with a friend, I suppose.”

His face grew fiercer. “Yeah, that’s what I suppose and that’s what I’m gonna find out. I’m gonna stay here till I find out.”

The idea of having Mr. Finelli on her hands for hours and perhaps for days did not please her much, but she did not see how she was to rid herself of him. She saw at once that he was not a very pleasant companion, even in an agreeable mood, and she felt that somehow she ought to get him out before Baby returned. While he spoke she kept thinking that if only she knew a little more about the situation and what it was exactly that Baby owed him, she would be better able to act. So she said: "I'm sure Baby doesn't mean harm to anybody. Maybe if I knew more about it I could help."

Mr. Finelli looked at her suspiciously. He took another drink and pursed his lips and puffed at the cigar. Miss Mehaffy noticed that the backs of his hands were covered with long black hair, and then it occurred to her that he looked like a gorilla.

"Didn't Baby write you nothin' about me?"

"No," said Miss Mehaffy. "She don't write very often. Just now and then to say how she's gettin' on and if she's well." She realized suddenly that it would be very difficult for her to converse with Mr. Finelli, as in a way they'd never be talking about the same things. Whatever Baby had been up to, she couldn't very well write home about it if it had anything to do with Mr. Finelli; but you couldn't make him understand that he hardly belonged or would be understood in such a safe, contented, respectable little world as Winnebago Falls. As she watched Mr. Finelli she began to think that he was rather more than she had bargained for in her quest for excitement, and that any contact or relationship with him could hardly come to a good peaceful ending.

He smacked his lips again and said, "I'm a rich man, Mrs...." He groped for the name.

“Mehaffy,” she said, “*Miss Mehaffy* ... by choice.”

“I’m a rich man. I’ve done everything for Baby, and if she double crosses me now she’ll be sorry for it. Nobody can double cross Sam Finelli and get away with it.” He looked around him in alarm. “You don’t think she’s run out on me for good, do you? She’s comin’ back, ain’t she?”

“She’s left all her things here,” said Miss Mehaffy.

“Well, that wouldn’t stop her if she wanted to go. Baby’s the kind could always pick up another outfit just as good.” He leaned forward and placed both hands on his knees so that he looked more than ever like a gorilla. “Where was that girl when I found her?” Miss Mehaffy started to answer, but it proved that the question was merely rhetorical. “Where was she? Pounding the pavement. And where is she now? She’s got a good job. She’s got furs and jools. She’s singin’ in a night club, bein’ applauded every night. That’s what’s the matter with her. She’s got her head turned. Every little squirt and cheap gunman in town runnin’ after her, and Sam Finelli ain’t good enough for her any more.” He pounded his chest with an alarming gorilla violence. “Well, let me tell you Sam Finelli’s the grandfather of ’em all when it comes to shootin’ or to lovin’. Nobody can fool around his wimmen.”

For a moment Miss Mehaffy felt slightly dizzy and experienced the sensation of having seen Finelli before and having lived through exactly this same moment. Again she had that extraordinary feeling of having come home after spending a lifetime among strangers: and then as the sensation of dizziness passed a little, she understood what it was. Years ago Two-gun Joe had made that same speech, pounding his chest, saying exactly the same words. He had only done it when he was a little drunk.

“I guess maybe Baby had better look out,” she said, feeling that there weren’t any words virile enough to make answer to the speech and actions of Mr. Finelli. “I guess I’ll speak to her. But don’t you get any wrong ideas about Baby. She’s spoiled, but she’s a good girl at heart. You have to kind of understand her.”

“Yeah, she’s sperled all right. You can tell her she’s sperled so bad she stinks.” He pulled back his cuff to glance at his watch, and Miss Mehaffy became fascinated, for she caught a glimpse of a platinum watch and two heavy gold bracelets encircling the hairy wrist.

“It’s nearly twelve o’clock and I got an appointment over in Jersey at two. I’m gonna sit here until then. You don’t play pinochle, do you?”

“Yes,” said Miss Mehaffy. “I sometimes play with the Petersens. That’s Baby’s mother and father.”

“*Auction* pinochle?”

“Yes, auction pinochle. I don’t know if Baby has any cards.”

“Sure she has. They’re in that drawer over there. There’s three or four pinochle decks.”

Miss Mehaffy rose to fetch them as Mr. Finelli showed no signs of doing so. He was clearly accustomed to being waited upon. “Do you mean to play for money?” she asked.

“Sure. Whatever you like. The sky’s the limit.”

“Well, it isn’t for me.”

“How much can you stand? Five cents a hundred?”

“I guess that’s all right.”

“There’s a card table behind the piano.”

She fetched the card table and her eyes brightened. She loved to gamble, and she had never played for so much as five cents a hundred. At first she meant to refuse, but she checked herself, thinking that it might seem to Mr. Finelli that she was a poor sport. Anyway, it was exciting to play for more than she'd ever played for before.

"I won eleven thousand dollars last night," said Mr. Finelli, shuffling the pack with an expert rattle. "I was in luck."

"My goodness! I guess you musta been."

She seated herself opposite Mr. Finelli and they began to play. Mr. Finelli kept the score with a gold pencil and Miss Mehaffy couldn't see, even with her glasses on, whether he was keeping it properly. They played one hand and two and three, and Miss Mehaffy was able to keep the score in her head, but after that she got muddled and knew only that she was winning and that even if he cheated on the score she couldn't *lose* any money.

"Can't do anything against that luck," Mr. Finelli said. She thought he played very badly, worse even than Nils Petersen, but it didn't matter, she supposed, if he'd won eleven thousand dollars the night before. Anyway, she went on winning.

At ten minutes to two he looked again at his wrist watch and said, "This'll be the last hand. I guess we'll finish it all right. I gotta conference in Jersey at two."

When they had finished he added up the score and said, "Well, I guess it's me that got trimmed." He took out a fat roll of bills, so fat that Miss Mehaffy gave a little gasp. With it he could have bought up her house, her tearoom, and everything she had in the bank, and never have noticed it.

“I owe you twenty-two dollars and thirty cents. We’ll call it an even thirty. I ain’t got any small change.”

Miss Mehaffy protested and opened her worn handbag, but he wouldn’t take anything from her.

“Never mind. Give the change to Baby if it hurts your conscience.” He rose. He did not put on his hat, for he had never taken it off, but he said, “Tell Baby when she comes in that I’m comin’ back tonight and she’d better be here.”

“I’ll tell her.”

“I’ve had enough foolishness from that girl. I’ve been too good to her. That’s the trouble. Good-by. See you later.”

Miss Mehaffy heard the door close, but she didn’t see him go out. She was looking at the banknotes in her hand, thinking. “That’s more than I make out of the tearoom in four days.” She began to think she would do better by turning gambler. “Maybe,” she thought, “there is something in being the daughter of Two-gun Joe and Big Annie.”

Meanwhile Baby was riding round and round the block in the back of Teeny’s handsome motor. She knew Miss Mehaffy was in the flat, because Teeny had told her that her aunt had come to surprise her, and when she said she hadn’t any aunt he described her so thoroughly that there could be no mistake about who it was. Anyway, he knew her name. She was riding round the block not because she didn’t want to see Miss Mehaffy, but because she knew Sam Finelli was there and she didn’t want to see Sam at that moment. The discontented janitress had told her he was there and promised to hang a dishcloth in the areaway window when he had gone away. She had kept her word, only she had delayed putting up the dishcloth until half an hour after Sam had actually

gone, just out of spite, so that Baby would have to kill that much more time. Most of it she killed in the back room of Anytime Annie's place, where, worn out from riding round and round, she retired to drink and await the return of Teeny with the news that the dishcloth was up.

When at last she returned to her flat and opened the door, she found Miss Mehaffy standing in the center of the sitting-room, regarding three ten-dollar banknotes. At the sound of the opening door she saw Baby, and throwing the bills on the card table she advanced and took Baby in her arms, with a loud cry of, "Baby!"

Then she began to cry, and Baby began to cry, too, and they both sat down on the sofa, laughing and crying in turn.

At first glance she wasn't sure that the young woman who came through the door was really the same girl she had seen for the last time nearly four years before at the railroad depot when she left for Des Moines. Baby had changed. She was thinner and looked older, but most of all she had lost that small-town look, and her blond hair was twice as blond as it had once been. It was now white blond, the platinum blond Miss Mehaffy had read of in the picture magazines. The contours of her face had hardened. Only the big round blue eyes and the childish mouth remained the same. So long as they were unchanged she would always be Baby.

