IT TAKES ALL KINDS

By

Louis Bromfield

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NEW YORK *and* LONDON
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FIRST EDITION

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The story Better Than Life *was originally published serially under the title of* And It All Came True *and is published in England under the title of* It Had To Happen. *The story* McLeod's Folly *was originally published serially under the title of* You Get What You Give.

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Better Than Life

BECAUSE they rarely had boarders who had to be in an office at eight-thirty or nine o'clock, Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie did not rise until nearly eight. It was Maggie who got up first to be downstairs and start the fire in the kitchen because she was the cook. A little later Mrs. Lefferty rose, put on a black dress (she had worn nothing but black ever since Mr. Lefferty died twelve years before and very little else before that event), joined Maggie and had a cup of strong coffee at the kitchen table. Then by eight-thirty or a quarter to nine the boarders began to appear in the dining room—old Mr. Van Diver, Miss Flint, Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon who were always with them, and occasionally a transient or two. Mrs. Lefferty sat at the head of the table, poured the coffee, dished out the oatmeal and the eggs and led the conversation. Luckily, she always wakened in high spirits, for Miss Flint nearly always had a headache in the mornings, Mr. Boldini suffered from chronic biliousness and Mr. Salmon in the early morning always seemed to be in a kind of haze, confused and poetic and a little sullen. Only Mr. Van Diver was bright and gay because he was so old that he slept very little and so his day had already begun hours before the others were out of their beds. As a rule he wakened and was washed and dressed and reading a motion picture magazine a little after daybreak, so that by the time breakfast was ready he was already in full possession of all his faculties save his memory.

After breakfast Mrs. Lefferty cleared the table, put the dishes on the dumb-waiter and whisked them down to Maggie. Then if it was her turn, she put on her hat and coat and went out to do the marketing, and if it happened to be Maggie's turn, she at once set about cleaning the house and doing up the rooms. While she did Mr. Boldini's room, he took his poodle for an airing. A little while later Mr. Salmon went out, he said, to visit editors and publishers, and with relief she threw open his windows (which he always kept closed at night) and made up his bed. She sometimes argued with him about the windows, telling him that it was lack of air which gave him such a pallor, but nothing could persuade Mr. Salmon. As a young man he had had a pallor and as he passed middle age and threatened to become stout and ruddy in a Jewish way, he fought to keep his youthful pallor because it was an impressive part of the picture he had made of himself long ago.

Old Mr. Van Diver never left the house until nightfall, so while she did up his room, he took a motion picture magazine and went downstairs to sit in the parlor among poor Miss Minnie's Victorian furniture. Miss Flint always did her own room. If there were transients Mrs. Lefferty did their rooms last with very little interest because they rarely stayed long enough for her to feel that they had become a part of her life. Either they had come to her boardinghouse because they wanted to hide or because they were a little broke, and as soon as the reasons were removed they disappeared.

The four star boarders—Miss Flint, Mr. Van Diver, Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon—had been there for so long that their lives and hers seemed to have become entangled and grown together beyond separation. Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie

were both affectionate, easy-going and creatures of habit, all of which was a handicap in keepers of boardinghouses. The transients nearly always seemed to them violent creatures blown in by the wind from the strange hard outside world, to be blown out again after a week or two, always mysterious and remote and cantankerous, never fitting the leisurely old-fashioned tempo of the establishment. None of that inner circle of boarders, the permanents, at Mrs. Lefferty's ever seemed to be in a hurry like the people one met outside the house, rushing for the bus or the subway or the elevated, dashing about in taxis and motors. In the middle of Manhattan Island, Mrs. Lefferty's boardinghouse was an island where time seemed to have stood still. Mrs. Lefferty would never have taken transients save that the income from them gave her and Maggie a tiny margin that permitted them to keep the place going for Miss Flint, Mr. Boldini and the rest.

A little before noon Mrs. Lefferty went down to the kitchen and helped Maggie finish the preparations for lunch. Then she went upstairs again and sounded the bronze Chinese gong in the lower hall, just as she had done when poor Miss Minnie was still alive, every day in her life since she was twenty-three years old. At lunch everyone was, as a rule, cheerful, and after lunch they all had coffee in the parlor. That was where Miss Minnie had always had it and Mrs. Lefferty continued the custom because it was elegant and also because it made old Mr. Van Diver feel at home, as if nothing had changed. She felt sorry for him because his mind was failing and at times he didn't seem to realize that he was old and poverty-stricken and living in a boardinghouse, and Miss Flint knew that having coffee in the parlor was the proper thing to do because they had always

had coffee in the parlor in all the fine houses where once, long ago, she had gone to sew.

When coffee was finished Mrs. Lefferty went downstairs to help Maggie with the dishes and then dressed and went out to the pictures. Now and then, rarely, Maggie went with her but usually Maggie preferred to take a nap or soak the feet she had been standing on for eighteen hours a day for thirty-one years. About six Mrs. Lefferty came in again, climbed the stairs and wakened Maggie who was a great sleeper and but for alarm clocks and Mrs. Lefferty would have slept, as Mrs. Lefferty said, "until the trump of doom." Together they got ready the evening meal and after supper Mrs. Lefferty left Miss Flint to serve the coffee in the parlor while she descended to the kitchen to have her own coffee off a shelf while she helped Maggie with the dishes. This she did in order to gain time so that she might get upstairs to the rummy game a little earlier. When the dishes were finished she put out the cat and Maggie turned out the lights and they went upstairs to find Miss Flint, Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon already gathered impatiently about the card table with old Mr. Van Diver dozing or reading a movie magazine in poor Miss Minnie's plush armchair by the fire.

There were no stakes in the rummy game because none of them could afford to play for money, but they kept a running score of the games, month after month, year after year, and played with passion. Mrs. Lefferty, who was full of tricks and played every night, had eighteen hundred and thirty-four games; Miss Flint, who was less successful because there were times when she seemed foggy and unable to give her full attention, had fourteen hundred and three. Mr. Boldini, who was handicapped by having to be absent when he had a

professional engagement, had twelve hundred and forty-five, and Mr. Salmon, who was frequently called away by his muse, had eleven hundred and sixty-three. Because Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon were unable to play every night, they were each allowed the value of one and a half games for every game they won. As Mr. Salmon grew older his muse called him less and less frequently and he had been able to catch up a little on the general score.

About midnight Mrs. Lefferty brought up a cold snack from the kitchen and then they all went to bed.

Every day with Mrs. Lefferty was exactly the same except Sundays when sometimes she went to Mass, and on the first and the fifteenth of each month when she and Maggie took an evening off to go over their hopelessly muddled accounts in an effort to discover whether they were making or losing money, something which they never did discover until the insurance came due or the taxes had to be paid. Always after these evenings spent over the accounts, the meals became noticeably slimmer and the cuts of meat a little poorer. This would last for three or four days and then the generous, carefree spirits of Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie would defeat their sense of impending doom, and the food would become excellent again and plentiful until the next day of reckoning.

The truth was that Mrs. Lefferty was an incurable romantic, and that the reckless temperament of her partner, Maggie, did not help. If she had not begun life as a kitchen maid too early to have learned in school much more than the merest elements of reading, writing and arithmetic, she might have been a writer instead of keeping a boardinghouse in the sixties too near the elevated. She would have had a great popular success, for in all her romances, in all the stories she

was always making up about her boarders and the people she met while marketing, the ending was always perfectly happy or so sad that it wrung the heart and so was almost more satisfactory than if it had been happy.

Mrs. Lefferty's imaginings had very little to do with what was known as "life"; there was, even in the blackest moments of her "stories," no evil or bitterness but at worst only the rather mechanical plottings of the "villain"; there was never any misery, nor any irony nor any real malice. Mrs. Lefferty never even made people into villains unless it was necessary to the story; and even then in her heart she knew all the time that they were not really villains but only made up that way like actors on the stage. She knew from her reading of the picture magazines that all the vamps and villains were in private life good, kindly, respectable people who either had large families or adopted large ones, and spent their evenings at home knitting or reading books of philosophy. Being just able to read, her awe of the printed word was so great that she believed whatever she saw in print.

That was the way she felt about people in real life—they were never really bad. When they seemed to be bad they were only playing parts; and watching them playing parts gave Mrs. Lefferty a deep satisfaction, even when she herself suffered from their evil actions. Thus twice she and Maggie had lost all their small savings because she became fascinated by gentlemen who came to see her and discuss investments. Thus life was always interesting to Mrs. Lefferty, whether she was cleaning the rooms or shopping on Third Avenue or helping Maggie in the kitchen, and there were moments when she grew a little confused in the head, not knowing where what went on about her in the boardinghouse ended and

where what went on while she was in the picture house across the street began.

Aside from the fact that optimism was a part of her romantic nature, Mrs. Lefferty remained incurable because somehow, in some mysterious fashion her romantic imaginings were always coming true. She knew in her heart that the two gentlemen who had swindled her had not gone out of her life forever but would one day return bringing all her money and a lot of profit besides. She was certain that some day luck would turn for Miss Flint and that once again Mr. Boldini would be "the sensation of three continents," that Mr. Salmon would be a famous writer, and that Maggie's daughter Sarah Jane would settle down and "get a break" and cease to be a burden and a worry. Mr. Van Diver was much too old to have any ending but the inevitable one and Mrs. Lefferty, taking care of him, was planning as happy an ending as possible.

Only in the case of her son Tommy did she ever have any doubts and those only came to her at times in the middle of the night when she lay awake unable to sleep, and kept seeing Tom as a little boy playing in the back garden of poor Miss Minnie's house on Murray Hill with Maggie's Sarah Jane. Watching them long ago when poor Mr. Lefferty and Maggie's husband Mr. Ryan were still alive, she had imagined all sorts of wonderful stories about them both. But Sarah Jane hadn't turned out so well and it was more than five years since she had heard anything at all from Tommy.

To ease her heartache she told herself that it was really not Tom's fault that he had neglected and forgotten her but because poor Miss Minnie had paid for his music lessons and sent him to college. Mrs. Lefferty still had old world ideas

and she was not at all certain of the virtues of democracy. It did no good, she felt, to educate people above their stations in life. It only made them feel restless and insecure. Being ambitious, Mrs. Lefferty knew wisely, did not make you happier. Even if you gained your ambitions, it didn't make you any happier because you only wanted more. The important thing in life, Mrs. Lefferty believed, was not to make a great deal of money nor to win a great deal of glory but to have a good time and help others to have a good time. After all, that was the only important thing when you got to be old and the only thing you could take into the grave with you. If people had always to be wanting things in order to be happy, then there was a curse on them.

That was the trouble with Tommy. He would have made an excellent butler like his father, with his good looks and his gentlemanly air, but education had put ideas into his head and unsettled him. It was really his father's fault. Because he was an Ulsterman, he had been ambitious and wanted a better life for his son; if he had been south of Ireland like herself and Maggie he would have known better. It was Mr. Lefferty who let poor Miss Minnie educate Tom and teach him to play the piano.

And it was American ideas and those dancing lessons that poor Miss Minnie had given Sarah Jane which had sent her off into the chorus with ideas about becoming a famous actress, instead of being content with being a good typist and coming home regularly with her money. Sarah Jane was always coming and going, returning to live with her mother, and Mrs. Lefferty when she was out of a job and dead broke. Choruses, Mrs. Lefferty observed, seemed to work in a spasmodic fashion for two or three months at a time with

long gaps in between, and Sarah Jane never seemed to get one of those "breaks" Mrs. Lefferty was always reading about in the picture magazines. Just the same she knew that Maggie was lucky to have her come home at all, instead of never seeing her the way she never saw Tommy, not knowing what had become of him or whether he was alive or dead. She had his picture and his baby shoes and sometimes in the night when she could not sleep she got them out and looked at them and the baby shoes always made her see him crawling about the floors of the servants' sitting room in poor Miss Minnie's "big house" or climbing the dark back stairs which always infuriated his father who might at any moment descend the stairs with a tray full of things. Those were happy days! Because Mrs. Lefferty was a romantic she forgot whatever was unpleasant and so she remembered nothing at all about the endless stairs of poor Miss Minnie's "big house" and the carrying of coal and hot water and the tantrums of "the old gentleman," Miss Minnie's father, and the fact that the house had been overlarge and understaffed. Sometimes a horrible suspicion came to her that Tommy had disappeared because he was ashamed that his mother had been a housemaid and now kept a boardinghouse. Once long ago in the Grand Central Station she had seen him talking to another boy about his own age, a nice boy dressed like a gentleman, but Tommy seemed not to see her. She was never sure whether he had seen her or not and she had never had the courage to ask him and now, perhaps, it was too late and she would never know.

It was only at night that she thought much about Tommy because in the daytime she was too busy, what with Maggie and herself seeing to the whole house and the buying to do, which meant listening to the troubles of all the friends she

had made at the grocer's and the butcher's and the chain stores. She had a great many friends for she had no shyness. If she liked a person's looks she had a friendly "good morning" and something about the spinach or the chops or the weather. Sometimes people were standoffish and sometimes they were not, but very few held out for long against her faint Cork brogue and her grin which seemed to say, "Well, the world is a fine place, and it's a fine morning for sure and Myers hasn't any right to charge that much a pound for rumpsteak." And so she knew almost everybody—the young housewives who needed advice about cuts and such things, the tired, shabby, respectable, middle-aged women with husbands out of work trying to keep up their respectability and dignity with only twenty-five cents to spend, and even the one or two cooks from the "big houses." There weren't many "big houses" because the neighborhood was run-down and shabby-respectable, not a grand neighborhood like Murray Hill in the days of poor Miss Minnie and "the old gentleman," where there were only big houses and fine carriages and coachmen.

Miss Minnie had been dead for ten years but she still lived so far as Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie were concerned. They had both gone to the funeral in Long Island, wrapped in yards of hired crepe, and seen her with their own eyes laid away in the earth of the old cemetery alongside “the old gentleman” and her mother, among the other Randolphs, the last Randolph who would ever be buried there because Miss Minerva Randolph was the last of them. There weren’t many people there—just the clergyman and old Mr. Van Diver and two or three elderly respectable friends of Miss Minerva. By the time she died she hadn’t many friends left because she was not only the last of her family, but almost the last of a generation and of a whole society which had lived quietly and well and had very nearly disappeared. And when Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty came back to the empty house they wept and keened not only because poor Miss Minnie was gone but because without her, the world itself seemed to have come to an end.

Poor Miss Minnie had been their mistress, their charge, the figure about which their whole world revolved since they had come from Ireland long ago. They had seen her grow from a thin, delicate, middle-aged spinster into an old lady, waiting upon her, worrying about her health, fetching her cushions and delicacies, never once seeing that they too had changed, from young apple-cheeked girls into women past middle age. They had both come home to Miss Minnie’s house from their weddings, in the old days when it was a grand house on Murray Hill, Mrs. Lefferty married to Miss Minnie’s butler and Maggie to Mr. Ryan, the coachman. In her house

Maggie's Sarah Jane and Mrs. Lefferty's Tommy had been born. In her house Mr. Lefferty had died of pneumonia contracted when he rose on one winter night and went downstairs in his nightshirt to help Miss Minnie calm "the old gentleman" who was in one of his tantrums. To Miss Minnie's house Mr. Ryan had been brought home to die after his horses shied at "one of those new horseless carriages" and threw him out on his head in Central Park. To Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie, sitting in their crepe in the servants' sitting room of the house near the elevated where Miss Minnie had come when "the old gentleman" died, the world had come to an end. Not only had they lost poor Miss Minnie but there would no longer be a house with fine walnut furniture and the remnants of beautiful china, and a beautiful linen closet, but Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie would have to find new places and perhaps be separated and Sarah Jane and Tom could no longer live at home.

And then the day after the funeral Miss Minnie's lawyer, old Mr. Prendergast, came to the house and called Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie into the long tunnel of a drawing room and told them that Miss Minerva had left the house to the two of them with everything in it and all the money she had left from the great fortune founded by her grandfather which, if everything went well, would be about enough to pay the taxes and insurance. Mr. Prendergast advised them to sell the house and its contents and invest the money, but neither Mrs. Lefferty nor Maggie could bring herself to do such a thing. Sell all that furniture they had always lived with? It would be like being evicted. Anyway neither of them wanted to retire. They could not imagine what retirement would be like. What could they do with themselves?

Mr. Prendergast painted a bright picture of the joys of living on one's income, but neither Mrs. Lefferty nor Maggie was moved. They would not have been moved if the prospective incomes had been ten times greater than the figures which Mr. Prendergast made on a bit of paper showed they would be.

Ten years afterward Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie still spoke of Miss Minerva as if she were still alive, calling her "poor Miss Minnie" or simply "she," discussing what she would have liked and what she would have thought and said and done. There was wisdom in their calling her "poor Miss Minnie." They had always felt sorry for her, from the beginning when they had come into the house fresh from Ireland, for the emptiness of her life and the tyranny of "the old gentleman." She may have had money and been beyond the need of working with her hands, but in their hearts Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie knew this was nothing, because she had never known what it was like to have the love of a fine upstanding man like Mr. Lefferty or a big good-natured fellow like Mr. Ryan, and she had never had any children and never any fun.

Miss Minnie, they were vaguely aware, had been a relic of a New York that was gone forever, a New York which had already begun to wither and fade when they stepped off the boat long ago at Castle Garden. Miss Minnie had lived gently and discreetly and well while the world into which she was born withered all about her, until at last "the old gentleman" died and she had no longer to take care of him and put up with his tyrannies and pretend to him that they were still as rich as ever. When Mr. Ryan was killed Miss Minnie gave up the horses and when Mr. Lefferty died she did not take on

another butler, and put off "the old gentleman's" rages over the indignity of having no manservant in the house by explaining that she could not find a man as satisfactory as Lefferty; and all the time she knew that they were living no longer off income but off capital. But being a timid soul she was unwilling and afraid to let her father know they were no longer rich and no longer of very much importance. In the big house on Murray Hill, Maggie, belowstairs, and Mrs. Lefferty, above, went on doing all the work, and when "the old gentleman" died, Miss Minnie quickly sold the big house on Murray Hill and bought the nondescript brownstone front in the sixties near the elevated, where she lived until she died.

It was an ordinary four-story brownstone house like a score of others in the same street, with a high stoop and a tunnel-like parlor. At that time it still stood within the limits of gentility. One house farther east would have been too near the tenements and one farther west would have been too expensive for the money Miss Minnie had left out of the ruin. As it was, she managed to get along; nothing would have induced her to suffer the indignities of an apartment house or a hotel. She couldn't, she said, feel comfortable and genteel living in the same building with a hundred other people whom she had never even met.

She was a little, dry, withered old lady. As often as she could afford it, she had friends to tea or to dinner, always the same friends because there were not more than a half dozen who remained out of the world in which she had spent her youth and middle age. They were old ladies and gentlemen as gentle and dry and withered as herself, timid and a little frightened of automobiles and subways and skyscrapers. One by one they died until there remained only old Miss Tilton

who long ago had sat next to her at Miss Waterbury's School for Young Ladies in Washington Square and old Mr. Van Diver who had been courting her for forty years. After she came down in the world to the brownstone house, she never bought any more new clothes but wore out the dozens of old dresses that filled the closets, strange, fussy garments of heavy, durable purple or black satin and grosgrain. She gradually became deaf, not so deaf that conversation was difficult, but only so deaf that she could not hear the sordid noise of the elevated trains passing a couple of hundred feet from her door.

She never said anything about it, but Maggie's Sarah Jane and Mrs. Lefferty's Tommy went on living in the new house. It would not have been genteel to say anything, even if she had not in her heart felt that they were like her own grandchildren, denied to her by her long devotion to her father and to virtues which no one any longer regarded. An extraordinary love existed between Miss Minnie and Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty. None of them ever spoke of it. Miss Minnie knew that it would not have been genteel, and Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty would never have dreamed of giving any sign that they were aware of it. But they all knew that it existed. It existed because the three of them, so different in character and circumstances—Miss Minnie with her desiccated correctness, Maggie with her terrible temper and Mrs. Lefferty with her good-natured romanticism—were simple and good.

When Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty were left the house, there seemed only one thing to do in order to keep it going and that was to open a boardinghouse. It was all there, ready and waiting, furniture and all, in a good location save that it was a

little too near the elevated. And they knew, because they had known poor Miss Minnie for so long, that the plan would have pleased her. They talked it all out in terms of what poor Miss Minnie would have thought and said and done. It was Maggie's opinion that poor Miss Minnie had left them the house, hoping that they would go on living there.

So Mrs. Lefferty, because of her appearance and because she had been a housemaid all her life, was obviously the choice as nominal proprietress. She was plump and pleasant with humorous eyes and a kindly manner, so kindly that she sometimes failed in one aspect of her duties; she would have been swindled again and again but for Maggie's peasant shrewdness. Mrs. Lefferty's romantic imagination made her want to believe the stories her boarders told her partly because their tales of pending inheritance and vast checks gone astray and huge projects with success just around the corner, were always so much more exciting than the simple truth that they were broke and that there was no prospect of ever paying her.

Sometimes as in the case of Miss Flint, the seamstress, and the Great Boldini, weeks passed without any payment being made, but Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie knew that when they had money they would pay, and besides they were almost members of the family; at least they were members of the club. Old Mr. Van Diver had only thirty dollars a month when he first came to them and when stocks began to go bad, this was cut to twenty dollars. He paid Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty everything he received, simply turning over to them the endorsed checks. He did not smoke, and like poor Miss Minnie, he had enough clothes left from his prosperous days to last him until he died. The sum he paid them scarcely

covered the cost of his food, but they could not turn him out. For forty years he had been devoted to poor Miss Minnie. For thirty years he had called three times a week and come to supper every Sunday evening. For thirty years he and poor Miss Minnie had waited for "the old gentleman" to die or give his permission for them to marry, and when at last he died it was too late and the habit of courtship had become fixed and agreeable. Not only were they too old, they were too poor to marry. And so one day about three years after Miss Minnie died, old Mr. Van Diver came to the door and asked Mrs. Lefferty to take him as a lodger. Trembling and shy, he told her that if she did not take him he would have to go to a charitable institution. He told her exactly how much money he had. So while he sat in the familiar parlor, Mrs. Lefferty went belowstairs to consult Maggie. Her own mind was made up, but she was afraid of Maggie who sometimes lost her Irish temper and told Mrs. Lefferty that before long they would be paying boarders to stay with them.

Belowstairs, Maggie was busy with the supper. She was a squat little woman, very fat and built rather like a hippopotamus. For thirty-seven of her fifty years she had lived between the basement and the top floor. For thirty years she had been constantly on her feet and so she waddled a little as she walked. She wore her gray hair yanked back from her plain face and twisted into a tight screw on the top of her head. Worn in that fashion it took simply a jerk and a twist to do it in the morning and it never came down, and the danger of hairs in the soup was practically nonexistent. Her face and her nature alike would have been hard save for her sense of the comic and the twinkle in her blue eyes which betrayed her. Without it she might have been a murderess, not one who employed slow poison, but one who used a meat cleaver.

Mrs. Lefferty knew that in the old days, when Mr. Ryan the coachman, came home drunk, Maggie gave him a beating, big as he was, which kept him in order for weeks afterward. She was a black Catholic and a Fenian. She would, as she bluntly said, have gone to the grave a virgin like poor Miss Minnie, before she would have married an Orangeman like Mr. Lefferty. Sometimes Mrs. Lefferty, corrupted by the Ulsterman husband, long since dead, missed Mass and confession, but Maggie had missed neither the one nor the other since the day she was confirmed.

So when Mrs. Lefferty proposed Mr. Van Diver as a boarder at thirty dollars a month Maggie, oddly enough, did not fly into a temper. She only said, "We'll have to do it, I guess. Poor Miss Minnie, God rest her soul, would like to know that he's well taken care of." Both of them referred to their late mistress as "Poor Miss Minnie, God rest her soul" so that for a long time after the Great Boldini, who never learned English very well, came to the boardinghouse, he had an idea that "*Godresthersoul*" was Miss Minnie's last name.

So they took in Mr. Van Diver and his few belongings—some books, a few worn suits of clothes, a gold-headed stick and a photograph of Miss Minnie taken during her twenties in which she wore a dress with a bustle in a gentle storm of artificial snow. From the beginning the old gentleman was happy. He never went out save after nightfall because his clothes were shabby and he lived in gentle terror of a world which moved too rapidly and too noisily for him. He was very clean and gentle and retiring and as Mrs. Lefferty said, "He gave class to the house."

Mrs. Lefferty gave him all her motion picture magazines to read, and because he was so old that he did not remember

what he read, they were always new to him and he read them over and over again until at last they fell apart and were used by Maggie to start the kitchen fire in the morning. In all his life he had never been inside a moving picture theater, but, at eighty, virtually his only reading was stories about the stars and their lives. It opened a whole new world to him in which everyone seemed to rise from poverty to riches with amazing rapidity, a world in which existed none of the baser motives and weakness of life, where everyone was happy and pure and rejoiced only in doing good for others. He had not seen many beautiful women in his life and no naked ones whatever and the pages of Mrs. Lefferty's magazines seemed filled with little else; he regarded the pictures with a certain gentle wistfulness, and regret that he had been a young man in the days when bathing beauties wore costumes with ankle-length skirts, high collars and long sleeves. He and Mrs. Lefferty talked a great deal together about the picture stars and presently he began to use the phrases he read in the magazines as freely as Mrs. Lefferty herself. It gave them pleasure that Myrna Loy "had got a break" at last and for days the two of them were troubled after reading an article entitled, "Is Baby Le Roy Through?"

The magazines stood in a huge pile in the corner of his room, mounting higher and higher each month until at last the worn ones were carted off by Maggie, a whole compendium of extravagant romance, beauty and excitement, out of a world which to Mr. Van Diver in his childishness was as wonderful as the Arabian Nights.

At last Mrs. Lefferty took him for the first time to see a picture with Miss Ileana Dangerfield, whom he thought the most beautiful of all, in "Love or Die." But he found that the

pictures hurt his eyes and gave him a headache and that Miss Dangerfield, seen from all angles and portraying all emotions, was rather like a great many of the girls he passed on the street during his excursions after nightfall, and not nearly so beautiful as in the carefully posed photograph at the edge of her swimming pool just outside the galleria of her lovely house in Hot Water Canyon. So he never went again and gradually he forgot the shock of reality and slipped back again into the lovely hazy world of the magazines.

As he grew older and his mind a little more confused there were moments when, living in poor Miss Minnie's house, surrounded by the furniture and the pictures and the carpets he had known for forty years, he forgot that she had been dead for a long time, and now and then when he found himself alone with Mrs. Lefferty in the parlor, he would look up and ask gently just as he had done in the old days, if Miss Minnie would be down soon, and Mrs. Lefferty would always reply in a friendly way, "You know where poor Miss Minnie is, Mr. Van Diver," as if she were not in her grave but had just gone round the corner on an errand.

Mr. Van Diver, like poor Miss Minnie, belonged to a world that had vanished and Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie belonged to one that was rapidly vanishing. There weren't any more Irish servants like themselves, belonging for their lifetimes to one family—witty, sloppy, slap-dash, good-humored and devoted. Even boardinghouses like theirs with sober respectable pasts, where the lodgers all sat down at one table like a large family and knew each other's failures, disappointments, vanities and weaknesses and which piece of chicken each one preferred, were rapidly going the way of poor Miss Minnie and Mr. Van Diver. Nowadays, Mrs. Lefferty knew, people who had no

homes lived in vast mechanical structures divided into cubicles, with the sexes segregated as often as not, where the food appeared mysteriously out of the walls into which the laundry in turn disappeared to come back mysteriously fresh and clean in a few days. Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty and their boardinghouse were swiftly becoming as odd and incongruous in the New York of the thirties as the horseless carriage which frightened Mr. Ryan's horse and killed him, had been in the New York of the nineties.

And so slowly they had come to be a shelter and a refuge for those who in the march of time had lagged behind and found in turkey-red carpets and high ceilings, pullman drawing rooms and old-fashioned chandeliers, a refuge and a solace which they could not find in hotels and furnished flats.

That was why Miss Flint had come to them and why after nine years was still with them. All her life she had been a "sewing woman" who went out by the day to make the dresses of whole families in the days when the rows of brownstone houses lay monotonous and respectable in a gigantic gridiron across the whole of Manhattan north of Thirty-fourth Street. But slowly everything had changed for Miss Flint. People no longer had in "the sewing woman" spring and fall to stay day after day and sometimes overnight, gossiping, wielding her scissors, her mouth full of pins. Something had happened which Miss Flint, a little puzzled and hurt, could never quite understand. People didn't seem to have big families any longer and if there were children, their parents seemed to buy their clothes, as Miss Flint said scornfully, "ready-made." She still had one or two clients, ladies like herself who were no longer young and could not abide buying things off the racks. Twice a year she visited

them to “go over” their dresses, but most of the time she stayed in her room at Mrs. Lefferty’s working in melancholy solitude on the crocheted bags she sold occasionally at the Women’s Exchange.

It was not only that she was left miserably poor by the decline of her fortunes; it was much more than that, for in the old days she had led a kind of exciting vicarious existence in which she knew everything about family life and almost everything about matrimony, going to houses where there were big families, knowing their griefs and pleasures, their joys and their disappointments, hearing fresh bits of gossip, and bringing gossip with her from house to house along with her scissors and pins. Then she had been a person of importance. There were even families who had looked forward to her coming. Now no one looked forward to seeing her. Nobody knew that she existed, or cared whether she lived or died. Mrs. Lefferty and Mrs. Ryan were kind to her and Mrs. Lefferty sometimes took her to the pictures, but after all, as Miss Flint, who was a snob, knew, they were only a pair of Irish servants who had set up a boardinghouse and were not genteel like the people she had worked for in the old days. She had never taken her meals with the servants. Either she had eaten alone in the sewing room or at the table with the family.

Miss Flint dyed her hair now in order to make herself look more “youthful,” not discreetly, but a strange, flaming red, which resembled the color of no hair on land or sea. She did it herself in the bathroom and because she was unfamiliar with the art of hairdressing and too nearsighted to read the directions correctly, she may have been guilty of some error in the use of the dye. In any case the unnaturalness of the

shade did not seem to trouble her; rather she flaunted it as if she thought it becoming to her tired, raddled face. There were times when the sight of poor respectable Miss Flint coming down the steps of the boardinghouse on her way to the Women's Exchange with a crocheted bag, was almost too much to be borne by Maggie who said, "Sure and she gets herself up like a madame."

She did her own room and mended the sheets and pillow cases and napkins as a contribution toward the board and lodging with which she had never been able to catch up during the nine years she had lived with them. She spent no money except on whisky which she used "medicinally," and always wakened in the morning with a bad headache. Lately she had returned home from the Women's Exchange again and again with the story that she had been "followed"; twice the man dared to come almost to the door itself. When she recounted these stories Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie listened sympathetically, pretending that they believed them, but after she had gone upstairs Maggie said one night, "Sure and she's lucky to have only one man following her. It's a wonder there ain't a whole crowd the way she gets herself up."

And there was Mr. Boldini whom Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie sometimes called with a kind of pride, "The Great Boldini." He was not much better pay than Miss Flint or Mr. Van Diver but they were attached to him because long ago he had been their first boarder. In those prosperous days he had been in and out a good deal, now staying for a week, now away on tour for four or five weeks at a time. Occasionally when he was what he called "at liberty," he was with them for as long as three months at a time, but as the years passed, the engagements grew steadily fewer and fewer until at last

he seemed to be “at liberty” most of the time and became a “permanent.”

He was a tall man of about sixty who looked rather like a bloodhound, with large hypnotic Mussolini eyes, a sallow skin, and hair which he wore very long and, like Miss Flint, dyed to give himself a youthful appearance. His clothes, like those of Mr. Van Diver, showed signs of once, a long time ago, having cost a great deal of money. It was the Great Boldini who, as the Original Boarder, occupied what had once been poor Miss Minnie’s sitting room at the front of the house overlooking the picture theater so much frequented by Mrs. Lefferty; but the room no longer bore, save in shape, the slightest resemblance to the room where Miss Minnie spent the last years of her life. The closets which once contained her starched and whale-boned clothing were now filled with costumes—Spanish, Turkish, Indian and Chinese together with a great many which were created in a moment of fantasy by some creator as Roman. Once bright and gay, they were faded now and their gold and silver braid and embroidery was tarnished beyond repair; but the Great Boldini clung to them, keeping them wrapped carefully in newspapers and sprinkled with camphor.

The shelves on which Miss Minnie’s hats once stood were burdened with turbans, berets, Roman helmets and headdresses with plumes, carefully put away against the day when Mr. Boldini would stage his great “comeback” and be able to pay all he owed Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie. Luckily the house was old-fashioned and the closets were enormous for Mr. Boldini had stowed away in them not only his own costumes but those of a whole troupe as well. In the past when great magicians were still held in esteem, he had

believed in giving his act novelty by changing the costumes of his troupe each season; and being of an economical nature, he had always kept them as his own property.

The walls were covered with photographs of himself in all his various costumes, some framed, some merely fastened to the wall with thumbtacks. In some of them he was surrounded by his troupe of "Fourteen Performers, Fourteen Magicians, Jugglers and Acrobats." And in one corner, where they were a great nuisance to Mrs. Lefferty because they gathered dust, stood a huge pile of books filled with clippings. Once or twice Mrs. Lefferty had suggested storing them in the attic but the Great Boldini objected and she had not the heart to pursue the idea because she knew that he liked to have them at hand where he might read them over and over. They were the only reading Mr. Boldini ever did. There might be wars, floods, catastrophes, but the Great Boldini lived on in happy ignorance of them, lost in the raptures of reading the notices he had got long ago in London and New York, Berlin and Budapest, Bombay and Singapore and Shanghai. Whenever he was embarrassingly far behind with his rent he got out the books and read aloud to Mrs. Lefferty the clippings about his invitation performances before the Kaiser and the Emperor of Austria, and Mrs. Lefferty was impressed, never noticing that royalty had fallen to an estate very nearly as low as that of the Great Boldini. Nowadays his agent, hounded by Mr. Boldini, occasionally produced a three-day engagement in some picture house in the "sticks" but the bulk of his income came from pulling rabbits out of top hats at children's parties. The very families which once had engaged Miss Flint to make up their children's clothes for the year now spent their money in engaging Mr. Boldini to perform tricks.

