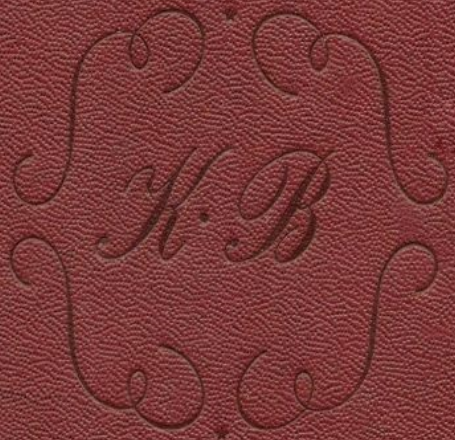
This Man

AND

This Woman



Title: This Man and This Woman
Date of first publication: 1936
Author: Katharine Brush (1902-1952)
Date first posted: 8th December, 2024
Date last updated: 8th December, 2024
Faded Page eBook #20241203

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

This Man AND *This Woman*

FOUR SHORT NOVELS BY

Katharine Brush

THE BLAKISTON COMPANY
Philadelphia

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

For
CHARLES SAMUEL INGHAM

C O N T E N T S


Free
Woman

THIS IS the story of Harriet Lansing, whose name you know; whose photographs you see in her professional announcements in the proper magazines. She is a young woman to be such a success in life. She is thirty-one. She looks exactly thirty-one in the photographs. She would not fool you.

She looks intelligent, and handsome, and direct, with steady eyes. She has dark hair, worn smoothly, parted in the middle. Her ears show. Her forehead has a thoughtful breadth, and she has strong black eyebrows shaped like darts and tweezered only for the sake of tidiness. They remain thick and positive, like a man's. She has a positive chin. Her face is just a little long for symmetry because of it.

To meet her face to face is to corroborate and color these impressions, rather than to multiply them. Her dark hair is almost black, and the white central part is very white, and in the back there is the knot that you expected, low and flat. Her eyes are sometimes gray and sometimes green, like deep, cold water. Her make-up is almost invisible, and in a world of mouths done in red grease, and newly done, her mouth might be her own. It is as red as her good blood, and it is dry.

She wears a tailored suit. There is no qualifying this statement. No matter what she sometimes wears, it always seems to friends of Harriet that they have never seen her except in a tailored suit. She wears a custom-made silk blouse, with a close collar. Fifty dollars. She prefers small hats, not too extreme, but always new and subtly smart.

Furs are her passion—if so controlled a person may be said to have a passion. She likes furs, and she collects them. Jewelry does not interest her, unless it is antique and strange. She has been married once before, and both her husbands—both conventional men—have given her conventional engagement rings and platinum bands. She keeps all four of these mementoes in a leather jewel case in one velvet groove. She cannot tell the wedding rings apart by this time, though she could at first.

Her present husband's name is Pendleton. Edmund B. Pendleton. No one remembers it, but that is what it is.

She has one child, a boy, now eight years old. His given name is Jon—without an *h*. Jon Bishop. He was born during her first marriage. She keeps him in a country house she built especially for him in Connecticut, with an

excellent Miss Holliday she brought especially from England. Miss Holliday is known as Nannie, naturally.

Harriet goes to visit Jon on Sundays, on the ten o'clock, returning on the seven in the evening, peaceful with accomplishment. She always takes a secretary with her on this expedition, and dictates in a drawing room between New York and Saybrook, where her country driver meets her with the station wagon from the house. At the New York end there is her city chauffeur, with the town car. She has two super-secretaries, and they alternate on Sundays. She always cleans up quite a lot of work that way.

You know her business, and how big it is, and how diverse it is. Harriet Lansing, Incorporated. Counselor to Women. This is the story of that business, and of other things more personal. There is even more to Harriet than meets the eye.

Begin with the year of her graduation from the private school of a Miss Cowperthwaite, in Minneapolis, which was her native city. She was seventeen that year. She was to enter college in September—specifically she was to enter Smith, her mother's Alma Mater. This had been determined by the sex of Harriet at birth, as the alternative to Harvard and then Oxford.

Smith it was, and nothing else was ever subsequently thought of, until Harriet at seventeen herself announced, with Harriet's already famed conciseness and finality, that she had changed her mind. "Now wait a minute, Mother," she said firmly, adding, "please." She had good manners, and she has them still.

She went on speaking. She had decided not to go to college after all, but to a certain school in Boston where they taught physical culture. She named the school, and exhibited a catalogue and several letters from the registrar. She was expected on September 12. She needed only a small check to send them for her registration fee—deductible from her tuition later, she explained—and that would clinch it.

And that did. There was discussion first, of course; there was even rather heated altercation; there were quick, pertinent questions in her father's business voice after a time, and always there were high, despairing protests from her mother. "But physical *culture*!" Mrs. Lansing kept crying out incredulously, in very much the tone she might have used if Harriet had been proposing a career of general housework, or of circus acrobatics, or of floating down from airplanes in parachutes to fairgrounds.

"Yes, Mother," Harriet kept answering equably.

"How long a course is it?" her father said.

“Three years.”

“And after that?”

Her father was H. Osborne Lansing, Harvard, ’08. He was a Minneapolis success, described inevitably as “leading”—a leading manufacturer, a leading citizen, a leading philanthropist—even a leading churchman, since this was politic. He would ultimately be mentioned first of all as Harriet Lansing’s father, but this day of mixed emotions in his bosom was not yet, nor would it have been imaginable to Minneapolis or to himself.

He was admiringly aware that Harriet was very like him—that she and not his only son H. Osborne Lansing, Junior, was the good granite chip off the old block. They even looked alike. You saw it now, across this living room. You heard their voices speak in the same way.

“And after that?” said Mr. Lansing.

“I might teach it,” Harriet said. “Or I might not. I think——”

Here Mrs. Lansing interposed again. “*Teach* it?” she echoed tragically. “Oh, my dear Harriet—a teacher of *gymnastics*? In a middy blouse and *bloomers*? I mean to say,” said Mrs. Lansing, who never quite said what she meant to say, “like that great strapping violent Amazonian woman at your school, what is her name? Miss Hopkins? Miss Hawkins? I mean that gymnasium woman.”

“Miss Johnson, Mother.”

“She’s too dreadful,” Mrs. Lansing said. “That bouncy manner, and those legs exactly like the backs of tires. Women should be *feminine*, my dear, and how can they be feminine if they go making great galloping athletes of themselves? How can they expect to have successful debuts, and their share of beaux to dance attendance on them? Why, men *abhor*——”

“Oh, Mother, please!” Harriet said. “Must we go all over that again?”

“But you’re so *strange*!”

“I know,” Harriet said agreeably. “I’m not like you a bit, am I? I’m sorry, Mother.”

She was very glad.

She spent three years in Boston, and the intervening summers in New Hampshire, at a camp for girls on Lake Winnepesaukee. There she was a junior counselor the first year, and after that a counselor proper, with a tent of eight small girls to guard and guide and herd about. She taught canoeing, swimming, diving, tennis—all the staff taught all these things—and in addition she was called upon to coach the soccer teams, and to preside at campfires in the evenings, and to put on little plays, and to give fancy-diving exhibitions

when the parents came, and occasionally to take a group of older campers on a hike up Mount Chocorua, or on an overnight canoe trip down the lake.

She lived in shorts and jerseys—it was a little past the day of the middy-blouse-and-bloomer costume that her mother had so bleakly prophesied. Her brown legs were bare, and she wore sneakers and rolled woolen socks. Everyone dressed the same, even the massive camp directress wore the uniform, and on occasions of full regalia everyone affected braids and beaded headbands stuck with Pocahontas feathers. These were unhappily not always so becoming as they were to Harriet, who somehow looked exactly right in hers.

She liked the life, and lived it energetically and skillfully, so that she was invaluable to her employer from the start. This was a point of pride with her in all the jobs she ever held—employed, she was not merely adequate, not merely satisfactory, she was priceless, and there could be no lesser word. It was a role she played. It was a pattern she conceived and copied. She could be anything she cared to be, to anyone, at any time. She always knew that.

Now she enjoyed the contemplation of this picture of herself—the youngest counselor in the camp, and yet the best, from every point of view that mattered. She excelled in everything, except in piffling incidentals such as botany and basket weaving, and the girls adored her and looked up to her. The ease with which she could control them was remarkable, and it was constantly remarked. She was a born disciplinarian, the camp directress said enthusiastically. She was a born leader, that Harriet.

"I know," she thought.

She even thought, "Of course."

She meant to buy this camp herself someday and run it properly. She thought of that when she was seventeen; decided it, and planned it.

She went home to Minneapolis four times a year during those three years, for brief vacations between school and camp, and for the Christmas and Easter holidays. She became very social then, not only for her mother's sake but for her own—she realized that her chosen life was of one kind, winter and summer, and that contrast and variety were sensible and good for her. Accordingly she shopped and fitted with a patience that amazed her mother; she submitted docilely to permanents and manicures; and thus transformed from Pocahontas to a Minneapolis debutante, she issued forth to gaiety.

She found it boring, as she had expected, but enlightening nonetheless. Her mind took notes incessantly, while her feet danced. She was a nimble and a rhythmic dancer, though a domineering one—she invariably discovered that she was a better dancer than her partners, so she managed everything.

The fact was that her partners were not apt to be the best, in any respect. They were not apt to be the handsomest, or merriest. They ran to undistinguished dinner jackets of uneasy fit, and to ballooning shirt fronts, and to drizzling foreheads which they mopped with name-taped handkerchiefs, and to pump-handle arms, and to great gravity of spirit. They had grave names like Ernest, they were frequently nearsighted, and no party dress you wore escaped their hands' ineptitude—they bunched your waistline in a portly way, or made a dancing hunchback of you.

Harriet always attracted them.

Away from dance floors, she was rather more successful. Athletes liked her, as a kind of female brother; young men studying for degrees and writing theses found in her a sympathetic and a safe companion, less distracting than some others; talkative dinner partners liked the way she had of eating steadily without interrupting—this made her appear interested when she was merely hungry; little men liked her, as they would; older men liked her, because she liked them.

She did quite well.

Those were the years of bootleg cocktails served in teacups, and of homemade hasty gin worn on the hips in convex flasks. Harriet sampled everything, but tentatively, moderately, pending the time when she should have a private opportunity to test and learn her individual capacity. You had to learn it in this day and age. The thing to do was learn it quietly and inconspicuously, sanely and scientifically, and quite alone.

This was a little hard to manage, her life being what it was, but she contrived it ultimately, and went through with it as planned. Locked in her bedroom in the house in Minneapolis, secure in the knowledge that her parents were away for over night and that her brother Osborne would be dancing in St. Paul till almost morning, she consumed a measured dose of whisky on the hour and half-hour, while she could.

They were average doses. They were what you got at parties. She began at half past eight, surviving until almost midnight. At eleven she went prudently to bed, so as to be there. She kept a written record, somewhat like the last long letter of a suicide dying slowly and reporting all the while. In so far as this was legible, she read it over in the morning with enormous interest, and without the slightest levity; and in the afternoon, when she felt almost well again, she wrote four pages more, headed CONCLUSIONS, with the subtitle SCOTCH WHISKY.

That was that experiment. So far, so good.

The Southerner's name was Crosby, and he was about thirty. You were supposed to call him Happy, as they had at Yale. He wore a mighty raccoon coat over a tweed suit with a Greek pin on the waistcoat. He also wore a small gold football chained across his stomach, and on this morning of the game in Cambridge a blue feather soaring in his hat. He had arrived in Boston yesterday from Alabama, where he lived, and where he must have learned to talk. Yale had had no effect now audible.

He announced himself as being a bit hung-over at the moment—he had fallen among friends last night, and what a night, he said—but this would pass. He grinned at Harriet, to promise her a better Crosby presently. He had a nice grin, big and vital like himself.

He was a friend of Fletcher Adams, who was the special swain of Harriet's school roommate, Thelma Coburn—that was the way of it. It was a blind date for the game, beginning now. Fletcher had a flat on Charles Street, and they met there at eleven in the morning, for apéritifs before their early lunch. This was one of those rainy football Saturdays—it was raining torrents even now. The girls arrived in yellow slickers, extra sweaters under oldest coats, wool stockings, overshoes, and last-year's sport hats, resurrected from the backs of closet shelves.

Thelma, who was usually chic, and lovely in a pastel way, was sadly dimmed and seriously dispirited by clothes like these; but Harriet was not. She was a girl for the occasion. It was a day on which most women appeared at a disadvantage, and those were ever Harriet's best days.

"*You* won't mind the rain," Happy decided warmly, during the second highball. "You won't run, or shrink, or anything. I'll bet you won't even catch your death of cold. Old Fletch was right."

"Why? What did he say?"

"He said you were my kind of woman."

There was no coquetry in Harriet at all, but there was always curiosity, and always candor.

"Are you married?" she inquired.

She nearly lost him then and there, but didn't quite.

"I was," he said, when he had scrutinized her carefully. "I'm divorced now. Why?"

"I just wondered what your wife was like, if you had one."

"You're a funny girl."

"You'll get used to her," said Thelma shortly from across the room.

He did. It was a fine, congenial day for both of them. They ordered the

same things for lunch, and they were mutually determined to eat fast and go without dessert and get there for the kickoff—Thelma and her vanilla éclair to the contrary notwithstanding.

"If you'll excuse us," Happy said at last, and Harriet jumped up instantly, and they both said, "Give us our tickets and we'll see you there." They left the restaurant on the run, and somehow found a taxi—Harriet found one and got into it, thrusting competitors aside, while Happy was still hunting in the traffic in the rain. She and the taxi picked him up, and Harriet said, "It's going to be four dollars to the stadium. Do you mind? He wanted five, but I said four, and even that's bad enough. They gyp you outrageously here on football days, of course. Meters mean nothing. What are you laughing at?"

"You, darlin'," Happy said. "I like you very much, do you know it?"

"I do you too," said Harriet, nodding briskly.

This increased. They shared that grotesque afternoon in the most perfect harmony. They were not cold and miserable, and querulous, like other people. They deplored the unrelenting downpour, because it really spoiled the game—this wasn't really football, they agreed regretfully—but otherwise they did not mind it very much, although it drenched them.

Even their zealots' disappointment in the football game *per se* was somewhat mitigated by the humor there was in it. The whole spectacle amused them—the wild antics on the puddled field; the dripping chocolate players; the long, spinning skids they took in all directions from the heap on downs; the vast, bedraggled, huddled audience, and everything it did, and everything it wore, from hoods and scarfs of sodden newspapers and capes of stolen hotel blankets, to rubber boots, and bathing caps, and even shower-bath curtains, and fishermen's coats, and ponchos of white kitchen oilcloth from the ten-cent store.

Happy wore one of these, like a gay ghost. Harriet's head was bonneted with a sou'wester hat, to match her oilskins. They had had time for shopping in the street outside the stadium gates, and they had bought emergency equipment of all kinds. They now sat high and fairly dry on concrete padded with the Boston *Traveler,* and they both had souvenir programs balanced on their heads like tents. Harriet wore her oilskin hat turned up in front and down in back. She had a bunch of ribboned violets pinned against her yellow slicker—this corsage alone distinguished her from the Uneeda Biscuit boy.

There was no keeping cigarettes lighted, and so they didn't try it. They drank from Happy's flask between the halves, but only then. They got up simultaneously, blankets, tents, and all; they sat down simultaneously, too, needing no signal. In every move they made there was an order and a

teamwork that suggested years of practice in this sort of setting. In everything they said there was accord, and on their streaming faces there was comradely serenity, and they held hands from time to time, contentedly, in their wet gloves. Darby and Joan at the Yale-Harvard football game.

They saw it through, of course. Thelma and Fletcher did not long survive—Thelma not being among the fittest, and not long pretending, either. Fletcher took her home when the half ended. "Hard luck there, fella," Happy said in a complacent undertone. He squeezed Harriet's hand to tell her what he thought of her. "How *can* you leave?" said Harriet to Thelma meanwhile; and she meant it. When Thelma nevertheless stood up, Harriet's glance of incredulity and criticism lifted, too, so suddenly and sharply that the raindrops fairly whisked from off her eyelashes.

"Afraid of a little dampness!" she exclaimed contemptuously.

"I've got double pneumonia," said Thelma, adding with acerbity, "and furthermore, you make me tired. I'll see you later."

But in this assumption, though it was based on fixed arrangements, Thelma was mistaken. She did not see Harriet again till Monday morning.

"So it's you, is it?" she observed grimly then.

"It is," said Harriet, thumping her suitcase down. "Hello. How are you? Everything all right? Any mail for me?"

"Big as life, and twice as natural," Thelma continued in clipped accents. She shut her lips in a red line and opened them again. "Just what was the idea, if I may ask?" she asked demandingly.

"The idea?"

"You heard me."

"Educational," said Harriet.

Thelma waved this aside. "Did you get tight, or what happened?"

"Of course I didn't. Do I ever?"

"I should think you'd have had to, to go getting on a train for New York with a perfect stra——"

"Oh, so you found my note?"

"I did. Such as it was."

"Good," said Harriet. "I was a little worried about it. I was afraid to leave it on the traditional pincushion, for fear somebody else would see it. That's why I hid it in your bed."

"I found it all right," said Thelma. "I got into my own bed—in my quaint

way—and there it was. I found it, and I read it, and it gave me the shock of my life."

"Why?"

"'*Why?*' Because you scarcely knew him! Because he's thirty-one years old—and you're eighteen——"

"He thought I was twenty-five, though," Harriet said. "As far as that goes."

"You told him you were twenty-five?"

"And experienced. In fact, no virgin. I cited instances."

Thelma stared at her helplessly. "You would!" she said, after a pause.

"Certainly I would," said Harriet. "So don't blame him."

"Well," said Thelma.

Presently she said, "Well, where is he now?"

"Still in New York. He's leaving today for home."

"For Mississippi?"

"Isn't it Alabama?"

"Whichever it is," said Thelma, "it's the hell of a long way from here. Do you think you'll ever see him again?"

"No, I don't," said Harriet. "In fact, I'm sure I never will."

"You're calm about it."

"Of course I am. It's one of the reasons I went."

"One of the reasons you went?" Thelma repeated blankly.

"Yes."

"Then you don't care anything about him at all? You just——You don't even *like* him?"

Harriet looked surprised. "Why, don't be silly," she said. "Of course I do. I like him better than anybody I've ever met. I should think that was obvious."

"I don't understand a thing you say!" Thelma cried despairingly. "You like him better than anybody you've ever met—but you never want to see him again?"

"I never want to try," said Harriet. "If it happens accidentally, then that's another matter. But otherwise it's all over, don't you see? It's a closed incident. As it should be."

"But——"

"And I told him so," said Harriet, "and he agreed, and we shook on it."

II

She was twenty when she finished school and went to work. She was complete. This was and would be Harriet forever. The fine, strong, healthy body. The smart and simple clothes. The way of walking as if she were late to a business appointment of consequence. The straight spine, and the square shoulders, and the slightly lifted chin, and the clear eyes, and the good color. The vitality there was about her. The almost aboriginal perfection of condition. The hard fingernails that never broke, and the white teeth that never had a cavity—that sort of thing. That incorruption.

And Harriet's mind. Her made-up mind, at twenty. Now she knew where she stood on every question, current or classic—she knew exactly—nor would she shift position as the years went on. She was a feminist. She was an agnostic. She would vote the straight Republican ticket, as her father did. She believed in capital punishment, the repeal of prohibition, the study of foreign languages, a measure of Christian Science, eugenics, family limitation, trial marriages, easy divorces, ice-cold shower baths, oil shampoos, eight hours of sleep a night, psychoanalysis for others, travel for everybody, cremation for the dead, French dressing made with lemon juice instead of vinegar, morning and evening calisthenics, the pronunciation "eyether," and ten-percent gratuities for servitors—no more, no less.

She did not believe in Communism, or Socialism, or lasting love, or dark-red nail polish, or any girdles, or the use of perfume, or the vows of men, or any obligation on the part of children to revere their parents. She distrusted relatives, strange dogs, all cats, all foreign shopkeepers, all drivers but herself, most pious people, and all sweet-faced women. She disapproved exceedingly of silly girls her age. She despised weaklings, whiners, parasites, neurotics, flirts, and morons. She admired ambition rather more than any other human trait. She liked her father better all the time; her mother less.

Now in this year that was her twenty-first a number of things of large importance happened to her, with remarkably little effect. It is true that one of them changed the course of her life—but that was all it did. It did not alter Harriet herself by one iota.

She admitted that it was a ghastly business, while it lasted; and certainly it was upsetting to her winter plans. It happened at the end of August, just as she was completing her third season as a counselor at the New Hampshire camp. She had finished school in June, and in September the first fruits awaited her—she was to be Director of Athletics, spelled that way in capitals, at a fashionable school for girls in Pennsylvania.

This was a prized position, one that she had wrested from a score of other applicants in her own graduating class, including Thelma, who had almost had it at one time. "Thelma needs it worse than you do," some third person had

suggested. “She doesn’t want it any worse than I do,” Harriet had answered. “And anyway she wouldn’t be as good.” And this was true.

The school was opening late, she would have all September to herself, and she had planned to sail for Paris on the first, returning on the twenty-fifth. This was a new habit of hers—she had discovered Paris at nineteen, and she would always sail for it hereafter, when she had a minute. She wrote her parents that she would not see them until Thanksgiving—then the thing happened at the camp, and she went home immediately. She arrived in Minneapolis on the last day of August, and took a taxi from the station to her father’s office. She had not telegraphed, but he was there, and half expecting her.

“Did you see the papers?” Harriet said at once.

“I saw a few of them.”

Harriet dropped into a chair and hung her hat on a desk telephone. “Lord, what a sickening mess!” she said. “That little fiend—— Would you *believe* a child could do a thing like that? Fourteen years old——”

“Begin at the beginning.”

“Well, I’m going to.”

She spoke rapidly. This child, this fourteen-year-old camper—Mungo, everybody called her—a curious-looking child, and very strange, always so quiet—had gone canoeing with another little girl, a younger one, the one called Prue. Prue was in Harriet’s tent. She was twelve, and a great favorite of Harriet —“I don’t deny that,” Harriet said. “But what about it? Prue was everybody’s favorite. She was a perfect darling. Well, so anyway——”

To go canoeing, any camper had to have a counselor’s permission; and this was usually granted only to good swimmers, going in pairs. An exception had been made this time by somebody or other—“Not I, thank God,” said Harriet —for the reason that, although Prue was a weak swimmer, her companion was an expert one, skilled even in lifesaving. They had set out, and disappeared around a point along the wooded shore.

Then there had been the screaming in the woods, after about an hour, and there had been the child called Mungo reappearing, running, running wildly down the path along the shore—thin in her dripping uniform—screaming and screaming. There had been all the boats going out, and Harriet in the first motorboat, and the capsized canoe drifting a long way off—far from the shore, and almost half a mile below the point. There had been Harriet and others diving frantically at first; then doggedly; then hopelessly, all morning. There had been the hideous and timeless afternoon—the lake being dragged—the parents of the little Prue arriving. And in the evening, in the end, for no more reason than there had been all this day, except the darkness now, there was the

child called Mungo turning suddenly to Harriet, hurling herself upon Harriet, clutching hysterically at her, and screaming once again, saying, “I did it! I did it! You loved her best—you never looked at me——”

Harriet’s father said, “How did the newspapers get hold of it?”

“How should I know?” Harriet sighed. “How do they get hold of anything? And what they make of it! Those tabloids! Did you see the New York tabloids?”

“I did not.”

“Headlines all over the front page,” said Harriet. “And pictures on page three.”

“Pictures of you?”

She nodded slowly. “My graduation picture, that some Boston paper took. And two team pictures with the teams blocked out, and me enlarged. Oh, very pretty. Charming, really. Well——”

“Well?” said her father.

“That’s that. That ends the school job—naturally. As a matter of fact, I’ve already sent in my resignation—I did that yesterday, from the train. I thought I might as well beat them to it.”

“You’re quite sure that was unavoidable?”

“Think a minute,” Harriet said.

“You weren’t to blame——”

“Of course I wasn’t, but that’s neither here nor there, is it? I know when I’m licked. One look at the publicity—— No, definitely,” Harriet said. “My career as a mentor for the young is over and done with. Finished. Washed up.”

“Pity,” her father said.

“It is.”

“Well, and what now? I take it you’re not sailing, to begin with.”

“I’m not,” said Harriet. “I canceled that, first thing. I’m going to stay here and sleep for three days, and then—with your kind assistance—I’m going to New York, and take a room for myself, and find something.”

“Some other kind of job?”

Harriet’s eyes flashed proudly then. She really had minded very much. “Yes, and a better one,” she said, setting her jaw. “You wait and see.”

She found it. She even found it with the minimum of difficulty. Simply she

heard of the job, and went and asked for it, and got it. She had been in New York eleven days when she wrote her father to tell him about it—a typewritten letter, black and neat from her own portable, covering two pages of the stationery of the small mid-town hotel where she was temporarily in residence.

"September 15," the letter said. "H. Osborne Lansing, Esquire, The H. O. Lansing Co., Inc., Minneapolis, Minn. DEAR DAD: Check received. *Merci beaucoup.* It ought to be the last, because I go to work next Monday. Clicked today, and very nicely too. Am to be in charge of the Exercise Department of the salon of Adrienne Gaylord, Fifth Avenue. You know the name. Cosmetics, beauty treatments, All Is Vanity. Famous all over the world. Seems Adrienne Gaylord is not a person, however, but a syndicate, male. Interviewed daily for the past three days by series of dark, swarthy gentlemen. They much impressed by school diploma and record but not letting on—seems no other applicants had any such qualifications. I gathered this, and when they offered $60 (weekly) I sniffed and made as if to leave, but way was barred and argument continued, so shall get $85 to start, $100 after first of year.

"Duties consist in interviewing fat women who wish to reduce, agreeing with them that they certainly should, and recommending exercises, Swedish massage, cabinet baths, and what else have we. Department very complete, in point of fact, as to equipment and personnel. Staff of thirty under me, including masseuses, exercise coaches, dancing teachers in lavender silk rompers, etcetera. I hope you are as pleased as I am about this. Shall take an apartment on the strength of it, small but comfortable, with serving pantry suitable for cooking own breakfasts, preferably in East Fifties between Madison and Park. How is Mother? Tell her I suggest a course of Adrienne Gaylord treatments—no offense intended, but she does eat too much, as I told her. Best to you both. Yours, HARRIET."

She was Miss Lansing of Adrienne Gaylord's for the next four years. She sat at a Queen Anne desk dotted thickly with telephones, in a reception room like a cross between a shop and a courtesan's boudoir, with a suggestion of gymnasium and of scientific laboratory, and even of infirmary, in the offing. She had a private office, as well as this more public one, into which she retired for her little heart-to-heart talks with potential clients. The office door, closed firmly during these sessions, said "Miss Lansing" in gold letters. Nobody ever entered without knocking. Timid knocking.

Inside the office there was another desk, there were more telephones, there were fresh flowers and silken curtains and several easy chairs, and in a corner there were white-painted iron scales, behind a screen. "Let's just see what your

weight is," Harriet said, uncounted times a day; and then, "Oh, dear. That'll never do, will it? We'll have to do something about that right away. And now just let's take your measurements—I'll take them myself, if you don't mind—I always do this part of it, to assure myself of accuracy."