When she finally spoke, Miss Mehaffy said, "Well, are you surprised?"

"Teeny told me you were here," said Baby.

"He's a nice boy, Teeny. Funny how he picked me up."

Baby frowned a little. "Not so funny, considering he's often hanging around stations. Funny, though, that you

looked like his old woman.” And then, as a kind of afterthought, Baby asked, “How’s poppa and momma?”

“Just the same. Your mother kind of talked about comin’ to New York with me, but I discouraged her.”

“Still gossiping and playing pinochle?”

“Just the same.”

She didn’t ask after Willie and Miss Mehaffy didn’t speak of him. She thought, “Better let sleeping dogs lie.” After seeing Mr. Finelli, Willie’s suit seemed more than ever hopeless.

“There was a man called Finelli come to see you,” she said.

“Oh, *him!*” Baby replied.

“He stayed about four hours, waitin’ for you to come home.”

“I’ll bet he did. He can be a great stayer.”

“We played pinochle.”

“*What?*” asked Baby. “You played what?”

“We played pinochle. I won thirty dollars ... only twenty-two dollars and thirty cents, but he didn’t have change.” Before she had finished the sentence Baby began to laugh. She laughed and laughed.

“What’s so funny about that?” asked Miss Mehaffy.

For a long time Baby couldn’t answer her for laughing. At last she said, “He’s the biggest gambler in New York ... and crooked, too. Anything he does is crooked.”

She laughed some more, and Miss Mehaffy said, “I thought there was something kind of different about him.”

“Kind of different is right.” She put her arms about Miss Mehaffy’s big shoulders. “Kind of different. I’ll say so. You certainly got a good start, making friends with him and Teeny right off. You can take care of yourself, I guess.”

Miss Mehaffy flushed a little with pride and a little because Baby found her adventure so comic. “No,” she said. “I guess I’m just an old woman from the country.”

Baby took off her hat and fur and threw them on the sofa. “Well, you’re getting on fast.”

She lighted a cigarette, poured herself a drink, and looked about. “I see somebody’s been cleaning up. I suppose it was you.”

“I didn’t have anything else to do while I was waiting.”

Baby laughed. “Quite a job, wasn’t it?”

“Well, the place did need it.”

“Yeah. I had a little party, and when everybody went home the place looked so bad I got discouraged and went out to a hotel.” She didn’t say whether she had gone alone to a hotel or not, but something in Miss Mehaffy’s blue eyes made her understand that Miss Mehaffy understood everything and it was all right. The old bond between them, revealed to both long ago when Baby used to come in secretly to talk to Miss Mehaffy while she worked over the oven, was still living and strong. Baby knew it the minute she came in the door. Miss Mehaffy knew it, too. And they both knew something more—that they were together in New York and hadn’t any longer to pretend or hide part of themselves on account of the people in Winnebago Falls. The knowledge gave Miss Mehaffy a look and a spirit which nobody in Winnebago Falls had ever seen in her. She knew right away that the surprise visit was a success. Even if Baby had wanted to hide anything or pretend

that things were as they were not, it wouldn't have done any good, because Miss Mehaffy had already seen the wreckage of the party and made the acquaintance of Teeny and Mr. Finelli. She had gone through all that and never turned a hair.

"Well, I'm certainly glad you've come," said Baby. "And believe me I'm gonna show you the town. We'll burn it up. You'll have enough excitement to satisfy you for the rest of your life." She put a record on the gramophone, lighted another cigarette, and began to do some tap steps. This was the Baby Miss Mehaffy had divined was the *real* Baby whom no one in Winnebago Falls had ever seen.

"Gee! I'm glad to see you," she said, above the music. "You came just at the right time. Had anything to eat?"

"No," said Miss Mehaffy.

"Well, put on your coat and hat and we'll go out and have a swell lunch. And then we're gonna buy you some clothes, everything bottom to top, and I'm gonna show you the town."

"I brought my foulard and my China silk," said Miss Mehaffy.

"Throw them away," said Baby. "You won't want 'em any more."

"Clothes cost money," said Miss Mehaffy.

"Forget the money. You're here to enjoy yourself. See? And you're gonna have everything." She stopped dancing and picked up her bag. Opening it, she held it toward Miss Mehaffy. "If you don't think I got money, look at that."

Miss Mehaffy looked and felt faintly sick. In the bag there was a roll almost as big as Mr. Finelli's.

"Mr. Finelli told me to tell you he was expecting to see you later, and if you weren't here he'd beat the hell out of you."

Baby closed the bag with an angry snap. “Oh, yeah? I see myself hurryin’ home for that dago.”

“Ain’t you afraid?” asked Miss Mehaffy.

“Afraid of *him*? He always carries on like that. I been dealin’ with him for months. He ain’t dangerous unless he’s drunk, and when he’s drunk you can’t see me for dust. Imagine! He wants me to marry him. Can you imagine marrying that gorilla just because he did me a couple of little favors?”

“Funny,” said Miss Mehaffy. “I kind of thought he looked like a gorilla, too.”

“Don’t get alarmed over Sam Finelli. All you have to do is bawl him out good, and that tough air just wilts up and dies.” She put on another gramophone record and the subject of Mr. Finelli was dismissed. “Yeah, we’ll get you all dressed up and then we’ll come home and have a little sleep and then some late dinner and we’ll go to the club. You can hear me sing. Can you imagine it? I’m a singer.”

“Yeah, your momma and I couldn’t quite believe it.”

“I ain’t a real singer. I’m a torch singer. That’s easy. You just sit on a piano or hang from a chandelier and pretend you’re a basso profundo and it’s okay. Of course looks kinda help, too.”

Miss Mehaffy, watching her, thought Baby seemed a little overwrought and nervous. Hers was the kind of vivacity which was a little alarming because of its intensity. The dancing, the consecutive cigarettes, one after another in rapid succession, the excited manner, could hardly have been called signs of gaiety that was natural. She was, Miss Mehaffy thought, sort of like something that was wound up too tight.

“Come on,” said Baby, “I’m starved. Put on your things and we’ll feed.”

Miss Mehaffy went into the bedroom, and at the same moment the door bell rang. She closed the door, but even through the closed door she could hear Baby welcoming a gentleman. She washed her hands and put on her old plain black coat and her hat with the rosebuds, and the old fur which had belonged to Big Annie. While she regarded herself in the mirror the door opened and Baby came in, closing it behind her.

“Well, we’ve got an admirer to take us out to lunch,” she said. “Lookit what he brought me.” And she held out a fur piece made of two silver foxes, thick and silky and expensive. “Better than the old one, isn’t it?” she said, and held it up against the fur she had just taken off. Then she threw them both on the bed and turned to survey Miss Mehaffy. She looked at her for a long time critically, turning her head this way and that, and after a moment she pulled off Big Annie’s worn old fur and threw a silver fox about Miss Mehaffy’s shoulders. At once the simple black coat looked richer and smarter. Then she reached up and gently but firmly removed the rosebuds from Miss Mehaffy’s hat, leaving it trimmed simply with black satin ribbon.

“Rosebuds are pretty. Nobody wants to be pretty nowadays. You gotta be smart. *Pretty* hats are no good.” Again she stood off a little way and regarded Miss Mehaffy. “Could you do without the spectacles?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Miss Mehaffy. “I just put them on while I was playin’ cards with Mr. Finelli. My father said you oughtn’t ever to trust strangers in a card game.”

She removed the spectacles and the transformation was complete. Almost every trace of Winnebago Falls had vanished and she emerged looking rather like the wife of any rich banker interested in charity and social work. One thing survived which was her own, and that was her expression of simplicity and a curious look of goodness and kindness, but to that Baby had no objection, for at the moment it was something she could use. As a final touch Baby pinned an artificial camelia to the silver fox and pressed into Miss Mehaffy's hands one of her more conservative handbags.

"Now, we're off," she said. "If I call you Aunt Gladys, don't be surprised. You're Aunt Gladys from now on. See?" She gave Miss Mehaffy an affectionate pat. "You've always been, anyway." As she opened the door she added an aside, "This sap is crazy about me."

The sap reminded Miss Mehaffy of somebody in Winnebago Falls, and after two or three minutes she remembered who it was. He reminded her of Herbert Brandt, whose family owned the waterworks and who used to run after Baby. The sap's name was Mr. Willoughby. Like Herbert Brandt, he had very little chin and not much forehead. Like Herbert Brandt, his teeth projected slightly from beneath his upper lip. Like Herbert Brandt, he was extremely amiable and given to giggling nervously when there was a pause in the conversation. There were other likenesses which Miss Mehaffy might divine later but could not know at that moment. Mr. Willoughby was rich and a bachelor about town, and his one interest in life was to be seen in public places with pretty women, actresses if possible. Not that anything ever happened. For the pretty

women Mr. Willoughby was solid profit and no great loss. All he asked was to be *seen* in public with them.