In one corner of the room there was a large and shabby basket with a cushion in it. Here slept Fanto, Mr. Boldini's poodle. He was no longer a young dog for he had already had a career as part of his master's act in the days when vaudeville was still prosperous; but despite his rheumatism, he was as clever as he had ever been and none of his tricks had been forgotten. Sometimes he performed with Mr. Boldini at children's parties where he always experienced a greater success than his master. For Fanto Mr. Boldini charged extra. His agents announced him as "The Great Boldini. With Fanto, the World's Most Extraordinary Dog, Fifty Dollars. Without Fanto, Thirty-five Dollars." The billing was incorrect, for of the two Fanto was certainly the star and always had much the greater success. They loved each other, but like a husband and wife in "a double," professional jealousy sometimes disturbed the happiness of their relationship. On the occasions when the children, delighted by Fanto, shouted for more and more tricks from him, Mr. Boldini was always a little hurt and outdid himself to regain prestige, and Fanto, aware of his own success, barked and turned somersaults and heartlessly thrust his master into the background. When Mr. Boldini had engagements without Fanto, the poodle would sulk jealously at home, melancholy and heartbroken, or would lavish his affections on Mrs. Lefferty and scarcely notice Mr. Boldini on his return. At such times he would follow Mrs. Lefferty about the house, from room to room, while she did her work, and from her he learned all sorts of new tricks. He would fetch her scrubbing brush and dust cloth and he even learned to help her make the beds, holding the sheets gently in his dull old teeth on one side of the bed while Mrs. Lefferty drew them smooth and tight on the opposite side. He did all this

joyfully with wild barkings and waggings of the tail which sometimes made Mrs. Lefferty helpless with laughter so that she had to sit down for a moment in the midst of her work.

In the beginning Mrs. Lefferty had been dubious about allowing dogs in the house. Poor Miss Minnie had always preferred cats, so until Fanto came neither Mrs. Lefferty nor Maggie knew anything about dogs. They took poor Miss Minnie's opinion that they were untidy beasts. But once Fanto was allowed inside the door he made forever secure not only his own place but that of his master as well, for although there were times, at the bi-monthly reckonings, when Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie would have been willing to see Mr. Boldini leave, they could never bring themselves to see Fanto go. Once as a joke Mrs. Lefferty, working on the third floor, put Fanto into the dumb-waiter and sent him down to the kitchen where Maggie, opening it in the expectation of finding a wastepaper basket or some soiled linen, was nearly knocked down by the joyful Fanto, barking and wagging his tail. After that whenever Fanto had finished helping Mrs. Lefferty with her work, he jumped into the dumb-waiter and rode down to the kitchen where Maggie wickedly fed him all sorts of delicious tidbits outside the dull diet of vegetables, rice and dog biscuit which Mr. Boldini prescribed for his rheumatism.

Sometimes when Mr. Boldini had engagements at picture houses in places like Troy or New Haven or Atlantic City, he would be gone for a whole week and then Fanto's basket was moved up to Mrs. Lefferty's room on the fourth floor because, Fanto, left alone, would droop and grow melancholy and actually become ill. Occasionally, about three times a year, one end of poor Miss Minnie's parlor was cleared of its

clutter of Victorian furniture and the Great Boldini and Fanto, with the finest of professional manners, would go through a whole performance of magic and tricks before an audience made up of old Mr. Van Diver, Miss Flint, Mr. Salmon, Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie, who always finished the evening, her eyes popping with excitement and real terror, by saying, "Sure, and it's all black magic!" And as the months and years passed it became more and more evident to Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie that no matter how far behind the Great Boldini became with his board and lodging, they would have to keep him on.

Mr. René Salmon, *né* Joseph Solomon, was, financially speaking, the rod and staff of the establishment. Luckily, for he was a poet, he received three hundred dollars a month quite regularly from his father who owned the extremely prosperous Boston Store in Great Falls, Indiana. Mr. Solomon, senior, a delightful old gentleman over eighty years old, had for more than thirty years found it worth three hundred dollars a month to be able to open a magazine now and then and read poems filled with sentiments, either very high-flown or completely incomprehensible, bearing the signature of René Salmon. He always kept the magazines in a pile in the corner of his office and showed them to citizens of Great Falls and the girls in the shop saying, "Who'd have thought that my Joe would ever get to be a famous poet?" He even thought it worth a few hundred dollars more from time to time to bring out Joe's poems in limited editions in bindings which he thought a little loud but accepted in his humbleness as beyond his under standing. And when Joe came back to Great Falls, which he did about once every six or seven years, he read his poetry before palpitating assemblies of middle-aged women who would have died

rather than admit that they understood none of it, and before somewhat puzzled congresses of businessmen who understood only the dirtier parts. With them he had a great success during his "breast and buttock" period and fell into unpopularity with his poems written during what he called the "Freudian Influence."

Mr. Salmon, like the others at Mrs. Lefferty's, was a relic, although of a vintage somewhat later than that of Miss Flint and old Mr. Van Diver. He had begun his career a little before the turn of the century when Mouquin's was Mouquin's and poets were creatures full of light who dressed in such a way that there could be no doubt of their calling. At that time he had come fresh from the West, a dark, slender, good-looking boy with large gazelle eyes, who attracted notice as much by his physical beauty as by his talents. He wrote poems about the High Road and Golden Girls and the Joy of Living, for at that time, long before the war, New York was a joyous place, comfortable and secure and gentle, where a joy might still be found in living, not the hysterical, frantic excitement of life which left Mr. Salmon, as a poet past middle age, bewildered, frustrated and stranded, but a gentle, rich kind of joy. Not only did he frequent Mouquin's and sit elbow to elbow with the great literary men of his time; he was invited to read his poems in the salons of female poets and patrons of the artistic where he had, although he failed to understand it at the time, a greater success from his beauty than from his verse. The "free" languid ladies would watch him as he read, hearing nothing of the dubious music of his verse, but absorbed completely in the music of his gazelle eyes, his thick, dark, curling hair and the pure line of his throat above the black flowing tie. Life was easy then; there were always plenty of women, good wine and tobacco and talk, and on the three

hundred dollars a month which came from the Boston Store in Great Falls, he lived like a king. He knew John Drew and Richard Watson Gilder and Richard Harding Davis and once he was invited to dinner by Robert Underwood Johnson.

Then the war came, and that lovely world of Golden Girls and the Joy of Living was shattered beyond all repair, and when the bewildered Mr. Salmon wakened among the fragments, he was over forty and no longer a somewhat corrupt and opportunist gazelle-eyed boy but a middle-aged man with a paunch and bags beneath the gazelle eyes, and Greenwich Village had taken the place of Mouquin's. Richard Harding Davis was dead and all the figures of the Happy Period, both men and women, had become old and tired. Luckily he still had enough resilience and adaptability to cope with the situation, and before long he was sitting in a room in Eighth Street surrounded by another group of admiring ladies, no longer languid New York females with salons, but plainly dressed and rather plain ladies no longer in their first youth who had come from high schools and kitchens of comfortable homes in the Middle West and New England to be "free" in the Village. Despite his paunch and the bags under his eyes, René Salmon was not yet out of the running, for he had two great advantages—his three hundred a month which was about one hundred times as much money as anyone else in the Village possessed, and he had a wonderful technique, learned from the ladies of the good old Golden Girl period. And so for a time he became a kind of king in a flat painted black and orange with red curtains, where there were always plenty of cigarettes and gin and whisky. At this period Mr. Salmon also brought his poetry up to date. He began to write verse full of breasts and buttocks and freedom, touched, as he expressed it, "with a harsh

animal beauty," and under the strain his liver began to give way.

And then after a little time that world crashed too, not in a violent explosion of war like the world of the High Road and the Joy of Living, but slowly, crumbling bit by bit like a jerry-built house constructed upon a fraudulent foundation. It was the tourists and the uptown drunks and prohibition which ruined the Village. It became intolerable to Mr. Salmon and it had proved too great a strain on his health and left him with dyspepsia and a tendency to bilious attacks as well as forty or fifty extra pounds of weight, which made him seem less and less like a poet and more and more like Mr. Solomon who ran the Boston Store in Great Falls.

It was too late for him to change again and impossible for him, who had known the ease and splendor of the Happy Period, ever to adapt himself to the raucous bitter realities of a New York dominated by speakeasies and night clubs. So he went into retreat, temporarily, he thought, at Mrs. Lefferty's, and while he was there had himself psychoanalyzed.

From that time on the "Freudian Influence" made itself apparent, and instead of writing poems about breasts and buttocks, he wrote, virtually the same poems over again, about mountains and hillocks, Maypoles and serpents, wells and horses and balloons, all of which confused the businessmen back in Great Falls who had never felt lasciviously about any of these things and did not understand the poet's excitement over them.

Back in Great Falls, old Mr. Solomon began to grow a little alarmed by two things—the suspicion that his son Joe was going a little potty, and the fact that for the past few years Joe's "pomes" appeared less and less frequently in the

magazines; and presently, about five years after Mr. Salmon came to Mrs. Lefferty's to live, old Mr. Solomon wrote timidly suggesting that since the poetic vein of his son seemed to be running out and Mr. Solomon himself was growing old, it might be a good idea if Joe came home and took over the Boston Store. To which Joe responded with a great sheaf of poems of the Village and the "Freudian period" which he said he meant to bring out in a privately printed edition. They only succeeded in shocking and puzzling the old gentleman. René, *né* Joe, wrote that all editors were nincompoops and prudes and that naturally they would not publish poems about breasts and buttocks and did not understand the deeper significance of the poems written during the "Freudian period."

He had neither the desire nor the intention to go home and take over the Boston Store and he was very happy at Mrs. Lefferty's, for by the time his psychoanalysis, which took nearly two years, was finished, he found himself very much at home there. In that obsolete establishment where time stood still, with Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty, old Mr. Van Diver, Miss Flint, Mr. Boldini and the eternal presence of poor Miss Minnie, he found again something of the peace and security of the old days at the turn of the century. It was the old play done over again by a new cast. The characters were the same, only the values had changed. Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie with their awe of anyone who could read and write without difficulty, would listen, eyes and mouth wide open, while he read his poetry, understanding not a word of it and accepting the blame for themselves, because they were not properly educated. They and the bedizened Miss Flint, with her conviction of her fatal effect upon all men, took the place of the palpitating ladies with literary salons. Miss Flint

understood no more of the poetry than Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie but out of the confusion of Maypoles and mountains, serpents and cisterns, her distracted mind gained a muddled, half-voluptuous excitement filled with the intimations of carnal pleasures she had never known; and afterward, aided by the "medicinal" whisky, she experienced the most strange and exciting dreams. Now and then, about twice a month, she spent twenty-five cents out of what they paid her at the Women's Exchange for one of her bags, on a gardenia which she left on the mat outside Mr. Salmon's door. The first one, unluckily, was discovered by Mrs. Lefferty instead of Mr. Salmon, and, puzzled by the discovery of a gardenia apparently fallen miraculously from heaven, Mrs. Lefferty picked it up and put it in a vase in the parlor. At supper she discussed the miraculous flower before the blushing Miss Flint who said nothing whatever of its origin. Mr. Salmon only smirked and implied that it was a sign from the gods, indicating his genius. Afterward in private, a bridling Miss Flint explained to Mrs. Lefferty, and from then on Mrs. Lefferty always left the gardenias respectfully on Mr. Salmon's doormat.

So Mr. Salmon, nearing sixty, still had a life that was carefree and filled with adulation, a life which perhaps he could have found nowhere else in New York of the nineteen-thirties. Only the values had changed; and nature itself had been unkind, changing the appearance of Mr. Salmon bit by bit, maliciously, without his becoming aware of it. He still wore his hair long and "touched it up" but he was a little bald in front and despite the flowing black tie and the large black felt hat which both screamed "Poet!" at every passer-by, he no longer looked like a gazelle-eyed boy poet but a prosperous businessman who needed a haircut. For a year or

more he had written almost no verse but was engaged upon his memoirs.

Into the quiet of this small lost world, Maggie's daughter came and went, sometimes appearing quietly, sometimes returning noisily in a burst of drama, for she was one of those personalities which appear to project excitement, to create disaster, calamity and farce.

Sarah Jane had a "career," spotty, checkered and full of ups and downs, a career which somehow, no matter what the opportunities, never seemed to arrive anywhere. Luckily for the career she resembled the squat flat-footed Maggie scarcely at all. She had Maggie's quick temper, and her sense of the ridiculous, but physically nature had been kind to her, permitting her to resemble her father, the big, florid, wild, handsome Mr. Ryan, the coachman, to whose charm even poor Miss Minnie had succumbed despite his drinking and his habit of overturning the victoria by running it into trees. She was tall, and even the most severe dieting, upon which she embarked spasmodically, could not make her beauty anything but one of curves. She would have served admirably as a model for Mr. Salmon's poems of the "Village Period" which so excited the Great Falls businessmen; those features of the human anatomy to which Mr. Salmon referred so freely were not only remarkably developed in Sarah Jane but she displayed no desire to hide them. On the contrary, covered by one layer of flimsy cloth, she displayed them with an engaging frankness and generosity to the entire world. Her naturally red hair she had changed long ago to a color which even old Mr. Van Diver, from his reading of the motion picture magazines, knew was "platinum."

At home she was known as Sarah Jane, a name suggested long ago by poor Miss Minnie, but when she crossed Sixth Avenue into the world of theaters and night clubs, she was known simply as "Sal" and sometimes as "Big Sal." Because she was at once bold and beautiful, hot-tempered, honest, provocative and virtuous, she was always in trouble and rarely able to hold a job. The great Mr. Ziegfeld had attempted her glorification and when he gave it up Mr. Carrol used her as a siren, captured nude, so that her only costume was a fish net with a mesh so large that anything less heroically built than Sarah Jane could have slipped away without an effort. But he too had to give up helping Sarah Jane on her way to fame, for like Mr. Ziegfeld he found that having Sarah Jane in the theater was exactly like keeping a package of nitroglycerin lying about. After that she got a job in a Shubert revue, but that was no good either. Once she threw another girl down two flights of stairs and on one occasion an admirer, enraged because Sarah Jane would not give in, eased his feelings by smashing all the mirrors in the dressing room she shared with eight other show girls.

That was really Sarah Jane's trouble; she would never give in, either in her quarrels with other show girls or to the advances of admirers and so all the "breaks" that came her way eventually shriveled up and died. At times she used language which would have startled a longshoreman and there was nothing she did not know, but technically she remained "a good girl." Only the more experienced and hard-boiled denizens of Broadway believed this and they believed it only because they "*knew*" for Sarah Jane's appearance was scarcely that of a well-behaved young woman. Along Broadway some of the more flippant called her "Virgie" when they were well out of her reach, and flashy lady-killers

had been known to make large wagers on the score of her assailability, but all of them had lost their money and some of them had lost teeth or gained black eyes as well. There were even times when old Maggie, bewildered by Sarah Jane's clothes and behavior, did not believe she was "a good girl," and then between the two of them would break out a row which shook the whole boardinghouse. But it was true, because Maggie had put the fear of God into Sarah Jane as a child and because being Irish, and Roman Catholic, she had a wholesome terror of hell, and finally because after she found out about the wagers of which she was the subject, she made up her mind to "show them."

She would not have minded being married so long as it did not interfere with her "career" but she had never been asked by a man whom she did not hold in contempt. On one or two occasions she could have married rather feeble young men who would have given her Rolls-Royces and diamonds, but the honesty which came to her from Maggie always spoiled everything; she couldn't have a man about for whom she felt contempt. She wanted someone like Mr. Ryan, the coachman. Now and then her maternal instinct was touched and she felt sorry for the rich little "pip-squeaks" who sent her orchids, but in the end she couldn't do it. Once long ago when she and Tommy were twenty, she had thought about marrying him and fulfilling the dream of Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty; but Tommy never asked her, and anyway they knew each other too well and both of them were ambitious and they were always fighting.

Her "career," as Maggie sometimes observed during their rows, seemed to move backward. She had begun with Mr. Ziegfeld and for six years she had been slipping down and

down. Each job was a little less good than the one before until presently she found it very difficult to get work at all save in fly-by-night restaurants which opened and went into bankruptcy with extraordinary rapidity. Every now and then a manager who had forgotten her reputation or did not know her would "discover" her, a statuesque beauty who seemed all the more remarkable for being surrounded by middle-aged and broken-down chorus girls, but always within a day or two he was informed by a friend that he had only rediscovered "Sal" and that he might just as well bring a package of dynamite to rehearsals.

Her presence at the boardinghouse during those periods when, like Mr. Boldini, she was "at liberty," always brought troubles and disturbances of the somnolent peace which otherwise enveloped the place. She had a way of upsetting the "relics," of filling their heads with new ideas, of making them think, even old Mr. Van Diver, that they were young again and skittish. She never brought home any money because she never had any and sometimes Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty loaned her a few dollars out of the slender store which kept them out of ruin.

One evening about eleven o'clock while the rummy game was in progress in poor Miss Minnie's parlor and Mr. Boldini, with a look of triumph, was in the act of laying down four aces and three kings, Sarah Jane had one of her dramatic homecomings. It was preceded by the sound of rushing footsteps on the steps of the brownstone stoop and of someone trying frantically to open the door. Then came Sarah Jane's voice crying, "Let me in! Let me in!" and the sound of a violent smack followed by a flow of sulphurous language.

Fanto, barking wildly, sprang from his chair and ran to the door.

Mrs. Lefferty followed him and when she opened the door she discovered Sarah Jane and a small, dark, ugly little man seated on the floor with his back in the corner, shielding his face with raised hands. Sarah Jane held a revolver in one hand and was kicking him, saying, “You rat! I’ll teach you to pull a gun on me.”

At the sight of Mrs. Lefferty she rushed into the house and closed the door. Mrs. Lefferty double-bolted it and Sarah Jane threw the revolver down on poor Miss Minnie’s table of teakwood inlaid with mother-of-pearl and said, “The rat! The white slaver! He had the nerve to pull a gat on me,” and without another word ran up the stairs to Maggie’s room.

Mrs. Lefferty went to the parlor window and watched Sarah Jane’s unfortunate admirer limp down the stairs, climb into a taxicab and drive away.

Then she turned and said, as if nothing had happened, “It’s Miss Flint’s deal.” In her determination to beat Mr. Boldini, even with his meld of four aces and three kings, she forgot all about Sarah Jane and no one at the table even mentioned her or asked the cause of her latest stormy return. This was partly because they were used to her homecomings and partly because all of them found something a little shameful and upsetting about their violence, something out of another day, almost of another civilization which until Sarah Jane came into the house they had managed to keep at a distance. It was something which disturbed them all and at times even frightened them. They went on with the game in the well-bred silence of complete gentility, as if all of them—even old Mr. Van Diver in his childishness—had an unspoken

agreement to treat Sarah Jane and her escapades either as nonexistent or as something which the demands of gentility made it necessary to ignore. Miss 1935 crashing a party given in 1890 was something difficult to carry off.

But this was an attitude possible to carry out only as long as Sarah Jane herself remained in the background; once she came into the room—handsome, reckless, glowing with the excitement of her violent homecoming—it was impossible to pretend that she did not exist or had never happened at all. On this occasion while they went on with the game, Sarah Jane remained closeted abovestairs with Maggie. She remained, so to speak, in the background or at least out of sight, but to their ears she was violently present, for fragments of the quarrel going on on the fourth floor kept penetrating the parlor ... shouts from Maggie of "Sure, and I ought to shut you up with the sisters for a time. Your poor father must be rollin' in his grave," and, "You're a bad girl! Don't tell me you aren't!" With Sarah Jane shouting back, "I'll do as I please and you can't stop me. No man has ever laid hands on me without bein' slapped for it."

Once it had been difficult to pretend that Maggie and Sarah Jane weren't having a row, but long ago the rummy players had become so used to it that it no longer disturbed their game. Indeed they all knew all the taunts and accusations, the reproaches and answers and threats which were hurled back and forth, all meaningless and without result and giving both participants a great deal of fun. But presently there was silence and a few minutes later Sarah Jane herself appeared in quest of company and beer and at sight of her, Mrs. Lefferty did not wait for Mr. Salmon to deal, but quietly took up the cards, the pencil and the score and put them away in poor

Miss Minnie's *secrétaire*. She knew that the game was finished for that night.

When she came into the room something happened to everyone in it except Mrs. Lefferty who had known her for too long and spanked her out of too many tantrums to be impressed by her now. Mr. Boldini became very Italian and full of old-world courtesy, quips and elegant speeches. Mr. Salmon smirked, deftly ruffled his hair and disarranged his flowing tie to give himself a more Bohemian appearance, and experienced a sudden return of youth which made him remember the ladies of his earlier days, none of whom was ever as young or as handsome as Sarah Jane. As for Miss Flint, instead of glowing and relaxing, she grew as rigid as the wife of Lot after she had satisfied her curiosity about the friends she had left behind in Sodom. Old Mr. Van Diver, who never joined in the games because he could never remember the cards that had been played, put down his moving picture magazine, smoothed his hair and began to chuckle. All the while Mrs. Lefferty had been hoping that for once Sarah Jane would not appear to provoke a quarrel between Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon and throw Miss Flint into a fit of sulks, but she had known too that the hope was vain. Sarah Jane only stayed out of sight, when, broke and discouraged, she came home quietly by the areaway and the kitchen door.

Now she sat down in the midst of them, crossed her legs, lighted a cigarette and said, "Can you *imagine*? He was gonna make me into a torch singer. He took me to his studio to give me a lesson and after about five minutes, I said, 'Yeah, well, I never heard that called a singing lesson before.' The dirty little white slaver! And when I beat it, he followed

me right to the door in a taxicab. Can you *imagine*? With a gat too ... as if I didn't know enough to manage a guy with a gat! Torch singing!"

Breathlessly she went on with the whole story, about how Mr. Myers had "discovered her" and was going to open a night club and give her all sorts of "breaks." She threw away one cigarette and lighted another. "Breaks!" she said, "I know all about breaks! They always mean the same thing. All men are beasts!"

"You never said a truer word," said Miss Flint. Then, unbending a little she told about *her* experiences, beginning with her earliest disillusionment and finishing with the story of being followed home—all the way—from the Women's Exchange by a "young Italian-looking man about thirty" only yesterday. Then in order to show that she didn't include Mr. Salmon, who was a poet, among "all men," she bridled a little and asked him for a cigarette and sat back in her chair, smoking, with her lips pursed, the cigarette held between her thumb and first finger with the little finger sticking well out, tossing her head a little so that the long, oriental earrings made a jangling noise against her scrawny neck.

"I remember," she said, "once when I was sewing for Mrs. Willoughby ... you know the Willoughbys who used to have that big house at the corner of Madison Avenue and Seventieth Street, very fashionable they were in those days.... Well, while I was there, making up the spring clothes for the children, a young man attacked Dorothy, that was the oldest daughter ... she's Mrs. Jackson Durant now ... right in the front parlor ... her own front parlor."

Mrs. Lefferty, watching her, knew that Miss Flint had reached the second stage. First the presence of Sarah Jane

made her bristle and then it made her feel fast and Bohemian. “The minute Sarah Jane comes home,” Mrs. Lefferty thought, “everybody goes cockeyed.” And in disgust, scarcely able to stand the spectacle of Mr. Salmon’s smirks and Miss Flint’s bridlings and Mr. Boldini’s fatuous compliments, she went off downstairs for beer and sandwiches.

The party lasted until one o’clock and before going up to her room, Sarah Jane announced to Mrs. Lefferty’s dismay that she thought that now she was home she might as well stay for a while and have a rest.

Left alone, putting the room in order, Mrs. Lefferty considered the growing problem of Sarah Jane and the equally growing problem of making ends meet. Sarah Jane was a good girl at heart and Mrs. Lefferty loved her and it made Maggie happy to have her home. But aside from the extra burden upon an already tottering budget, Mrs. Lefferty disliked the effect on the boarders. Even her good-natured soul was annoyed and a little revolted at the display of sex which Sarah Jane’s presence aroused in Mr. Salmon, Mr. Boldini, Miss Flint and even poor tottering old Mr. Van Diver. Sure it was shameful and disgusting. Why, even Fanto became a different dog. And she was upset too at the thought of what poor Miss Minnie would think of the goings on in her house, with her front stoop defiled by the presence of a man like Mr. Myers. With poor Miss Minnie sex had been kept in its place. Never once in forty years had Mr. Van Diver so much as kissed her. And unlike Sarah Jane poor Miss Minnie had kept her figure so well covered beneath cotton underwear, whalebone and padding that even Mrs. Lefferty had never had any idea what it was like.

And as she carried the remnants of the supper to the kitchen and put out the lights, there were tears in her eyes, tears of jealousy of Maggie at having Sarah Jane back in the house, sleeping in the room next to her where she could see her and talk to her and wait on her. Five years was such a long time. There were moments now when she thought that perhaps Tommy was dead and maybe buried some place outside consecrated ground with no one to care for his grave. Tommy, who loved her, wouldn't have stayed away so long without a sign, if he were still alive.

She felt so bad that she took a little drink of Irish whisky, "medicinally" like Miss Flint, and that warmed her and by the time she had taken off her woolens and was in bed she was her old optimistic self again and knew that somewhere, out in the great world of which she knew nothing, Tommy was all right and would one day come back to her.

Sarah Jane would get her "break" and Tommy would come home in a big comfortable automobile with a cut glass light in the top, rich and successful, to take her away to live in a fine palace. Once started on a story like this, she lay for a long time sleepless, building it up, putting in details, making it more and more like a moving picture, seeing it all happen on the screen of the picture house across the street. It was a beautiful story. Tommy had gone away to South America and discovered a big mine full of gold and hadn't told her anything about it because he wanted to surprise her by driving up in front of the house in a big car. He would buy her a big house and she and Maggie would move into it and take all poor Miss Minnie's lovely furniture with them and then Sarah Jane would be "discovered" and become a great movie star and she and Tommy would get married. She was

just at the end of the story, with Sarah Jane and Tommy at the altar when through the half-waking dream came the sound of the doorbell ringing violently, and she thought, "There he is now! He's come home at three o'clock in the morning to make the surprise better."

While she put on a wrapper and twisted her thin hair into a screw on the top of her head, she knew that when she opened the door Tommy would be there. It couldn't be anybody else ringing the bell at this hour of the night. The bell kept up its wild clamor, ringing the way it rang when Sarah Jane was on the stoop pursued by an admirer. As she went down the stairs, there was something in the desperate sound of the bell which frightened her. Suddenly she felt old and afraid and, with a feeling of sickness, she knew all at once that the whole dream had been made up and foolish and that probably Tommy was dead and she would never see him again.

But when she opened the door, cautiously on the chain, and called out, "Who's there? What is it?" Tommy's voice answered her, a voice she would have known anywhere in the world, a voice which she knew better than her own. It said, "It's Tommy. Let me in!" And suddenly Mrs. Lefferty was sure that when she opened the door she would find a beautiful automobile with a cut glass light in the top, waiting at the curb.

But when she opened the door, she caught only a glimpse of a taxicab driving away. It was Tommy all right, but a Tommy so changed that for a moment she doubted the truth. And there was a man with him, a big man who was cockeyed and wore his hat pulled far down over one eye.

They came in and Mrs. Lefferty threw her arms about Tommy, crying out, "Tommy! Tommy!" over and over again

and then she stood back a little and looked at him, frightened a little because he was so pale and thin and looked so sallow and shabby. He was still a good-looking boy with big dark blue eyes (like Mr. Lefferty's) and a big generous mouth, but his body seemed to have shrunk and shriveled inside his clothes.

And then somehow they were in poor Miss Minnie's parlor, with Tommy looking around at the furniture he had known all his life, and the big man said, "I guess it's a long time since you seen Tommy."

"Five years!" said Mrs. Lefferty, tearfully. "More than five years."

The big man was about forty with a red face and big shoulders. He stood now with his hat in his hand, a cigarette hanging from his lips.

Tommy was still shy and embarrassed. He didn't say anything but she knew from the way he looked at her that he was glad to be back. He asked, "Have you got anything to eat, Ma?"

"Sure, and what would you both like to drink?"

Tommy wanted beer and Mr. Grasselli, which was the name of the big man with the cockeye, wanted whisky.

"You set right down here, both of you, and I'll go and fetch it. You're going to stay a while, ain't you, Tommy?"

"Yeah, Ma, I'm going to stay a while."

She kept staring at him, still not sure whether she was dreaming or not. He hadn't come back with a big automobile but it didn't matter now. The only thing that mattered was that here he was back in poor Miss Minnie's parlor as if he had never gone away.

“My friend, Mr. Grasselli, wants a room for a time. Have you got one, Ma?”

“Yes. On the second floor at the back.”

“Mebbe I could have the little room next to him.”

“Sure, Tommy, anything you want.”

“He doesn’t like to be alone.”

She thought it was funny that a big man like Mr. Grasselli didn’t like to be alone. You’d have thought he wasn’t afraid of anything.

“Well, I’ll get some cheese and cold ham and some drinks.”

“Sure,” said Mr. Grasselli, “that would be fine.”

She went downstairs thinking that she did not like Mr. Grasselli’s face and wishing he wasn’t there so she could talk to Tommy and hear about why he had never written to her. He was alive! He wasn’t dead! She and Maggie would feed him up. In a little while he’d look like he used to as a little boy.

When she had gone, Mr. Grasselli put out the light and went over and pulled aside the lace curtains to look out of the window. Opposite there was the darkened façade of Mrs. Lefferty's favorite moving picture theater. The street was empty. It lay shabby, obscure, characterless, lined by rows of old-fashioned, shabby, respectable brownstone façades. Then Mr. Grasselli turned back and surveyed the room with a grin.

"Sure," he said, "this is all right. It's great. Where did they find all this stuff?"

"It belonged to an old lady called Miss Randolph. She left it all to my mother." And for a second it occurred even to Tommy that it was odd to see his "friend" Mr. Grasselli standing there in poor Miss Minnie's parlor among all her things.

"Well," said Mr. Grasselli, "it ought to be worth a lot of money some day to a museum. They oughta pay a big price for it."

From the direction of the dining room there came a sudden violent rumbling sound and Mr. Grasselli started and jumped behind poor Miss Minnie's old-fashioned piano.

"Put on the lights," he said, with his hand in his pocket.

Tommy put on the lights. "It's all right," he said. "It's only the dumb-waiter." And a moment later Mrs. Lefferty appeared with a tray burdened with cold ham and chicken and sandwiches, beer and whisky and glasses and a large pot of coffee.

In silence Tommy and Mr. Grasselli ate everything on the tray. They ate, Mrs. Lefferty thought, as if they had not eaten

for days, and when it was all gone she went downstairs for more, a little troubled by the thought of what Maggie would say when she found that all of tomorrow's lunch had been eaten up. At last they had enough and Mr. Grasselli said he thought it would be a good idea if they all went to bed, "Because," he said, "this is a kind of rest cure I'm taking. I'm gonna stay in bed a good part of the time. I'm not goin' out much."

Secretly Mrs. Lefferty regretted the news because it would mean a new interruption of the non-stop rummy tournament.

"Mr. Grasselli," said Tommy, "didn't bring any baggage. I'm going out in the morning to buy him some things and get my own stuff."

When she had made up the beds and everything was ready and she had shown Mr. Grasselli to his room, she lingered for a moment in Tommy's room, watching him with a beaming face, thinking how much more refined he was than his friend, Mr. Grasselli, and how nice he talked. She wanted to stay and talk to Tommy, to find out where he had been and what had happened to him and why he'd never written to her, but when she saw how gray and tired he seemed, she had not the heart to keep him awake any longer.

Anxiously she asked again, "You're goin' to say a while, ain't you?"

"Yes, Ma."

"And you'll never run off like that again?"

He looked away from her at the floor and at last said, "No, Ma."

"Why didn't you ever write and tell me where you was?"

"Because I didn't want to come home till I was successful. I wouldn't have come home now only ..." He did not finish the sentence, save by a weary gesture.

"I know, Tommy."

She bent down and kissed him and he put his arm about her waist and leaned his head against her plump body. It was a tiny gesture but it made Mrs. Lefferty feel warm and triumphant.

"Never mind," she said, "everything's goin' to be fine. You're goin' to be a big success. What line have you been tryin'?"

“Writing songs ... lately. I’ve tried a lot of things ... too many things, I guess.”

She knew now, with his head resting against her side, that she was glad he hadn’t come home in a big automobile with a cut glass light in the roof. Now she could feed him up and see that he got plenty of sleep so that he’d get good and strong to start all over again. All her life she had been taking care of people—first poor Miss Minnie and “the old gentleman” and after that all the boarders and the people she met when she went to market. She knew now that she didn’t want Tommy to take care of her. She had never wanted it. She wouldn’t have felt right. She wouldn’t have known how to act in a big car and a big house. No, this was a lot better story than the one she had imagined.

As she said good night, she added, “Sarah Jane is home again.”

Without interest, he said, “Is she?”

“She’s out of a job.”

“Too bad,” said Tommy, “but it isn’t exactly news.”

“She’s had a bad time lately. She never gets a break. She had to sell that beautiful silver fox.”

“I guess some of her bad luck is her own fault.”

“She’s a good girl.”

“Yeah,” said Tommy, “that’s her trouble. She’s made an issue of it. Even I can’t ...” He didn’t finish the sentence so Mrs. Lefferty never knew what it was he meant to say.

She asked him, “What were you going to say?” But he only answered, “I don’t know. I’ve forgotten.”

Then she left him, wondering that he showed so little interest in Sarah Jane who was like a sister to him.

It was nearly four o'clock when Mrs. Lefferty finally fell asleep but she was up again at eight, helping Maggie and seeing that everyone got enough to eat at breakfast and that old Mr. Van Diver didn't forget to take the medicine for his heart. She had just finished clearing away the table and was on her way to do the rooms when Maggie appeared carrying a letter from old Mr. Prendergast, poor Miss Minnie's lawyer. Maggie always let her read all the letters because she wasn't very good at reading herself, and it was the day when the check from Mr. Prendergast was due so she wasn't alarmed until she tore open the letter and found there wasn't any check in it. Instead there was a note from old Mr. Prendergast saying that there weren't any dividends from the stock poor Miss Minnie had left them and he did not know when there would be any. And he said there wasn't much use in trying to sell the stocks now as they weren't worth anything.