Established clients, too, consulted Harriet in her office. She weighed and measured them religiously after each course of treatments—six treatments to a course—six hours of exercise for fifty dollars—six massages for thirty, with six Scotch-hose showers thrown in. She exclaimed exuberantly over pounds and inches lost, seeming as happy as the client—sometimes seeming rather happier. Further than this, she listened. She listened all day long. She heard complaints, occasionally, and confidences hour by hour. Women were astonishing. The things they told you, out of a clear sky. The tears they wept.

She heard the reasons why they wanted to be thin, or to be beautiful, or to be supple, or to improve this feature or that feature, or to look pretty for tonight, or to recover from the week end, or to repair the ravages of many years. She heard it all, sitting quite still and listening, wearing her sympathetic face, and knowing when to speak, and when to look, and when to look away. She would remember all of it. Heartbreak. Deception. Infidelity. Indifference. Grief. Loss. Guilt. Revenge. Failure. Unpopularity.

A hundred motives, and a hundred variations on a hundred themes, and always the same characters recurring, time and time again. The errant husband. The suspicious husband. The husband ten years younger. The successful husband, with the wife outgrown. The other man. The other woman. . . .

Harriet would remember. It would all be useful someday. Everything she ever learned about the fools women could be, and were—and surely were—would help her make her fortune.

III

There was a flurried Friday afternoon in the October of her second year at Gaylord's when Miss Lansing astounded everyone by leaving early—putting on her hat and coat and furs at four o'clock, and picking up her gloves and bag, and leaving. She was followed to the elevator by a little covey of her minions, to whom she still delivered last instructions as she waited. She said that she would not be in tomorrow; that a Mrs. Arbuthnot was to have hard massage—Helga should give it; that the plumber should be called to fix the faucet, the cold-water one, in the third shower bath, and that Esther must be sure to keep an ice pack on Miss Crandall's forehead during the paraffin, and that there could be no excuse for such a slow response to elevator bells—"This is

ridiculous," she said. "Somebody ring again. This is going to make me late to my own wedding."

That was how they knew.

She returned on Monday, and received felicitations with brusque thanks during the first hour, and after that with absent-minded inclinations of her busy head. By noon she had lost patience altogether, and was saying, "Oh, don't be silly" to well-wishers. On Tuesday she unearthed a plot—there was a fund being raised to buy a present for her—and she was polite but firm in foiling that. On Friday someone said, "Miss Lansing, there's a Mr. Bishop on the phone—I told him you were tied up just now, but he said he was your husband ——"

"I am tied up," said Harriet. "Tell him I'll call him back later."

Later she said, "Listen, Whit, you had no business to do that, you know."

"To do what, my sweet?"

Harriet elucidated sternly.

"I thought I might as well introduce myself," her husband said. "Besides, it was important. Wasn't it?"

"Not that important. No."

Whitney Bishop. She had met him somewhere where New Yorkers meet each other—at a cocktail party, or in a theater lobby between acts—she had forgotten where it was exactly, although he had not. It had been almost a year ago, when she first came here. He was one of countless people she had met through knowing three or four New Yorkers to begin with, and through cultivating them—he was the one of whom she always thought, with pleasure and amusement, "Poor man, he's never seen anything like me."

This was the role she played for him, after she hit upon it accidentally during their first meeting, when it obviously scored. She continued to be like nobody he had ever known, and gradually she realized that this required no effort—she had only to be Harriet, herself, to stun this man. He was bewildered and delighted all the time.

His age was thirty-three. She always married older men. He looked a little like her father, which was in his favor—she was often conscious of it, and for her it gave him a distinction of appearance that he did not have at all for other people. He looked very much like anybody else, in point of fact. He was of medium height for a male—Harriet in heels was slightly taller—and he had a New York face with a set mouth and keen, tired eyes. He carried shell-rimmed spectacles in his breast pocket, where they stayed. He was an architect, and fairly prosperous; and he had always been a bachelor. He had a mother he called Mummy to this day. Harriet hated that.

She liked the rest, and she had always meant to marry somebody when she was twenty-one—this was the year, and so she married him. They combined households, and they shared expenses, according to advance agreement; Harriet's consent had been conditional upon this. They had a double-sized apartment, of which every room except the living room and dining room belonged specifically to one of them. Harriet's bedroom. Whitney's bedroom. Harriet's workroom. Whitney's study. Harriet's dressing room, equipped and used by her as a gymnasium. They lived together, but apart—very much as they had for several months before, except that this was more convenient, and more neighborly.

Harriet made an excellent wife, in every way that seemed important to her. This surprised her friends, but it should not have done so. She regarded marriage as a job, like any other, and she tackled it with her accustomed diligence and capability, and while it lasted she succeeded in it to her usual degree. She was a perfect housekeeper, a splendid manager, a clever hostess, and none of this was domesticity so much as it was drama—she liked to feel that people said, "How does she do it?" and in truth they did. "With all the other things she has to do!" they said. She knew that too.

Asked how she did it, asked directly, she replied, "Organization." It was all a question of organization—everything was, as a matter of fact. This was a favorite theory of hers, and a favorite word, in all its guises. Well organized. Badly organized. Utterly disorganized. The trouble with most women was that they were utterly disorganized; and there was simply no excuse for this whatever.

Look at her. She lived on schedule, and by the clock, and on the dot. She planned her private life on paper, with a pencil. She kept it filed in tabulated notebooks, under headings such as "Menus," "Household Linens," "Social Debts," "Clothes & Accessories," "Birthdays & Anniversaries," "Xmas Memoranda," "Contents of Basement Storeroom," and "Special Tastes of Guests." She trusted nothing to her memory, though it was a very good one. Everything was here, where she could put her finger on it; and so valuable were all these lists and notebooks in her scheme of things that she kept duplicates in Whitney's office safe, in case of fire.

Ordering a dinner, she said simply, "We'll have Number Forty-three, for twelve." This is by way of illustration. There were one hundred dinner menus in her menu book, all carefully balanced, all delicious and yet wholesome, all complete even to wines, and all devised by Harriet herself—but in advance, and all at once, during one long Sunday spent with cookbooks. The original investment in time was seven hours. The saving ever after was incalculable.

An excellent wife, Miss Lansing. A superlative homemaker. A helpmate.

She was gracious about entertaining Whitney's business prospects in her charming rooms, provided only that they really did mean business. She was dutiful about his mother, regularly every Sunday. She even spared an evening for his friends occasionally. No woman could do more. No man could ask.

She bore him a son. This figure of speech was never more figurative, however. Harriet bore herself a son at the end of the second year of her marriage. It was the year appointed; and even the month had been chosen carefully—it was the month of August, when business was at its lowest ebb at Adrienne Gaylord's. This consideration had outweighed the fact that January, for example, would have been a cooler time for such a strenuous undertaking. Harriet could not be spared till June, and that was that. She doubted all this talk of strenuousness anyway.

As it turned out, she worked till July first, then she indignantly discovered that her interesting condition was embarrassing to the salon, and she began her two months' leave of absence. It irked her from the very hour of its inception; she was as restless as a convict for two days in her apartment; and on the afternoon of the third day, her husband, coming home at five o'clock, found the front doorway blocked by two deliverymen and one new dictaphone.

"I thought I'd write something," said Harriet in explanation.

She wrote twelve articles on beauty, health, diet and exercise, housekeeping, child-raising, the training of servants, the holding of husbands, the cooking and serving of meals, and the necessity for more and better organization. She spoke all morning, every morning, into the dictaphone; in the afternoon she went over the typewritten transcription of the previous day's work, and found it good. And very good. She had no special flair for writing, but she now perceived that—as she had suspected—none was needed. She was articulate, and she had had something to say, and she had said it. She would sell it, beyond any doubt at all.

She did, but that was a little later, while she was in the hospital. The sale of all twelve articles, offered together as a series, was pending on the seventh of August, when her son was born. She had acquired a literary agent as an adjunct to the dictaphone, and it was during a conference in his office in the morning that she became aware that this was going to be the day. "August seventh," she thought pleasantly, while she talked on and finished talking. "Jon Lansing Bishop, born August seventh."

There seemed to be no hurry, and she liked being calm about this. She liked knowing that her agent would remember. She left his office leisurely, and took a taxicab to her apartment, where she shut a suitcase that had previously been packed; sent it downstairs; informed her cook that Mr. Bishop would be alone for dinner; administered a scolding to a window washer who was

working there; and telephoned her obstetrician's office, where she left a message. "Yes, Mrs. Lansing," the nurse said. "He's at the hospital now. I'll tell him you're on your way."

"*Miss* Lansing," Harriet said. "Thank you."

She did not call Whitney, knowing his engagements for the morning, and that they were important—she would call him later, if at all. It occurred to her that it would be amusing not to call him, not to let him know that this was happening until afterward. It would be another of those things of which her friends were always saying, "My dear, wouldn't you know? Wasn't that just like Harriet!" They would be right, too, she decided, hearing their exclaiming voices even now. It *would* be like her—and that settled it. It would be done.

As a matter of historical record, the whole subsequent performance was characteristic, even in ways over which Harriet herself had no control. She arrived alone at the hospital, where they hustled her into bed. It appeared that this would not take very long. Harriet smoked cigarettes, and issued commands as she thought of them—one of them was that she was not to be given an anesthetic of any kind. "This is the only baby I shall ever have," she said. "I want to know what having it is like, while I'm about it." She was sincere in this; and whether or not she would have changed her mind in the course of hours remains forever problematical. Her son was born in less than thirty minutes.

She exhibited no elation over the fact that it was a son—she had been confident of this, as if only men were born to women. Here he was. Jon Lansing Bishop, weeping squeakily. She regarded him with keen attention when they showed him to her, and remarked that she supposed he would look better presently. They wheeled her back to her own room, where she smoked another cigarette, and drank a cup of tea, and took the nap they recommended. They had called Whitney in the meantime, and he was present when she woke. "My dear," she said to him, "women are sissies, as I've always said. The *fuss* they make about this thing! The way they dramatize it!"

"It wasn't bad?"

"It was uncomfortable," said Harriet. "I'll go that far with them."

She took Jon home when he was ten days old, and turned him over to a trained nurse called Miss Blodgett, to whom he belonged for several years thereafter. They dwelt in the apartment, this new pair, and they were sometimes seen going in and out, in seasonable clothing. Once a day they received Harriet—this was at six-fifteen each evening. It was a little formal, for some reason. Whitney's calls upon his son were more successful, and more

numerous. “You’ll spoil him,” Harriet said from the beginning.

He was a good baby, and reasonably quiet. He was to look like Harriet eventually—precisely like her. At the moment he looked rather like Miss Blodgett, who was pink and vague. They had the room once known as Whitney’s study, now the nursery—an airy, sanitary room with scrubbed white furniture and plain blue walls—no marching ducks, or busy tots in sunbonnets and pinafores, nor any nonsense of that type. Harriet Lansing, decorator.

That was a crowded year for her, and a fine year. She worked prodigiously that autumn, to make up for lost time; and on her own momentum she went on that way all winter. The results were various, and profitable. Her salary at Gaylord’s was raised for the fourth time—this time to ten thousand a year, which was a first milestone achieved—and in addition she had sold not only twelve but nineteen magazine articles, at prices ranging from one hundred to six hundred dollars each.

This was a joke, she said and thought—at the same time she was unsmilingly determined to demand eight hundred dollars for the next ones, and a thousand later. The ease with which she wrote the things was where the joke came in. She literally ripped them off—she could do one in a short evening. It appeared that the tongue in the cheek was no deterrent to serious composition. She could still speak fluently into the dictaphone. Ninety per cent of these extra earnings she invested prudently—and with the other ten per cent she speculated wildly. This was fun, and she was lucky, and it was very profitable. Risking exactly what she felt she could afford to lose—and never any more than that—she won instead, on several long-shot gambles. She even bought some Texas land that really had some oil in it. You couldn’t beat her, as her husband said.

She divorced Whitney. That was a year later. She divorced him—casually, as she had married him—during the following summer, in the course of a long vacation which she spent in Reno. She took a house there, and engaged a native secretary, and in six weeks she wrote some sixty thousand words for magazines. She also wrote an almost equal number for herself—these with more thought and much more care. She had a plan.

Her reasons for divorcing Whitney were not very clear to him, but this was of no consequence—he had agreed, as one agrees to death and taxes. He was rather sorry, but he was not surprised; and he was not even as sorry as he felt he ought to be. Harriet thought he took it very well indeed, and she was very glad. She hated fuss. In an excess of friendly feeling brought on by his compliance, she permitted it to be decreed that, even though she had the

custody of Jon, Whitney could see him once a week, and Jon should visit Whitney for two months out of each year, and furthermore Whitney should have a father's voice in all decisions relative to Jon's upbringing and his education.

This was a mistake—one of her few. She knew that later.

Gross cruelty and desertion were charged by Mrs. Bishop, answering now to that misnomer for the first time and the last; and the divorce went off without a hitch, in seven minutes. She asked no alimony—naturally. She was rabid on that subject. She had excoriated alimony wives in several of her published articles, under such telling titles as *The Reno Racketeers*, and such sardonic ones as *Happily Ever After*.

In effect she now said, "See how I do it, when I divorce a man." She did not even ask assistance in supporting Jon, and would not take a penny of what Whitney wished to give her.

She returned to New York, and to her very own apartment, rejoicing in its emptiness and spaciousness and peace. "*Now!*" she kept thinking. Now she could work. Now she could live her life. Now any interruption, any diversion, any emotion, any change, any delay, would be because she willed it. All projects would be her projects, and any hours she kept would be her hours, with no one to come knocking on her workroom door at night, saying, "But it's two o'clock! You need your rest," when she did not.

Now she would really travel fast, traveling alone. The only wonder was that she had let herself be hindered—bothered, anyway, and bored—these past three years.

Never again. She would be free—forever now—and now the world could watch and see what she could do, and what she would do.

IV

Whitney remarried, practically at once. Whitney behaved incredibly, to Harriet's way of thinking. He who had been a confirmed bachelor until three years ago now scarcely let a decent interval elapse between his wives—and such a second wife as he acquired so expeditiously you never saw, but never in your life.

"Well, yes, you have," said Harriet to friends, amending this pronouncement, "now that I think of it. Of course. She's like a younger Mummy."

"Mummy?" her friends inquired.

“That’s what Whitney calls his mother,” Harriet said, still bitterly.

No one misunderstood her for an instant. There was no faintest jealousy in anything she said about the second Mrs. Bishop—there was simply the annoyance that stupidity in other people always caused in her. She pitied Whitney, who had clearly lost his senses and would suffer for it. Here was this childish blonde, in baby blue. Dottie, her name was. She had little bits of feet, and little fluttering helpless hands, and profuse yellow ringlets, pale and plump, like curls of restaurant butter. She adored Whitney—there was no mistaking that; and that of course explained his aberration. She obviously thought him big and beautiful and wonderful, and very witty when he chose to be, and other things that he was not.

Where he had ever found her in the first place was a mystery, and where he now resided with her was a nightmare, nothing less. It was a penthouse in the cinders over East End Avenue, and it was full of Sealyhams and sofa-cushions and the like. “And you an architect!” Harriet chided Whitney mentally. She almost said it, when she went to call upon them in the modern way. She did say to Dottie, in a warm, smooth voice, “What a cozy living room this is—with all your cunning things about.”

She gave a dinner party for them, in a mood of ostentatious sportsmanship, and in a vein of smart drawing-room comedy. She spent three hundred dollars on her wedding present to them, which she chose herself, with such exquisite taste as to rebuke their dining room. She saw them rather often, as time went on. Jon spent his Sundays with his father, according to the letter of the law, and Harriet herself often delivered him and called for him.

Delivering him, she would remain and visit for an hour or more; and when she called for him she would arrive an hour or more ahead of time. This left only four hours in which he was unsupervised, and of these four hours he slept two—he was supposed to, anyway. Harriet did not trust his stepmother in this or any other matter. Already she began to see her legal error, all too clearly. This was deplorable. Jon’s every Sunday with that fatuous father, and that cooing little fool of fools.

She still believed the error to be irreparable, however; it was only later that necessity gave birth to inspiration; and in any case she was too busy nowadays to worry much about it, or to give it any thought whatever between Sundays.

Her own life was all-absorbing during the week. It was a changed life now—she had revised it even in a business way. She had resigned from Gaylord’s in September, after her divorce; the resignation would become effective on the first of January. She was gratified by the inducements offered her to reconsider, but she was not swayed. She had her plan, and money could not buy her.

As the next step she had accepted a position—self-promoted—on the editorial staff of the biggest and most influential of the several women's magazines in which her articles had been appearing. This would be temporary. She would stay two years, no more. They did not know it on the magazine; but Harriet knew it.

In the meantime, and for the duration, she would read and edit other people's manuscripts; she would continue to contribute feature articles, one every issue; she would also write a column, if she had her way about it; and she would conduct a question-and-answer department of general feminine interest. She would be more than worth her salt. That much they did know, on the magazine. She was already popular with readers, through her articles—there were already women in the world who swore by her.

As she had foreseen, it worked out very well for all concerned, and marvelously well for Harriet—when it did not, she spoke, and what she said carried increasing weight and power. She could have edited this magazine, become the editor in chief, and this in record time, if she had had no better thing to do. Since she was bent on quite another course, she stepped on no one's toes, she frightened no one—and since the menace that she might have been was evident enough, this was appreciated in important ways.

She got everything she wanted, really, out of those two years. Additional experience. New contacts. Countless new ideas. Publicity—that above everything. Herself appearing in her manifold capacities in each fortnightly issue of the magazine. Her name writ large; reiterated unforgettably. Her picture in the framework of her column.

Three million women read these pages every fortnight—read or turned them. Three million women were incited editorially to read what Harriet Lansing had to say; to write to her; to send their questions to her, and their stamped, self-addressed envelopes; to ask her anything; to trust her absolutely, as a friend and an authority—a mere authority at first, when she began, and then a well-known authority, and then one of America's foremost authorities on women, and their interests, and their problems.

Here was advertising such as she could not have bought, and she was paid for it. She made an ample salary all the while.

She left on schedule, when the two years were up. Now she was ready. Everything was ready. The tidy fortune in the bank—intact, and waiting. The tremendous plan perfected to the last and littlest detail. The notebooks in which it was written—nine of them, in two and a half years. Her chosen advertising agency already hard at work on her account. The printers setting up the pamphlets that she would sell to women, and the lessons—thirty to a course—and all the questionnaires, and charts, and forms, and all the

handsome letterheads. Her reputation made. Her reputation growing every minute, on the radio, and in the women's pages of the newspapers. Nothing to stop her. No power on earth to stop her.

That is to say, none that she could anticipate.

She took with her from the magazine the fashion expert and the household editor, at irresistible salaries. She gave them each ten shares of stock besides. She also took the business manager's famous secretary for her own; and she brought along the circulation list, and all her own card-index files of the names and addresses, the circumstances and case histories, of all the countless women who had written in to her in those two years. She engaged spacious offices in a high, worthy building on Fifth Avenue, and signed a long-term lease on them—she was as sure as that. She started in.

Hers was a unique service. There were authorities on charm, and on good manners, and on beauty, and on fashion; there were shopping counselors, and party experts, and love experts, and the rest; but Harriet was all things to all women. She had booklets covering fifty subjects, thoroughly, at fifty cents apiece. She had lessons that could teach you anything. She had solutions—ready-made or custom-made—for any problem you could bring her or send in to her by mail or telegraph. She had assistants and consultants; she had shoppers and designers; she had departments of all kinds; and her advisory staff beyond the confines of her offices included psychoanalysts, physicians, plastic surgeons, dermatologists—even an astrologist, and a handwriting expert, and a guide-and-escort service, and a singing teacher, and a dancing school.

The result you know. It has been told too many times to tell it again here. It is a favorite feminine success story, and it is always cropping up in magazines and Sunday supplements, in columns and in women's sections, and in anthologies and reference volumes dealing with celebrities. It has been broadcast, syndicated, serialized, even translated. It has been done to death these past five years.

This is the other story, underlying it. This is what happened in the private life of Harriet at the same time. This is catastrophe, and no one knows it.

It began with Jon. This was two years ago the present year. Jon is now eight, so he was six then—a sturdy, handsome little boy, with Harriet's eyes in Harriet's face, and with her coloring. There was nothing of his father there at all.

The superlative Miss Holliday had been imported to take charge of him, while the outgrown Miss Blodgett went the sobbing way of all her kind.

Harriet had a house now instead of an apartment—a rather stately town house in the gray-stone East Sixties, which she had bought quite cheaply and remodeled. Among other things, she had installed an air-conditioning system, and a triple layer of soundproofing between Jon's suite and hers. She now had ten rooms on four floors, all cool, all hushed. She had a string of offices even at home.

She believed in property; she knew no wiser thing to do with money in these ticklish times than to buy durable material possessions of all kinds, at the prevailing bargain rates; and recently she had acquired two hundred and ten acres and a farmhouse in Connecticut, along the river. She was rebuilding that this year, for Jon to live in. She had already moved the house, and all but torn it down, and now it rose again, complete with many bathrooms, game rooms, sleeping porches, a gymnasium, of course, a little swimming pool in back, and a solarium and handball court on the roof.

This was all for Jon, and it was like a playhouse on an adult scale, and he would love it, and it would be perfect for him. New York was not a proper place for growing children, Harriet remembered now. She was delighted with her new idea, and with its whole development—she saw a business value in it, in the end, and she brought out another booklet, full of pictures of the house, and reproductions of the blueprints and the decorative schemes. *Build Your House Around Your Child*, this one was called.

Her architect made money out of it, since he was credited. His name was Breckonridge, and it was he who had remodeled the town house—he and Harriet, putting their heads together. In the beginning, she had played with the idea of giving the job to Whitney, because he needed it—he was hard hit by the recent decline in building, as she knew.

But so was Breckonridge, and she had easily decided upon him, because she liked him personally, and because, after all, she owed Whitney no favor. She had had a lot of fuss and trouble with him lately, over Jon.

When she began to plan the country house, she did not consider him at all, except in his capacity of interfering father. She supposed he'd raise another row when he was told about it—well, let him, she decided stonily. Let him maintain that Jon ought not to live out there alone, with just Miss Holliday. She, Harriet, would be ready for him. She had stood enough. She was fed up with Whitney's idiotic protests of her judgments, his sentimental notions, his incessant butting in, and this time she would speak her mind, once and for all.

She was the mother of this child, she lived with him, she saw him daily, and she knew what was best for him as Whitney never would or could know it. She would say that, to start with. She would point out to Whitney also that she was the sole support of Jon, and that as such she had the right—the only right

—to govern him. She would demand that right, now and hereafter. She need have no fear that Whitney would attempt a readjustment on that point, because he couldn't any more. He had no money.

She would omit nothing of what she thought and felt. The present situation was impossible, and it was growing worse—she would tell Whitney so, and she would tell him why. His wife. His mother. All discipline relaxed when Jon was with them, all routine ignored, and this once every week, and for two full months in the summer. It was ruining the child. It was preposterous. No court on earth . . . The case was altered on the day of his remarriage . . . She had not agreed to share her child with any woman he might choose, nor so to jeopardize her child's whole character, and health, and future . . .

She would be ready for him, when the time came; and she was.

The interview took place at his apartment. Dottie didn't happen to be present, which was just as well; the dowager Mrs. Bishop was, however, there. It all began quite pleasantly, with Mrs. Bishop serving tea and Harriet explaining that she had called to tell them about a splendid new arrangement she had made for Jon. She outlined it, enthusiastically, and lightly.

That was the end of all amenity in that room. As she had anticipated, they opposed her—they were outraged. Mrs. Bishop said that she had never heard of such a thing, of such a heartless and inhuman thing; and Whitney said that he forbade it. Harriet grew angrier than she had ever meant to be, and more vituperative than she had planned—and more imaginative, finally. Her subconscious mind was cleverer than she.

It spoke for her. It answered Mrs. Bishop, who had just cried out insufferably, " '*Your*' son! '*Your*' child! Why do you keep saying that? He's as much Whitney's son as he is yours!"

"No, he is not!" said Harriet, and then she knew what to say next. "I'll tell you now," she said. Her voice grew quiet and distinct. Her eyes grew calm. "Jon is not Whitney's son at all," she said. "Whitney was not his father."

"*What are you saying?*"

"I'm telling you the truth!"

"*You're lying!*"

"I am not lying," said Harriet.

"Unfortunately," she thought of adding, and she added that.

She looked at Whitney, straight and steadily. "So now you know," she said. "He's not your son. You have no slightest claim to him, and never have had."

She went away. She thought it over carefully thereafter; and it pleased her. She saw no danger in it, and she felt no dismay. Only relief. It would save her endless bother in the future—might have saved her endless bother in the past, if she had realized it. Now Jon was wholly hers, and hers for life; and this was right. This was an end that more than justified the means.

There was a week of this complacence; then, on a certain Monday morning, Harriet rode desperately from her office to Whitney's office, in one of those creeping taxis that await one's greatest haste. She had his lawyer's letter with her, in her hand; not even in her handbag. She reread it half a dozen more times on the way. She arrived, and was forthwith admitted—Whitney had no clients to delay her in the anteroom—and she said instantly, "What does this *mean*, Whitney? You *can't* do this to me!"

She was still carrying the letter, and she flung it on his desk and pointed at it. Her finger did not tremble, though it might have; she had never been so frightened in her life. She said again in a high voice, "What does it *mean*? I don't understand it! I told you Jon was not your child——"

"And I can prove he is," said Whitney evenly. "And I intend to. That's what the letter means—as I'm sure you understand very well."

"*How? How* can you prove it? If it's your word against my word in a court of law . . ."

"It's rather more than that."

"What do you mean?"

"I had some blood tests taken."

Harriet sat down then, suddenly. "You did?" she said.

"You should have thought of that," said Whitney. "You who think of everything."

"When did you do that?"

"Several days ago. Tuesday or Wednesday." He looked at her, and added, "And the incomparable Miss Holliday is not to blame, if that's what's in your mind. I took him out of kindergarten. You had neglected to acquaint them with the news that I was not his father, and so they let me borrow him for an hour or so."

"He didn't tell me anything about it," Harriet said blankly.

"Possibly he hasn't seen you in the interim."

She didn't even hear that. "All right," she said, having arrived at an abrupt decision. "All right. You win. Of course I lied. You knew it at the time—you

said it—and I knew you knew it. I would have come to you and admitted it, as soon as I got over being angry. You didn't have to have a lawyer threaten me."

Whitney said nothing.

"Did you?" Harriet said reasonably. "Wasn't that rather drastic of you? You and I could have straightened it out without that."

He was still looking at her thoughtfully. He said, "The conciliatory attitude sits oddly on you, Harriet."

"Well, I'm in the wrong," Harriet said. "Why shouldn't I be conciliatory? I'm entirely in the wrong, and I admit it, and I'm sorry, and now I want to know what you want to do about it, Whitney. Do you want me to sign something, right here and now? Some statement to the effect that I was lying? Because I'm quite willing."

"I daresay," said Whitney dryly. "I'm sorry, Harriet. It isn't as easy as that."