“This is my Aunt Gladys ... Miss Mehaffy,” said Baby, and Miss Mehaffy was upset for a moment by the change in Baby’s manner. It was as if she had become another person or was acting a rôle. Not only had her voice and way of speaking changed, but she actually *looked* different. As she spoke the long lashes fluttered shyly over her great blue eyes. She had become a dove.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Miss Mehaffy.

“Aunt Gladys thought I oughtn’t to be living all alone in New York, so she came on to look after me. It’s the first time she’s ever been here. You see, she’s always lived quietly next door to us out in Iowa.”

“We’ll have to show her the town,” said Mr. Willoughby. “I’ll send my car around in the morning and she can go sight-seeing.”

“Oh no ... I couldn’t think of it,” began Miss Mehaffy, and then halted, aware that she had been given an un-dovelike kick by Baby.

They went to lunch at the Ritz in Mr. Willoughby’s Rolls-Royce, and all through lunch Baby talked in a low, refined voice, and when she looked at Mr. Willoughby the long dark lashes fluttered shyly. After lunch he left his car to them for their shopping tour. They went from shop to shop, buying Miss Mehaffy bags and silk stockings and a couple of evening wraps and silk underwear and slippers for the small, pretty feet of which she was so proud. With evening gowns they had difficulty in finding Miss Mehaffy’s size, and at last they went to a shop which specialized in clothes for

fashionable expectant mothers and overweight middle-aged ladies, and there they found one black and one purple evening gown, very simple, which the saleswoman promised to alter and deliver by seven o'clock. Baby bought a big bunch of yellow artificial poppies to pin on the shoulder, and Miss Mehaffy's costume for the evening was complete.

It was six o'clock when Mr. Willoughby's Rolls-Royce took them back to the flat. As they climbed the stairs Baby said: "I'm gonna move out of here next week and have a decent flat in a decent neighborhood. I'm sick of this hole."

Upstairs Baby said they were each going to have a bath and then go to sleep for four or five hours. The idea rather startled Miss Mehaffy, who, for every day of the fifty-odd years she had spent in Winnebago Falls, had risen every morning at seven-thirty to get the oven going, and gone to bed every night at half-past nine—at least every day and every night except when she and old Joe made the futile pilgrimage to Meeker's Gulch. She didn't know whether she could go to bed and sleep at six in the evening, but she told herself that change and excitement were what she had come to New York to find, and at a quarter to seven she was sharing with Baby the double bed ornamented with damaged rosebuds.

She laughed and said, "Just like the days when you were a baby and your momma left you with me when she went to a dance of the Eastern Star."

As she was about to go to sleep the door bell rang. She went to answer it and brought a telegram addressed to Baby. Sleepily Baby tore it open and read, "*Held up in Jersey by a big game. Expect me home after midnight. Sam.*"

She threw the telegram on the floor and said: “He must be losing. When he wins a pile he always finds an excuse to get out. Keep your fingers crossed, honey, and hope he goes on losing.”

“I’d be afraid of that man,” said Miss Mehaffy.

“Afraid of *him*? He looks like a gorilla and he’s got as much courage as a bedbug—unless he’s drunk and got a gun.”

Then she turned over, and in a moment both she and Miss Mehaffy were sleeping peacefully.

The Café de Babylone was at once a disreputable and a fashionable establishment. People like Mr. Willoughby sat there thigh to thigh with people like Mr. Finelli and Teeny. Really respectable people never sat foot inside its plush-lined doors. There could be no doubt about the non-respectability of people like Sam and Teeny, and if one analyzed even superficially people like Mr. Willoughby and his friends, they weren’t respectable, either. They might be rich and fashionable and have their names in the papers, but they weren’t respectable. They were both too cowardly and too feather-brained. Brought up in a different environment, most of them would have been Sam Finellis and Teenys and most of them would have liked to be, only they hadn’t the courage to cut loose. So they played about in places like the Café de Babylone, rubbing elbows with people who were the genuine article and always hoping something would happen.

That was how Mr. Willoughby came to “discover” Baby. No party in Mr. Willoughby’s set was a success unless there was present at least one bootlegger, one pimp, one hot piano-player, one racketeer or a couple of tough girls. Baby was Mr.

Willoughby's contribution. Discovering her attracted attention to him. It provided rather an excuse in his behalf and served to endow him with the vestiges of importance and even personality.

Sometimes in places like the Café de Babylone something *did* happen. A couple of girls would throw bottles or pull out handfuls of hair, and sometimes even somebody got shot.

The Café de Babylone occupied what had once been the ground-floor flat of a cheap apartment house near Eighth Avenue, and it was the joint investment of Sam Finelli and Mr. Schultman, who knew all about the operation of such establishments. By demolishing the walls which had once separated the parlor, the dining-room, and one of the bedrooms they had created a long tunnel of a room. The walls of this Mr. Schultman had caused to be painted peach pink. The windows and doorways he draped with red plush. The furniture consisted of plain chairs and tables of pine painted black. The furnishings of the whole place represented a minimum in investment, for Mr. Schultman was never quite certain at what moment it might be closed and all its appurtenances carted off. There was no ventilation of any kind, but there were half a dozen electric fans, which were turned on when a difficult patron asked for air, and served to churn and re churn an atmosphere composed of cigarette smoke, whisky fumes, cheap perfume, and the odor of perspiration.

When Miss Mehaffy and Baby and Mr. Willoughby arrived the place was only half filled. There were a few friends who called out greetings to Baby and a few people, described by Mr. Schultman as "Park Avenue parties," who said "Hello" to Mr. Willoughby.

As the star performer, backed by the owner, Baby had a table of her own at a little distance from the orchestra. Tonight it was decorated by orchids sent ahead by Mr. Willoughby.

Miss Mehaffy had never seen a place quite like the Babylone, and she was not certain whether she was disappointed or not. Indeed, she found it a little difficult to make up her mind about anything at that moment. It was smaller and less grand than she had expected, and she was a little upset not to find people gambling the way they always were doing in old Joe's stories. And Baby kept confusing Miss Mehaffy and contributing to her bewilderment by a chameleon display of moods. At one moment she would be gay and a little wild; in the next sullen and bitter; and then a moment later she would be innocent and girlish and wondering. It was very difficult to keep up with her.

The moment Baby swept through the red plush curtains of the Babylone she assumed still a new personality hitherto unrevealed to Miss Mehaffy. She seemed to become a curious mixture of eagle and dove and to be seized by an attack of haughtiness and contempt for everyone in the place. She carried over the gentility from one of her earlier manners and added to it something which could be only described as regal. She was the star and the Babylone was her special firmament.

They seemed to arrive at exactly the right moment, for within a few minutes the place was filled. People kept pushing in until there were no more tables—people in expensive evening clothes and people dressed in hand-me-downs and basement bargains. When there was no more room they stood in the doorway, arguing with Mr. Schultman, who couldn't put another table on the floor because he had to

leave a little space for the Babylone girls and the roller-skating act. In the middle of the floor they perspired and bumped and joggled each other, and along the wall they sat thigh to thigh, smoking and drinking, while waiters trod on their feet, thrust their elbows into their backs and spilled ice water on their clothes without so much as a "Purdon me." The Babylone was in big money, Baby observed. You could see for yourself.

Miss Mehaffy was bumped and joggled and trampled along with the rest. This was what she had come for, and Baby was not disappointing her. And her natural good nature had been improved by the champagne Mr. Willoughby had provided at dinner. She had never tasted champagne before, and she found that she liked it, not only on account of the cidery taste, but because with each glass something miraculous happened to her. The shackles, the restraints, the checks imposed during fifty years upon a nature meant to be jovial and free were falling away. The effect was not like that of cooking-sherry and brandy, which only served to put her to sleep. With each glass of champagne she grew more awake. She felt younger and stronger and gayer, indeed she began to feel capable of almost anything. The sense of years and of age had never troubled her very much, and now it seemed to be vanishing altogether. She felt more than ever like the twin sister of Baby. She felt that the world was good and that she loved everyone, even feeble people like Mr. Willoughby and gorillas like Sam Finelli. About Teeny she had never had any doubts. And everyone was so kind and friendly. Mr. Schultman made a special effort to make her comfortable because she was Baby's aunt.

