Snow in Summer

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Title: Snow in Summer
Date of first publication: 1938
Author: Helen R. Hull (1888-1971)
Date first posted: June 6, 2026
Date last updated: June 6, 2026
Faded Page eBook #

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

SNOW IN SUMMER

BY

HELEN R. HULL

HARPER & BROTHERS
1938

FIRST EDITION

To

Thérèse Heilner Simon

Snow in Summer

Hazel ran down the stairs to the basement, caught her heel on a step, flung out her hand against the white-washed cement wall, and just didn't fall. She stared at her outstretched smarting hand, and shook it gingerly. Nothing sprained, thank Heaven! Her tongue lapped at the reddening scratches and she crossed more cautiously to snap off the racket of the washing machine. At the final subsiding rumble she gave a sigh of relief. There was always the chance that the whirling rhythm confined in that sleek, white-shining drum might someday get the better of her, explode, fill the whole basement with its froth and din. She wouldn't have told George about the animosity between her and that machine, but she knew that someday she would fail to make something fast, and it would electrocute her or drown her in suds, or flail her to bits. George had given it to her for a Christmas present, two years ago. She could see him now, explaining how it worked, a clear flush like a boy's standing out on his cheekbones. She had demurred a little. Think how much it costs! Why, that would pay the laundry for weeks and weeks!

"But this will last for years. Hazel! Years! I can keep it in order. Don't you like it?"

He would have laughed at her if she had explained how it terrified her. She took a deep breath of the quiet in the basement, and watched the motes dance in the morning sun-shaft through the low window. Her tongue took a last dart along her abraded palm, and she flexed her slim fingers. It would have been too awful if she had wrenched something! Her mind picked up the game with time it played so constantly these days. She'd be back in half an hour. Another hour to rinse and hang out the clothes, ten minutes to brush up the living room, she had the salad ready. Well, say ten o'clock. If no one telephoned, she might have two hours—but she must be careful. A kind of warning, the narrow escapes she'd been having. Just because she rushed so.

She held herself to a sedate pace up the stairs, a propitiatory offering to this household *poltergeist*. After eight, the Dutch clock over the yellow breakfast table said, and Lorna hadn't touched her breakfast. From the living room came voices, George's, exasperated, "But if you'd just watch, you'd see how I do it. See, this spring—" and John, "Gee, Dad, I'm late now. I tried to put that spring back. Where's Mother, anyway?"

Hazel was there instantly, her eyes round with dismay under the crisp fringe of lashes. Had John upset that typewriter again? George was hunched over the table, elbows, square shoulders absorbed, the tuneless hum with which he always worked (like a little dynamo, thought Hazel), breaking into a satisfied, "There it is. Now don't throw it on the floor if you can help it."

"I never did," said John. "Ole second-handed thing." He peered over his father's shoulder as George rattled the shift bar triumphantly.

"Will it run?" asked Hazel. "I warned you to be gentle with it!"

"Oh, sure." John croaked a little, being casual, and reached for his schoolbag. "It's time we got a move on."

George turned, brushing at the square tips of his fingers. "Lucky John spoke of it if you want to use it. Thought you sent the bills all out." He came briskly across the room, a sturdy, compact figure, blond and well-scrubbed, his blue eyes alert and sanguine.

"Yes," said Hazel, vaguely, while she made automatic inspection of her son. He looked—well, grubby and stringy—beside his father. Growing so fast this last year or so. His face had a thin, surprised look. Hazel slid two fingers into a sagging pocket of his coat and drew out a limp, smudged rag which she dangled, her fine nose crinkling.

"Aw, gee, I thought I had a clean one." John squirmed past her and started up the stairs, three steps at a stride.

"Tell Lorna to come along this instant," Hazel called after him. "I'm getting the car now."

"I don't see what she does all this time." George opened the front door. "The postman's late, too, and this is the day my dental journal comes. He's not even in sight."

Hazel pulled a blue felt hat down over her soft hair, called, "Lorna! You must drink your milk!" and ran out to the dining room. The keys should be there on the buffet, in the silver cup, behind the candlesticks . . . in the corner of the top drawer. Where had she left them? Oh, not in the car again!

"Looking for something?"

(Oh, darn! Now he would know—) Her glance darted sidewise at him, caught the round bright expectancy in his eyes. "You've got them! Oh, you —" she thrust out her hand. "Please!"

"And where were they?" He spun the chain in a flash of metal on a taunting finger. "Lucky for you I happened—Ouch!" He jumped back, as Hazel, lunging for them, stubbed against his polished toe. "The time you'd save if you had a little system!"

"Meet you at the front door," called Hazel, hurrying out through the kitchen. Fall chrysanthemums and marigolds marched in rows of bright disks along the straight gravelled drive to the small garage, and in the next yard, beyond the row of barberries, Polish Annie was hanging out sheets. Well, Mrs. Marks could afford a washer-woman; she had no children. Hazel swung back the doors, edged along the fenders of the small sedan, and slid under the wheel, wriggling to free her knees from the pull of her blue piqué frock. She fitted in the key, made a few indeterminate movements of her hands, her face serious in concentration. Brake, gears, clutch. "It's valuable practice," George insisted. "I won't get the car out any more. You know how to drive, only you won't relax and let it be automatic." At least she hadn't driven into the back of the garage for days! Her toe pressed the starter button, and holding her breath she emerged in a bucking and erratic course which landed her, after a final parabola, in front of the house. George was probably right, but if only she could start off head first perhaps she wouldn't mind so much. Like that nightmare in which she went leaping backward through all the streets of the town, unable to stop because she'd forgotten the word. She laid a finger on the horn, but before she pressed it the front door opened and George stepped out on the tapestry bricks of the entrance. For a moment he stood there, hands lifted to fit on his new gray hat. For a moment Hazel looked at him, clear of the mists, the manifold subtleties of her intimacy with him, her emotion toward him. He might have been a stranger, seen for the first time in one of those intuitive flashes when she could see almost the stranger's image of himself, the way he hoped the world saw him. Confident, not exactly jaunty, but full of a kind of well-being which was a matter of equilibrium, inner and outer. He really likes his life, she thought. Teeth are terribly important, they're fascinating, a dentist is practically the mainstay of the world, he likes the town, he likes this house, having a family. He's really as happy as anyone I ever saw. As he called into the house, "Come along, you two! Mother's waiting!" Hazel shivered, and her tight fingers swung the wheel a trifle. When he found out what she was doing, he would think it very funny. Now with driving, he enjoyed teaching her, he didn't really mind that she was stupid about learning. It would be dreadful if ever she did anything to shake this content of his. Not that he was smug; he worked too hard.

The three of them, George, John, and Lorna, were rushing at the car, and Hazel, tipping forward the seat beside hers, forgot the moment of strange inspection.

"Did you get any breakfast?" She saw, in the fresh curls at the back of Lorna's fair head, the cause for her delay. That rose sweater was growing too snug over small young breasts; Lorna liked the color and refused to wear anything else.

"She's banting, Mother." John plumped in beside his sister. "I hear her jiggling the bathroom scales every time I want to get in."

"If I was as skinny as you, I wouldn't say anything," began Lorna.

"All nonsense," said George, dropping the front seat and pulling shut the door with a sharp bang. "Eat what you want and work hard and you'll be the way you're meant to be."

"My goodness!" Lorna's voice came shrilly over the clash as Hazel, sliding forward, poked the gear lever toward reverse. "Just because I don't enjoy guzzling!"

Hazel could feel the restrained patience with which George held himself until she fumbled into third gear and popped down the street. It would be almost better if he spoke out, except that when he just thought she could pretend she didn't know it. Now she was reasonably safe until she had to start up again after she dropped the children at school.

"Guzzle? Who guzzles? We, they, it est guzzledator."

Poor John and his Latin! Hazel laughed, partly a crumb of nervousness, partly amusement, and George, turning a moment from his alert vicarious driving, said, "You remember I like my girl as she is! None of your anemic slats for me!"

Of course Lorna did take after his people. Hazel drove along her thoughts drifting, melting one into the next, just at the edge of awareness, hazily beyond the focus of her attention on this hazardous business of driving. Lorna was a trifle on the solid side, but she had George's coloring, fair skin and hair. She wasn't exactly pretty, but later, when her character had firmed out— This corner was a bad one; Hazel peered left, right, and met George's blue glance as he peered first right then left. She pushed down her toe and leaped across the intersection. Just last summer, while she was in camp, Lorna had jumped out of childhood into—well, not maturity, but some of its superficial concerns. As if something had stepped too hard on the gas. Life ought to have a good driver, going along smoothly— She swerved,

sucking in her breath, as a brown and woolly dog trotted across the road. George seized the wheel as she bumped over the curb, and swung the car back into the road. A long blue car rolled past, the chauffeur grinning. Mr. MacAndrews, on his way to the factory. Her knees had that untied feeling!

"You missed that one, Mother," said John. "Better luck next time!"

"It's those impulsive movements," said George, "that keep women from driving as well as men."

"Would you run down a dog?" cried Hazel.

"I never have. But if I had to choose between hitting one and wrecking the family——"

Hazel found herself biting hard on her upper lip. She pushed it out and ran the tip of her tongue over it. That was why she had that little fringe of chapped skin always after she had to drive. The shadows under the tall maples along the street were full of dogs! Why had she ever thought it would be nice to live out at the edge of town, in the new residence section? Three, two blocks more; she turned up a side street to avoid the few business blocks, and came through the small park to the high school, rocking the car as she pushed valiantly with both feet on clutch and brake. George got out, and the children clambered after him; John's books caught on the hinge of the seat, and as he stooped to free the strap he winked solemnly at Hazel. She watched a moment after George sat again beside her. Lorna had called out, a group of girls had turned, and she went toward them, her dark skirt tight with the quick movement of sturdy legs, the sunlight brilliant on her hair. John dawdled behind her, banging his strapped books against his thigh. Then Hazel peered sidewise under her lashes at her husband, and for a fleeting instant saw, in an unfamiliar contraction of muscles between his brows a kind of puzzled wonder. But all he said was, "John ought to try out for one of the teams. He's spindling. Needs filling out." Then the wonder disappeared, and he was comfortable again, knowing what to do. "Well, time to be off."

There was again a moment of suspended attention, of withheld comment while Hazel got under way, fairly smoothly this time. Then George said, in the uninflected, almost talking-to-himself tone of one who has no doubt of his listener's response, "I think I'm booked every hour today. That means night work again. Mrs. Wills's upper, and there'll be two sets of X-rays."

(Monday night. If I get the children off to their rooms early, I'll have sat two more hours.) Hastily, as George's silence nudged at her, "It seems forever since you've had a free evening."

"I really need a laboratory assistant, a mechanic." His hand darted toward the emergency brake. "Look out! That truck——"

With a squawk of the horn Hazel dodged around the red bulk as it swung out from the curb. "I saw it," she said. Well, she had, just as George spoke. "You'd never find one to suit you," she added, incautiously. These few blocks of morning business traffic took her mind off her words.

"I'm not unnecessarily particular," said George, calmly. "I didn't want another fender crumpled. And as for my work, it just has to be right. Take an inlay. It fits or it doesn't. And bridge-work——"

"I just meant—" Hazel was a trifle breathless, slowing behind the huge gray bus from the city, and then swinging past it as the one traffic light of the town, on the bank corner, showed green—"that you do everything so well yourself—" There, she drew up at the curb without grazing the tires. Sunlight glinted on the brass sign beside the entrance to offices above the bank. Dr. George Curtis. On the whole she'd done pretty well this morning. "You're a kind of genius, everything you touch, now aren't you, darling?"

"Well, I shouldn't go that far." George smiled. "Pulling my leg, eh? Just because I like things right. Anyway, I couldn't afford an assistant. Not till the X-ray machine is paid for, and the kids are educated, and the Building and Loan is settled. The more I make, the harder I work."

"But look at the reputation you're getting." Hazel was serious now, pride luminous in her eyes. "Even Doctor Brown sending you cases, asking you to consult with him— You're really educating the town."

George nodded, his mouth firm at the corners. He didn't need her encouragement exactly; he had no doubts about himself. But he rather liked a salvo of trumpets before he rode away into his busy day. "Yes, I think all that new equipment is justifying itself. If only John wasn't so clumsy! Lots he could do to help me, a boy his age. I wouldn't dare trust him in the door. Take that typewriter this morning. Why, any boy could have fixed that. Sometimes I suspect he's putting it on, too lazy to try."

"Oh, no! I know just how he feels! Things like—like cars and typewriters are just malicious, the way they go wrong. John isn't lazy. He just knows you can fix it, whatever it is, just as I do."

"But John's a boy! He makes me uncomfortable he's so stupid."

"You don't really think he's stupid." Hazel laid her hand over George's, her finger-tips pressed, sensitive and light, against his knuckles. "He hasn't got your hands, but you wait!"

"You'd think I'd nothing to do but sit here and chin!" George gathered himself up alertly, brushed her cheek in a kiss which was less a caress than an absent-minded symbol of affection established past inquiry, and let himself briskly out of the car. "Blow twice when you come this noon, then I won't waste time waiting for you." He wheeled; his erect head and straight sturdy back vanished in the hallway.

At least he no longer waited to inspect her departure. Hazel smiled, remembering the day he had run after her for a block to tell her to release the brake. She could drive home now in her own way, and leave the car in front of the house, safe for her noon pilgrimage.

As she drove at a snail-easy pace out the wide street, she thought, it would be like a fairy tale, so much so that it can't happen. I'm just a silly fool, having a dream. That's why I don't dare speak of it. George would try not to laugh, but he'd get that rosy, amused look. Ten thousand dollars. Think what I could do! The mortgage, the X-ray machine, college.

It had all started with the typewriter. If George hadn't brought that home! She let herself into the quiet house, and stood at the door of the living room, looking at the thing, the round white disks of the keys dancing under her intent stare. He'd picked it up cheap, second hand, and set it in order. Better business to have his bills typed. Could she learn to run it? She had learned, after a fashion, holding herself to the attempt in spite of clatter and extraordinary results until she no longer wasted George's excellent stationery. If other people do it, then you can, she told herself. She had been telling herself that about a great many things, ever since her marriage. Such as keeping the house in order. She threw aside her hat, and moved quickly about the living room, gathering sheets of the Sunday paper, plumping cushions on the divan, brushing kernels of popped corn into the ash of the fireplace, straightening lamp shades, magazines. It was queer about marriage. You expected it to be—well, a prolongation of a state of feeling. There was that about it, of course. But what you didn't expect was that you had, suddenly, to become an expert at all sorts of things you'd never dreamed of doing.

Until she had married George, she had never done anything, in the sense of tackling the great variety of material items out of which life seemed to be composed. Her mother had spoiled her, of course, but like George her mother had been so competent that she forestalled activity from less skillful competitors. And they had been so proud of her, her mother and father, for her graceful accomplishments in school. The darlings, she thought, as she hurried into the kitchen for a dust cloth. If they knew what I'm trying, they'd

be sure— She felt that queer jerk deep in her consciousness, like the sensation of being dropped too quickly in a swift elevator, with which she came upon the fact of their being dead. It had happened so suddenly, and had interrupted the pattern of her life with George so little that for long busy stretches she almost forgot.

If her father had not gone to that training camp on the Lakes the dreadful winter of the flu epidemic, he would still be alive. And she might never have known George. There had been too few doctors, and her father had worked night and day trying to save the boys. When, finally, he had almost died himself with pneumonia, Hazel and her mother had gone to Chicago, had waited until they could bring him home. Hazel, seventeen, had met George, had thought him an archangel, Michael himself, his bright hair and fair skin brilliant in his uniform of petty officer making him a thing of life in a scene of appalling death. Her father had said, "We need a good modern dentist in Lounsberry. If you ever get out of this, and want to locate, think us over."

Her father had come home with a heart never the same, and so, in a way which faced life and not death, had Hazel. When, a year later, her father said that a fellow named Curtis had turned up, sort of prospecting for a dentist's office, Hazel knew she had just been waiting. And later—she could see her father's face now, as he had talked with her, waxy, wrinkles down the long cheeks, around the deep eyes like a bit of used paraffin paper—"But, good Lord, Hazel! I thought you'd want someone different—someone you'd meet at college—" she had said, "He is different. I don't want to go to college."

"And I'm responsible for getting him here!"

"You've always got me what I wanted!"

"I'd like to, as long as I can." Something had happened to his face, like a hand giving the paraffin paper another crumple.