She had known it wouldn't be, when she first saw his face. She said, "You mean you're really going *ahead* with this thing? You're going to drag me into *court* about it?"

"I mean exactly that."

"But that's *insane*!" Harriet cried out passionately. "For what? What will you gain by that? What would be the point of it, after all? You're his father, and I've said so, and I've said I'm sorry I lied. What more is there to say, in court or anywhere else?"

"There's a great deal more."

"But will any of it prove anything that isn't already proved? What are you trying to *do*, Whitney? What is it you *want*?"

"You always expect to get off scot-free, don't you?" Whitney said. "And you usually manage it. Well, this time you're not going to."

"I wouldn't have *believed* you could be so vindictive!"

"And I wouldn't have believed you could deserve it as you do."

"I thought so!" Harriet said, and her eyes narrowed savagely. "That's all this is! That's all you want, isn't it? To punish me! To crucify me!"

"No," Whitney said. "That isn't all. I want the custody of Jon. I don't think you're a fit guardian for him, and I think I can prove it."

"And do you know what 'proving' it will involve?" Harriet almost shouted. "Have you the faintest conception of what it is you're proposing to do to me? And *to Jon*? I don't believe you have! I can't believe you'd be so ruthless! In the first place, it would ruin my business—absolutely and irreparably! It would smash everything I've built up in all these years! You understand that, don't

you? You know that! You know how women are, and you know what the newspapers would do to me. I can't afford a scandal, for one single minute, and you know it damned well!"

"And in the second place?"

"And in the second place," said Harriet, not realizing what she said, "there's Jon. Just to revenge yourself on me, you're going to drag *him* through a thing like that! 'To establish the legitimacy of his son,' your lawyer's letter said. Well, who in the world doubts his legitimacy, as things are now? Nobody! Not even you! But if you drag it into court, you'll suggest a doubt, and there'll always *be* a doubt—'No smoke without some fire,' and all the rest of it. Why, it'll follow him all his life, Whitney! He'll never live it down!"

"Are you really thinking about him?"

"Of course I am!"

"I doubt it," Whitney said. "Don't you mean that you yourself will never live it down?"

"I mean that neither of us will! I mean that I should think you'd have some mercy on Jon, if you haven't any on me!"

"You had very little on either of us," Whitney reminded her.

There was an hour of it. She could get nowhere with him. She could do nothing against his malevolence and wrath. She couldn't even bribe him with the gift of Jon, although she tried—since she would surely lose Jon anyway in court proceedings such as these, she might as well try, and she did try. She said, "Look. Listen a minute, Whitney. You can *have* the custody of Jon—if that will settle it. If you'll withdraw this suit."

But he wouldn't.

In the end she rose and strode across his office to the threshold, where she stopped and spoke once more, turning to face him.

"You won't reconsider?"

"No."

Harriet stared at him in silence. "By God, you will," she thought. But she said nothing now. She wheeled and left him.

She went back to her own office, and to her delayed appointments, and to all the waiting women who would have her tell them how to run their lives. She told them, all that day, as if it had been any day. She worked till eight o'clock that evening. Then she went home, and ordered dinner on a tray, and ate a little of it. She locked herself into her workroom after that, and walked

the floor. Money, she thought. Money, she kept thinking. Whitney would have his price, like other people, now his need was great—but how high would it be, and how would she know what it was, and how would she get it, and how would she offer it indirectly—and yet on her terms?

There was an answer in her mind, as there had been since afternoon. She didn't like it, but it was an answer, and the only one that came. She had a very rich admirer named Edmund Pendleton—the richest man she knew—one of the quietly, immensely rich men of the town. He was fiftyish, he was a widower, and for the past two years and more his strange, harsh dream in life had been to marry Harriet. He was an adversary, he had always been a fighter, and he liked the people worthy of his steel—the tough, triumphant people. The hard and ruthless ones.

He had proposed to Harriet two years before, and twice since then. The offer stood. He had recited it as if he read a business document. The financial settlements. The property. The houses. The monstrous mausoleum of a country house that he had taken her to see one day last year—that he would deed to her, with others elsewhere. She kept remembering that, not for itself, but for the memory of its size—that was the scale on which he built, when he built houses.

That would do it.

She married Edmund Pendleton within a month or two. He built a house for her—another house, which everybody said was too ridiculous, in view of all the houses he already had. Everybody said to Harriet, "What in the world will you do with it? You won't live in it, will you? 'Way out there? I can't see you commuting!"

"It will be nice for week ends," Harriet said.

It was palatial. It was a million-dollar castle on the Sound, and everybody thought it was so kind of Harriet—yes, and of What's-His-Name, the new husband—to have engaged her former husband as the architect.

Of course it was the making of him—it was the making of his fortune and his reputation, anyway. It broke his health down before he was through; and he is still recuperating somewhere in the West. Harriet's little boy, who lived with him—with Bishop—for quite a while after she married Edmund Pendleton, is back with her again. That is to say, he is back in his own house in Connecticut, alone there with Miss Holliday.

Harriet seems entirely happy in this new marriage. Her friends agree that Harriet is always unpredictable. Who would have thought she'd ever marry anyone again—she who had always sworn she never would—and when she

did, who would have dreamed it would turn out so well? But after all, when all is said and done, things always turn out well for Harriet. That is another point on which her friends agree.

They are deceived. Harriet herself could tell them that, although she never will. She hates this marriage, and she hates this man. He is a martinet. He is a match for her. He has allowed her to go on in business—he admires her in her business role—but he has been unyielding in many other matters. He expects certain things of her; he exacts certain obligations. She is required to live as he prefers to live. She keeps his hours. She entertains his friends and relatives and satellites—and they are numerous—and she dines and wines his business contacts, to whom she is Mrs. Pendleton. She must take her vacations with him, at the times and in the places he designates. He chooses all the servants now. He makes the rules—she must abide by them. He even tells her how to wear her hair. She wears it that way.

She cannot get away from him. She cannot think of any way of freeing herself from him that would not damage her professionally—that would not harm her business. She cannot divorce him, since there is no blame she can attach to him which would excuse her publicly. She does not even dare to leave him—knowing him so well. She remembers always that he is a fighter.

This is how it is. She hates him, and she hates her life. She feels that he has ruined everything for her. For all her vast success, she is not happy in the least. . . .

This is in case it pleases you to know.


Two
to
New York

THE TRAIN for New York would leave at seven-forty in the evening. At three in the afternoon Nancy Avery's bags were ready to close. Now the question was, thought Nancy, surveying them anxiously, whether they would close somehow, or whether they simply wouldn't. She decided that Norman, who weighed one hundred and seventy-eight pounds, would have to sit down hard on some of them.

There were five pieces of hand luggage in all. Lids rearing, they stood about on chairs and on the twin beds in Nancy's bedroom. Two of the pieces, a suitcase and a hatbox, matched, being made of a beige fabric and marked identically, "N. K. A." These were quite new. They had been a wedding present, they had gone on the wedding trip last year, and they had waited hopefully in the cellar storeroom ever since.

The other suitcase, the black pigskin one, was older. It was old enough to be marked "N. K.," with no "A" at all. The basketball shorts and sweaters of boarding school had been packed in that suitcase, and the clothes of friends and roommates that one borrowed for the dances at State. Its black surfaces were scratched and worn, and Nancy eyed it now without affection. It seemed very old indeed. It belonged to a dim adolescent past. She must have had it all of four years.

The remaining pieces were an immense and mannish bag, which she had borrowed from Norman; and a second hatbox, the property of young Mrs. Phillips, next door. In this hatbox, not without some fleeting thought of what young Mrs. Phillips would say if she knew it, young Mrs. Avery had packed eleven pairs of high-heeled shoes. She hoped they would not prove too heavy for the hatbox. She didn't believe they would. It looked good and strong.

So much for the luggage. On the chaise longue by the windows there were laid the various articles of apparel to be worn on the journey. Their owner considered these now, making sure once again that they were all there. Her beaver coat. Her brown felt hat, a pancake with a snood. The gray wool dress with the brown alligator belt that she had bought to travel in—though Sheila had said she was crazy, why didn't she wait till they got to New York to buy it? "When you see the Fifth Avenue shops," Sheila had said, "you'll wish you had."

This perturbing recollection gave Nancy pause. Frowning just a little, she

lifted the gray dress by the wooden hanger that lay in the shoulders and carried it across to a full-length mirror. On the hanger was printed in black letters, "Mme. Betty, 26½ North Elm Street, Gowns, Coats, Ensembles, Millinery." Centered under "North Elm Street" there was a supplementary line —"Burlington, Ohio"—in letters so small as to suggest that you ought to know where Mme. Betty was without being told.

Nancy, at the mirror, tucked the hanger under her chin and held it there, meanwhile fitting the waistline of the dress to her waist with both hands. The effect was reassuring. It was really very good. She was cheered to the point of remembering that, after all, there should be no difference between this dress and a gray wool dress in a Fifth Avenue store. For didn't Mme. Betty's things all come from New York City? Of course they did. Mme. Betty went over herself and picked them out, four times a year, and, furthermore, she had wonderful taste, being French. Well, anyway, foreign.

The checking up of the garments and accessories on the chaise longue, resumed, took only a moment more. Gloves, hose, silk slip, lace bandeau, step-in girdle, brown alligator pumps and matching handbag, plump with contents now, were there. Nancy opened the handbag and looked again at the tickets. One was green and one was pink. Pistachio and strawberry. "Burlington, O., to New York, N.Y."—that was the green one; and the pink one said, "Drawing room A, Car K-84." Everything was as it should be, and the date was right. November 27, 1941.

For a whole week now, ever since Norman had brought these tickets home one evening and given hers to her and delivered Sheila's to Sheila, the sight of them had been unfailingly exciting. "I'm going!" she always thought. "I'm actually *going*!" It hadn't been true before. She had never been to New York in all the twenty years of her life, and in the year of their marriage she had never been separated from Norman; and all the planning with Sheila was just pretending, just for the fun of it—until the somehow-irrevocable tickets came.

She was panicky then, at first. She almost cried that evening when they were alone, and she clung to Norman, because she had not meant to leave him —ever. She had always thought that she could never bear to leave him, even for a day. She thought so now, and she said, "I can't! I couldn't. I don't want to go." But all the while there was that high excitement singing in her. "I'm going! I'm going to New York next Thursday night!"

Her imagination had often been there, naturally. It had spent a lot of time there, by and large, in one way and another. She read the syndicated columns, she listened to the radio, and she went almost daily to the movies. She knew so well what to expect—it was no wonder she was breathless. Now in her mind, now while she tucked the tickets carefully back into her handbag, she saw New

York, all glittering, like a diamond bracelet on black velvet. That was the way it was at night, and simultaneously she saw it as it was by day—the towering skyline, gray, as on a picture post card. In the daytime in New York you woke up late, you breakfasted in bed, you shopped for clothes in gray velvet salons, you watched a fashion show, you had a facial—a Name facial, you might call it, probably given by the Name herself—and then you had your hair restyled by a Free Frenchman in a morning coat; and after that you went to lunch in a famous restaurant full of debutantes and cigarette-ad. models, and gossip columnists, and visiting movie stars; then to a matinee, then to a cocktail party in a penthouse, or in an artist's studio; then back to the hotel to dress (in the new, dreamy evening dress you'd bought that very morning); and so to dinner and the theater and a night-club and another night-club. . . .

Meanwhile—being still in Burlington—young Mrs. Avery set her own hair, at her own small dressing table with the triple mirror. She spent the next half-hour at this, making great work of every ringlet. She was careful not to dampen any strand too much, for fear it wouldn't dry. In the mirror her face looked solemn and absorbed and rather anxious.

It was a very pretty face, pink-cheeked, ingenuous—it was almost a baby's face, by modern standards. No matter what she did to it, it never seemed sophisticated; nor was it fashionable in shape, like Sheila's face with the long eyes. You had to have long eyes these days, and nice high cheekbones, and a sexy mouth. Whereas Nancy, to her deep regret, was round-eyed, dimpled, slightly snub-nosed, with a friendly smile—coeducational—and without a cheekbone to her name.

She had finished putting up her hair, and she was tying a veil around it to hold the flat brown scrolls in place, when Norman arrived loudly at the curb outside the house. From her dressing table, through the window at the right of the mirror, Nancy saw his car and heard it. Norman always put his brakes on as if he had just that instant thought to. There was no slowing down at all between his speeding and his stopping.

The whole six feet of him appeared out of the car, then disappeared below the window. An instant later he yelled to her from the front hall downstairs, saying, "Hey! Where are you?" as he always did. "I'm up *here*!" Nancy shouted back, at the top of her lungs. "I'll be down in a *min*ute!" . . . They always bellowed at each other, joyfully, like that. You would have thought it was a huge house, instead of eight small rooms.

"You came home early!" Nancy added. "I'm so glad."

The phone rang at that moment, and she answered it upstairs and held a

long, gay conversation with her friend Ginger Palmer, who had called up to say good-by, and to express her envy generously. This conversation took ten minutes, what with one thing and another. Meanwhile, Norman's voice was heard again, and Nancy cried, "I'm on the phone!" and he said, "Well, come off it," cheerfully. She finally did. Returning briefly to the mirror, she tied a triangle of figured silk over the net that was over her hair, and knotted it under her chin, so that she wouldn't look so awful for seeing Norman. Ordinarily, it wouldn't have mattered so much, but today it mattered a good deal. He might remember her that way the whole time she was gone.

She also applied powder and refreshed her lipstick while she was about it. "There!" she said aloud, and banged a drawer and ran out of the room and down the stairs.

Norman was outdoors, in the side yard. With a wooden-headed golf club he was driving a succession of imaginary balls in straight lines for astounding distances. Norman loved golf in December as he did in May. Though the afternoon was chill, he wore no coat; his shirt, which was blue, clung thinly to his athlete's back and shoulders. He was a big young man with a genial, rather homely face and bright blue eyes. Nancy thought he was beautiful, and it was true that people liked to look at him—there was a certain charm about his very plainness.

"Look!" he said now, enthusiastically. "I've figured out what's been wrong with my drive lately. It's this left knee. Watch. Here's what I've been doing."

He demonstrated. A large piece of turf flew twenty feet.

"You see?" said Norman. "Now, watch this."

He demonstrated again. The divot was unquestionably smaller the second time. "See the difference?" he demanded, triumphant.

"Um-hmm. That's fine," said Nancy. "Listen, you'll catch pneumonia, honey. Come on in."

Norman nodded. "Okay."

He swung once more, then joined her on the doorstep and hugged her with one arm, bare to the elbow. "Hi," he said. "How's Old Lady Avery?"

"Grand."

"All packed and ready?"

"Just about. I'm so glad you're home," Nancy said, following him through the door. "I was afraid maybe you wouldn't be able to break away."

"I shouldn't've," Norman admitted. He was very important, as Nancy well knew. "There were five people waiting to see me," he added, "but to hell with them. I told Ruth to tell 'em they'd have to come back tomorrow."

In the living room he turned on the radio and moved the dial till he got music. Then he sat down on the couch near by, on the nape of his neck and the base of his spine. His long legs seemed to extend halfway across the little room. Nancy, stepping over them, brought him cigarettes and matches and put an ash tray at his elbow. She sat down, too, one foot tucked under her.

"Talk," she said, snuggling close.

"I thought you'd have things to do."

"I did, but I've done them. I haven't got anything to do till I have to dress, except be with you."

They talked for some time, with the unceasing radio accompaniment that was usual to their conversations, however important. They heard the music only when it stopped, but they thought they heard it, and would have missed it if it hadn't been turned on. Meanwhile, they discussed such matters as spending money, and missing each other, and the care and feeding of Joe Louis, Nancy's cat, and what to tip bellboys. They spoke now casually, now very earnestly, saying many things they had said before.

The question of what Norman was going to do with himself for ten or twelve whole days and evenings came up again, and once again was settled. Norman was going to be busier than usual at the office. There were Big Deals on. Also, if it didn't suddenly turn cold, or start to snow, there would be golf, as there had been all through November. All daylight hours would thus be taken care of. In the evenings Norman would write long letters to Nancy. He would drop around and see his parents and have dinner with them. On Saturday nights he would play high-low with the boys, as usual, and perhaps on a few other nights if there were games. When nothing else offered, he would go to the movies, or sleep. "Or read a good book," he added sensationally.

Nancy observed that there would be parties. "There'll be some for Jean Lewellyn," she said, in a troubled voice.

"Who?"

"Jean Lewellyn. You know. Bee Phillips' friend from Pittsburgh. She's coming again tomorrow, and going to stay a week or so, and Bee's counting on you for an extra man to take her all around everywhere. Bee told me so today. Bee says she thought you were wonderful, last time she was here."

"Who did?"

"Jean Lewellyn, silly! What's the matter—aren't you listening?"

"Must be some mistake," said Norman. "I don't even remember any Jean Lewell—— Oh yeah, I do, at that," he corrected himself. "Redheaded job, with fat ankles. Talks all the time. So she's coming again, is she?"

“Um-hmm. Tomorrow.” Nancy smiled suddenly, softly and comfortably. “They are, aren’t they?”

“What?”

“Fat. Her ankles.”

Norman nodded. “Terrible,” he said.

Lying awake that night in the train, unable to sleep and not trying to, really, because listening to the wheels and thinking where they were going and hearing them hurry was pleasanter, Nancy remembered this conversation. Again she smiled, in the roaring darkness. It was good not to have to worry about Jean Lewellyn—or about anyone else, for that matter. Norman didn’t care anything about girls in general; only about her. His enthusiasms were for golf and poker and things like that. He was a man’s man. “Thank goodness,” Nancy thought devoutly.

She would be jealous. She was not like Norman, above jealousy, as he was. Briefly, and not for the first time this week, she tried to imagine what her state of mind would be if Norman were going to New York, leaving her, for ten days; if Norman were going to meet a lot of unknown New York women, all probably gorgeous, and take them places in the evenings—as a lot of New York men (all probably gorgeous, too, being friends of Sheila) were going to take Nancy. “I’d have a fit,” she decided promptly and honestly. “Why, I don’t know what I’d do!” Because Norman was hers, and some better girl might steal him. There, Nancy told herself earnestly, was where Norman had the advantage. He himself was the best in the world, and so it would be silly for him to be jealous. Nobody could possibly steal anybody from *him*.

She thought of Sheila, asleep now in the berth in the dark below her, with her hair tied back with a ribbon, and with three kinds of cream on her face; and she thought for the hundredth time that Sheila didn’t really appreciate Norman, and that it was strange. Oh, she liked him, and said nice things about him sometimes, but Nancy had always felt that they were insufficient things and—well, funny. Kind of, anyway.

Tonight, for instance, after the train left, when something was hurting Nancy and making her eyes red, and they were talking, Sheila had said, “Yes, of course, he’s a sweet boy, Nancy. He couldn’t be cuter, in his own way. But you mustn’t be a sentimental little dope about him. Just don’t think about him now for a while. He’ll be all right. He’ll be right there when you get back. That’s one thing about husbands—they always are. So forget about him for the time being and just enjoy yourself.”

Imagine!

But that was Sheila for you. She had said a number of other things, some new, some familiar to Nancy as part of Sheila's own marital credo. "Listen," she had said. "Look at it this way: This is the smartest, most intelligent move you could possibly make at this point. You've been married a year, and it's time you had a vacation from Norman, and he from you. Married people ought to take vacations deliberately, every so often. It doesn't make any difference how much in love they are—if they're never apart, they get sick to death of the very sight of each other. They're bound to! Eventually, I mean. And you certainly wouldn't want that to happen, ever, would you? Well, then!

"And besides," said Sheila, winding up, "it's time you got out of that little town, and met some new people, and saw some new things. You've never traveled *anywhere*, have you? I mean, anywhere to speak of? Well, it's broadening—to coin a phrase. There's nothing like it for getting you out of a rut. You'll see what I mean when you've been in New York a couple of days. It *does* things for you."

Sheila knew what it did, all right, because she was always going to New York herself, on trips like this. She usually went alone. She had a wide acquaintance in New York, having lived there once for five whole years. That was when she and Doug, her husband—Douglas Barbour, now of Burlington, but originally a native of Long Island—were first married. Sheila herself was from New Jersey somewhere; from some town within commuting distance. It was no wonder, all in all, that she knew New York like her own back yard, and that she talked of it as often as she did, and as possessively. There were people in Burlington who said they wished she would shut up about it—"just for a change," they said unkindly; or, "just for *two minutes*"—but, on the other hand, there were other people who loved listening. Nancy Avery, for one, had always hung on every word.

Sheila even looked New Yorkish, and she dressed that way, and had that accent. She always came back with new clothes, and new ideas, and even new expressions, such as calling people "characters," and saying "what's with?" and "on the beam," and using ordinary words like "treatment" and "department" and "routine" and "situation" in unusual, chic places. She also brought back all the latest tricks and gadgets as they came along, and introduced them locally—flowers in the hair, for instance, and velvet bows on combs, and V-for-Victory emblems, and lip brushes, and the Samba, and wearing your coat on your shoulders, and playing gin rummy at Sam's Bar and Grill. All these and many other innovations had been introduced to Burlington by Sheila in the past twelve months; and most of them were now the rage. She was a very influential girl, when all was said and done.

She was suspected of being older than she looked, or than she claimed to

be. After all, Douglas was thirty-four—if that was a clew—and they had been married eight years. Sheila herself was probably nearly thirty. She bore it well, however. There was that glamour-girl face of hers, and the figure to match; and the legs for the figure. Her clothes were always artfully cut and marvelously fitted. Her this year's hair-do was no do at all—she simply let it hang, in the Veronica Lake manner. (You must remember that this was still 1941.) It was thick, blue-black hair, and it curved inward slightly at the ends. She was forever combing it with little pocket combs—in restaurants and everywhere—but otherwise she didn't touch it. When it fell over her eyes she shook it back.

No one could figure out whether Sheila really liked her husband Doug or whether she merely tolerated him. There were two schools of thought. In this connection you made what you could of the number of trips she took without him and of the length of time she stayed away. There was that, and there were many other moot points, big and little. There was even the fact that Sheila almost invariably called Doug by his last name—as though he were a butler, or the gardener, people said. This was probably merely jaunty; it was doubtless very stylish; but somehow, in Sheila's voice, it sounded brittle and hard-boiled.

Doug was the quiet type, and he even looked it, having a thoughtful sort of face with gentle, soft brown eyes that seemed to listen all the time. He looked poetic, everybody said—you'd never in the world have taken him for the successful businessman he was. Certainly, on the evidence, there must be a core of strength and shrewd authority in him somewhere, but it seemed to be strictly an office thing, and it didn't show up domestically. Sheila bossed him around a good deal—and always got away with it—and her manner toward him was apt to be more than a little brisk and curt and impatient. On the other hand, there were times when you caught her patting his arm affectionately as she passed, or smiling at him sweetly and intimately across a room. As Nancy knew, it was one of Sheila's tenets that you ought to flirt with your own husband every now and then. Doug's gratitude when she did it was plain to behold, and considered pathetic by many. He worshiped Sheila anyway; there was no slightest doubt or argument on that score.

Nancy woke believing that she had not been asleep, and thinking that Sheila was probably right about husbands and wives and separations, and that Sheila ought to know, if anyone did, and that although of course you couldn't get sick of looking at Norman, he might get sick of looking at you, which would be awful. . . . Then she discovered that the train was standing still, and

that she must have dozed off, because she hadn't heard it stopping. She wondered what time it was, and where they were. What station was this? She could hear feet hastening on the platform outside, and the rumble of a baggage truck, and the great gasping of an engine that had run fast a long way.

Sudden wild alarm possessed her. Had she slept hours, and overslept, and was this *New York*? It was pitch black in the upper berth, but it might be day outside.

"Sheila!" she squeaked, sitting up.

She forgot that there were little lamps to turn on in the corners. Holding tight to the edge of the berth, she leaned over and looked down. It was lighter below. She could distinguish the dim shapes of clothing and suitcases on the long seat. Sheila's negligee was a thin, tall ghost with feathers for hair, caught on a high hook. Sheila herself was invisible, but there was a reluctant slight stirring of the bedclothes below.

"Wake up!" Nancy implored. "I'm afraid we're *here*!"

Sheila woke up. "Oh no," she said at once, "we couldn't be."

An instant later she reported that they were not. "It's just some station."

"What station?"

"I don't know. All I can see is a baggage truck and a lot of engine. It's either Harrisburg or Philadelphia."

Nancy hoped it was Philadelphia. Philadelphia was only an hour and a half away. . . .

"What time is it?" she asked. "Is it light out?"

But Sheila had jerked the shade down, abruptly and noisily. She giggled a little. "Fool!" she murmured.

"Who?"

"Some man on the platform, losing an eye. This must be Philadelphia," Sheila added irrelevantly. "Where did I put my little clock, do you know?"

"Look in the hammock thing."

It was seven-thirty. The train was due in New York at a little after nine, so this was Philadelphia beyond question. They could sleep no more, nor did either of them wish to try. Lights were turned on, Nancy climbed down carefully from above, and the day began with cigarettes smoked sociably in the lower.

They dressed then, and it was unusual dressing. It occupied nearly an hour. They wore few garments and slipped them on, but their faces took lots of time. It was hard to do your mouth, especially when the train was joggling. That was one thing about a lip brush—you had to have complete calm for it. "I give up,"

Sheila said finally. “I’ll have to wait till we stop at Newark.” This seemed a good idea, and Nancy said, “Me too,” and both of them abandoned the little brushes temporarily; and for the moment—for the dining car, where they would snatch a cup of coffee—they used their lipsticks straight, as in the quaint old days.

They would have their real breakfast at the hotel, they had decided. Only coffee now. They made their way to the diner, through four or five sleeping cars full of fluttering dressing gowns, and neckties being tied publicly, and shoes with disembodied ankles in them, and distended, writhing buttoned curtains. The train was rushing at a great rate, and they had to grab hold of things, and Sheila was very amused and attractive about it, smiling back at Nancy with her white teeth catching her lower lip and her eyelashes vivacious. Everybody watched her pass. Nancy didn’t blame them, but she herself was a little embarrassed. Somehow she felt like a follower of a parade.

At the table Sheila sat facing the car, though this made her ride backward. “You sit over there,” she said to Nancy. They ordered, and Sheila smoked chain cigarettes and talked a lot. She also laughed often and merrily, puzzling Nancy somewhat, since nothing in their conversation was as funny as all that. Over the rim of her coffee cup, when she drank, Sheila’s eyes gazed shiningly at scenery or something down the car. “What’s back there?” Nancy finally inquired, and she twisted around to see, but it wasn’t anything really—just a lot of people, mostly men, including a couple of junior lieutenants.

Nancy preferred the scenery outside the windows, which was getting thrilling. Now they were nearly there. The train was a little late, the porter had told them; it was already nine o’clock, and flashing past them even now were billboards advertising hotels, theaters, restaurants, Turkish baths. “23 Miles to New York,” one sign said. Twenty-three miles was only as far as from Burlington to Renwood. It was only half as far as from Burlington to Cleveland. . . . “Stop at the Hotel Stuyvesant—2000 Rooms—2000 Baths.” . . . “After the Theater—Club Deauville—49th Street, West of B’way—Supper, Entertainment, Chip Chandler’s Orchestra.” . . . “22 Miles to New York.” . . .

It was almost too exciting to be borne.