It was all far better than she had ever imagined and all so much simpler and easier. It was as if at last the shell had broken and her own personality was beginning to burgeon. The fine clothes which fitted her so silkily gave her a feeling that she was a different person. It seemed to her that she was as smart as Mrs. Cadogan had looked during the visit when she carried a pearl-handled revolver in her bustle. Now and then she would lean back on the uncomfortable chair and experience the most extraordinary feeling of freedom and joy. Hazily she thought, "It's the way I felt when I used to dream of shooting up Winnebago Falls." It was the way, she thought, that Two-gun Joe and Big Annie must have felt when the Eldorado Dance Hall was going full blast. The music was very loud and on the opposite side of the table Mr. Willoughby's silly face wore a permanent grin, while he ordered champagne for all comers. It was nice, Miss Mehaffy thought, for anybody to be made happy so easily.

There were a great many all-comers, especially when the news of Mr. Willoughby's generosity got noised about. People came and went and all were introduced to Baby's Aunt Gladys. Miss Mehaffy looked so well and so respectable, all dressed up, that even Baby's enemies began to think there might be something in the stories she told of coming from an old Iowa family and having been educated in a convent. There were three or four permanent visitors, besides Mr. Schultman, who kept coming and going to make certain that Baby's aunt had everything she wanted and was comfortable. There was a young man with a cast in one eye and shoe-blackening hair whom they all called Jakey, and two girls who were addressed as "Murree" and "Eyeruss" and another overplump young man with very wavy blond hair and a hysterical giggle. He had dimples and a cupid's-bow

mouth, and made jokes in a high-pitched voice which Miss Mehaffy couldn't understand, but which sent the others off into shouts of laughter. His name seemed to be Homer. Marie had artificial red hair and Iris was a natural brunette, and so far as Miss Mehaffy could make out there was ill feeling between them, based upon the fact that Jakey belonged to Marie and Iris was making a play for him.

Marie was dressed in a gray tweed suit and Iris wore a pink evening gown trimmed with sequins. Jakey wore dinner clothes, of a design, cut, and color which Miss Mehaffy had never before encountered. The jacket was held together by a single button high on his narrow chest, and the lapels ended in scissor-like points just beneath his protruding ears. Whenever Mr. Willoughby left the table to dance with one of the girls, the others at the table fell to congratulating Baby on her new "Good-time Charlie" who was so free with the champagne.

Iris said: "It feels to me like one of those nights that was working into a party. We otta give your Aunt Gladys a good time. Your boy friend is here to pay for it."

Jakey paid great attention to Miss Mehaffy, asking her impressions of New York which were rather confused and grew more so as the evening progressed. They made her the center of everything. Baby didn't dance, because she felt it was undignified for the singer to appear on the floor with the common patrons of the Babylone. Everybody was happy, most of all Mr. Willoughby, who felt that at last he had achieved notoriety. There was a note of smugness and superiority in every greeting he exchanged with what Mr. Schultman called "the Park Avenue parties."

Then presently the lights were turned low and spot lights broke out from the four corners of the room. There was a roll of drums and the floor show began. Through the red plush covering the door of one of the former bedrooms sprang a troop of girls. The orchestra grew deafening. The girls began to dance in the tiny space left clear in the center of the room, and quietly Miss Mehaffy took out her steel-rimmed spectacles and put them on, because she could not quite believe that what she saw was true. But the spectacles gave her back the same image—that of two rows of girls clad only in aprons of white organdie trimmed with lace. So far as she could see, they had on nothing else. And suddenly she realized that the aprons were the same as the soiled one she found in Baby's kitchenette when she set about cleaning the flat, and it occurred to her that once, not very long ago, Baby herself had been one of these girls. It was odd how Baby's history began to reconstruct itself. Hazily she began to realize that all Baby had confided in her was no more than a skeleton of the whole truth. The girls screamed and danced and jostled the tables, and when they came to the chorus, which was something about "Everything's hotsy-totsy in Hot Cha Town" Miss Mehaffy found herself singing softly with them.

The air grew hotter and smokier, and after the girls had gone out Baby rose languidly and moved toward the platform, where she leaned against the curve of the piano. She had assumed still another personality with such composure as Miss Mehaffy had never seen before. It broke only when something went wrong with one of the spotlights and she flashed an angry look in the direction of the operator. There was a patter of applause and the sound of people hushing one another. Miss Mehaffy's heart began to palpitate

violently. A young man with a cadaverous face began the accompaniment, and suddenly Baby was singing.

The effect startled Miss Mehaffy. It was as if the voice didn't belong to Baby at all. It was deep and hot and completely detached from Baby's rather brittle personality. It was as if Baby was standing by the piano, making faces, and the voice of some one else was coming from a loud speaker behind her. Miss Mehaffy couldn't say she liked it. It was a kind of singing she didn't understand and it didn't seem to make sense, but she was aware that Baby was making an effect. At the next table a drunken man began to cry and say that his life was useless, and when his friends tried to quiet him he protested even more loudly, saying: "I can say it if I wanna. My life's useless! I'm a bum!" Baby looked savagely in his direction and Miss Mehaffy grew angry until one of the men with him called out: "Never mind, Baby. You're art's got him!"

It was a song about how Baby was left by her man and how everything went black when she thought about it. When that was finished the people at the next table succeeded in inducing "the man whose life was useless" to go out and have some air, and Baby began another about how her man had two-timed her and she was going down to the river to end it all.

When she had finished there was a burst of applause which would not finish, but Baby only rose from the table and bowed languidly and then went on drinking champagne with an air of being alone in her own bedroom. Miss Mehaffy couldn't believe it was true that all those people were applauding and cheering Baby. She thought first, "If only Nettie Petersen could see Baby's success," and then she

added an amendment to the thought, "If only Nettie Petersen could see the success without guessing what Baby's been up to." The old feeling that she and Baby were really one and that it was herself who had been singing at the piano came over her again. She knew it wasn't herself, but in a way it was her own success. She and Baby understood each other. Wasn't she the one who had bought Baby's ticket to Des Moines? She had another glass of Mr. Willoughby's champagne and the last traces of that personality which had been imposed on her for fifty years seemed to melt slowly away like the rings of smoke above the table.

There was a roll of drums and more music, and onto the tiny floor at a prodigious speed came a man and a woman on roller skates. They seemed to be heading straight for Baby's table and Miss Mehaffy instinctively spread her napkin over her bosom to protect her new dress from the expected shower of champagne. But just as they reached the table they veered off like bats avoiding a telegraph wire and swooped toward the table opposite. Miss Mehaffy didn't see how they did it. They darted here and there like swallows, with no effort at all, smiling all the time. The man threw the woman into the air and when she landed she went off again in a series of spins which threatened the whole circle of tables. To Miss Mehaffy it was much more wonderful than the Empire State building.

It was a flash act, all over in five minutes, and as it progressed Miss Mehaffy's enthusiasm mounted. For the finale the music stopped and there was only a roll of drums as an accompaniment. The woman seized the man about the neck and he began whirling faster and faster until the woman's legs swung straight out horizontally. But as they

whirled they came a little nearer with each whirl to Baby's table, until at last at each whirl the lady's feet just cleared the top of the champagne-bottle. It was at this point that Miss Mehaffy in her enthusiasm gave way. Each time the feet whizzed past her face she shouted, "Whee!" in a loud voice. "Whee! Whee! Whee!" she cried.

Then the whirls steadily grew slower until the woman glided once more into an upright position and the pair skated off backwards, bowing, to the din of applause. The act had never had such a success. There were cheers and whistles and the pair returned again and again to bow, and at the end they made a special bow in the direction of Miss Mehaffy herself. There was something unexpected and perfect in the sight of a respectable quietly dressed elderly woman enjoying herself in a fashion of which no one in the room was any longer capable.

"What a stooge your Aunt Gladys is," said Jakey.

"They otta hire her as part of the act," observed Homer.

But Baby didn't seem to hear them. She sat smoking one cigarette after another and consuming enormous quantities of champagne. In the childish blue eyes there was a glazed look. The bee-stung lips grew more and more sullen.

"Isn't Baby drinking too much?" Miss Mehaffy asked Jakey.

"I guess she can stand it," he answered. "She's always like that lately."

"She's got the jitters tonight," said Iris.

"What's the jitters?" asked Miss Mehaffy.

"It's kinda hard to describe," said Jakey. "It's when you get goin' faster and faster and faster and can't seem to make the

brakes hold.”

“I guess it’s Sam Finelli that’s worryin’ her,” said Marie.