He had died before Lorna was born, and her mother, rather like a clock there is no one to wind, had quietly run down a few years later.

Then for years Hazel had gone about her new business of housewife and mother, thinking, when she at rare intervals looked at herself, that the slim, dreaming girl who had written poetry, who had delivered the class valedictory, who—but what did it matter? She was gone, perhaps her bones were still the same, but her very flesh was different.

An hour later the clothes-horse in the backyard oscillated gently with its burden, the planes of linen and garments making in the sunlight a design of labor done. Hazel came into the living room with two square black hatboxes

which she set one on each side of the straight chair. She seated herself between them, and for a moment relaxed, spine soft, suds-crinkled fingertips pressed against cheekbones. But she couldn't be tired, not until this job was done. A month ago she had dropped into a bog of consternation: she had been mad to start such a thing, she was too ignorant, too ill-equipped, she had better throw hatboxes and all into the fire. That had been just after the children had returned from their summer at camp, and George had come back from his fishing trip. Perhaps she had worked too many hours while she was alone. At any rate, after a few days she had swung herself into the double rhythm of taking care of the family and stealing time for herself, a half hour, an hour, whenever she was alone. Second wind, her father would have called it. "People don't begin to use themselves, there's an inner reservoir they don't tap. I see it often enough in a crisis. I tell you, Hazel, some of the old boys that did so much, generals, geniuses, what-not, they'd learn how to dip in, how to work up second wind."

Hazel wasn't sure just what her father had meant, but she knew she had to finish this task if she wanted to be at ease with her self-esteem, and the very compulsion seemed to produce the necessary energy. She pushed back her shoulders, and her face lost its soft, relaxed aimlessness. The upper lip looking long and Irish under the fine nose, pulled down, its curve straightening, and the eyebrows, even, fine accents of the structure of wide brow and eye sockets, drew together. She whisked off the lids of the two hatboxes, picked out of that on the left an exercise book with a mottled cover, and from that on the right, sheets of white paper. She propped the copybook open against a pile of George's *National Geographics*, and slid the paper under the roller of the machine.

It had really started with the typewriter, she thought, again. Until George had brought it home, she had just scribbled in her copybooks; she would buy them for a nickel at the drug store which kept school supplies, and no one ever wondered what she did with them. She couldn't remember just when she had started that. After the children were both old enough to go to school, and she was efficient enough so that she no longer lost the frantic race between the length of a day and the tasks she must finish,—or was it when George began to go back to his office after dinner? At first he had had time during the day, poor boy, because not many people noticed his shiny new sign. She could remember well enough the first day he had been busy every hour. "Wasn't I right, Hazel? Even if I offended Mrs. Betts, insisting that she had to pay when she forgot her appointment, you see it made them think I was busy and couldn't be fooled with. Now you see!" What she saw, among other things, was that now she had long evening hours on her hands. She

couldn't leave the children, and there wasn't much to do if she had left them, as she didn't care for bridge, and the moving picture theatre was open only on Saturday. George said, "We can get a maid pretty soon, if you want one, although with all this modern equipment—" Then, before they reached even the point of discussing a maid, along came the depression, so that people couldn't pay their bills, even when they could no longer put off a visit to George, and George worked harder than ever.

She had tried reading. But she knew most of the books in the small library, and she found nerves twitching so that her feet jumped, as they had when a little girl she had sat beside her mother through a long sermon. Reading for hours and hours would be all right when she was an old woman, but now it was too like watching someone else run and dance and live when inside her something turned and twisted and pressed to break into its own movement.

When the children were little she had told them stories, about her own childhood, about her father, about his people. Lorna never listened long, but John loved them, and gradually Hazel had woven a long serial which went on night after night, held rigorously by the boy to fidelity in every statement. "No, Mother! You said he had his possessions tied in a handkerchief on a stick, not in a bag at all!"

She had always liked her father's yarns about his people. Restless footed, he had called them, coming from Ireland and southern England to this country, settling in the east, and then the restless footed moving on, west again. Perhaps, after all, it had all started with the unused copybook she had found the first summer the children were in camp, and the sharpened pencil. Put the two together, and there was Hazel, starting to set down the story she had spun so many nights for her son. When she had filled one book, a nickel bought another. Her hand-writing was amusingly uncertain, a product of the period when the public schools swung from Spencerian script to round and horizontal letters; Hazel had made a queer combination of the two. But at the end of an evening with the copybook, slipped into a table drawer as she heard George at the door, she had a half-guilty, warm-cheeked contentment.

When she had started the first copybook she had no clear notion of what she meant to do, and telling George seemed too like confessing a private vice, trotting out a fragment of day-dream. When she had filled two books she hid them in a hatbox on her closet shelf, under a winter hat. She was finding writing like wine, and tippling on words she set down many things she had never known she felt. It was unlikely that George would have curiosity enough to read all the scribbled pages, but she ran no risk. And she

didn't want him to point out with patient good humor that she was wasting hours of time. Then last spring, at the final meeting of the Ladies' Literary Society, a lecturer from the University had given her the final push into what seemed at moments a life of crime. Certainly it took as much scheming and equivocation as a clandestine love affair. She typed CHAPTER SIXTEEN at the top of the sheet, and, a little ridge of concentration between her brows, began vigorously to peck. "The country is looking for new voices," the lecturer had said: "The middle west must grow more articulate. There may be someone among you ready with the next great novel." Then as proof of the country's eagerness he had cited awards, fellowships, prize contests. "Here's a new publishing house, just being launched. Does it look for established authors already with repute? No. It offers ten thousand dollars for the best first novel from a writer who has never published a thing."

A good many of the club ladies had gathered around the lecturer to ask questions. After all, they had paid him twenty-five dollars just to come over from Ann Arbor, and he had talked only an hour. "But don't you think, Professor Elson, when so many things in the world are unpleasant, that our writers should give us what is pure and sweet?" Hazel, being part of the refreshment committee, was passing cakes. If she could get him alone for one second, could ask him one question! No hope. Miss Emma, one of the two Buckley girls, who wrote poems for the Lounsberry *Weekly Record*, was holding her cup of tea dangerously near his crisply buttoned coat and bubbling at him through her very new teeth. Hazel offered cakes to them, with a protective glance at Miss Emma. (George had been funny, about the way her transformation had slipped while she was biting on plaster for the upper plate.) But the young lecturer wasn't laughing at her; he was concerned with escape, he had an engagement, he had appreciated the audience very much indeed, very receptive, and he had edged past the barrier of silk bosoms and teacups disappearing just as the ladies' quartette started the Spring Song.

She couldn't have asked him without someone overhearing, anyway. But after two days in which she dodged and twisted only to find the same idea in the middle of her thoughts every time she opened her mind's eye, she wrote to Professor Elson. A friend of hers was writing a book, would he please send her the name of the new publishers he'd spoken about. When he didn't answer, she wrote a second time. She was sorry to trouble him, but would he please? Then she watched for the postman, and luckily reached the door first the day the envelope addressed in her own hand came back to her, with a printed announcement, and an apology scrawled in the margin: sorry, my secretary overlooked your request.

October first. Ten more days. She tapped more briskly, and the paper slid crooked as she reached the bottom of the page. She managed to finish the line, if slightly on the bias, and pulled out the sheet. Page 292. She wasn't sure how many pages a book should have. Some of Dickens seemed very long, and she'd looked at "Anthony Adverse" with dismay. Well, a man might find time to write as many pages as that; she couldn't. "Pere Goriot" was much shorter, and her father had liked that. She was a little troubled because the typewriter lacked quotation marks and authors seemed to use them. On one page she tried inserting them by hand, but the pen marks looked unprofessional. Lucky for her the machine had capital letters and periods. She adjusted the next sheet. Yes, the typewriter really was responsible. She had been struggling with the exercises George had brought home, until she was sick of the sly gray fox and the aid of the party, and she had suddenly thought it would be more fun to copy a piece out of one of her copybooks. That had done it. Almost like seeing one's self in print to have the transformation from intimate careless scribbling into the uniform impersonality of printed letters in straight rows. (Or almost straight; a few hops and glides of letters.) For the first time she had thought of her own words as standing out apart from her, making a shape for someone else to see. The idea that she might make a book had started right then, although she had waited for the circular from Professor Elson before she admitted it.

John alone had suspected anything. "What on earth do you pound that ole typewriter so much for?" he asked. "I woke up last night and you were just a-going at it!"

"Just practicing." Hazel thought: I can't tell John, because I'd be so mortified then if I didn't get the prize. I should have taken up painting. That doesn't make a noise.

She had time for another page before starting luncheon. Only part of this last copybook left. Do not insert name of author on script. Script was this thickening pile of sheets. Write title of book and name and address on separate sheet, and enclose in sealed envelope. She had already done that. "Your Hand Upon the Gate," by Hazel Browning Curtis. She had thought of naming the book "Restless Feet," but decided it sounded too much like horses. Her concentrated haste had brushed color over the narrow bridge of her nose and under her eyes when at quarter before twelve she tied the covers on the two hatboxes and carried them upstairs to the closet shelf.

Five minutes behind schedule, having turned the gas low under her lunch dishes, and set the table, she ran out to the car. She could drive fairly fast with no passengers aboard. High school was already dismissed; she kept a

quick eye out for her two, among the drifting groups, girls with sunlight on their curled heads— (I'm positively the only girl in my class who hasn't had a permanent, Mother!)—boys dawdling behind the girls in noisy pairs or trios . . . scuffling, shrieking out jokes which the girls pretended not to hear. They act just as we used to, thought Hazel, in spite of all the talk. Playing up to each other before they know why— There's John! Straddling a hydrant at the corner. He propelled himself with a minimum of effort into the car. "Here we are again," he said.

"Have you seen Lorna?"

"She went on over town."

"I'm not very late, am I?" Hazel let the clutch pedal jump up, the car bucked gaily down the street.

"I haven't waited more'n an hour or two." John had a solemn drawl.

"Yes, you!" Hazel laughed. "Have a good morning?"

"Lousy."

"John!"

"Pardon muh. Stinko, then. Honest, I bet I'll flunk that Latin. No sense to it."

"Nonsense. You never flunked anything yet. Don't say that to your father!"

"He'll know soon enough. Then I'll be more popular than I am now."

Hazel stared straight ahead, her mouth firm. She'd have to talk to George; he had been riding John too much about—oh, springs out of typewriters and such! "If you were more popular," she said, lightly, "you'd —" she jammed down the brake as the traffic light jumped red at her, and a car following cracked against the bumper. She peered guiltily over her shoulder, but the grimy face of the truck driver behind seemed unperturbed. Too much to handle car and domestic nuances together! As she drove across the street she saw Lorna, standing in the triangular recessed entrance of the drug store, her face lifted in gay absorption to that of a strange young man whose red head bent toward her, shooting up from broad shoulders on which stretched a grayish sweat shirt with extraordinary inked designs. Hazel poked the nose of the car toward the curb, and peered at John. Something startling about the pose of the two figures, obliviousness, challenge. John was staring gloomily at his father's sign, as if he hadn't seen Lorna. "Who's the boy?" asked Hazel. It couldn't offend John's code to tell her that.

"What boy?" John overdid his inspection of the neighborhood. "Oh, him! He's new this year. Daniels his name is. He plays football."

Lorna had given a little start, spying the car, and after a moment of concentrated animation, quick words too low to reach Hazel, strolled out to the curb, her creamy blandness implying that she had been waiting tedious hours. So this is the next one, thought Hazel. Just a day or so ago she'd asked Lorna where Tommy Burke kept himself, and Lorna had said, "That dope! My goodness, how should I know?" This boy looked—well, older. John got out, muttering he'd like a back door to the car so he wouldn't have to move around all the time, and Hazel punched the horn button twice. Unnecessarily, because as she blew George appeared at the doorway, hat under his elbow, and beside him a young woman. Hazel was thinking: Lorna's only sixteen, but she looks older. Something about that red-head I don't like. Just the way Lorna looked at him. Lorna tossed her head as she climbed into the car, and her smile at Hazel was bright with defiance. Don't worry, darling, I won't say a word; I know better than that! Why didn't George come along, and who was the woman, anyway? Hazel leaned forward; the edge of the door cut her view. "You'll have to wait," drawled John, "till Dad finishes his lecture." A hint of laughter crinkled at the corners of Hazel's eyes, but she kept her mouth sober. It was true, George did have his serious, now-I-will-tell-you-all manner, one forefinger beating against the palm of an outstretched hand. His hat slid down as his finger grew emphatic, and he stooped for it, brushed it off without losing a word. The woman was very smart, like a red-winged blackbird in tailored suit and scarlet purse to match the long quill on her small hat. Even her hair lay in a black and shining swirl, like feathers, and she had certainly repainted her mouth if she'd been having anything done to the teeth that gleamed as she laughed. "I'll think it over." She waved her purse, and strolled away, her dark, indifferent eyes not even grazing the car or Hazel's half curious face. It is time for fall clothes, thought Hazel. But George hadn't sent a glance after that smart figure. A suit does things for you, her thoughts jumped along. But she must have at least a dead tooth! She wondered if George's habit of monologue had grown a little, perhaps because his listener so often had a mouth too full of cotton and rubber dams to answer back! But John mustn't laugh at his father. Just because George was so much in earnest——

He sat beside her, the clean whiff of antiseptic soap filling the car as he banged shut the door. "I'm glad to sit down," he said.

Hazel backed gingerly out from the curb and drove down the block of stores. At the corner where the large sign LOUNSBERRY HOUSE

announced progress in neon letters, she turned, just as the woman in the black suit started across the street. The woman moved ahead with an arrogant indifference to small town traffic, and Hazel stalled the engine. "I wish people would look where they're going!" she said, as she trod on the starter.

"It is a good idea," said George.

(Only he means me, thought Hazel.)

"I wonder if she's staying at the hotel." George craned his neck.

Hazel couldn't say "Who is she"; suddenly she felt too cross to say anything. But Lorna asked. "Is she a new patient, Father?"

(Even her voice sounds excited, thought Hazel. She's trying to start something else, so I won't ask about her new boy friend.)

"She may be," George was saying. "She's making a canvass for a dental supply company, she's a representative of the concern, but we got to talking about her own teeth. She's practically agreed to come back for some X-rays. She's a very intelligent woman."

"Be kinda hard on her," said John, reflectively, "if she had to have a tooth pulled every time she got an order."

"She said," continued George, "that she seldom saw an office, except in the largest cities, so well equipped as mine."

"My goodness," said Lorna, "I shouldn't think she'd like to go all around like that!"

"I don't know." George stopped eyeing the street ahead for a moment to turn his head toward his daughter. "Not that I'd like you to go on the road. But she has her own car, and she seems to like it."

She does, does she, thought Hazel, with unexpected wryness. Well, I hope she doesn't sell George something terribly expensive. Like that new washbasin with footpedals, so he didn't have to touch the faucets after he'd washed his hands. Oh, *dear*! I mustn't be so edgy. Nothing's happened. Lorna's had beaux before, and George—as she rounded a corner into their own street she let her elbow rest against his arm, and her tension relaxed. She even smiled a little, remembering George, years ago. "A dentist is about as safe as a man can be. Any woman knows she hasn't got a throb of sex appeal left when she gets her mouth wide open and a drill going in it." Even a swanky saleswoman was a dead tooth to George. Typing always made her nervous, this double life was getting her down. If she weren't so near the

end— When she brought the car successfully to a stop in front of the white house, she had pushed herself into her usual busy and quiet acceptance of the three of them as her family home for lunch, all separate undercurrents submerged.

On Friday afternoon, the last day of September, Hazel was hunting for a piece of paper large enough to fold around a box. It would be a joke, she thought, if after all these months of work she couldn't send off her book because she couldn't wrap it properly! She rummaged through the pile on top of the broom closet, and off it slid, grazing her nose. Odds and ends; the only thing in the pile large enough was a brown paper bag from the grocer's, rumpled but intact. Hazel smoothed it out on the table. Something fatally appropriate, a tag of domesticity. She might better save the money the postage would cost. Her fingers were listless with dejection as she lifted the tattered lid of the box—(the paper on which she had copied the book had come in the box, and she might have been more careful of it if she had known she would use it as casket). Yes, casket. That was just the way she felt about it! She'd expected elation and triumph; if she didn't hurry she wouldn't have the courage to send the thing away! There lay the sealed envelope, her name inside, "Your Hand Upon the Gate" somewhat aslant on the outside. She tied a piece of twine about the box, and slid it into the paper bag. With a little folding over along the sides, at the end, she could make it serve. Ship by express or first class mail said the directions.