“Let’s get back!” she begged Sheila. She could not possibly finish her coffee. She suddenly couldn’t have swallowed another spoonful. Sheila drank a little more, and they paid the check and went hurrying back, through the four or five cars. The porter had made up the drawing room in their absence. They packed what was left to pack, and shut their luggage, and wrote on the little tags that were provided. Nancy wrote, “Mrs. Norman Avery, Highland Avenue, Burlington, O.,” without thinking. Sheila wrote, “Mrs. Sheila Barbour,” and the hotel, and “New York, N.Y.” Nancy wished she had an

eraser.

The Newark station came, and stayed briefly outside the windows, and went again. . . . Then there were a few minutes, just a very few minutes more, of powdering noses again, and of putting on gloves, and of being brushed off by the porter. Meanwhile, the train slid into a long tunnel—under the Hudson River, Sheila said this was, and you could feel the pressure of the river in your ears, along with your heart.

Then the tunnel widened, became a vast cave full of posts and swimming lights. And they were there.

In the ensuing moments impression crowded upon impression in Nancy's mind, and picture upon picture. She remembered a line of people, herself and Sheila in the line, moving inch by inch through the corridor to the door. She remembered the smell of shaving soap and stale cigars from a washroom. Suitcases thumped outside, and voices said, "Porter? Porter, lady?" and other voices said, "Here, porter!" There were no steps down from the train to this platform, no yellow box like a shoe shiner's box; there was only one step over, which you negotiated carefully, so as not to catch your foot in the crack and break your neck and never see New York at all.

It took two porters to carry their bags, and one porter was little and yellow and the other was very black and big, but the little one carried all the heaviest things. There were long iron stairs, full of a human river running upward, with the porters' caps like bobbing red buoys in the river. At the top there was a gate, behind which other people stood and looked at them. Sheila stopped a minute and looked at the people. She murmured that there was just a chance that Chuck might be meeting them. Nancy said, "Who's Chuck?" but Sheila didn't answer, and whoever he was, he wasn't there.

They went on, following their porters closely through confusion, bound for the taxis. Nancy remembered noise, seats, signs, a magazine stand, a wailing baby in a fuzzy bonnet, a girl with an armful of Pekingese dog. En route a young man in a polo coat bumped into her and said, "Oh, sorry," which sounded lovely. She decided that if she bumped into anyone, she would not say, "Excuse me," or "I beg your pardon," she would say, "Oh, sorry," lightly, as New Yorkers did.

The taxis were all of a color, and they rolled like dozens of oranges around a loop of covered street with a sidewalk on one side. The street sloped up and opened at the far end into—Broadway, maybe? It would be dreadful to get separated from Sheila, to be lost in this crowd. What if Sheila should take it into her head to go off without her? "Don't leave me," Nancy said feverishly, but Sheila didn't hear. She was scolding the porters for letting the taxis go by. "Now *get* this one," she commanded.

The little yellow porter grabbed the handle of the taxi's door and ran up the sidewalk clinging to it. "There, he's got one," said Sheila. "Come on."

Then they were in it, sinking back against the cushions, sighing. All the bags were in it, either here or in front with the driver, and the porters were going away, not saying thank you. Weren't quarters enough? Never mind now, though. The taxi driver's name was John Populias. He wore glasses. "Where to?" he asked, and Sheila told him.

"Go over to Park Avenue," she added knowingly, "and then turn up."

Sheila was marvelous.

Sheila continued to be marvelous. There was her sweeping entrance into the hotel lobby, and the way she registered for both of them, and the way she behaved when it developed that the previous occupants of the room reserved for them had not checked out as yet and the room wasn't ready. With a sweet but firm finality, the iron hand in the velvet glove, Sheila replied that in that case they would have to be given another room. And they were too. It was a beautiful big one, high up, with windows looking down on a park—*the* park, Sheila said—and with mirrors in every possible door and wall space. There was even a little dressing room between the bedroom itself and the bath. It was really a suite, in a small way; and even Sheila fell in love with it; and she telephoned down to the desk to say that this would do very well for them, and that they would stay where they were, thank you. There was a pause while the desk explained something, and then Sheila said airily, "Oh, but of course that's understood. Yes. Quite."

She hung up. "It'll be four dollars a day more than the one we would have had," she said. "But that's all right, isn't it? It is with me, if it is with you."

"Ye-es, it's all right," Nancy agreed, a little hesitantly. Norman was always generous, but he wasn't very rich, and she had thought the other price was high enough. Sky-high, in fact.

Sheila must have caught the hesitation. "Or I'll pay the difference myself, if you like," she said kindly. "I certainly don't want you worrying about it."

"Oh no—we'll split it," Nancy said, in haste. "It's perfectly all right. I wasn't worrying a bit."

You had to say that.

So the room was theirs, and they began at once to settle into it, unpacking everything they'd brought, and strewing everything around. This was gay work, and they prolonged it deliberately by doing it the hard way; saving themselves no steps; carrying no armfuls—only handfuls. The room became

full of the wildest confusion, with drifts of tissue paper littering the floor, and luggage gaping everywhere, and closet doors wide open, and bureau drawers extended, and the beds covered over with clothing and the chairs heaped high with hats. They kept agreeing, with mock despair, that they would never, *never* get things straightened out. Meanwhile, they matched to see who should have the dressing table and who the chiffonier (with Sheila winning); and they sent a floor maid for more coat hangers; and they telephoned down to Room Service and ordered a gala breakfast. Nancy sat down at the writing desk right away and wrote out a telegram to Norman to say that she'd arrived safely, and that she was well and happy, and that New York was absolute heaven—and it was too. You could tell already. You could tell by the room, and by the view from the windows, and by the breakfast when it came, and even by the floor maid's Brooklyn accent. . . .

One of the first things Sheila unpacked—and one of the most precious, judging by the way she handled it—was a large green-leather address book, which she placed on the telephone table. She even weighted it down with the phone itself, for further security. "There, now!" she said. "Whatever you do, don't knock that off, or move it. It's full of the best numbers, and it might get lost in the shuffle, and then we'd have an awful time. Nobody's in the phone book in this town."

"Is that the phone book?" Nancy said, pointing. There was a perfectly monstrous volume on the low shelf of the table. "Yes, that's it," said Sheila; and her glance reduced it to the merest pamphlet. "Don't let it fool you, though. Nobody's in it."

Nancy giggled joyfully all of a sudden. "I *love* New York!" she exulted again.

It appeared that Sheila's own personal book of Best Numbers would be pressed into service as soon as they'd eaten their breakfast. "It's ten-fifteen now," Sheila said, at the table. "And I'll begin phoning at ten-thirty. That's just about right for catching people—you know," she added in explanation. "Before they get out, but after they get up."

"Doesn't anybody work?" Nancy asked wonderingly.

"Oh yes, they work," said Sheila, "more or less. They've all got offices and so on. But I don't imagine they get to them too early. And that reminds me," she continued, glancing at the clock again, "Chuck ought to be calling me any minute now. I wonder what's happened to him."

"You keep talking about Chuck," Nancy said, "and I don't even know who he is."

She saw Sheila's eyes begin to smile, in a warm and shiny sort of way.

“Wait till you see him,” Sheila said. “You’ll simply love him. Everybody does. He’s one of the divine people of this world. Not beautiful—I don’t mean that—but attractive, and amusing, and fun, and gay. He’s really terrific, all in all. And he’s a bachelor, and he’s got a duplex apartment with a terrace, and he knows everybody in New York worth knowing—which of course is a help. For instance, he’ll be able to dig up scads of extra men for you, and he’ll give parties for us both and everything. He’s probably got the whole program under way already, as a matter of fact. I wrote him days ago to tell him we were coming.”

“He sounds dreamy,” Nancy said. “I never heard of such a friend to have.” She thought it over briefly, watching Sheila in the meantime; and then she ventured to say further, “Is he a kind of beau of yours—or what?”

“You might call him that,” said Sheila, looking mysterious and merry. “Yes, definitely. He’s a kind of beau of mine, you funny baby.”

“What’s funny about that? I only wond——”

“Nothing,” Sheila said, still smiling. “It was just rather sweet, the way you said it. I hope you’re not going to be shocked when I tell you that Chuck is in love with me—or thinks he is. He’s thought so for years and years. And I’ve always been a little bit in love with him, as a matter of fact.”

“You have?” said Nancy breathlessly. “My goodness! Does Doug know it?”

Sheila stopped smiling then. She looked severe, and somehow dramatic. “Doug knows very little about me,” she said darkly. “And understands less.”

Nancy was still pondering that, and gasping inwardly over it, when the expected ring of the telephone came and Sheila flew to answer. It turned out not to be Chuck, however—it was just the downstairs desk, about the extra key—but Sheila had finished her breakfast now, and being at the phone she remained there. She stayed on it for the next half-hour, in fact—what with one call and another—and it was something to see and to hear. Nancy sat spellbound through most of it, or walked about the room on tiptoe. Sheila’s New York telephone voice proved to have a cooing tone to it, and a sudden Southern accent, for some unaccountable reason. Furthermore, Sheila flirted with the telephone, batting her eyelashes; there were moments when she seemed to embrace the telephone, cuddling it against her heart. Sometimes she sat perched on the edge of the bed with the phone in her hand and leaned over it; at other times she lay flat on her back on the silver-gray ribbed-silk bedcover and smiled up at the ceiling as she talked. . . .

She talked to Chuck, whose formal name Nancy now learned—“Is Mr. Charles Hathaway there?” Sheila said to the switchboard operator at the other

end—and then to men called Paul, and Bill, and Hoot, and Steve, and "Jimmy *da-a-arling*!" Sheila even called up one girl, or woman; although only one. This was a Mrs. Armstrong, and Sheila called her Dottie, and she explained to Nancy afterward that Dottie Armstrong gave the world's best parties. "Rolling in alimony," Sheila said of Mrs. Armstrong. "And I was the one who introduced them in the first place—Dottie and her ex-husband, I mean—so Dottie still feels indebted to me in a kind of way. Or at least she *should*."

All these numbers came out of the green-leather address book; and all of them yielded something in the way of a plan or an invitation. To everybody she talked to, Sheila said enthusiastically, "I have this little friend with me—Nancy Avery. From Burlington. She's the cutest thing in life. Wait till you see her. And it's her first time in New York, and I've promised her a whirl, and you've got to help." And everybody seemed to rally willingly, and even to trust Sheila absolutely, which was rather troubling. "They're going to be terribly disappointed in me when they see me," Nancy put in woebegonely more than once. It was nice of Sheila to build her up like that, but an hour of reckoning would come.

By the time all the telephoning was over with, their dates for the week ahead were so numerous that a kind of improvised engagement pad had had to be made out of hotel letter paper—several sheets of it, the big or business size. Sheila had headed these with the names of days, and then she had ruled them off into sections, "A.M.," "P.M.," "Evening." As things were now, only the A.M. sections remained blank—those would be for sleep and shopping, and for writing long letters to Norman. The rest was a wild smudge of names and nicknames, hours and places, and such supplementary details as "Black tie," "Don't dress," "eight-thirty curtain," "Park Avenue side, near desk," "If can get tckts," and "Will ring from lobby when arrives."

The miracle was that it all came true—everything came completely true. There never was a week like that one, never in the world. New York itself came true, and it was even better than Nancy had dreamed it—sometimes it was a little different, here and there, in this or that way; but the differences were usually improvements, on the credit side. Almost nothing disappointed her, except possibly Wall Street, and Broadway-in-the-daytime, and the stylish soup called vichyssoise. Everything else was as advertised. Terrific, colossal, stupendous.

Chuck took them for lunch on that first day to one of the world's most famous restaurants—one that was known by its street address only, or by the linked nicknames of its two proprietors. There wasn't any name at all on the outside of the building, and except for the little knot of shabby kids hanging around on the sidewalk in front—the usual autograph hunters, Sheila said—

you could easily have mistaken it for somebody's private house. You went down three steps, and there was a tiny cement-floored yard or areaway or what-would-you-call-it, and standing around in that there were strange little gaily-painted statues of jockeys, each jockey holding out one hand. These seemed to be hitching posts, of all things, and there they were in a huddle, and Nancy didn't understand them, but there wasn't time to ask.

The house had an iron-grilled glass door, and now a face appeared behind the glass and looked at them—reminding you that, after all, this was a kind of club, though without dues. Not everybody could get into it. Nancy had a horrible moment of fearing that the face behind the glass was going to shake its head at them, but it didn't; instead, the door opened, and Sheila sailed in confidently, saying, "Has Mr. Hathaway come yet? Mr. *Charles* Hathaway?"

He hadn't but they knew him—it was quite clear that they knew him well here, and that Sheila's proud way of pronouncing him had been entirely justified. "I'm Mrs. Barbour," she said now. "He'll ask for me when he comes." She gestured gracefully sideways, to show where she would be.

There was a kind of alcove there, and Nancy followed Sheila toward it. It had a fireplace at the end, in which a real wood fire was burning; and there were big, comfortable chairs around, with slim, sleek New York women in them. You would have known them anywhere—you could have told them by their hats alone. More women like them kept coming in, through the grilled door, and meeting the first ones, or meeting men, and uttering pretty little cries of "Darling, I'm so sorry! Have you been waiting long?" All of the women seemed to have dogs on leashes, and they checked the dogs with an attendant. . . . There really were dogs everywhere: tied up in corners; attached by their leashes to chairs; and every now and then one dog and another dog would take a dislike to each other, and there would be growlings and barkings and scufflings, and attendants would rush to intervene.

Chuck was a little bit late—Sheila said indulgently that he always was. He arrived finally, in what might have been described as a sauntering rush, or as a strolling stride. He had the long legs for it, and the height—he was as tall as Norman, but much thinner. He was also older; he must be in his early thirties. He had a whimsical face with bright blue eyes in it, and a long, tilting nose that jutted quite far out—not a comical nose exactly, but somehow a humorous one all the same. His whole expression was quizzical and agreeable and genial. Nancy liked him the minute she saw him, and, furthermore, she felt warmly relieved. There was nothing formidable about *this* New Yorker, at any rate.

He waved to Sheila from just inside the door, and Sheila said, "There he is now" in a fluttered-sounding undertone, although she managed to wave back quite nonchalantly. There was an instant's delay while someone took Chuck's

overcoat and hat; then he came toward them, tweaking down one coat sleeve on the way. He wore a gray lounge suit (somehow you wouldn't think of calling it a business suit), and there was a flower in his lapel—a small, plain, humble, yellow flower. This country-garden touch seemed odd, and Nancy noted it with interest. Could it be that New York florists sold such things, along with orchids?

She had no time for pondering the point, because Chuck hadn't far to come. Now, as he reached them, he gave Nancy a quick little advance smile, a kind of promise of imminent friendship; then he was greeting Sheila enthusiastically, and even kissing her soundly. Nancy had already observed that kissing seemed to be a part of hello in this particular meeting place—even as endearments were part of every opening sentence. New Yorkers named no names, in fact; they just sang praises, kind of.

"My sweet," Chuck was saying now to Sheila, "it's too wonderful to see you! How are you, darling? Let me look at you. But you never looked better in your life!"

They both talked that way for a minute, and then Sheila thought of Nancy, and reached for Nancy's hand. She said to Chuck, "See what I brought you," and Chuck made a grateful, gay rejoinder, and he beamed at Nancy meanwhile, and he said that he refused flatly to call her Mrs. Avery, because it was a case of Nancy at first sight with him.

So that was settled, and they were good friends already, just as promised. "And now whither?" Chuck inquired of Sheila. "Upstairs or down?" Sheila seemed equal to this question, as to every question. "Oh, up, don't you think?" she said. "The bar is so hectic always." That was evidently the first thing to say; and the second thing was an amendment. "Or we might have one cocktail in the bar and then go up," Sheila said now. "I want Nancy to see everything there is to see, in both rooms."

So they had one cocktail in the bar, at a very small table with a red-checked tablecloth over it. They sat squeezed on a red-leather banquette, the cushion of which was so sprightly with air that it bounced you a little when you sat down on it, or when your near neighbors sat down. This kept happening. The room was jammed with people, and yet more kept coming in, and settling somewhere, somehow, in a cheerful human tangle. It wasn't a very large room to begin with—it was just incredibly capacious—and Nancy was surprised to realize that it looked a good deal like Sam's Bar and Grill in Burlington; it lacked only a corner juke box, when you came right down to it.

The resemblance, however, was purely one of architecture and of *décor*. Never in Sam's Bar and Grill would you have seen two movie stars, one columnist, one famous stage actress, one celebrated foreign correspondent—

and, furthermore, everybody else taking them quite as a matter of course, and not even bothering to stare at them very long or very hard. Chuck pointed them out for Nancy's benefit, but nobody else seemed to be pointing them out, or even to be caring. What a place!

It was the same upstairs. The restaurant was a little more elegant than the bar had been, but not much more; and you really wouldn't have known where you were at all, if it hadn't been for the people. The people were fascinating to watch, and the women's clothes were exciting to study, and your general impression was that everybody was Somebody—that there were no nonentities in the room, except, of course, yourself. It was probably a House Rule. Everybody had an air of sublime self-confidence, not to say self-importance. Quite a lot of them even kept calling for telephones, which the waiters would bring and connect at their tables, and there they'd sit, with their food getting cold, telephoning away at a great rate. A man right next to Nancy (cater-cornered, but still next) was even talking to Hollywood; and not a bit privately.

"Well, you tell Hornblow what I said," the man kept saying, with one eye on you.

"Retiring sort of fellow," Chuck observed. "The shrinking-violet type. Knows Hornblow—so the rumor goes. Don't encourage him, Nancy darling."

"Me? Why—how? What am I doing?"

"It's those stars in the eyes," Chuck said. "You're looking impressed, my angel. Just ignore him, and he'll subside in time. He's a fair-weather broadcaster, that one."

"Oh!"

"Nancy believes in him," said Sheila, smiling tolerantly.

You wouldn't have thought that any of the telephone addicts could hear a word, with so much noise going on, and you certainly wouldn't have thought they'd be willing to let their food get cold, after all the fuss about ordering it, and all the reverence with which it was served. You really never saw such a pother over food in your whole life. Everybody's luncheon was fixed in the kitchen, and then wafted in ceremoniously, and then fixed all over again by the waiter captains, on small wheeled-up tables. Here the hot things were heated even hotter, and sauces were cooked on little copper stoves, and salads were whisked in wooden bowls, and dressings were mixed, and fish were boned, and bottles of wine were sheathed in napkins, and the corks out of the bottles were sniffed at, no doubt enviously, by the waiters—or by the wine steward, rather. There was a wine steward in a striped vest, with a chain around his neck; there was a bus boy who brought you breadstuffs in one of those big silver-metal things, shaped like a cash register, worn like a monstrous muff;

and there was another boy who lugged around a wooden slab with cheeses on it, and the people at the tables patted the cheeses with the flat of a knife. Sometimes that seemed to be the end of it, and sometimes not.

Chuck apparently knew almost everybody in the room, and at first everybody kept him busy returning greetings from near and far. He would begin a sentence, and then an eye would catch his eye—it was almost always that way, not the other way around—and he would have to interrupt himself to smile and nod, or to wave hello. Nancy noticed that the women especially made a point of speaking to him; there was really quite a leaning and a craning for this purpose. She also observed that Sheila exchanged an expressionless glance with each of the women—one of those short, polite, yet quite rude feminine glances, meaning "Who are you?"

It was Sheila's idea that they let Chuck do the ordering for them, and he did, and the result was gastronomically out of this world. Nancy kept exclaiming over the taste of things; she just couldn't help it. Even Sheila said it was "beautiful food," in her most sophisticated voice. Sheila, in other words, was taking everything in her stride. You would have thought she lunched here daily, and was getting a little bored with it all. She merely toyed with the beautiful food, and she barely looked at the beautiful people. Now and then she said things like, "We must find some more celebrities for Nancy"—and as a corollary she would say, "Who's that in the green hat, for instance?" Not that Sheila herself burned to know, of course; why, not a bit of it. "Sheila, you meanie!" Nancy kept thinking cheerfully. "Stop blaming it on *me*!"

But she didn't say it, and she didn't really mind. She was having a wonderful time. Chuck was making sure that she would—and that was one reason. He really couldn't have been nicer, or more considerate, or more attentive. He was the best listener Nancy had ever talked to, except Norman (sometimes). He drew you out with questions, he missed no word of what you said, he was appreciative of any littlest flash of humor there was in it, and as a result you found yourself being quite a lot brighter than you really were. If all this was only a trick on Chuck's part, it was a most delightful trick; and it all seemed quite genuine. Anyway, it endeared him to you right away, and probably forever.

Nancy talked so much and so easily that she finally thought, "I'm probably babbling." Stricken at this idea, she looked anxiously at Sheila, to see if Sheila was being ashamed of her. . . . On the contrary, Sheila wore an expression of tender and indulgent pride, which would have been almost maternal on any face in the world but Sheila's. It was clear that Sheila was pleased with her little protégée, and now she smiled over at Chuck and said, "Didn't I tell you she was a darling?"

“You did,” said Chuck, “and it was a triumph of understatement, my dear Sheila. It was the all-time euphemism of all time. I am madly in love with this child. I shall marry her tomorrow, if present plans work out. This alleged husband of hers—this Allen, or Milton—has just got to step aside, that’s all.”

“Norman,” said Nancy firmly. “Not Allen, or Milton. You’re not very good at names, I’m afraid. And I thought you were listening so carefully!”

“Don’t try to distract me,” Chuck said. “Stop drawing red herrings across my trail. The question is, are you going to marry me or aren’t you?”

Sheila gave a loud stage sigh. “I was afraid of this!”

“Now, darling,” Chuck said to her, “you keep out of it, will you? No heckling, my pet. Can’t you see I’m conducting a wooing? You be quiet, and behave yourself, and maybe we’ll let you be bridesmaid. Or possibly ring bearer.”

“Or the mysterious veiled lady in the back pew,” Sheila said. “The one who swoons, for no apparent reason.”

She and Chuck both smiled, but not in the same way exactly. Not in the same spirit. Nancy glanced from one of them to the other, and she noticed that. Sheila’s smile was intimate, and personal, with meaning in it; whereas Chuck’s just looked like the kind of smile that went with casual banter like this.

It was he who changed the subject, saying smoothly in transition, “So much for tomorrow’s gay events. Now let’s work out a program for today. This afternoon I thought I’d throw a small cocktail party for you two little adventuresses—all the people you like best,” he said to Sheila. “All the original crowd. And after that we’ll see what develops. I mean, you saved this evening for me, didn’t you? You said you would on the phone.”

“We did—against all comers,” Sheila assured him.

“That’s my good, brave girl. Well, so after the cocktail party,” Chuck continued, “we’ll go on to dinner, and out on the town—the three of us, and whatever likely lad Nancy takes a fancy to. There’ll be a wide selection for her—I was very thoughtful about that. Very big-hearted, as I now see it. Jimmy’ll be there, for instance, and Skibo, and Steve Russell, and Paul Schaeffer——”

“I think Jimmy,” Sheila said.

“So do I. But we’ll let Nancy choose.”

They were supposed to come early to the cocktail party because they were the guests of honor, but actually they got there late, owing to the fact that Sheila, at the last minute, had decided that she didn’t like the color of her nail polish and had gone downstairs to the hotel manicurist to have it changed—

and then it wouldn't dry. She was still waving her fingers around to dry it when they arrived at Chuck's, and Nancy had to carry Sheila's gloves and bag in addition to her own. . . . It was by this time after six o'clock, and Nancy more or less expected that the party would be all over with, and everybody gone; and her first look at Chuck's living room seemed to bear out this suspicion, because there were only Chuck himself and a couple of other people in it. Then it turned out that no one else had come yet. Late was early in New York, it seemed. "What did I tell you?" Sheila said.

There was even time for an inspection of the premises before the others came. Nancy confessed at once that she had never been in a penthouse before, and so Chuck showed her around in quite a thorough fashion. This particular penthouse had such a big terrace encircling it on all four sides that the house itself was really quite small, and so it had to be a duplex, with the rooms one on top of another. In fact the second story hung like an open shelf over the first, and the dining room was up there, with a kitchen somewhere behind it. Chuck's bedroom and his bath were on the first floor, back of the living room. Nothing was really where you would expect to find it. There was a bar in a former coat closet; and when you climbed up the spiral stairs to the dining room, you found that it was a combination library and game room, and there wasn't really any dining room in the whole place. But still there was everything you'd want, if you were a bachelor; and all of it was smart and comfortable and extremely good-looking.

It turned out to be quite a large cocktail party, once it all convened—a standing-up one, not a sitting-down one, because there just weren't enough chairs or couches. Accordingly the guests stood about and milled around, or else they perched. They had a way of making fashion-poster tableaux, no matter what they did; they were that kind of people. They might have been (although they weren't) the very same ones Nancy had seen at lunch. The women looked as though they always slept ten hours a night, and then got up and went directly to Elizabeth Arden's, for creaming and icing and tinting. The men looked a little wearier, what with business, but still they held up pretty well. Their tailors hadn't made any mistakes, and neither had their barbers.

At first Nancy found them awesome, so many handsome people, and she tried to sit shyly in a corner and just watch them, but Chuck wouldn't have it that way. He kept bringing people over—mostly young men—and the young men stayed, which was gratifying; and presently Nancy had a group around her, a really sizable group. At first she tried hard to talk to them the way she thought they talked, but this was too much of a strain, and she felt like a bad imitation of Sheila, so she abandoned the attempt abruptly and just talked like herself from there on in; and it was amazing how well this went over. You

wouldn't have dreamed it would, but it did.

In no time at all they were discussing her approvingly, right in her presence, in what seemed to be the prescribed fashion of this flattering town. They spoke of her as "little Nancy," in affectionate voices; and they made gay plans for her. It would be fun to show New York to little Nancy. They all seemed rather surprised about her—or perhaps she just imagined it—and several of them said things such as "Have you known Sheila long?" Or they said, "You aren't quite what we expected, for some reason." A lot of them asked about Doug Barbour, of whom they seemed to be very fond. "Why doesn't he ever come back here any more?" they said. "He just sends Sheila."

Nancy tried to keep connecting names with faces, for telling Norman. Paul Schaeffer was the one who looked a little bit like Walter Pidgeon, only younger. Dottie Armstrong wore no hat, and she had bright blonde hair, all piled up high, and a kind of sunburned make-up, and the most complicated eyelashes—so long and thick they were practically shaggy. She sort of peeked at you out of them, and you couldn't think how she saw you at all. Then there was a girl everybody called China, who was a fashion photographer, and an older woman called Becky who they said was married to a concert pianist —"but not working at it," they added—and there were two men who looked like brothers, but weren't, and a nondescript youth who said sudden hilarious things, and a glamour-boy type named Steve Russell who had some kind of radio job, and another called Skibo Somebody who was in Wall Street and played polo. There was even a girl in a uniform—a Red Cross Motor Corps uniform. She looked very snappy in it, but she was apologetic about wearing it here. She kept telling everybody that she hadn't had a minute to go home and change.

Jimmy McCormick was the nicest—far and away. Chuck and Sheila had been right about him. He was the one of all these people whom Norman would have liked and understood best; and Nancy's recognition of this fact was like a hallmark, stamping him sterling. He arrived rather late at the party, looking and talking right away like somebody she'd known all her life. He even had a Middle-Western accent—Indiana, he said.