The truth was that old Mr. Prendergast was himself a "relic" belonging to a simpler age. He had failed them not because he was careless or dishonest but because he was not shrewd and mean enough to cope with the stock market and its "riggers." He wrote a long explanation of how it had all come about but Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie did not understand a word of it. Besides if there wasn't any more money, it wasn't any use in worrying about why there wasn't.

Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty had the same thought, "What was to become of old Mr. Van Diver and poor Miss Flint and Mr. Boldini?"

For a moment Mrs. Lefferty could think of nothing to say. At last she said, "Something will turn up. It'll be all right. It always is." But her voice was a little weak this time, because it was the first time she had ever had any doubts. She and

Maggie weren't as young as they once were and they needed money now on account of Tommy and Sarah Jane. But a story like theirs, which had begun so pretty with poor Miss Minnie leaving them everything, couldn't have a bad ending. That kind of story never did. It had to come out right.

6

It was after two o'clock in the afternoon when Sarah Jane wakened at last, rose lazily, dressed and went down to the kitchen. It was too late to have lunch with the boarders but, that, she thought, was all the better for her figure. Now she wouldn't be tempted. She'd just have a cup of coffee with Maggie in the kitchen.

She found her mother dealing with the remains of lunch just sent down on the dumb-waiter by Mrs. Lefferty.

"You'll have to get up for your meals if you're goin' to get anything around this house," said Maggie.

"I don't want any meals. All I want is a cup of coffee."

But as she drank the coffee the fragrance of hamburger steak was wafted to her nostrils and she traced the scent to the pan on the stove where Maggie was keeping warm what was left. "I guess I'll just have a bit of steak," she said.

"Sure," said Maggie, "I don't believe in this dietin'. It ain't natural for any big strong woman to diet herself. How about some potatoes with the steak?"

"If there's any gravy I'll have just a bit," said Sarah Jane.

When her mother returned with the plate it bore not only the hamburger and potatoes and gravy but also a large helping of beans. About this Sarah Jane made no comment whatever, and while she ate she caught sight of a large slice of lemon meringue pie, the last left on the plate, and thinking that another mouthful or two did not much matter now, she had that too. And then as she picked up the *Daily Mirror* she had another cup of coffee.

While she was eating, Maggie said, “Tommy’s come home.”

“Has he?”

“Yes. Sure, you take it as if he’d only gone away yesterday.”

“It doesn’t seem so long.”

She wasn’t listening very closely to what her mother said because she had gotten interested in a story in the *Mirror* about Monk Maguire, the Beer Baron, who was being sought by Federal officials on an income tax charge. She had known Monk, off and on, mostly in the days when he was the head of a bootlegging ring, when he owned a couple of speakeasies and the Villa Paradise night club. She had worked there once for a couple of weeks until she had that fight with Renée LeClaire, the fan dancer, about who had the best *exposé*.

“Five years,” said Maggie, seating herself before a large lunch she had constructed out of the remnants from abovestairs. “Five years it is ... it was the year that Mr. Ziegfeld gave you your first job. He ain’t so well, Bridget says.”

Sarah Jane, still lost in reading about Monk Maguire, said, “What’s the matter with him?”

“I don’t know. I guess he’s just run-down. I told Bridget to give him a lot of that swamp root tonic.”

To this Sarah Jane made no response whatever.

“He brought a friend back with him. He’s gonna stay as a boarder.”

“Yeah?” said Sarah Jane.

“His name is Mr. Grasselli.”

“Never heard of him.”

Then slowly Maggie began to show signs of becoming irritated by Sarah Jane’s lack of interest. Her face grew a little redder and a wicked light appeared in her blue eyes.

“I should think you’d be interested ... with Tommy brought up alongside of you like a twin.”

“WELL, can you beat it!” exclaimed Sarah Jane. “That’s what I call fast work.”

“What?” asked Maggie.

“About me and Mr. Myers and the vestibule. *Imagine*, already. And it ain’t three o’clock yet.”

“I hope it ain’t one of them scandals again.”

“Listen,” said Sarah Jane, reading from the *Mirror*. “It says, ‘Early this morning Abe Myers was trying to explain away a black eye and a missing front tooth. Said he fell downstairs. Wiseacres say ... (here Sarah Jane stumbled for a moment) *Cherchez la femme* ... a femme known around Broadway hot spots as Sal. Well, Abe’s in good company. A lot of other fellows have lost bets on Sal, along with their front teeth.’ ” Sarah Jane threw down the paper. “The bastard!” she said. “If I’d known he was bettin’ I’d have given him more than he got.”

“Bettin’ on what?” said Maggie.

“That he could make me. Why, the little rat!”

“Well,” said Maggie, growing still redder. “If it ain’t a scandal I don’t know what you’d call it.”

“It’s only a coupla lines,” said Sarah Jane. “Why, the last time....”

“Your poor father ain’t allowed to rest in his grave and poor Miss Minnie....”

"*Poor* Miss Minnie is right. She never had any fun...."

And then Maggie exploded. Reaching across the table she gave Sarah Jane a slap that was heard by the boarders having coffee upstairs in the parlor. "I'll teach you to be disrespectful about the dead. I'll teach you to speak like that of poor Miss Minnie...."

Tears of pain came into Sarah Jane's eyes, but she took the slap. Maggie was the only person in the world who could slap her and not be knocked down.

7

Abovestairs in the parlor an air of dullness and futility hung over the boarders. It affected even old Mr. Van Diver, although there were moments when he did not know quite why he felt dull. Lunch, approached in the expectancy of having not only Sarah Jane to brighten the table but Tommy and his "friend" as well, had ended in full disappointment, since none of them had appeared and the boarders had only themselves to look at and to listen to. For the news of Tommy's return had gotten quickly about, as well as that of the arrival of a new "transient." Once the arrival of a "transient" had been frowned upon as an invasion upon the circle and something which disturbed the atmosphere, but now it had been so long since there had been a "transient" in their midst that they were willing to welcome almost anyone. Only Mrs. Lefferty was in high spirits but she found herself quite unable to raise the spirits of the others. She was aware that Miss Flint and Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon felt a kind of actual resentment toward her as if the food she had put on the table were spoiled. They drifted away quickly after their coffee as if they had been asked to an entertainment which had not come up to expectations.

On the second floor, Tommy and his friend still slept. Three times Mrs. Lefferty went to their doors, but each time she discovered only the unmistakable sounds of slumber. Mr. Grasselli, she discovered, had even locked his door, which she thought odd and even faintly insulting. Nobody in the house ever locked his door. What on earth was there in the house to lock one's door against?

It was nearly five o'clock when at last Tommy did wake and have a bath and dress himself. When she heard him moving about, she went in to tell him that when he was ready, she would be in the kitchen with something for him to eat. He said that he didn't want much and that he was going out right away to buy a razor and a toothbrush for Mr. Grasselli and bring his own clothes.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that Mr. Grasselli would like to have his meals in his own room."

"Why can't he come down to the table like everyone else?"

For a moment Tommy hesitated and then said, "You see he's having a kind of nervous breakdown and he can't see people without getting upset."

"It'll make a lot of extra work."

"He'll pay extra for it."

Mrs. Lefferty was silent for a moment, considering. Now that old Mr. Prendergast didn't have any more money for them, every penny could be used. Somehow or other she and Maggie would manage the meals. It would mean maybe fifty cents a day sheer profit, except for her legs. She remembered that Mr. Salmon had been like that when he first came, that time when he was going to see a fancy doctor about himself. He had been very uppity about the other boarders, but in the end he had turned out to be really the best of them all.

"All right," she said, "I guess I can manage."

"And he doesn't want to see anybody," said Tommy. "Will it bother you if he stays in his room while you make it up?"

"Yes, it'll bother me. I can't bear to have somebody sitting around in the room I'm working in. I always make all the others get out."

“I guess he’d pay extra for that too,” said Tommy.

“He must have a lot of money to throw around ... paying extra just to sit in his own room to watch his bed being made up. Maybe we can work that out too, but I should think he’d be better off in a hospital.”

“No,” said Tommy, “he can’t stand hospitals. They make him worse.”

“All right, being he’s a friend of yours.”

As she was leaving the room Tommy asked, “Has Sarah Jane gone out?”

“Yes. She’s gone to fetch her clothes.”

“When will she be back?”

“I don’t know. She’s just gone.”

Tommy went on arranging his tie. “Okay,” he said, without looking at her.

But Mrs. Lefferty was suspicious. She said, “What’s the matter with you and Sarah Jane?”

“Nothing.”

“Why don’t you want to see her?”

“I didn’t say I didn’t want to see her. I just asked if she’d gone out.”

But that didn’t fool Mrs. Lefferty. She went downstairs to the kitchen but she wasn’t deceived. She knew there was some kind of mystery.

At the kitchen table something happened to Tommy. Perhaps it was the sight of the familiar kitchen itself, unchanged after so many years, with the same old-fashioned chairs, with Maggie's worn raincoat and battered hat with a feather hanging against the wall, with the same plates and tea cups which he had noticed for the first time when he was spanked for breaking one of them as a little boy of four in the kitchen of poor Miss Minnie's big house on Murray Hill.... Perhaps it was that in all the suffering he had known during the five missing years, he had become more human and honest and much nearer to reality and truth, sloughing off all the pride and falsity and vanity which had corrupted him.... Perhaps it was nothing more than the presence of the two fried eggs which lay on the plate before him, swimming in browned butter, fried as only his mother and Maggie knew how to fry them, eggs such as he had neither seen nor tasted since he left home, either in cheap eating places or cafeterias or in great hotels and expensive restaurants.... Perhaps it was simply the sight and the smell of those two humble eggs rousing a long train of memories, of his father long since dead, of his mother as a young woman taking care of him, protecting him as she was still trying to do with all the warmth and simplicity of her nature. Whatever the reason Tommy underwent a sudden change. He became another person, a person who seemed, after those five hard years, almost a stranger, even to himself.

Mrs. Lefferty, with a leap of the heart, saw it almost at once. She knew it not only by the look in his eye, but by the tone of his voice, by the way he looked at her simply and

directly as he had done long ago before he went away to college. He had come back to her, not only the Tommy who had gone away five years ago, but the Tommy he had been before poor Miss Minnie sent him away to be educated—the Tommy, her boy, who had been born in poor Miss Minnie's house and grown up there along with herself and Sarah Jane and Mr. Ryan and poor Mr. Lefferty, before he had got his head filled with ideas that he was better than all of them.

And presently, quite easily, he was telling her what had happened to him since he went away, how he had planned to be rich and successful and some day have enough money to buy a place in the country for her and Maggie. He told her about the fine job he had got in the mills belonging to the father of one of the boys he had known in college, and how quickly all that dream had vanished at the first sign of bad business, how his friend and his father had quickly rid themselves of him and forgotten him at the first threat to their own security; how one by one, he had tried other college friends, how some had put him off with smooth words and others had simply told him to get out, and how he had wandered from job to job, trying to gain a foothold anywhere, even on the lowest rung of the ladder of success, and finally how he had been content to do anything at all simply to get a place to sleep and enough food to keep him alive, and how sometimes he went without anything to eat at all for days at a time, and how at last Mr. Grasselli had befriended him and given him a job as a kind of secretary and manager of his personal affairs.

It was a long story and Mrs. Lefferty cried while she listened, mostly at the thought of Tommy going hungry when there was always so much good food at home. Mrs. Lefferty

believed every word he spoke, for it was a believable story despite the fact that it was not quite true. The facts themselves were true enough but bare facts add up so rarely to make the total sum of truth. It was not that Tommy distorted the truth; it was that he left out part of it.

He did not tell her that he had disappeared because he was ashamed of her and Maggie and the noisy Sarah Jane, because he had never had a home like other boys, uncluttered by eccentric boarders, to which he might bring his friends. He did not tell her that while he was in college he had pretended to be an orphan and the nephew of poor Miss Minnie, and how afterward when he set out to make his own way, he had thought his mother and Maggie and Sarah Jane too great a handicap for any young man to carry who planned to get on in the world. He did not tell her of his wild ambition to become rich overnight. And he did not tell her all the low things he had done from time to time simply in order to be able to go on living. And he did not tell her what Mr. Grasselli's business was.

Lately, he said, he had gone back to playing the piano and that he was more thankful now than he had ever been to poor Miss Minnie for the lessons she had paid for long ago. He told her that he was writing songs but that he hadn't had much success as yet because it was so hard to get a "break." And he asked her if they could have poor Miss Minnie's piano tuned so that he could work at home.

When he had finished, Mrs. Lefferty held her peace and did not tell him, as she had meant to do, of her own troubles and the letter from old Mr. Prendergast and the menace of taxes and insurance which hung over her and Maggie's head. Poor Tommy! she thought. He had enough to bear.

When he had finished his coffee, he put on his hat and went out to buy a toothbrush and razor for Mr. Grasselli and to fetch his own things. But again he told her only part of the truth, for he was going out to do a great deal more than that. When he returned he brought with him two suitcases which seemed singularly heavy. It astounded Mrs. Lefferty when she made up his room the next day that they seemed to have contained nothing more than one suit of clothes, some underwear, three shirts and Mr. Grasselli's razor and toothbrush.

9

For nearly a year Sarah Jane had known that Tommy was alive; for most of that time she knew where he was and for a part of the time she suspected, at least, what he was doing. But Tommy had made her promise not to tell. It was a promise Sarah Jane would have broken if she had seen fit to do so; she kept it because she had no more desire than Tommy to tell Mrs. Lefferty and because, oddly enough, Tommy was the only person in the world, save Maggie, who could ever exert even the faintest control over Sarah Jane.

There was a whole world known well, even intimately, to Sarah Jane which she left outside the door once she returned to the boardinghouse. She never brought it any nearer than the vestibule, as she had done with Mr. Myers, although the aroma of it still clung to her sometimes and excited faintly all of Mrs. Lefferty's boarders with its intimation of things going on in the world which they had never dreamed of. It was a world made up of confidence men and chiselers, pimps and drug addicts, dubious, second-rate gangsters and gunmen's molls and middle-aged broken-down chorus girls, a whole world filled with the Hogarthian gusto which Sarah Jane's wild nature had need of from time to time.

During the years in which she kept slipping downward from the eminence upon which Mr. Ziegfeld had placed her in the beginning, she gradually found a greater and greater need of that gusto. By circumstance she slipped into it and by nature she did not dislike it for it bucked her up at moments when the prospect of a "career" seemed beyond the possibility of realization. There was a kind of what-the-hell atmosphere which she liked; and being Sarah Jane, she was

able to take care of herself and never quite succumb to its blandishments, no matter how broke she got to be. When worst came to worst, she always found a refuge in the boardinghouse. It was a world which existed in the forties and fifties between Sixth and Ninth Avenues and in it Sarah Jane was known as something apart, a special character, a curiosity who was always welcomed on account of her health and gusto and good looks. Her mere appearance in that tired, sick and cynical world served to raise the spirits of its inhabitants, just as her presence in the boardinghouse raised the spirits of Mr. Salmon and Mr. Boldini. “Sal” was something special and by her honesty and violence and physical strength, she drew respect from a world which respected nothing else.

In the fifties, not far from Eighth Avenue, there was a kind of all-night lunch with a false front much frequented by those who belonged to that lost shabby world. To the uninitiated it displayed a shabby, sordid façade with the legend THE EXCELSIOR CAFE AND LUNCH ROOM stenciled in chipped and fading paint on the dusty windows. Beneath the legend one saw displayed piles of fly-specked fruit and immortal vegetables made of wax whose brilliance was dimmed by a coating of Eighth Avenue dust. If you didn’t know the place, the best you could expect was a bad snack cooked and served by a Greek known as Pete. You could eat and go away again without suspecting anything. But of course you would never have chosen to eat there because it was the last place within a radius of five blocks where anyone would have chosen to eat. It did not, however, depend on the trade attracted by Pete’s frightful concoctions to keep it going.

Those who knew the place entered, exchanged a word or two with Pete and then walked directly through a door which was marked “Lavatory.” To a stranger this would have appeared a fabulous place capable of swallowing up whole armies of people who entered and never came out. The secret was simple. There was a lavatory behind the door but there was also a long hallway which led into a back room. This, unofficially, was known as the Excelsior Club.

The ceiling of the room was low and the room completely airless save when someone opened the door leading into a dreary back areaway in order to save those inside from suffocation by cigarette smoke. The floor was covered with sawdust, and beer was the fashionable drink. Here congregated a large part of that world which Sarah Jane found from time to time exciting. The police knew about it and from time to time paid the place a visit in the casual hope of picking up a couple of characters they were looking for; but they never had much luck and they never knew quite why because they did not know about the electric button hidden just beneath the grill where Pete cooked his hamburgers.

At sight of policemen or detectives Pete would become completely absorbed in his cooking and unnoticed press the button which rang an electric bell hidden behind the piano in the back room. If somebody happened to be playing the piano at that moment, he would stop abruptly, strike a sour chord and then continue as if nothing had happened. If he was not playing, anyone could hear the bell and by the time the officers of the law had negotiated the long passage marked “Lavatory” the wanted ones would have slipped out into the areaway through a cellar and out into the freedom of Eighth Avenue. The only time the police ever caught anyone was the

night that Albany May was insulted by Pete and out of revenge cut the wires with her nail scissors. It settled a double grudge for Albany May because the police caught Young Dansy alias Hyman Breuer who had walked out on Albany May, and sent him up the river for seven years.

Sarah Jane came and went, to and from the Excelsior Club, miraculously escaping any trouble more serious than an occasional scandal like that of Mr. Myers and the vestibule.

And then one night when she came in, there was a new man playing the piano. She did not notice him at first. In any case it was almost impossible to see him at the far end of the room through the fog of cigarette smoke. It was only when he began playing Irish tunes like "Kathleen Mavourneen" and "Mother Machree" that she noticed something different about the music, some quality which together with the music itself made her cry without quite knowing why. It made her think first of the good old days in poor Miss Minnie's house on Murray Hill with herself and Maggie and Mr. and Mrs. Lefferty all sitting about listening to the miraculous Tommy playing tunes which brought tears to all their eyes, poor Tommy who was probably dead by now and buried somewhere in a pauper's grave. She hadn't thought of Tommy for quite a while and now, crying into her beer and thinking of him, she was ashamed of herself to be sitting there in the Excelsior Club surrounded by bums. And then slowly, as she listened, it seemed to her that it must be Tommy himself or Tommy's ghost who was playing the piano because she had never heard anyone play "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" like that with little trills all through it.

Rising halfway out of her seat, she peered through the cigarette smoke at the back of the pianist's head. It was ... no,

it couldn't be ... exactly like the back of Tommy's head. She knew the way the curly black hair grew close and vigorous. But it couldn't be Tommy.... Tommy would never be playing the piano in a joint like the Excelsior Club ... not the Tommy who had had a college education and wanted to be a swell. She was about to cross the room and make certain when "Irish Eyes" was suddenly interrupted by an especially sour chord. Three members of the Excelsior Club, two men and a girl called Quick Time Bessie, rose hastily and disappeared through the door into the areaway, and then two "dicks" came in. They walked around the room and when they passed her table, they said, "Hello, Sal," with a kind of good-humored affection and then went out. The piano player began a new selection called, "Just a Little Bit of Dublin."

While she waited for the "dicks" to make their round of the tables all sorts of things happened to Sarah Jane's emotional nature. She was crying, not simply moved now by the music, but by all the memories which the sight of the back of the piano player's head had roused without warning. She cried over the big house on Murray Hill and poor Miss Minnie herself, and over her own muddled career and lost opportunities and because she was getting old (she was twenty-four) and because of Tommy, not the Tommy who had pretended not to know her in a swell speakeasy five years before, but the Tommy she had played with as a child, the Tommy she had always protected, the Tommy she was once in love with. That Tommy, she knew now, out of her hard experience, was the nicest man she had ever met. And she cried because the man playing the piano couldn't be Tommy, because Tommy was dead by now.

But when the detectives, empty-handed, had gone away, she pushed the table violently away from her, rose and went all the way across the room to make certain. Before she reached the piano she knew that the player *was* Tommy, a Tommy who looked tired and thin and played the piano dully, without enthusiasm, a cigarette hanging from his lips ... a Tommy who she knew at once was crushed. The old gay funny look wasn't there. He looked much older and his whole body seemed to droop.

She took a chair and placed it beside him and sat down and even then he seemed completely unaware of her presence. He went on playing absentmindedly, as if his spirit had left his body there functioning mechanically and gone away.

"Poor Tommy," she thought; and from the depths of her rich nature there arose a knowledge of all that had happened to him during the missing years. She saw everything. She thought, "I'll take him home and look after him. Maybe I'll marry him. He needs somebody." And suddenly she felt in love all over again, not as she had been at seventeen when he came home from college, so changed and grand, but in another way, knowing that of the two she was the strong one who could cope with the world and protect him. It was the same direct brusque richness of nature which made her say at once the wrong thing.

She said, "Hello, smart guy!"

He turned and looked at her, not seeing her at first, as if he had to wait for his spirit to rejoin his mechanically functioning body. Then he said, as if he'd never gone away at all, "What are you doing here?"

He went right on playing because that was his job and because he could do it without effort or concentration.

“Where have you been?” asked Sarah Jane.

Tommy raised one hand from the piano to chuck his smoked-out cigarette. Then he went right on again. “Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, Panama ... a lot of places.”

“Never sending a word to your poor old mother.”

“Leave my poor old mother out of it.”

“She’s been nearly crazy sometimes.”

“Yeah? You don’t need to tell me about that.” He looked away from her and went into another tune.

“Will you come home with me tonight and surprise her?”

“No,” said Tommy.

“Why not?”

“I can’t go yet.”

“Why not?”

“Not till I get on my feet again. I’ve got a lot to atone for. I’ve got to pay.”

“Don’t turn mick on me,” said Sarah Jane.

“Well, I’m not going, and if you tell her anything, you’ll regret it.”

She knew all about that. That was Tommy’s stiff-necked pride, that Orangeman stubbornness he had come by from Mr. Lefferty.

“I’ve got plans,” he said. “You keep out of it. I don’t suppose you can, but anyway I’m warning you.”

“I’m gonna tell her,” said Sarah Jane.

“If you tell her, I’ll go away again and never come back. You’ll spoil everything just when I’m beginning to get on my feet again.”

“Well, you ain’t on your feet yet. This job ain’t so hot.”

“This job isn’t everything. I’ve got other plans ... maybe in a week, maybe in a month ... you’ll see.” His thin shoulders stiffened a little defiantly. “I don’t want her to know I’m playing the piano in a clip joint.”

“This isn’t any clip joint.”

“I guess you know it better than I do. What does Maggie think about your being in a place like this?”

“She doesn’t know it. Can I help you out ... a little cash or something?”

“You don’t look so prosperous yourself. Are you working?”

“No,” said Sarah Jane.

“What’s the matter? A looker like you ought to be able to get a job any time.”

“That’s the trouble,” said Sarah Jane.

“How?”

“They’re never satisfied with me being only an actress.”

“I get you.”

“I was just thinking about the old days. All that mick music made me think about it.”

“Yeah,” said Tommy, “so was I. That’s how I came to be playing it.”

“Tommy.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m sort of fed up.”

“You don’t know the meaning of the word.”

She wanted to say something to reach him but she did not know what to say or how to say it. He turned away from her. She saw the cords at the back of his neck stand out and his

jaw suddenly grow hard and then she knew there wasn't anything to be done, not right now anyway.

"Where'll I find you?" she asked. "Here?"

"Yeah ... off and on."

But the next night when she returned to the Excelsior Club he was gone and she did not see him again for weeks although she went from place to place with only that in mind. And then one night she saw him again in a big Broadway restaurant, well-dressed and looking almost prosperous although he was still pale and thin and his shoulders drooped. From across the room she watched him without his being aware of her presence, disapproving of the company in which he found himself, noticing that he did not feel at home in the small circle of chiselers and cheap racketeers which surrounded him; and presently, unable to resist the impulse any longer, she crossed the room and spoke to him.

When he had left the table she said to him abruptly, "You'll end up in the cooler."

"What about yourself?" he asked. "Your company isn't so hot."

"I can take care of myself," said Sarah Jane.

"Meaning that I can't?"

"Yeah, that's it."

"How would it be if you minded your own business?"

"Okay."

She went away and again for a long time she did not see him, and when she did see him again he was still in bad company and again she spoke her mind and again they quarreled. But she worried about him and in spite of everything she could not get him out of her mind. She knew him well enough to know how hard it was to reach him. It wasn't weakness that got him into bad company; Tommy was

hard enough. It was, she knew, ambition and impatience. He wanted to get on so desperately. All his life he had been looking for a short cut and Sarah Jane knew by now there wasn't any such thing, at least there wasn't any short cut that didn't get you into trouble.

She didn't mind his ambition. She herself knew about that. She was only afraid that he might be tempted to do something that would get him into a scrape. But she did not know how to penetrate the hard shell of his pride and resentment and rediscover him, the real Tommy who she knew was there all the time. For the first time in her life she regretted the fiery temper that was forever defeating her; the other defeats, the quarrels with managers, the fights with other girls, the brawls with men who had bet on her powers of resistance ... none of these did she regret because there was always the compensating fun and excitement which accompanied them. Now she wished earnestly that she could control herself just long enough to talk Tommy into reason. She wanted to talk to him gently, to get *through*, to make him understand how she felt, but each time she saw him she spoiled everything right at the start by opening the conversation with a smart crack.

She had a feeling—indeed she knew it each time she saw him—that he was lonely and wanted to be friendly, perhaps more than anything else on earth, and she knew all the time that beneath the complications of pride and impatience and bitterness, he was as fond of her as he had ever been. There were even times when for a moment everything seemed between them as it had been long ago at home when poor Miss Minnie was still alive. Now and then he would look at her suddenly, just for a second, with the old look of teasing

good-humor in his blue eyes, in a way which made her feel subdued and a little faint and not at all like the overpowering character she was supposed to be. And then she would think, "If only I could get him away somewhere, maybe in the country, till he could pull himself together. I could do it if he'd let me." But almost immediately she found herself compelled to laugh at the picture of them both in the country, bored, not knowing one tree or flower from another, wondering what to do with themselves. They belonged, she knew, forever to the asphalt. Besides he would not let her help him, and after a long time she divined the reason; it was because he was both proud and ashamed, and in his stubbornness he would not admit these things, least of all to himself.

So week after week, month after month, they saw each other infrequently and nearly every time the encounters ended in smart cracks and insults. And then suddenly Tommy inexplicably came home, bringing with him the mysterious Mr. Grasselli, and the moment Sarah Jane heard of it, she grew suspicious. She knew her way about. She didn't like the smell of Mr. Grasselli and she determined to find out who he was and why he had chosen to become a pensioner of Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty.

But finding out who Mr. Grasselli was, was no easy matter.

None of the boarders ever saw him, not even Miss Flint who, driven by the curiosity of a gossipy nature and by a kind of obscure romantic conviction that perhaps Mr. Grasselli was the man who had been waiting for her all these years, found excuses to go up and down the stairs several times a day and even managed to linger on Mr. Grasselli's landing for an hour or two at a time in the pretense of mending the curtains. No one saw him but Tommy and Mrs. Lefferty—not even Maggie.

He had his meals in his room and paid Mrs. Lefferty not the fifty cents a day she had counted upon but two dollars a day extra for the privilege. He insisted on paying two dollars a day more for the privilege of remaining in his room while she cleaned it and made up the bed. And he voluntarily added ten dollars a week to the regular sum she asked of him for board and lodging. In short, for Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty, Mr. Grasselli turned out to be a small gold mine, and in a way the most satisfactory boarder they had ever had, better even than Mr. Salmon. Not only did he pay his room and board regularly like Mr. Salmon but he paid a lot more. But Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty both knew that even if they filled every room in the house with gold mines like Mr. Grasselli, they still would not have enough money for the interest and taxes and insurance when the day of reckoning came. Maggie did not worry much about it because she had always left these things to Mrs. Lefferty and Mrs. Lefferty, feeling that in any case there was nothing to do, waited for something to turn up, convinced in her romantic optimism that the story which had

begun long ago when she and Maggie went as green Irish girls to poor Miss Minnie's big house, could not have a tragic ending. Stories never turned out like that. Nobody would even sit through a picture that had that kind of an ending.

Tommy brought in newspapers for Mr. Grasselli, a good many of which Mrs. Lefferty had never seen before—*Variety*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily News*, the *American*, the *Racing Form* and the *Hollywood Reporter*. Tommy said he read them not so much for the international and political news as to keep in touch with his friends. Now and then, about once a week, Tommy went out and returned with a visitor for Mr. Grasselli, a short rather plump Jewish gentleman with thick glasses, dressed very quietly and respectably, and always carrying a leather dispatch case with a gold lock on it. He would remain in Mr. Grasselli's room for a couple of hours and then go away again. Tommy told Mrs. Lefferty that his name was "Mr. Hirsh" but "you'd be surprised if you knew who he really was." That was the nearest Tommy ever came to giving away a hint of Mr. Grasselli's true identity.

Slowly the thing became an obsession with Sarah Jane. When she was not in bed eating chocolates and reading the *Daily Mirror* and the picture magazines and putting on weight, she spent all her time in trying to discover who Mr. Grasselli was. From Tommy she could gain not the slightest hint. They did not see each other very often even though they lived now in the same house, for Tommy, at the moment, was just a little afraid of Sarah Jane and Sarah Jane shrewdly divined that the time for breaking down Tommy would never arrive so long as Mr. Grasselli was there in the house troubling Tommy's conscience. For she knew almost at once that there was something shady about Mr. Grasselli and that

Tommy was worried. In a way Mr. Grasselli, mysterious, always hidden in his room behind locked doors, became a kind of mortal enemy of Sarah Jane, an obstacle blocking her path, baffling her, defeating her, and that was not a good position for Mr. Grasselli or anyone else to be in.

Now and then she encountered Tommy working over his songs at poor Miss Minnie's piano which had been tuned and put thoroughly in order. She did not hesitate to attack him on the subject of Mr. Grasselli. One day she said, "If you want to get yourself into trouble, it's okay by me (which wasn't true) but you haven't any right to drag your mother and Ma into it."

"Who's dragging them into anything?" asked Tommy.

"Don't try to kid me."

"I'm not trying to kid anybody. It's a damned shame that a man can't come here and have a rest without every boarder in the house getting sick with curiosity. You behave like old Flint hanging around the stairway pretending to mend the curtains."

"What's he hidin' from?"

"He's not hiding from anything. Go on away and let me work."

"You might give me an idea of one of your songs, unless you're afraid Mr. Boldini or me or somebody else is gonna steal them from you."

"Sure," said Tommy, "I didn't know you were interested."

So Sarah Jane sat down and lighted a cigarette and listened while he played. At first she lay back in poor Miss Minnie's armchair, relaxed and not very sanguine in her expectations.

Then slowly, as Tommy played, she sat up a little in the chair, and by the time he had finished, she was sitting on the edge.

"Jeez ..." she said, "that's good! Where'd you learn to do that?"

"Haven't you ever heard about genius?" asked Tommy.

"What d'you mean ... genius?"

"How it's born and not made."

"Why don't you get it published?"

Tommy wheeled round on the old-fashioned piano stool and said, "Did you ever try to get a song published?"

"No," said Sarah Jane, "I never wrote any."

"Well, just try to get a hearing some time."

"What's it called?" asked Sarah Jane.

"I kind of like 'The Up and Down' as a title."

"Who's gonna write the words?"

"I wrote them myself."

"Jeez," said Sarah Jane. "Let's see it."

He handed her the manuscript and she looked over it. When she handed it back to him she said, "Well, what d'you know about that? It looks like the real thing ... all written out and everything. I didn't know you were so smart. Where'd you learn to write out music?"

"Well, that's one of the things I learned wandering about."

The shoe was suddenly on the other foot and both of them were aware of it. Sarah Jane was not treating him now as if he were a naughty, half-witted child who had to be taken care of. She was impressed and in her simplicity she collapsed at once. The fact that she was impressed changed her, and Tommy saw that too, right away. He swelled a little with

pride. He lost the defensive air of indifference and defeat. His eyes became brighter and the color came into his pale face. It was as if the old Tommy had suddenly returned. Sarah Jane noticed it at once and thought, "Maybe that's done it. Maybe if I keep on telling him he's God himself, I can get through to him." The emotion wasn't false, either. The song, she thought, was swell.

"Got any others?"

"Yes," said Tommy, "if you can spare a minute from bed to listen to them."

He played three others, singing the words in the husky tenor voice which she loved. When he had finished, she said, "You're wonderful. Maybe you'd let me take a crack at singing one of 'em?"

"Since when do you sing?"

"I've always sung."

"Yeah, I remember," said Tommy, "you and poor Miss Minnie's cats."

Miraculously Sarah Jane kept her temper. "Well, I *do* sing," she said. "I've sung in public even ... twice ... not very good places but I got away with it."

"Okay," said Tommy without enthusiasm, "if you want to try."

"Sure I do."

So they chose a comedy song, "What Am I Gonna Do Now?" There was a great deal of difficulty over the key but at last they found it and Sarah Jane sang from the manuscript leaning against poor Miss Minnie's piano, and when she finished Tommy looked up at her.

"Not bad," he said, patronizingly, "not bad at all."

“Thanks,” said Sarah Jane. “Jeez ... we ought to make a team. We’d be good.”

“Yeah,” said Tommy, “but not so good at starving to death.”

“We could get a break some place.”

“Where?”

“Well, I don’t know. We could get somebody to take us on. Of course I can sing it better than I did. I’d never seen it before. I’ve got ideas about how to build it up.”

“When did you take lessons?” asked Tommy.

“I never took any lessons. You don’t need any lessons to sing a song like that.”

“Thanks,” said Tommy.

“I didn’t mean it that way. You know what I meant. If a girl’s got any talent, she ought to work a song like that out her own way. She ought to trust her instin’t.”

“I suppose you would take a *few* suggestions.”

“Sure,” said Sarah Jane, “from the composer. Give me a chance to work it up.”