She stared at the window, where fall drizzle and fog pressed flat and gray, seeming in its monotone to be without depth, drabness painted on the glass. If she went to the Lounsberry post office, Mrs. Pickett or Sam would come to the window. "What's in it, Hazel?" The Pickett back yard had touched the back yard of the Browning place when Hazel was a girl. People had complained that Mrs. Pickett was worse than a daily gossip column, but after Sam came back from the war his amputated foot carried him right through civil service and change in administration. Hazel couldn't hand under the lifted grill such a parcel as this, with the inscription: Prize Novel Contest, Horn and Westerby, Publishers. She could hear Mrs. Pickett. Like the time she had told George about the money order for the new office chair for Christmas! That would be a way for George to hear what his wife had been doing! "I'm not a bit surprised," Mrs. Pickett would say. "Hazel always had her nose in a book when she was a little girl." Brr! Her very skin felt too tight, chill-shrunken, at the inevitable calamity.

If she had time to go into the city— But she had to send the thing today or never at all, and even if she had time—already the clock pointed to half-past three—she couldn't conceal a trip to town. "But whatever did you go in for? You didn't say you were going!" Hazel decided that a life of crime presented unique difficulties. She might drive to the next village. The postmaster there didn't know her, and if she took a back road out of Lounsberry— "You have to be careful," George had said that noon. "These damp leaves falling are almost the worst hazard." She saw herself in a ditch, she heard George or Lorna or John explaining, in sombre, tragic tones, "We don't understand what she was doing, she never went to Roseville," and hastily, before her imagination could bog her into immobility, she buttoned on a raincoat and pulled a hat well down on her troubled head.

She reached Roseville without a skid, parked the car in front of a chain grocery, the one note of color in the drenched, deserted street, and the box bulging under the raincoat, to keep it dry, she darted from the car into the one story building, the sign almost lost in the dinginess of the window. The postmistress was fat and suspicious. "What's in it?" she said, as Hazel had feared. "Typewriting," said Hazel. "I—I'd like to register it." The postmistress turned it round and round. Did she smell a bomb, or hear it ticking? "You oughta seal it, then."

After a despairing ten minutes Hazel had found glue at the shoe-repair and fruit shop on the corner, had stuck down the ends of the grocery bag, and talking too much, she couldn't seem to stop, about weather, roads, the automobile plant between Roseville and Lounsberry, at last had the stamps affixed, and the thin strip with the registry number in her fingers. "The mail goes out today, of course," she said, finally.

"Gone," said the postmistress.

"Oh!" Hazel crumpled the receipt in her palm. "But this has to go today!"

"Postmarked the thirtieth," said the postmistress. She reached for the surrendered box, as if to sniff out the reason for such urgency, and Hazel, backing toward the door, murmured something.

As she drove toward Lounsberry, the windshield wiper keeping a rhythmic half circle of clearness, she tried to remember what she *had* said. She thought: of course Roseville people know George. Lots of them come over. Maybe the postmistress herself— Then she remembered the woman's mouth, with the white china display, and drove more swiftly along the rain-

dark road. That postmistress didn't know George. But what did people do when they had something like—well, like a murder, say, to hide?

She came in to Lounsberry by the upper road, past the schoolhouse, down into the business block. Too late to pick up the children, too early for George. She'd stop for oranges, and if anyone asked her, that was where she had been. As she passed the bank corner she glanced up toward the windows of George's office. The neatly shirred pongee curtains she had made caught streaks of red from the traffic light, bars against the amber glow behind them. Well, she thought, I've wasted a dollar and sixty-seven cents. And how many hours! And now it's all over, but anyhow, George needn't know.

The judges appointed by Horn and Westerby, Publishers, were having their committee meeting. As the date for release of the prize announcement was January fifteenth, and this was January thirteenth, they knew severally, and in various irking ways, that they must, today, commit themselves. They met in Mr. Horn's new office, thirty-two stories above Fifth Avenue, and Mr. Horn himself had dropped in for a few minutes. "I don't intend to offer suggestions," he said. "I just want to repeat that this isn't a Nobel Prize you're awarding. We want a book to sell. We've got the organization, we've got a staggering sales campaign—did I tell you we're planning to ship by motor truck and trailer, with loud speakers?—all we need is a book." He was a dapper little man, with an exaggeration of grimace and gesture which kept his hair rumpled and cut premature wrinkles in his thin face. He whirled now and darted from the room as if the loud speaker had summoned him.

The members of the committee looked at each other. "Nice little pep talk," murmured Carlton, a plumpish, bald book-columnist on a daily paper. He was irritated at his presence at the committee meeting anyway. He had no recollection of making Horn any promise to serve as judge, but Horn had cited place and date, a cocktail party a year ago, when the staidest firm in town showed what they could do for a novelist. Either the Scotch had made him incautious, or he hadn't believed Horn would find anyone with funds to back him. He'd told Horn he never read novels any more. Too ephemeral. He didn't tell Horn he found it easier to establish himself by expressing violent opinions on books no one else was likely to read. But Horn had promised real publicity for the judges. He was a good salesman; that was why he'd hooked Westerby as partner. "The advertising agent turned into the custodian of our literature," Carlton added.

Letitia Thomaston blinked her myopic and large brown eyes in Carlton's direction, and the lavender orchid which she had bought for herself that noon trembled on her silver fox scarf. Carlton had never spoken of *one* of her books, although for several days after each of her latest serials appeared in covers she looked at his column. She didn't read it, she just glanced at the title he had so captiously selected. When Alf Horn had spoken to her about being a judge, he had said, "Carlton's one of them. You might get chummy with him. He could do a lot for you." Not that she needed much done, but what she always said was, when thousands of people just run to get the next issue of my serial, it seems strange that no reviewer can understand my message. Carlton's face, well outside her radius of clear vision, was an amber egg. He looks just like a changeling, she said to herself; a disagreeable baby. "I need you on that committee, Letty," Horn had urged her, "to balance Carlton. You know what the public likes. He's too—" Now had Alf called him erotic or exotic? Not that there was much difference. And as Alf had promised, there weren't many manuscripts left to read by the time the office had combed out the hopeless.

"It is a great rethponthibility," said Letitia Thomaston. "Bestowing such a large thum on an unknown writer when we don't know who it is and our own names are attached to the award!" She spoke in accelerated tempo and the listener was not sure whether she really lisped or just slid over some of the consonants. "Personally I think it was a mithtake to limit the prize to new writers. Everybody who can write is in print already, and a great many of them ought not to be."

"I know what the mistake was," said Carlton, gloomily. "I should have written a novel instead of being a judge. I could use the ten grand."

"I always meant to write one," said Mrs. Rudolph Arner, the third judge. "But I never have had time."

For an instant Letitia and Carlton stared at her, united fleetingly by hostility toward an amateur. Mrs. Arner, sleek, plump, well clothed in a dark frock so simple and extreme that Letitia had felt a doubt of her own velvet, had a way of appearing on committees, a pleasant little moon illumined by her husband's reputation as essayist and editorial writer. She entertained frequently and well, and she seldom interfered much with committee decisions. She was a little troubled at present, because her second cousin's daughter had submitted a manuscript for this contest, and Mrs. Arner thought in glancing at papers, she had recognized it. She had said, firmly, "You must not give me an inkling, otherwise I can not be on the committee." Her second cousin Minna had cried. "You know what it would mean to us!"

Mrs. Arner did know, among other things, that such an award would mean Rudolph could stop sending a monthly check to Minna. But she knew, too, the untemporizing scorn Rudolph would feel for any shade of nepotism, and that knowledge of Rudolph buttressed a certain crack of practicality in her own honor. The trouble right now was that she thought she knew, without intending to know, without pre-knowledge, which manuscript had come from Minna's girl. Should she lean backwards in an attempt to escape suspicion from Rudolph, and vote it down? Especially when she wasn't sure?

"But then, if we had all written books, we couldn't give each other the money, now could we?" Her secret dilemma heightened the slight accent of her husky, rich speech.

"We might as well get down to business." Carlton's implication was that the women had been talking for hours. "Shall we vote at once, or do you (grudgingly) prefer discussion?"

"What's the use of being a committee if you can't talk?" Mrs. Arner jumped her chair forward until she could reach the pile of manuscripts on the glass-topped table. "I can't remember them by name, anyway. Names seem to have nothing to do with what's in a book nowadays." If she got them to talking she could see whether that one had a chance. She couldn't help it if they chose it; even Rudolph couldn't blame her for that. Only five had survived the earlier meetings.

Carlton twirled his wrist until he could see the face of his watch. "I've got to get out of here before night," he said. "Let's vote."

"Before we vote—" Miss Thomaston's orchid was choreatic—"I must go on record. There is one book there I think we should discard. If by any chance it has two votes I should be compelled to resign from the committee. I could not allow my name to be associated with such—such—" She had wound herself into such tight sibilance she had to stop.

"You mean my choice, I suppose," Carlton's face had no expression, except for a widening of nostrils. "'Alley Cat.' The only book in the lot with any guts."

"That's just it! That's all it's got! No, Mr. Carlton, your jaded palate may relish that rank taste, but my finger has rested for years on the pulse of the reading public. I know how their heart beats!"

"Oh God!" Carlton's lips made the words without a sound, and Mrs. Arner wriggled on her chair. Something stimulating about real argument,

especially when she could see each side so clearly! Carlton said, aloud, "Since you have been so frank, may I explain that your choice offends me even more? Obsolete and immoral saccharinity. Resigning wouldn't be enough! I'd have to commit suicide!"

"Then those two cancel each other," said Mrs. Arner. "I don't believe either would fit a loud speaker."

They voted on the three remaining, three times, and each time each book had one vote. Mrs. Arner did not vote for the book she thought Minna's daughter had submitted, and she couldn't decide from the printing on the slips which of the other two had chosen it. Carlton looked as if at any moment his boredom would become complete paralysis, and Letitia Thomaston wore a glaze of indignity.

"I'm tired of this," said Carlton. "Let's draw lots. They're all tepid. Horn will blow hard and get his money back. What difference does it make?"

"It makes a difference to me. I am not part of a lottery, I am a judge. My first choice is thtill 'Ordeal By Love.'" (And mine is "Alley Cat," muttered Carlton.) "But since I have no co-operation, and since it is almost five o'clock—" she blinked hostile eyelids toward Carlton, and then turned toward Mrs. Arner bending forward to pull some focus around the woman's face. "I should think *we* might agree—"

"I'm not a bit dogmatic," said Mrs. Arner, hopefully. "I don't really know which to pick, and so I voted for 'Aspic and Honey.'"

"At least it begins with an A," said Carlton. Mrs. Arner smiled at him. He didn't bother her at all; Rudolph could be much more sarcastic.

"But I'm willing to change." Mrs. Arner took a long breath. Not even Rudolph could impute partiality to her now. She didn't really know it was Ethel May's book; she only knew that Ethel May had a modern way of writing, without ordinary aids to the reader such as punctuation and capitals, and the pages of this book had the same queer nakedness. "I'll vote for the one about the hand on the gate, if you will."

"And this," said Carlton, as he agreed, "is the way democracy works." When he opened the door, Horn leaped up from a chair, with the capped and spurred air of one whose horse paws and prances to be off. "Yes," said Carlton, "it is the unanimous decision of the committee. And if you ever catch me again!"

"Oh goodness, don't tell me it's meat pie night again!" Lorna gave a wriggle intended for a shudder as Hazel slid the casserole onto the mat in front of George.

"We have to finish the roast." Hazel spoke indistinctly, nibbling at the tip of a finger she had just burned.

"What's wrong with meat pie?" asked George, bisecting the brown crust neatly. "Especially your mother's."

"They're so—so common." Lorna leaned her forehead against her hand, but at her mother's glance she thought better of that elbow on the table and sat upright again, while John muttered, "Just a little taste of pheasant, please."

(Nothing suits her, thought Hazel, when she comes out of her trance far enough to see us at all!) George, knife poised for a transverse cut, looked at his daughter. "You'd do well to learn how to make a pie like this," he said, tranquilly. "Your husband will appreciate it some day."

"He looks like a hearty eater, too," said John, very low. Hazel shook her head at him, and Lorna decided not to hear him.

"I can remember—" George served with a dexterous turn of the wrist —"when your mother's pies weren't like this."

"Why bring that up?" asked Hazel, her finger still smarting.

"Oh, well!" Lorna disposed of the argument. "Cooking's old fashioned. You buy things in cans and boxes. Just listen to the radio!"

A sharp buzz of the front doorbell caught George with his mouth just opening for a homily upon the home, the hearth, the kitchen.

"That's probably for me—" but although Lorna pushed back her chair and flung aside her napkin, John beat her in a dash for the hall.

Hazel saw George glance at his daughter, his blue eyes candidly alarmed, saw him seal back a protest. He's worried, too, she thought, about that Daniels boy coming so often, although he won't say a word.

Lorna expected him; she poised at the edge of her chair, every nerve waving toward the front door, to catch his voice. They all heard John's "H'ryuh, Bo," and, "How long you been working there?" and then the door shut. John strolled back, exasperatingly slow, thumb and finger pinched at the corner of a yellow envelope.

"'Satelegram," he said. Lorna slumped. A telegram was adult disaster, and did not touch her suspense.

"Let's have it!" George reached for it. "Now who on earth——"

"It says Hazel Browning Curtis," said John, parting with it reluctantly.

Well, I don't know anyone who'd be dead, thought Hazel, and she opened it. It roared at her, each printed word, the room rocked up at a queer arc, and faintly she heard George, impatient, "Who is it? What does it say?"

"It says—" her lips were stiff, "it says I got it."

John stood behind her chair and read it aloud. "Delighted to offer you congratulations your book unanimous selection of judges for award send photo wire biographical details immediately representative will fly west to arrange trip to New York presentation of check publication being rushed."

"That's a queer mistake," said George. "John, you better call up the office at once and tell them. There may be some other message for us."

Hazel's heart, buffeted by consternation and amazement, began to beat swiftly; the blood burned in her ears, her temples. "I don't think it can be a mistake," she said. "It says my name."

"But what—" George stared at her. ("What have you been up to that I don't know about," flickered in his eyes, a premonitory doubt of stability as if the earth's crust heaved slightly.) "Here, let's see it."

Hazel waved the sheet toward him, and pressed her fingers against her temples, trying to push back the flush of guilt, of shock. If only the news had come when she was alone! Giving her a minute to get used to it.

"Horn and Westerby," said George. "Never heard of them. Whose trip to New York? What book? If you know what it's about——"

"Yes, I know." Hazel took a long breath, to inflate the feeble squeak in which her voice had come out. "I must have got the prize. I didn't expect to."

"What prize?" asked George, and Lorna said, "Did you win a trip to New York? Why, *Moth*-er!"

"I won more than that." Hazel thought: I'll say it, and see if it's true. "I won the prize. Ten thousand dollars."

George's eyes were round and light blue, just the color of his broadcloth shirt, the pupils contracted to dots. John loped around the table to lean over

his father's shoulder and stare at the yellow paper. "Ten thousand bucks! Oh boy oh boy oh boy!" he chanted.

"It doesn't say ten thousand," said George, slowly.

"That's the only prize there was." Hazel gave herself a little shake. There, she wouldn't cry. She'd been afraid she might. The paroxysm in her chest was quieting. "I thought I wouldn't say anything—I didn't really expect to get it."

"I don't understand yet what you did." George's expression of doubt thickened.

"I wrote a book. A novel." Hazel's color had subsided, her eyes were bright under the fringe of lashes, her pallor, the uncertainty of her mouth had entreaty. They all looked as if she'd suddenly stood on her head in the middle of the table! "You aren't any more surprised than I am," she said, and as her eyes met those of her husband's she caught a flash of the clairvoyance which lived at times between them. You shouldn't ever be so sure you know everything about me! She smiled at him.

"You mean these people—" he laid a finger on the telegram, "whoever they are——"

"They're publishers," said Hazel.

"Are going to give you ten thousand dollars for something you wrote out of your head?"

"Of course," said Hazel, "there's a good deal of work getting it out of your head." She had, suddenly, a new feeling, a tardy response to the stimulus of an unfamiliar drug. Her book had been selected. Unanimously. She, Hazel Browning Curtis, had written it! "Let me see that telegram!"

"I don't see when you found time."

"That's why you pecked away on that ole typewriter!" John dropped into his chair, his face screwed in dark concentration on this phenomenon in his own house. "Ten thousand bucks! Why, you're rich, Mother!"