He was a medium-sized young man, rather plump, with curly dark hair and small merry eyes which stood out black as watermelon seeds in his pink face. He was in the advertising business, and he lived at the Yale Club; and he had been married in the past but wasn't any more. He was Chuck's closest friend, of many; and he became the favorite fourth of their foursome—Chuck and Sheila and Nancy all agreed that he fitted in better, and was more fun to have along, than Paul Schaeffer, or Steve Russell, or any of the other runners-up. Besides, Jimmy himself refused to be ousted from the quartet, once he'd met

Nancy.

Well, and so there it was. If you were properly escorted, guided, aided, and abetted—if, in fact, your escorts worked in relays, and were therefore tireless—it was simply incredible how fast and far you could get around, and how much glittering territory you could cover in a very few days. *And* evenings, of course. In one short week of nightlong evenings they saw four hit shows, to start with; and one movie première (complete with Robert Taylor, come to life); and they practically ran straight through that list headed "Dinner, Supper, and Dancing"—the one you tore out of the front of a weekly magazine and used as a Bible. They did pretty well with the section headed "Broadway Atmosphere," too, and they even dipped into "Miscellaneous," which took you into the highways and byways, including Greenwich Village.

They also did some straight hick sightseeing—although Sheila said, "Oh, now, Nancy, *really*!" They rode in the subway (Nancy's first subway), and visited the tops of a couple of skyscrapers, and attended a radio broadcast, and had coffee and cake at an Automat, and even took the guided tour through Radio City one afternoon (albeit without Sheila, in the last-named instance. There were limits, Sheila said). Nancy loved this sort of thing almost best of all; and it was Jimmy's idea, usually. The real inspirations were apt to be his. Chuck and Skibo and some of the others were fairly good at guessing what you wanted to do in New York, and what you had always expected of it; but Jimmy was positively psychic.

"It's because I'm a stranger here myself," he explained. "Have been, these fifteen years. Someday I suppose I'll get used to this town, and stop getting a kick out of it, but I haven't yet."

"I *never* will," Nancy declared passionately. "I never would—not in a hundred years."

There was no use trying to conceal her ceaseless excitement over everything, and she didn't try—it was a lucky thing for her, she felt, that New Yorkers seemed to like this undisguised enthusiasm, and even to find it contagious. Sheila alone seemed embarrassed by it; everybody else entered right in. There was the business of the souvenir collecting, for example—Nancy was avid about this, and everybody helped. The men would stuff their pockets cheerfully with the evening's harvest in the way of restaurant menus, theater programs, night-club favors, and wooden swizzle-sticks; and even girls like Dottie Armstrong would contribute festive items. Dottie, indeed, was always snitching restaurant ash trays, if not silverware.

"Look! For little Nancy," she would say unregenerately.

Little Nancy meant to buy a scrapbook when she got back home, and paste in all these things—or as many of them as were pastable. “New York Trip, November-December 1941.” It wasn’t that she thought she’d ever need reminders, of course; it was just for fun.

She learned a lot, and she wrote almost all of it to Norman, who had never been here either, and thus would want to know. Park Avenue had a grass plot down the middle of it, but otherwise it couldn’t possibly have been less parklike. The Waldorf-Astoria sounded like two hotels—sort of hitched together with a passageway—but was really only one, and simply gigantic. You had to change elevators three times to get up to the top of the Empire State Building, and it was open nightly till midnight, and there was a bar at the next-to-the-top stage, on the eighty-sixth floor or something, and you could sit in the bar and look outward and downward, through the safe plate glass, at the vast illuminated map of what seemed like practically the whole world—and you on the absolute, ultimate pinnacle of it.

The mid-town New York streets were laid out evenly and straight, except for Broadway, which went slanting off in quite a haywire fashion. Street photographers were always trying to take your picture on the sidewalk, but it wasn’t a compliment—as you’d thought at first—it was just commercial. The sales-girls in stores were haughty enough, but the cigarette-girls in restaurants were worse. Right now the store windows were full of Santa-Clauses-versus-Palm-Beach-clothes, and it looked silly. When you went to a radio broadcast, there was a man who stood there on the stage and signaled to you, telling you when to laugh and when to stop laughing, and when to applaud and when not to. Somehow he made you feel stubborn, though, and you wouldn’t.

Sardi’s was full of stage celebrities, sitting right under their own framed caricatures. The Rockettes had to be seen to be believed, and there was no describing them. One jewelry store on Fifth Avenue had three bronze plaques in its doorway, commemorating the visits of three different Foreign Majesties (but not mentioning what they had bought in the way of jewelry, which would have been interesting). There were certain sections of the smartest restaurants that people in the know preferred, and those people would sit only in those sections, come what might. Sometimes it was the front room, and sometimes it was the back room, and you could never figure out their reasons, either way. No doubt they had them, though. . . .

These things, and many other similar comments, revelations, opinions, and impressions, Nancy wrote to Norman. She was aware that she was somewhat given to generalizing from the particular; and that this was especially true when she dealt with the subject of New Yorkers themselves. “New Yorkers,” she would say, “have quite a funny accent really. British, I suppose. They all

seem to have been divorced a lot. They call highballs ‘scotch-and-sodas,’ and they drink them pretty steadily, but hold them very well. They call the Ladies’ Room the ‘Little Girls’ Room.’ They spend lots of money wherever they go (I mean in night-clubs and restaurants and theaters and stuff like that), but then they never seem to care about getting their money’s worth—they’re always late to the theater, for instance, and they don’t pay much attention to floor shows, unless it’s just one person entertaining, like Paul Draper. Or this Hildegarde.

“They all think there’s going to be a war—I mean, they think America’s going to get into it before it’s over. They keep saying it isn’t a war anyway, it’s a world revolution. I keep telling them that nobody out where I come from thinks we’re going to get into it, but they just shake their heads and say, ‘That’s what I’ve heard,’ and then they look gloomier than ever. They really take it very seriously, Norman—you ought to hear them. It’s the only thing they’re ever grim about, as far as I can see.”

She left out Sheila from these letters, except for passing mention. Sheila was the one who was being grim—and not about the war, either—and Nancy would tell Norman all the facts and details when she got back home. The whole thing was too long, and too involved, for written narration. It took too much explaining altogether. And besides, Norman—who had never cared much for Sheila anyway—would probably just write back and say, “Well, who’s surprised? I’m certainly not.”

But Nancy was surprised. Perhaps she was the only one. In the first place, Sheila was a different person in New York, and there was just no use denying it. She was almost frightening sometimes. At home you certainly never thought of her as a repressed or quiet person, but now you realized that in Burlington she *was*, compared with the way she was here. She seemed to acquire a kind of intoxication from the very air of New York, and her eyes grew bolder, and her voice louder, and her manner more conspicuous. She used more make-up than she did at home; and far more perfume, of a heavier kind; and she smoked too much and drank too much, and ate too little for the drinks she drank. In conversation she went in for what you might call sudden shocks—she would say anything, apparently, if it would startle anybody.

This was the public Sheila; and the other one, the Sheila who shared Nancy’s hotel room, seemed equally a stranger. Well, but perhaps this always happened, Nancy argued with herself—maybe no woman ever really knew a thing about another woman until the two of them went traveling together. Until they shared a room and bath, and a small passageway (made for collisions),

and a single full-length mirror, and a scarcity of coat hangers. Until they spent every minute of every hour of every day in each other's presence—and so on, far into the night. *Then* they found out the things they hadn't known. Then practically nothing at all was hidden.

Of course it worked both ways, and Nancy made a dutiful mental list of little things about herself, and little habits of her own, which Sheila probably disliked and found annoying. There were some, in fact, which Sheila had already mentioned and deplored. One could proceed to one's own findings with a reasonably clear conscience. For instance, Sheila with her face washed had astonished Nancy, at first sight—it had turned out then that Sheila had a small tight mouth and a rather pinkish, even wholesome-looking skin. Her make-up disguised both these features so you never would have guessed. Sometimes she didn't bother to take her make-up off at all at night, if it was very late; instead, she slept in it, and woke in the morning sadly smeared—a pallid ghost of a paint job. She was always rather haggard in the mornings anyway, and looked much older than you'd dreamed she could look. She was usually very cross with breakfast waiters. She had a little back tooth on a bridge, which she took out, and scrubbed, and put back in again. She didn't want you to know about this little tooth, but how could you help it?

There were other discoveries. Sheila's favorite powder pad could have stood laundering, although the little ones in her compacts—the public ones—were immaculate. Furthermore, she used saliva instead of water to mix her mascara. She was reproachful with Nancy for leaving the bath soap lying in the tub, for the water to drip on; but at least this happened daily. Sheila just wasn't a daily bather. She wasn't a seamstress either, and she did all her mending with small gilded safety pins. She borrowed your stockings, and your pearl-studded evening bag, and your best satin slip; and she wore your velvet beanie with the bow in front so often that surely the whole crowd thought it was hers, and by the time you yourself got a chance to wear it, you had no heart for doing so. Besides, there was lipstick on it, for some inexplicable reason. Who in the world but Sheila would get lipstick on a hat?

All of which, of course, was really neither here nor there. The actual conflict now existing in this cozy hotel room—the out-and-out animosity now fairly crackling in the air at times—was Sheila's animosity, in the first place; and it had a broader base than any of these minor differences of taste and temperament. The blunt truth was that Sheila was jealous of Nancy, as anyone could see; and for this reason she was treating Nancy very coolly indeed, whenever she could. This was whenever they were alone together, with no

observers around. Sheila in public was still being silkily sweet to her dear little friend.

The private war had developed more or less gradually—although of course anything which achieves such magnitude all in a week must happen fairly fast. It had had degrees to it, however. Distinct stages. For the first two or three days in New York, Sheila had seemed delighted with Nancy's social success, and personally proud of it; then she had become a little weary, as one who would like to say, "There, that's enough"; and then definitely irked; and by this time it was apparent that Sheila could no longer take it at all. . . . This was perfectly clear to everybody, despite the aforementioned silky sweetness. It displayed itself in a kind of general flaunting of various tempers and moods.

"She's getting impossible," everybody said, and sometimes Nancy overheard this complaint—and sometimes it was even made directly to her, by Jimmy or Skibo or somebody. She always defended Sheila then, out of a troubled loyalty, and because Sheila certainly needed defending, whether or not she deserved it. These New Yorkers pulled no punches, once you bored them with the wrong behavior. Nancy felt that Sheila ought to realize that, and have more sense.

It all centered around Chuck, of course; that was another thing that everybody understood quite well—and Nancy better than the rest. The world in general was being punished slightly, and Nancy quite severely, for the fact that Chuck adored Nancy and didn't care who knew it. This was platonic, it was comradely, it even had paternal qualities, but it displayed itself in a great public fuss and to-do over Nancy, and marked attention and devotion; and Sheila hated it; and that was that.

Not that it was admitted, even once. Chuck's name was barely mentioned nowadays in that hotel room, though on the first day it had bounced so ringingly against the walls. Sheila never came right out and told you what was wrong. Nancy kept wishing that she would, and trying to get her to, so they could tackle it and settle it, but Sheila parried all these tentative attempts. When you said, "Sheila, what's the matter? I'm afraid you're angry with me"—as Nancy did on two occasions, following long glacial silences from Sheila—the reply was an evasion, a denial, and a bland stare.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Sheila said. "Of course I'm not angry with you. Why would I be angry with you? Don't be so absurd."

You couldn't get at it. You knew exactly what it was, and you had every proof that it was there—but you couldn't bring it out into the open to save your life.

Well, but there was one thing you *could* do, Nancy said to herself—and

one thing you obviously would have to do—and that was, avoid Chuck as much as possible. Just simply leave Chuck entirely to Sheila. So Nancy did that, after the first few days; or at any rate she tried her best. It was very difficult, however, because Chuck simply wouldn't co-operate.

"I see your little game," he said at once, "and I want no part of it. You may as well abandon it, Nancy, my sweet. It just won't work. I'll choose my own friends, thank you, if it's all the same to all concerned."

And thereafter he actually seemed to make more of a fuss about Nancy than ever.

So this was the situation on their second Saturday night in New York—which was the night when it kind of began to come to a head, in a vague sort of way. On the calendar it was Saturday, December 6, if anyone happened to look. Sheila had spent that afternoon getting a permanent, and this had made her fretful to begin with. Nancy had spent it at a matinee with Jimmy McCormick. Nobody seemed to know how Chuck had spent it, although at 6 P.M., when Nancy returned to the hotel, Sheila had questioned her on this point, unexpectedly, and quite suspiciously.

"You mean he wasn't with you and Jimmy?" Sheila had said.

"Why, no, Sheila. There were only Jimmy and me. I just this minute told you that."

"Then you don't know where he was all afternoon, or what he was doing?"

"No, I don't. I haven't the faintest idea."

"I thought maybe you might have had lunch with him before the matinee," Sheila said lightly. Oh, so lightly.

"Well, I didn't," Nancy said, not lightly at all. "I'd have mentioned it, if I had."

This stout rejoinder seemed to amuse Sheila, and she laughed. "Temper, temper," she said teasingly. "Can't I ask a simple question?"

"Well, yes, but you thought——"

"I didn't think anything, you silly baby," Sheila said. "And what if I had? Do you think I'd *mind* if you'd had lunch with Chuck? For heaven's sake, why should I?"

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

"That would be fantastic," Sheila said.

This was the nearest they had ever come to a discussion of the whole matter; and here it was all cockeyed, Nancy thought disgustedly. It wouldn't get anywhere, ever, having started off like this. It wouldn't clarify anything. They would just both get mad. It was better to drop it, here and now; and so

she did.

They were to be eight this evening, according to schedule. Dottie Armstrong had a major in town—a magnificent major, Dottie had said; a fabulous Ferry Command major—and they were all to have cocktails at her place and then go on somewhere for dinner. Later there was a night-club opening for which they had a table reservation. “I suppose we’re dressing, aren’t we?” Sheila had inquired on the phone, and Dottie had said, “Oh yes, by all means. For the major especially. He hasn’t seen anything but Eskimos, my dear, and Fiji Islanders, and other such mad types, for the past year or more—and all in all, let’s definitely dress to the nines for the major.”

So they dressed to the nines; and practically everybody else in the place looked quite elaborate too. There were a number of uniforms, which always made things picturesque. Everyone of their own party seemed to be in a good mood, and everyone had had just the right number of cocktails at Dottie’s, and the most delectable little gadgets to eat with them, too, to reduce the potency. The major’s magnificence was owing to his size, and his uniform, and his wings and ribbons; and he wasn’t too pretty; in fact, he was kind of Billiken-looking, in a likable way. It was as though his face had decided not to try to vie with his military apparel and accouterments, but just to stay in the background. He had one of those big, abrupt, booming laughs, the infectious kind that you sometimes heard in the theater, and that always set everybody off. He was a great addition, all in all.

So it would have been one of their best and cheeriest evenings, except for Sheila. To begin with, Sheila drank even more than usual, which added up to a good deal too much. It was deliberate, and it was also plain that it was being done for Chuck’s benefit—it was directed, and it was defiant—and after a while Chuck duly took notice, and he said, “No more for you.” This precipitated a small scene; it was evidently what Sheila had been wanting. She stared at Chuck across the table and said, “I’ll have another if I like.”

“I wouldn’t,” he said pleasantly. “The evening’s young. Why don’t you wait a while? Come on,” he said, rising suddenly, “let’s dance. You haven’t danced with me yet.”

“You’ve been busy,” Sheila said. But she stood up; and they took to the dance floor, both of them. Several people at the table watched them dance away together—Sheila looking sullen and saying nothing, Chuck speaking tranquilly—and Skibo Mitchell said, “Well, kids, we’re in for it. There’s stormy weather.”

“What’s the matter with her, anyway?” somebody said to Nancy.

“She’s tired,” Nancy said earnestly. “She really is. She had a permanent

this afternoon, and it took four hours, and you know how you feel. *You* know," she said to the major, since he seemed to be listening with rapt attention. "It's really awful. They kind of string you up to the chandelier, and you steam away. You even sizzle."

Dottie Armstrong was still watching Sheila. "You know something?" she said thoughtfully aloud, to the table at large. "If it weren't for our little Nancy, I think I'd sign off on this problem—and I mean, but permanently. It's getting just *too* tiresome, it really is. If there are going to be moods and tantrums to cope with—Mondays through Fridays, and a double bill week ends——"

She ended up with a little shrug. "I just think life's too short."

No one disagreed. Even Nancy said nothing this time, maintaining a sorrowful silence instead. She thought, "I guess it's a good thing we're going home pretty soon." They had their reservations for Tuesday night. Another three days.

She kept an eye on the dance floor; you could see that Chuck and Sheila weren't solving anything out there. Whatever the one-sided quarrel was about, it was still going on, with Sheila doing the talking now—too much of it, by the looks of things—and Chuck just listening, not too patiently. He finally interrupted, and you could tell that what he said was short and to the point; and it seemed to infuriate Sheila, because she immediately broke away from him, and whirled around, and started back to the table. She arrived well ahead of Chuck, and plumped herself down in the chair she had left. Nobody spoke except Skibo Mitchell, who said amiably, "How now?" It seemed unwise of him, under the circumstances, and Sheila didn't deign to answer. Nor did she look up at all when Chuck arrived.

"Well, it's fight night," Jimmy said in Nancy's ear. "All doubt has vanished. Poor old Chuck. Look at his expression. The only thing that bores a man worse than fighting with a woman he cares about, is having to fight with one he doesn't even *like*. Epigram by McCormick."

"Oh, but he *does* like her!" Nancy said, in great distress. "Of course he likes her. Why, she——I mean, what on earth makes you say that? You know he likes her."

"Depends on whose version you listen to."

"But——"

"Look," Jimmy said. "Let me tell you something. I can straighten you out on this whole unhappy affair in a few one-syllable words. Chuck would never tell you this, but it's high time somebody did. Sheila's been chasing him shamelessly for years—and with the absolute minimum of encouragement, I might add. Sure, he's nice to her, he's pleasant, he takes her around when she's

here in New York—after all, she's Doug's wife, and Doug is one of his best and oldest friends on earth. They're even in business together, in a way—did you know that? Chuck is a kind of silent partner in that setup of Doug's out there in Burlington. Well, and so, all in all, there's every reason why he should try to be decent to Sheila on her all-too-frequent visits, and the good Lord knows he *does* try——"

"Hush," Nancy murmured at this point, because Jimmy's voice was getting excited.

"But it's dynamite," Jimmy continued. "It's fatal. It just goes straight to her head. She doesn't know common courtesy from passion's undying flame, that girl. You think Chuck ought to like her, and I say maybe he *might,* if she'd just relax and give him half a chance. But she's too busy misinterpreting everything he says, digging around for deeper meanings that aren't there, taking all his natural Blarney to heart, and even all his general-handout pet names—— My God," Jimmy said, "what a stupid dame she is! There's just no excuse for it. She's been around long enough, and she should know better."

"You mean," Nancy said, with huge eyes, "you mean there's never been anything *to* it, then? Between them, I mean? Not anything at *all*?"

"It's a big mysterious world," Jimmy said, "and nothing is impossible. So I wouldn't bet my bottom dollar. But I'd bet all the rest."

"Oh, goodness!" Nancy said, and she could think of nothing more to say.

Sheila's current fit of sulks stayed right with Sheila through the evening. There was a certain tedious familiarity about the forms it took. "This is where I came in," Jimmy observed exhaustedly at one point; and everybody else had that same feeling. It wasn't just that Sheila had behaved like this before. "Dames in a rage," as Jimmy put it, "all act the same way. They never vary the routine. How many times have we all been through this sort of thing, I wonder?"

It was true enough. You knew exactly what he meant. Sometimes it was a jealous wife, or a merely petulant one. Sometimes it was an exhibitionist who wasn't getting enough attention. The end result was always the same—the girl or woman, whoever she was, did what she could to spoil everybody else's evening, because hers was spoiled. Sheila's whole will seemed bent upon this now.

It became a kind of game or contest—the field versus Sheila. They just weren't going to have the evening spoiled, and that was final; and the moodier Sheila became, the merrier they all grew. This had the desired outcome, although not for a long time. It wasn't until nearly midnight, after they'd moved on to the supper club where the new floor show was to open, that

Sheila suddenly announced in a clear voice that this place gave her claustrophobia, that it was far too crowded and noisy, and that she wasn't going to wait to see the floor show—she was leaving now.

"Good!" said Dottie Armstrong audibly.

Sheila ignored that, though she heard it. She was standing now, and all the men were struggling politely to their feet. Paul Schaeffer, being the nearest, picked up Sheila's wrap from the back of her chair, and Sheila let him put it on her shoulders, meanwhile presenting a proud-beauty countenance, aloof and cold, for them to see. Her eyes were fixed on a point in space. Then they flashed to Chuck, and she said to him, "Would you take me back to the hotel? If it isn't *too* much trouble?"

"No trouble at all," Chuck said, with such alarming alacrity that for a minute everybody feared Sheila would change her mind and refuse to budge.

She didn't, though, and they departed safely.

Chuck—alone—was back in no time. Everybody eyed him in a warm, congratulatory sort of way, and Dottie Armstrong said, "No battle scars? No broken bones? No bruises, even? Let me look you over."

"I don't bruise easily," Chuck said, and smiled at them, and changed the subject. "Why, look what's here! We've got champagne. A magnum too."

"We're celebrating something," Dottie told him, "and it isn't what you think. We've just discovered what day this is—and it calls for champagne, so we called for champagne."

"A sound idea," Chuck said, helping himself. "But what day is it?"

Dottie was smiling sideways at the major, virtually dazzling him. "Well, as of one minute after midnight," she explained to Chuck, "it's the seventh of December, and it's very important, *we* think."

"She's trying to tell you it's my birthday," said the major, looking big and bashful.

Nancy got in at three in the morning, and went tiptoeing around, undressing. In her anxiety not to wake Sheila, who was a motionless ridge in the right-hand twin bed, she didn't even turn a light on in the room, but undressed in the bathroom instead. These precautions succeeded; Sheila didn't stir; and so all was peaceful till the morning—the real morning. Eleven o'clock, in fact, when their room telephone jangled and woke them.

They had left a call for eleven—Sheila had left it, remembering somehow, and Nancy had checked to make sure on her way through the lobby last night. They were going to have to lunch very early today, at twelve-fifteen promptly,

because of a football game. Chuck and Jimmy were taking them, and would ring them from the lobby at twelve. Almost the last thing Nancy had said last night was, “Are you sure you *still* want to take us?”—which was another way of saying that Sheila might still be in a bad mood—but Chuck and Jimmy had both assured her that they certainly did, and that the date was on.

“Well. Maybe everything will be all right,” Nancy had vouchsafed hopefully.

The prospects were not good, however. She could see that right away, in the clear morning light. She herself bounced up brightly when the phone rang, and said “Thank you” into it, but Sheila still lay motionless, and began moaning faintly. “I seem to have a hangover,” Sheila’s voice said, “by an odd coincidence.” . . . This bitter rue sounded encouraging, and seemed friendly, but it didn’t last. By the time Sheila was fully awake, she had recalled the events of the evening; and it was clear that she had decided not to rue them, after all. They were her guns, and she was going to stick to them.

“Oh dear!” thought Nancy. “*Please!*” But it was just no use. Sheila got up and got her clothes on in an almost total silence, giving only monosyllabic replies to what you said to her. “Let’s order coffee,” was her longest sentence, and her only voluntary contribution to the conversation. She borrowed Nancy’s green sweater, though, holding it up after she’d fished it from the bureau drawer and saying, “Okay?”

They were still drinking coffee when Chuck and Jimmy rang them from downstairs. They were all dressed, however; they were correct football girls, in correct sports clothes. Going down in the elevator, Sheila made a full-length speech—it was six whole words long, and hence sensational. It was, “I daresay I’ll live through this.”

“You mean you still don’t feel well?” Nancy said compassionately.

Sheila didn’t answer.

Chuck and Jimmy both wore polo coats; and Jimmy had on the first hat that Nancy had ever seen him wear. It was a very old hat, but still it seemed to make him look quite dressy. Both men carried automobile robes over their arms, and Chuck had a newspaper folded to show the line-up of the football game, and Jimmy had a bottle of scotch, the neck of which protruded from his pocket. He patted it tenderly, and smiled at Nancy and said, “Reminds you of prohibition days, doesn’t it?”—and then he bethought himself, and laughed, and chucked her under the chin.

“I keep forgetting,” he said. “You wouldn’t remember, would you, baby? Repeal was in nineteen thirty-three—and how old were you then?”

“I was twelve,” she said with dignity.

"I see. Just an old sot, like the rest of us."

It was happening again—both the men were beaming at her, at Nancy; and standing like brackets around her; and neither of them was paying any special attention to Sheila, who was just off at the side. Nancy glanced at her apprehensively, and then appealingly at the men. "Sheila has a hangover," she said, just to try to include Sheila. It didn't seem to have been a very tactful choice in the way of a remark, though. Sheila looked anything but grateful, and said, "I'm perfectly all right."

"That's fine——" Jimmy began to say. But he never did get it out.

"If anybody cares," Sheila was saying crisply to Chuck.

"Now, darling," Chuck said promptly, "none of that. We all care deeply. Much depends on it, in fact. Three people's pleasure, besides yours. Try to remember that, will you?"

Sheila just looked at him.

They decided to have their breakfast-lunch at a restaurant just down the street from the hotel, and they proceeded there on foot. It was a beautiful day in New York, clear and briskly cold, and windy. The coats of the Sunday strollers—who didn't stroll but walked fast to keep warm—blew about them in the wind; and women held onto their hats and their fur pieces. Nancy found the air exhilarating, and she wanted to skip like a little girl; and she said, "It's just the right kind of a day for football, isn't it? Who's playing who, by the way? You didn't tell me."

"The Giants are playing the Dodgers."

"I've never seen any pro football," Nancy said. "But I'll probably love it. I'm mad about just plain football. Norman used to play," she added dreamily. "He played both in high school and in college. He played end, and he was terrific."

Both the men eyed her fondly, and Chuck said, "There she goes again," and Jimmy said, "Some guys have all the luck. Now why can't *I* find a wife as worshipful as that? Is there anything wrong with me, that I can't? Or is it just something wrong with the system?"

In the restaurant, when they reached it, there were other people who were obviously going to the game, too—there were groups of four and six and eight—and it gave the place a tweed-and-sweater look, unusual in New York. Everyone was eating in a hurry. They themselves ordered a kind of lunchlike breakfast, half and half—"And if anybody calls it 'brunch,' " Chuck said, "I shall be sick in public."

"So shall I," said Sheila unexpectedly. Even with feeling.

The men kept pleading with the waiters, until the food was finally brought.

It seemed that even men who habitually missed theater curtains hated to miss kickoffs. They consumed their meal in a bare fifteen minutes, once it came. “I’m gobbling,” Nancy said despairingly. “I *never* ate so fast.” They commandeered a taxi, and rode out to the Polo Grounds, through the steadily increasing traffic that grew very thick as they got near. They finally left the cab and covered the last few blocks on foot. . . . Once inside the concrete stadium walls they mounted ramps, made hairpin turns, and climbed again, emerging ultimately on an upper-level balcony, or mezzanine, or something. Nancy didn’t know what it was called, but it was vast.