Then their speech was drowned by another blare of the band and onto the floor swept the girls again. Once more Miss Mehaffy put on her spectacles and once more she could not believe her own eyes even with the corrective glasses. The girls had outdone themselves. This time their costumes consisted of three roses, one full blown and two in bud, plus a little black cotton fish-net judiciously draped. It was a hot number, and the trombone not far from Miss Mehaffy’s ear deafened her. The girls stamped and sang in shrill sparrow-like voices, a song which was something about a “hot time in Harlem.”

Miss Mehaffy leaned over and shouted in Jakey’s ear. “You ought to have heard Ma sing ‘There’s a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight.’ I guess she musta been sort of a torch singer in her day.”

The girls bumped against the table and jostled Miss Mehaffy and screamed and shouted until she had a dizzy sensation of going down for the last time in an ocean of flesh. Then suddenly with a final scream they all dashed back through the velvet curtains and the blast of the orchestra ceased.

Marie mopped her brow with a handkerchief and Iris said, “Open the window, Jakey, and leave in some air.”

“It don’t open,” said Jakey.

Baby’s eyes grew sultry and her manner became more and more haughty.

“Havin’ a good time, Aunt Gladys?” asked Jakey.

“And how,” said Miss Mehaffy. “I’d kinda like to sing myself.”

Iris leaned across the table. “Go on, sing. I’ll bet you know some hot songs.”

Miss Mehaffy giggled nervously, “I couldn’t. Not here. With all these people.”

“The pipple would love it,” said Jakey. “That’s what they’re all lookin’ for. Novelty. That’s the kind of crowd they are. As soon as the novelty is worn off they’ll give Baby the raspberry.”

Suddenly Baby awakened from the trance which seemed to have settled over her. “Oh, yeah? They will, will they? A hell of a lot you know about the show business—you and your tank-town movie houses.” She picked up her champagne glass. “Gonna take that back—what you said?”

“Sure,” said Jakey, “I take it back. I don’t know nothin’.”

Marie put a hand on Baby’s arm and Mr. Willoughby looked suddenly alarmed. “Careful, Baby,” said Marie. “Remember there’s Park Avenue parties here.”

“Let me alone,” said Baby. “Quit pickin’ on me. See?”

“Sure I see,” said Iris. “We all see.”

“Who’s pickin’ on you?” asked Homer. “You’d think you was in a trance tonight.”

“I guess I can be in a trance if I wanna.”

“You lay off her,” said Iris.

Miss Mehaffy interposed as peacemaker. “It’s all right, Baby. They didn’t mean anything. Jakey was just taking you for an example.”

“Yeah,” said Jakey, “that’s it—an example. I didn’t mean nothin’. You’re a panic, Baby. Nothin’ can stop a girl with the

dumb look you got.”

“Sure. Baby’s all right,” said Miss Mehaffy. “She’s got a good heart.”

“If you can find it,” said Jakey.

Homer leaned over to speak in Marie’s ear: “Aunt Gladys is a dream. If we could only get the old girl to sing.”

The lights were low and Baby was rising again, somewhat unsteadily this time, to sing a couple more numbers. There was a little difficulty with the accompanist about the key during which Baby said in a loud voice, “Who’s singin’ this song, you or me?”

“If you ask me, nobody’s *singing* it,” replied the cadaverous young man.

Baby gave him a look and then, remembering where she was, composed herself and faced the audience. The business of composing herself was quite an elaborate affair. She leaned back against the curve of the piano so that the thin silk of her dress clung to her otherwise naked breasts, thighs, and abdomen. She allowed (by careful design) the shoulder strap on one side to slip down, exposing part of her bosom. Then she ran her hands with an abandoned air through the platinum hair, cleared her throat, closed her eyes, then opened them again, and throwing her head far back, looked at the ceiling. In her hands, which she wrung from time to time in the course of her songs, she held a chiffon handkerchief the color of flame.

“What a showman!” whispered Jakey. “She wrings everything there’s to be got. She’s a wonder, and to think she’s got no talent at all.”

She sang a song about losing her man on the way home from a dance-hall and how she wandered about in the wind and rain down by the river. Then she sang another about how her man was no good and how he beat her and robbed her and about how it didn't make any difference, he was her man just the same. And the audience demanded another, so she leaned over to the accompanist and had another argument about the key, and then sang one how the world had turned blue since her man went away. The man whose life was useless broke down again and then quietly became unconscious and was removed permanently.

When she had finished Miss Mehaffy was crying and mopping her eyes. She kept saying, "To think that my little Baby could become such a wonderful singer!"

People began to leave and Baby returned to the table. The band struck up again and then suddenly Miss Mehaffy said: "I'd like to sing myself. That's what I otta have been, a singer. I otta have been a singer."

"Go on, Aunt Gladys," said Marie. "Go on and sing."

"I don't wanna make Baby ashamed. But I otta have been a singer."

"You won't be ashamed, will you, Baby?" asked Jakey. "Ever heard your Aunt Gladys sing?"

"Sure I have. She's a lot better than most of the hams you're treated to in New York."

"Go on, sing, Aunt Gladys," urged Iris.

"What does she sing?" asked Jakey.

"A lot of those old ballads, like they're reviving now. You know, 'The Baggage Coach Ahead' and 'After the Ball' and 'A Bird in a Gilded Cage' and the 'Wedding of Big Annie.' "

“I’d kinda like to,” said Miss Mehaffy, shyly.

“Have another glass of champagne,” said Homer.

“She used to sing ’em to me when I was a kid and I’d bawl my head off.”

“Mebbe I’m crazy,” said Miss Mehaffy, shyly, “but I’d kinda like to sing, just to see what it’d be like.”

“Aunt Gladys is a dream,” said Homer.

The last bond was broken, the last restraint melted away, and through the pleasant haze of champagne Miss Mehaffy was thinking, “This is what I otta been, a singer, and this is my last chance to have fun. Who cares? What difference does it make?”

Baby leaned back and motioned to the cadaverous young man, and when he came over she explained about her Aunt Gladys wanting to sing. “It’ll be good. I’ve heard her. Something like they’ve never heard in New York before. The old-time stuff.” The corpse-like young man inhaled something, and then said he could play the accompaniments; for old favorites like “After the Ball” and if it was anything he didn’t know, he could fake it if Miss Mehaffy would just give him a hint of the time and the tune. “Can she keep on the key?” he asked.

“She don’t have to have a piano to keep her on the key,” said Baby, “like some people I know.”

“There ain’t nobody here but friends now,” said Jakey. “You don’t need to be scared.”

So at last when the band stopped Miss Mehaffy went over and had a conference with the cadaverous young man, and Jakey went to see about the lights, and when he came back he asked Baby how he was to introduce Miss Mehaffy and Baby

told him about her being the daughter of Two-gun Joe and Big Annie.

“That’s okay. That’s swell,” said Jakey. “That’s all I need.”

There was a roll of drums and Jakey in his tight suit went up on the platform. Marie took another glass of champagne over to Miss Mehaffy.

“Just to give you courage,” she said, “and don’t be scared. Remember a Palace audience is a hick audience, the easiest in the world, and this is a Palace audience. They all know how lousy they are themselves, and they’re pullin’ for you with every nerve.”

Jakey’s voice broke in on them. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he was saying, “we have a great privilege tonight. We got with us Miss Gladys Mehaffy, the aunt of Miss Dupont who’s been entertaining you. Miss Dupont kinda comes by her talent direct because Miss Mehaffy is a link with bygone days. The good old days when the West was wild and fun was fun. Her father was Two-gun Joe Mehaffy and her mother was Big Annie. Mebbe you heard of ’em, some of you boys who played the Pantages.” Here he was interrupted by a couple of shouts of, “Sure. Everybody’s heard of ’em in Colorado.”

“Well,” continued Jakey, “Miss Mehaffy has kindly consented to sing for us a couple of old ballads she remembers her mother singin’ in the days when her mother was the toast of the West. That kinda takes us back a long ways when most of you was in short pants and some of you wasn’t born, but don’t forget that the show bizness has always been the show bizness and a finer lotta pipples never lived. And Miss Mehaffy belongs to the show bizness. She was the lady who gave such a big hand to Rose and

Donahue's skating act." He turned toward the piano and bowed. "Miss Gladys Mehaffy."