"I haven't got a photograph, except that one with the children years ago. I couldn't wire biographical details. What would I say? I think you might congratulate me! You haven't one of you——"

They did then, George adding stiffly, "If we'd known anything about it —have to get over the shock." Lorna thought it was like something in the movies, exactly! And wouldn't people's eyes stick out! George said he

wouldn't say anything about it until they saw the check. Hazel did not notice until late that evening, when she cleared away the dishes, that he had scarcely touched his dinner. He had said, "Well, we ought to celebrate. But I promised two inlays for tomorrow. Even if I've got a rich wife, I suppose I must go on working." Hazel went to the door with him. "You know," he said, slowly, "I knew you had something on your mind. I felt it. Only I thought for a while it was another baby. You were absent-minded, that way."

"Well, aren't you at least glad that wasn't it?"

"I don't know." George held his muffler in place with his chin as he jerked into his overcoat. "I'd understand that. But ten thous— Why, my best year I didn't clear— And never saying a word—"

Hazel's hand wavered upward. She wanted to poke a finger into the buttonhole of his lapel, to explain that her silence had been a lack of confidence not in him, but in herself. "I never expected to win the prize," she began.

"I'm surprised you confided that in us!" George drew himself stubbornly away from her finger. "Mere accident, perhaps, the telegram coming as it did."

"I hadn't made any plans." Hazel shivered as the raw January wind pushed around George's stiff figure into the warmth of the hall. It was too bad of George not to be whole-heartedly pleased— "How could I when I never expected—you're just surprised because you didn't think I was smart enough to do it!" She didn't know where her sudden anger leaped from, the words curling like a wave over the blond rock of her husband's face.

"I didn't say that." He shrugged, and thrust his hands into pockets. "You needn't get mad just because I'm surprised. Only how—" his breath puffed out a great white feather in the frosty air, "however can I tell what else you're up to? But you're cooling off the whole house. Shut the door." And he strode with finality out of the range of light toward the car.

Hazel shut the door, hand braced against a desire to slam it. She ought to be high with excitement, delight, and instead George had done this to her. That was why she hadn't told him: she had known just how he would take it. She broke the thin string of accusations, seeing his face just before he had swung down the walk. Oh, poor George! The delicate, assured balance of their lives knocked suddenly out of kilter! A balance of expectancy, habit, knowledge. And she had been resentful, instead of wise. She'd heard that success was bad for people; was she already proof of that? She heard Lorna at the telephone, in the muffled effect of lips sealed against the receiver. As

she walked past her daughter, the murmur ceased, and the blue eyes rolled up at her ingenuously. John sat at the dining room table, one hand rustling in a large cracker box, the yellow telegram propped against his tumbler.

"Are you still hungry, Johnny?" Hazel glanced at the table. He'd had the rest of the gingerbread, and all the milk. But she hadn't noticed much about what he ate.

"I guess not." John munched. "Just thought I'd eat a cracker. Say, Mother, are you sure it's ten thousand dollars? It just says award."

Hazel opened a drawer of the buffet, and from under the imitation leather box for knives and forks took out a folded paper. "You can read it," she said, and John frowned as he smoothed out creases and read the announcement.

"Maybe they won't pay it," he said, darkly. "Lots of those prize things are fakes. I knew a fellow and he drew the number for a car, but they gave it to someone in the firm. He never saw it!"

"Oh, but this is different!" Hazel's fingers closed over the telegram, and she read it slowly. "Books aren't like drawing numbers for cars! Why, a professor gave me that notice. He'd know if it was a fake! And here's my name and address— —"

"John's just being smart, Mother!" Lorna was at the door, dark beret pulled toward one ear, coat over her arm. "Don't let him fozzle you."

"Just because I have brains enough to raise a question!" began John, but Hazel interrupted.

"Are you going out, Lorna? Tonight?"

"Why, I told you, Mother! We're meeting at Agnes' house to talk over the Senior play. I explained this afternoon. You must have forgotten, with all the excitement and everything." Lorna was forbearing, kind.

"Didn't you meet last Friday?" asked Hazel.

"Of course *one* meeting can't decide *everything* about a thing like that!"

"Not when you think who's there," said John in falsetto.

"You know—" Hazel hesitated. Lorna was so intrenched in righteousness, and her forbearance was so egg-shellish— After all, if George didn't want his daughter going out during the week, he might see to it himself! "That coat really isn't warm enough for tonight," she finished.

"I can't wear that other old thing!" Lorna tugged the coat over her shoulders, buttoned it with an air of drama. "Honestly, I'd rather freeze to death! *Mother!*" her face changed from its slightly reserved hostility into glowing supplication. "Oh, Mother! I just thought—with all that money—Oh, could I have a fur coat? Could I?"

Hazel looked down at the yellow paper, and again, slowly, there expanded within her a bright bubble. Somehow, among them, they had almost obliterated the extraordinary fact that she, Hazel Browning Curtis, had won the prize!

"We'll see," she said, deliberately. "After I know more about this."

Lorna's hands, pulling the belt through the buckle, stopped, and her eyes stopped too, round, and almost thoughtful. "Would you rather I didn't go tonight? I—if there's anything——"

"Any little thing like a fur coat?" queried John, reaching for another cracker.

"Don't be late," said Hazel. Her hands, automatically, began to pile together dishes from the table. The silver clattered.

"Of course I said I'd be there," Lorna waited.

"Of course." Hazel pushed open the door into the kitchen, and blinked her lashes. It would be ironic if after all her care in handling Lorna, her tender noninterference, her attempts to erect invisible safeguards just to keep the child from blundering too early into what she thought was love, bribery should now prove effective. Lorna would stay home, if Hazel wished, with a fur coat in the offing! Money was a weapon Hazel had never had a chance to try. It might be stronger than words or wisdom. A reminiscent flush of embarrassment showed in Hazel's face as she poked her head through the shoulder loops of an apron. That night last week when she had tried to talk with Lorna! She'd been strictly contemporary, using bold and simple words about what a strong instinct sex was, and how it might blot out all the other interests that were important for her development, and that would be all right if she belonged to a primitive tribe, but she had to think about earning her living, getting a proper education— Hazel had been proud of her little speech, and at the end Lorna had looked at her pityingly and said, "Of course, Mother, we belong to entirely different generations!"

She hadn't even been surprised that her mother had written a book! I suppose—Hazel turned the faucet and held a finger in the stream of water, testing the temperature—I was as self-absorbed as she is, at her age. Maybe

I hid it better. I don't know. Lorna's like George, you know just where they are. George had been surprised. She clattered the dishpan into the sink. That water wasn't hot. Never was, unless the furnace was roaring. Why—she stood motionless, and the water purled over the edges of the pan. She could install a new heating plant, if she wanted to. That oil burner, automatic, that the agent had been so persistent about last summer. She could do anything she liked! Almost. Of course, at this very moment, whether she liked or not, she had to do dishes in lukewarm water. Was that a way to celebrate?

There should be someone to tell, someone who would say, "Marvelous! Wonderful!" Her mind clicked off a line of people, neighbors along the street, women in the church, in the literary society, girls grown older who had been her best friends when she was a girl. Queer, the way marriage altered your intimacies, absorbed whatever it was that ran out searching for friends. Turned you into a small principality with guards along the border. Well, it would come out in the paper, and then they'd all know. As George said, better wait until she had the check.

In the quiet kitchen, above the soft note of the water, the ticking of the porcelain clock grew louder. A queer, hard tone, the beat of metal under porcelain, like a premonitory whir which might someday shiver the china into fragments. Hazel listened, her upper lip caught between her teeth, her eyes bright and rebellious. She didn't like that clock. It had run her life for her too long, measuring her inefficiency against its methodical progress. Time you had those dishes done, it said right now! Hazel looked at the stacked plates. She didn't like them, either. George's mother had sent the set, not as a wedding present, just as an extra. "We don't need them, now the family is so small," she had written. "It will save you buying any."

Heavy, old-fashioned ware, with a design in yellowish-green which crawled and twined around the borders. George had been delighted. "Makes me feel at home," he had said. One of the hired girls who helped out a few weeks after the birth of Lorna or John had broken one plate. That was all. Hazel stared at them, the design began to swim around the plate, the clock had the vibratory tone of breaking china. Suddenly Hazel seized the pile, thumbs on top, fingers spread, held it well away from her body, and with a little push to help out gravity, dropped it.

John poked the door open and looked in, his face solemn. Hazel with her toe spun off the top plate, sole survivor among the shards.

"Migosh," said John, "another revolution in China!"

"I can buy some more," said Hazel.

The telephone burst into a prolonged and unnatural clangor.

"Gleeps!" said John. "They gone crazy, too?" He vanished, the ringing ceased, and in a moment John was at the door again, his thin face twitching, as if his air of nonchalance had grown too tight for his skin. "New York calling for Hazel B. Curtis," he paged her in his deepest tone, holding the door ajar.

New York calling, or Mars would like to speak to you. Hazel slid past John, sat down at the telephone stand, and after an instant blew a somewhat winded "Hello," toward the mouthpiece.

"Is that you, Mrs. Curtis? Someone in New York *says* he wants to talk to you." That was Flora Robb, Jessie's oldest girl. Hazel had heard she was night operator. "At least they have your address."

"Yes," said Hazel firmly. Flora needn't sound so incredulous! Well, George's caution about saying nothing would do no good now, with Flora on the line.

"Here's your party."

The brisk, staccato voice was, as Hazel said later, just as clear as if he'd been right in the room. Yes, she was Hazel Curtis, yes, she'd written the book, yes, she'd had the telegram, yes, she was delighted. Something both stimulating and breathtaking in the rapid pelting of words. A little information for a news story to be released at once. Had she ever written before? What did she do? Oh, fine! Two children, husband was what? A remote voice interloped, words about three minutes, and the staccato bristled. How did you happen to write a book? (John had crept near, head bent as if he listened to New York.) Hazel floated above the earth, herself the golden bubble, even the intent and repressed astonishment in John's face a remote thing, caution quite gone. How had she happened to write—those lonely evenings, with George at the office— Any message, how you feel at winning the prize? What will you do with it? And now, Mrs. Curtis, we want you to drop in for a few days. We're rushing the book through the press, need you for publicity hints. No, we've decided it's much better for you to come to New York, meet all of us, sign contracts, of course you can manage, matter of paramount importance. Wire me, I'll meet you. What's that? Can't afford— Nonsense, you're rich. I'll mail you a check for expenses. Work up radio and movie ends when you come. Congratulations.

The hall door opened as the voice ceased, and Hazel swung dizzily around on the stool, finger-tips tingling. George, both hands embracing a pyramid of green paper, kicked the door shut behind him. The kick jarred his

hat forward, and he peered from under the brim with raffish suspicion. “I thought you weren’t going to tell anyone yet.”

“I wasn’t.” Hazel giggled. George did look comical! “He was telling me.” (This must be like being drunk, she thought. It’s a grand feeling!) “But he’s going to put it in all the papers!”

“Was that the very guy that’s handing you ten thousand bucks?” drawled John.

“How’d he get here so soon?” George pushed his chin over the crackling paper.

“New York calling, Dad. I bet Florabelle got an earful that time.”

“I hope what I said was all right. Goodness, I can’t remember what I did say! But how could I go to New York?” Whirling away from them, across a continent— “I could hire someone to come in— Oh, it’s too—too——”

“Utter,” said John. “Just too utter! That’s the word.”

George set down his parcel on the console-table, propping it against the wall. “I’ll have to put up the car,” he said.

“Lemme, Dad.” John angled past him a whoop floating back as he slapped the door shut. George took off his coat, folded his muffler into a pocket, and opened the door of the hall closet, his movements deliberate and prolonged.

“I wish you could come to New York with me,” said Hazel. “I’m not used to going places by myself.”

“It sounds as if you would be,” said George into the closet.

“Would you rather I just stayed here?”

“Of course not.” George turned, and smiled, just a quirk of the corners of his mouth. “I mean of course I would.” He shoved the green bundle along the table. “I bought you that. They didn’t have much to choose from. Maybe you won’t want it—if you’re going away.”

Hazel pulled off the metal clips, folded away the noisy paper, the red azalea danced.

“Of course I want it!”

“He had some roses, but I thought this would last longer.” George cleared his throat. “You—you didn’t think I wasn’t pleased, did you? I mean

I just never thought of your writing a book, and then to have it turn out that it was my wife——"

He's trying so hard, thought Hazel, looking up from the red blossoms. She could see only the shadows cast by his quick and secret thoughts, in a shifting of tautness about his mouth, about his grave blue eyes. Not the thoughts. Never the thoughts themselves. Suddenly she stepped close to him, her hands slid between his arms and rigid body, clasped tight against his hard back. "Darling!" she said. His arms strained around her, urgent, and they kissed, the wryness of shock or fear or strangeness gone as their blood remembered all their knowledge of each other.

"You know—" Hazel sniffed, liking the faint clean odor, the cool firmness of his cheek—"I'd rather give it back than have it make any difference. It couldn't, now could it?"

"I hope not, old lady." George's embrace relaxed. "Not if you keep your head. You couldn't give back ten thousand. That's a lot of money."

Hazel withdrew slowly. Too bad, the way saying things changed your feeling— "Goodness!" she spoke briskly. "I haven't even finished the dishes! You put the plant on the living room table. I'll be through in a little while."

She slipped through the door into the kitchen, and stooped to gather up the fragments of china. She didn't, suddenly, want George to see that mess. As the pieces clinked softly into the waste basket, she thought, and the back of her neck prickled, almost with fear, that perhaps it was a bad omen, this first gesture of hers. You'll always have to pick up the pieces, if you smash things, she told herself. But what a silly way to feel. As if good fortune was too much for her!

Hazel left for New York late in March, after three changes of the date. The first time John had the flu. He had pretended that he felt perfectly well, but at the very moment when Hazel kissed him good-bye, she caught the unmistakable faint whiff of fever about him. Stripping off her gloves, she took his temperature, ignoring the awful faces he made. (Never worry about your children, her father had told her. Find out right away.) When she read the thermometer she asked George please to send a wire that she couldn't come. John hadn't been very sick, but only, she was sure, because she popped him into bed that minute. The second time the housekeeper left just as Hazel meant to go. George had something to do with it, although Hazel couldn't ask him what. "All I ask is a woman competent enough to take

charge of things," he said. "I can't give up all my business, unimportant as it may seem to you, to look out for the children." The news stories had done that to George. Mr. Horn had played up the, "Wife seeks solace for lonely hours in writing. Beside the cradles of her sleeping children she composes great book. Domesticity palls upon this remarkable woman." The first time George read that he had been too outraged to listen to Hazel. By the tenth time Hazel had ceased any attempt to explain the difference between what she had meant and what the stories said. It was too bad they'd called George a struggling young dentist. Hazel couldn't honestly blame him for being angry, but she blamed him for not believing her when she protested that she hadn't told reporters such things. George did drive her into the city for her train this third time when she made an actual getaway; a formal George who made comments on the state of affairs in Michigan as indicated by objects of the landscape. He left her at the stairs which led up to her track, and his kiss had the effect of chastisement. "When you come back," he said, "I hope I'll recognize you."

Hazel brushed away tears which burned her lids, and suddenly parting, blade-sharp, cut through the layers of awkward hostility, of self-reproducing misunderstandings, and she was in his arms. "Don't let anything happen to you while I'm gone! Oh, George, darling! I don't want to go."

"You're the one things will happen to. We'll be all right." But he kissed her again, and this time he loved her and reassured her.

"Nothing that will make any difference between us, will it? Say it won't. I couldn't bear it!" Never had she loved him more, the firm clip of his arms, the little wave of his chin as he tossed off too much emotion, the everything that was George.

"When you get this all over and settle down again—" A porter jostled them, climbing past with luggage, but the moment was gone, anyway.

"I don't want to settle down." Hazel folded her hands under her collar, pushing the soft beaver against her chin, and stared at George, her eyes startled. "I didn't mean that. I mean—but you know!" Challenge rang like a silver disk struck softly, clear under the hubbub of the station noises. We can't go back as we were, exactly, she was saying. But we do still love each other.

"You mustn't miss your train." George retreated into practical matters. "Send me a wire in the morning."