“Okay. Maybe that’ll keep you from annoying Mr. Grasselli.”

“Sure,” said Sarah Jane.

She had never lost her temper once. Although a score of smart cracks came into her head, she had managed to suppress every one of them. When she went up to her room again, she couldn’t quite believe what had happened, but she was glad, because for a minute or two she had recovered the old Tommy, quick, humorous, lovable. “Jeez ...” she thought, “mebbe love makes you keep your temper. Mebbe I’m in love. Mebbe that’s the way it feels.” And then suddenly a

great revelation came to her. Maybe that was what had been her trouble all along. Maybe that was why she never seemed able to get along with men. Maybe you had to keep telling them all the time that they were God himself.

After that she went down now and then to work with Tommy in the afternoons. It was fun. It was like the old days. Tommy's disposition improved and she didn't feel restless any more, wanting to go out as soon as midnight came round to see lights and people and drop in at places like the Excelsior Club. She began to see that maybe it wasn't all Tommy's fault. Now that they were working together and she kept telling him he was wonderful, it was just like the old days.

But she didn't leave Mr. Grasselli in peace. She knew perfectly well that he wasn't having any nervous breakdown and that he was in the house for no good reason. Most likely, she thought, he was hiding away, whoever he was. And because she had no intention of getting into trouble like a fool, without knowing why, she began a campaign to find out about Mr. Grasselli, Tommy or no Tommy.

At first she began on Mrs. Lefferty, questioning her, but she didn't find out anything because Mrs. Lefferty really didn't know anything, except that one day when she had gone into the deep closet where he kept his clothes and picked up one of his suitcases to move it out of her way, it fell open and revealed three revolvers and a big complicated piece of machinery which must have been a gun. She couldn't say because she'd never seen anything like it before. When it happened, she said Mr. Grasselli got very mad and followed her into the closet and asked her what she was poking around in there for. Then she lost her temper and told him she wasn't poking around but only doing her work and if he didn't like it he could leave, as she had enough trouble carrying up his meals and having him sitting around watching her while she worked, and besides she wasn't used to having boarders who kept guns in their closets. After that he quieted down and said it was all right so long as she didn't mention it to anyone else.

That was exactly what Sarah Jane had expected. After the story, she tried to get Mrs. Lefferty to let her go into the room and pretend to be helping with the work, but Mrs. Lefferty wouldn't agree to that. In the first place, she'd promised Mr. Grasselli and in the second place except when she had lost

her temper as she did over the gun incident, she had no desire to lose the best boarder they had.

"He means a lot of money," she told Sarah Jane, "and believe me we need it just now. I don't know what we'd do without him."

And Sarah Jane soon discovered that it wasn't any good waiting around the hall for a glimpse of him. After spending two whole afternoons on the landing just above with a box of chocolates and a picture magazine, she gave that up as too boring.

And then she had an inspiration. Now and then Mr. Grasselli did have to go to the bathroom. These visits she discovered were made either late at night or early in the morning when there was no one about. Even if you got up early or waited up late it didn't do any good. She tried it a couple of times but all she saw was a glimpse of a man in a red dressing gown with a hat pulled far down over one side of his face. The door to the bathroom was only three feet from his own door and in the half-light from the single bulb at the far end of the hall you couldn't see anything at all. So at last she came to the conclusion that there wasn't anything to do but go right into the bathroom and hide and catch him as he came in.

At the end of the bathroom there was a sort of shallow curtained alcove where Mrs. Lefferty kept towels and soap and here one night, after pretending to everyone including Tommy that she had gone to bed, Sarah Jane concealed herself and waited. When Mr. Grasselli came into the room she planned to emerge from the alcove and pretend innocently that she had only come for a towel or a cake of soap.

A little after midnight she hid herself but Mr. Grasselli never went to sleep until two or three in the morning and so was in no hurry about his bath and she had a long boring wait in which she developed a terrible case of fidgets with nothing to do and nothing to read and nothing to amuse herself but her own thoughts. She must have been there for more than an hour when she heard his door opening and his step in the hallway. Peeking out from between the curtains she saw the door of the bathroom open a few inches and one eye peer round the corner to make certain the coast was clear. When the eye discovered the room was empty the door opened and the rest of Mr. Grasselli came into the room, and she knew at once who Mr. Grasselli was.

Pushing the curtains back she came out and as she emerged Mr. Grasselli's hand went swiftly into the pocket of his dressing gown. And then when he saw that it was only Big Sal, he took it out again.

Sarah Jane said, "So *you're* Mr. Grasselli!"

"Yeah, and you've got a nerve spying on me."

"I wasn't spying. I came after a piece of soap."

He knew that wasn't true and he didn't pretend to believe it.

"I oughta gone away," he said, "when I discovered you was livin' here."

"I'm not gonna bite you." Then she didn't pretend any more. "I only wanted to know what Tommy had got himself mixed up with."

"Well, now you see."

"I knew he was mixed up with something that was gonna get us all into trouble."

“Well, don’t worry. I’ll beat it now. Anyway nobody would have got into any trouble. They only want me on account of income tax.”

“Yeah, I read that in the papers. It was kinda dumb of me not to guess you and Mr. Grasselli was the same. Nice of you to get us all in trouble. I suppose we’ll all get pinched now.”

“No. None of you’ll get pinched. I’m gonna give myself up when the time comes. Only the case ain’t ready yet. We’re just preparing it. When it’s ready I’ll beat it an nobody’ll ever know I was staying here. They can’t ship me up the river. They haven’t got anything on me. Only we got to make everything tight before we take a chance.”

“Give me a cigarette,” said Sarah Jane. “I’ve been sittin’ behind that curtain for an hour without anything to smoke. I thought you were never gonna take a bath.”

He gave her a cigarette and held a match for her. He knew it wasn’t any use trying to threaten Sal or bully her because there really wasn’t anything she was afraid of. But if you could get on the right side of her everything would be okay. So he began feeling his way.

“I suppose you’ll go right out and tell everybody up and down Broadway.”

“I wasn’t gonna tell anybody at all. It’s none of my business if the government is after your money. Go on, turn on the water. I’m not gonna stay.”

Mr. Grasselli, alias Monk Maguire, turned on the water meekly and Sarah Jane asked, “What ever made you think of comin’ here anyway?”

“It was Tommy suggested it.”

“How was Tommy mixed up with you?”

“He wasn’t mixed up with me. I liked the way he played a hot piano and I told him I’d help to get his music published, and then I asked him if he knew about a good hideaway. It had to be a place in New York where I could see my lawyer. I didn’t even want any of the boys to know where I was. They’re all kind of nervy just now and one of ’em might squeal to get himself off. And he said he knew a boardinghouse that would be the last place in the world anybody would think of looking for Monk Maguire. He was right, all right. Nobody would ever think of looking for me here. Only he didn’t tell me before I came that you was here in the same house.”

“He didn’t know it then,” said Sarah Jane. “Did he tell you after?”

“No, I heard your voice. I’d know that voice any place. Well, what are you gonna do about it?”

“I’m not gonna do anything. If you’re gonna give yourself up without any trouble, you might as well stay on till the time comes. Ma and Mrs. Lefferty need the money pretty bad ... worse I guess than any of us know.”

“I’ve never seen your mother yet, but I like Tommy’s mother. She’s on the level. She keeps makin’ me think of my own old woman, lookin’ after me as if I was her own.”

“You must get awful sick of that one room.”

“I am beginning to feel a little nuts from being shut up so much.” He leaned over the tub and felt the bath water.

“Why don’t you come down for meals? That would be a change.”

“I’m not so hot about being seen just now.”

Sarah Jane laughed. “None of them would ever know. You oughta see the rest of ’em. Why, they ain’t even alive. At least they don’t live in New York. They’re a lot of fossils.” And she proceeded to give him a brief description of old Mr. Van Diver and Miss Flint, Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon. “You’re safe as a church with them around. Sure, they’d make you laugh....”

“Well, mebbe I’ll think about it. It’s kinda like beginning a sentence already, being shut up all the time in that room. I’m gettin’ awful sick of the wall paper. About midnight it begins to crawl.”

Sarah Jane opened the door and went out. “Have a good bath,” she said, over her shoulder. “And don’t worry about me. Silent as the grave.”

“Oke,” said Mr. Grasselli, beginning to take off his dressing gown.

“And don’t forget about Tommy,” said Sarah Jane. “He needs a break pretty bad. If he don’t get one he’s gonna go to pieces.”

“I won’t forget him,” Mr. Grasselli called from behind the closed door.

And then the worst happened. As she passed Tommy’s door, it opened and Tommy’s head was thrust out. His hair was tousled and his face red with anger, and at sight of him Sarah Jane was not so much frightened as smitten with a sudden terrible feeling of love for him, because he looked exactly like Tommy as a little boy.

“Now you’ve done it,” he said, “spoiled everything with your spying.”

“I haven’t spoiled anything. I’ve just kind of cleared up the situation.”

“Yeah?” He began to swear at her.

“Calm down! Calm down! He’s not gonna beat it. He’s staying right here and he’s even coming down to meals. Leave him to me. I know him better than you do.”

“He was going to give me a break,” said Tommy. “He could have helped both of us.”

“He mighta talked about it before,” said Sarah Jane. “Now he’s gonna do it, believe me, he’s gonna.”

“Better not try any monkey business with Monk.”

“Listen, Tommy, I know guys like Monk Maguire. I know what kind of a rat he is. Help you when everything’s goin’ fine and he can use you and forget all about you the rest of the time. I know that kind of a rat ... you oughta seen him when I came out from behind the curtain ... scared stiff! Just leave it to me. Go on back to bed. I’ve been waitin’ for years for a break like this.”

It was a lot better than she had hoped. After she was in bed she lay awake for a long time thinking how dumb she was not to have guessed that Mr. Grasselli was Monk Maguire. She knew all about Monk. She'd even worked for him a couple of times in his Glass Slipper Night Club. She knew everything about him, even back in the days of prohibition when he was a bootlegger and speakeasy king. She knew about his night clubs and the money he put up to back shows and about his interest in the "drug" business. And most important of all, she knew that at heart he was a coward. She knew that all the lot were like that. They were brave enough when they worked in gangs, full of bullying courage when everything was going well, but once a guy like Monk Maguire found himself on the way out, he collapsed. She knew that it wasn't only Monk Maguire that was scared now but most of his friends and rivals. The government had them scared. They all went around quaking on the inside. She knew Monk was quaking as soon as she stepped out from behind the curtain. He didn't deserve any pity or any soft treatment; playing on the level didn't get you anywhere with a mug like him. The sooner she got Tommy out of that jam the better, because he was too innocent to cope with anything like Monk Maguire.

And she knew now who the respectable "Mr. Hirsh" with his dispatch case was. He was Mr. Berolzheimer, the smart lawyer that Monk always hired to get himself out of a jam.

Sarah Jane, lying awake until early morning, laid her plans.

14

The next evening Mr. Grasselli came out of his retirement and appeared at dinner all dressed up in a dinner coat and a black tie, his sandy hair all oiled and shiny. His appearance was the greatest moment in the history of Mrs. Lefferty's boardinghouse. For two weeks, the boarders had been aware of Mr. Grasselli's presence in the same house; for two weeks they had speculated upon his identity, his past, his appearance, his present condition, and now suddenly on an hour's warning he had appeared to become one of them. Maggie made up a couple of special dishes for the occasion. Mrs. Lefferty put on her best dress and Miss Flint, making a supreme effort, hastily ran up a concoction made of the bottom of one dress and the top of another. She it was who appeared the most deeply affected by his presence. She giggled and bridled, shaking her oriental earrings, and whenever she talked, she was completely incoherent.

For two weeks, ever since the arrival of Mr. Grasselli, the idea of him had obsessed her. There was something so exciting about the presence of a strange man mysteriously hidden in the same house with her that after the first two or three days she came and went to the Women's Exchange in the greatest peace. Thinking about Mr. Grasselli she entirely forgot about being molested. In the solitude of her own room she invented the wildest fancies about Mr. Grasselli—how after all these years he had come to her—the man for whom she had been waiting all her life; how one day there would be a knock at her door and on opening it she would find Mr. Grasselli standing there to say he was *the man*. And slowly she had come to believe these things just as she had once

believed that she could not walk a block without being followed at once. So when Mr. Grasselli came down the stairs and entered poor Miss Minnie's parlor she had thought, "Here *he* comes."

He was not exactly what she had thought *he* would be. He was not handsome and she had not exactly expected him to be a little wall-eyed, but he had other qualities. Perhaps it was the hardness of his jaw and the cruel twist of the lips, the coldness in the shallow blue eyes, in which she found compensation. He was, she thought, exactly like the heroes Miss Ethel M. Dell always wrote of ... masterful, cruel, with one eye a different color from the other (only Mr. Grasselli was wall-eyed instead). In any case *he* was a success, perhaps because his appearance was completely a surprise.

Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon bristled a little at the appearance of another male boarder, and Mr. Salmon became aware at once that Mr. Grasselli did not speak like a gentleman. At his corner of the table old Mr. Van Diver chortled and chuckled to himself, pleased and faintly aware through the haze of immense age that there was excitement about and that everyone was happy.

Oddly enough the only one at the table who felt uncomfortable was the newcomer. Mr. Grasselli had been through a great deal and he had seen a great deal more and he was altogether far from being an innocent, but never before had he encountered that atmosphere of gentility which reigned at Mrs. Lefferty's. Never before had he seen such courtly old-fashioned manners as those of old Mr. Van Diver and Mr. Boldini, Mr. Salmon and Miss Flint and Mrs. Lefferty herself. Belonging to a New York which none of them knew, a raucous, noisy, scrambling place where he

reigned for a time as king, the elegant leisurely New York he encountered in poor Miss Minnie's house was something which made him feel clumsy and brutal and now and then brought him close to a peculiar kind of terror worse than anything he had ever felt, even in a tight spot covered by a sawed-off shot gun.

And afterward in the "drawing room" (which was a word Mr. Grasselli had never even heard) while Mrs. Lefferty sat pouring out coffee as poor Miss Minnie had done evening after evening for nearly sixty years, his fear and awkwardness increased. He became, also for the first time in his life, conscious of his own language, and aware that very often he expressed himself in words and expressions which the other boarders seemed to find quite as new as he found the name of the room in which they were sitting. And Miss Flint fascinated and terrified him, because he had never seen anyone like her before, sitting all bedizened and coquettish, bolt upright on the edge of one of the chairs that were so funny-looking. He told himself, in words which had never even been thought, let alone been spoken, before in poor Miss Minnie's drawing room, what was the matter with Miss Flint. She could be cured, he thought, only now it was probably too late and it would be very difficult to find anyone to undertake the task.

But on the whole the dinner went of! extremely well save for one incident which occurred just as they were finishing something which Mrs. Lefferty called "the sweet." Mr. Grasselli sat between Mrs. Lefferty and Sarah Jane opposite the screen which hid the dumb-waiter, and suddenly without warning from behind the screen came the sound of breaking china and a muttered imprecation. At the same time one blue

eye became visible at the joint of the screen and Mr. Grasselli's hand flew into the pocket of his dinner jacket.

"It's all right," said Sarah Jane. "It's only Ma trying to get a look at you. She's knocked something off the table."

After dinner Mrs. Lefferty and the boarders were aching to return to the non-stop rummy game but none of them were impolite enough to propose it until Sarah Jane, feeling that the atmosphere was becoming more and more arid and strained, asked Mr. Grasselli if he played rummy. He didn't, he said, but he played all kinds of cards and liked playing. He said that he guessed he could learn.

"They don't play for money," said Sarah Jane.

"Okay," said Mr. Grasselli.

"If you're all gonna play cards, I guess I'll take Tommy to the movies."

So Mrs. Lefferty fetched "the old gentleman's" gaming table and they all sat down to play. The game relieved the atmosphere enormously and after a little while Mr. Grasselli, with the worn playing cards in his fat ugly hands, began to feel more at home. He picked up the game very quickly and after the second hand no longer needed the solicitous help and advice of Miss Flint. And when the second game went to him, Mrs. Lefferty took out the copy book in which she kept the running score and wrote "Mr. Grasselli" and under it the figure one.

"Now," she said to Mr. Grasselli, "you're one of us."

During the third game Sarah Jane and Tommy returned from the movies across the street and sat down to watch. Until that point Mrs. Lefferty had been showing her usual skill and was far ahead, but from the moment Sarah Jane and Tommy returned, she seemed unable to keep her mind on the game. She kept getting caught with cards she should have

played and discarding cards which were of the greatest advantage to Mr. Boldini who sat next to her.

It was, she knew, the first time that Sarah Jane and Tommy had gone out together in more than five years, and the sight of them, coming in out of the rain, both looking happy, filled her heart with warmth. She couldn't keep her mind on the game for thinking about them and watching them slyly, out of the corner of her eye. She couldn't help thinking how wonderful it would be if they took a fancy to each other and got married and settled down, so that she and Maggie didn't have to be worrying about them all the time. Tommy, she saw, was already looking plumper and healthier for the quiet well-fed life he had been living. "If only that would happen," she kept thinking, and then suddenly her heart would feel cold when she remembered the interest and the taxes and the insurance. "Maybe," she thought, "we won't have any home at all this time next year." But the story, she knew, couldn't turn out wrong. Something had to turn up.

Mr. Boldini won the game, principally by the aid of Mrs. Lefferty's mistakes, and while Mrs. Lefferty put away the cards and the score, he excused himself and took Fanto for his nightly airing.

"That's a funny-looking dog," Mr. Grasselli observed, "I've never seen one like that except on the stage."

"Fanto's been on the stage," said Miss Flint eagerly, "and he knows the most wonderful tricks. You'd never believe what he can do, Mr. Grasselli." And then she asked Mr. Salmon for a cigarette to show that she was playing no favorites, and leaned back in her chair puffing at it in the most genteel and spinsterish fashion.

“Sure,” said Mrs. Lefferty, “and Mr. Boldini is a magician ... a wonderful magician. Sometimes he does tricks that makes the hair stand up on your head.”

“They ought to give a performance for Mr. Grasselli. About twice a year Mr. Boldini gives a performance just for us.”

“I kinda remember that name from somewhere. Did he used to play the Palace—in the old days?”

“Sure,” said Sarah Jane, “he used to travel with a whole company ... the Great Boldini and Troupe.”

“D’you mean he’s the *Great* Boldini?”

“Sure,” said Mrs. Lefferty with pride, “you ought to see his clippings. He’s done tricks for the Kaiser and the Emperor of Austria.”

And then Mr. Boldini returned with Fanto who made his entrance walking on his hind legs, and Mrs. Lefferty suggested the performance.

“Of course,” said Mr. Boldini. “What about the end of the week? We’ve got some new tricks we’ve been practicing. We’d like to try them out. How about it, Fanto?” And the poodle went into an outburst of happy barking.

“And Mr. Salmon could read his poems,” said Miss Flint.

“Oh ... no ... not really.... I couldn’t,” said Mr. Salmon.

“He’s a wonderful poet,” said Miss Flint.

“But I haven’t written any for a long time. I’ve been so busy on my memoirs,” said Mr. Salmon.

“Sure and the old ones are good enough for us,” said Mrs. Lefferty.

“If you’ll read your poems, Mr. Salmon, Tommy and I will play and sing for you all,” said Sarah Jane.

This was not entirely an innocent remark. In the first place she thought Mr. Salmon's poems were the funniest things she'd ever heard, funnier than anything she had ever found in the theater, funnier even than Mr. Boldini when he was giving a performance. And in the second place it would give her and Tommy a good chance to show Monk what they could do. By Friday they'd have four or five songs all worked up and ready.

"That would be wonderful," said Miss Flint, "just like a vaudeville program."

"Will you, Mr. Salmon?" asked Mrs. Lefferty.

"If you insist," said Mr. Salmon.

"All right then," said Mrs. Lefferty, "Friday night."

Then they all went to bed. The evening had been a success and Mr. Grasselli fitted into the society of poor Miss Minnie's drawing room far more gracefully than Mrs. Lefferty had thought possible. She helped old Mr. Van Diver upstairs to his room and brought him the latest moving picture classic to read when he wakened in the morning and then went off to bed thinking about Sarah Jane and Tommy and how after all things seemed to be working themselves out, all save the money.

After that Mr. Grasselli came down every evening to dinner, and every evening there was a rummy game and every evening he won more often than anyone else. After the second night they let him do all the dealing because he seemed to know how to do it better than any of them and the game went so much faster, and so he became a kind of croupier in the gambling hell of poor Miss Minnie's drawing room. Sometimes Tommy stayed in and played the piano and once he went out again with Sarah Jane to the pictures. Then on Thursday, the day before Mr. Boldini's performance, two things happened.

In the morning Sarah Jane came upon Mrs. Lefferty sitting on a chair in Mr. Boldini's room with a letter in her hand, weeping. When she questioned her, Mrs. Lefferty simply handed her the letter. It was brief. It said that the interest was overdue and that something would have to be done about it. The bank, said the letter, had been lenient and put up with delays in the past but under present conditions, it could no longer continue such a policy.

"So that's it!" said Sarah Jane. She knew now that all along she had been aware that there was something wrong but she hadn't imagined that it was as bad as this.

"It isn't only that," sobbed Mrs. Lefferty, "there's the insurance and the taxes."

Sarah Jane sat down opposite her and took a pencil and some paper from Mr. Boldini's desk. "Now tell me the whole story." So Mrs. Lefferty told her all about everything, about their struggle to make ends meet and about how little Mr. Van Diver paid and how much Miss Flint and Mr. Boldini owed

them and how for a long time until Mr. Grasselli turned up there hadn't been any transients at all.

"You'd better sell everything and clear out. How much would you have left?"

Mrs. Lefferty didn't know. She only knew the assessed value of the house. So Sarah Jane took that and did some figuring. She wasn't very good at arithmetic but after a long struggle she managed to discover that when everything was washed up they'd have practically nothing at all.

"That wouldn't do any good," she said.

"Besides I couldn't do that anyway ... no matter what happens," said Mrs. Lefferty.

"Why not?"

"We couldn't sell poor Miss Minnie's things ... not after she left them for us to keep."

"Poor Miss Minnie won't know anything about it."

"Don't talk like that," said Mrs. Lefferty sharply. "Poor Miss Minnie knows everything we do. It's blasphemous." She blew her nose and added, "Anyway we couldn't. What would become of Mr. Van Diver and Miss Flint and Mr. Boldini? Somebody's got to keep a home for them. Mr. Van Diver couldn't go to Ward's Island ... a man like him to die in the poorhouse after he was poor Miss Minnie's friend for forty years."

"How much do you have to have right now?" asked Sarah Jane.

"I don't know exactly," said Mrs. Lefferty.

After another struggle Sarah Jane got it out of her and wrote it all down. The interest and taxes and insurance and some bills that hadn't been paid. Again she did some figuring

and at last she said, “Leave it to me. I guess the bank can wait a day or two more.”

“I’m sure something will turn up,” said Mrs. Lefferty.

That made Sarah Jane a little impatient. “The only thing I can see,” she said, “is the process servers.” And then almost at once she was sorry for speaking sharply and went over and kissed Mrs. Lefferty and told her everything would be all right. She was a little ashamed of herself because she knew suddenly that she hadn’t made it any easier for Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie by living off them and borrowing money from them. It struck her for the first time that Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty weren’t so young any more. They couldn’t go on working, looking after people, forever. She didn’t know exactly what she was going to do but she meant to do something. The idea did not come to her until late that same evening when she was watching the rummy game.

Somehow the spirit had been going out of the game, slowly, bit by bit, night by night. In four nights Miss Flint hadn’t won a game nor had Mr. Salmon. Mr. Boldini had won a single game and Mrs. Lefferty had won two. All the others had gone to Mr. Grasselli. And now the game wasn’t fun any longer, because Mr. Grasselli had all the luck. Mr. Boldini’s face had grown long and solemn and Mr. Salmon never stopped complaining about his bad luck, and even Miss Flint, despite her admiration for Mr. Grasselli, found no pleasure in the spectacle of his perpetual success. And then Sarah Jane, watching, discovered the reason. Mr. Grasselli was stacking the cards. Once she was suspicious, twice she was very nearly sure and on the third occasion there was no doubt. After that she saw him do it again and again.

For a second she very nearly lost her temper and made a big scene. Two weeks ago she would have done it, but now that things were going so well with Tommy, her temper wasn't quite so bad, and after a second of heroic control, she kept silent. Mr. Grasselli won the game and after that everybody went to bed. While Mrs. Lefferty was putting away the cards, Sarah Jane said to Mr. Grasselli, in a low voice, "Wait a minute, Monk, I want to tell you something."

"Okay," he answered, "but lay off that name."

"All right, Mr. Grasselli." Then she said to Tommy and Mrs. Lefferty, "I'll be up in a minute. I want to talk to Mr. Grasselli about something confidential. I'll put out the lights."

Tommy looked at her curiously, and Sarah Jane's heart gave a sudden leap. This time it wasn't a look of anger because she might be stirring up trouble for Mr. Grasselli. It was a look of jealousy. There was no mistake about it.

But Tommy and his mother went upstairs and when they were well out of hearing, she said to Mr. Grasselli, "Well, of all the cheap, lousy bastards!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Palming the cards in a game with a lot of old women."

"Who was palming any cards?"

"Listen, I wasn't born yesterday. I saw you do it not once but twenty times."

"So what?"

"It would be bad enough if you were taking their money ... but you're taking their fun from 'em ... about the only fun they have."

“I never thought of that. My God, I’ve got to have a little fun myself. I guess it’s a kind of habit ... hard to break.... When I get cards in my hand.... I guess I’m goin’ nuts here anyway, bein’ shut up all the time.”

“You oughta be ashamed of yourself.”

“I am ashamed of myself. I won’t do it again, only I’ve got to have a little fun now and then.” He was ashamed. He couldn’t look at her, even with his one good eye. She had never hoped for that—a Monk Maguire who was ashamed.

“Sure. Well, I can tell you how to have some fun. I can tell you how you can square yourself.”

Mr. Grasselli finally looked at her. “What?” he asked.

“Sit down.”

Mr. Grasselli sat down.

“The old girls are broke,” said Sarah Jane. “They’re gonna lose the house if something isn’t done.”

“What, for instance?”

“Some money.”

“How much?”

“I’ll tell you in a minute. Wait till I tell you the story first.”

She told him the story, all of it, from the very beginning, all about poor Miss Minnie and Tommy and herself, and the boarders who had found a little corner of peace in a city which frightened them.

“You see,” said Sarah Jane, “it isn’t only Ma and Tommy’s mother. It’s all the rest of them. They’ll all have to go to flophouses or Ward’s Island. See?”

“Yeah, I see,” said Mr. Grasselli, “I like Mrs. Lefferty. She makes me think of my old woman. She’s been dead for ten

years, God rest her soul." For a moment something glistened in Mr. Grasselli's good eye. "How much?"

"They got to have it right away. About two thousand."

"Oh," said Mr. Grasselli. "Two grand! I thought you was talking about real money. Sure, they can have it ... tomorrow, as soon as Tommy can get it from my lawyer. What are they gonna do after that?"

The words of Mrs. Lefferty came to Sarah Jane's lips, "Something'll turn up." She didn't doubt it now. This first step was so easy that the rest seemed nothing. Anyway it was still six months or a year away before they had to worry. Maybe her mother and Mrs. Lefferty *were* right. Maybe a story like theirs couldn't have a bad ending.

Mr. Grasselli went upstairs and when Sarah Jane had turned out the lights she followed him. Just as she expected, Tommy's head appeared in the doorway of his room.

"What were you doing downstairs?" he asked.

"Business," said Sarah Jane.

"Don't pull that stuff on me."

"I'm not pulling anything on you."

"Well, take it from me. Don't get mixed up with that guy. I'll beat you up first. If Maggie isn't strong enough, I am."

"Good," said Sarah Jane, "you might gang up on me. When do we begin?"

"I should think you'd try to keep straight in the same house with your own mother."

That made Sarah Jane lose her temper for the first time in two weeks, perhaps because it came too near to the subject about which so many bets had been made.

“Listen, you! No man has ever touched me. See? And if you think I’m gonna begin with a rat like that, you’re nuts.”

Tommy looked at her for half a minute without speaking. “Do you mean that?” he asked. “Is that true?”

“You’ve got a hell of a nerve thinkin’ it isn’t.”

“What did you expect me to think? The way you act and talk, the people you go around with.”

“I thought you had a little idea of what I was like. My God, you’re dumb! Go to bed and sleep it off.”

And in disgust she walked off and left him. It was only after she had gone that he remembered he still had not found out what her business with Mr. Grasselli had been.

She told him in the morning when Mr. Grasselli sent him with a note to “Mr. Hirsh” instructing him to pay over two thousand dollars. Mr. Grasselli hadn’t any money or securities in the bank. They were all in the keeping of “Mr. Hirsh” where the government couldn’t find out about them.

17

On Friday at lunch Mr. Boldini made a disappointing announcement. His performance, he said, would not be ready for that evening. It would have to be postponed for another week. He had some new tricks. He and Fanto had been rehearsing steadily but Fanto, he explained, was not quite ready for his part and might break down. This, as a professional and experienced performer, the Great Boldini was not willing to risk. The new tricks, he said, would be stupendous, something that had never before been attempted on the stage. The other boarders, he implied, were being greatly honored by being allowed to see the first performance.

A murmur of disappointment went around the table and Sarah Jane glanced quickly at Mr. Grasselli, half-expecting him to say that he was sorry but that he wouldn't be here to witness the performance because he would have to leave before then. But he said nothing at all. He seemed to take the announcement philosophically.

Sarah Jane was aware that at any time Mr. Grasselli might decide to give himself up and once he was out of the house she knew he would be of no further use to her. Out of long experience she knew exactly how those things happened. Once he escaped, he would be too busy to see her or Tommy. He would forget all about them because their usefulness was finished. He would put them off again and again until at last their patience was gone and their hopes wearied. And so would come to an end one more sterile opportunity. She was aware too that even now when he came down to meals and played cards every evening he was beginning to be fed up.

For that she didn't blame him. It wasn't a very exciting life after you had been used to crowds and bright lights and gambling for big stakes. She knew all about that. It was only the presence of Tommy which kept her quiet and subdued. Without Tommy she would long ago have found her way out of the house at midnight to go to the Excelsior Club or some other place like it.

Once her temper over Tommy's suspicions had died down, she came to see that he wasn't to blame for what he had believed, any more than Maggie, driven at times beyond endurance, was to blame because she didn't believe that her daughter was "a good girl." But she was aware that the announcement had brought about another change in Tommy's attitude toward her. It seemed to bring her one more step nearer to the Tommy she knew was the real one. It was as if he had opened a door, letting her come a little nearer to him. Those moments when he would suddenly withdraw just when she was feeling very near to him, failed to occur during the next two or three days. He seemed to relax and he no longer bristled when she came upon him suddenly while he was working, but accepted her presence, easily, almost, thought Sarah Jane, too easily.

There were times too when it seemed to her that they would never get anywhere, because they were too used to each other and because Tommy accepted her as a pal and a sister rather than someone who was no relation to him. This she found very subtle and difficult to combat, much more difficult than the problem of her own temper. The trouble was, she knew, that she had begun all wrong at the moment when he had come back into her life. She might have been strange and aloof and different, a mysterious Sarah Jane, who

roused his interest, but instead of that she had gone right up to him and greeted him with a smart crack, just as if they had parted only the day before instead of having been four years without seeing each other.

Thinking about it, there were moments when, in her own room, she acted out for herself how she *should* have behaved; this she did by raising her head, lowering her eyelids, moving with the old show-girl walk she knew so well. She would study her big, handsome face in the mirror trying one expression after another in order to appear seductive and mysterious. But before very long she always broke down and laughed because she looked so funny. In her heart, she knew it was impossible for her to be mysterious and aloof and seductive. If it had been possible she would have been a big movie star long before now. She would have given in, either in marriage or otherwise, to one of those ten or fifteen men who could have given her a boost upward on the ladder of success and fame. No, there was nothing doing. It wasn't her type. She wasn't any good as a glamour girl.

Nowadays, she knew, you had to have something special to get on. Good looks weren't enough. Thinking about it, she felt sure that she really had something special, some kind of message or interpretation which she might project to the millions who went to theaters and picture houses, but what it was, she seemed unable to discover. What she needed, she thought, was someone to take her in hand and exploit her the way Mr. Von Sternberg had built up Miss Dietrich. Only it was too late to expect that now; she had been about Broadway for too long. Too many people knew her too well. Nobody would believe that "Big Sal" could be anything more than "good company." She was, she felt, after all her

experience in musicals, revues and night clubs, a little shopworn. After all Mr. Ziegfeld had tried and Mr. Carrol and Mr. Shubert and all of them had given it up.

And so after a time, her rehearsals of seduction and mystery in front of the mirror degenerated into a travesty of all the tricks she had observed in the movie queens, done for her own amusement during the hours when she had nothing to do. She got out the make-up box which hadn't been used for so long that most of the materials had begun to dry up, and made up her face to give it a faraway look and plastered her eyelashes with mascara and drew over her own ripe generous lips a cupid's bow which had nothing to do with nature. The result made her laugh so loudly that Maggie came into her room one evening to find out what was the matter and thought one of them had gone crazy when Sarah Jane turned toward the door and she saw the mask which Sarah Jane had created on top of her own face. "Sure," said Maggie, "you'd better go out and get yourself something to do or they'll be shuttin' you up."

And finally she shaved off her eyebrows and with a pencil created new ones, arched far above the ones she had inherited from Mr. Ryan, the coachman. The false eyebrows with the veiled mascara look gave her a surprised, rather half-witted expression, as if she had just been startled out of a deep slumber. "Languor," she thought, "is no name for it." And made up as she was, she went downstairs to poor Miss Minnie's drawing room where Tommy was working at the piano.

He did not hear her enter but when she was quite close to him, he turned, looked suddenly frightened, and said, "What's the matter with you? Have you gone nuts?"

She didn't answer him but walked across the room, languorously seated herself on poor Miss Minnie's "love seat" and lighted a cigarette. Then it was that Tommy burst into roars of laughter. When he finished, he suddenly said, "I've got it."

"What?" said Sarah Jane, sprawling back into a comfortable Sarah Jane position.