Here they descended, for a change, and found their seats in the front row of this enormous shelf. You sat in them, and felt like bric-a-brac in a high cupboard—and right out on the edge, at that. “Don’t let me jump, will you?” Nancy said fervently to Jimmy. There was a great bustling at first, while they arranged the blankets and disposed themselves—while they did their nest-building act, as Chuck called it.

“Where do you want to sit?” he said to Sheila, right away; as though to say, “The rest of us don’t care, but I suppose you do. So take your choice.” Sheila chose the fourth seat in, to everyone’s surprise. This put Nancy between the men, where Sheila would have liked to be. She was certainly punishing herself today—along with others.

The game began, and Nancy recognized it as a good game, and exciting—nevertheless, she watched it more obediently than attentively. It wasn’t like watching a school or college team that you cared about; it was all a little remote and impersonal, and of course commercial. She couldn’t even see the players’ faces from way up here; and at first she didn’t know which uniforms were which, and didn’t want to ask for fear that would sound *too* dumb-bunny. She finally worked it out for herself by listening to the loud-speaker.

People around her seemed to care a lot about these teams, though, and they spoke possessively of the various players. There was a big, gay-looking crowd, befurred and vivid, and vociferous. Nancy read afterward that it was estimated at 55,000. . . . Chuck and Jimmy kept making bets with each other; their rapid mathematics kept whizzing past her nose. This was another thing that excluded Sheila; and to all intents and purposes there were just the three of them. Again it worried Nancy, and presently she whispered to Chuck, “Change seats with Sheila, why don’t you?” That would put the two girls in the middle and the men on the ends. But Chuck declined—affably but firmly. “No, we’ll leave her there a while,” he said, “to meditate on her sins. A little solitude won’t hurt her. She’s not speaking to us anyway.”

“She spoke a few times,” Nancy reminded him. But that was the best she could do today for Sheila.

It was not very long after the game started that the loud-speaker began calling out messages to people in the audience—summoning them to telephones—and this happened repeatedly, all in the next few minutes. It became strange with repetition, and Chuck and Jimmy looked at each other and Jimmy said, “They’re all newspaper people, have you noticed?” and Chuck said, “That’s right,” in a puzzled voice. But then after a while it stopped, and they didn’t think any more about it, and the game went on through all its quarters to the end; and the Dodgers beat the Giants, 21-7.

So it wasn’t until they were leaving the stands that they heard about Pearl Harbor. It wasn’t until then that any of the 55,000 heard about it. They must have been the last Americans on earth, as Chuck said afterward. . . . They were all moving slowly down the ramps, around the hairpin turns again; they were packed tight together, making sloping human hills, rocky with bobbing heads; and Nancy would remember always how the faces looked in the queer light, and how the people pushed you (some of them, the kind that always did), and how her feet felt frozen, and just what she was saying. Jimmy and Sheila were ahead, and she herself was saying to Chuck that she was glad she had low heels on, coming down a ramp like this. She was explaining that in *high* heels, you could go *up* with perfect ease—but coming down was torture. There was simply no room for your toes.

“Listen a minute!” Chuck said suddenly, and grabbed her arm, and stopped her in her tracks. Everyone else stopped, too, for some reason, and so there was no pushing. It was the loud-speaker, yelling at them once again. It sounded very close now, as though it lived here on the ramp.

“Attention!” it was saying. “This is urgent! All officers and men of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps! All leaves and furloughs have been canceled. Report immediately to your nearest command——”

“What is it?” Nancy said. “Oh, Chuck, what *is* it? What does it mean?” Everywhere around her people were saying that, women were saying it, white-faced women; and the men were saying almost exactly what Chuck said to her now, which was, “I don’t know, but it sounds—— I don’t know. We’ll find out in a minute. Let’s just try to get out of here.”

They tried very hard, but now there was great confusion, and you couldn’t hurry. There was no real need for it, either, because in a minute they did find out. The news came running up the ramp to meet them, from the world outside. It came like an invisible forest fire, touching off everybody. Or like a great wind, made of little bits of phrases, and small single words. “The Japs” . . . “the Fleet” . . . “early this morning” . . . “bombs” . . . “ships” . . . “planes” . . .

They listened until the fragments fitted together. Until it was whole. Chuck talked quickly to a man next to him, and then to Jimmy, and then to a soldier

ahead. Nancy merely waited. She was glad that Chuck had hold of her hand. She moved when the people moved, and she listened to everything, and she didn't know that she was already crying.

Chuck finally turned back to her. "Well, there it is," he said. "That does it."

"It means we're in the war."

"Yes, darling. It means we're in the war."

Norman, Nancy thought. She couldn't think of anything but Norman. That was why her eyes were streaming. Norman, who was twenty-two.

"Attention!" the loud-speakers were blaring once again. "All officers and men——"

Sheila was still ahead of Chuck and Nancy, and now suddenly she turned around. Even through tears Nancy could see that Sheila's mood had changed, that Sheila's spirits were restored—even that Sheila seemed in high good humor.

"Isn't it exciting?" Sheila said. "Have you ever *lived* through such a moment?"

"—all leaves and furloughs have been canceled—" the loud-speaker was repeating.

"That, for instance," Sheila said. "The whole thing's simply too *dramatic*!"

Whereupon Nancy slapped her in the face—the shining face.

II

It had happened quicker than thought, and Nancy was quite as astonished by her own action as Sheila must have been. For perhaps ten seconds sheer surprise knocked everything else out of her head—the provocation, the surroundings, all the clamoring horror on this stadium ramp. She stood staring incredulously at Sheila, thinking, "Oh, my goodness, what made me do that? Why, I never slapped anybody's face in my whole *life* before!" But she had certainly slapped Sheila's face, completely altering its expression—there was a rude slang phrase for this, and the phrase was the one about wiping the smile off. Sheila's eyes narrowed angrily now, and there was an almost murderous glint in them; and Nancy thought, "Oh-oh. I knew it. She'll never forgive me, *never*." And she was quite right about it, as it turned out afterward. The odd thing was that retribution was delayed.

Sheila, in fact, seemed to take the whole incident rather well, after those first few seconds of visible fury. She was really an unpredictable sort of girl, every now and then. This was one of the times. Now she seemed to relax, and

she even almost smiled. If her eyes still glittered ominously, you couldn't see them for her lashes. "My dear Nancy," she said, "what an extraordinary thing to do! What on earth's got into you? You must be completely unstrung."

"Of course she is," Chuck said, with violence. "We all are. Good God, Sheila, aren't you *listening*? Don't you know this means we're in the war? Or don't you care?"

"Certainly I know it," Sheila said. "And I couldn't feel worse about it. I only said that the way we were hearing it was dramatic—and it *is* dramatic. For heaven's sake, what's wrong with that? Why do you all turn on me, like—like three savages?"

"Look," Jimmy said incisively. "What do you say we postpone this discussion? I mean it seems hardly the time or the place. Let's get along—and take it up later, if we have to."

They got along. Jimmy grasped Sheila's arm and hustled her ahead again. Immediately his profile reappeared, over his shoulder, and his rolling eyes gave Nancy a congratulatory look—just to show her whose side he was on, in case there should be any doubt about it. Chuck and Nancy were following him as closely as they could, and now Chuck called after him, "If we get separated in this mob, go down to my house. We'll meet there"; and Jimmy turned back again long enough to say, "Yes, but let's not get separated. It's going to be hard enough to find one taxi—let alone two."

"What about the subway?" Chuck suggested, shouting now. But Jimmy didn't hear. He had forged well ahead by this time, pulling Sheila with him. He was being more than a little rough with her, as anyone could see.

"Thanks for standing up for me," Nancy said wanly to Chuck. "You and Jimmy both."

"And why not?" he demanded fiercely. "Thanks a million for doing what you did. She was simply outrageous. God in heaven, does she think war's a *joke*?"

"But just the same," Nancy said, "I had no business slapping her, I guess. I did it before I thought. Something tells me she won't forgive me in a hurry."

"I wouldn't care if I were you."

"I don't. Not really."

They forgot about Sheila then, and once again there was nothing in the world but the surging crowds on the slopes of the ramp, the stricken faces of the people, the fragmentary sentences that ran from lip to lip—crying Armageddon—and the loud-speaker still summoning the uniformed young men.

It seemed to Nancy that it took forever just to get out of the stadium. There

were bad bottlenecks at all the turns, there was another when they reached the exit, and then they had to wait a long time in the outer cold, while the dense mass of people filtered into single file between narrow railings. They finally achieved the street, where they were relatively free. But Jimmy had been quite right about the taxi situation, and the only thing to do was keep on walking.

This was endless. First there was a cluttered hill to climb, then a right turn, and then a maze of other, brighter streets, not much less crowded. They followed Jimmy's lead, which seemed to have some knowing plan and purpose to it, complex though it was. They never quite caught up with him. Everywhere they heard radios talking, talking in the cars and taxis, coming out of doors and windows in the buildings as they passed—it was as though every radio in the world were talking at once, and as though all the many different voices were the same voice, saying the one thing. And on every street corner there was a tight, black, struggling knot of people, like great angry bees in overcoats, and you knew that the hidden center of this hive would be a newsboy selling extras.

"Wait right here," Chuck said, and he went plunging into one such huddle, and presently backed out again with a paper in his hand, and there it was in giant letters. It seemed even truer when you saw it than it had before. They stopped under a street light, but only for a moment, because the paper was just headlines really, and there wasn't much to read as yet. It was a paper like a placard, and no more.

They started on again. Nancy was walking blindly, stumbling on her small cold feet. Chuck kept his arm linked into hers, and she relied entirely on his guidance, and simply went along with him. It was as much as she could do. She was almost glad to be so chilled and tired and miserable, to have these sheerly physical discomforts to distract her mind from too much thinking. Her face looked white and sick, and she was very quiet. The tears had dried on her cheeks, and she felt as though the cold had frozen them.

She said, "Chuck."

"Yes, honey?"

"When there's a war, do married men have to go? I mean, do they *always* have to? No matter what?"

"Why, no, not always. Not by any means. It depends."

"I just wondered."

Chuck said, "How old is he?"

"He's twenty-two. He'll be twenty-three next month. And he's awfully big and healthy," Nancy said, with her voice catching. "There isn't a thing wrong with him. He's never been sick a day in his whole life."

“My sweet,” Chuck said, “try not to worry. He may not have to go at all—for one reason or another. Why don’t you wait and cross that bridge when you come to it?”

“Because I’m *at* it,” Nancy said, now wailing. “Norman will *want* to go. I know he will. I feel it in my bones.”

Chuck said gently, “But you wouldn’t want him not to want to, would you?”

“Yes!” she said passionately. “Yes, I would!”

“No, now think a minute,” Chuck said. “I don’t really believe you mean that.”

She didn’t know. She couldn’t think it out—not now. She said, “All I know is, I can’t bear it. I can’t *bear* it!”

“Nobody can bear it,” Chuck said somberly. “But it’s got to be borne. We’re in it now. The thing to do is get mad as hell, instead of frightened.”

“Yes, I know. That’s true.”

“They can’t do that to us,” Chuck said, from between his teeth. “That’s the important thing to remember.”

That was what everybody was saying. You could hear it all around you. It was the slogan of this nightmare night; the watchword, and the rebel yell; the nation’s sudden battle cry, couched in the native tongue and tone. “*Why, those yellow so-and-sos—they can’t do that to us!*”

“It wasn’t even Hitler,” Nancy said, “the way everybody thought. Everybody who thought it would be anybody,” she amended.

“It’ll be Hitler soon enough,” Chuck said, forgetting to be comforting.

Then they were silent once again, for minutes more. Presently Nancy spoke, in a queer, stormy little voice, like a protesting child. She said, “The trouble with me is, I’ve been brought up all wrong for this.”

“In what way, darling?” Chuck asked absently.

“Oh—I don’t know. Every way.”

She didn’t explain, though she could have. It was all plain enough in her mind. It was there like a kind of helpless anger, along with the woe and dread. She felt completely unprepared for this, she didn’t feel grown up enough, and in such years as she had lived, no one had braced her for this possibility, nothing had trained her for it in the least, or made her ready. She had never even heard any real warnings, any grim prognostications, until just ten days ago, when these New York people—these alarmists, they would have been called in Burlington—had talked about the war to come as though it were inevitable. Nothing ever before that. Nothing at all, from anybody.

And so now she felt deluded, and deceived, and lost. She felt sold down the river. All the trusted parent-teacher voices of her life had been so wrong—though they had meant so well. There was her father's point of view, for instance (and her mother's, too, by marital adoption). Her father had fought in the last war, and he was of those who thought they had settled it. For twenty-one years of an established cockiness he had been sure of this; and then, in 1939, when the thing broke out again in Europe, he and the other members of his Legion post in Burlington had all agreed that it was Europe's shooting match this time, and not for them or for their sons. It was Britain's trouble, and not theirs. Ho, no! they'd said. Once was enough. This time the Yanks weren't coming.

That was the way people had talked in Burlington—most of the people. They had called everyone a warmonger who even thought that there might be a war. Nancy wondered briefly, without really wondering at all, what they were saying and thinking now, around their radios; and how they were reacting. She could almost see some of the incredulous faces in her mind—her father's, and other people's. She could almost hear what some of them would be saying. Her father would be stamping up and down, swearing a blue streak—he always did that when he was excited, and her mother always said mildly, "Now, Harry"—or else he would be saying, "I don't believe it! You wait and see. It'll be denied in the morning." He would be quoting Lindbergh, as he always did. And Senator Wheeler.

And there was her father's employer, Mr. William Hastings Huddleston, III. Everybody in town would be quoting Mr. Huddleston, because he was a kind of local oracle—being the chief manufacturer, and the richest man, and the chairman of the board of practically everything. Mr. Huddleston would be saying that it was all the fault of that man in the White House. Mr. Huddleston was always saying that, no matter what went wrong. And everybody in Burlington was always saying, "Yes, Mr. Huddleston."

Chuck's voice brought Nancy back, and now she saw that Jimmy and Sheila had halted on the sidewalk, up ahead of them, and were looking back and motioning frantically. "Don't tell me he's found an empty cab," Chuck said. "It's too good to be true." It was, unfortunately; and instead it appeared that what Jimmy and Sheila had found was a bar-and-grill sort of place, with steamy windows in the front, promising warmth at least, and with a curlicued red Neon sign over the door saying "Benny's Tavern."

"This is for us, we thought," Jimmy explained as they caught up. "Sheila's half frozen, and I've got a broken arm from waving at taxis. What do you say

we put in here for quick repairs?"

They did so, wedging themselves in somehow. The place was packed, and at first they had to stand. There was a long mahogany bar running the length of the narrow room, and the bar was lined eight deep with people, and the tables down the side looked squeezed. Here again the radio was going full blast, and the crowd wasn't talking very much because everybody was listening. People had newspapers, everyone had one, and wherever you looked you saw the same front page, the same black placard, telling everything and nothing.

Chuck undertook to fight his way up to the bar, for drinks for all of them, and Jimmy and the two girls stood and waited where they could. Sheila didn't look at Nancy, and she hadn't spoken to her—not directly—but this might or might not be intentional, in such confusion. Nancy felt too distrait even to bother wondering. She watched the crowd, their faces, their expressions, and she thought, *Americans,* and marveled at how many different kinds and types there were. She had never really noticed it before, in such a conscious way; it was a fact of life, a thing you took for granted, usually—you being one of them. But now you saw it, and you thought about it.

"Are you all right, baby?" Jimmy inquired solicitously.

"Um-hmm. Yes, thanks."

"I didn't dream we'd have to walk so far," he said. "You'd think the taxis had all gone to war—like the Paris taxis to the Marne. But don't you worry. We'll get you somewhere pretty soon."

"I'm all right. Really," Nancy said, and she smiled faintly at him. "You look all in yourself, as far as that goes."

"Things on my mind."

"I know."

"It's quite a night."

Sheila said suddenly, "Look, there's a table!" and she started off. It was true that the indicated table's occupants were showing the first stirrings of departure. In a flash, Sheila was over there, taking possession. It was the sort of thing she was good at, and this time she was so quick about it that she seemed to be seated at the table almost before the other people rose. Jimmy, snorting, said to Nancy, "Can you beat it? She thinks she's playing Musical Chairs." But the fact remained that they got the table, and there was no use pretending they weren't grateful for it. Jimmy and Nancy followed her over and sat down; and presently Chuck came struggling toward them through the crowd that walled the bar. His hands were full of chunky little glasses, brown with liquor.

"Sorry I couldn't get any chasers," he said. "Seems the bar's fresh out of

soda—and too prosperous for plain water." Setting the drinks down, he added, "These are double scotches. I thought we could all stand a stiffish bracer, in the circumstances."

They were very strong, and Nancy had a hard time swallowing hers. Her throat was aching in the first place, and then she wasn't used to whisky—not even in an easy, well-diluted, highball form. But now she labored at the task, and got the whisky down in gradual sips, because it was needed medicine. She had the feeling everybody seemed to have about it, all these people here; this was grim drinking, sober drinking, with no sign of pleasure in it. Nobody seemed affected by it, just as nobody seemed helped.

There was a woman at a near-by table who was weeping hopelessly and openly; she kept wiping her eyes and blowing her nose and being resolute, but she couldn't stop crying; and the word went around through the room somehow—"Her son's in the Navy, and he was stationed at Pearl Harbor." Everybody said "was," as though the woman's tears of fright were tears of heartbreak, and confirmed already.

Even Sheila seemed impressed by this. "Poor woman," Sheila said.

In the back of the room there were two public telephone booths, and you could see the solemn profiles of two servicemen through the glass panels—one a soldier, one a sailor. Others were lined up outside both the booths, awaiting their turns. Still more kept dashing into the bar from the street, saying at the threshold, "Is there a phone here?" The civilians in the place, a lot of the men and even a few of the women kept surrounding the servicemen in the telephone line-up, asking them questions. It was as though the servicemen were already authorities on what had happened at Pearl Harbor and at Hickam Field; as though they must already know the inside story and the untold facts.

They were being treated with a sudden new respect too; even with a sudden new humility. There was something almost timid, something ingratiating and conciliatory, about the way the people now approached them and addressed them. . . . Jimmy described it. "Change in the weather," he said sardonically. "America discovers its Armed Forces. *Look* at those people, will you! Butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. There's a general air of 'Be-good-to-us-now. Forgive-us-our-trespasses.' "

"What trespasses?" Sheila inquired curiously. "What are you talking about?"

"There was a time," Jimmy said, "way back before the war—in fact, way back prior to three hours ago—when too many of those civilians treated those kids as though they were less than human. I used to see a lot of it when I was off on business trips—in all those little towns near which there were army

camps. The merchants gypped the soldiers, and the people snooted them, and the parents thought they were after their daughters—and the defense-plant workers called them suckers for working for twenty-one dollars a month. I know towns down South where the boys from the camps weren't even allowed to swim in the public swimming pools, believe it or not! And all in all, they got kicked around plenty, and don't ever think they didn't. We damn well better be nice to them now. We've got a lot to make up to them for."

It was a very long speech for Jimmy, and a highly emotional one, and he broke it off by saying, "Hell, where's my soapbox?"

"You did all right without it," Chuck observed.

"It's your fault," Jimmy said to Sheila. "You asked me what I was talking about, and I forgot to keep it short. Seems I was talking about the joke conscription Army—now become the great white hope of the world. And here's to Mr. Roosevelt whom I didn't vote for," he concluded suddenly.

"Oh, didn't you?" said Sheila. "*I* did."

That amused the men, for some reason, and they both smiled. "Sheila, the political wizard," Chuck murmured.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Of course, actually," Sheila said, "I didn't vote at all that time. I just made a pact with a Willkie friend of mine, so we wouldn't either of us have to bother."

Nancy was still watching the line-up at the telephones. "They look so young, don't they?" she said to Chuck. "That little sailor's just a baby."

"He looks keen, though," Chuck said soberly. "They all do. They look *good*. I was just thinking that while Jim was talking."

"Could we go pretty soon, do you think?" Nancy said then, in a lowered voice. "I want to get somewhere where there's a phone that isn't being used. I want to call Norman."

"Of course. And you shall," Chuck said. "We'll go right away. There ought to be taxis by this time."

Sheila had overheard Nancy's remark, it seemed, in spite of the lowered voice.

"*Oh!*" she said now, as though she had just discovered something surprising. As though, indeed, a profound mystery had just been cleared up for her. "Oh, so *that's* what you're so upset about!" she said to Nancy. "You're worrying about Norman."

There was a short, blank pause, during which Nancy thought, "Well,

anyway, she's speaking to me." No other thought occurred to her, and in the end it was Chuck who answered Sheila.

"What did you suppose it was?" he asked her, with what sounded like simple interest.

"I didn't know. Is it that you're afraid he'll rush right out and enlist in something?" Sheila said to Nancy. "I hadn't thought of that." She thought about it now. "Well, yes, perhaps," she said. "I see your point. He's just the type that would."

The words were kindly enough—there was nothing wrong with the words at all. And you couldn't tell anything from Sheila's face, which was wearing its blandest expression. It was Sheila's tone that was suspect, so that Nancy scrutinized her hard. "Oh no, I must be wrong," she said to herself in the next instant. "I'm imagining things, I guess." But the suspicion lingered, all the same; and it still seemed to her that Sheila had managed to inject a faintly mocking note into what should have been high praise—into "He's just the type that would."

Somehow it was as though Sheila had said, "He isn't very bright, your Norman."

They found a taxi fairly easily, after the fifteen-minute interval; and they rode downtown to Chuck's apartment, with the radio turned on all the way. The elevator man who took them up spoke cheerfully of possible air raids, and chuckled as he said, "Poor Mr. Hathaway, in the penthouse!" This reminder alarmed Sheila, who exclaimed, "Oh, but not *tonight*, surely? You don't think there'll be one as soon as *this*, do you?" Nobody did. Their host unlocked the penthouse door, and they trooped in, turning on lights—sighing with relief to be here, where it was warm and comfortable.

They dropped their many wraps on the foyer chairs, and Jimmy went directly to the radio and switched it on; and they all stopped dead for a minute, listening to find out whether anything new had happened in the brief time it had taken them to come through the lobby and up in the elevator. . . . Apparently nothing had, and Sheila went back to Chuck's bedroom to fix her face, and Nancy started back with her, but then thought better of it. There might be some private recriminations, once Sheila got her alone, and she felt in no mood to cope with them or even to endure them. So she waited instead, and stood warming herself in front of a radiator.

"We'll have a fire here in a minute," Chuck said. "Where's William, anyway?" He crossed the room and rang a bell for his manservant, and then remembered aloud that William was out. "It's his Sunday off," he said. "Of

course it would be. I forgot that."

"James is here," said Jimmy, from the radio, "at your service. What do you want?"

"Wood for the fire, and a tray of the makings for drinks. I'll get the wood, and you rustle up the other stuff."

Nancy said to Chuck, "Will it be all right if I call Norman now? I'll reverse the charges——"

Chuck said "Hush!" to that, but he encouraged the main proposal. "Go on in and use the bedroom phone, why don't you? It'll be quieter."

"Yes, I will. As soon as Sheila comes out."

Alone in the bedroom a few minutes later, Nancy called the hotel first, to see if by any chance Norman had called her; and when she found that he hadn't, she left Chuck's number with the hotel switchboard, just in case he should. That done, she dialed the long-distance operator and gave her own Burlington number. She didn't know exactly what she intended saying to Norman when she got him—she just wanted to hear his voice; that was the chief thing. On a night like this you had to talk to the person you loved most on earth; since you couldn't be with him, as you longed to be, a telephone talk might help a little. It might even reassure you, calming your more immediate fears.

But it seemed that everybody in the country had had somewhat the same idea, and it took hours to get the call through, in the end. Not that you knew it was going to, when you first put it in. The operator kept saying that all the circuits were busy, and that she would call you—and then either she forgot to call you, or else she reported the same thing again. That was the way it went, hour after hour.

It was a hectic evening anyway, in Chuck's apartment as everywhere else. It was the typical evening that almost everybody had, all over the nation. They never once turned the radio off, and the news didn't get any better, and it was reported (though not confirmed) that the *West Virginia* had been sunk, and that the *Oklahoma* was burning, and that Guam had been attacked; and the rumored total of the casualties in Hawaii mounted every time they heard it. Meanwhile, the President had called a cabinet meeting for 8:30 P.M., and a meeting with congressional leaders for 9 P.M., and everybody predicted that the war with Germany would start tomorrow, and this program was being brought to you through the courtesy of Seraphim Face Cream—"Beauty is your duty, ladies. Don't neglect it. Buy a jar tonight."

Forgotten in Chuck's wallet were four tickets to this evening's hockey game at Madison Square Garden, which they'd meant to see. No one even

mentioned this original, this prehistoric plan. Sheila said, “I feel as though I’d been in these same clothes for years and years,” but she said nothing about leaving, even temporarily. All of them except Nancy mixed and drank successive highballs, and Sheila became definitely talkative and chipper, although the men did not. In fact, you never saw such gloomy men, as Sheila kept complaining.

Chuck dug around in a hall closet where everybody had always thought only card tables and poker chips and backgammon boards were kept, and produced huge maps and an atlas, and he and Jimmy spread the maps out here and there around the room, on all available flat surfaces. You saw the blue Pacific everywhere you looked. The men kept studying these maps, and Nancy pored over them, too, appalled to find that she knew even less about geography than she had thought. In the intervals of dialing different stations on the radio, and looking up the mentioned places on the maps, both Chuck and Jimmy paced the floor distractedly, and wouldn’t stay down when they sat down; and they kept getting off into corners together and conferring in undertones; and Jimmy kept trying to put through a series of long-distance calls of his own. He had no better luck with this than Nancy was having.

Local calls were possible, though, and both the men made many of them; and whenever they let the telephone alone for a minute, it would ring. Each time this happened, Nancy would rush to answer it in the bedroom, thinking surely this time it was her call—but it would be somebody wanting to talk to Chuck about Today. You certainly found out how many friends a person had on a night like this. Chuck’s friends were countless, and all of them had heard new rumors, and all of them said, “Where were you when the first flash came? We were driving in from the country . . .” or, “We were listening to the Philharmonic . . .” It was the order of this evening (as indeed it would be often in the future) to compare notes in this fashion; to describe the exact circumstances under which one had heard the news.

“I never *knew* so much telephoning!” Sheila kept saying lazily from her chair, and she was above it all at first, but after a while she herself got the urge and said she thought she’d better call up Barbour. “Doug to you, Mr. Hathaway,” she added, because Chuck had recently reproached her for that surname trick of hers, which he disliked. It was pointed out now to Sheila that if Nancy couldn’t get through to Burlington, she couldn’t either, but Sheila dismissed this logic airily and betook herself to the bedroom phone—whence she returned in triumph five minutes later, having had the luck of the undeserving.

“No delay at all,” she said maddeningly. “I just gave them the number, and they put the call right through.” This was after Nancy’s Burlington call had

been in for more than two hours.

"Had Doug seen Norman anywhere today?" Nancy asked eagerly; but Sheila didn't know. "I never thought to ask him."