She couldn't sleep. There was, she thought, something appalling about a train trip. Surrendering yourself, giving up your freedom. You kept an

illusion that you were free to make choices: you could eat dinner or go to bed early, but all the time you were being propelled through space, your destination fixed. Wasn't it a good deal like life, except that on the train you had at least chosen your destination? Who bought the ticket for life? Weren't you propelled along as inevitably, with as much illusion of freedom, through time instead of across miles of country? When she had started to write a book she hadn't said please give me a ticket away from George, and yet look! She wouldn't have thought George would take it as he had. But she couldn't be sorry she had done it! As the train rolled eastward George was diminished by more than space, and the next day, vague and brilliant, seemed to come to meet her minute by minute, just as she rolled toward it mile after mile.

After the first flurry of news stories, people in Lounsberry had acted almost as if nothing had happened. Except George. The Ladies Literary Society had thought it would be nice to have Hazel tell them about the book, but they had their meetings all arranged, and of course they hadn't read the book yet. Was it laid in the town, and had she put them in it? Insurance agents, numerous and persistent as English sparrows, had rung the telephone and doorbell, automobile salesmen, young men representing investment companies. It seemed silly to hide in one's own house, but Hazel tried that, instructing the new housekeeper to say that she was out. The woman complained that she couldn't do a lick of work for arguing at the door, and George came home one evening, stiff and cold with indignation. Two of his patients had cancelled appointments, one for herself, one for her little girl whose teeth George was straightening. Mrs. Wills and Mrs. Parsons. "They're insulted because you wouldn't see them when they called. Must you ruin my business, too?" Hazel had written notes to them, trying to soothe them, and Mrs. Parsons did bring back her child, as the brace had to be adjusted. Mrs. Wills said that some people couldn't stand good luck.

After that Hazel answered the bells herself, when she wasn't trying to decide which letters should have answers. Advertising letters, begging letters—(the world was suddenly crammed with worthy institutions for seamen, blind men, orphans, Lithuanian cripples, indigent actresses, and worn out horses, all of which institutions would totter unless she remitted . . .) letters from women in Oklahoma, Alaska, Texas, and the Bronx who had written novels they wished to send her, letters from men in prison, in a lumber camp, on farms, in the haberdashery business who had plots for novels they would share with her, one dreadful note on brown paper threatening the children unless she mailed a thousand dollars to X B, General Delivery. George had taken that up with the police, and they had

watched for a while to see if anyone claimed the envelope thus addressed. But as the officer said, "A real gangster wouldn't bother with chicken feed like that. Just some nut."

Weeks ago the crest of the flood had dropped, almost as suddenly as it had risen, and the postman no longer made his joke about needing an extra mailbag just for Hazel. She wondered whether someone in some other town had unwittingly made himself such a target. Even Mr. Horn ceased to wire or telephone so often. He was rushing the book through, proofreading it in the office to save time; he consulted her about various matters of which she knew nothing, and Hazel caught the wind stirred by his rush even over the telephone.

She tried to fit the solid Pullman pillow between shoulder and cheek, tried to wriggle into comfort under the tight blanket. Here in the dark cubicle, with unexplained shafts of brilliant light striking at intervals under the drawn shade, she could admit that she had liked it. Not everything, of course. Like being transposed into a different key. Hazel, with variations. I wouldn't tell George that, she said. But I like it. And New York should be more exciting still, because that would concern the book itself, not just the prize. People would read her book. She hoped the dresses she had bought would be all right. As the clerk had said, black lace was always good. George couldn't have stood it if she'd bought that red dress with no back at all, although she had looked at herself for a long time before she let it slide down to the waiting hands of the saleswoman. She hoped her speech would be all right, too. She hoped she wouldn't be frightened. She hoped John and his father would get along while she was gone. Better, perhaps, than these past weeks while she was there, with George so edgy, and John so quick to catch moods.

And Lorna—Hazel frowned, a concentrated and baffled tenderness expanding through her body at the thought of her daughter. She must have quarreled with the Daniels boy. Queer, Hazel had worried about their intimacy, and yet when she saw the boy downtown with that red-headed Gwendolyn Baratsky, who had more reputation of the wrong kind than any other girl in town, she was furious. John ceased to tease Lorna, an ominous sign. Hazel tried unobtrusively to assure Lorna of support or sympathy or whatever she most needed. (At her age a heart, even broken, should heal quickly, like your bones.) But Lorna went about with a surface hard and prickly, resisting intrusion. She shut herself into her own room, and said she supposed they wanted her to do some studying, didn't they? She carried her secret, whatever it was, in a sort of fourth dimension, where no one could

touch it. When Hazel said, "Don't you want to go to the movies?" or "Why don't you and Tommy go to the Club dance tomorrow?" Lorna had looked at her, and for an instant her fair, round, unchanged face had seemed a mask over lean torment. "When I want to go places, you and Father say I'm going too much, and when I want to stay home you won't let me alone." I just have to stand by, thought Hazel, waiting for contact. I'll get something for her in New York, a new dress.

The next morning she was the first passenger to appear as a finished and civilized product, being driven by anxiety lest the train arrive at Grand Central and she find herself ejected, like one of those dreams in which you walk down a street with your clothes over your arm! The porter found her a seat forward, beyond all the bulging green curtains, and she looked out at the great river running down in the sunlight as fast as the train, at patches of dingy snow, at gulls on old sunken piers, her fingers tense over her new brown purse.

"Take a taxi to the hotel," Horn had written. "I'll engage rooms for you there, and drop in early." It was strange to get off the train and know that not one of the people at the gate waited for her. Always George or the children waited for her, with that grand moment of recognition exploding like a Roman candle between them. Unless, indeed, George and the children were with her on the train. But the red-cap rushed her to a cab, and the cab rushed her in spurts to the hotel. New York wasn't unlike the other cities she knew, except perhaps that the chasms of the narrow streets were deeper, cut sharper angles, and the blue sky was buttressed incredibly far above by towers extraordinary and varied. Her name, the name of Alfred Horn meant nothing to the hotel clerk, and Hazel searched in her bag for the letter. Surely he had said this hotel! "Will you please register, Madam?" Why, he had known, all the time! The bell boy whisked her to the elevator, the swift ascent reminded Hazel she had had no breakfast, their feet were silent on the deep nap past polished doors, and then the bell boy lingered, having indicated ice water, radio, phone. "Yes, it's a nice room," said Hazel, and then the persistence of his shrewd, pimpled face reminded her, and she opened her purse again. How much should you give him—she'd given the porter more than George said, because he seemed to expect it . . . oh, dear! . . . She found a quarter, and then a dime, and sighed as he withdrew with no excess of gratitude. Outside the windows lay New York, superimposed silhouettes, with shadow-accents, city haze dimming the sky color. Hazel gazed at the mulberry and blue of rug and hangings, the reddish cast of

modern maple, she wondered how they made the pleats of the valance, and decided to unpack her dresses.

As she unlocked the case, the door trembled under a tattoo. Hazel opened it, and was swept back into the room by the influx of several men, Mr. Horn himself, a photographer, a reporter. Mr. Horn all but embraced her, holding both her hands. "Hazel Browning Curtis, at last! Well, well, this is wonderful! Just a minute for some pictures." The next hour was a blur of holding her head this way and that while silver bulbs exploded in silent dazzles, of answering questions, no she didn't know how she liked New York yet, no, she hadn't started another book, (keep George out of it, she warned herself; don't mention George!) Mr. Horn seems very young, she thought. He'll wear himself out, he's too intense. Then the photographer disappeared, the reporter folded up his sheets, and Mr. Horn said, "Now we'll go over to the office. I've made a luncheon engagement for you, good chance, Mrs. Canterbury's literary luncheons. One of her speakers fell down, and she'll tuck you in. She has a crowd of females, soaks 'em plenty, tells them about books, dames lap it up, don't have to read, see? They don't buy books, but Canterbury gets good notices."

"But I couldn't think up a speech——"

"You don't have to say anything. Get up and give 'em a look. Come along."

"But do I look all right?" cried Hazel, desperate to brace herself against the rush. Mr. Horn was worse than the train, the way he propelled her inevitably ahead.

"Why, yes." Mr. Horn looked at her, the crease deep between his bright, dark eyes. "Little brown wren from the middle west. Yes, you're fine. We'll play up that aspect. Homebody."

Wren, in her new coat that even Lorna had said did things for her! But Mr. Horn wouldn't hear her if she told him what she thought of his wren. And when he stopped at the florist shop in the lobby, and bought a spray of gardenias tied with silver ribbon for her, she decided to say nothing about his bird lore.

The offices of Horn and Westerby seemed a trifle bare. Perhaps she had expected something more like a library, instead of this series of cubby-holes in and out of which moved men and young women, each with an air of being in a great hurry to reach some other spot before it was forever too late. Hazel sat beside Mr. Horn's flat desk, trying politely not to read any of the fascinating letters which littered the top, and meeting in such rapid

succession that she never sorted them out the sales manager, the advertising man, the business manager, the publicity head, and what else. The telephone rang often, and Mr. Horn, hooking the mechanism between chin and shoulder, talked into it and over it at the same time. Finally he said, "Well, that's about the line-up. Reviews ought to begin Sunday. If we get a good break— Is there anything else you'd like to ask?"

"Could I see it? The book, I mean?"

"Good God, haven't you seen it?" Horn pressed the buzzer. "*Didn't* we ship you some?" A thin dark girl in horn-rimmed glasses looked in; her glance at Hazel said plainly, what is a mere author doing here? "Bingham, get me a copy of 'The Hand,' willya?"

"If I can find one. We sent out all we had around."

"Well, find one. And order a bunch sent up here. Mrs. Curtis ought to sign a few."

Then for a few minutes he was intensely silent, looking over papers, and Hazel wondered whether only a homebody would ask to see her book. The Bingham girl came back, and Hazel had it in her own hands, her own book, "Your Hand Upon the Gate" in zig-zags above white palings on a red ground, a gold band sealing it, announcing the ten thousand dollar prize award. She was afraid she might cry, her throat hurt, but Mr. Horn said, "Take it along. Canterbury may not have a copy. Hold it up when you get up to talk. Pretty neat job, we think here at the office."

So Hazel held it through the luncheon, although she found it hard to keep her knees stiff enough to support bag and book. Mrs. Canterbury had swept up to her in peach lace, a gold cap on assisted-gold hair, her animation as applied as her lipstick. So sweet of Mrs. Curtis to consent to come, she hadn't read the book, but she would say all she could, and Mrs. Curtis could speak just a few words to the ladies. A remarkable group, highly intelligent. Then she swept away to project herself around a plumpish man with white hair and a pink face, evidently her favorite guest. Hazel was seated well down the long table, between two women from the suburbs who talked across her, and across the table to the women opposite. If they knew I had a book, thought Hazel, they might talk to me. But as she swallowed tomato bisque, thick and not too hot, the dismal emptiness, partly physical, began to ease away.

The woman across stared at her, the wired bow on her turban quivering. "Aren't you one of the speakers?" she asked "I didn't catch the name."

"Curtis," said Hazel.

Never heard of it, signalled the woman's well-pruned eyebrows. "We hoped to hear Stark Young today," she said. "Mrs. Canterbury is very good usually about taking up only the books you have to know about. My life is too full for reading, but I think when someone gives you a good digest it is really better than if you read the book yourself, because she can pick out just the salient points, don't you agree with me?"

Fortunately she did not wait for Hazel's answer, but turned her wired bow toward the woman on her left, and the two confided in undertones, while Hazel jabbed at her chicken à la king. For the first time in her life she felt the apologetic uneasiness of a performer. Because she had written a book she ceased to be one of the ladies lunching, and became a questionable part of the entertainment for which they paid. Getting up to speak would be exposing herself to all their arrows. But Mr. Horn said it would be good for the book. Her left hand spread over the smooth surface of the book, pressed it hard against her flesh. She had to stay.

The ladies adjourned to a reception room where gold chairs stood in rows before a low platform. Mrs. Canterbury strolled back and forth on the platform, fitting the gestures of her jewelled hands less to her words than to her intended emotional effects, while she offered her digests of the books on her program. She was gay, very feminine, she made little jokes, she referred at times to the quality of her audience, she pattered briskly through the story, and at crucial points of deaths or lovers' meetings she quoted lines with elocutionary histrionics. She really works hard for her money, thought Hazel. Wouldn't the Lounsberry Literary Society love her! Hazel wound her ankles tightly together and clasped book and purse. What would she say when she had to stand on that platform? She tried to remember lines from the speech she had written for the dinner. They wouldn't do; she couldn't thank these women for giving her the prize!

Mrs. Canterbury swayed at the platform edge, hands extended gracefully.

"And now, Ladies, we have a little special treat. We hoped for Stark Young, but fate intervened, fate in the form of a teeny little flu germ. So we have a new writer. I can't tell you about her book, as I haven't read it, as I didn't know until this morning we would have the pleasure of hearing her. But since it has won a prize of ten thousand dollars I am sure we will all want to read it if only to see why it should be given so much money. I present Hazel Browning Curtis, who will tell us the story of—what is the

title?" And to Hazel, in an undertone, as the latter rose, she said, "The ladies are getting a little restless. Don't talk too long."

Hazel didn't. As she collapsed in the taxi on the way to her own hotel, her face burning, her heart still racing, she was sure only that she hadn't talked too long. She scrambled through her mind, trying to hear echoes of what she had said. A spurt of anger had lifted her clear of the symptoms of stage fright, and she rather thought she had said that perhaps someone there would read the book out of curiosity, as Mrs. Canterbury had suggested, and as she'd written the story she wouldn't bother to tell it over, there was the book, and she'd held it out, flaunting its gold band, and she didn't know how to make a speech, this was her first, and so she'd stop. Had she said thank you or not? Her mouth quirked at the corners. "My goodness, she got my dander up, as George would say. Now, see here!" She sat forward in the cab, her pulses calming. "Can't go 'round losing your temper. But acting as if she were doing me a favor, when I thought I was the one—"

She decided that if she moved fast she could bathe and dress before Mr. Horn called for her. Quarter to five, he had said. A cocktail party. She supposed she couldn't wear the black lace. She'd have to come back again to dress for dinner. She wished she had bought that red one, just to dispose of the wren idea. She was in the tub, having scrubbed it thoroughly with her wash-cloth (how did she know who had last used it!) when the 'phone rang. She popped out, seized a bath towel, and left a trail of damp prints across the mulberry rug. Mr. Horn calling. Was she ready?

"I thought you said quarter to five!"

"I got wind of another tea. For an English author, but we'll drop in. Bound to meet some people there."

"I'm taking a bath," said Hazel.

"Bring it right along! How soon can you make it?"

"Five minutes."

She did, too. Being a mother was good training in speed at one's toilet. The gardenias had brown smudges on the outer petals, but Hazel repinned them to her coat. She powdered her nose, and wondered whether she might buy a lipstick, just to use in New York. George always liked her own color better, but of course he had such close-ups of mouths.

At midnight Hazel closed the door of her hotel room, brushed back her hair with a slow, heavy hand, and sank down on the bed. Someone had turned down the blankets. Nice. If ever she could stir again! She did not feel

tired, so much as extinguished. Blotted out, scattered, lost. As if, presenting herself again and again to all these strange men and women, hostile or indifferent or bland or self-absorbed, none of them coming out to look for her, some of them cagey, suspicious (don't think you'll get me to write you a good review by smiling at me!) she came at last to non-existence, annihilation. The teas were easier than the dinner, although just as annihilating, for when Horn convoyed someone up to meet her—most of the names she didn't understand—the someone murmured, "Ah, Horn's prize!" or "How do you like New York?" and then hailed an acquaintance or strolled off toward the bar. One darkish man seemed friendly, and asked whether she was at work on a second book. Just as they had begun a real talk, Horn dragged her away. "Has he got you signed up yet?" Mr. Horn's cocktails had accelerated his ordinary tempo. "Biggest pirate in town, steals authors under their publisher's nose." At the second party, which a literary agent, a friend of Horn's, was giving for him and his author, Hazel thought she met again some of the guests from the first. But she wasn't sure. Her face had stiffened, her mouth felt dry from too many smiles, but she found corners of tables and windowsills where she could set down the cocktails presented to her whenever anyone observed her without one.

At the dinner, however, she had to sit at the speakers' table, and try to talk. On one side sat Mr. Carlton, a member of the committee which had chosen her book, and Hazel, although partially extinguished, had thought, he at least must have read it. But when she said she was glad to meet him because he had liked her book well enough to select it, he stared at her gloomily, the light strong on his bald forehead, and said, "Don't thank me. Now I suppose you'll write another. Or perhaps—" a spark through his gloom, "you're one of these one-book authors."