"An idea!"

"What is it?" she asked.

"Wait till I get it worked out. Go on away and leave me in peace." And almost at once he took up a piece of paper and began working as if she weren't in the room.

"That, I suppose," said Sarah Jane, "is genius."

But there was something else which troubled her about Tommy. He had never told her anything of what had happened to him during the five years he had been away, nothing beyond the mere statement that he had been in "Chicago, St. Louis, Panama and a lot of other places." And slowly she began to be suspicious. There were times when in the midst of a mood of gayety he would suddenly grow quiet and still and a shadow would come across his face and he would look old and tired again and a little gray, and she would want to say, "What's the matter? Tell me about it." But she did not dare for fear of driving him still further from her. Whatever it was that changed him thus, suddenly, was, she knew, something which took him far from her, something that seemed to undo all the good she had accomplished, all the progress she had made. He would become remote again and almost hostile as he had been on that first evening in the Excelsior Club. His mother didn't seem to notice anything.

She was too happy at having him home again where she could look after him.

Now and then late at night Sarah Jane sometimes felt tired, for the first time in her life. It was not physical weariness, but a tiredness that affected her head, what with Tommy to worry about, and wondering what was to become of Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie, and how long it would be before they all got a "break" and how long before Mr. Grasselli would leave them to give himself up. She supposed it was because she had never had to use her head much up to now. All her life she had been free as the wind and now suddenly, she found herself having to think and to look after everyone around her. She was even beginning to feel the way her mother and Mrs. Lefferty felt about old Mr. Van Diver and the other boarders. Somebody had to look out for them, because they weren't able to look out for themselves. They were all like babies, even Mr. Salmon with his funny poetry and his "memoirs" which no one was ever going to read.

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Mr. Grasselli had been right. Mrs. Lefferty's boardinghouse was the last place in New York that they even thought of looking for him. Nearly every day the name of Monk Maguire appeared in the papers. Again and again there were pictures of him, pictures, it is true, which bore no resemblance whatever to him. When he saw them he was thankful that he had always made war on photographers and pulled his hat over his eyes and his coat about his ears every time one had appeared on the horizon. Nearly all the pictures were photographs of a hat or an elbow or a back, which might have belonged to any man on the street. And he was lucky too, he knew, in the fact that practically nobody at Mrs. Lefferty's except Tommy and Sarah Jane ever read the tabloid papers. The scandals, the orgies, the murders, the breach of promise suits, the florid gossip which illumined their pages like fireworks, had no interest for the others. To Mr. Van Diver it would have been like reading about life in China, and for Miss Flint and Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon it was much the same. It was all a world of which they knew nothing, and in which they had no interest. So Mr. Grasselli kept his fingers crossed.

"Mr. Hirsh," he thought, hadn't been very quick about fixing up his case. He kept saying that what would help them most was an "adjournment." If they could get a delay, the feeling against Monk Maguire wouldn't be so strong. The public would get bored with the idea and the jury wouldn't be hostile, especially as he was going to prove that the income which the government wanted to tax all came out of bootlegging and the public didn't think that much of a crime.

When he complained to “Mr. Hirsh” about how bored he was, the lawyer suggested that he leave town to which Mr. Grasselli replied, “I can’t do that. I’ve got too many interests I’ve got to keep my eye on. The way things are now, everything would go to pieces if they knew I wasn’t right here in town keeping an eye on them.”

“Sure,” said “Mr. Hirsh,” “then you’d better stay right here. You couldn’t find a better place.”

“Yeah, that’s right. But what if somebody took to following you?”

“How could they follow me? I got that fixed too. When I’m coming here, I never go out the front door of the apartment. I’ve got a way of coming out half a block away. I take a taxi. How could anybody follow me?”

“How’s it all gonna come out?” Mr. Grasselli always asked anxiously.

“Okay. You leave it to me and don’t rush things. I’ll get you off.”

“Mebbe I’d better beat it.”

“No. You don’t need to beat it.”

So “Mr. Hirsh” would go away and Mr. Grasselli would sink back in bed (where he spent the whole morning) and begin all over again to read about himself and look at the pictures of overcoats and hats and elbows.

The truth was that Sarah Jane had spoiled a lot of his fun when she caught him cheating. For Mr. Grasselli, playing cards without stakes or cheating was no fun at all. But since he had stopped palming the cards, the spirit came back into the game for the other boarders. Miss Flint won a game and Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon two or three apiece. But after a

couple of nights, Mr. Grasselli began stacking the cards again. He couldn't do it when Sarah Jane stayed at home and watched, but he did it every time she was not there.

At last the night of the performance arrived. Mrs. Lefferty arranged to have supper a little early so that she and Maggie could both be up in the drawing room by nine o'clock. Everybody was excited, even Mr. Grasselli, to whom the performance offered at least a change from the inevitable routine of rummy. Miss Flint seemed to be almost beside herself and at dinner talked incessantly, mostly to Mr. Grasselli, about the families she had known and worked for in the old days. After supper while Mrs. Lefferty was downstairs helping Maggie, she acted as hostess in Mrs. Lefferty's place, pouring out the coffee with the air of a duchess. When Mrs. Lefferty came up at last from the kitchen, she brought with her a bottle of old brandy, one of the last bottles that remained from the remnants of "the old gentleman's" cellar left them by poor Miss Minnie. When Mr. Grasselli tasted it, his eyes closed a little and he smacked his lips. "What is that?" he asked, and Mrs. Lefferty showed him the bottle so covered with dust and mold that the label was no longer legible.

"Jeez!" said Mr. Grasselli, "that's great stuff. There ain't any like that around any more. That's worth a lot of money. How much of it have you got?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Lefferty, swelling a little with pride. "Maybe twenty-five. Maybe a few more. We don't use it much."

"Twenty-five bottles of that liquid gold!" said Mr. Grasselli. "D'you want to sell it?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Lefferty. "I'd have to talk to Maggie about it. I don't know what poor Miss Minnie would

think of selling it."

"Whenever you want to sell it, let me know. I'll make an offer right now of fifteen dollars apiece for every bottle you'll sell me."

"I wouldn't want to cheat you," said Mrs. Lefferty. "Did you say fifteen dollars?"

"You ain't cheatin' me and I said fifteen dollars!"

Then Maggie appeared, not from the kitchen but from upstairs where she had gone to change, in a purple dress, wearing poor Miss Minnie's gold watch that pinned on with a gold fleur-de-lis. All day her hair had been done up in kid curlers and now it had blossomed forth in an elaborate coiffure with rolls on the side and the back instead of the usual tight screw which adorned the top of her head.

While Sarah Jane and Mrs. Lefferty arranged the room, Tommy, with a cigarette hanging from one corner of his mouth, played the piano in order to build up the mood. All the chairs and the "love seat" were removed from the end of the tunnel-like room where the piano stood, leaving it empty for a stage with two entrances, one into the dining room and one into the back hall. Then Mrs. Lefferty drew the curtains which in winter divided the room in half to keep in the heat and keep out draughts, and the illusion of a small theater was complete.

At the opposite end the audience seated itself, Mr. Van Diver chuckling with an excitement which he understood only vaguely, Mr. Boldini a little nervous and Mr. Salmon with his tie and hair carefully ruffled, already getting into the mood. In the center of the audience in a large chair Mr. Grasselli had been given the seat of honor and next to him in a smaller chair drawn very close to his, sat Miss Flint like the

Queen Consort. For the occasion she had tied a bit of black velvet about her throat and wore a butterfly of rhinestones given her long ago by one of her employers, pinned in her flaming hair. She clutched her handkerchief in her hand, and kept saying, “Oh, I’ve never been so excited.” She kept smoking incessantly. The smoke of her cigarette drifted upward and mingled with that from the expensive cigar made especially for Mr. Grasselli in Havana.

Presently Mr. Salmon retired and everything was ready and Sarah Jane stood up and announced that the program was about to begin. Mr. Salmon, she said, would open the program by reading two or three of his poems. After that would appear the Great Boldini and Fanto, the wonder dog, and it would close with an act by Tommy Lefferty and Sarah Jane Ryan, “Ryan and Lefferty,” she said, “in a few songs.”

Then Tommy left the piano and came to sit in the audience and Sarah Jane went to summon Mr. Salmon, who had retired upstairs in order to make an entrance and suddenly, as if they were in a real theater, the audience lowered their voices and conversed in whispers. “Oh, I’m so excited,” said Miss Flint.

Mr. Salmon chose two poems out of his “Village” period. One was called, “In Praise of Venus” and the other, “The Tea Shop Under the El.”

Long ago as a handsome gazelle-eyed boy with an open throat reading before the literary ladies of the days before the war, he had acquired a special and impressive technique, in which there remained traces of the Oscar Wilde influence. First of all he had to have a table against which to lean at moments when, apparently overcome by his own poetry, he grew weak and vaporous. He never stood on both feet but on one or the other, the legs slightly bent at the knees, so that while he read he moved with a faint swaying motion like that of an elephant in the zoo. His eyes were rolled upward and out, above his audience. At times, when overcome by some rapturous passage, the pupils would disappear entirely. And he had a special voice, with a deep organ quality which he never used on other occasions when his voice was rather lean and high-pitched.

Now, as Tommy pulled back the curtains, he took his place languorously beside poor Miss Minnie’s table of teakwood inlaid with mother-of-pearl. For a moment he seemed to go into a trance waiting for the audience to grow calm and Miss Flint to overcome the excitement which had taken possession of her at the idea of sitting beside Mr. Grasselli and hearing Mr. Salmon read his poems all at the same time. Then clearing his throat he began:

Oh, Venus, born of hot and languorous seas,
Creature of breasts and buttocks and dimpled thighs

At the second line Mr. Grasselli began to feel nervous. Something about Mr. Salmon's poem, recited in the genteel surroundings of poor Miss Minnie's drawing room, seemed to him indecent. And the words ... they were words which Mr. Grasselli had never used, words indeed which he had never heard spoken before. He knew all the female charms well enough but by other more vulgar words which would have offended him much less than the words Mr. Salmon used because he was accustomed to them. By the middle of the poem he began stealing glances to right and to left to see how the ladies were taking it. The faces of Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty were perfectly blank and filled with that look of awe which they both felt at any demonstration of literacy. On the angular, sagging face of Miss Flint there was a look of rapture as if Mr. Salmon's ode had been written to herself instead of Venus Anadyomene. It made Mr. Grasselli suddenly suspect the authenticity of that atmosphere of gentility which made him feel so ill at ease. By the tenth line Mr. Grasselli alias Monk Maguire was blushing and when it was finished he looked quickly over his shoulder at Sarah Jane, reproachfully, as if she herself had sat in the nude for this effort of Mr. Salmon.

There was a faint patter of applause to which the shocked Mr. Grasselli contributed nothing as a way of showing his disapproval. Then Mr. Salmon, after a bow, cleared his throat again and announced, "The next verse was written a great many years ago when I lived in Eighth Street. Some of you never knew Greenwich Village when it was the American

Parnassus. Some of you are not old enough to have known it. I hope my few lines will give you an impression of what it was like during those Golden Days. The poem is called, 'The Tea Shop Under the El.' It is written in free verse."

He began:

Beneath the El obscured by the grim shadow of a prison,
Nymphs and fauns disported by the light of ancient candles
on tables of ebony and lacquer red
Venus, enshrined, gave blessing to the revels
Unseen, reclining on her bed of clouds....

As he read, recognition slowly dawned on Mr. Grasselli. The second poem like the first was filled with references to the more unmentionable parts of female anatomy, still designated by those refined words which Mr. Grasselli found so offensive; but this time Mr. Grasselli was less shocked than transported to the realm of wonder because before Mr. Salmon was half through the reading, Mr. Grasselli recognized the background of the poem. He knew that little tearoom beneath the El. It was the Tinker Bell Tea Shoppe and he figured out that he knew it at about the same time Mr. Salmon had written the poem, and his wonder was born of the fact that to Mr. Salmon it had looked so completely different from the way it had appeared to himself. He knew it very well because he had begun his career in a small room just above it where he established a flourishing business in cocaine and heroin, and try as he would, he could never remember having seen any of the nymphs and fauns Mr. Salmon wrote about going in or out of the tearoom doors. The only nymphs he had ever seen frequenting the joint were rather scrawny middle-aged spinsters wearing batik blouses

and a great deal of art jewelry; and as for the fauns, well, what Mr. Grasselli thought of them was better left unsaid.

At the close of the poem Sarah Jane seemed suddenly to be overcome by an attack made up of equal parts of coughing and sneezing and ran from the room. Maggie looked after her severely and then after a moment's pause Mr. Salmon said, "The next poem belongs to an earlier period. Indeed, this recital might almost be called retrospective, as I have gone backwards, you might say, to my origins. This little bit of verse was written long ago at a time when life was beautiful and easy and New York was a place full of kindliness and gentility and talent. Golden days they were, when I first came to that New York out of the Middle West. The verse is called The Open Road.' "

Again he cleared his throat and began:

Oh, to be out on the open road,
When the sun is up and the dew is wet.

It was, in fact, the poem which had been Mr. Salmon's greatest early success and long ago in the New York of the Golden Days it had been printed on postcards and souvenir calendars, the glorification of nature written by a poet who never left the city if he could help it and had never walked a step when it was possible to be transported. Mr. Grasselli liked this one better than the others and listened attentively, but the sense he got from it was scarcely the sense which the poet intended. The picture Mr. Grasselli had in his mind's eye was of a troupe of Bronx debutantes dressed in knickerbockers, silk stockings and high heels, hiking up the Hudson to Bear Mountain.

This time he joined in the applause. The sentiment of "The Open Road" struck him especially strongly after being shut up for a month at Mrs. Lefferty's with the possibility ahead of him of several years at Atlanta, if "Mr. Hirsh" happened to be wrong in his judgment. "That's great," he said.

Mrs. Lefferty leaned forward and said, "Isn't he wonderful?" and Miss Flint echoed, "Wonderful! Wonderful!" and Mr. Salmon came toward them and sat down, beaming. After all nothing had changed in nearly forty years since he first read "The Open Road" as a boy of twenty in Mrs. Van Rensselaer's drawing room on Sixteenth Street.

Then Mr. Boldini excused himself to go and fetch Fanto, and Tommy set about preparing the stage for the magician's act. He pushed the screen a little nearer the front, shoved poor Miss Minnie's table to one side and again seated himself at the piano and began to play. Sarah Jane, who seemed to have recovered her coughing fit, returned, and took her place in the audience, but traces of the attack still remained for every time she looked at Mr. Salmon it began all over again.

The appearance of Mr. Boldini was heralded by the wild barking of Fanto as he and his master descended the stairs from Mr. Boldini's room where the poodle had been shut up to keep his nerves quiet. Fanto knew he was going to perform and now he could not restrain his delight. It took Mr. Boldini nearly five minutes before he could quiet him enough to begin. Then he gave the signal and Tommy stopped playing and Fanto and the Great Boldini made their entrance.

The entrance came as something of a surprise to everyone for even Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty, as often as they had seen him go through his repertoire of old-fashioned tricks, had never seen him in costume before. He had chosen to appear

as a Roman and was dressed in a suit of mail made of papier-mâché and painted bronze. Here and there the papier-mâché had given way beneath some ancient strain and cracked, leaving the bronze paint chipped and missing in spots. On his head he wore a helmet of pseudo-Roman design with a plume of black horsehair which fell to his shoulders and became confused with his own long, black, dyed hair. Beneath the coat of mail he wore a sort of kilt which left his bony knees exposed, and fastened about his throat and hanging down the back he wore a long cloak of faded purple pierced by a great many moth holes. One thing about the costume he had either failed to notice or been blind to: the armor had been made, in the classic Roman fashion, upon the model of a heroic warrior with all the muscles of massive trunk molded in high relief. Looking at it, one expected it to be accompanied by limbs of herculean proportions; instead, there emerged from the openings in the armor only Mr. Boldini's own skinny withered legs covered with black, coarse hair. The effect was that of a spider with a large body rearing into the air.

The sight, after the strain of Mr. Salmon's embarrassing words, was too much for Mr. Grasselli. He grew red in the face and choked and then snorted and went into a coughing fit like Sarah Jane. While he coughed and stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth, the Great Boldini waited with an expression of resignation on his face. Beside him Fanto wriggled and wagged his tail in impatience to show off before an audience. When Mr. Grasselli had recovered himself, Mr. Boldini in his spectral tragedian's voice enriched by a heavy Trieste accent said, "Ladies and Gentlemen: This evening I am going to exhibit to you a few tricks which I hope will hold your attention. One or two of them have defied the efforts of whole committees to understand. I regret

that I have not my troupe with me and that the stage is too small to employ all the apparatus which would be necessary to give you such an entertainment as I should feel worthy of the Great Boldini. However, we shall do our best. And now I take pleasure in introducing to you Fanto, the World's Wonder Dog."

At the sound of his name Fanto stood on his hind legs and made a bow. He did not bark because he was too well trained and he understood now that with Mr. Boldini all in costume, he was giving a real performance as he had done long ago on a stage in the days when, as a young dog, he had traveled over half the world with a whole troupe of fellow actors; he did not bark, but inwardly he was shaking with excitement and despite anything he could do a little whimpering sound came out of him from time to time. Once the bow was made, he scurried about fetching colored handkerchiefs and wands and other bits of apparatus of which Mr. Boldini had need. This he did with the expertness of an old actor, keeping one eye on the audience, quite aware that he was already having a success behind the back of his master. He heard the faint discreet murmur of Miss Flint saying, "Oh, the darling! Isn't he cute?" and gave a faint wag of his short tail in answer to the flattery. He heard the faint, suppressed chuckles of Mr. Grasselli, and he was aware of the silent steady love and admiration of Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie, sitting there very quiet, a little terrified as they always were by Mr. Boldini's tricks. He *knew* ... he and Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty had jokes together that Mr. Boldini, standing there dressed up in Roman costume, trying to attract *all* the attention, knew nothing about. Mr. Boldini didn't know about the way he helped Mrs. Lefferty make the beds or about the dumb-waiter trick. In

spite of his fourteen years, in spite of his rheumatism, Fanto felt young again and gay and important.

The Great Boldini went on with his tricks. There wasn't anything extraordinary about them. They were tricks which might impress Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty but Mr. Grasselli and Tommy and Sarah Jane had seen them all a hundred times, better done often enough, because now Mr. Boldini was getting old and his hands were not so sure any more and worst of all, in spite of everything, he was bored by his own tricks. He didn't sweep cages full of birds out of the air or saw young women in two before your very eyes. He contented himself with the tricks he passed off at the children's parties, simple ones in which he produced odd objects out of the plumed Roman helmet and from beneath the flowing moth-eaten cloak, and slowly as he worked, he became aware that a terrible thing was happening, the same terrible thing which happened nearly always nowadays when he and Fanto appeared together at children's parties. Fanto, his "stooge," was stealing the show. His audience was more interested in Fanto than in the Great Boldini; and worst of all, as Mr. Boldini noticed from the corner of his eye, Fanto knew it and was showing off. He was insufferable, wagging his tail and whimpering and looking to the audience for approbation. Pangs of jealousy attacked the Great Boldini, and the more Miss Flint murmured and the more Mr. Grasselli chuckled, the deeper did the pangs gnaw into Mr. Boldini's heart. He knew that he was not holding his audience and he suspected, rightly, that behind his back Fanto was behaving like an elderly female star, grimacing and sitting up and turning somersaults in order to kill the performance of his master. And slowly the jealousy transformed itself into fury. He knew what he would do. He would punish Fanto. The new and

wonderful tricks he had been rehearsing depended more upon Fanto than upon himself, and Fanto, whimpering and impatient, was longing for the moment when he might show off. Desperately Mr. Boldini kept trying to annex to himself the success Fanto was having behind his back. Inwardly furious, he would turn suddenly and pat Fanto's head and murmur with bitter enthusiasm, loud enough for his audience to hear, "Good old fellow!" and "Clever dog!" He would give the poodle a patronizing glance over his shoulder and then chuckle, with bitter artificiality, as much as to say, "Haven't I trained him well? Isn't he a clever dog?" And all the time he was longing to pinch the incorrigible Fanto's ear or give him a good smack to put him in his place.

Behind the frozen smile he turned on the poodle, he came to a decision. He thought, "Very well, young man, I'll fix you! We won't do the new tricks at all!" And so instead of withdrawing for a moment to put Fanto into a travesty of his own Roman costume for the new tricks, he went suddenly into the goldfish trick, the breath-taker with which he always finished his act.

Fanto knew the goldfish trick! He knew it was the end of the act. Vaguely he suspected that he had been betrayed. For a moment, in astonishment, he stopped wriggling with joy and then suddenly sat up on his haunches, very grave, all his joy gone, a chastened and well-behaved dog. It was as if he said, "I'll be good, if you'll only let me do the new tricks." Mr. Boldini made a professional tour of the audience holding out the purple cape to show that he concealed nothing beneath it and while he passed before Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty and Mr. Grasselli and Miss Flint (who was a little upset by the proximity of Mr. Boldini in so scanty a costume) Fanto

remained on his haunches, still as a statue. He did not move a muscle while Mr. Boldini returned to the stage, faced his audience and impressively paused for a moment before producing a bowl of live goldfish out of the air itself. Then Fanto acted. With a swift jerk of his teeth he snatched the Great Boldini's moth-eaten Roman cloak and from beneath it fell the bowl of goldfish, water and all, on poor Miss Minnie's Axminster carpet. The score was even!

For a moment there was a dreadful silence while the startled goldfish attempted to get their bearings and swim away over poor Miss Minnie's faded carpet; then came the explosion. The sight of the goldfish was one too much for Mr. Grasselli. He began to laugh softly at first and then louder and louder, and at the first chuckle Tommy and Sarah Jane were with him. Only Miss Flint and Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty gave forth sounds of disappointment and sympathy. They had been waiting for this last great coup, sitting forward on the edge of their chairs. They had really been working with Mr. Boldini all the time, straining every nerve and muscle to make certain that this wonderful trick would come off properly before Mr. Grasselli; and now everything was ruined. Maggie leaned over to Sarah Jane and in a fierce whisper said, "Shut your face before I give you a good slap." And Mrs. Lefferty dashed for a cloth to rescue the struggling goldfish and save poor Miss Minnie's carpet. There on the front of the stage beside a Great Boldini who was shattered, stood Fanto on his hind legs barking joyously and taking his bow.

Nothing could check the laughter. Mr. Grasselli shook in a terrifying way, clapping his hands together at the same time to create an applause which was worse than if he had kept

silent because each clap was patronizing. Sarah Jane began to grow red in the face and choke again. Tommy howled. Maggie and Miss Flint glared at the offenders but nothing could stop the awful mirth. It was all the more terrible because they were laughing not merely at Fanto and Mr. Boldini's mishap; it was more profound and devastating than that. It was the New York of 1935 laughing at the New York of poor Miss Minnie, of Miss Flint and Mr. Salmon and Mr. Boldini, laughing at poor Miss Minnie's furniture and Miss Flint's clothes and stories of the families for whom she had once worked, at Mr. Salmon's poems and old Mr. Van Diver's long and placid devotion to poor Miss Minnie, at poor Mr. Boldini's old-fashioned tricks and the mere idea that a magician could ever have interested large and childlike audiences. If Mr. Boldini's tricks had been the most impressive in the world Mr. Grasselli and Sarah Jane and Tommy would still have laughed in the same uncontrollable way because the laughter was an accumulation, heroic in proportion, that came from days and weeks of suppression. And the worst was that everyone in the room, even Maggie, understood this dimly.

Mr. Boldini dashed suddenly from the stage but Fanto lingered for a moment longer to savor to the full his triumph and success.

"That's great," said Mr. Grasselli, gasping for breath, "that's one of the best acts I ever seen."

"It wasn't meant to be like that. It's a wonderful trick," said Miss Flint with a frozen dignity. "Fanto is a naughty dog. I can't imagine what got into him."

When the wreckage had been cleared and the panting goldfish rescued, they waited for Mr. Boldini before

beginning “A Few Songs by Ryan and Lefferty.” They waited for five minutes and then ten and then fifteen and then Mr. Grasselli had some more brandy and at last Mrs. Lefferty rose and said, “Maybe I’d better see what is the matter,” and left to go up to Mr. Boldini’s room.

Upstairs she knocked once and then twice but there was no response and, alarmed, thinking that Mr. Boldini in his humiliation might have done something terrible, she pushed open the door. There was no light in the room but by the light from the hall she saw that Mr. Boldini, still in his papier-mâché armor, was lying on the bed. In his basket in the corner Fanto lay curled up, looking up at her, the very picture of dejection. His ears drooped and his large brown eyes regarded Mrs. Lefferty mournfully. She knew that Mr. Boldini had not struck him, but she knew that Fanto and his master had had a quarrel and she could tell from Fanto’s dejected expression that accusations had been hurled at him. It was difficult to say which figure was the more tragic—Mr. Boldini in his Roman armor or poor Fanto shrinking with shame in his basket. Mr. Boldini did not even turn his head when she entered and for a moment she thought he might be dead, but when she touched his shoulder he turned his mournful bloodhound face toward her and she saw that there were tears in his eyes.

“Sure,” she said, patting his shoulder, “it was nothing at all. It was a great success. Mr. Grasselli said he never seen such a funny act.”

At this Mr. Boldini gave a great sigh and a groan and turned his face to the wall.

“They’re waiting for you.... Tommy and Sarah Jane ... to begin their act.”

At this Mr. Boldini gave a great snort of anger. Mr. Grasselli and Tommy and Sarah Jane had laughed. He could still hear the awful sound of their laughing.

"No," he said, "I couldn't go down. I couldn't face them."

"Sure, and you'll spoil all the fun."

"No. Never again ... never again." Tears began to come out of the large eyes.

"You're taking it too hard. Maybe some brandy would make you feel better."

Mr. Boldini made no response. Mrs. Lefferty said, "Sure, I'll bring you some brandy and they can begin the act and then you can come down."

She fetched a fresh bottle of brandy and a glass and left them on the table by his side and then returned to the drawing room.

"I guess we'd better go on with the program," she said. "He's all broken up. Maybe he'll come down later."

So Tommy went to the piano and Sarah Jane retired to the dining room to make ready.

It wasn't easy. Both of them were aware of that. Now that the uproarious mirth over Mr. Boldini was finished, there was a reaction, a lassitude, a faint weariness on the part of the audience, of which Tommy and Sarah Jane and even Mr. Grasselli were aware. A part of their public—Miss Flint and Mr. Salmon and Maggie—were definitely hostile, because they all knew somehow that it wasn't only Mr. Boldini but themselves as well who had roused the outburst of mirth. It was as if they sat there like a first night audience, saying, "Come on. Show us, if you're so good!" The laughter had

divided the audience into two camps—the party of 1935 and the party of 1890.

Mr. Grasselli had another brandy and then Sarah Jane signaled that she was ready and Tommy began to play. Turning to the audience he said, “This one is called ‘Tit for Tat.’ ”

Nobody had ever heard one of Tommy’s songs through to the end and nobody had ever heard Sarah Jane sing one of them. The most that any of the audience had ever been permitted was a snatch or two of song drifting upstairs from behind the closed doors of the drawing room where the two “artists” worked in the late afternoons. Some of the snatches had sounded good and some of them had sounded merely detached and a little confused. Now for the first time they presented the whole, and astonishingly, it was good. Even the 1890 faction admitted it grudgingly.

Sarah Jane had put on a black evening dress, cut very simply and very low, and she wore about her throat, tied carelessly, an immense scarf of plain white silk. The costume made her appear slimmer than she really was yet it concealed none of the generous exciting curves of her heroic figure and it threw the attention at once to her face, a part of her which, despite its beauty, was usually a little overlooked by the public in its interest in other features of Sarah Jane. For the first time Mr. Grasselli thought, “The girl’s got a face. She ain’t just all body. She ain’t just simply a show girl.” As she leaned against the end of poor Miss Minnie’s old square piano, waiting to sing, Mr. Grasselli sat a little further forward in his chair. Sarah Jane noticed this. It was what she had been waiting for. Now she had to produce the goods and

dazzle him. Clearing her throat and gritting her teeth she prepared to give him the works.

And when she began to sing, Mr. Grasselli discovered that Sarah Jane not only had a face, she also had a voice. It wasn't exactly a voice for grand opera, although the volume would have filled any vast auditorium, but it was a voice that did something to you. Mr. Grasselli, at least, was aware that it did something to him. It was low and deep and rich and somebody—it must have been Tommy—had taught her how to use it. She did not shake her shoulders and get hot or do any hi-de-ho. She just stood perfectly still, and allowed her voice and singing to convey how she felt about the music, and her voice made the spine of Mr. Grasselli tingle agreeably. And it was good music too. It was the first time that Mr. Grasselli had ever really listened to Tommy's music, the first time he had really seen that there was something in it. "Tit for Tat" was a swell song. The rhythm of it not only penetrated the critical consciousness of Mr. Grasselli, who might have been expected to understand such things, but Maggie felt it, grudgingly for she was still out of temper with Sarah Jane, and Mrs. Lefferty and even old Mr. Van Diver who at the second chorus began to hum softly off the key to himself. As for Miss Flint, she appeared to be enchanted by the song and began to sway a little in sympathy, to tap the tip of her slipper on the floor and set her oriental earrings to jangling.

When Sarah Jane reached the end, there was a burst of applause and she noticed that Mr. Grasselli was applauding loudly and was quite red in the face, although it was impossible to tell whether this had been caused by enthusiasm or by brandy.

Then they sang another called “Here We Are in Love,” and put a great deal of feeling into it and Mr. Grasselli sat still further forward in his chair and about the middle of the song it occurred to him that he didn’t know Sarah Jane at all. She wasn’t just “Big Sal” that he’d known about Broadway for five or six years, a big good-looking show girl who was always getting into some kind of scrape. She wasn’t dumb; she couldn’t be dumb and sing like that. You had to have brains and feeling to sing like that. Sarah Jane had never been the type that appealed to him. He had never liked those big, handsome women; he preferred little cuddly blond ones; but now suddenly Sarah Jane began to appeal to him. He could feel the appeal stealing over him slowly, creeping outward from his head and his imagination to the very ends of his big ungainly body. Sarah Jane had changed. He was sure of that, but he did not know why she had changed. He did not understand that for the first time in her life, Sarah Jane was in love, richly, deeply, violently in love and when she fell in love she did it in a big violent way as she did everything else. She wasn’t only doing her best for herself; she was working to put over Tommy’s songs as well. In her heart, although she wanted a “break” she didn’t really care about herself. She was straining every nerve for Tommy’s sake.

Then after the second song she retired to the dining room and there was another wait of five minutes, and then suddenly she appeared between the dining room curtains, a Sarah Jane none of them but Tommy and Maggie had ever seen before because she was made up as a siren, the way she had been the day she came downstairs and frightened Tommy into an idea. Her face was dead white and her eyebrows appeared to have risen in astonishment or terror of something she had seen and then remained there high on her forehead

without coming down again. The lashes, veiling her half-closed eyes, seemed to be at least an inch long and very thick, and the mouth, created by nature full and voluptuous, had been blocked out and recreated into a mouth which promised a perverse voluptuousness beyond even the imagination of Mr. Grasselli. It was a Sarah Jane which made Maggie think that one of them had gone a little crazy and that nobody who looked like that could possibly be "a good girl." The sight of her made the room very still until she again leaned against the end of the old square piano, and Tommy said, "This one is called, 'I'm Nada McSweeney, the Glamour Girl.' " And then the silence was broken by a laugh, a loud belly laugh from Mr. Grasselli who had seen the point.

The song itself was funny. Tommy had hit it and in the lyric he told the story of Mary McSweeney who had been "discovered" and put into pictures, and how they blocked out her mouth and stuck on eyelashes and changed eyebrows and taught her to speak in a bass voice, and altered her figure and changed her name to Nada, until her own mother didn't know her and wouldn't let her in the house. And as she sang Sarah Jane changed the pitch of her voice, ever so little now and then, lifted an eyebrow, or read a line with a faint accent. The gestures, the intonations were nothing at all, the merest outlines, but so skillfully were they done that in turn she created Garbo and Marlene Dietrich and Katharine Hepburn and Myrna Loy and a half-dozen others so that everyone in the room except Mrs. Lefferty was pleased; even old Mr. Van Diver who only knew them from his movie magazines, got exactly what she was doing and began to laugh. Mr. Grasselli laughed hardest of all, slapping his thick knees with his big red hands.

She sang:

I'm Garbo, I'm Dietrich, I'm Hepburn, I'm Loy.

She had won her audience, even the hostile audience of the nineties. When she had finished there was a lot of applause and Mr. Grasselli kept saying, "That's great.... Say, I'd never have thought it. Say, that's great!" Only Mrs. Lefferty seemed not quite enthusiastic. She applauded a little feebly as if something in Sarah Jane's behavior troubled her.

Led by Mr. Grasselli they called for more but there wasn't any more, because, as Sarah Jane said, "That's all we've got ready. Tommy's got a lot more songs but I haven't got them worked up."

"Sing them over again," said Mr. Grasselli; so Sarah Jane sang them all over again, but this time differently, imitating a different star with each verse, and Mr. Grasselli laughed so hard that Mrs. Lefferty became alarmed for fear he might injure himself. But behind his laughter he was *seeing* Sarah Jane very clearly. He had begun to discover what it was Sarah Jane had ... that special something which he had never been able to define or clarify—Sarah Jane, Mr. Grasselli saw in a moment of revelation, was a great comedienne ... a better comedienne than she was a singer; and she was a pretty good singer too. The trouble was that nobody had ever before been able to see beyond her beauty and her famous figure. They'd never let her do anything but show the body that nature, lavish and benevolent, had given her, never suspecting that Sarah Jane had other assets, more lasting, which might carry her to fame and keep her going long after her body had

grown too fat and fan dancers were as old-fashioned and funny as Mr. Boldini's tricks.

When she had gone through the songs twice, Sarah Jane had to stop for breath and everybody had a drink and talked about how they couldn't believe Tommy's songs were so good and Sarah Jane could sing like that, and every now and then Mr. Grasselli would smite his thigh and say, "Yeah, that was great! Say, I never guessed you had it in you." And they all felt so well that Mrs. Lefferty decided to go upstairs and fetch Mr. Boldini. Sarah Jane said that if he'd come down, she'd sing the songs all over again.