It was nine o'clock by this time, and they all agreed that they were hungry—or at least that they should eat something—but nobody wanted to leave the phones, and there was no William to prepare a meal in the apartment. At nine-fifteen Chuck telephoned out for sandwiches and coffee; at about ten-thirty the order finally came. In the interim they drank more drinks—even Nancy drank one, and then two, while they were waiting. She was afraid to switch from the whisky she had had in the bar uptown, even though that had been hours ago. People always said you shouldn't mix things. So she declined the sherry that Chuck offered her, and drank the first mild highball, then the second. They were not mild enough, however, as it proved. Not on an empty stomach.

"I feel a little wuzzy," she thought presently.

But that was just before the sandwiches arrived. The feeling passed when she had eaten—and of course the coffee was a major help. Now she felt quite all right again; better, in fact, than she had felt all evening, in every way. And it was at this juncture that one of her attempts to locate Norman succeeded, in a measure—she had been told an hour ago that the house number did not answer, so she had given two alternative Burlington numbers to the operator. He might be at his parents' house, or at the Phillipses' next door. "And if he isn't there himself," Nancy had said in desperation, "—not at either number—then I'll talk with anyone who answers."

So now she had Bee Phillips on the wire. Well, better than nothing.

"Isn't it *awful* about the news?" Bee gasped immediately.

"We've never left this radio—— Wait just a minute, Nancy, I can't hear you. Wait while I yell to Joe to shut it off——

"There, now," she said, returning. "That's the first time it's been off since three o'clock this afternoon. We've just been sitting right here on the floor, with our heads practically *in* it. Well, how are you, Nancy? How's New York? Have you been having a good time?"

Nancy thought exasperatedly, *My goodness, Bee, I didn't call you up to have a* chat! But she managed to say, "Yes, fine, thank you. Until today. Bee, look, where's Norman, do you know?"

"He went to Pittsburgh," Bee said promptly. "He drove up—he and Jean. You know, my house guest, Jean Lewellyn. You remember her. They left here about six o'clock, I think it was. Jean had to get home—she got all excited as soon as she heard about the Pearl Harbor thing, on account of her brother who's in the Philippines, and one thing and another—and she wouldn't stay,

and I couldn't get her to. So Norman said he'd drive her home."

"That—that's funny," Nancy said slowly. "All the way to *Pittsburgh*? I mean, it seems a funny place for him to go. I mean, on a night like this." She moistened her lips a little. "Well, anyway. Is he coming back home again tonight, did he say? Or is he staying over? Or what?"

"I guess he was planning to stay over," Bee said. "He ran across to your house and threw some things in an overnight bag. I suppose he'll be back tomorrow sometime."

"You don't know where he might be staying, so I could phone him there? What hotel, or anything?"

"Why, no, I don't. Where does he usually stay in Pittsburgh?"

"But that's just *it*!" Nancy's voice soared. "He never *goes* to Pittsburgh! That's what's so f-funny about everything——"

She checked herself, although a little late. She'd be in tears if this kept up.

"Well, anyway," Bee said soothingly, "he wouldn't be staying at Jean's place—I shouldn't *think*," she added, spoiling it. "She just has this little tiny apartment, with only room enough for herself. She's divorced, you know."

"Of course I know it," Nancy snapped.

A most disturbing vision of Jean Lewellyn rose in her mind and stayed there, smiling like a minx, and smiling steadily at that. Norman had said she had fat ankles, and he had said that she talked all the time, but the fact was—as Nancy remembered now—that Jean Lewellyn talked very amusingly; and maybe, in the ten days just past, Norman had grown to like this loquacity, and even to forget about the fat ankles. The rest of Jean Lewellyn was distinctly attractive and glamorous; there was the red hair, and the very white skin, and the very superior figure indeed. Jean Lewellyn even had green eyes—almost emerald-green—like a storybook redhead.

And she was one of those girls with legends surrounding her—most of which came from herself, but never mind that. Her marriage and her divorce made a wonderful, mad, merry saga, as Jean told it; she had even served as her own co-respondent, caught in a hotel room with her husband. She had covered her face with the bedclothes so as not to be recognized by the official invaders. That was the kind of thing. Prior even to that jaunty chapter she had been on the stage for a year—in summer stock, and then in a small part in a road company of *Personal Appearance*—and there was simply no use talking, and Nancy had always known it: girls who had been on the stage, even briefly, had something that other girls usually lacked. It was a special kind of poise, and it was terrific.

All this went through Nancy's head in a few seconds at the telephone; and

she simply had to know what the situation was. Even at the risk of hearing something she didn't want to hear, and even though it humiliated her to say it, she had to say to Bee, "It sounds as though Norman likes Jean pretty well!" She tried to make it sound light, and she added a gay little laugh on the end of it, although the laugh didn't turn out to be quite what she had hoped it would be. It was little, all right, but it wasn't gay—in fact, it was distinctly forlorn.

"Oh, he does!" Bee said earnestly. "They got along just fine. He's been over here at our house all the time."

That was almost all there was to the conversation. There seemed to be nothing else for Nancy to ask, and her voice wasn't up to it anyway, and Bee now launched into an agitated monologue on the subject of how people in Burlington were taking the war. They were taking it very seriously, Nancy gathered, without half listening. "And, my dear," Bee said tragically, "*everybody* thinks there'll be a bombing raid on Burlington before this is over. The Huddleston Steel Works, you know—where your father is. And the Tri-County bridge. And of course the reservoir, while they're about it. And even maybe Joe's father's factory—— Oh dear!"

Joe's father's factory made paper labels, including some for cartridge boxes. This was the climax of Bee's list of obvious enemy targets, and in a minute or two more Nancy was able to get off the telephone.

She went back into the living room, trying hard to keep her face composed, because of course they would all look at her inquiringly as she came in. They did; and Sheila said, "Well? Did you finally raise somebody?"

"Yes. Bee Phillips."

"What's with Bee?" Sheila said. "You mean she knows where Norman is?"

"He's gone to Pittsburgh."

To her relief, Sheila didn't seem interested, and didn't question her any further. "You see?" Sheila said to the men, instead. "That's the kind of town it is. If you want to find out anything about your own family affairs, just ask your neighbor."

"You look tired, baby," Jimmy said to Nancy.

"I am, kind of. I think I'd like another highball now," said Nancy, "if you don't mind."

They fixed her one—another mild one—and she sat there before the fire and drank it. It might be a mistake, she was aware of that, but she told herself rebelliously that she didn't care if it was. Norman had no business going to Pittsburgh with Jean Lewellyn. "Well, no," she thought, trying to be fair, "it isn't that exactly. Of course he has a right to do whatever he wants to do. After all, think of the people *I've* been seeing these past ten days—people he doesn't

even know. So why should I feel this way, just because he saw a lot of Jean Lewellyn? If he really did. Maybe he didn't, really, anyway. Bee always exaggerates everything."

But it was no use. The major question kept gnawing at her mind; and she kept thinking over and over, "But why did he *want* to drive her all the way to Pittsburgh, on a night like this? I just don't understand it, unless—unless he likes her an awful lot. I just simply don't understand it at all."

She also thought, "He didn't even call me up, or anything. He didn't even try to. He just threw some things in a bag, Bee said, and away he went with Jean Lewellyn. Here was this terrible night, and here I was trying so hard to talk to him, and he might have known I would be, but what did he do? He forgot all about me. He——"

She put her empty glass down, having decided suddenly that she wasn't making very good sense, and that she could reason better without it. She thought of it as still half full at least. She felt a little drowsy now, and this was an amazing thing, because you wouldn't believe you could get sleepy with so many awful troubles on your mind.

It seemed you could, though. It had definitely happened to her, all at once. The firelight was warm and good on her face, and the chair she was sitting in was much too comfortable, and in another minute she wouldn't be able to keep her eyes open. Sleep would be welcome anyway—she could forget the war and Jean Lewellyn, and in the morning maybe things would begin to look better, since they couldn't look worse. She said to Sheila, "It must be getting awfully late, I guess. Don't you think it's time we went home? I mean to the hotel?"

But Sheila was wide awake, and she didn't think anything of the kind. "Why, don't be silly," Sheila said. "It's only a little after eleven."

"Oh. Is that all?"

Sheila glanced sharply at her then. "Yes, that's all," she said. "And I'm not leaving yet. It's too exciting, still. How can anybody want to go to bed, with all this history happening? We might miss something frightfully important.

"No, I'm staying," she added. "But you don't have to wait for me. You go along, if you like. Jimmy will take you."

Nancy thought, "I can't," and it was true enough. She felt too relaxed to move. She said aloud, "I'll stay a little while longer," and she thought, "I'll *try* to keep awake." She even thought now that another sip or two out of her highball glass might help—and she looked into it, but there was nothing there except some melted ice. This seemed odd, but not irreparable, and she extended the glass vaguely, thinking that Chuck or Jimmy would spring to fill it for her. But Chuck and Jimmy were back at the maps again, or back at the

radio, or somewhere. Anyway, they weren't in sight, and she was too tired to turn around, and there was only Sheila, who was now watching her with interested, bright eyes.

"You want another drink, don't you?" Sheila said sympathetically. "Just a little tiny one. Shall I mix it for you?"

"Um-hmm. Please," Nancy said. "That's—awfully sweet of you."

She remembered Sheila's mixing the drink, looking gay and pretty in the firelight, and talking to her all the time, in a kind of cheerful girl-to-girl way. She remembered thinking that Sheila had forgiven her, after all, and that that was nice, and that it would save a lot of trouble. She even remembered saying, "I really didn't mean to slap your face, Sheila," and she remembered Sheila's saying that it didn't matter, and laughing it off. And that was quite the last thing she remembered, until morning.

She woke slowly, struggling up from profound sleep and knowing even as she did so that consciousness was going to be painful—physically painful. It was, and her head ached, and she thought dismally, "Oh, my!" She opened her eyes, and found the room pitch dark around her, and for a moment she lay staring into this blackness, while her sixth sense told her not to be fooled. It looked like night, but it was really day. Or almost.

She turned over then, intending to consult the little bedside clock with the illuminated dial, Sheila's little folding traveling clock, that always stood on the telephone table between their beds in the hotel room—and it was then she realized that she wasn't in the hotel room. There was a frantic fraction of a minute when she couldn't think where she was at all, or even where she might be. Then a degree of recollection came, and brought the first suspicion with it, and she sat up wildly, groping for a light she could turn on. Even before she found the light, she knew her whereabouts only too surely. This was Chuck's bedroom, and here she was, and it was early morning. . . .

"Sheila!" she cried imploringly aloud. It was a vain hope, though. Sheila wasn't in the room; she'd been alone here, and was still alone. She found the bedside light now, and switched it on, confirming everything. Here was Chuck's bachelor bedroom, spacious and strange around her. It was familiar only as a place to leave your wraps, and as the place where she had spent so much time trying to telephone last evening—and here she was in bed in it. No, *on* the bed. That was a little better. Someone had turned down the top cover, the big heavy daytime silk thing, but otherwise the bed was still made up, and she was lying on top of it. There was a silk quilt over her—at least there had been. It had slipped off now. She was completely dressed, except that her belt

was loosened and her shoes were gone. She looked around for them, and found them on the floor at the side of the bed. They were set primly there. She hadn't kicked them off herself, then; they had been taken off, and placed just so.

"What *time* is it?" she said aloud, as though this were the all-important question. Even "Where's everybody?" sounded less so, though she tried that next. Her voice rang out despairingly in the solitude. She got up from the bed, and in her stocking feet crossed over to the chest of drawers, because there was a clock there. It said six forty-seven. She picked it up and held it to her ear, and set it down again.

There was a mirror above the chest of drawers, in which she now examined her white face with the wide, startled eyes, and her disheveled hair. The hair was really in a mess, but otherwise her image was faintly reassuring—she was herself, she looked the same as usual, though of course paler. She found that her own handbag was lying there, among Chuck's toilet articles, and she took out a comb and make-up things and carried them into the bathroom. She felt better when her face was washed and freshly powdered, and when her hair was combed. She reddened her mouth bravely, and felt almost well again, although she wished she had a toothbrush. . . . There was some mouthwash in the medicine cabinet, and she used that. "There, now," she thought. "And here's some aspirin." She took one tablet.

Her headache wasn't really very bad, she realized now. This must be only a slight hangover, and not the kind that people moaned and carried on about. It was her first, and it was nothing much. Beginner's luck, or something.

She went out and down the little hallway, into the living room. Chuck was there alone—he was sitting at his desk, and his back was toward her. The room looked just as she last remembered it, with the maps strewn all around, and the empty highball glasses, and the overflowing cigarette trays. The fire had died out now, though, and there was only one charred log, with one red spark in it, lying on a gray pillow of ashes.

Chuck still had on the tweed suit he'd worn yesterday, but with the coat off now; he had a sweater on instead, and the coat was hanging on the back of the chair behind him. He was working very hard and absorbedly, cleaning out the desk. He looked as though he had been busy there for hours—all night, even. It was a huge, carved desk, gracefully bowlegged, with a leather top, and it had many drawers, and all their contents were out of them and heaped on the surface, any which way. Chuck was tackling this mound of papers, examining them one by one. Two wastebaskets flanked his ankles, and both baskets had brimmed over, and torn papers littered the floor for some distance around.

"Hello," Nancy said, in a small, miserable voice.

Chuck turned his head and smiled at her, and said, “Oh, there you are.” He stood up, with the aid of one hand pushing on the chair back. He looked tired, and he moved that way. His hair rumpled, and there was an ink smudge on his cheek, and he needed a shave. He still smiled warmly, however, and he said, “How are you this morning?”

“It *is* morning, isn’t it?” Nancy agreed lugubriously. “I kept hoping it wasn’t. Oh, Chuck, what an awful thing for me to do! I slept here the whole night long—in your apartment.”

“Like a little top, I hope,” Chuck said. “Now, now. What’s so awful about that? It was a bit unconventional, I admit, but that was Sheila’s fault, not yours. Sheila ought to’ve stayed, too, as chaperon, but she walked out on you.”

“She did,” said Nancy tonelessly, not even making it a question.

“She did indeed,” Chuck said, “with a brisk rat-tat of her little high heels. She took herself off very shortly after you fell asleep in the chair. She and Jimmy and I—— Well, there was a little trouble.”

“What?” Nancy said wearily. “What kind of trouble?”

“Continuation of same kind,” Chuck said, also wearily. “It appeared that it hadn’t died down, as we’d hoped. It was just hiding out on us. The minute your back was turned, it emerged, and Sheila made a few snarling remarks about you, and Jimmy and I took violent exception to them, with the inevitable result. Sheila flew into a rage at us, and went home in it, as usual.

“Abandoning you to your fate, my sweet,” Chuck added, smiling straight at Nancy, “which might have been worse than death, of course, if there had been any wolves aprowl in the house. Or any villains with handle-bar mustaches and black hearts. There were none, however, and you were not molested. I hope I don’t have to tell you that.”

Nancy smiled wanly back. “I wasn’t really worrying. It’s just that it *looks* so awful—me being here all night like this. What would anybody think? Where was Jimmy, anyway? Did he go too? He must have.”

“He had to,” Chuck said, and there was more to say on this score; but Nancy, engrossed in her own contrition, was not listening.

“I drank too much,” she said woebegonely. “I don’t know how it happened—but it did. I’ve never been even a little bit tight in my whole life before, but this time I was drunk.” Her lip curled up, because it was such an ugly word, unfeminine, stupid. Then her mouth trembled suddenly, and she said, “What will Norman think of me? I got drunk, and passed out, and spent the whole night in your apartment——What will he *say*?”

There was no thought in her mind of withholding this confession from Norman when she got back home. Chuck understood that, and he didn’t even

mention the alternative.

"In the first place, darling," he said, "stop calling yourself names. You weren't 'drunk,' and you didn't 'pass out,' and there's no need for all this black remorse. You drank a little more than you're used to, and in the meantime we didn't feed you properly, and you were under a terrific emotional strain besides—and all in all, it was too much for you. Then, finally, you sat in front of the hot fire, and that topped off the whole combination, and after a while you just went to sleep, like an exhausted baby."

"I still wish you'd waked me up, though, when it got so late. Or maybe you tried and couldn't?" she asked humbly.

That seemed to be it. "You were really dead to the world, poor kid," Chuck said. "We didn't have the heart to try very hard. After Sheila left, Jimmy and I discussed the pros and cons, and we thought on the whole you'd be better off here, having your nap out in peace and quiet. We had reason to believe that there wouldn't be much of either for you at the hotel."

"I suppose not—if she was as mad as that."

"She was as mad as that," Chuck said.

"And what time did Jimmy go home?" Nancy inquired, after a little pause.

"He was here till about two o'clock. Then he had to leave," Chuck said. "I started to tell you this a minute ago. He finally got one of his calls through—the Washington one—and he had to get down there by morning. And, I might add, by hook or by crook. He called up the airport, being a dreamer, but you can imagine what came of that. It seems the whole place is bulging with brigadier generals, all waiting for seats on the planes. So Jimmy was headed for Penn Station when last seen. He left you his boundless love."

"What's he going to do in Washington?"

"Just what you think," Chuck said. "He's going to see a man about a war. Jim's got his eye on the Marines, and naturally he'd like a commission, and it seems he knows somebody down there he thinks can get him straight into that officers' indoctrination course, or whatever they call it—and no red tape, and no delay. That's what he hopes, at any rate."

"Oh, my," Nancy said, in a kind of moan, "is *everybody* going?"

"Yes, darling. More or less. That could be about the size of it."

"You——" Nancy began, and then she stopped, because it certainly wouldn't be tactful to say "You too?" in case he wasn't. . . . But when she looked at the desk beside him, at the things he was doing, at this whole self-evident business of putting his house in order, she knew that she could risk saying it perfectly well, and even should say it. So, after the little hesitation, she said, "You're going too. I can see that. Where are you going, though?

What are you going to do?"

The most curious expression settled over Chuck's face, and she waited, watching it. It was determined, it was grim, and yet there was a kind of glad relief and satisfaction in it. An excitement too. It was, in fact, a highly masculine look, and new to her, being peculiar to wartime. She would get quite used to seeing it within the next few days and weeks.

"Well, now, that's still a problem," Chuck was saying. "I wish I knew myself, but I don't yet. I'm going to try to justify my existence"—he spoke lightly, but there was that look again—"which hitherto has had no justification that I or anyone else could discover. But the method still isn't altogether clear, I regret to say. I mean I have a nasty feeling that I'm everything the Armed Forces don't want. In the first place, I'm thirty-nine years old——"

"You're not!"

He gave her a very sweet smile. "Thank you for that," he said. "But I certainly am. And a rambling wreck, I fear—what with sinus trouble and riotous living. God knows what I can get into. I only know it's got to be something or other. I can't sit this one out.

"And that's enough of that," he concluded abruptly. "Now let's get down to cases. In the first place, it's cold in this room, so I'd better bring in some more wood and build up that fire again. And then how about a spot of breakfast? You must be starving, and so am I."

"I could eat something," Nancy admitted.

"But could you cook something?" Chuck said. "That's the point. William won't be here till eight-fifteen, so either we get our own breakfast, or we wait another hour and a half, which is manifestly impossible. How are you at scrambled eggs and coffee?"

"Norman thinks I'm elegant."

"He does, eh? Hm'm. Well, we shall see."

In the shiny white overgrown cupboard that New Yorkers called a kitchen —and specifically in the big icebox which monopolized a good third of the room—they found everything they needed for a really sumptuous breakfast. Chuck helped Nancy take things out, and together they hunted up the right cooking utensils, and then Nancy said, "There, now. I'll do the rest. You go and shave, since it seems to be worrying you." Chuck went obediently, saying he'd be back long before the photo finish; and Nancy carried on alone, contentedly enough. She was wearing one of William's aprons, reefed up so it wouldn't trip her; and this was a nice little silly kitchenette, in a doll's house sort of way; and the food looked wonderful; and she felt brisk and able and efficient. "I'm going home today," she said to herself. "I'm not going to wait

till Tuesday night. I'll change those reservations, and I'll take the day train—if I can get on it. I don't even care if I have to stand up all the way."

Chuck reappeared shortly, presenting a shining morning face and wearing a clean shirt and a different suit. His wet blond hair had comb marks through it. He demanded an assignment, and Nancy said, "Well, you can fix up some kind of a table for us, if you want to." So Chuck put up a card table before the living-room fire, which he had replenished; and they found linen and silver and glassware, and Nancy set the table for two.

They had everything nearly ready—the bacon was crisp in the pan, the coffee was all made, the toast was browning beautifully—when there was a sudden peremptory buzzing from the house telephone on the kitchen wall. Nancy turned her head to identify the source, and then she glanced at Chuck, who was eying it, too, in mild surprise. "Now what?" he said. "Don't tell me I have callers at 7 A.M."

"Oh, heavens, I hope not!" Nancy said. "What would they think of me for being here?"

Chuck said, "I was kidding, darling. Of course it isn't anybody. It's just some message."

He took the receiver off the hook, and said "Hello" into the mouthpiece, and listened a minute; and then he said "*Who?*" Nancy saw how his expression changed, and how his eyes looked over at her. He listened again, and then he said, "I can't quite hear you. Would you spell that name?" But you could tell that he had heard it, and was just making doubly sure.

"Oh yes, of course," he said matter-of-factly then. "Ask him to come right up."

He replaced the receiver, missing the hook the first time but making it the second time, even without looking at it. He was looking at Nancy. "It's a very helpful thing to have a clear conscience, darling," he said. "That's your husband. He's on his way up in the elevator now."

"*Norman?*"

"So they tell me. 'Mr. Norman Avery calling from the lobby.' "

"But——" Nancy gasped. "Why, how—— What's he doing in New York? And how did he know I was *here*? He would have gone to the hotel——"

She stopped with that.

"Keep guessing," Chuck said dryly. "You're getting very warm."

"Oh, but Sheila *wouldn't*——"

"There is nothing Sheila wouldn't do," Chuck said. "This definitely proves it."

Now Norman—to go back a little—had first heard about Pearl Harbor at his parents' house, where he was having Sunday midday dinner. Or, rather, he had had it. Sunday dinner was always a tremendous meal at the Averys'; a killer-diller of a meal, as Norman sometimes said enthusiastically; and he and his mother and father (and Nancy, too, on more usual Sundays) always sat around in a kind of overstuffed stupor after it. They ought to have gone to bed for the afternoon, every one of them, and in the days when Norman lived at home his parents would have done so, but now he was a visitor, he lived in another house than theirs, a long way off—clear on the other side of town, in fact—and so the parental nap was no longer thinkable to the parental minds. They must keep awake and make the most of enjoying Norman while they had him here. They saw him only six or seven times a week, and missed him terribly.

So now they all three sat plumply about in the pleasant living room and rattled the Sunday papers, making desultory conversation. . . . Norman's mother was a great one for reading bits aloud. She could spy any name she'd ever seen or heard before, no matter how obscure the item or how tiny the print. She would have made a priceless employee for a clipping bureau.

"Jonas K. Witheridge is dead," she remarked now to her husband. "You remember him, don't you? On our Australian cruise?"

Mr. Avery didn't; and Mrs. Avery's attempts to remind him took up the next few minutes. Meanwhile, Norman drifted to the radio, in search of music. He got the Philharmonic first, but that was not what he meant by music, so he moved on hastily; and the next thing was an excited voice saying, ". . . aerial attack . . ."

Mrs. Avery, from behind her newspaper, caught only the two words; and Mrs. Avery was a woman who knew her radio vernacular. "Now, Norman," she protested gently. "Darling, please let's not have that. I don't mind watching football games, but I loathe listening to them."

"It isn't," Norman said.

"It isn't what?"

"It isn't football." . . .

Two and a half hours later they stopped listening, because Norman said he had to leave. It was after five o'clock, and Bee and Joe Phillips were giving a cocktail party—or at least they'd planned to, and Norman didn't imagine they'd called it off—and he had promised Bee that he'd show up for it. His parents both accompanied him to the door, as they always did; this time it was a little special, though. His mother even behaved as though she couldn't bear

to let him out of her sight.

"I wish you'd come back here afterward," she besought him more than once. "Come back and have supper with your father and me."

"Afraid I can't. I think Bee's having some kind of buffet business there."

"That's really where you're going, isn't it?" his mother inquired anxiously. "Just to Bee and Joe's house?"

"That's all," he said, and he meant it at the time. "Where did you think I was going?" he added; and he kissed his mother and laughed at her. "Off to get my gun or something?"

"Norman," said his mother, in a voice he'd never heard before. She took him by the shoulders and gave him what was meant to be a little shake, and would have been, except that she had such inadequate, small hands. "Norman," she said again, with the same urgency. "Listen to me. Don't even *say* that. Don't even say it in *jest*. You're not going to be involved in this war, and there's no reason on earth why you should be. You're a married man, and your duty is to Nancy—and to us—and to the business. Don't forget you're in an essential industry, you and your father. Thank God for that," said Mrs. Avery fervently. "And I do wish you and Nancy had a baby, in addition. Then I'd feel really secure. Surely they won't take fathers, even later."

"A nice patriot you are!" Norman said, still grinning fondly. "What a way to talk!" But otherwise he didn't argue with her. There would probably be quite enough of that when the time came.

They let him go at last, waving him off from the front steps. He drove his car downtown, and through the business section, and then uphill to the North Side, where his own house was, and the Phillips' house next door. Even from the corner he could see their lights, all blazing in the early twilight. There wasn't any space for parking left along the curb, or in Joe's driveway, so he pulled the car into his own drive and walked over, as he had done so often lately.

He had really spent a lot of time at Joe and Bee's since Nancy had been gone—he was aware of that himself—but it was not because he cared much for that chattering redhead they had visiting them. It was just that he was lonely, and theirs was the nearest friendly house; and, furthermore, there'd been a lot of parties and informal gatherings and stuff these past ten days and nights, because the girl was there. There was something going on all the time, in fact, and a perpetual crowd around, and even when Norman hadn't been specifically invited—because it was casual and impromptu and nobody had—he always knew that he had a standing invitation from Bee and Joe, and could just drop over. And very often he would, when he saw the lights and heard the music.

His own house seemed so damned empty, that was the whole thing. You wouldn't think such a mite of a girl as Nancy could make all that difference.

The plain truth was that Norman had been worse than lonely; he'd been desolate. He managed to keep this confession out of his letters to Nancy, and he tried to deny it to himself, but there it was, just the same. He kept telling himself to be his age, to act like a sensible human being, to stay in his house once in a while, and relax there, and read stuff, and go to bed early—but there was simply no use talking, the place was like a tomb. He couldn't settle down, he couldn't get interested in anything, and the only reading he could concentrate on was the ceaseless rereading of Nancy's letters from New York. This he enjoyed thoroughly, but you couldn't do it for hours every evening, and even the radio palled when you had nobody to listen to it *with*; and after a couple of million light-years of this he would look at his watch, and it would be only something like nine o'clock. And you certainly couldn't go to bed at nine o'clock—and you wouldn't sleep if you did. So he would go over to the Phillips' instead, striding across the patch of lawn, and through the gap they had long since made in the hedge.