"I don't know," said Hazel. "I haven't thought of another one yet." Then, slyly—she couldn't help it, he looked so cross—"Would you mind if I did?" (After all, someone had to write books if a critic kept his job!)

"Mind? Oh, no. Not at all." (Nothing in his life!) "You know, I've been considering a project. I think authors should be licensed before they can practice. Like doctors, or lawyers." The tip of his thin nose twitched, and he stroked his chin thoughtfully. That idea would do for a column. "Board of examiners, penalties for illegal practice—why hasn't it been done long before?" He turned to the woman at his left, and Hazel heard him repeating his proposition with sardonic elaboration. Mr. Horn explained later, in a rapid two-minute survey of the evening before he handed Hazel into her taxi; "That's just Carlton's line, being rude to authors. Likes to bully 'em.

What he said about your book wasn't bad. Some quotable phrases. Couldn't very well pan it when he helped pick it. Never heard him enthusiastic about anything except a treatise on the family life of the three-toed sloth. On the whole the evening was a great success. You made a nice little speech."

"I didn't know it was going to be broadcast. I was frightened." That awful disk, set up between her and all the staring eyes! If she'd known, she could have told John to tune in.

"One of my last minute breaks. One of the things I do best, getting breaks that way. Get a good rest. I'll give you a ring in the morning."

Hazel pushed back her coat and let it lie in a mound around her. She hadn't thought of needing a real evening wrap. In Lounsberry everyone just wore a winter coat because it was so cold at night, but here even the new beaver collar looked—well all right! wren-like—among velvets and ermine, even if the ermine was rabbit. Not that it made any difference. "If I'd been a Hottentot princess in beads maybe someone would have seen me. I'm not sure." But in her handbag was the envelope, heavy cream, with her name, and inside it an engraved slip. Not the real check. "I'll give you that tomorrow," Horn had said. "Have to figure out the deductions I've advanced." And on the table beside the bed lay the book.

Hazel reached for it, the black lace falling away from her arm. Her dress had been all right, she thought, although not striking— She turned the volume slowly, and slid the gold band carefully off. Then she opened it. She looked at the first page, and the printed words spoke to her in her own voice. Reading them was like life flowing back into her, it was like writing them again, and yet different, almost creation in reverse. She turned the page and read the next, wondering how she had happened to say just that, and yet feeling the words drop softly, rightly, as if she held within her the archetype from which they had been made, and each word fitted into its own place.

A long time later Hazel closed the book. She didn't know, really whether it was good or not, not being able to tell how much was there in words to reach other people, and how much was in her own feeling. But she had written it, and for the first time she had read her own book. It's not like having a child, she thought, with sudden scorn for that old comparison. A child is separate from you right away, and a book— She laid the volume on the table. It's more like ectoplasm, it seems to be separate, there it is, and here I am, but it's really me, all the copies everywhere. She wondered, in alarm, what she had been up to, scattering herself in pieces all over the earth! But she did like that last scene, where the restless footed one of the

third generation came home at last, and the woman he loved welcomed him, her hand upon the gate. She'd always liked the poem.

Her foot had gone to sleep, and she hobbled across to the dresser, unclasping the string of pearls (George's present last Christmas: he'd said he wished he could give her real ones, but these were pretty good). She poked them, still warm, into a double circle, and stamped on her prickling foot. She must get to bed, or she'd look dreadful tomorrow. She did now, with smudges under her eyes and a mazed whiteness on her face. Presently, her purse safe under her pillow and the table lamp drawn so close she couldn't miss it in the dark, she lay small and flat in the strange room, and looked out at the amber haze which filled the sky, a haze which was not steady but fluctuated to the rhythm of flashing signs and beacons.

Mr. Horn telephoned the next morning. He was rushed, number of things just came up, but he'd made an appointment for her with Grawn, an agent, to talk over movie possibilities. Just run over and have a chat. "Don't commit yourself to anything. See what he says. I'll take care of any actual offers. Then drop in here at the office. A few advance reviews have come in. Um, fair. Fair."

Hazel waited for a long time in an outer office, with engrossed and oblivious people rushing past her until she suffocated under the dull cloak of invisibility. She peered at herself in a small mirror. She'd bought a lipstick that morning and tried it; now she wasn't sure it helped. At last a bored young woman escorted her down corridors and into Mr. Grawn's office. He sat with a dingy window at his back, a little man with a large head gray-crested, and a slow, deep voice.

"Ah, yes, Mrs. Browning. Horn suggested I see you. Just what have you in mind?"

"Nothing," said Hazel, trying to arrange herself easily on the hard chair. "Mr. Horn told me to come."

"Ah, yes, let's see, your book is going well, is it?" His small, white hands moved slowly among papers, found a memorandum. "'Your Hand Upon the Gate.' I don't believe that title would sell. Ah, yes. Prize book, Horn says he's launching big publicity campaign. Frankly, Mrs.—" he glanced at the memorandum— "Browning Curtis, it would be well to wait. If the book is a smash hit, we can work up good bids for it. Otherwise, I may say the motion picture business is incalculable. No one can prophesy. Why, I could tell you—" And then for what seemed hours to Hazel, blinking her eyes against the light, seeing Mr. Grawn's stiff gray crest prismatic, he did

tell her, stories of books he had sold, of books he had not sold, of fabulous prices, of extraordinary rivalries, until he ended, accusingly, "If it had been serialized, that would help. You could, of course, run out to Hollywood? If the book is a hit, I often place authors. Say five hundred a week, to begin with? It's valuable experience for a time. You mustn't stay too long, though, or you lose your public. Nice of you to drop in."

Hazel, dropping down in the elevator, wasn't sure whether she would find herself in Hollywood when she walked out upon the street. It was still New York, and she asked a traffic policeman how to reach the offices of Horn and Westerby, if she walked. If she went under her own power, she might step out of the Alice-in-Wonderland daze. Five hundred a week. How could she go to Hollywood? Anyway, who had asked her to go? Three blocks over, five up. But walking in New York was not like walking in Lounsberry. Her usual firm, smooth stride, which could shake nonsense out of her mind, turning into dodgings and delays. It's not really walking, she thought, it's wriggling through.

Again she waited, although not so long, in the triangular little reception room at Horn and Westerby's, watching the telephone girl shift plugs and say "Who's calling? Just a moment, please, Who's calling? Just—" Mr. Horn burst into the room, seized her hand, ushered her swiftly along the corridor. Had she seen Grawn? Of course, it was just a wedge. An opening attack. Oh, Grawn never read anything! You bet he'd grab it if it showed signs of going over big. Now she must look at the lay-out for the ads. He whisked smooth sample sheets past her, rattling off names, the *Times*, the *Tribune*, some of the trade journals, these little ones for daily papers. Hazel's color deepened. All those about her book! "Of course, Mrs. Curtis, a publisher can do only so much. He can launch a book, and we're doing a big job on the launching. After that, it's up to the book. Word of mouth is what does it. If people like it—get to talking about it— If you have any suggestions, any original publicity— I'm sorry to say some of the reviews aren't as whole-hearted as they might be. Trouble with a prize novel, reviewers like to say why in the name of God was this book chosen! Don't mind them. I suppose you'd like to look them over? This one's the best. Good selling review. Tells the story, see, catches interest, calls it good wholesome book of familiar type. Carlton comes out and says he preferred 'Alley Cat.' That was runner-up, going to put it out next week. Here, look 'em over." He pushed toward her a pile of clippings and blue-penciled sheets. "Remember, a panning's better than no attention. May start talk. Yes, Bingham?"

The secretary's spectacles glinted at Hazel. "You here again?" they suggested. Aloud she said, "Mr. Smith says he has an appointment with you."

"So he has." Horn jumped up. "I'll leave you here, Mrs. Curtis. Amuse yourself."

When, an hour or so later, he came back, Hazel was sitting straight and still beside the desk, on which she had ranged the papers, her eyes dark with bewilderment under the thick lashes, petals of vivid color on her cheekbones. Mr. Horn's tentative glance investigated her mood.

"Mr. Horn," she asked, "did you by any chance read my book?"

"Why, yes, certainly. Of course." He flung himself into his chair, lighted a cigarette. "You smoke? No."

"What did you think of it?"

"Damned good book, of course. Now don't let some of those cracks disturb you. I never knew an author yet who could take criticism. Have to take it. Part of the game."

"Are you sure these are all about my book?" Hazel pointed at the clippings. "I thought maybe they mixed up the titles."

Horn jackknifed into a sudden laugh. "Say, that's rich!" he shouted. "That's a good one on reviews!"

"I wasn't sure. They blame me for so many different things I thought there might be a mixup." She shivered, as if she had been driven confused and stumbling down a long gauntlet where men cracked whips of phrases as she fled. No book ignoring the social and economic problems of the present deserves consideration. Style is spontaneous and fresh, but plot is hackneyed. Style is labored with affectations of modernity, although the plot has originality. Another family cycle; surely the time has come when we might be spared this banal repetition. Refreshing to find an authentic picture of the American scene, although the characters unfortunately are mere wooden types. The characters have a three-dimensional vitality; it is a pity that the action is nothing but moralizing, a projection of Miss Curtis' ideas of good and evil. The book has promise; the prize will give it undue attention, and no doubt destroy the author's future growth. Carlton's column had been the worst, perhaps because she had met him, and could hear him saying the words as she read. "There was another entry, virile, salty, full-bodied, with the tenacious hold on life hinted in the title, 'Alley Cat.' Not a pretty little book to win a prize. But Horn and Westerby, having presented

the circulating library readers with a chocolate marshmallow, may put themselves on the publishing mat with a real book. Watch for it."

"Anyway—" Hazel thrust out her chin, her upper lip drew down long and Irish, her color deepened—"I did get the prize! Even if it made them mad. That's the way they sound, just mad!"

"Sure," said Horn, "they're all frustrated novelists. Don't let 'em worry you. Now, what have you got on for this afternoon?"

You couldn't say nothing to a question like that. Hazel shook her head.

"I have to run out of town. Terribly sorry."

(Golf, thought Hazel. Or fishing. She knew that masculine air of inevitable, foredoomed preoccupation.)

"I thought you might like to shop, look around a little. The office is closed Saturday, of course. But Monday is a full day. In the morning I want you to see a pair of the cleverest radio agents in town. Fleeman and Flower. Chance to do a program for them. One of their biggest clients is looking for something new. In the afternoon you're to autograph books at one of the department stores. I've got the girls here all lined up to drop in at intervals, get a book, get it autographed, suggest there's a big demand, see? We can use 'em later. Why don't you look around for a place to settle here in town? You might as well stick around."

"But I've got a family," said Hazel.

"Bring 'em along. Good thing for a writer to be here on the ground. Get to know the right people."

"My husband wouldn't leave his business." Hazel braced her heels on the floor. If she didn't watch out, Horn's dynamo would have whirled her forever away from Lounsberry and the three there. She would be a star sucked out of her proper constellation by his velocity, and go spinning alone in the dry unreality of his orbit.

"He's a dentist, isn't he? Hm. Might be openings here. I wouldn't know. Out of my line. You aren't planning to leave him, then? Not that divorce or separation is much use as publicity. Too common. But more than one woman when she pulls off a big thing of her own finds it makes a difference."

Hazel set her teeth into her lower lip. It wouldn't do to tell her publisher that he was impertinent. Anyway, his inquiry had a terrible impersonality, quite as if she were a horse he had entered for a race, and he looked at her teeth, ran a hand over her hocks.

"Let's see." He flung out his wrist, read his watch. "Why don't you run down to Atlantic for the week-end? I can telephone for a reservation. Now, why isn't that an idea?"

"No." Hazel got to her feet quickly, before he shipped her off. "You needn't have me on your mind. I'd much rather stay here. Only I'd like some of my money."

Mr. Horn's face changed; he became almost husbandly. "Certainly. Now, you've had five hundred. I suppose if I give you the rest, you'll spend it before you leave town!" He waggled a finger at her.

"I'd like a thousand now," said Hazel with dignity. She hadn't meant to ask for so much, but he drove her to it.

After further persiflage Mr. Horn arranged to deposit it for her, and wrote out a card of identification. "Not a bad little publicity stunt, prize author goes shopping. See if I can't get one of the sob sisters to do a story. I'll be seeing you Monday, then. Have a good time, and don't buy Brooklyn Bridge!"

Hazel went back to her hotel, and as she ate luncheon she wrote on a slip of paper the names George, Lorna, and John, with dotted lines after each. A dress for Lorna. A watch for John, a good wrist watch, something like Mr. Horn's. For George—he'd like something for the office. She found the telephone directories in a long corridor of booths, and studied the Red Book until she had several addresses. The desk clerk, being urged, indicated which one was not too far from the hotel, and presently Hazel had convinced a supercilious young woman in an outer office that she was in earnest about buying a piece of dental equipment, and followed a tall, thin salesman into the show rooms. She wanted something quite expensive. No, she wasn't a dentist, her husband was. No, not in town, in Lounsberry. That was in Michigan. (Still there, solid and familiar, in spite of these strange days!) He had a good office chair. And an X-ray. In the next room she stopped, entranced, as if George stood beside her, and all his delight in perfect mechanism flowed into her. "These are the newest units, chromium and a new treatment of steel." Marvelous shining robots, with hinged and crooked elbows, dazzling metal threads through intricate wheels. The salesman swung the arms, turned a button and the drills sang and water gurgled. "You can spend as much as you like, depending upon the accessories." She was one with George again as she signed the check and arranged for the shipping. Just as quickly as possible. Freight was too slow. Express. She wished it might go by air-mail!

Lorna's dress was easy, and John's watch, and when at the end of the day Hazel returned to the hotel she was thoroughly happy. She could even stand being called a chocolate marshmallow! She bought an evening paper, and rode up to her room. For a time she sat at the window, watching the geometric silhouette of the city flatten against the sky, the sharp forms merging into dimness, light-pierced. Then she spread the paper open on her knees. At the third page she stopped, the sheet crackling in her fingers. "Prize-winning Housewife Visits City." It stared up at her, shadowless, blanched by the flashlight, startled, a picture with her name beneath it. Hazel read through the article, a half column. Then she re-read it, her face white as anger closed a tight hand over her heart, her breathing. At least, she thought, George would never see it. Nobody at home would see it. "Modest, pleasant little middle-aged housewife comes to city to claim prize. From hamlet nestling in hills of distant Michigan—" I suppose they think we have Indians and buffaloes—"Slight air of distracted anxiety, as she thinks of babies she has left for this momentous trip." Hazel folded the paper, picture inside, and thrust it into the wastebasket. "Somewhat dazed by the city, by the whole adventure, she finds herself figure in fairy tale." I never said that! "She thought it would be nice to write a book, and here she is! We can see housewives all over the land hearing of her good luck, neglecting pots and pans to dash off best sellers."

"I'm not middle-aged! I'm not modest. I—I certainly don't feel pleasant!" Hazel confronted her reflection in the mirror, and color ran up her soft throat into her face. She wondered who wrote the article. One of those smart, hard young things at the dinner last night. "It's dreadful, having to know how I seem to strangers, who don't know me, don't care—" She looked about the room, her anger changing subtly into desperation. Suppose she had to stay here always, with such articles, or such book reviews all she had! She would cease to exist, that was all. She wouldn't be herself any longer, because no one would know what she was. She moved swiftly to the telephone on a stand; she couldn't even stop to sit down.

"I want an out-of-town number," she said, her voice urgent. "In Michigan. Lounsberry. Two eight six three. No, I'll speak to anyone there."

"What's your room number?" and then, "I will con-nect you with long distance."

Listening, Hazel heard the quick calling of exchanges across the country, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, each transporting her nearer home, strides on seven-league boots across the land.

"Here's your number!" and then John's voice, his blessed telephone voice, affecting boredom, the quality thinned a trifle. Tears in her eyes, in her throat. "It's Mother, John!"

"Why, hello!" His drawl quickened. "How are you? Say, you sounded swell on the radio. Dad saw in the paper about the broadcast, and we all sat up."

"You did! Are you all right, John?"

"Sure. How's ole New York?"

"Oh, it's fine. Is Father there?"

"No. He went in town to a meeting."

(He hadn't said anything about a meeting—)

"And Lorna went off as soon as she ate her dinner."

"Where did she go?"

"I dunno. Ketch me asking that gal anything."

"Poor Johnny, all alone!"

"Well, I got my hat on, all set for the movies. Some of the fellows are going."

"Don't be too late, will you, dear. It's not long since you were sick." Hazel closed her eyes, her fingers tight over the instrument, straining for each inflection of his voice. She could see him, thin shoulders hunched as he bent toward the telephone there in the hall.