Until that moment Miss Mehaffy hadn't really believed that anything serious was happening. It was all kind of like a dream in which she was having a good time and everybody was being nice to her. But when Jakey said, "Miss Gladys Mehaffy" she knew something had to be done. She had to do what Baby called "producing the goods." The terror and importance of the moment seemed to annihilate all her gaiety. For a moment again she became respectable Miss Mehaffy, proprietress of the Lilac Tea Shoppe. It was a frightful moment when she thought she was going to faint. Years seemed to pass, and then suddenly some one, a man, called out "Whee!" and there was a burst of laughter and applause. She heard Jakey call out: "Go on, Baby. Wow 'em!" and suddenly it was all right again. She was Baby and Big Annie all rolled into one and she had all the confidence in the world. She leaned over the piano the way she had seen Baby do and said, "The Baggage Coach Ahead."

"What about the key?"

"Go ahead. It'll be all right."

The audience was applauding again, trying to make her feel at home. She remembered what Marie had said, "There's nothing like a Palace audience."

She began to sing and to her astonishment her voice came out big and strong. It went all right. For a moment or two she was uncertain and then suddenly she saw Big Annie in front of her in the kitchen, singing the song, and suddenly she became Big Annie herself and sang it the same way—big and free and open, and all at once she felt happier than she had ever been in her life before. She knew suddenly that this was

what she had always wanted to do. The room was very still. There wasn't even a drunken whisper. What Jakey said was true. What they wanted was novelty. The audience was with her.

She came to the end, and before the accompaniment was finished there was a burst of applause and cheers and Miss Mehaffy was bowing the way she had seen Baby do.

There were cries of "More! More!" She looked toward Baby's table and saw that Baby was deep in conversation with Mr. Schultman, who was bending over her. She heard Jakey call out, "You panicked 'em, kid."

"Another Sophie Tucker," Homer called out.

Then Baby looked toward her over her shoulder. "Give 'em 'Big Annie,' " she said, "and give 'em the business."

Miss Mehaffy was flushed and excited and happy. She turned toward the piano player, but he didn't know the tune.

"It ain't hard," said Miss Mehaffy. "Listen." She bent over him and sang a score of bars and he nodded.

"Sure. I got it. It's a blues. I can follow you. The second verse'll go okay."

He felt about for a key while Miss Mehaffy, suddenly professional, listened. "That's it," she said. "That'll be all right."

Jakey handed her another glass of champagne and there were fresh cheers. Then she began:

"Annie was an orphan who ran a house of song.

And Joe, a two-gun fighter, was the man who done her wrong."

She sang it through, verse after verse, just as she had remembered Big Annie singing it for Mrs. Cadogan before

Mrs. Cadogan showed them the revolver she carried in her bustle. She was afraid at first that she might forget some of the words, but they all came back to her miraculously. She went through the whole story about Father McCloskey and the wedding while the passengers waited, finishing each verse with the chorus which ended:

“She got him at the depot
Awaitin’ the three-forty-five.”

When she finished there were fresh cheers and they wouldn’t let her stop until she sang it all over again. And still they wanted more, but she put up her hand and said, “I can’t do any more till I get my breath.”

So they let her go back to the table. Mr. Willoughby had disappeared and Mr. Schultman was talking again to Baby. She heard Baby say: “Tell him I’m not going home. Tell him I’m going to Jakey’s place.”

“Lissen,” said Jakey. “Don’t get me mixed up with Sam. I can’t afford it.”

“Aw shut up!” said Baby, and then turning back to Mr. Schultman, she said: “If you double cross me you’ll never get over bein’ sorry for it. If he catches you, you can blame it all on me. It won’t be the first time I told him a lie.”

“All right,” said Schultman.

Miss Mehaffy took up her napkin to fan herself. “What’s the matter?” she said. “Where’s Mr. Willoughby?”

“You couldn’t see him for dust,” said Baby. “I told him he’d better clear out if he didn’t want his head busted. Sam is on the loose.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Miss Mehaffy.

“We’re going back to the flat and have a party.”

“Ain’t you scared?”

“I’m sendin’ him on a false trail. By the time he finds out he’s chasin’ his tail around, he’ll be fallin’ down.”

“We got a lotta champagne outa Percy before he cleared out,” said Homer.

“Who’s Percy?” asked Miss Mehaffy.

“Mr. Willoughby,” said Marie.

Baby rose. “We gotta clear outa here before he turns up. He’s left Jersey now. We’ll go out the back door. They’ll never let you outa here, Aunt Gladys, if they think you’re goin’ home.”

“I think that’s kind of mean,” said Miss Mehaffy.

“Mean or not, you’d better get outa here before Sam turns up.”

Suddenly Homer looked a little alarmed. “Mebbe we’d better go some place else. What if he turns up at the flat?”

“He won’t,” said Baby. “Besides, I’m not gonna let that bastard spoil my fun.”

Baby was pale and shaking. Jakey looked at her and said, “What you need is a little ride.”

“Shut up,” she said. “I’m not goin’ in for that stuff. I told you that for the last time. See? Coke all you like yourself, but leave me alone.”

“Okay,” said Jakey.

They all began moving toward the red curtains from which the roller-skaters and the Babylone girls had appeared. The people at the tables began a loud murmur of protest, and Baby turned toward them.

“It’s all right,” she said. “We’re just goin’ to the dressing-room for a minute.”

Some one shouted, “Don’t let Big Annie get away,” and then the band began playing again.

“Lissen,” said Jakey in Miss Mehaffy’s ear. “I can get you bookings any time you want. You’d make a fortune.”

Miss Mehaffy giggled. “It’s in the blood, I guess. I’d kinda like to stay.”

As they climbed the stairs Baby said, in a loud whisper, “I don’t care what you do as long as you don’t wake Mrs. Flaherty.”

“Who’s she?” asked Homer.

“The old whatnot who lives in the basement and looks after the flats.”

“What about your neighbors?” asked Marie.

“Yes, if there’s nothing I hate it’s a shushing party,” said Jakey.

“There ain’t any neighbors,” said Baby. “A warehouse on one side and offices on the other and Maisie Granard lives underneath.”

“I guess *she* don’t mind parties,” said Homer.

“No,” said Baby. “One good thump on the floor and she comes right up. Anyway, she’s in Atlantic City, opening.”

“Gee!” said Iris. “If I had a flat like that I wouldn’t be wantin’ to change it. What’s twenty rooms on Park Avenue if the neighbors are always crabbing?”

Once inside the flat, Jakey opened the champagne and cracked up the ice. Marie put a record on the gramophone,

and Homer began telling stories which Miss Mehaffy didn't understand. Then he pulled down two of the window curtains, rods and all, and gave imitations of Tallulah Bankhead, Greta Garbo, and taking off his trousers and clad only in shorts and a curtain, sang "Falling in love again" as rendered by Marlene Dietrich. Then Marie said she could do Jean Harlow and Joan Crawford, but she wasn't very good. Jakey began playing the piano and Iris did the routine she had just learned for her new show, and when she had finished Homer said: "We forgot all about Sam. What if he turns up and breaks in on us?"

"How can he get in?" asked Iris.

Marie gave a look at Baby. "What are keys for, sweetheart? Anyway, if that gorilla wanted to come in he'd just push through the door."

"Don't worry," said Baby. "By the time he gets here he won't be able to push open the ventilator of a baby-carriage."

But Homer and Jakey were doubtful and, aided by the girls, pushed the sofa against the door, and Marie said, "What about the gramophone?" So they pushed the gramophone against the sofa and forgot about Sam Finelli.

Only Homer had an afterthought. "Is there another exit to this flat in case of fire or disorder?"

"Of course," said Iris. "There's the kitchenette. That's the way I got out the night Maisie came up and found me here."

Homer opened the top of the piano, upsetting inside the vase containing the flowers Mr. Willoughby had brought when he took Baby and Miss Mehaffy to dinner. Then he began playing on the strings like a harp in accompaniment to Jakey's music. "Nice watery music," he said.

“Wonderful for playing Debussy,” said Marie, who had studied music.

“Who’s Debussy?” asked Baby.

“It’s all right,” said Homer. “He wrote some great torch songs, only he couldn’t stick to one key.”

Four o’clock passed, and five o’clock, and gray light began to come in at the windows. At the first sign of it Homer pulled down first one window shade and then the other. The second one came off the roller and fell on the floor.

“Never mind,” said Baby. “It wasn’t tacked on, anyway. Maisie pulled it off one night, and I just rolled it back up so Mrs. Flaherty wouldn’t notice.”

Dimly through the haze which was beginning to settle over her Miss Mehaffy understood how the wreckage she had found on her arrival came about. This was a party. Everybody was enjoying himself. She never saw young people having such a good time. She thought, “If only they could have fun like this in Winnebago Falls, girls like Baby wouldn’t run away from home and old women like me wouldn’t go traveling to find excitement.”