So again Mrs. Lefferty opened the door of Mr. Boldini's room when he failed to answer her knock, and again she found him lying in his armor with his face to the wall, only this time when she shook his shoulder he didn't respond at all. Terrified, she turned him over and discovered that he was still breathing. He wasn't dead at all. The air was filled with the fragrance of "the old gentleman's" brandy, and when Mrs. Lefferty looked at the bottle she saw that he had drunk up the whole fifteen dollars' worth. Fanto wasn't in his basket at all. He was lying curled up at the foot of the bed, but his eyes were still mournful and filled with shame.

So Mrs. Lefferty with a good deal of effort got the armor off and put Mr. Boldini beneath the sheets and opened the window and as she left, she thought, "No, I couldn't turn him out. What would become of him?"

Downstairs she said, "Mr. Boldini can't come down. He's not feeling so well."

The statement dampened the gayety and Miss Flint said, "It isn't serious, is it?"

"No," said Mrs. Lefferty. "He'll be all right in the morning. What about a game of rummy?"

So they played one game of rummy which Mr. Grasselli lost because Sarah Jane, still made up as a glamour girl, was there to keep an eye on him. It went to Mr. Salmon who had won only two or three games since Mr. Grasselli had entered the contest. Then Mrs. Lefferty produced supper and a miraculous bottle of "the old gentleman's" champagne but it wasn't any good because Mrs. Lefferty, who didn't know about champagne, had left it in the cellar for too long. It had been there for nearly thirty years and it wasn't champagne any longer. So everyone had beer instead and enjoyed it just as much and at last about two in the morning they went upstairs and Mrs. Lefferty turned out the lights.

At the bottom of the stairs Mrs. Lefferty called to Sarah Jane and Sarah Jane waited for her. She had been aware that something was troubling Mrs. Lefferty, that Mrs. Lefferty was the only one of her public whom she had not succeeded in winning, and she suspected that now she was to find out the reason. Mrs. Lefferty looked a little saddened and said, "That wasn't very kind of you."

"What wasn't kind?" asked Sarah Jane.

"What you did to Katharine Hepburn."

"What did I do?"

"You made fun of her. She isn't like that. She's *real*. She's just a nice, wholesome, honest girl. She's one of my favorites."

"All right," said Sarah Jane, "the next time I'll make her real."

She allowed Mrs. Lefferty to go up the stairs ahead of her. The old lady felt better now, and she fell to thinking what a nice evening it had been save for Mr. Boldini's mishap. In the end everything was turning out for the best what with Tommy and Sarah Jane getting on together again and staying home evenings to work on the songs. Maybe it was all going to come out all right after all. There was only one cloud over her happiness and that was the two thousand dollars that came from Mr. Grasselli. Sarah Jane said not to worry about that, but she couldn't take it as easily as Sarah Jane took it. She wasn't "modern" like Sarah Jane. A debt was a debt and she could not think how she was ever going to save enough to pay him back nor how she was going to manage things when the next payments came due. It hadn't really helped at all. It had only made things worse.

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After Mrs. Lefferty had disappeared around the curve of the stairway Sarah Jane knocked on Tommy's door and he thrust out his head. He looked suddenly white and tired and collapsed again and Sarah Jane, to cheer him up, said, "Well, we got over big with Monk."

But Tommy was carrying the weight of five years of disappointment and disillusionment. He looked at her and said, "So what?" and that made Sarah Jane angry.

"What's the matter with you? Haven't you got any guts?"

"I don't believe the moon is made of green cheese."

"Trying to help you is like trying to lift the Empire State with one hand."

Then Tommy lost his temper. "Nobody asked you to help me," he said, and closed the door, leaving her standing alone in the hall, all her excitement and pleasure gone. The old Tommy had vanished right there before her eyes, and she knew that he wouldn't come back again for days, not until that mood of defeat and despair left him. She thought, "I've got to make him talk and tell me everything. He won't be any good until he gets that load off his mind, whatever it is. He's done something he's awful ashamed of."

In his own room, Mr. Grasselli got into a bathrobe and as he opened the door to go for his bath he discovered Miss Flint waiting in the hallway outside. He said, "Oh, hello!" with exaggerated casualness for he was not at all sure what she wanted or what she might do. At sight of him Miss Flint giggled and said, "I've got a surprise for you."

"What d'you mean, a surprise?"

She shook her finger at him. “I know who you really are.”

Mr. Grasselli didn’t like this. He looked at her for a moment and then said, “Well, who am I?” and Miss Flint opened her beaded bag (one of those she had never been able to sell at the Women’s Exchange) and pulled out a clipping from a newspaper.

“Look,” she said, “I found it in the kitchen.”

It was a picture of the missing Monk Maguire but how she had ever divined that Monk Maguire and Mr. Grasselli were one and the same man, Mr. Grasselli was unable to discover. It was one of the usual pictures, perhaps a little more generous than most, for it showed about a quarter of his face with his bad eye.

“I knew by the eyes,” she said in a voice filled with romantic overtones. Then she put her finger to her lips and the long earrings jangled. “But I won’t tell,” she said. “Nobody could drag it from me. I can keep a secret.” And she left him suddenly and went on upstairs, still bridling and giggling, to the tiny room which had once been poor Miss Minnie’s linen closet. In bewilderment, Mr. Grasselli stood there until she was partway up the stairway, long enough to see her lean over the rail, shake her earrings at him once more, put her finger to her lips and say, “Mum’s the word.”

Then she vanished, shaking with romantic excitement. She was feeling young again and almost up to date. She knew a gangster. Better than that, she knew him almost intimately. It never occurred to her that she had not yet caught up with the times and that before long gangsters would be as old-fashioned as poor Miss Minnie’s furniture.

Inside the bathroom Mr. Grasselli swore loudly and eloquently while he waited for the water to fill the tub. Now,

he knew, he would have to clear out, for his instinct, if not his experience, told him that Miss Flint, despite all her breathless promises, could never keep a secret like that. She could never resist throwing dark hints to the others in the house, to the people at the Women's Exchange. Luckily she never saw anyone else. Apparently she knew no one else. Mr. Grasselli was in a fury because it had happened just at the moment when he was becoming reconciled to life at Mrs. Lefferty's, and now he would have to find a new hiding place where he could still keep an eye on his business and make his presence felt by his subordinates. And try as he would, he could think of no place so secure as Mrs. Lefferty's—until Miss Flint had made her discovery.

When he had finished his bath, he got into bed, turned on the radio and took up the papers to read about himself and look again at the photographs of hats and elbows and backs. And while he read and looked, he listened to the radio, turning from one station to another, in order to get one torch singer after another, for "the old gentleman's" brandy had worn off a bit now and the discovery of Miss Flint had helped to sober him, and he wanted to see whether Sarah Jane was as good as he thought she was or whether it had only been the brandy. He listened to one torch singer after another until he had heard four and then he decided that he was right. Sarah Jane was better than any of them and Tommy's music was a lot better than most of the stuff that was coming out of the air from over half the United States into his room at Mrs. Lefferty's. And suddenly Mr. Grasselli's great idea came to him.

Once the inspiration had lost its novelty he was surprised that he hadn't thought of it before. It made him decide to stay

on at Mrs. Lefferty's despite even the peril of Miss Flint. It was a lucky idea, for the next morning when "Mr. Hirsh" appeared he brought the news that the trial had been adjourned for six weeks since the defendant couldn't be located and that meant that Mr. Grasselli would have to remain in hiding until "Mr. Hirsh" felt the case was watertight and the time ripe for acquittal. With the great idea under way, Mr. Grasselli wouldn't have to be bored any longer.

He was a man of great energy and, like all people of vitality, he had to be doing things, creating new projects and realizing new plans. In a way that had been the secret of his great success. He had enough energy to do ten times the work of his competitors, and if one thing didn't succeed at once he always had ready a half-dozen other projects. He was never forced, like his competitors, to wait around and think up something new or to follow where others had blazed the way. Mr. Grasselli, in the realm of corruption, had always been a pioneer and an innovator; in that lay the source of much of his pride. Backed by the merest suggestion of education and diverted in the proper direction, his energy and ingenuity might have carried him to great heights in another world. That they had always been turned in the wrong direction was not precisely his fault; he was not to blame, for example, because he had been brought up in miserable poverty in slums where it was impossible for any boy to take the right path; nor was it his fault that his father had spent half his life in prison and his mother had been a drunkard. Mr. Grasselli, it might have been said, had done the best he could with his talents considering his background, his education and the examples which surrounded him. He had accomplished a number of things, not much more corrupt than the things which got by as honest undertakings in the world of "big business." He had established a watertight drug ring and made a fortune out of bootlegging and established three of the best speakeasies in existence, one which had attracted racketeers, another which had had the most fashionable clientele in town and a third, which had done the biggest business of all, designed just for dull people, who wanted to

feel at the same time safe and reckless. And he had organized and given his “protection” to the laundry business and the undertaking trade in the suburbs surrounding New York, a bit of pioneering which brought him in a large income. He was always full of plans and looking for new fields to conquer, and his boredom at Mrs. Lefferty’s had come about largely from the fact that the atmosphere of the place and the necessity of his keeping in hiding made it impossible to carry out any of these projects. It was, he had discovered long ago, no use to send lieutenants to arrange things; they lacked his presence and above all else the prestige of his name, which was worth a great deal of money, and they never planned things in a big way; they were likely in their small-mindedness to become absorbed in details and lose the forest for the trees. “Mr. Hirsh” was the only man with talents, which in the matter of seeing things in a large way, he felt approached his own, and “Mr. Hirsh” could scarcely be expected to take over his business. He had a large clientele of his own and he was kept pretty busy simply with keeping Mr. Grasselli himself out of jail.

The next day neither Mr. Boldini nor Mr. Grasselli left their rooms. When Mrs. Lefferty brought coffee for Mr. Boldini, he only groaned in response to her cheery "good morning." She left him alone and took Fanto for a walk and when she returned and went up at the usual hour to do Mr. Grasselli's room, he told her not to come back until three o'clock and that he wanted no lunch.

This was a disappointment to Sarah Jane for she had meant to take him aside and press the question of Tommy's songs. He had, she knew, plenty of connections and plenty of influence along Broadway. He could get them sung and even published. Now that she had got in the small end of the wedge, she had no intention of giving up, and she was afraid that a good deal of Mr. Grasselli's enthusiasm had been alcoholic and that once it was passed he would cool off a little, and need further prodding. It was not the first time that a gentleman after four or five drinks had told Sarah Jane she was a great artist.

And then in the afternoon just as she and Tommy had begun to work in the drawing room, Mrs. Lefferty appeared with the news that Mr. Grasselli would like to talk business with her in his bedroom.

At the announcement, Tommy stopped playing the piano and said, "Why his bedroom?"

"Well, I guess he ain't feelin' so well," said Mrs. Lefferty.

"He's got a nerve," said Tommy.

"Leave it to me," said Sarah Jane. "I can take care of myself."

"Make him come down here."

Sarah Jane faced him across the piano. "Listen!" she said, "I've been passing up breaks for years and this one I'm not gonna pass up. Take it or leave it."

"All right," said Tommy, "leave me out of the whole thing."

"Nuts!" said Sarah Jane and left the room.

She found Mr. Grasselli in his red dressing gown propped up in bed surrounded by bicarbonate of soda, the *Daily Mirror*, *Variety*, and a lot of legal papers which "Mr. Hirsh" had just left. As Sarah Jane entered, he turned off the radio and said, "Shut the door."

"No," said Sarah Jane.

"Why not?"

"On account of...."

"On account of what?"

"On account of the old girls wouldn't like it."

She sat down and Mr. Grasselli said, "Well, I'm gonna become a permanent, I guess, unless Nutsy Flint chases me out."

"Why? What's she done?"

"Well, in the first place, she goes around heaving and panting, and in the second place she's found out who I am."

"How?"

"By the pictures in the paper."

"How could she tell by them?"

"I don't know. I guess it must have been my cockeye."

"Never mind, I'll fix her."

"How?"

“I’ll tell her that if she breathes a word they’ll take her for a ride.”

“Okay. I’ve got an idea.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” He paused to light one of his expensive Havana cigars. “Boardinghouses is kinda out of date.”

“I’ll say they are.”

“My givin’ money to the old girls ain’t gonna save the place. It’s got to be put on a payin’ basis.”

“Yeah,” said Sarah Jane. “How?”

“Well. What about a night club?”

“Are you crazy? Can you imagine Ma and Mrs. Lefferty runnin’ a night club?”

“They wouldn’t run it.”

“Who would?”

“I would. I gotta stay shut up here at least another six weeks, and I gotta have something to amuse me.”

“It’ll take you six weeks to get it goin’.”

“Not me. I’ve got a couple of guys that’ll make all the changes it needs in ten days. Anyway, that’s not so tough. I don’t plan to make a lot of changes.”

“What are you gonna do?”

Mr. Grasselli regarded his cigar thoughtfully and then looked at Sarah Jane for a moment without speaking. She did not like the look; she had seen it before too many times. It meant that Mr. Grasselli was interested in her, and that his interest was not, as she had hoped, confined entirely to her art.

“Well,” he said, “I plan to keep it pretty much as it is. I’d kinda like to get the atmosphere we had last night ... you know, kind of old-fashioned and cozy, a sort of homelike night club.”

“Yeah,” said Sarah Jane, “if you can make a homelike night club I’ll go right to Macy’s tomorrow.”

“I plan to keep a lot of the furniture and the curtains and things like that so as not to lose the atmosphere.” Mr. Grasselli began to feel the enthusiasm of an artist and make gestures like a window-draper. “And then I’ve thought of a good name, too.” He looked at Sarah Jane with pride.

“What?”

“The Golden Nineties! It ain’t exactly original. It was Mr. Salmon’s poems that give me the idea. I think the time’s just ripe for something like that to go in a big way.”

“The place ain’t big enough.”

“Yeah, that’s just it. I plan to keep it small and exclusive, see? And expensive. And have specialties to eat ... make it an eating place where you get good food, not just one of these dumps where you pay a lot of dough for bad liquor and garbage. I wanta make it small and classy, see? With just a coupla acts to amuse the clients.”

“What, for instance?”

“Well, you and Tommy doin’ four or five songs.” He looked at her again in that interested way which she didn’t like. “What d’you think of the idea?”

“It sounds kinda nuts to me.”

“Who are the tenants next door?”

“There’s a box factory on one side and a couple of budding architects on the other.”

“Well, I guess they won’t complain, then. They won’t be in nights. Yeah, I’d like to put you and Tommy on and Mr. Boldini and his act.”

“Mr. Boldini?”

“Sure. Just the way he was. I never seen anything funnier. We could make the dog the star of the act and let Mr. Boldini play straight, see? Make them speeches just the way he does with that long face of his and then have the dog spoil his tricks every time.”

“You mean, make the Great Boldini into a stooge?”

“That’s it.”

“You’re crazy. You’d never get him to do that.”

“Not even if there was money in it?”

“I doubt it.”

“Your mother and Mrs. Lefferty would have to give me the basement and the first two floors. I can make a fortune for ’em quick. I don’t want no profits. This is just to amuse me, see?”

“Yeah,” said Sarah Jane. She saw clearly enough but she was trying to keep from showing her excitement. For the first time she was getting a break, and she was getting one for Tommy, if only it didn’t turn out the way it always did, the way those glances of Mr. Grasselli’s made her suspect it might.

“We’d just have specialties ... for dinner and for after the theayter.... Your old woman could superintend the kitchen ... you know, Irish stew and corned beef and cabbage, the way she makes ’em. I never tasted ’em as good anywhere.”

“I don’t know if the two old girls would do it.”

“Why not? I’ll get ’em out of the red in the first month.”

“Well, on account of they wouldn’t think it was respectful to Miss Minnie.”

“I get you. Well, tell ’em it would be a lot less respectful if all Miss Minnie’s stuff went at auction. What d’you think about it? A great little idea, ain’t it?”

“Sure.”

“We can have a lot of fun together ... especially you and me.”

“Don’t kid yourself about that,” said Sarah Jane.

“Now don’t get mad. I ain’t got any bets with anybody.”

“When d’you want to begin?”

“Tomorrow morning. I already talked about it to ‘Mr. Hirsh.’ He thinks it’s a great idea. He can get men in here to work in twenty-four hours. It’s up to you, see?”

“How?”

“You gotta bring the old girls around. I’ve got to have some fun or I gotta find a new boardinghouse. And you might ask Tommy to write a coupla ‘nineties’ numbers. I can kind of see you all dressed up, singing a coupla old sob songs.”

“Okay,” said Sarah Jane, “but don’t get any ideas about me mixed up in it.”

“Why not? I could do a lot for a girl like you.”

“Well, I mean it. I’m not kidding and I’m not mad either. Only it just won’t work so don’t let your mind dwell on it.” She rose to go and he said, “Okay, only tell me all about it some time. You’ve got a psychology that interests me.”

“Mebbe I will in a pinch,” said Sarah Jane.

“And don’t forget Miss Flint.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll scare the bejeezis out of her.”

She couldn't take the thing up at once with Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty because Maggie was asleep, resting her feet and Mrs. Lefferty was across the street seeing the new Hepburn picture. And she knew that Mr. Boldini wasn't in any mood to discuss becoming a "stooge" for his own dog; so she went downstairs and told Tommy all about it.

He listened while she told him everything and when she had finished, he said, "Well, what's the answer?"

"What d'you mean? What's the answer?"

"Well, what's he gettin' out of it?"

"Nothing.... I guess, but amusement."

Tommy looked at her sharply, masterfully, as if he were already married to her and beat her every time she looked at another man. It was a look that Sarah Jane loved. It made her feel all warm inside and every time he looked at her that way, she knew that his spirit was coming back and that he was a little nearer to being the old Tommy who as a little boy had always bullied her, and that was what Sarah Jane wanted more than anything else in the world. She wanted to be bullied by the man she was in love with.

"Why did he want to talk to you alone in his bedroom?"

"He's known me for a long time and I guess he thinks you're temperamental."

She wanted, out of vanity, to tell him that Mr. Grasselli had been making passes at her, but her instinct told her that this bit of information she could use to more advantage a little later on. Right now it might spoil everything. So she held her

tongue and said, “Listen, everything between me and him is on the level. He’s scared of me.”

“It had better be,” said Tommy.

“What about working up a coupla ‘nineties’ songs like he suggested? You know ... something comic, like ‘In the Baggage Coach Ahead,’ or ‘Down by the Wayside She Fell,’ only kind of modern with a good tune you could dance to.”

“I can’t turn out songs like sausages.”

“Well, I guess it won’t hurt your genius this once. It don’t matter if they’re lousy as long as they’re funny. We’ve got three or four *good* songs already. If you listen to me, they’ll be playing ‘Tit for Tat’ and ‘Here We Are in Love’ over every hick station all over the country before we’re open a week.”

“Okay.”

“You get to work on the songs, I’ll do the rest of it.”

“Okay.”

When she left Tommy she went down to the kitchen and went through the whole pile of *Daily Mirrors* that Maggie kept in the corner to start the fires with each morning. Near the bottom she found what she wanted. Then she poured herself a cup of tea from the kettle of black liquid Maggie kept stewing all day on the back of the stove and sat down at the kitchen table. In about five minutes, as she expected, Miss Flint appeared for her afternoon cup of tea, and from the way she entered, tossing her head a little, Sarah Jane knew that she was thinking about Mr. Grasselli.

“Oh, hello!” said Miss Flint, very flip and modern.

“Hello,” said Sarah Jane, “I thought I’d join you in a cup of tea.”

“That’s nice,” said Miss Flint, pouring herself a cup of Maggie’s witch’s broth.

“I just had an idea,” said Sarah Jane. “I wanted to talk to you about it.”

“Yes?” said Miss Flint, blowing on her tea.

“I want a coupla dresses ... old-fashioned ones ... you know, the kind they used to wear in the nineties. It’s for a number I’m building up. You’d know how to make them, wouldn’t you? I mean dresses with a lot of ruffles and flounces and lace and stuff, you know?”

“I guess I haven’t forgotten how,” said Miss Flint.

“Have you got any ideas?”

“Well, maybe I could remember some of the ones I made when I used to go out. I made some wonderful dresses for Mrs. Pierrepont Wycherly, when she was young—you know the one that lives now at the corner of Park Avenue and Sixty-first Street, the one that founded the home for stray cats.”

“Yeah,” said Sarah Jane. “Can you draw?”

“Yes ... a little bit.”

While she talked, Sarah Jane kept turning the pages of her newspaper, looking up now and then to watch Miss Flint, noticing how she had undergone two changes recently, one when Mr. Grasselli first came downstairs and she had ceased to be “followed,” and now a new one when she discovered who Mr. Grasselli really was.

“Well,” she said, “make me a picture of a coupla dresses. Only I want ’em funny. You know, everything a little bit exaggerated.”

“I don’t know whether I could do *that*,” said Miss Flint.

“Oh, yes you could, if you tried. I’ll help you. I’m good at that kind of thing.” Sarah Jane turned a page of her *Daily Mirror* casually and took another sip of black tea. “Isn’t it awful,” she said, “what goes on in New York?”

“Why?” said Miss Flint. “What’s going on?”

“Why, it’s in the papers every day. Just listen to this,” and Sarah Jane began to read:

Workers on a North River dredge early yesterday morning made a gruesome discovery when the shovel of the dredge dumped on to the deck a barrel containing the body of a man who had been tortured, strangled and his body placed in a barrel which was filled with liquid cement. Late this afternoon the body was identified as that of Buzzy Leibowitz alias Buzz the Whizz alias Little Hermy, a member of the notorious Valparaiso gang.

The impact of the barrel striking the deck cracked open the cement which encased the body, exposing it, naked and mutilated, but in a remarkable state of preservation owing to the cement which shut out all air.

Sarah Jane looked up from her paper. “Isn’t that terrible?” she asked.

“Horrible,” said Miss Flint in a weak voice.

“But listen to this!” said Sarah Jane.

An autopsy showed that the victim had been tortured before being killed. The head and feet were tied together and the body covered with small wounds. About the neck there still remained the wire with which the victim had been garroted.

“What is garroted?” asked Miss Flint in a whisper.

“I don’t know exactly,” said Sarah Jane, “but I think it means slow strangulation. Listen!”

It is believed by the police that the victim was murdered for squealing.

“Squealing,” said Sarah Jane, “means betraying somebody.” With one eye she regarded Miss Flint and saw that she had gone quite white. The rouge stood out on her cheeks in hard spots and her lips were trembling a little. She had forgotten all about her tea.

“Aren’t you going to finish your tea?” she asked.

“I don’t feel like it,” said Miss Flint in a whisper.

“Listen,” said Sarah Jane. And this time, although she regarded the newspaper again, she allowed her fancy to insert a line of her own creation:

It is believed [she read] that Little Hermy talked too much and let slip a clue by which the police were able to arrest two other members of the gang. The body was identified by certain scars and dental work. The gold teeth for which Little Hermy was famous, had been wrenched from his jaws, probably while he was still alive.

Miss Flint’s hand went quickly to her jaw, and little beads of perspiration came out on her forehead.

“Look,” said Sarah Jane. “Here’s the picture of the barrel.” She handed the paper across the table but Miss Flint recoiled from it.

“No ... no.... I couldn’t look at it,” she said, and then rising unsteadily, she added, “I think I’ll go upstairs and lie down. I don’t feel very well.”

“Don’t forget about the dresses,” Sarah Jane called after her. “I’ll be wanting them in about ten days.”

When she had gone Sarah Jane put the tea cups in the sink and thrust the paper into the stove. She thought, “Well, I guess that fixed her,” and went upstairs to waken Maggie and see if Mrs. Lefferty had come in yet from the Hepburn picture.

When she told the plan to her mother, Maggie looked at her with a fishy eye untainted by Sarah Jane's enthusiasm, and said, "No good will come of it, and how can I go into the night club business at my age?"

Mrs. Lefferty received the news with a more open mind, warmed, as always, by the romantic character of her imagination. While she listened, wonderful stories began to create themselves in her brain, dazzling stories of fame and fortune and success. She saw herself branching out into a chain of night clubs, making a fortune once a month, providing for her boarders a life full of splendor and luxury. She saw Sarah Jane becoming an opera star and Tommy becoming a famous composer. And at the end just before the picture faded, Tommy would drive up in a large motor with a cut glass light in the roof.

Seated about the kitchen table they talked until Maggie, glancing at the clock, said, "Sure, and while we go on gassin', it's gettin' later and later and there won't be any supper for the boarders we *have* got."

But Sarah Jane kept worrying her, even after Maggie had begun making the dinner, and at last she got them both to admit that they wouldn't mind taking a try at a night club except for what poor Miss Minnie would think. Somehow they couldn't see people drinking and cavorting in poor Miss Minnie's parlor.

But Sarah Jane had her answer ready. "I guess poor Miss Minnie would feel a lot worse if she saw her furniture being sold off at auction to anybody who came along."

Maggie turned indignantly from the kettle filled with boiling potatoes, “Sure, and who’s sellin’ poor Miss Minnie’s furniture to anybody who comes along?”

“What’s gonna happen?” asked Sarah Jane, “the next time you have to pay interest and taxes and things? What Mr. Grasselli said is true. Boardinghouses are out of date. There’s no money in them any more. You already owe him two thousand dollars. You can’t go on borrowing from him forever.”

“That’s right,” said Mrs. Lefferty. “I don’t know what we’re gonna do, Maggie. Poor Miss Minnie wouldn’t want her furniture sold up and us thrown out on the street.”

But Maggie had one more argument. “And what d’you think Father McGuffy would say if he heard I was runnin’ a shindig like that? Sure, I’d never be able to go to confession again.”

“Father McGuffy would tell you to do it,” said Sarah Jane.

“And what do you know about Father McGuffy ... you who haven’t set your foot in a church since God knows when?”

“I’ll tell Father McGuffy for you.”

“And I can tell him myself, thanks.”

“And will you do it, if Father McGuffy says it’s all right? Will you do it if I begin going again to Mass and confession?”

Maggie dropped her spoon in astonishment. “Sure,” she said, “if you’d begin goin’ to Mass again I’d be willing to walk along the Third Avenue El naked as the day I was born. It’s an awful thing for a mother to know that she’ll get to Paradise some day and that if she waited till the trump of doom she’d never see her child there.”

"All right. I'll go to Mass again."

"We'll see," said Maggie, but Sarah Jane knew she had won and she knew that she had Mrs. Lefferty on her side. There was a look in Mrs. Lefferty's blue eyes, the look that came into them whenever somebody offered her tickets in a raffle, or sold her worthless stock that was going to make her a millionaire. Sarah Jane knew that look. Mrs. Lefferty was making up stories. She knew that she had won, but she decided she'd take the trouble anyway to pay a visit to Father McGuffy and explain it to him, just in case her mother remained stubborn. It was hard to choose between the stubbornness of Maggie and the stubbornness of her daughter, but Sarah Jane knew that she had youth on the side of her own stubbornness. Sometimes when Maggie was tired and her feet hurt, she gave in.

She left them and went upstairs to Tommy, whom she found working on the new songs. He already had a melody for one of them, a melody that was haunted by intimations of Mr. Salmon's Golden Nineties but was at the same time catchy and a good dance tune. It wasn't, she knew, any use going to work on Mr. Boldini until he felt better. When she and Tommy had gone over the new songs a couple of times, she left him and went upstairs to report to Mr. Grasselli. She was proud of her progress. Everything was practically set. She only had to call on Father McGuffy and wait till Mr. Boldini had recovered and they could go ahead.

Mr. Grasselli thought they could go ahead anyway. He wrote out a telegram. "Take that out and send it to 'Mr. Hirsh,' " he said. "That'll get things started."

"It looks good, don't it?" said Sarah Jane.

“You’re a great little kid.” He gave her a pinch and was rewarded by a good slap.

“Lay off that,” she said. “This is on the level or I’m out of it.”

“Okay,” said Mr. Grasselli. “Did you fix Miss Flint?”

“I fixed her all right,” said Sarah Jane.

That night when Miss Flint came down to dinner she looked pale despite all the rouge she had put on, and once or twice she dropped her fork with a loud clatter. It was clear that he fascinated her more than ever but for some reason she appeared to have forgotten her coquetry. During the rummy game she became confused and played the wrong cards, and at eleven she complained of a “sick headache” and went upstairs to bed.

Before Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty had time to consider what had happened, three men appeared at the kitchen door and said they had come to make over the drying shed in the back yard. When Maggie asked indignantly who had sent them and what they were doing to the drying shed, they said that a “Mr. Hirsh” had sent them and that they were to look it over to see whether it could be made into an addition to the kitchen. She told them sharply that she didn’t need any more kitchen than she had already and she would have sent them away but for the sudden appearance of Sarah Jane who conducted them through the kitchen and showed them where they were to go to work. About an hour later a contractor arrived and Sarah Jane and Tommy took him through the first and second floors showing him what he was to do.

There weren’t many changes. Poor Miss Minnie’s Axminster carpet was to be taken up and a floor of hardwood put down in its place, and the opening between the dining room and the tunnel-like drawing room had to be widened. In the kitchen two more stoves and an extra sink had to be installed. “Mr. Hirsh” got in touch with the right men to buy small tables, chairs, linen and silver but there wasn’t much to buy because Mr. Grasselli always had a lot of table linen and silver stored away, the residue of one of his other night clubs. The first time since Minnie had come to the house, perhaps for the first time in all its existence, it was thrown into a hubbub of activity. The moment the workmen disappeared Mr. Grasselli would descend and inspect what they had done and have a lot of new ideas. A remarkable change came over him. Now that he had a project under way, his spirits rose. He

no longer sulked in his room, and no longer became ill at times with boredom. He even ceased to stack the cards in the rummy game whether Sarah Jane was absent or not.

As for Maggie, she took up an embattled position in the kitchen and, surrounded by workmen and dust and débris, refused to be moved. If the workmen got in her way, she berated them until presently they came to live in half-humorous terror of her. And on the third day after Mr. Grasselli's gigantic operations had begun, she put on her hat with the plumes and went to see Father McGuffy. But Sarah Jane had been there first and told him the whole story, truthfully, except for slipping over the true identity of Mr. Grasselli; so Father McGuffy told Maggie that he saw no harm in her running an ordinary restaurant (which was how Sarah Jane had described the project) especially as she was a good woman and came regularly to confession and with Mrs. Lefferty (the backslider) was doing a good Christian work in taking care of old Mr. Van Diver and Miss Flint and Mr. Boldini. So long as she didn't turn them out into the world, there was nothing wicked in the project.

But Maggie had no intention of turning them out, or Mrs. Lefferty either. It required a good deal of ingenuity to keep them there and give them three meals a day while all the renovations were going on, what with workmen about and the house being torn down over their heads, but Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty managed it. They simply had the meals in the servants' sitting room instead of the dining room and Sarah Jane gave up her own room to share Maggie's. They played rummy in the evening either in Mr. Grasselli's room or in the torn up drawing room. When Mr. Grasselli proposed that all of them, except himself, take their meals in a restaurant to

make things easier, Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty rejected the idea with vigor. Nobody would feel at home in a restaurant, and what about poor Mr. Van Diver? He was already confused out of his wits by the hammering and the pounding and the fact that he could not remember from one hour to another why there was such confusion and disorder in the house. What would he think of eating in a restaurant? Now and then, whimpering, he would come to Mrs. Lefferty to ask whether they were pulling down the house over his head and when he would have to leave.

Only old Mr. Van Diver and Miss Flint seemed to be disturbed, for even Mr. Boldini, once he had been brought round, grew excited, and Mr. Salmon seemed to take on a new youth, because he became aware presently that he was being brought up to date in spite of himself and that perhaps out of all the confusion, his genius might be reborn and he might go into a "fourth period" of creation. But Miss Flint seemed odd and depressed. Except at rare moments, she no longer tossed her head until the earrings jangled, and when she went out to the Women's Exchange now she always wore a veil, a relic of the nineties so thick that Sarah Jane wondered how she could see where she was going. Once more she took to being "followed," only now it was not by young men who were attracted by her charms but what she referred to as "rough individuals" who were bent on a more dark and sinister purpose. She scarcely spoke at all when Mr. Grasselli was about, and whenever he was not looking at her she stared at him fascinated with a look of mingled terror and admiration in her eyes.

The “bringing-round” of Mr. Boldini was accomplished by Sarah Jane. She did it craftily, waiting for two days until Mr. Boldini appeared a little less yellow and depressed. When the effects of the awful night had passed and the first workman had appeared in the house, she allowed Mrs. Lefferty to tell him that Mr. Grasselli was planning to turn the place into a night club. This news he received with dubious enthusiasm, for he was still feeling embittered about everything even faintly connected with the show business. Sarah Jane allowed him a day of reflection and recovery during which Mr. Boldini’s bitterness about the fiasco of his performance became transformed, as Sarah Jane had hoped, back into the old bitterness at being unable any longer to find a job save at children’s parties. And on the fourth day, Sarah Jane knocked and bustled into his room full of enthusiasm and excitement.

“I’ve got news for you, Mr. Boldini,” she said.

Raising his large yellow eyes, he regarded her dismally, as if the mere sight of anyone so young and so enthusiastic depressed him.

“What?” he asked with indifference.

“I’ve got a job for you!”

“What kind of a job?”

“A job as a magician ... a regular job, seven nights a week.”

“Where?”

“Right here in the house,” said Sarah Jane. “You won’t even have to go out.”

He began to display a faint interest and instead of looking out of the window regarded Sarah Jane for the first time. Even Fanto looked up and wagged his tail as if he too were beginning, after his disgrace and triumph, to take an interest in life.

"Yes," said Sarah Jane, "Mr. Grasselli thought you were wonderful."

"Mr. Grasselli," said Mr. Boldini in a hollow voice, "laughed. He laughed the hardest of all."

That made Sarah Jane see that it was going to be difficult to persuade Mr. Boldini.

"That was it ... he appreciated it. That's the way he showed he liked it."

"What does he want me to do?"

"He wants you to put on the act just as it was, with a few small changes."