"Say, when you coming home?"

"Very soon. Next week."

"Not till then?"

"I have to do some things Monday. I have to see some radio men, John! Maybe they'll give me a job. And perhaps I'll be in the movies." She laughed, and the excitement she had not felt suddenly prickled through her veins as she offered it to John. "But I'll tell you all about it soon. Good-night, Johnny. Tell Father and Lorna I'm sorry they weren't home."

She held the receiver hard against her ear until the click which followed his "So long" broke the thread between them. She felt better. Like having her foot go to sleep, the way these two days had made her feel, and John's

voice sent blood racing so that her own self woke up. She wouldn't let them get her down again.

Monday evening Mr. Horn escorted Hazel to the Wolverine, although he protested her departure. "To be sure, there weren't many customers at the bookstore, but you can't rush things. If you'd stay a few weeks— —"

Many, thought Hazel. Two, besides the girls from the office who had pretended to be customers, and she'd sat on that chair for three hours. "If you really need me, I could come back. But I don't want to stay now." She had been stern with herself on Saturday and Sunday, buying a little guide book and booting herself over town to see what a visitor to New York should see, but she wasn't going to put in any more days paying solitary visits to fishes at the Aquarium or marbles at the Museum. She was going home.

Mr. Horn advised the porter about the placing of her bags. On the seat beside her he piled a large box of candy, all red cellophane and bows, a smaller glossy florist's box, and several magazines. Then he lolled against the arm of the seat, knee up, ears pricked for the "All Aboard," which would release him. "I hope you've had a good time," he said. " 'Sbeen a pleasure to meet you. You try a few scripts for Fleeman and Flower, and I'll see if I can get a contract out of them. Of course they felt, too, that you ought to stay here, be on hand for conferences."

"I couldn't do what they want," said Hazel, and for a moment Mr. Fleeman's face swam out from the green plush of the opposite seat, coming too close to hers as it had in the morning interview, black velvet hair, deeply lined white skin, sharp beak. "Something like Amos and Andy, only not colored, with a touch of Eddie Cantor, a few old songs thrown in (people like hymns), a real heart interest, and perhaps room for a touch of amateur hour."

"They don't know what they want," said Horn, briskly, "except they know what's pulled the best the last year or so. All those radio guys are crazy, but if you give 'em something good they'll pay real money for it. You try."

Hazel had her face set toward home. Although the train had not yet moved, she had already surrendered herself to the journey, and Horn's words danced like the final faint notes of a fantasia terminating with the wind instruments.

"Don't worry about your book," he was saying. "We're backing it with all we've got. Well, happy landing!" He pumped her hand, and was gone.

Hazel arranged her coat and hat neatly on the opposite seat. She untied the metallic cord and peered into the florist's box. More gardenias. She'd give them to Lorna, if they lasted until morning. She opened one of the magazines, turning the thick, smooth pages of advertisements until she reached an illustration. Posed against a pillar, a stairway winding below her to nothing at all, urns and palms behind her, incredibly tall and slender and arching backward, one arm above her head, so that the satin sheath of gown caught highlights on every curve she owned, stood a girl, her eyelids inscrutable not with the weight of ages of sin, like Mona Lisa, but with well applied eyeshadow. Hazel stared at the photograph. Now that, she thought, is the way you're supposed to look. What it really is is just a picture a man took of a girl in a dress that wasn't even her own, a girl from some small town who had that kind of figure. Like that girl Lorna knew who got a job modeling. The train was moving now, and Hazel leaned back, hands folded on the magazine, her face close to the window. If she could put her finger on it, she'd know something about New York that was like that photograph. The New York she'd seen, at least. For here, outside the window as the train climbed above street level and pried its way between dingy, close-pressing apartment buildings, was another city, washing flying on a fire-escape, a woman leaning with elbows on a dirty cushion, and then as the train gathered speed, too quick a winding past of interiors for Hazel to see anything but lights which marked rooms where people lived. She sighed. The whole fantasia of the past days, with its abrupt rhythm, its dissonances, was growing very faint. Later she might decide what it all meant. But if she'd known what happened when you wrote a book—no, not when you wrote it; when you had it published, when you took a prize! She could see dark water now, and great advertising signs flooded with light, and dimly on the window the shape of her own face. She thrust out her chin, and worried a little at her lip. She'd do it again.

Horn walked jauntily through the Station. It was late, but Millbeau, the salesman for the eastern territory, had agreed to wait for him. Like to run over the order sheets with him, tell him about the campaign for "Alley Cat." "The Hand" wasn't going to do much here in the East. Carlton had crabbed it, but he'd have to howl for the "Cat," he'd committed himself. Out in the sticks the "Hand" might move better. Women like Hazel ought to go for it, prize band on it and all. But he'd cut the advertising, at least till reorders started. Jeese, was he glad to be rid of that woman! He paused a moment at the curb, snapping his fingers, eyeing a girl that passed, her tight dark dress catching the good line from thigh to knee. Not that she wasn't a

good sort, nice eyes, if she knew how to use 'em. But personally he didn't fall for that flower of the field type. Didn't get on with 'em. Something appalling about that kind of naïveté. Probably never see her again. Didn't think she had another book in her. If he didn't get his money (Westerby's!) back on her, he would on "Alley Cat." First book sweet and pure, second strictly modern and soiled, good beginning for the firm. Then he had at least another half dozen manuscripts he could spread over the summer and fall, if nothing better came in. Just as he'd thought, the prize had been good bait, giving them a quick choice for their list, even if Westerby'd been skeptical about the sales value of a prize. "Make it a million, someone'd hear you. Ten grand? Bah!" And Horn had snapped, "What you think this is, a relief project?" That had tickled Westerby. He knew how to handle him! Then Horn darted across the street, swinging his arms in excess motion, jostling the crowd as he hurried, his nostrils wide, his face shifting in quick grimaces, all the superficial aspects of the city, the brilliance of the shop windows, the concentrated drive of the crowds, the rhythm of traffic the stimuli which nourished him.

Hazel had not wired that she was coming home. The children would be in school, and George would not like to leave his office. She took the bus out from the city, watching with content the familiar, flat country wheel past, fields winter-brown, farm dooryards muddy, the only hint of spring some quality in the sunlight, as if the angle at which it struck meant a stirring in the earth. The bus stop in Lounsberry was just across from George's office. She wanted to see him so much that she felt in every muscle the climbing of his stairs, the pushing open of the door. And then she'd find someone waiting in his office, thumbing over a magazine, and George, white-coated, bending over a patient in the chair. Their meeting must be more than that! No interference. No static! But how to get home? She could telephone the Murphy boy. If he were home, he'd come for her. As she turned toward the grocery store, Bill Pakaloupus, the owner's son, came out, arms full of bags and baskets, the morning orders.

"Morning, Mis' Curtis." He bobbed his head. "Just going out to your place. You going away?" He saw her luggage.

"No, I've been," said Hazel. She glanced at the Pakaloupus car, a battered sedan converted into a truck on week-days by removing the rear seat. "Could you give me a lift, Bill? I don't want to bother Dr. Curtis."

"Sure. Climb right in."

Hazel did, her eyes bright with amusement. Famous author comes home.

"I seen a woman at your house Sattiday," said Bill, as he clattered around the corner. "I thought mebbe you was sick."

"No. I've been to New York."

"Yeuh? Was you down on Washington Street? The old man lived there when he first come across. Guess you're glad to be back, ain'tcha?"

Hazel hung on to the rattly door-frame as they swooped up the street.

"Can't waste time." Bill grinned, his teeth white in his swarthy face. Then when he swung into the driveway at the Curtis house and stopped, with all the groceries bouncing, he refused Hazel's money. "Ain't you one of our good customers? 'Sa real treat to have company." He carried her suitcase to the front door, and disappeared around the house with a basket.

The front door was locked, and Hazel waited. Bill backed out of the yard, waving to her, and presently the housekeeper opened the door. "Why, Mrs. Curtis!" Her high, firm bosom pumped reproachful breath through her words. "I didn't know you were coming home today!" She was larger than Hazel, with an effect of polish on the planes of her wide, hard face.

"No, I didn't send word," said Hazel, managing to enter her own house. "Everything all right?"

"The Doctor said he wouldn't be home for lunch, and the children said they'd get something at the drug store because it was too far to walk and so I never planned a thing for this noon because all I ever take is a cup of tea."

"I'll call up my husband," said Hazel. "I guess you can find something."

She waited until Lizzie's broad and still reproachful rear had vanished into the kitchen. Then she called George. Yes, this was Hazel. No, she wasn't calling from New York, she was home! And George said, "For heck's sake, why didn't you let us know?"

"I knew you'd be busy this morning." Hazel swallowed a thistle before she went on. "You've got the car, haven't you? Can't you pick up John and Lorna, and come home for lunch?"

"Of course I want to see you! But I didn't know you'd be here. I made arrangements—if I can get hold of the party, I'll let you know. But it's pretty awkward." And then, almost caustically, "Have you had a grand time?"

"Oh, yes. Wonderful. Don't bother about lunch." Hazel held the instrument at a distance, hating it. "I'll see you tonight."

"It's not that lunch is a bother, Hazel. Please be reasonable. How could I know when you were coming? You told John you didn't know—" After a moment's pause he went on, and now his voice had lost its self-vindicating tone, had grown crisply professional. A patient must have come into the office. "The party I have the appointment with isn't in town yet, but if I can get hold of them, I'll explain. But it's a piece of business. Quite important."

"Well," said Hazel, "if I have to have a tooth pulled, would you have time to see me?"

"What's that? Is that tooth I filled bothering you again?"

She laughed. "No. *That's* not bothering me. See you later."

Ridiculous to feel such disappointment. She knew how George disliked suddenness or change. He planned his day, and he wanted it to go by schedule. He planned his life—and what a jolt she'd given him! Her mouth was soft and contemplative, and the pencil in her fingers drew a row of little birds with cocky tails and stiff legs, a row that marched across the cover of the telephone directory. Suppose he never accepted the jolt. She bent her head a trifle, evoking the quality of his voice. Clear, fresh, each syllable, each word distinct; it's a blond voice, thought Hazel. No shadows. But strong, like sunlight. She had heard it all these years, and never thought before how precisely George it was. Things have got to be all right, she told herself, ignoring the way a shred of apprehension clung to her mood, for all she brushed away her disappointment.

She considered telephoning to the school. But John and Lorna would not have time for the long walk home, and perhaps they, like George, had made dates for their sandwiches at the drug store counter. She'd been gone only—she counted off the days on her fingers—five days, and when she came back, she found the pattern so changed it didn't include her at all! What would happen if she went to Hollywood? But women did do things like that, lots of them. She heard Lizzie stomping about overhead, her feet expressing annoyance that Hazel had taken advantage of her, arriving unheralded before the roomwork was done. Better wait till she's through, thought Hazel. The living room was in stiff order, the small rugs each in the wrong place. Hazel moved about quietly, changing the rugs, pulling chairs out from the wall, until the room was hers again. She glanced over the mail piled on a corner of the table, advertisements, circulars, letters from three clipping bureaus enclosing several of the reviews she had already endured. Then she carried her bag to her own room and unpacked, alert for signs of what George had been doing these five days. He must have worn his new gray suit today. The

blue one needed pressing; she'd call the tailor. Then she saw, on the lower shelf of the night stand between the twin beds, her book! Her heart gave a thud, and she couldn't move. An end of the gold prize band showed; George had marked his place with it. Where had he got it? And what, dear God, what did he think about it? Imagine him lying there, turning page after page in his slow, deliberate way, George, who never read anything except the paper and his dental journals! He might have said something, when she telephoned.

Her hands trembled as she hung away the black lace dress, the new silk dressing gown. She took off the brown silk, and buttoned herself into a clean linen frock. She peered into the bathroom cabinet. Those cold tablets had been moved. Now which of them— Still seeking news, she went into John's room. The brown rep curtains hung in straight folds, the brown and yellow cover was spread smooth on the bed, a few books stood between the bronze lion bookends she had given him Christmas. His neckties were a stringy jumble in the top drawer. She sat down on the bed, crossing her ankles, and her heel struck something hard. Her hand, groping, touched smooth leather, and she was on her feet, drawing out a suitcase. John's, bought for camp last summer. She sank to the floor beside it, her knees weak, and pushed at the catch. John's suitcase, packed! Pajamas, shirts, sweater, little balls of socks, the case with brushes, the cup he'd won in the Junior tennis match. She closed the lid, snapped the lock, and pushed the case out of sight beneath the bed. Then she got to her feet, brushing out wrinkles in the blue linen. Whatever he'd planned, he must come home first. But where, this time of year— Had George said, done something? Once, when John was just a little fellow, he'd run away. But all boys do that—Hazel could see him, riding home with the milkman, dirty and tired, but proud because the man let him hold the reins. Was he in school, after all? If he'd packed the suitcase, he meant to take it. She wanted to run through the streets to the school, to be sure he was there, safe. But he'd never forgive her. She would have to wait. Perhaps it was some school trip, some legitimate plan she had not heard about. Oh, John!

She went quickly to the door of Lorna's room, her eyes dark, her lip caught between her teeth. Rose and blue, ruffled and feminine orderliness, surely she would find no clue to disaster, no vague threat here. She looked at the small painted desk, her hand lifting, fingers curved, importunate. The drawers there might have notes from that boy. That was different, prying. Fair enough to look for clues, when she had such hunger. But no prying. She opened the closet door, and the dresses swayed on their hangers, neat blue pasteboard containers for shoes, for stockings, sat in decorous rows, and a

whiff of sachet blew out. Hazel closed the door and went away. Her daughter's room kept secrets as well as did her daughter. But she's like George, thought Hazel. She has his passion for fitness, for orderliness. If she has it about her own life——

Lizzie served tea, toast, and an egg, with an air of that being more than one might expect, especially as she'd been trying to finish the ironing. She'd ordered the things for dinner before she knew Mis' Curtis was coming, and she hoped it would suit. Hazel wandered into the living room. She supposed she'd better keep the woman for a while, at least. "Although I might feel less an interloper in my own house if I had the dinner to get."

She tried to take a nap, but when she lay down the clatter of the Pullman trucks over the ties began again in her head. The minister's wife telephoned. Would Mrs. Curtis meet with the Ladies' Aid on Friday, and give a little talk about her trip to New York? They would charge ten cents admission for the tea and sandwiches. "I knew you were back," she added, "because I saw you with the grocer boy." (You would! thought Hazel.) Yes, she could come Friday, unless something came up to prevent.

"You aren't going to Hollywood right away, are you? I said I'd never believe Mrs. Curtis would leave her family to mingle with the kind of people we hear of out there, even if we do try to be charitable, where there's so much smoke——"

"Who said I was going?"

"It was in the paper, how you were considering an offer."

Mr. Horn must have put it in! And George must have seen it! "I'm not going immediately," said Hazel. "Nothing's settled. I won't go before Friday, anyway." She could see the face of the woman, spare, dun, with a look of bitter exhaustion in the sagging folds about mouth and chin, like that of a swimmer spent from the effort to keep above the surface of gentility. Not since the depression had the church made up the full amount of the Reverend Mr. Morrison's small salary. She must almost hate Hazel for her sudden fortune! "I'll see you then," Hazel finished, "I'm sure I can make it."

That would account for George's tone on the telephone. He saw her alighting for a moment, en route to California. "We'll play it up," Horn had said. "That's the way to create a demand, make those fellows think someone else is hot on your track." She went uneasily upstairs, thinking that if she had alighted she had found a threat of quicksands where the earth had always been firm and stable. She'd change her dress. Not one of the new ones. The blue silk with the lace collar that George always liked. She

dressed slowly, watching the hands of the small clock crawl. The children couldn't possibly come before four, and they might be later.

It was five when John came. Hazel sat in the living room, the evening paper unread on her lap, her cold hands folded over it. She heard a car stop, heard John's, "So long. Thanks for the lift." She went quickly into the hall, the secret and ignored dread of the long afternoon peeling away like a dry husk. He pushed open the door and looked at her, silent, but she saw a great gulp move in his thin throat. "Hello," he said, "when'd you blow in?"

"Oh, this morning." She had to kiss him, had to run her fingers, feather-light, over his stiff young head, although she held tight to the passion of tenderness which cried in every nerve-end for release. "How are you, Johnny? Come tell me what you've been doing. Did you miss me?" She slipped a hand under his arm, pulled him into the living room, down on the divan beside her.