She was feeling a little tired, and now and then she felt perilously near to slipping into a doze, but every time she seemed ready to fall asleep Homer would run over to her and, shaking her, say: “Tut! tut! Aunt Gladys. None of that. If you went to sleep, something might happen to the girls.”

She had to laugh, he was so funny. She’d never seen anything like him except maybe Harold Watts, who helped his sister in the Woman’s Exchange on Beaver Dam Avenue.

Suddenly Homer had an inspiration. With the aid of a little padding he built out his figure, wrapped a curtain around it, exposed his shoulder, and said to Iris, "Put on a Mae West record." Then he disappeared into the bedroom.

Baby on the opposite side of the piano, leaning against the curve, said: "I got about enough of Homer. When he gets to Mae West it's always a sign he won't last out the party."

"Aw, let him alone," said Marie. "He's enjoyin' himself, if nobody else is. It's more than I can say for some others at this party."

"Meanin' me, I suppose," said Baby.

"Meanin' you," said Marie.

"Aw, lay off," said Jakey. "Stop spoilin' Aunt Gladys' fun."

Iris put on the record and Homer came in dressed in the window curtains. On his head he had perched one of Baby's wide-brimmed hats, to which he had attached pieces of the kitchenette broom as plumes.

"Look at his walk," said Marie. "Ain't it wonderful? You otta do impersonations, Homer."

The record played on and on, and so no one heard Sam Finelli's footsteps on the landing outside the door. No one heard the key slipped unsteadily into the lock and turned stealthily. It was Iris who had the first inkling of his arrival. She saw the sofa begin to move slowly toward the center of the room and the gramophone totter. The record jumped a dozen bars, and then, as Sam gave a mighty shove, the sofa sailed into the room and the gramophone fell over on its face. Marie gave a scream of warning and then they all saw the

figure of Sam come into the room. He was drunk, wild-eyed, and bellowing. In one hand he held a revolver, and with the other he beat his chest.

They heard him yelling, "So there you are, you two-timing...."

And then Iris, Marie, Jakie and Homer vanished through the bedroom door.

Baby was behind the piano and couldn't escape, and Miss Mehaffy at the moment of the entrance was falling into a doze, so she couldn't have gotten away even if she'd been willing to desert Baby. The bellow disturbed her, but it was the sound of a pistol-shot which wakened her.

Sam Finelli was shooting point-blank at Baby, who was under the piano, screaming. Mr. Finelli fired one shot and then another, and then Miss Mehaffy acted. In the dishpan by her side lay a bottle of champagne on ice. As she said afterward, she never knew how she did it. It must have been the blood of Big Annie. But before Sam Finelli had time to fire a third shot he was lying on the floor on his face, with a big gash in the top of his head, and the pistol lay in a far corner of the room.

At the same moment the fumes of champagne seemed to leave Miss Mehaffy's brain and she saw everything as clear as day. Sam Finelli was lying unconscious at her feet, and Baby was still under the piano, screaming, and down the front of the new dress Miss Mehaffy was so proud of there was a great stain of champagne.

At first she couldn't do a thing with Baby, who wouldn't move, but just clung to a leg of the piano, screaming, so Miss Mehaffy couldn't find out whether she'd been hit or not. She only got her free of the piano by seizing her ankle and

dragging her out. Then she found there wasn't anything the matter, and she picked her up and carried her in and deposited her on the bed, where she continued to scream and moan. After that Miss Mehaffy went in to look at Sam Finelli and worry about how she was going to bring him to. She washed away the blood and made a bandage out of a piece of pillow-case. She went and fetched some cold water to revive him, but on second thought she put it down without doing anything. He was better off the way he was, at least till she got Baby out of the way. If she brought him round he might begin bellowing and shooting all over again.

In the bedroom Baby refused to make any sense. She would moan for a time and then break into hysterical laughter, and all she would say was to repeat over and over again: "Take me home! Take me home! I'm so tired."

And then Miss Mehaffy thought of Teeny. He was just the one to get them out of a pickle like this, if only she could find him. After a search she discovered her handbag lying in the water inside the piano, and took from it Teeny's card, but when she approached the telephone she didn't know how to work the dial. She carried it to the bed and said to Baby, "Here, help me get Teeny's number." But Baby just kept on moaning and thrashing about and saying, "Take me home! Take me home!" until Miss Mehaffy, exasperated, lost her control as she had done now and then long ago when Baby got into temper tantrums, and swinging her arm she slapped Baby with all her force.

The blow had the effect she desired. Suddenly Baby sat up on the bed, looking as if she had just been wakened out of a deep sleep.

“Get that number,” said Miss Mehaffy, and Baby set to work on the dial.

There was a moment’s pause and then Anytime Annie’s voice came over the wire.

“This is Miss Mehaffy. I want Teeny right away.”

“Mehaffy? Mehaffy?” came back over the wire.

“Yes. I was in your place this morning with Teeny. I’m Baby’s aunt. Tell Teeny we’re in Baby’s flat and we’re both in trouble.”

“Okay,” said Anytime Annie.

Miss Mehaffy put down the telephone and turned to Baby, but Baby had relapsed into hysterics and was useless, so Miss Mehaffy, after another cautious look at Sam Finelli, dragged out three suitcases and began to pack. She took what she judged were the best of Baby’s clothes. The ones left behind she regarded with regret, but it would have been impossible to take them all without three or four trunks, and she consoled herself by remembering Sam’s remark that wherever Baby went she’d soon pick up an outfit just as good.

All the haziness and confusion had left her brain. Everything depended upon her. She knew that somehow she had not only to escape with Baby, but that Sam Finelli had to be removed from the flat. If Mrs. Flaherty or the police found him there, there would be trouble for Baby. As yet he made no trouble, and when she returned to look at him a third time she could not decide whether he was still unconscious or just asleep.

“Get up,” she said to Baby. “We’re clearing out of here.”

“I wanna go home! I wanna go home!” moaned Baby.

“That’s just where you’re going,” said Miss Mehaffy.

She pushed a hat over Baby’s eyes and took down her mink coat and threw it around her, and then the door bell rang and when she opened the door Teeny was there.

He came in grinning, and as he looked around the room, he said, “I see you’ve been havin’ a party.” Then he looked at Sam Finelli. “Quite a lot of wreckage, I see. Who got *him*?”

“I did,” said Miss Mehaffy.

Teeny’s grin widened, “How?”

“With a bottle. We got to get rid of him. Baby’s no good. She just moans and cries.”

“I knew it was gonna happen some day.”

Teeny pushed Sam’s body with his foot, and a snoring sound came from Sam. “He’s all right. He ain’t dead.” Then slowly he took a revolver out of his pocket. “Want me to finish him off?” he asked, raising his thin eyebrows.

“No. No,” said Miss Mehaffy, “We got enough trouble.”

“We gotta dump him some place away from this flat. Hot or cold, it’s all the same.”

“No. I don’t want to get mixed up in anything like that.”

With a regretful sigh Teeny slipped the revolver back in his pocket. “It’s too bad. I been waitin’ for years for a chance like this, aside from the fact that I’d like to do a favor for ladies.”

“Listen,” said Miss Mehaffy, taking hold of his arm, “I want to get Baby out of here. She’s got to go home. Back to Winnebago Falls and her momma.”

Teeny grinned, “I guess she won’t stay with momma very long.”

“She’s got to have a rest, anyway. When can we get a train out of here?”

Teeny pulled an old-fashioned gold watch out of his pocket. “You ain’t had much of a visit.” He glanced at the watch. “There’s a train in about half an hour. You could make it, I guess.”

“We’re all packed and ready.”

His eyebrows went up. “You’re kinda good in an emergency, ain’t you? Must be kinda wasted in Iowa. Just like my old woman. She was always like that—always best in a pinch. Funny how you look like her. That’s a nice watch, ain’t it. Belonged to the old man. When he died he gave it to the old woman, and when she died she gave it to me because I was her favorite son. All the others is bums. Lookit the engraving—a waterfall and a house and lilies. They don’t know how to do work like that any more.”

Miss Mehaffy took a precious second or two to admire the watch. Then she said, “What are you going to do with him?”

“I’ll take you to the train, and then get a friend and we’ll come back and take him out and dump him some place—some place where they’ll find him and take him to a hospital or something.”

“What’s burning?” asked Miss Mehaffy.