She saw from the way he looked at her that he was beginning to be suspicious. "What changes?" he asked, in the same hollow voice.

"Well, you see, it's like this." Then suddenly she found that she had begun without knowing where she was going. She coughed and said, "It's difficult to explain ... but you see, he liked the finish. He wants to make it all like that."

"You mean the part where everybody laughed?" He glanced suddenly at Fanto's basket and Fanto cowered with shame.

"Well, not exactly, only he wants to make it into a laugh act. See? He thinks it would be one of the greatest acts ever."

For a moment Mr. Boldini stared at her as if he could not believe his ears; then all the dewlaps and ridges and furrows

in his bloodhound face contracted until he became the picture of outraged Roman dignity.

"Do you know what you're asking, young woman? Asking me, the Great Boldini, to make a prostitute of myself!"

"No, not *that*, Mr. Boldini! You get me wrong."

"Me, the Great Boldini, who has been president of the International Society of Magicians!" He began to thump himself on the chest so hard that Sarah Jane became alarmed. "Me!" he continued, "who has given command performances before the Emperors of Germany and Austria!"

Shouting the last words he turned his back to her and stood staring into the street. Sarah Jane waited for a moment and then said, "Listen, Mr. Boldini, it isn't like that. Look at me, for example. Well, I was known as the most beautiful show girl on Broadway. Mr. Ziegfeld, God rest his soul, glorified me. Mr. Carrol put me on as Lady Godiva. I've been a fan dancer and a balloon dancer, but d'you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to be a comic. Why? Because show girls and fan dancers have gone out of fashion. The public is sick of 'em. They want to laugh, see? It's just like boardinghouses and magicians. They've gone out of date too. And the Kaiser and the Emperor of Austria. Where are they now?"

Mr. Boldini, it seemed, did not know the whereabouts of the Kaiser and the Emperor of Austria. He turned suddenly and gave her a single swift look of fury. But Sarah Jane meant to drive home her point, "Name me a single magician that's making a good living. Just name me one!" She paused but Mr. Boldini, it seemed, couldn't think of any, so the question became purely rhetorical. "No, the public is sick of magicians ... anyway of magicians playing straight. Houdini ruined them. The public knows all about magic." Again he

turned and glared at her, but she continued, “No, Mr. Boldini, times have changed, and we artists have to change with it. See? An artist isn’t any good unless he keeps up to date.” Then in a more quiet mood she said, “All Mr. Grasselli wants you to do is to do your magician’s act up to date and teach Fanto to be a clown.”

Mr. Boldini gave Fanto another savage look and again Fanto cowered with shame. “That’s easy enough. That’s all he is—a clown! There isn’t a drop of artist’s blood in him.”

“Clowns can be artists, Mr. Boldini, just the same as you and me.”

“Well,” said Mr. Boldini, turning from the window. “What does he want me to do?”

But Sarah Jane didn’t tell him at once. “There’ll be a lot of money in it.”

“How much?” asked Mr. Boldini.

“Well, maybe as much as seventy-five dollars a week.”

“I get thirty-five dollars a performance already without Fanto—and fifty with him.”

“Yes, but you only work about once every two or three weeks.”

“During the school holidays I work sometimes as much as four times a week.”

“All right. Maybe Mr. Grasselli would pay you a hundred a week.” Mr. Grasselli had said he’d pay up to a hundred and twenty-five if Mr. Boldini was as good as he was the night Fanto ruined his act, but Sarah Jane didn’t tell him this. She wanted to keep the extra twenty-five as a margin with which to bargain against Mr. Boldini’s dignity, the Society of Magicians and the two emperors.

Suddenly, without warning, Mr. Boldini became indignant again, so indignant that he slipped back into his richest Trieste accent. “You ask me to become a feeder, a stooge for my dog ... that ungrateful clown of a dog.”

“No,” said Sarah Jane, “it’s not like that at all. He just wants Fanto to learn some new tricks.”

While they talked, Fanto in his basket was swept back and forth like a pendulum between the poles of emotion. When Sarah Jane spoke he pricked up his ears and wagged his tail and when Mr. Boldini referred to him, he was covered with shame and dejection.

“I’ll tell you something,” said Sarah Jane confidentially. “If you leave it to me I think I could get him up to a hundred and twenty-five a week and if we’re successful, Mr. Grasselli might put us into a revue he’s got an interest in.”

This time Mr. Boldini didn’t answer but turned away again to the window, not indignantly now, but thoughtfully, lost perhaps in considering that if he took the job he might be able to pay Mrs. Lefferty what he owed her, that he might become famous again, that he might have money enough to live again in the Astor Hotel.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll think it over.”

“I’ll tell Mr. Grasselli.” She knew Mr. Boldini meant to do it. She had known a lot of Italians and she knew he was talking like this just to save his face and pretend that he was giving in as a favor to her and Mr. Grasselli. “Mr. Grasselli,” said Sarah Jane, “will show you what he means. Maybe he’ll help you work out the act.”

“Who is Mr. Grasselli that he should tell me?” asked Mr. Boldini.

“Don’t worry. He knows all about show business. He’s backed a lot of shows.”

As she left the room she noticed that there was a new expression in Mr. Boldini’s melancholy face, an expression she had never seen there before. For the first time he looked as if he expected something a little better than the worst.

That afternoon Mr. Grasselli himself honored Mr. Boldini by a call in his room and there, after Mr. Boldini had gone through another fine performance of indignation and wounded dignity and breast beating, they got down to brass tacks and discussed the act. It was not difficult, Mr. Grasselli said. Mr. Boldini would only have to keep the speeches and gestures he already made, losing none of their solemnity and impressiveness, and Fanto would have to learn a few new tricks, or rather change a little the tricks he already knew, turning them into impudence and comedy. The trouble, Mr. Grasselli knew from the beginning, would be in forcing Mr. Boldini to play "straight," to suppress his jealousy of Fanto and abandon all attempts to horn in on Fanto's success.

They went to work at once and for days they rehearsed the act above the din of hammering and pounding from belowstairs. They worked in poor Miss Minnie's bedroom, now occupied by Mr. Grasselli, because it was the biggest, with Mr. Grasselli lying in bed smoking a cigar and Mr. Boldini and Fanto performing at the far end.

From the very beginning the dog was easy. He soon gathered what was wanted of him and asked nothing better than to play the role of clown. But Mr. Boldini was a problem. It was, Mr. Grasselli discovered, like trying to make Sarah Bernhardt stand by and hold the handkerchief for a troupe of acrobats. All during the performance he kept regarding his audience with one eye, telling Mr. Grasselli by the smug expression in his bloodhound countenance that he knew how good the dog was, and wasn't he cute, and of course he couldn't have learned all those tricks save for Mr.

Boldini himself. And at first as Fanto spoiled one trick after another for him, he would turn, instead of giving an exhibition of that divine indignation which had driven Mr. Grasselli to hysterical laughter, and pat the dog's head to show that there was no ill feeling, and to take for himself a little of the glory of Fanto's cleverness. Then Mr. Grasselli would sit up in bed indignantly and say, "No, not like that, Mr. Boldini! You've got to be mad at the dog! Get me? You've got to be funny!"

That was a fatal suggestion, for nothing could be more terrible than the result of telling Mr. Boldini to be funny. He wasn't a comedian. He wasn't even an actor, but he was convinced that he was both; and his idea of being funny was to take the audience into his confidence and let them know how funny he was being. With a patience he had never known before Mr. Grasselli labored with Mr. Boldini until he came to the verge of giving up the whole thing as a bad job, and then by accident he found out how he could get the effect he wanted.

"Listen," he said, with exaggerated patience, "get this in your mind, Mr. Boldini. I know it's the hardest thing in the world to get a ham to play a ham. See? You're a broken-down ham magician and every time you do a trick your dog spoils it and that makes you mad. Get me?"

But while he was talking an expression came over Mr. Boldini's face that very nearly frightened Mr. Grasselli.

"So I'm a ham, am I?" he cried. "A broken-down ham magician ... me! The Great Boldini! You tell me that?"

Mr. Grasselli held up his hand. "Now, listen, Mr. Boldini, I didn't say you were a ham. I was just telling you you must think of yourself as a ham. That's what acting is, ain't it?

That's what great art is. Now listen, be sensible and go ahead with the act."

Fuming, Mr. Boldini went ahead with the act and miraculously in his fury and wounded vanity, he gave exactly the effect that Mr. Grasselli wanted. Crushing out his cigar, Mr. Grasselli lay back in bed and laughed, very nearly as hard as he had laughed on that first night. "That's it!" he said. "That's exactly it!"

Mr. Boldini beamed, and Fanto, the clown, aware that he had at last got the laugh he wanted, barked and wagged his tail frantically.

"You're a great artist, Mr. Boldini," said Mr. Grasselli, "when you do it like that. Let's do it again and see if we can hold it."

But when he did it again, in a good humor now, Mr. Boldini fell back into his old tricks, smirking sidewise at the audience, giving Fanto patronizing glances and trying to keep the stage all for himself. It was terrible. But Mr. Grasselli had discovered his secret. You had to make Mr. Boldini mad to get the effect you wanted. Only you had to use the secret discreetly. If you kept making Mr. Boldini mad at rehearsals his rage would have the edge off it by the time he came to give a performance. So craftily Mr. Grasselli said, "That's great! You've got it. That's great!" and bided his time.

In the meanwhile Tommy and Sarah Jane were making progress with their songs and Miss Flint was making progress with Sarah Jane's dresses.

Tommy had written two "nineties" songs and Sarah Jane was learning them. One was called "The Poorhouse with You" and the other "She Was the Bartender's Sister." Now they had five good songs. Sarah Jane worked at them giving them everything she had, taking a tip now and then from Mr. Grasselli when she thought it was a good one and rejecting others when she thought they were bad, for she was aware of a sudden new confidence, different from anything she had ever known before, not like the confidence she had felt as a fan dancer or as Lady Godiva when she simply displayed with generosity what a lascivious nature had bestowed upon her. That was just luck and she hadn't anything to do with it. This confidence was different. It was Tommy who told her that it was what you called "creative confidence." She knew how a song ought to be sung. She knew when she was right and when she was wrong. And best of all, Tommy trusted and praised her. Now and then he would stop playing and look at her with something close to awe in his blue eyes and say, "You've got it, baby! I don't know where it came from, but you've got it!" That always made her feel faint with happiness.

But Tommy didn't seem properly excited about their début. As the time drew nearer, as the alterations were finished, one by one, and the tables and chairs and linen and silver began to arrive, he seemed to grow more and more depressed and nervous. When Sarah Jane questioned him directly he said it

wasn't anything, but he always looked away from her and she was sure again that there was something troubling him which she knew nothing about, something which had happened while he had been away from her for five years.

Miss Flint had a good deal of trouble over the dresses. She remembered the design she had made for Mrs. Pierrepont Wycherly but just how the intricacies of their ruffles and stays, lace and passementerie were put together she had forgotten. It took a great many fittings, which were hard on Sarah Jane's temper, and Miss Flint, heavily veiled, had to make a good many trips to shops, because Sarah Jane was a good deal bigger than Mrs. Pierrepont Wycherly and Miss Flint found that she was always underbuying. During the fittings Sarah Jane accidentally revealed that she shared Miss Flint's awful secret and after that the sewing woman never talked except on one subject—Mr. Grasselli alias Monk Maguire. She no longer referred to him by name but only as "he" or by sinister nods of the head in the direction of his room belowstairs. She asked questions until Sarah Jane thought she was going crazy. Most of the answers she did not herself know and some of them she made up, as when Miss Flint asked, "How many men d'you think *he's* taken for a ride?" and Sarah Jane replied, "Oh, I suppose about thirty or forty ... roughly, that is ... about thirty or forty." And with a mixture of terror and admiration in her voice, Miss Flint answered, "I suppose he's what you'd call a modern Robin Hood."

"Not exactly," said Sarah Jane, "not exactly a Robin Hood."

But the dresses went ahead well. There wasn't any need of having Miss Flint exaggerate their lines and cut and

ornament. What Miss Flint regarded as making them "straight" was funnier than anything Sarah Jane could think up in the way of exaggeration. What annoyed Sarah Jane was having to buy a corset and pull in her generous Venus de Milo waist to suit the styles of the nineties. After she bought it, she always put it on when practicing "The Poorhouse with You," and "She Was the Bartender's Sister" so that she would feel used to it because it was the first time she had ever worn such a thing. In that kind of corset, she discovered, you had to breathe in a special way.

But Miss Flint herself seemed to grow thinner and more wrinkled and silent and about four days before the opening she developed a tic which made one eye and her mouth twitch without ceasing. Mr. Salmon noticed this, and out of his knowledge of psychoanalysis, decided that there was something troubling Miss Flint's "subconscious."

And then suddenly the alterations were all finished and the chairs and tables installed and Maggie's two assistants arrived and in the afternoon there was a final rehearsal of cooks and waiters, captained by Victor Leontopopulos, a headwaiter who had served Mr. Grasselli at the openings and closings of countless night clubs and speakeasies. And at three o'clock, behind closed and curtained doors in poor Miss Minnie's drawing room, the performers held a rehearsal under the eye of Mr. Grasselli, the impresario. The act of "Ryan and Lefferty in a Few Songs" went perfectly, but Mr. Boldini was terrible. Sarah Jane and Tommy, watching, were aware of this and it troubled Sarah Jane that Mr. Grasselli either did not notice how terrible it was or he did not seem to mind. When she drew him aside after the rehearsal and said, "Old Boldini is going to be terrible," he only grinned at her and replied, "Never mind. He's going to be great. You wait and see."

"You're nuts if you think that," said Sarah Jane.

Then the worst happened about eight o'clock in the evening when Tommy didn't come down to dinner. He sent word by his mother that he didn't feel very well and wanted to lie down for a while in the dark. When Mrs. Lefferty told her the news, Sarah Jane was aware that all along she had known this was going to happen. Her instinct had told her, if she had only listened to it, that Tommy was still a broken reed that under pressure might collapse completely.

When she had eaten a quick but substantial dinner (for Sarah Jane was so healthy that she could not work on an

empty stomach and nothing upset her appetite) she hurried up to Tommy's room and knocked.

In response to his "Come in" she entered and found him lying in the dark on his bed. By the light from the hall, she found her way to the foot of the bed and stood there looking down at him. He didn't even stir and made no effort to speak until she said, "Well?"

Then he said, "It's no use. I can't do it. You've got to find another piano player."

Suddenly she was angry and scornful. Fury blazed up inside her, but in the next second, remembering what she had learned, she counted ten before speaking and then said, "You must be crazy. I can't get a piano player at this hour. And anyway he couldn't do those songs the way we do them. Not even Paderewski could do it."

"I can't," said Tommy. "That's all there is to it."

"What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know ... nerves, I guess ... jitters. What you call neurasthenia. I'm scared."

Quietly she came round the end of the bed and sat on the edge of it by his side. "Listen," she said. "You can't do that. You can't let us all down ... not now, when everything is ready."

"I can't," said Tommy in a low voice. "I guess I'm going nuts. I've been trying to think of the music and I can't even remember it. I guess I'm going nuts. If I went on to play I wouldn't know what I was playing."

Then she was aware by the dim light from the hall that there were tears on his cheek. He said almost in a whisper, "I

don't want to act like this. I can't help it. It isn't my fault, Sally."

Her heart suddenly leaped. He had called her Sally long ago when they played together in the back garden at poor Miss Minnie's house on Murray Hill; but he had never called her that since he came home. She knew suddenly that she didn't care about "The Golden Nineties" or her career or anything. She only cared about Tommy. But she knew too that she had, somehow, to make him go through with their performance for his own sake more than for any other reason. She had to make him do it in order to save him.

"Don't you see?" he said, "I'm nuts or something."

She had to think quickly and skillfully; she knew that she could not risk making a mistake. After a little silence in which she abandoned thought and allowed her instinct to tell her what to do, she asked, "Is it on account of something that happened while you were away?"

He didn't answer her, and after another silence she said, "Was it something you did?" and in a whisper, he said, "Yes."

Then suddenly she reached over and took his hand. It was the first time they had touched each other since he came back, and the feel of his hand brought a lump in her throat, a lump caused as much by happiness as by pity. In the dark she felt his hand take hers and press it tightly, almost hysterically, as if he depended on her. Then she said, "Tell me. What is it?" But he didn't speak.

"Tell me," she said. "It'll do you good. You know, don't you, that I'm all for you ... that I'd do anything for you? You know that, don't you, Tommy?"

"Yes."

“Well, tell me then ... what was it ...?”

After a long silence, he said, “I was in jail.”

That didn’t surprise her, because it was what she expected. “What for?” she asked.

“Bootlegging ... in Detroit.”

She laughed. She couldn’t, in her relief, help herself. “That doesn’t matter,” she said. “Bootlegging wasn’t any crime. Everybody did it ... everybody was guilty ... people who drank were just as guilty. Nobody cares about that.”

“I beat it,” he said. “I got out of jail by a trick and beat it.”

“Well,” said Sarah Jane, “that was very smart of you. So what? All that’s finished. Nobody’s gonna bother you about that. All that’s squashed.”

“It wasn’t only that,” said Tommy.

“What else? Go on! It’ll do you good to talk.”

“It was a lot of other things I did.”

“What?”

“It’s no use talking about. A lot of things ... little things I’m ashamed of. I don’t know how or why I did them except that sometimes it was on account of getting a meal or a place to sleep. D’you know what it’s like, Sally, to be hungry and cold and sleepy and have nothing to eat and no place to go? Maybe I was kind of weak. But then it seemed to me anything was better than that.”

She pressed his hand again softly. “Go on,” she said, “tell me. I get it all.”

“It’s no good telling you some of the things. I’m ashamed to. I’m ashamed because I was ashamed of you and Ma and Maggie. I thought I was too good for you all until I found out I wasn’t good enough.”

“I know,” said Sarah Jane, “I knew all that.”

“How did you know?”

“I’m not so dumb.”

“I guess that’s what’s the matter with me. I’m sick inside.”

“It don’t matter, now,” said Sarah Jane. “It’s all finished. You weren’t the same as Ma and me and your mother. You’re kind of a genius too, I guess ... sensitive like. You were kind of different and you got to know a different kind of people. That’s all washed up now. We’re both down to brass tacks again. That’s why I know everything is gonna be swell for both of us. I’ll bring you a drink and you’ll be all right.”

“No,” said Tommy, with a sudden return of hysteria. “I can’t! I can’t sit up there in front of all those people. I can’t remember anything. It’s all kind of come back at once in a heap. I can’t explain exactly—only all I want to do is to hide—like this in the dark.”

So now, she knew, there was only one thing left to do, and again she knew she mustn’t do the wrong thing. It had to be just right. She didn’t know anything about neurosis and she didn’t know anything about psychoanalysis but she did know a lot about people, and about men. So for a second time she abandoned thought and trusted her instinct.

“Tommy,” she said.

Out of the darkness his voice answered her, tired and frightened. “Yes?”

“Tommy, would you marry me?”

There was a silence and then he asked, “Do you really mean that? You’re not kidding me?”

“I never meant anything so much in my life. I’ve always been in love with you, I guess. Anyway since I was about

sixteen years old. Now, there it is! How do you feel about it?"

He pulled her hand up to his lips and kissed it. "There," he said. "That's how I feel. I guess I always felt the same way about you, only I was a fool. I didn't know it till just lately.... I wanted to ask you only I didn't dare."

"Why?" asked Sally. "I tried to make you see it."

"I couldn't, because I was so ashamed of myself, and I didn't have anything to offer ... nothing at all but failure. I didn't even have any guts. And you could marry all kinds of guys with money and Rolls-Royces and diamonds."

"Oh!" said Sarah Jane. "Those squirts! You needn't have worried about them."

In the darkness he pulled himself up and sat cross-legged on the bed. "Gee!" he said, "Gee! I'm still sort of afraid of you, Sally."

She leaned across toward him. "And now I can look after you," she said, "and keep you out of trouble. You oughtn't ever to get mixed up with people like Monk. You don't know how to manage 'em. See, from now on, you can just work at your music and not worry about anything at all."

Then suddenly he put his arms about her. He didn't speak at all but only kept saying, "Sally! My God, Sally!"

Then they both knew that it had been waiting for them all along, all the time, for years, and now when it came to them it was better than anything they had dreamed of because they *knew* each other. They had known each other always. There wasn't any strangeness. There wasn't anything they had to find out about each other.

At about eleven-fifteen the first clients began to arrive and about a quarter to twelve poor Miss Minnie's drawing room and dining room were filled to capacity. Victor Leontopopulos had even set up two small tables in the hall and one against the back of the piano itself. In the dining room near the dumb-waiter and the screen from behind which Maggie had given Mr. Grasselli a fright, there was a special table reserved for Mrs. Lefferty and the boarders, and here early in the evening Miss Flint and Mr. Salmon had installed themselves. Mr. Boldini and Sarah Jane and Tommy could not appear of course until after their performances; Mrs. Lefferty was still bustling about now upstairs and now down and now in the kitchen where an embattled Maggie, her face red and her eyes shining with the light of crisis, was directing the putting together of more last minute corned beef hash and Irish stew. Mr. Van Diver was kept in his room until Mrs. Lefferty was ready to sit down because she knew that if he came down alone and found the rooms where he had courted poor Miss Minnie filled with a noisy pushing crowd of strangers, he might do anything. He might even think that Ward's Island was a better place to live.

Mr. Salmon, in a dinner jacket but still wearing his flowing tie, sat by the side of Miss Flint at the center of the table. For the great occasion she had made herself a new dress out of three old ones and some of the pieces left over from Sarah Jane's costumes. Around her sagging throat she wore the bit of black velvet and in her flaming hair the butterfly of rhinestones, and from somewhere she had produced a *lorgnon* which Mr. Salmon had never seen before, and which

she now held before her nearsighted eyes from time to time to regard the patrons. These in turn stared back at her, not quite sure whether she was simply a bit of atmosphere like the curtains and the pictures or whether she was one of the performers. Mr. Salmon, watching her, from time to time out of the corner of his eye, noticed that her "subconscious" was still troubled by something. Her mouth and eyes still twitched, worse than ever.

A moment or two after they were seated Victor Leontopopulos came over to the table and asked them what they would have to eat, handing them a menu filled with a list of Maggie's specialties which made them feel all at the same time at home and very strange, because it was the first time in all the years they had been here that they had seen Maggie's dinners set down in cold print. When they said they would wait for the others, Mr. Leontopopulos invited them to have a bottle of champagne, tactfully adding that he had received instructions that they were to have everything and that it would all be "on the house." So they had a bottle of champagne and presently Mrs. Lefferty with old Mr. Van Diver in tow appeared through the passage from behind the screen and joined them and Mr. Leontopopulos bounced up to the table with another bottle of champagne.

Mrs. Lefferty wore a fine purple dress with poor Miss Minnie's seed pearls and looked very handsome, handsomer than Mr. Salmon had ever seen her look, and old Mr. Van Diver wore a white tie and an odd old-fashioned tail coat which had turned a little green along the seams and been restored to something of its original color by Mrs. Lefferty with the aid of a bottle of India ink.

Mr. Grasselli, opener and closer of night clubs and speakeasies, had done his work well. The room was full of important people, not diplomats and statesmen and great bankers, but people who were important in the world of Broadway and Hollywood and the show business, and that was the world that mattered so far as Maggie and Tommy and Mr. Boldini were concerned. If Sarah Jane had chosen an audience before which to show what she and Tommy could do, this would have been it. They had come in response to whispers sent along Mr. Grasselli's grapevine of communications. The news had reached them that this new place was going to be good, that there was a new singer who was a wow, and a magician act completely new that was something unique, and that the food was something to write home about.

And so they were all there, agents and actors, motion picture people, columnists and newspapermen, racketeers and chiselers, and people generally who were in the "know." Taken as an audience, as a picture as a whole they alarmed Mr. Salmon and Mrs. Lefferty; made no impression whatever on Mr. Van Diver, and only added to the terror of poor Miss Flint, whose eyes and mouth took to twitching harder than ever at sight of them. And Mrs. Lefferty, with a sinking of the heart, suddenly understood what had happened; this, all this crowd about her, was the New York of 1935. It had stormed and taken possession of poor Miss Minnie's house. The sight of them made her unhappy and she knew that she would not be happy again until they were gone, all of them, forever, no matter how much money they poured into her pockets, and poor Miss Minnie's house was once more the home of Maggie and herself and the boarders. Suddenly it wasn't fun and exciting like making up a story. She didn't like any of

their faces any more than Miss Flint liked them. They weren't poor Miss Minnie's kind or her own. They were cheap.

Mr. Leontopopulos brought another bottle of champagne. They were all enjoying it and Mrs. Lefferty said it was kind of him to think of them. It was the first time in her life that Miss Flint had ever tasted champagne and she thought it was lovely. Mr. Salmon filled her glass twice and then three times and then four. And then suddenly without warning from behind the screen which hid the dumb-waiter just beside them appeared a face which was at once terrifying and familiar. It was Miss Flint who saw it first and she gave a faint scream, which attracted the notice of the others. What she saw was like something out of a nightmare, out of one of those dreams which she had been having, night after night, of late. It was Mr. Grasselli, but a Mr. Grasselli none of them had ever seen before. His hair and new-grown mustache were dyed black, not a natural kind of black, but the black of shoe-blacking put on in the bathroom by himself, and he wore a pair of dark glasses which made it impossible to tell that he was wall-eyed. But worst of all was his skin which looked terrible for some reason. The reason was, after all, simple enough. It was the same skin—the pale, faintly freckled skin that goes with reddish hair; it was the black hair and mustache which gave it a leprous appearance. The whole face resembled more than anything else, the face of a walking corpse.

Miss Flint stifled her scream and Mr. Salmon pressed upon her another glass of champagne, and then the spectral face of Mr. Grasselli disappeared again behind the screen.

It disappeared at the arrival in the hallway of Mr. Boldini in his Roman costume accompanied by a panting and whimpering Fanto, a number of wands and rings and colored handkerchiefs and a bowl of live goldfish. Fanto was scarcely more excited than Mr. Boldini but the magician managed to conceal his excitement beneath an expression of such smugness that at sight of him Mr. Grasselli thought, "I'll have to make him mad as hell or he's gonna be terrible."

Then Tommy appeared, looking, Mr. Grasselli thought, like a stranger. In his dinner jacket he looked very smart and he held himself very straight and there was color in his face and a challenging twinkle in his blue eyes. Mr. Grasselli looked at him hard; this couldn't be the Tommy who a couple of hours before had been too sick with stage fright to join the others at dinner. Then he drew Tommy aside. "Listen," he said, "I forgot all about a master of ceremonies. You've got to be it. You've got to introduce old Boldini."

Tommy, staring at him, said, "I've never made a speech in my life."

"Well, this time you've got to do it, see? And get away with it."

"I'll get away with it," said Tommy, still staring.

"And lay it on thick," said Mr. Grasselli. "*Too* thick. Get me?"

"Yeah," said Tommy.

"What are you staring at?" asked Mr. Grasselli.

"That make-up you've got on."

"Is it okay?" asked Mr. Grasselli.

"Your own mother wouldn't know you. It's all right, if it don't scare away all the trade."

"Oke. Then get on with it."

Tommy gave a signal to the tiny orchestra that sat pressed against the piano and there was a roll of drums and he stepped forward into the tiny space left just before the widened doorway from the drawing room into the dining room. Mrs. Lefferty, from her end of the table, was just able to see him and she, like Mr. Grasselli, was startled by the change in him. This was the old confident, bright, dapper Tommy who Maggie always said reminded her of Jimmy Walker.

With the greatest of professional airs, he waited for the murmur to die away. Then he said, "Ladies and Gentlemen: I thank you in behalf of the management, the performers, the staff and myself for coming here tonight. As you see (here he looked all round the room) we are crowded to the doors. In spite of every effort we have had to turn away a large crowd. We are doing our best. I hope you will like the place and that you find the food as good as we hope."

From the back of the room a voice said, "Great!" and from another corner a second voice said "Swell!" Listening behind the screen, Maggie heard these compliments and beamed.

Then Tommy went on, "I hope you will like our performers of whom," he said modestly, "I am one. In any case the management hopes to give you something new. The first number on the program will be the Great Boldini and his dog Fanto (from behind the screen came the sound of a joyous bark, quickly stifled). There he is now," said Tommy.

Then continuing, "The Great Boldini scarcely needs an introduction. A good many of you have seen him before in

the days when he was touring the four quarters of the earth, before he went into retirement. In those days he was a headliner and gave command performances before the Kaiser and the Emperor of Austria. After a retirement of years he has been induced to appear again after much persuasion on the part of the management. I think I also ought to say that his costume has been in retirement with him. The Great Boldini—King of International Magicians!"

Then he made a little bow, received a round of applause, and retired.

Mr. Boldini did not come out at once but that was because Mr. Grasselli was preparing him for his appearance. In the half-darkness behind the screen Mr. Grasselli said, "Now listen, you old ham! Remember you're a lousy broken-down magician and this is your chance to come back. Get on there and do your stuff. And for God's sake, try not to ham it!"

A look of fury crossed the bloodhound face. The mouth opened to speak but no words came out because before he could speak Mr. Grasselli with the aid of his foot sent him through the doorway on to the tiny stage, preceded by a barking, joyous Fanto.

The entrance of Mr. Boldini savored less of pomp and dignity than of rage. The very suddenness with which he appeared to have been projected upon the scene was in itself comic, and the costume with its exaggerated muscles molded in papier-mâché, which had moved Mr. Grasselli to such uproarious mirth, had a similar effect upon the audience. And Tommy's speech too had done its part, for he had scarcely prepared the audience for the appearance of an elderly magician with a bloodhound countenance who resembled a somewhat hairy spider in Roman costume.

There was a wave of laughter and when Mr. Boldini glared at the audience in rage, they took it as a part of his role and began to laugh all over again. In a fury he began the act, feeling against Fanto the same genuine resentment he had felt on the night when Fanto ruined everything, so that each time Fanto mischievously ruined his best planned trick, he was really angry, and each time the audience laughed at his anger, their laughter served only to increase it.

Fanto was perfect, for he liked an audience, a big audience, and he was aware somehow that now he was the star of the act; there wasn't any longer any doubt about it. Mr. Boldini was his stooge. He made all the men laugh and he charmed the women and the minute Mr. Boldini turned his back for a moment, to make one of his pompous speeches, Fanto turned a somersault or stood on his head to attract attention to himself. The goldfish trick was a triumph, and when Fanto upset the bowl on the floor, there was a tempest of laughter and applause.

Then the act was suddenly over and Mr. Boldini and Fanto were called back again and again. It was only then that Mr. Boldini grasped the fact that he had been a success, and he was never aware that all the time, while he was playing the act in a blind rage, the audience had believed that the rage was acting, that he was a superb “dead-pan” comic. He had been so angry that never once had it occurred to him to wink at the audience or to give Fanto a patronizing pat on the head. And now, as the lovely sound of applause came rolling back to him, everything was changed; he forgot his anger and convinced himself that he had meant it that way. He had not been really angry; he was only acting. He even forgave Mr. Grasselli.

As for Fanto, he was beside himself, and after Mr. Boldini had taken his last bow and was turning to go up the stairs, Fanto turned, ran past him and had a final bow in which his master played no part. It was, after all, his right as the star.

At the boarders' table everyone drank another glass of champagne to the health of Mr. Boldini and Fanto, and a moment later Mr. Grasselli appeared to take a chair exactly opposite Miss Flint with his back to the audience so that the most anyone could see was the back of a man who appeared to have very black hair.

"What'd I tell you?" he said. "I know an act when I see one. Here's to Boldini and Fanto." He raised his glass, and everyone, including Miss Flint, drank a second health. But Miss Flint's hand had begun to tremble a little.

Then for a little time the customers tried to dance by all crowding on the tiny square of floor and then one by one they all gave it up and then there was another roll of drums and Tommy appeared again and made another graceful speech about "Ryan and Lefferty in a Few Songs," and when he had finished Mrs. Lefferty beamed and said, "I never heard a better speech. That's what education does. If it hadn't been for poor Miss Minnie ... sending him to college and all...."

And then Maggie, having finished in the kitchen, appeared with her hair done in rolls and wearing the gold fleur-de-lis watch and pin that poor Miss Minnie had left her, and once again those in the audience who saw her could not make her out any more than they had been able to make out Miss Flint and Mr. Salmon and old Mr. Van Diver and Mrs. Lefferty and even Mr. Grasselli in his strange make-up, and put the whole table down once and for all as "atmosphere," a table of "extras" hired like the furniture and the curtains.

In the corner by the door, Mr. Malkowsky, the great foreign movie director and his assistant, took a sudden interest when Sarah Jane appeared in the same simple black dress and white scarf which she had used before. Mr. Malkowsky discovered things in her that most of the audience who knew her at once as “Sal” accepted without examining critically. Mr. Malkowsky, to whom “Sal” was a stranger, saw her in a different way and noticed that when she came into the room the drums didn’t have to roll in order to get silence. He noticed that when she walked there was in her walk a kind of beauty which a lot of actresses spent their lives working to acquire. He noticed the shrewdness with which she had costumed herself, wearing a simple dress which revealed the beauty of her body but threw the attention to her face; and when she began to sing, he noticed that her voice, which was not a great voice, had in it a quality that sent a thrill down your spine. He noticed all these things.

His assistant noticed none of them; like the rest of the audience he only knew that she was “good.” But his whole career, the whole of his success, had been built not out of his own reactions and opinions, but of observing those of Mr. Malkowsky and then saying it first. He knew the signs of Mr. Malkowsky’s enthusiasm ... the faint quivering of the acquiline nose, the moistening of the lips above the black Assyrian beard as if he were about to sit down to a good meal, the light that came into his eye. So after watching all these things, when Sarah Jane had finished her first song, the assistant said it first. He said, “She’s great, isn’t she?”

"Yes," said Mr. Malkowsky, keeping his eye on Sarah Jane and not paying much attention to the assistant. That, his assistant knew, was one of the surest of signs. This enthusiasm was deeper than he had imagined.

Then Sarah Jane sang "Here We Are in Love," the second of her numbers, and at the end they would not let her go away but kept calling to her and Tommy to come back. There were cries of "Sal! We want Sal!" They all knew her. They were friendly toward her as a Broadway character and now when they were surprised by what she could do, they were pleased.