John let his strapped bundle of books plunk to the floor, and dangled his hands between his knees. "I noticed you weren't around," he drawled. "You don't seem much different."

"You haven't changed much yourself." Hazel laughed. She thought, that line his head makes, rising from his neck, that sweet boy line— But his color isn't good, too white.

"Say, did they really give you the money?"

"Yes, they really did. I brought you something. It's there on the table, the small box."

John looked at her, his mouth moving around words, and then, without speaking, he crossed to the table, his coat hitched up in funny wrinkles. He came back with the box, and opened it slowly. The flat gold rectangle lay in his palm, and he twitched at the leather strap. "Gee, it's a pippin! It's a good one, too. But you know—" his face twitched, "Dad'll probably say I oughtn't to have it."

"What nonsense, John! Father isn't like that." Hazel pushed back his cuff, and buckled the watch about his thin wrist. "There!"

"You don't know." John held out his hand, shook down the sleeve to see how much of watch remained on view. "You don't know—" and suddenly his face had despair, complete because without perspective, his parted lips dry, his forehead creased. "He's fed up with me. He said so." He gulped. "He'll tell you about it, don't worry. First I meant to clear out, get the hell away. Only then you called up, and I didn't like to run out on you. An' I was

talking with a fellow down by the freight yard, and he says times ain't what they used to be and you can't bum your way any more because if you haven't got a job then you have to go on relief or in a camp, and I couldn't because they'd look up my family. So I thought I'd wait and talk it over with you."

Hazel sat very still. He seemed balanced so precariously on a thin taut wire of confidence that a clumsy move from her would knock him headlong beyond her reach, into what pit of foolhardiness or danger? "Would you mind," she asked, "telling me what happened? I'm glad you waited. I should have felt let down if I'd come home—" She couldn't go on. That suitcase!

"The car got smashed." John hunched forward, knees pressing his hands together. "I was just driving along, and this fellow comes around the corner too fast and skids into me. It was sleety, see? Honest, I didn't do a thing wrong, but the fenders were crumpled and the running board stove up, and Dad said I oughtn't to be out loose."

"He'd be upset, John, but he didn't mean——"

"You didn't hear him!" John's fingers dug into his hair. "I can't help it if a mug skids into me! I can't help it if I haven't got a license yet. I just took the car to go down town, I wasn't going on any joy ride the way he said."

"You weren't hurt," said Hazel, softly.

"I wish I had been."

"Oh, hush! The car can be repaired, and your father was just worried ——"

"He stays mad—" a glint of humor touched John's mouth, "because he has to walk and that reminds him all the time."

"Anyone may have an accident." Hazel spoke briskly. "Now you unpack your suitcase and hang around with us a little longer. I sort of like having you here."

John straightened his shoulders, and rolled his eyes at her, round and surprised. "You knew—" he began, when outside another car stopped. "See here," he said, "when you go to Hollywood——"

"Sh!" said Hazel. "They're coming." And close to his ear she added, "You stick around, and if ever I should go, I'll take you along."

Then George and Lorna were in the hall, Lorna with little shrieks of welcome, George with a restrained and somewhat questioning heartiness.

Lorna loved her dress, white chiffon, soft and swirling. She held it up and posed before the hall mirror, and Hazel thought, she looks happier, less subdued, something has happened to her, too. "And this is for you." Hazel handed George the catalogue of dental supplies, open at the smooth cut of the marvelous dentists' unit, all black and shining chromium. "Only I couldn't bring it. It's coming soon, by express." George looked.

"You mean you ordered it for me?"

"Yes, sir." Hazel stood close to him, her finger on the page. "That very one! Don't you like it?"

"Yes, yes. It's just what I've needed."

"If it isn't exactly the one you want, we could send a wire—" Hazel pushed herself against that skim of reservation over his acceptance. "What isn't right, George? I wanted it to be perfect."

"It's quite all right. This is one of the best supply houses. I am afraid you were pretty extravagant."

Hazel shook her head. She knew that almost uttered *but*, that withholding of the kind of delight he should have. Better let it alone, rang a small warning. She couldn't, she had to dash on, no matter what! "You might as well tell me," she said. "It's really not a trifle, and we might still change it——"

"Trifle! Of course not. There's nothing to tell. I was just wishing you might have consulted me——"

(Dear Heavens, was his pride hurt again?) "But George, darling, you don't consult about presents!"

"You see, I practically gave an order for just such a unit this very noon. That shows I really want it!" He was defensive, prodded into explanation. "I meant to buy it on time, of course. But it would have been nice if you could have placed the order here. I've taken a good deal of her time."

"At luncheon?" asked Hazel, and down the street like a picture on a banner unfurling in a gust of angry wind marched the figure of that saleswoman, that red-winged blackbird person, arrogant and smart. You had luncheon with her, you wouldn't come home, said Hazel's sealed, dark look. And why not, after all you've been up to, answered George's steady, unrepentant gaze. This, thought Hazel, can't go on now, with the children listening. It must wait. Her stiff smile at George was a rain ticket. That was one thing about having children. You had to postpone settling difficulties,

and sometimes after such postponement you couldn't find them again. Either they had evaporated, or you had mislaid them and they waited to trip you in some dark corner of your life.

"Dinner should be ready," she said. "I'm famished. Last night, on the train, I was too tired to eat, and Lizzie wouldn't give me much lunch. She, like the rest of you, hadn't expected me. Wash your faces, my lambs, and let's sit down."

With the soup, Hazel began an account of her trip to New York. As she talked, she listened, thinking, Mr. Horn should hear me! He'd give me a job as publicity liar right away. She had moved in a glitter, in a dazzle, rushing from triumph to triumph, meeting famous men and women, being toasted in cocktails, dined and wined and fêted, sought after by radio (they said my voice was excellent!), by motion pictures, pursued by rival publishers (Well, Mr. Horn said she was!), Lorna leaned forward, elbows on table, chin propped on crossed hands, her blue eyes wide, her lips parted. John listened more soberly, frowning, glancing at his father. And George ate methodically, with an air of one who has often heard such recitals, but as Hazel mounted with animation from one glory to another, his color changed, until instead of his usual clear flush on cheekbones, his face was pale except for a curious dull red along the line of jaw. She couldn't stop. She was saying, see, you never guessed how wonderful I am, you don't believe it now, this is the kind of life I could have, and you are indifferent, cruel, you take saleswomen in black suits and red feathers to lunch!

"Do they just have parties all the time? Honestly, Mother, I don't see how you can bear it to come back to Lounsberry!" Lorna sighed.

"They implored me to stay." Hazel was reckless. She'd decked that little brown wren of Mr. Horn's out with bird of paradise feathers until she almost believed the bird had worn them! "They said you had to be on the ground to catch the early worms. (Confound that bird.) I mean to meet the right people, work up radio programs, everything."

"You had to come home sometime," said John, "unless you stayed forever. Don't they know you've got folks? Parties all the time would be sickening, if you ask me."

"Oh, I'd love it!" said Lorna, and George did not look up from his plate.

After dinner Lorna wished to try on the new frock. Hazel watched George settle himself with the evening paper. "You don't have to go back to the office?" she asked, brightly, from the doorway.

"How can I, with no car? Or didn't John tell you about his latest piece of brilliance?"

John bolted up the stairs as if his father's words yapped at his heels.

"Oh, yes. Well, I'm glad something keeps you home. I mean you drive yourself just too hard."

George shifted his paper. "That was why you wrote your book, wasn't it? Those lonely evenings while the struggling dentist struggled."

Hazel drew a quick breath, and mounted the stairs, her feet clipping each step sharply. If he was going back to the very beginning, if those first silly interviews still rankled— For the first time, with a galvanic shock as if the thought had physical existence, Hazel said to herself, "Perhaps we are finished. I've destroyed his contentment, his notion of our marriage, of me, his sufficiency. He feels belittled." She paused at the top of the stairs, one hand clinging to the rail, and everything about her, the light, the walls, the sounds of the house receded. She was alone in a dark void, her blood had curdled in that keen pain under her heart, and no stimuli could touch her. She mustn't faint, that would be absurd. Somewhere she found her will, she stirred her curdled blood, she drew light and sound and the shape of walls and floor back into her consciousness.

"See, Mother, how do you fasten this?" Lorna was calling her, and Hazel went quickly into her room. She would finish with this, she would say good-night to Lorna and to John, and then, and then! Eagerness beat up in her, as if the very chemistry of her body had changed. She wanted to confront George, to have this out. She was through with sidewise fencing, with gentle subterfuge, with postponements.

She fastened the girdle, catching the sweet warmth of her daughter's round, soft body. Lorna pirouetted, the toes of her gold strapped dancing sandals shining. "It's adorable, Mother! Put on your new black dress and let's pretend it's a party. We could show Father."

"Not tonight." Hazel adjusted the puffed caps at the shoulders. "It is sweet, and it fits very well."

"It's only a paper moon, it's on-ly a painted sky—" sang Lorna, taking dance steps. "Did all the people have on lovely dresses at the parties? Didn't they think you looked simply swell in yours?"

Hazel sat down on the bed. Her exhibition mood had vanished, and she said, drily, "No one spoke of it." She sat there, her brow crinkling, while Lorna swept down stairs to show her father. Just what had happened to

Lorna? Suddenly she had it, tangible as if it lay between her clasped fingers. Why, Lorna was actually thinking about her, Hazel! Little, first attempts— She had moved a step out of the childish prison of her self. Hazel watched the girl draw the soft clinging folds carefully over her head, watched her move about the room, thinking how sweet she is, that milk and honey white and gold, just that bra' and panties— "However do you keep warm enough?" she said.

"Oh, I couldn't breathe if I had to wear more clothes!" Lorna hung away the dress, tied the cord of a blue bathrobe firmly around her waist, and sat down beside Hazel. "You know—" she studied her pink toes, and then rushed on. "The girls think it's wonderful, to have a mother that can do what you do. They ask me everything about you. And Miss Chalmers, in English class, said we should be very proud, and maybe I might inherit some of your ability. I don't think I'll get married for years and years." She sighed. "I'm not really very smart, yet, but maybe—if I worked—I could do something, and go to New York and get my picture taken and everything." She hugged her round knees and brooded.

It hasn't been a total loss, then, thought Hazel. She relaxed, quiescent, receptive, waiting. At long, long intervals, and always after the girl had come out at the end of some experience, some stiff ascent in her development, she had a moment when she wished to talk. Just a few phrases, a seal the child placed on something she was done with.

"It isn't always being in love, is it, when you go all soft and squidgy inside being kissed, even if you think it is? Anyway, some boys just work too fast. Only when he got another girl right off, just because I wouldn't— But it's all right now. I see my future much more clearly."

"That's good, darling," said Hazel, quietly. She must keep her horror out of her voice. That dreadful boy!

"Good-night!" cried Lorna. "Look how late it is, and me with scads of homework." Confessional was over, she would have no more of it. She jumped to her feet, tugging at the cord about her waist. "I'll just say it was so exciting having you come home that I forgot about work!"

Hazel gave her a quick hug. "Good girl," she said, and Lorna pretended to be absorbed in the book she had opened. John's door was ajar, and Hazel laid one hand against her throat, as she saw what the boy was doing. The trophy cup sat on the dresser, and John was stowing away in a drawer the contents of his suitcase. She stepped past silently, and went down the stairs.

George stood at a window of the living room, hands hooked together behind his back. He did not hear her, and Hazel looked at him, gray suit snug over truculent square shoulders, smooth light head well up, heels together. Her glance hurried about the familiar room, and all the furniture, the rugs, the lamps, chosen over so many years, lived with, looked back at her bleakly, meaning gone from them. George hadn't even turned on the radio! She walked in, selecting a strip of bare wood beyond the rug, and George said, not moving, "I thought you must have gone to bed."

"No," said Hazel. "I haven't."

"I thought you probably were pretty tired after all you've been doing."

"No, I'm not."

He turned then, reluctantly, as if he heard in her voice the restrained violence of her intention to get at him, as if he preferred more silence, more dodging, more sly undercuts.

"I just want to say this. I don't mean to stand in your way at all. You can go on to Hollywood or New York or wherever you want to. As Lorna said, Lounsberry isn't much to come back to. I can't compete with your offers. Lorna can go to college next fall. And John—a good stiff school somewhere would be good for him. He needs some sense pounded into him. We'll close the house. I'd rather live at the hotel. And later——"

Hazel sat down. "Yes," she prompted. "Later?"

"Later we could arrange for a divorce. A nice, quiet one, that wouldn't upset the children. You could stop off at Reno, say, on your way to Hollywood."

"You've got everything planned without even asking me——"

"Ask you? What was there to ask you? When you've shown in every move you've made what you really want! When all our life meant was that you were so bored you had to say so publicly! From the minute that telegram came about the prize you were different. You haven't known I existed. You haven't thought or cared about anything except what was happening to you, what was being said about you." George spoke with a quiet, unmodulated fluency which meant that all these words, worn round and smooth from constant turning in his mind, rolled out with no effort. He could not know they were amazing, because to him they were rote-familiar. "I've always known you didn't really care about my work, you never listened when I tried to explain it, it was only the way I made a living for us, and now that you can make so much more money you don't have to pretend.

I waited till you'd been to New York. I don't know quite what I hoped for. But now I see it's no use. All these grand things—I won't stand in your way. You wouldn't say this to me, because you'd think, mistakenly, 'Poor George! I mustn't hurt him.' But I believe in extracting dead teeth. I can't stand things as they are. It's upsetting my work." His blue eyes had a sudden wintry gleam. "Do you know what I did yesterday? I mixed up two sets of X-rays, and I pulled out the wrong tooth. That is, it was the right tooth in the wrong mouth. The plate showed a shadow, but it wasn't Mrs. MacAndrew's shadow." He broke off with an impatient gesture, his hand implying, but you don't care about that!

Hazel sat back in her chair, her hands limp, her heart beating so heavily she felt it in her wrists. Dear Lord, it was like reading another terrible interview, or review of her book, this trying to see what George saw of her! The self she thought she was had shrunk into a dried pea, rattling in shells provided by other people! She didn't care about dentistry. George had told her that before. But who else could, the way George did? Was it true, that she was selfish, indifferent, absorbed? That grand picture she'd built up, of herself in New York! She'd come rushing home, and now George was pitching her out, making her over into a hard, demanding creature— Perhaps ——

"George Curtis," she said, fiercely, "are you getting rid of me for another woman? Are you—that woman you took to lunch? That saleswoman? Are you in love with her?"

"No," said George. "Not yet. We have things in common."

"Oh!" cried Hazel. She flung out her arms, her eyes brilliant under the heavy lashes. "George, you idiot! I won't be extracted. I'm not a dead tooth! You—" was it laughter that sprang from the tight coil of feeling?—"you've mixed your X-ray pictures all up. Oh, don't you know I've thought about you every second? I've been so wretched because you didn't like it—I've been terrified! I had to make you think I had a grand time, didn't I? I didn't even feel real until I got home—and then you wouldn't come— Oh, I won't let you be so stupid that you don't know what I want first!"

"You mean you'd give up your Hollywoods and everything?"

"I didn't mean that. We could leave that till it came up. But I mean if we tried, I'd get used to being somebody, not a big somebody, and you'd get used to it, and it wouldn't make any more difference than— than your filling a tooth!"

"You don't think I mind that all this happened to you?"

Hazel looked up at his strained face, the light gleaming on his forehead, on his neatly brushed fair hair.

"I had a feeling you were a different woman, not the girl I married. But I — —"

Hazel slid to her feet, clasped her hands behind his head, and kissed him. "There!" she murmured, against his lips. "Same girl."

Later they sat together on the divan, hands linked, Hazel's head on his shoulder. She thought: he did mind, terribly, just what we neither of us ever will know. But I've got him back. Dear Lord, help me look interested in dentistry or machinery or anything else he wants to talk about! I do love him so much.

George said, clearing his throat, "I bought a copy of your book. Two-fifty. They had quite a pile of them in Hudson's."

Hazel held her breath. She wanted to sit away from him, to watch his face, but she kept her head down against the solid shoulder.

"It's a good story. I don't see how you thought it all up. It wasn't exactly like your father's folks, although I recognized some of it. I was glad you ended it that way."

Hazel relaxed again. "I tell you," she said, dreamily, "when I write the next one, you can read it as I go along. You could make suggestions."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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The story is taken from an anthology, “The Flying Yorkshireman”, published with four other authors.

[The end of *Snow in Summer* by Helen Rose Hull]