“Over there in the corner,” said Teeny. “It looks like the window shade was on fire. Somebody’s cigarette, I guess.” He picked up the dishpanful of ice water and threw it over the window shade.

“Whose pants?” he asked, picking up the trousers that lay on the floor by the sofa.

“Homer’s,” said Miss Mehaffy. “He was givin’ imitations.” And suddenly she laughed.

“Yeah, he’s pretty funny sometimes.”

“It wasn’t that,” said Miss Mehaffy. “Only, when Mr. Finelli broke in the door, Homer ran out into the street dressed like Mae West.”

At the station Baby still remained in a daze and Teeny said he’d get the tickets. When he came back he announced that he had a drawing-room for them. “That’ll be more comfortable,” he said. “You’re both kind of nervous.”

“We can’t afford a drawing-room,” said Miss Mehaffy.

“Don’t worry about that. You ain’t payin’ for it.”

“Who is?” asked Miss Mehaffy.

“Sam Finelli. I guess the least he can do is pay the ladies’ fare back to Iowa. He had about two hundred dollars left. They musta cleaned him good.”

There wasn’t any time for protests. The train started to move and from the window Miss Mehaffy, still in evening clothes, waved good-by. As the train pulled out of hearing she heard Teeny calling out, “Don’t worry. I’ll take good care of Sam.”

When she turned from the window she found Baby was asleep. She looked at her watch. She had been in New York one hour and twenty minutes under twenty-four hours. Half aloud, she said, “My! It seems like years.”

Most of the day they slept, and when Baby wakened at last she was in a quiet, repentant mood and humbler than Miss Mehaffy had ever seen her. For a moment it even seemed to

her that Baby was ashamed of herself. For a long time they remained in silence, and then slowly Baby began to ask her about Winnebago Falls and what had been happening there since she left. Miss Mehaffy told her who had been married and who had new babies and about the Bennett divorce, and then there didn't seem to be much more to tell.

"It's pretty slow there, isn't it?" asked Baby.

"Yes," said Miss Mehaffy, "but it'll be good to be back."

"Yes, I guess we both need a rest."

There was a silence again while Baby smoked a cigarette. She seemed calmer than she had been the evening before, but she looked ill and her hands shook when she tried to light her cigarettes, one from the end of another. There were dark circles under the baby-blue eyes.

Presently, with an air of unconcern, Baby said, "What about Willie?"

For a moment Miss Mehaffy didn't answer. Looking at Baby, she thought, "I've saved Baby from Mr. Finelli, and now I've got to save Willie from Baby." Still, maybe none of it was any of her business. Anyway, she could spar for time.

"He's all right. He's been goin' around with the McCaffery girl. It looks like they were goin' to be married."

She watched Baby, wondering what she was going to say, but Baby didn't say anything. She went on smoking and presently she said, "Has he changed much?"

"No," said Miss Mehaffy. "His kind don't change much. They're pretty dependable. Day before yesterday when I left he was talkin' about going away for a month on a fishing-trip. I expect he's gone by now." After this speech Miss Mehaffy had to pretend to be interested in something in her

handbag, because none of it was true and she couldn't meet Baby's eye without betraying herself.

"It'll be kinda good to see him again," said Baby.

"Maybe he won't want to see you. You treated him pretty rotten."

Again there was a silence and presently Miss Mehaffy said, "What are you planning to do?"

"I don't know. Take a rest first, I guess, and then maybe go out to Hollywood."

Miss Mehaffy felt a little relieved.

They surprised Mrs. Petersen, who very nearly fainted, and once she had recovered began to cry and say how awful Baby looked and asked what she had done with her lovely hair and beautiful complexion. They didn't explain to her the real reason why Miss Mehaffy had come back, bringing Baby with her. Miss Mehaffy just said, "I thought Baby sort of looked as if she needed a rest, and I soon got enough of New York." Mr. Petersen took the surprise calmly, and not without secret misgivings, for life had been very peaceful since Baby went away.

The odd thing was that Miss Mehaffy was glad to be back. When she turned the key in her back door (she always took the back-door key) a feeling of comfortable warmth swept through her at the sight of the familiar stove and the table and the rolling-pin. She had had her moment of excitement and she knew now that she would be satisfied for the rest of her life. She had only wanted to know what it was like, and now she knew. And she had learned something else. You couldn't

find it any more in places like Meeker's Gulch. It had moved East.

When she had hung up her new hat and coat she saw Willie through the window, turning the crank of the gasoline pump, and leaning out she called: "When you get through, come in a minute. I got something to tell you."

He came in and sat down on one of the kitchen chairs, looking brown and honest and kindly and a little stupid in his denims stained with grease. She poured him a glass of cider and said, "Sorry I haven't got anything baked up, but I just got home."

"Kind of a hurried trip," said Willie.

"I didn't come alone. I brought Baby with me."

As soon as she said it she knew that the old trouble over Baby wasn't ended. He sat up in the chair, his honest brown eyes shining. "Where is she?"

"Now just keep calm. She's at home and you can't see her right now. Just sit right on that chair. I want to talk to you about her."

"How is she? What about her?"

Miss Mehaffy hardened her heart and prepared herself to do her duty. "Well, she's changed a good deal. You'd hardly know her" (she was thinking of the platinum hair and exaggerated make-up) "and she's not feeling so good. She isn't the same Baby that went away from here."

"I guess maybe she might want to go to the movies tonight."

"I kind of think she'd like to rest tonight." She poured him another glass of cider. "Listen, Willie, I used to tell you that Baby wasn't your dish. I was always telling you that you'd

better marry some nice girl and settle down. And I'm telling you that all over again. Keep away from Baby. She won't ever make you happy."

Willie looked at her sullenly. For a moment he was silent, thinking ponderously. Then he said, "I thought you liked Baby."

"Sure I do. Baby's like my own child and so are you, and it's because I like you both so much I don't want you both to get all messed up and unhappy. Listen, Willie, there's two kinds of people in the world that oughtn't ever to mix, and that's the kind that likes a quiet life and the kind that likes excitement. She's been bitten by it and she's never goin' to give it up. She may lay quiet like she's doin' now, but as soon as she's rested up she'll be on the loose again. Baby's a nice girl, but she likes excitement, and that's fatal." She leaned over and placed a big hand on his shoulder, "Listen, Willie, you've been planning that fishing-trip for three years, go ahead and take it. Go right home and take it. Get packed up and go away without ever seeing Baby. I told her you were goin'. Listen to me. It's the best thing for both of you."

He shook his head, "No, I'm goin' to see Baby. What d'you think I've been waitin' for?"

Miss Mehaffy was silent for a moment, thinking. She had to save Baby and Willie from each other somehow. Once married, they'd both hate each other. One more play remained for her to make, and she hesitated. When at last she plunged, she knew while she was speaking that the play was just the wrong one, but it was too late to stop herself.

She said: "Listen, Willie. I hate to tell you this. I know you'll take it hard, but I kinda feel it's my duty." She paused

and lowered her voice. “I don’t want to, but I’ve got to tell you—Baby’s been a bad woman!”

He looked away from her for a moment into his glass of cider. Then he said, almost in a whisper, “Poor little Baby.”

Then she saw the reason for her mistake. Willie was an average male and average males always thought of themselves as redeemers.

That night Willie took Baby to the pictures, where a small crowd of adolescents gathered round her, thinking that she must herself be a movie star. At home Miss Mehaffy set her bread, scrubbed her kitchen, and then went upstairs to unpack. It seemed as if she hadn’t been away at all. She couldn’t quite believe that what had happened to her was real. Only the new clothes convinced her and the big stain of champagne down the front of the new party dress. After she had gone to bed, she lay awake a little time, wondering what had happened to Sam Finelli, and then went soundly to sleep. In that haze between consciousness and slumber she knew that she would never have to take cooking-sherry again, for the desire for excitement was gone out of her system.

In the morning the postman left a picture card of the Chrysler building in color. On the back was written: *“Remember this? We left Sam on the golf-links in Van Cortlandt Park. They found him all right. He’ll be in the hospital for a couple of months. Jeez, what a wallop. They had to put rivets in his head. Love to Baby.”*

It was signed “Teeny.”

Opening the drawer of the kitchen table, she took out a hammer and a tack to fasten the picture on the wall beside the pictures of Baby advertising prepared foods and baby pants.

It was to remind her that the whole adventure hadn't been a dream.

Typographical error corrected by the etext transcriber:

Although Mrs. Williston slept=> Although
Mrs. Williston slept {pg 197}

[The end of *Here Today and Gone Tomorrow* by Louis Bromfield]