So she came back and sang "Here We Are in Love" all over again and then when they would not let her go she retired for a moment, and returned with her special make-up to sing, "I'm Nada McSweeney, the Glamour Girl."

This came as a surprise to Mr. Malkowsky who had not thought of her as a comedienne, but it pleased him too, although now and then something in the imitations struck very close to Mr. Malkowsky himself. But he took it good-humoredly and when she finished, "I'm Garbo, I'm Dietrich, I'm Hepburn, I'm Loy," he pounded his fat hands together hysterically, and his assistant pounded his in imitation.

Then Tommy announced that they would return shortly with a couple of more songs, and the public tried again to dance and again gave it up.

At their table in the corner by the screen Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie and the boarders, all save Miss Flint, were delirious with excitement. It was all better than they had hoped, better even than anything Mrs. Lefferty had made up in her story. She turned to Mr. Grasselli and said, "Is it always like this?"

And Mr. Grasselli said, "No, I never seen anything like it before." Then he leaned over and whispered to Mrs. Lefferty,

“Maybe you’d better do something about Miss Flint. She looks to me as if she was gonna be sick.”

Mrs. Lefferty looked at her and had the same idea. Miss Flint was staring sullenly through eyes that were a little glazed, directly at Mr. Grasselli. She had been staring at him like that for a long time, her face frozen except for the twitch of the eyes and at the corners of the mouth. It was rather a terrifying look in which defiance, terror and challenge were mingled, and it made Mr. Grasselli feel very uncomfortable.

“Maybe you’d better take her up and put her to bed,” he whispered to Mrs. Lefferty.

“Maybe I had,” said Mrs. Lefferty. Then she got up and bent over Miss Flint and suggested that they both go upstairs and have some bicarbonate of soda, and Miss Flint, strangely enough, agreed with docility. But once in the room that had been poor Miss Minnie’s linen closet, she refused to go to bed.

“No,” she kept saying, “I’ll be feeling better in a little while. Just leave me alone.” She lay down on the bed fully corseted and dressed. “No,” she said, “I won’t go to bed. I’ll be all right.”

So at last Mrs. Lefferty closed the door and left her, and as soon as Mrs. Lefferty had gone, Miss Flint rose and put on her raincoat over her evening dress and put on her hat and her thick veil right on top of the rhinestone butterfly. Then she opened the door a little way and peered out and when she saw there was no one about, she went into the hall. At each turn of the stairway she executed the same reconnoitering tactics until she reached the first floor where, in an unsteady dash, she went through the door and down the front steps, to the

astonishment of the doorman who had noticed no one who even faintly resembled her entering the house.

The “nineties” songs had the same success as the earlier ones, and in his corner Mr. Malkowsky’s enthusiasm grew. At the end he turned to his assistant and said, “Vell, wot do you tink of her?”

“What do *you* think?” asked the assistant.

“She’s vunderful. She’s just vot ve’ve been looking for.”

“That’s just what I was thinking,” said the assistant. “She’s remarkable. She’s got immense possibilities. Maybe I’d better arrange for a test to see how she photographs.”

“Ve don’t need any tests,” said Mr. Malkowsky. “An artiste is an artiste, Bergman. It ain’t got anything to do vit celluloid and sound apparatus. I vant to hear her speak. I vant to talk to her. I vant to hear her woice. Anyvay I’m gonna give her a chanct.”

“Should I go and bring her over here?”

“Sure. Vot you tink?”

“Mebbe the coast’ll want a test.”

“Listen, Bergman, I don’t do vot the coast says. The coast does vot I say. Vot kind of a contrict d’you tink I got?”

“All right. I’ll go and get her.”

So Mr. Bergman, the assistant, went over to the boarders’ table where Tommy and Sarah Jane had gone to join the others. The table was surrounded now by old friends of “Sal,” by people who pretended they were old friends, by people who wanted to know her, by people who had given her an extra push when she was on the way down, but Sarah Jane wasn’t deceived by any of it, because she’d been in the game too long. What she did know was that this was success. When

they came running like that it meant the real stuff, more than compliments and applause and everything. They all knew she was a success and they were all pushing and crowding like a subway crowd to get aboard the boat.

Mr. Bergman, the assistant, made his way through the throng and bent over her. “Excuse me,” he said, “I’m assistant director with Colossal Pictures. I’ve got Mr. Malkowsky, the great foreign director, with me, and he wants to know if you’ll have a glass of champagne with him.”

“Sure,” said Sarah Jane, rising.

The moment she saw Mr. Malkowsky, she thought, “He’s a ‘phony.’ ” She could tell it by the black Assyrian beard, by the unctuous voice, by the way he rose and kissed her hand. But almost at once she thought, “So what? Even if he is a phony, mebbe I can use him. I’ll feed him up. What’s the difference, if he ‘discovers’ me?”

So she fed him up, playing up to the shiny beard and the hand kissing and the unctuous voice, and when she left the table, Mr. Malkowsky said, “Vell, I expect you then to have lunch mit me tomorrow at one at the Valdorf.”

“I’ll be there,” said Sarah Jane.

When she had gone, Mr. Malkowsky said, “She’s vonderful! I tink I make a discovery.”

“She’s marvelous,” said Mr. Bergman, the assistant. “Colossal! You’ve got a wonderful eye for talent.”

Mr. Malkowsky beamed. “Vell,” he said, “I tink I go back and send a telegram to de coast. Ve can still catch the night rate. Funny, she vass just the type I vass looking for.”

When she got back to the table Mr. Grasselli had disappeared, because success had attracted to the table too many people that knew him. People came and went. Agents suggested meetings and one revue producer talked about a show he had in the fall, if Sarah Jane was “interested.” She said she didn’t know. She could tell him later. She had a good many plans to consider.

Finally about four in the morning there wasn’t anyone left in the room but Sarah Jane and Tommy and a couple of tired waiters. They had expected that Mr. Grasselli would return, but he never did, so Sarah Jane said, “Let’s go up and see him.”

In the upper hallway, Tommy suddenly put his arms about her and said, “Well, we pulled it off, didn’t we?”

“I’ll say we did.”

“And none of ’em knew why we were so good.”

Sarah Jane laughed and kissed him and he said, “There was even a song publisher playing around ... old Herman from Beck and Herman.”

“There’ll be a lot more,” said Sarah Jane.

“When d’you want to get married?”

“Any time ... tonight or tomorrow.”

“Can’t tonight.” He looked at her. “We’re as good as married now.”

“No,” said Sarah Jane, “it would upset the old girls. Ma would begin worrying about purgatory.”

“They had a good time, didn’t they?”

"Sure, but I don't think they really liked it."

"Guess you're right at that. It's not their dish."

"I kinda think they were still worrying about whether poor Miss Minnie was snooping about."

"I'll bet she liked it," said Tommy, "especially about you and me. I think she kind of always wanted that."

"Sure she did." She gave him a great hug and said, "Let's go and talk to Monk. I've gotta go to lunch tomorrow with Mr. Malkowsky, the great foreign director, and I gotta look fresh and young."

The old hostile, jealous look that pleased her came into Tommy's blue eyes, "What kind of a guy is he?"

"Don't worry. He ain't that kind. I sized him up."

She went to Mr. Grasselli's door and knocked and when there was no answer Tommy pushed it open. Still there wasn't any sign of Mr. Grasselli and when they turned on the lights the room was empty.

"That's funny," said Tommy.

"Maybe he's in the bathroom."

But he wasn't in the bathroom. They went all over the house but they couldn't find any trace of Mr. Grasselli. Then it occurred to Tommy to ask the doorman. The doorman would know. He'd worked at Mr. Grasselli's joints for years. Tommy found him back of the screen changing out of his uniform. He was a squat, powerfully built fellow sometimes used as an assistant bouncer.

Tommy described Mr. Grasselli's appearance, his black hair and mustache.

"Sure," said the doorman, "I seen him goin' out. A coupla cops had him. I kinda noticed him because he was so funny

lookin' ... like a walkin' corpse. He looked kinda familiar to me, only funny."

If the cops had him there wasn't any use pretending any longer that Mr. Grasselli wasn't Monk Maguire, so Tommy said, "You know who he was, don't you?"

"No, who?"

"It was Monk."

"Jeez!" said the doorman, "I knew he was familiar."

Sarah Jane, it was decided, should go to bed in order to be young and fresh for Mr. Malkowsky, so Tommy went off alone around the corner to the police station. He found the sergeant and a couple of sleepy policemen and when he asked for Monk Maguire, the sergeant said, “And what d’you wanta see *him* for?”

“Because I work for him.”

“How?” asked the sergeant.

“I play the piano in his joint.”

“Oh,” said the sergeant. “Well, that’s different. He ain’t here.”

“Where is he?”

“They took him to headquarters, but there ain’t no use in going way down there. You couldn’t see him. Better wait till the morning.”

“Okay,” said Tommy. “Thanks.”

As he turned to leave, the sergeant said, “Wait a minute. Mebbe you could tell us about the old dame we’ve got shut up here.”

“Mebbe,” said Tommy. “What does she look like?”

The sergeant described her—dyed red hair, lots of paint, a heavy veil and a kind of diamond butterfly in her hair.

“Sure,” said Tommy, “I know who she is. She lives at my mother’s boardinghouse. How did she get here?”

“Well, I’ll tell you,” said the sergeant.

It seemed that about two-thirty in the morning Miss Flint, in a state of hysteria, came into the police station and asked

to be locked up. When they said they couldn't lock her up for doing nothing and asked why she wanted to be locked up, she said it was because she was scared. When they asked by what, she said she was always being followed and that they were trying to take her for a ride. At first, because of poor respectable Miss Flint's appearance, they believed her story, only they couldn't think of any joint in the neighborhood that had a madame who resembled Miss Flint. And then it dawned on them that maybe Miss Flint had had a little too much to drink, and they began to question her and soon discovered that she was trying to hide something. At last after a half-hour of questions during which she nearly drove them crazy trying to follow her, they discovered that she knew where Monk Maguire was and that she was scared out of her wits by her knowledge. So finally they broke her down. She said nobody in the boardinghouse but herself had guessed the secret but if they wanted to get him, they could go right over there now and pick him up, only they had to remember that he had dyed his hair and mustache, and was wearing dark glasses.

Then the sergeant thanked her and told her she might as well go home, but she begged instead that they shut her up. She wouldn't feel safe outside of jail. She wouldn't be able to close an eye. She'd heard, she said, that Monk's gang meant to strangle her and put her body in a barrel and fill it up with cement. So in the end they yielded and locked her up in a cell and almost at once she had gone to sleep.

"Mebbe I'd better have a look at her," said Tommy.

"Sure," said the sergeant. "Murphy, take the gentleman in to see the lady."

They went along a corridor and at last came to the cell where Miss Flint was locked out of harm's way. She was asleep, very sound asleep. The police had taken off her hat and coat and veil and put a blanket over her. The butterfly of rhinestones still glittered jauntily in the flaming hair.

When Tommy returned, the sergeant said, "Better let her stay here tonight and sleep it off. We'll bring her home in the morning."

"Thanks," said Tommy. "Good night."

Tommy understood. The champagne *and* Mr. Grasselli's strange make-up had been too much for her. He didn't blame her. It would, he thought, have been too much for almost anybody.

Tommy didn't wake until noon and by then Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie had already discovered the disappearance of Mr. Grasselli and Miss Flint. An elopement, they decided, was scarcely likely, so Mrs. Lefferty went round to the police station, and there for the first time she learned the true identity of Mr. Grasselli. It came as a shock, such a shock that she had to sit down and have some brandy and be fanned. They knew her at the station house, so they didn't have any suspicions that she had been consciously providing the notorious Monk Maguire with a place of refuge.

Then when she had recovered from the first shock, she found out all about Miss Flint. Miss Flint, the day sergeant said, was still sleeping peacefully, but by now, he thought, she ought to be able to go home. So accompanied by Mrs. Lefferty, they went to the cell and roused Miss Flint. She waked slowly and at the sight of Mrs. Lefferty burst into tears and flung herself into Mrs. Lefferty's plump arms.

"Never mind, dearie," said Mrs. Lefferty patting her back, "we're going home now. They've told me the whole story. It's going to be all right."

"Oh," cried Miss Flint, "we can't go home alone."

"Why not?" said Mrs. Lefferty.

"They'll surely get us now."

"Who'll get us?"

"Mr. Grasselli's mob," sobbed Miss Flint.

Here the sergeant, grinning, intervened, "Sure, don't you worry, Mrs. Lefferty," he said. "I'll send Officer Leibowitz around with you. That'll keep her quiet."

“Oh, I’m so ashamed of myself,” sobbed Miss Flint. “I don’t know what came over me ... to get you into all this trouble.”

“There ain’t any trouble,” said Mrs. Lefferty, continuing to pat Miss Flint’s skinny back. “Sure, dearie, stop your worryin’.”

Officer Leibowitz came forward to escort the two ladies home. He was a respectable Jewish policeman, with a large family, and after he had taken a good look at Miss Flint, painted and dyed and still bedecked in a ball gown, with the diamond butterfly in her Titian hair, he went up to the sergeant and began whispering to him.

“Sure,” said the sergeant, “take ’em home in a taxi. I guess the city can pay for it.”

“Oh,” cried Miss Flint, “I’m so ashamed. I’m so mortified. I don’t know how it happened. I don’t know how I got mixed up in it all.”

“Come on, ladies,” said Officer Leibowitz.

Outside he summoned a taxicab and for the first time in their lives, Miss Flint and Mrs. Lefferty had a ride in an automobile.

But at home there was a fresh calamity, one which to Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty was far worse than the scandal of Mr. Grasselli's identity and the night spent by Miss Flint in a cell at the police station, for in this new calamity there was a tragedy which touched them both and destroyed forever the few remnants of dubious joy that remained over the success of the opening of the Golden Nineties.

After Mrs. Lefferty and Maggie had put Miss Flint to bed and given her calming medicines, they met Mr. Boldini on the stairs. He had been looking for them. His bloodhound countenance was the apotheosis of melancholy and the tears streamed from his eyes.

"A terrible thing has happened," he said. Then he began to sob and it took Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty quite a little while to calm him. Then he said, still sobbing, "Fanto is dead!"

"Dead!" said Mrs. Lefferty. "But what was the matter with him? He was in wonderful spirits last night."

She leaned against the stair rail trying to realize what it was that Mr. Boldini was telling her. Fanto couldn't be dead, not the Fanto who had been so joyous only last night.

"When I woke up this morning," said Mr. Boldini, "he was still in his basket, curled up the way he always was, but when I called him he didn't get up. He didn't even open his eyes and wag his tail. I went over to him and ... he was dead!" And Mr. Boldini began to sob again. "He's been with me for fourteen years ... ever since he was a puppy ... my best friend!"

And then the three of them, without speaking, went softly along the hall to Mr. Boldini's room and opened the door.

There in his basket, curled up as he had always been, lay Fanto. He looked happy. He looked, Maggie said, as if he had died wagging his tail.

"Sure, he had a good time," said Maggie. "And he had fun last night."

"Yes," said Mr. Boldini, "he never had such a success before."

"It must have been the excitement," said Mrs. Lefferty.

"Sure," said Maggie, "with his rheumatism. It was too much for his heart." She leaned down and touched Fanto's head. It was her way of saying good-by to him. She and Mrs. Lefferty were thinking the same thing. Fanto wouldn't be there any more to help Mrs. Lefferty make the beds. He wouldn't be there to spring out of the dumb-waiter to surprise Maggie. He wouldn't ever again give them a performance, wagging his tail, and turning somersaults and standing on his head.

After Tommy had risen and had some breakfast and heard about Miss Flint being home and Fanto being dead, he went to police headquarters to see Mr. Grasselli. He found him in a cell having a late lunch which he had sent out for, and he seemed to be taking the whole affair philosophically. Without the dark glasses now you saw not only the pale freckled skin but the pale blue eyes, one of them aslant. He looked, with the dyed hair and mustache, more than ever like something out of the Chamber of Horrors.

"It didn't make any difference," he said. "I was gonna give myself up anyway on Monday. It was all fixed. 'Mr. Hirsh' had it all arranged. He says everything is gonna come out all right. A coupla days don't make any difference. Say, but that was a swell opening, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Tommy.

"I guess you and Sarah Jane oughta be pretty well fixed. You two got a break anyway. You oughta be getting contracts right along now."

"It looks kinda good," said Tommy.

"If I can do anything, let me know."

"Sure," said Tommy.

"Are the old ladies pleased?"

"No, I think they're kinda mad this morning."

"Why?"

"On account of everything that happened. They think poor Miss Minnie wouldn't have liked it."

"I get you ... not respectable."

“That’s it.”

“Well, what d’you expect of show business? I guess even old Boldini will get a break out of this if he don’t lose his head and ham it.”

“No,” said Tommy, “that’s finished.”

“How finished?”

“Fanto is dead.”

“Dead ... that dog?”

“Sure ... the excitement was too much for him.”

Something like a tear appeared in Mr. Grasselli’s eye. “Say, that was a wonderful dog,” he said. “That was the swellest dog I ever seen. He was almost ’uman.”

“Yeah,” said Tommy, “he was. The old girls can’t get over that.”

There was a little silence and then Mr. Grasselli looked up from his lunch and said, “There’s one thing I’d kinda like to ask you.”

“What?”

“What happened to you last night between eight o’clock and eleven? I never seen such a change in anybody.”

Tommy grinned. “Well,” he said, “it was like this.” And he told Mr. Grasselli about what had happened between him and Sarah Jane.

When he had finished, Mr. Grasselli, with a little spaghetti still hanging from the corner of his mouth, grinned back at him. “So that was it,” he said. “I get it.”

“What?”

“About Sal being so upstage.”

“Yeah,” said Tommy, “that was it.” He rose and picked up his hat and called the turnkey. “Well, I guess I’d better go,” he said.

“If there’s anything I can do,” said Mr. Grasselli, “let me know. You don’t need to worry about the club. Leontopopulos can manage that.”

“Okay. Thanks. It’ll be all right if the old girls don’t kick up a row. Of course, old Boldini’s act is finished.”

“Yeah, that’s finished. Here, I almost forgot,” said Mr. Grasselli, reaching in his pocket. “Take this for Fanto’s funeral. Tell ’em to bury him in the dog cemetery. It’s a nice place. One of my girls has got a coupla Pomeranians buried out there.” He counted out some bills and then said, “And take this extra to put up a monument. A dog like that oughta have a monument ... more than a lotta ’umans oughta have. I guess three hundred dollars oughta cover it. If it ain’t enough, lemme know.”

“Thanks,” said Tommy.

“And tell Sal that she musta scared old Flint too hard.”

Lunch scarcely happened at all that day. Both Sarah Jane and Tommy were absent, Miss Flint was indisposed, and Mr. Boldini didn't feel like eating anything, so in the end Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty sat down with old Mr. Van Diver and Mr. Salmon in the servants' dining room to a meal in which none of them save old Mr. Van Diver found any pleasure. Mr. Salmon was suffering from a headache, Mrs. Lefferty was a little dazed, and Maggie had fallen into a Gaelic state of brooding. But old Mr. Van Diver didn't notice anything. He ate and chuckled and talked in his squeaky voice as if nothing unusual had happened. Although Mrs. Lefferty had told him everything—about Fanto and Mr. Grasselli and Miss Flint—he had forgotten it all in the next half-hour.

It was Maggie's brooding that worried Mrs. Lefferty. She hadn't brooded like this in years, and when she brooded, Mrs. Lefferty always knew that an explosion was certain to follow and Maggie, brooding, was a terrifying spectacle. She grew silent and stared into space. The corners of her mouth went down and a wild look came into her blue eyes. At such times she appeared to function mechanically, as if her spirit had left her body. She could ask and answer questions. She could cook and even rise from the table to serve the food, but you had the impression that it wasn't Maggie who was doing it, but an automaton. Maggie wasn't there at all. She had gone away somewhere into solitude. And the brooding had the power of projecting itself so that it settled down like a thick fog over all the world about her.

When lunch was finished, she went about her work, still brooding. Only once did she give a hint of what was

troubling her and that was when she suddenly said abruptly to Mrs. Lefferty, “I told you poor Miss Minnie wouldn’t have liked it.” Every time she went near the dumb-waiter out of which poor Fanto would never spring again, the look in her eyes became more baleful.

Even when Sarah Jane returned home filled with the news of her interview with the great foreign director, Mr. Malkowsky, it didn’t cheer her. She showed no joy at the news that Sarah Jane already practically had a contract for Hollywood and that she had already had two offers to sing in night clubs. Even when Tommy came in with the news that very likely three of his songs were going to be published and would be sung over the radio, she did not show any signs of pleasure. For a second, when Tommy produced Mr. Grasselli’s three hundred dollars for Fanto’s funeral and monument, the grim lines of her face relaxed a little, but she only muttered, “It’s tainted money. We oughtn’t to touch it.”

And when at last Tommy and Sarah Jane told her and Mrs. Lefferty that they were going to be married at City Hall, she merely said grimly, “Well, it’s about time you made up your minds. And you’re not gonna be married in City Hall. No daughter of mine is gonna be married outside the Church. You’re gonna be married by Father McGuffy, a proper marriage that is a marriage.”

Sarah Jane said to Mrs. Lefferty, “What’s the matter with Ma?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I guess it’s all the trouble. She hasn’t been like this for years.”

Mrs. Lefferty did not brood. She was merely frightened. She was frightened by all that had happened and what still lay ahead of them and she was frightened by Maggie’s

brooding. But most of all she was frightened because the story she had made up seemed to have gotten out of hand. It was all coming out just as she had planned it, the way her stories always did, sooner or later, only it seemed to be happening with too great a violence and distortion. Tommy and Sarah Jane had got their “breaks.” They were even going to be married and they were going to have money. And Mr. Grasselli, “the villain” (who was really a nice generous man at heart), was in jail. And the night club was a success and they wouldn’t have to worry over where the interest and taxes and insurance were coming from. All that was fine, only Tommy’s and Sarah Jane’s luck was too good, and the club was too much of a success, and everything, except poor Fanto, was going too well. Somehow the story, it seemed, had run away with her and she didn’t know how to stop it. It made her nervous. And like Maggie, she didn’t like the cheap, unhealthy people that success had brought into their lives ... people like Mr. Grasselli, and Victor Leontopopulos and Mr. Malkowsky, the big foreign director, and all those people who had crowded about the table to congratulate Sarah Jane. Now she wanted to stop the story where it was. It had gone far enough.

It was Maggie who stopped it!

About seven in the evening she went up to Mr. Boldini's room with Mrs. Lefferty to help choose out of a catalogue which Mr. Boldini had got, a casket in which to lay Fanto away. The three of them studied all the designs and the prices and finally agreed on a gray basket coffin trimmed with silver. It was more than Maggie could bear, going over that catalogue, with poor Fanto lying there dead right beside them. The look in her eye became a little fiercer, and suddenly she left the room without a word and went directly to the kitchen.

At a table in the far end, her two assistants, a pair of men whom Victor Leontopopulos had engaged, were busy preparing corned beef hash. The sight of them was too much for Maggie.

She advanced toward them and said, "Get out of here, both of you, as fast as your legs can carry you."

They were both timid fellows and they looked at her in astonishment. One of them said, "What's the matter?"

"Never mind what's the matter," said Maggie. "Get out. See?"

The more timid of the two rose and went to the sink to wash his hands. The bolder said, "You can't fire us like that. What have we done?"

But Maggie had already taken up a strategic position by the stove. She took up a kettle filled with boiling water and advanced on the objector.

“Don’t argue with me. Get out of here before I scald you both.”

That made him give in. The boiling water was bad enough but the embattled look in Maggie’s eye was worse. Both assistants reached for their hats and coats and keeping close along the wall, well out of Maggie’s range, they slunk out of the door into the areaway.

When they had gone, Maggie locked the door and then went to the stove where the Irish stew was boiling in three large kettles. One by one she emptied these into the large garbage cans that Mr. Grasselli had had installed. When she had done that she took the corned beef hash and likewise did away with it. Then she poured herself a cup of “tea” from the kettle of black liquid on the back of the stove and rang the bell that she used to summon Mrs. Lefferty from abovestairs.

When Mrs. Lefferty appeared she said, “Tell the boarders not to come down tonight.”

“Why?” said Mrs. Lefferty.

“Because it ain’t gonna be safe. I’ll fix up some cocoa and bread and butter and jam and you can take it up to ’em. There ain’t gonna be anything else to eat come out of this kitchen tonight.”

“What about upstairs?” said Mrs. Lefferty.

“They might as well call it off. There ain’t gonna be any night club. Anyway there ain’t gonna be anything to eat.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Lefferty. She knew now that the storm had broken. While she stood watching Maggie timidly, Maggie assembled on the table beside her several teacups, a half-dozen plates and a soup tureen.

“What’s the tureen for?” asked Mrs. Lefferty.

“It’s for that Greek when he comes down to make trouble. I never liked Greeks anyway. And you’d better go right upstairs and keep outa the way, Bridget.... I’ll send the cocoa and stuff up on the dumb-waiter when it’s ready.”

So Mrs. Lefferty went away. It was not desertion, because she knew Maggie could take care of herself, and Maggie, in her present mood drinking black tea, was a spectacle that always terrified the gentler Mrs. Lefferty. In the back of her brain, as she climbed the stairs, there was the memory of another scene very like this in the kitchen of the big house on Murray Hill when “the old gentleman” in one of his most cantankerous moods had come downstairs himself to discharge Maggie after poor Miss Minnie, in hysterics, had refused, for the first time in her life, to obey him. “The old gentleman” had never had a chance against Maggie, and Mrs. Lefferty guessed that if Maggie could put to rout “the old gentleman,” a Greek like Mr. Leontopopulos would be no trouble at all. So Mrs. Lefferty retreated to her room at the top of the house, closed the door, and waited for the sounds of strife.

In a little while, as Maggie expected, there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs, the unmistakable hated sound of the feet of Mr. Leontopopulos who had dared to put on airs and try to order her about in her own kitchen. Stimulated by the black tea, she listened until his unsuspecting feet reached the bottom step and then, just as he opened the door, she flung a plate with all her might. But Mr. Leontopopulos saw it coming and ducked. It struck the door and smashed into a thousand pieces.

When the crash died away, the head waiter opened the door an inch or two but before he could speak, another plate struck

it so hard that it was flung shut in his face. The third time he made no attempt to communicate with Maggie face to face, but spoke from behind the shelter of the door.

"What do you mean," asked Mr. Leontopopulos, very grand in his safety behind the door, "by discharging your helpers?"

"You'd better not come in here unless you want your head broke," said Maggie.

"Where's the supper?" asked Mr. Leontopopulos.

"In the garbage can," said Maggie.

Mr. Leontopopulos considered this disaster for a moment. Then he said, "Either you get the supper or get out and let someone else get it."

"Nobody is coming into this kitchen tonight," said Maggie. "There ain't gonna be any supper."

"What's the matter?" in a conciliatory tone.

"Never mind what's the matter. It's none of your business what's the matter."

Another silence and then Mr. Leontopopulos decided to take a firmer tone.

"I'm the manager of this place," he said, "and you're under my orders. Mr. Grasselli has left me in charge."

"That jailbird!" said Maggie scornfully. "He's in the cooler where he belongs."

"Well," said Mr. Leontopopulos, "I'll get the police. A contract is a contract."

"Sure," said Maggie, "a contract is a contract, only there ain't any in this affair. This is my house and my kitchen and nobody's coming into it."

So Mr. Leontopopulos retired temporarily. A little later he returned and again tried arguing through the door, but with no greater success, and at last he appealed to Tommy and Sarah Jane, but this did no good whatever because in her brooding, Maggie conceived the idea that after all they were to blame because it was on account of them that Mr. Grasselli and all those other people got into the house.

"Sure," said Maggie, "if it hadn't been for you that Grasselli would never have come here at all."

The siege continued, without result, until about eleven-thirty when not Maggie but Mr. Leontopopulos gave in. He was forced to tell the arriving patrons that there wasn't any food but sandwiches which he sent out for at a neighboring restaurant; and at last about midnight, he decided to surrender entirely and announce that "owing to a disagreement in the management" the place was closed.

So among all Mr. Grasselli's speakeasy and night club ventures, the Golden Nineties held a record. It had opened one night and closed the next, and never had a club had a greater prospect of success.

When Tommy, a little shamefacedly, told Mr. Grasselli the story in a cell at the Tombs, Mr. Grasselli only laughed. He laughed hard and long at the story of Maggie in the kitchen drinking black tea and throwing plates every time Mr. Leontopopulos put his head in the door. He laughed almost as hard as he had laughed at Mr. Boldini's first performance.

"That's the first time anybody ever fixed Victor Leontopopulos. He's the toughest egg in the whole racket." Then when his mirth had died down a little, he said, "Well, I wasn't countin' on makin' anything out of it. It's up to the old girls. But what are they gonna do now?"

"Well, I guess if Sally and I get along, we'll be able to help 'em out."

"Mebbe it was a nut idea anyway ... the whole thing," said Mr. Grasselli, after a moment's reflection. "The nineties is buried and I suppose we oughta let 'em stay buried. As I said to Boldini, you can't expect a ham to play a ham."

And then suddenly Tommy saw a light. He understood it all. The whole venture had grown out of that first performance when he and Sarah Jane and Mr. Grasselli had laughed at the nineties. The whole idea had been based on making money out of making fun of Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty, Mr. Boldini and Mr. Salmon, Miss Flint and old Mr. Van Diver. He knew now why the brooding Maggie had exploded.

Three weeks later Sarah Jane and Tommy were properly married by Father McGuffy. Nobody came to the wedding except Maggie and Mrs. Lefferty and the boarders. It was Miss Flint's first venture outside the house since she had "squealed," but her terror had died away a little beneath the assurances offered by everyone about her and by the message Tommy brought her from Mr. Grasselli that it didn't matter because he had meant to give himself up anyway, and that he didn't harbor any feelings of vengeance. She even consented to go to the wedding without being heavily veiled.

The rest of the story came out just as Mrs. Lefferty imagined except for Mr. Grasselli. What happened to him was a surprise, and Mrs. Lefferty, who knew that he wasn't really a villain but good at heart, thought they treated him badly. She didn't know exactly what she meant by "they" but anyway "they" wouldn't let him out on bail and after a short trial, "they" found him guilty of evading income tax and "they" gave him seven years in Atlanta. The truth, which Mrs. Lefferty never quite grasped, was that "mobsters" like Mr. Grasselli were already a little out of date. Juries and judges weren't afraid of them any longer. Like Mr. Salmon, Miss Flint and Mr. Van Diver, they had begun to belong to an epoch.

On the day Mr. Grasselli went off to Atlanta, just as he was boarding the train, a messenger boy came running along the platform shouting "Mr. Maguire! Mr. Maguire!" He had two packages for Mr. Grasselli. One was a large box of cigars with Sarah Jane's card in it and the other was a tiny bouquet of flowers. When he opened the flowers, Mr. Maguire found

inside a card on which was written in precise, even finicky handwriting, “Bon voyage, from Malvina Flint.”

Sarah Jane got her contract from Mr. Malkowsky and made a lot of money in the meanwhile singing in a couple of night clubs, and Tommy got his songs published and, largely through Sarah Jane’s connivings, got a contract for the coast. Two or three days before they left, the final chapter of Mrs. Lefferty’s “story” happened exactly as she had pictured it. There was a ring at the door and Tommy was standing there all dressed in fine clothes and he said, “You and Maggie put on your hats and come on for a ride.” And then she saw waiting at the foot of the stoop a fine, shiny new automobile.

It wasn’t quite as big as she had pictured and the light in the top wasn’t cut glass; it was only frosted. But Mrs. Lefferty thought maybe that was better. It kept the story in hand.

It was the first ride Maggie had ever had in an automobile and the first Mrs. Lefferty had had, if you didn’t count the ride home from the station house with Miss Flint and Officer Leibowitz. Tommy took them up Riverside Drive to see the Washington Bridge and then up the Grand Concourse and by that time it was getting dark. On the way home Tommy said, “As soon as Sally and I get our bearings in Hollywood we’re gonna send for you both. It’s a wonderful place. I’ve been there.”

“When?” asked Mrs. Lefferty.

“When I was away,” said Tommy.

She and Maggie didn’t talk much more but seemed to fall into a silence from which it was impossible to rouse them and when at last they drove up again in front of poor Miss Minnie’s house, Mrs. Lefferty said, “It’s a wonderful

automobile, and it's kind of you and Sarah Jane to think about taking us to Hollywood, but we couldn't go."

"No," said Maggie, "it ain't possible."

"Why?" asked Tommy.

"What would become of Miss Flint and old Mr. Van Diver and Mr. Boldini?"

"You can send us a little money from time to time, if you want," said Maggie. "It'll cost you less than keepin' us in Hollywood."

That night after supper Miss Flint poured the coffee while Mrs. Lefferty helped Maggie with the dishes, and as soon as dinner was over, Mrs. Lefferty got out “the old gentleman’s” gaming table and the perpetual rummy score and said, “You begin dealing, Miss Flint.”

The room was almost the way it had always been, save that beneath poor Miss Minnie’s Axminster carpet there was now a floor of hardwood and the opening between the dining room and the drawing room was wider than it used to be. Mr. Boldini won the first game and Mrs. Lefferty the second. In his corner Mr. Van Diver looked at the picture magazines and chortled to himself, and about eleven o’clock Mrs. Lefferty went downstairs to fetch beer and sandwiches. Nothing was changed except that poor Fanto wasn’t there. There was a new poodle, a puppy called “Flic” which Sarah Jane and Tommy had bought to comfort Mr. Boldini. And now they had a radio because Mr. Grasselli said he wouldn’t need the one he had in his room and they might as well keep it.

While they ate and drank, Mrs. Lefferty turned to what was known as “Sarah Jane’s station” and in a little while Sarah Jane was singing “Here We Are in Love” right there beside them—“just as if she was in the room.”

“Isn’t it wonderful?” said Mrs. Lefferty.

“Yes,” said Maggie, “if only poor Miss Minnie could be here.”

[The end of *Better Than Life* by Louis Bromfield]