He always had a fair enough time when he got there, and he would stay until he was sleepy enough to sleep, and then he'd go home. It never crossed his mind that anyone attributed the frequency of his visits to the charms of Jean Lewellyn, which to him were uncompelling, if not out-and-out negligible. She was pretty enough to look at, in the way that the paint-and-paper girls on highway billboards—the ones sipping soft drinks through straws, and the ones proffering packets of cigarettes, and lately the ones being beaued by rival army and navy officers—were pretty to look at. She interested him no less and almost no more than those billboard girls. It was true that she was a Picture With Sound, but with much too much of it, in Norman's opinion; and she was known to him in his private mind as "gabble, gabble, gabble." . . .

On this occasion there was no music emanating from the Phillips' house as he approached it; but the radio was on, all right, and turned up loud. While he was still outside, he could almost make out the words. Bee opened the door for him, and said immediately, "Isn't it *terrible*, Norman? Thank goodness Joey Junior's only three. That's all I can think about, somehow. Not that he could very well be much older," Bee supplemented meticulously. "We've only been married four years. Well, but come on in, Norman. Don't stand there. Brrrrrr, it's cold!"

Bee was something of a chatterer herself, when you came right down to it. "Well, where've you been?" she now continued. "We've phoned the house a dozen times, and yelled for you out of the windows, and Joe went over once or twice to see."

"I was at the family's."

"Oh. Well, you're here now, anyway. And here's everybody."

There were perhaps a dozen people in the living room, all the usual people, and most of them were draped around the radio, like figures of grief around a monument. Jean Lewellyn wasn't in sight—you could tell that at once, because you couldn't hear her. "Jean's upstairs packing," Bee explained. "She's all upset, and she's taking the six-nineteen."

"For where?"

"Home. Pittsburgh."

"That's too bad," Norman said politely.

Afterward he wondered just when it was that the idea occurred to him. It couldn't have been exactly then, but it must have been within the next minute or two. He sat looking around the living room, at all the familiar faces, and wishing already that he hadn't come, and thinking, "I'm not going to stay here." This was too static a place to be on such a restless night as this, it was too usual in every way, it didn't suit his mood at all. "I just dropped by for a minute," he started to say to Bee; but it seemed that Bee was still talking.

"She's all upset about her brother in the Philippines," Bee was saying. "She has this brother, and he went to the Philippines on a business trip, and now look at him. Anything might happen, the radio says. He might even get stranded there, with no boat. I don't wonder Jean's worried. But I keep telling her that it might be worse, because Pearl Harbor and Honolulu might have been right in the Philippines—and do you know," Bee said impressively, "that until today I always thought they *were*? I never was so surprised as when Joe told me no, they weren't. Well, and so anyway that's why Jean insists on leaving."

"I'll drive her home," Norman said.

He had murmured it, as though he were thinking aloud; and Bee hadn't quite caught it. "What, Norman?"

"I said, I'll drive Jean up to Pittsburgh. I'd like to," Norman added, in case a reason was required. "And it'll be easier for her that way. She's probably got a lot of suitcases and stuff."

"Yes, she has," Bee said. "Why, Norman, how nice of you! She'll be tickled to death. It'll be company for her and everything—which is wonderful, when she's feeling so blue. I'll go right upstairs and tell her about it. That is, if you really mean it?"

Bee still seemed a little amazed at him.

"Sure I mean it," Norman said.

It was all clear now, the whole scheme and schedule; and it was very good. Everything but the first step must have been there waiting, ready-made. Here was the answer to his restlessness, and to the things he had been thinking for the past two hours and a half, while he was at his parents' house; and now even a guidepost with a pointing arrow had been provided. Pittsburgh was ninety miles due east, and he would be well on his way toward New York, and it was nobody's business but his own if he kept straight on and drove all night. He could make it easily by morning. He supposed that there wasn't any real reason for keeping his true destination a secret—he might just as well have acknowledged to Bee that Pittsburgh was only a whistle stop this night—and yet somehow he preferred to leave it the way it was, and explain it later. He didn't want to tell anybody anything about what was going on in his mind, until he'd seen Nancy and told her everything. She had a right to hear it first.

And he couldn't wait to talk to her. That might be silly, but it was the truth. He couldn't even wait any longer to see her, as things were now. She wasn't due back here till Wednesday morning, and this was only Sunday night; and it seemed forever. You couldn't waste all that time away from your girl—not any more, not after today. There just wasn't going to be any to waste.

So that was how it came about. They left half an hour later. Norman and Jean Lewellyn, with all Jean's luggage in the rumble seat. The ninety miles until he dropped his passenger were not conducive to clear thinking, since she rattled on about as usual and must be listened to; but after that he had all night, and he felt wide awake, and it was fine. Now he could really work things out—if there was anything that wasn't settled.

There was really nothing, though, as he discovered. He knew what to do.

Just for the record, it is time to say that Norman was an average and quite unextraordinary young American—and it makes no difference what the loving Nancy's estimations of him were. He was not at all unique, in any way. He was, in fact, an almost perfect cutting from a pattern—a good native pattern. The same elements had made him that had made millions of others. They had been born just after the last war; and they had been fashioned and processed for this one. They were Destiny's young men. And their lifelong preparation had ranged all the way from the enlightened diets that had strengthened them in infancy, and the outdoor sports that had toughened them in boyhood and in adolescence, to the mechanical things that their minds and their hands had understood always, from the very beginning.

Norman had been luckier in his background and upbringing than some of them had been—even, perhaps, than most of them had been. But in the main his history was the same as theirs. He had been forced to eat his spinach, and to drink his orange juice; he had been given the right daily doses of sun and air

and exercise and sleep; his teeth had been straightened when they needed it, and his 20/20 bilateral vision had been checked and guarded zealously; he had been sent to the local public schools. His mother had really made a study of a book or two she bought on child psychology, and had been sufficiently frightened by what she learned not to baby him too much. His father had taught him to throw a baseball, and to make things out of wood and wire, and to fight back with courage when he was hit, and not to cry when he hurt himself. . . .

When he was very young he got Mechano sets and electric trains for Christmas, and toy aircraft, in lieu of the lead soldiers of an earlier day. When he was a little larger, he got a tricycle which he rode like the wind, and then a bicycle. At the illegal age of twelve he was driving the family's car, and at fourteen he understood its inner workings and cared about them. He grew up tall, and he was a natural athlete and a versatile one, and the co-ordination of his muscles was fluid and rhythmic, and quicker than thought. And his hands were big, but there was a curious delicacy and patience about them. They were careful hands, they were precise, they were designed for precision instruments. And he was made of all these things, this Norman—and there was one other thing that should be mentioned. Always over the roof of his house, from the days of his earliest consciousness, the planes had gone humming east and west, the mail planes and the passenger planes; and the sound of their motors was part of the song of his life.

Well, and so now here was a war, and there was no more question in his mind of what to do about it than there was of whether to do anything. His train of thought all during this afternoon, while he was listening in his parents' living room, had been exactly what it would be: still according to the pattern. There were no heroics in it, there were no illusions, and there was no furious rhetoric. It was his father who had raved and ranted, cursing the Japanese, saying, "Why, those yellow so-and-so's! We'll smash their teeth in!" And all that.

Norman hadn't said much; and his mental phrases had been—as they still were—the faintly disgusted but nevertheless good-humored, slangy ones with which he might have greeted any other disagreeable duty of his life. He thought merely that, well, damn it, here was a job to do. It was a dirty job, unwelcome, inconvenient as all hell; but it was for him and his contemporaries, and nobody else could do it. It was their war, it had their names and numbers on it, and their dates of birth; and when you had to go, you had to go—and fly an army kite, you hoped. Twin-engined, preferably. One of the big babies.

Nancy said now to Chuck, “I’ll let him in. I want to talk to him alone—before he even sees you. You stay right here in this kitchen till I call you. Don’t you move.”

But Chuck thought otherwise about it. “Why, nonsense,” he said mildly. “I’ll do nothing of the sort. I’m not going to skulk in any kitchen while you deal with this. What do you think?” He even smiled at her. “And what do you mean by ordering me around in my own apartment? It’s my front door, and I’m going to open it. At least I’m going to be on hand.”

“Oh, *please*!” Nancy said desperately. “But it’s *my husband*! And I know him, and you don’t! Please let me let him in all by myself, and talk to him first. It’ll be so much better that way. I can explain everything better without you ——”

But Chuck was adamant; and in the end they opened the door together.

There hadn’t been time for Nancy to do any speculating as to how Norman would look, or what his attitude would be; and yet she must have known what she expected, because now she knew this wasn’t it. She was completely unprepared for the calm-looking Norman who was standing there. You couldn’t say that he looked casual, or anything like that—his face, for instance, was dead white, and his eyes went straight to Chuck before he even glanced at Nancy—but still and all, he seemed far more composed, and far less overwrought, than you’d have dared to hope beforehand. This was a puzzled husband; this was a husband who wanted an explanation and meant to have it, and right soon; but it wasn’t the avenging fury of a husband you had been afraid of.

“Hello,” he said to Nancy.

“Hello, Norman.”

Chuck said, “Please come in.”

Norman came in, although not far in. Chuck shut the door again, and they all stood there in the little foyer, in a well-spaced triangle. Nancy had quite forgotten that she was still wearing William’s apron, and even now when Norman eyed it quickly she didn’t remember that she had it on. She was trying to make his eyes come back to hers, and stay right there.

They did come back, and she said, “Norman, listen. Don’t say anything till I explain this to you. It isn’t the way it looks at all. It was a kind of accident. I don’t know what Sheila told you, but—I drank too much, that was the reason. And I fell asleep, and nobody could wake me to go home, and Sheila——”

“Could I say something?” Chuck put in. “It was entirely my fault——”

“This is Chuck Hathaway, Norman,” Nancy said distractedly.

To her astonishment, Norman extended his hand. He didn’t even seem to

hesitate about it. Perhaps it was sheer reflex—automatic courtesy, and unintentional in this case, and maybe he regretted it—but anyway, it happened, and the two men were shaking hands. You would have thought this was just any ordinary introduction, except that it was so much graver. Both their faces were so solemn. Norman didn't say anything, he just gave Chuck another of those level, measuring looks, such as he'd given him when the door opened. Chuck met it squarely, as he had before, and as he could.

"I'm very glad to see you, Norman," he said simply; and you couldn't doubt him. It was even plain that he had chosen the word "see" deliberately.

Then he said, "What do you say we all sit down, and get this whole thing straightened out. Let's not stand here."

"Yes," Nancy said, and she turned and led the way into the living room. Almost immediately she looked back, afraid that Norman might not follow her; and it was true that he had stopped, but for a reassuring reason. He was taking off his overcoat, and Chuck was helping him.

"Thanks," Norman said. And Nancy heard him adding conversationally, "I haven't had that off all night. I drove clear through from home."

"Nice going." Chuck's voice again. "That's quite a jump. How far is it, exactly?"

"Four hundred and sixty miles. Or just about."

Nancy thought, "Why, they're *friends*!" . . .

Then Sheila should have seen the three of them, and Sheila should have heard how easily they got the whole thing straightened out, sitting there in the living room. Nancy kept wishing she would happen in, to view this pleasant miracle, and Chuck said afterward that he had kept wishing so too. "She would have learned a lesson about people," as he put it. This was a compliment to Norman, Nancy knew; not to himself or her; because of course no truth or earnestness of theirs would have prevailed, if Norman hadn't been the kind of person Norman was, and if he hadn't had the kind of trust in Nancy that he did have. This was a steadfast, shining faith, and it proved now that he had never lost it for an instant; it had never even wavered. Chuck had been the unknown quantity, and that was the whole thing.

"You do believe me, don't you?" Nancy kept saying anxiously, now that the narrative was over.

"Well, sure I do."

"That's absolutely all there is to tell you. What we've told you."

"I know that," Norman said.

"Well, but it's bad enough, I guess. Well, aren't you mad at me? I mean for

getting tight, and passing out, and all? My goodness," Nancy said, "I certainly would think you would be! The whole thing was the worst thing I ever did in my whole life."

They had forgotten Chuck. It was as though he were not there at all, just for this moment.

"Look," Norman said. "I'm not exactly pleased with you about it. I won't pretend I am. You ought to have a spanking, and it might be you're going to get one. But as for blaming you too much—or being mad at you—well, no, I don't feel that way. I see just how it happened. Everybody makes mistakes."

"Oh, Norman, that's so wonderful!" Nancy sighed happily.

"It is, at that," said Chuck, sounding quite awed.

"Well, gee," Norman said, seeming suddenly embarrassed by all this. "What did you expect? A scene, or something?"

Then they talked a little about Sheila, so as to catch up. Norman supplied the missing link; or rather he confirmed it. "It was sort of a shock, I must admit," he said. "I didn't know what to make of it at all. I got to the hotel, and I phoned your room from the lobby, and of course Sheila answered—and right away I thought she sounded kind of queer, when she recognized my voice. So then when I said, 'Put Nancy on, will you?'—well, then she said, 'Nancy's not here, Norman.' And she went on to tell me where you were, and all about it."

"You mean the way it really was?" Nancy said breathlessly. "Or did she make it even worse? What did she say, exactly?"

"She gave it to me pretty straight, except that she made it sound—— Well, you know. I don't like that girl," said Norman darkly, "and I never did. I don't know why I ever let you run around with her."

"Well," Nancy said, "I've stopped. Don't worry."

Chuck spoke at the same time. "You're right," he said to Norman. "I don't think you know the half of it. Sheila has really been hitting some all-time lows in the past week or so. Everybody fell in love with your Nancy, you see, and she couldn't take it. That's really what's at the bottom of all this. I'm sure I don't know why she didn't realize it was bound to happen—but it seems she didn't."

"I don't know either," Norman said, with a proud glance in the right direction.

"Well, but still and all," said Nancy slowly, "when you come to think about it, what else could she have said when Norman called the room? She couldn't produce me, and she couldn't pretend I was there when I wasn't. Unless I'd just died in the night, or something. She had to explain where I was somehow."

"You *would* think of that," Chuck said, with a groan. "You're an incurable forgiver, you are."

"Well, Norman's forgiven *me*!" Nancy pointed out blissfully, if illogically. "Only you haven't kissed me hello yet," she complained to Norman. "You forgot about that when you came in."

Chuck said, "I will leave you two lovebirds—at least for the moment. I'll go take a look at the world's coldest breakfast. Now, now, never mind," he added, as Nancy looked aghast at the reminder. "It wouldn't have been enough for three anyway."

"I left everything burning, though!"

"I didn't," Chuck said. "I turned everything off."

Norman and Nancy went out onto the terrace a few minutes later. "I want to show you New York from here," Nancy had said. It was nice being alone together, and they would still be alone on the terrace, whereas there was no telling when Chuck would come back into the living room. There was still a great deal to say, though Nancy didn't know just what it was. She had already covered the subject of Jean Lewellyn, and *that* was all right—even though it had left her feeling penitent and sheepish.

"Why are you so much nicer than I am?" she had inquired of Norman. "Here I spend the night in a bachelor's apartment, and you don't think anything wrong of me, and meanwhile you drive Jean Lewellyn to Pittsburgh on your way here to see me, and I think all *sorts* of things!"

"That's because you're a goon," Norman said fondly. "Come on, get your coat. Where's this terrace?"

"It's all around you. Goon yourself!"

Her beaver coat was still lying on the chair just inside the door, where she had left it last night. She put it on, and pulled it tightly about her, as though it had no buttons, and hugged it that way with her arms, tucking her hands into the sleeves. "We go out this way," she said to Norman. . . .

He opened the door to the terrace, and they stepped out on the red tiles, and Norman closed the door again behind them. It was a little misty now in the morning, but you could tell that it was going to be another clear, cold day, like yesterday.

They walked across to the parapet, and stood there, gazing at New York.

"Say! Look at it!" Norman said.

"Isn't it terrific?"

"It sure is."

"That's the Chrysler Building," Nancy said possessively. "The one with the kind of silver needle on top. And the one with the kind of long thimble on top is the Empire State. That's a mooring mast—only nothing ever moors, they tell me. And then, let's see. Oh, that's the Waldorf-Astoria, with the kind of beehives. And then there are all those others," she wound up, gesturing expansively.

"It's the windows," Norman said. "They're what gets me. How many windows do you suppose you can see—just from here? How'd you like to have to wash them all?"

"You might have to help me," Nancy said, "before the day was over."

They stood with their chests against the parapet—Nancy's chest, and Norman's midriff, because he was so much taller. Nancy leaned her elbows on the flat stone top, and Norman stood close and put one arm around her shoulders. "If I should spit from here," Nancy said, ducking her head far forward, "would I hit anybody, do you think?" And Norman said, "Not so they'd notice it. You go ahead and spit, if you feel like it."

He always understood every smallest silly thing you wanted to do. But Nancy didn't do it this time. It was no day for small and silly things. Instead she said soberly, "I'm terribly glad you came all the way over here to get me, but I'm still kind of surprised. Was it just to save those two days? You must have missed me as much as I missed you."

"More," Norman said.

She shook her head at that. She said, "I was coming home today anyway—if I could get on a train. But now that you're here, we can stay over as long as we want to, can't we? Or—can't we?"

It was a kind of test question, and very important. She waited almost without breathing.

"Well, no, I'm afraid not," Norman said. "Not this time. I mean, there's a lot to do, and a lot to plan, and all. We'd better get back. This just kind of isn't the best time to take a holiday."

"No. I guess not. But it would have been such fun," Nancy said. She could pretend, and she did pretend, that the quaver in her voice was disappointment, not fear. To carry it out, she said, "I could have showed you all around New York—the way they've showed me. All the time I've been here, I've thought that that would be the most fun of all—to come back here with you sometime, and explore everything, just the two of us."

"Well, and we will," Norman said. "Don't you worry about that. But—not this time."

"All right," Nancy said; and in her own mind it was as though she bowed her head. Now she was sure.

They were both silent for a minute then, both thinking in their separate ways of this and all the other things they might have done in the near future—that would have to be postponed now, for a while. Even that they might never do. They had a sense of the whole new world beginning, the grim world, the grown-up world. Maybe all the things they'd planned to do and see together would be different by the time they got to do them and to see them. Maybe nothing would ever be the same. This city with the towers that rose so arrogantly to spear the sky—you thought of their arrogance now as a reckless, dangerous thing; an asking-for-trouble. Maybe this town wouldn't be the same, maybe bombs would rain on it and level it—no, not level it, surely that was impossible, but scar and mutilate and blacken it, and leave great holes. You thought of those newsreels of London. Yes, perhaps. Maybe just like that.

A plane went over, very high, and they both watched it, lifting up their faces. It was a silver plane, and tiny—like something to wear in your hair, Nancy thought. She was still watching it when Norman said, "I'll tell you why I think we'd better start back home today. You're probably wondering what all the hurry is."

Nancy thought, "Here it comes," and she felt herself stiffen for it in every possible way. Mentally, spiritually, emotionally, even physically. Now in a minute she would know what he had in mind, and what he meant to do; and whatever it was, it was settled. It was entirely out of her hands. She said to herself, "I will have to be brave." And then, as a kind of patient corollary, "Women have to be brave." It was the first time she had ever really thought of herself as a woman, not a little girl any more, not little Nancy at all any more—but a woman grown.

It was a proud thing to be, no matter how terrified you still felt in your heart. It was a big, fine role to play; and she found herself able to play it, when the moment came. "I'd thought of the Air Force," Norman said. "I mean the flying end of it—not the ground. I mean if I'm lucky enough to make the grade ——"

He stopped and looked at her, and she was aware—with the new grown-up intuition that came with being a woman and not a little girl any more—that this was a moment when she could have weakened his determination, after all. She might not have been able to talk him out of it, but she could have cast doubts of one kind or another. She could have said, "Oh, Norman, how ridiculous! Why, you've never even been *up* in a plane, except that one little time to Cleveland!" She could have insisted that, for her sake, he find something safer to do. She could even have told him of her suspicion—which had been

growing these last ten days in New York—that they might be going to have a baby in another eight and a half months.

But she didn't do or say any of these things that she might have done, or might have said. The thing was bigger than she was now—it was so immeasurably bigger that you had to put yourself aside, forget yourself, be unimportant to yourself. You had to grit your teeth, say nothing except brave things, and not cry.

She said, "So that's what you want to do? I—kind of thought that would be it."

This prescience fascinated him, and he said, "You did, honey? But how? I never said a word about it."

"You didn't have to. I don't know—but I just knew."

Norman said, "You mean it's all right with you, then?"

Nancy couldn't speak, but she said to herself, "Nod your head," and she managed to do that, although it took her a long time to begin. It was so much the hardest thing she had ever had to do in all her life to date.

"Norman, look," she said then tremulously. "If I break down—right now—don't think it m-means anything, will you? I mean, not anything it shouldn't. It just means I love you, and I'll—miss you while you're gone. But that's all it means," she said, now sobbing outright, between words. "It doesn't mean I don't want you to do whatever you th-think you have to do——"

She turned and buried her face in his coat, and gripped his shoulders with her hands. She felt his arms go tight around her right away, and that was better. "You're such a good kid," his voice said, from high above her. "You're so swell." He sounded tremulous himself. "What did I ever do to deserve you?"

Even in the midst of grief she had to argue about that. "Oh, Norman, goodness!" she said shakily. "It's the other way around."


Lady
Not
Alone

BECAUSE this was a Thursday, and Thursday was Mademoiselle's afternoon off, Alison Sherman left her shop at four-fifteen. At four-fifteen and two seconds, having closed the plate-glass door—a modern door with chromium bars for trimming—she pushed it open again.

"And Violet," she said, "if that Mrs. Pomeroy comes—you know who I mean, don't you?"

"Mrs. Pomeroy?"

"You do know," said Alison. "Brown-eyed blonde. Hollywood eyelashes—to here. Complete with Russian sables. That will be Mrs. Mimi Pomeroy. If she comes in, show her the sketches in the top drawer of my desk—they're in a folio marked for her. And be sure and show her the new gold lamé negligee. The hussy one."

"All right, I will, Mrs. Sherman."

"I'll be late in the morning," Alison said. "I've got a dentist appointment. If that velvet doesn't come from Rinker's, telephone them, won't you? Tell them if they can't get it they may as well break down and confess. Oh, and Violet—while I think of it—will you call up a Mr. Roose, R-double-o-s-e, at Hellman-Jacques', in the boys' suits, and ask him what happened to Biff's extra shorts for the blue flannel jacket? Tell him I ordered two pairs and he sent only one pair."

"I'll do that, Mrs. Sherman."

"Bless you," said Alison, and departed again.

On the sidewalk she hailed a taxicab and shut herself into it—just in the nick of time, she perceived as the cab inched away from the curb. Behind her, the Juggernaut town car of Mrs. H. Richardson Reed was about to discharge Mrs. Reed and her debutante daughter. Since the shop on the left of Alison's shop sold only ready-made dresses, and since the shop on the right sold only semi-precious jewels, it was not difficult to guess where the Reeds were bound.

Alison through her taxicab's rear window observed them briefly, taking, care that they did not observe her. Her expression was wistful. It was even hungry. The Reeds were the Reeds; and they were trousseau-shopping, furthermore. "I ought to go back," thought Alison—knowing she couldn't. It

was late. She was lucky not to have been detained at all.

The taxicab moved on. Settled into her corner, her cigarette for the ride in hand, Alison fell to musing upon the inevitability of the advent of her most important customers on Thursdays after four. On Thursdays she had to get Biff at school, because there was nobody else to get him; and the minute she left—or the minute before, which was very much worse—a Reed or a Pomeroy came. This always happened; it never failed. Alison supposed that it was Fate's little frown at her for trying to run a shop while she was trying to rear a son. Fate was an anti-feminist, of course.

From the shop to the school was a fifteen-minute ride. It was now four-twenty, by Alison's Christmas present from Tom Jerome—a very little diamond watch set into the flap of an antelope handbag. Alison hoped that the watch was wrong, but feared that it wasn't; it was so new. She leaned forward and rapped on the front glass.

"Take Park Avenue, driver."

She pulled up one of the folding seats and put her feet on it. She had narrow arched feet in high-heeled black suède shoes. They were smart shoes, and everything else she wore was smart, because this was natural to her, and also because it was good business. She didn't overdo it, however—and she never sacrificed convenience to chic. The gloves on her hands could come off with one yank apiece, and no nonsense about it. The new black antelope handbag was a little overstuffed with contents. She was lugging a big and rather battered black portfolio, tied at the edges with tapes. She might have been any young professional woman, in any big city.

This at first glance. But it would have been a cursory first glance indeed that noted only Alison Sherman's type. The individual Alison commanded attention, and at once, because the hair against her young and vivid face was silvery-white. It was like a living wig, and very beautiful, and very startling. You wondered whether it had turned white in a single night, in the legendary way—it had that look of drama, and of suddenness. It was too old for Alison by thirty years.

But it was flattering. It accentuated the colors in her face, so that people said, "She has the bluest eyes." (Or the blackest lashes.) People said that she was picturesque, and in describing her they usually forgot that Alison's face and all its features—eyes, mouth, long straight dark brows, forehead, and chin—had character. They described her as a sort of bright design.

"Pink and blue and silver," they said, when they might have said, "Intelligence and courage and a sense of humor."

Her taxicab stopped eventually before a brick building on a side street, between great avenues. She was not very late, she saw at once. From both the building's double doors small boys and larger ones, all in blue caps with crimson *S*'s on them, were still tumbling. Governesses in little groups awaited them on the sidewalk, and town cars with chauffeurs edged the curb. The miniature gentlemen were led off homeward, one by one, or they were driven off, alone, in spacious tonneaux.

"Little plutocrats," thought Alison, amused. But this was New York, and the traffic was what it was, and you couldn't blame parents who could afford it for all this special, this chichi protection. It was just that Alison, whose own childhood had been spent in a little town, was sometimes, as now, diverted by the comparisons her memory offered. She could imagine what Biff's contemporaries in the Central Grammar School in Kent, Rhode Island, would think of Biff, well groomed and clean, walking sedately through the streets, with his gloved hand clasped in the hand of Mademoiselle.

She could imagine also, and this was more diverting still, what the Kent, Rhode Island, parents would think of Biff's school. A day school where the fathers and mothers of applicants for admission must be vouched for by the fathers or mothers of boys enrolled already; and nobody else at all would do. Alison Sherman, née Alison Evans, descendant of nine generations of solid New England citizens, had had a hard time getting her son into Stuyvesant—might never have got him in, in fact, had it not been for a Mrs. H. C. Heidrich, of the beer-brewing Heidrichs, who bought her handmade chiffon underthings at Alison's shop. Mrs. Heidrich's little eight-year-old stepson—by her third marriage—was a Stuyvesant boy.

The schoolhouse that Alison entered now was an oblong on end, ten stories high, squeezed in between two higher apartment houses. There was a gymnasium in its basement, a lunchroom on its ninth floor, a solarium on its tenth, and a wire-walled playground on its roof. Classes were held in the mornings only, in classrooms on the lower floors. Lunch by a Madison Avenue caterer was served in the lunchroom. The little boys were then laid out in rows in deck chairs, on the roof if weather permitted, or in the solarium; and someone read to them, firmly, for half an hour. At two o'clock, in busses, they were transported to the school's private playing field—nine traffic-weary miles away, across the Queensboro Bridge. At half past four they were brought back, to be collected.

New York, thought Alison again, ascending in the elevator, was a strange place in which to bring up a child. But what could you do? It was the best place in the world for selling the sort of things she sold—and, after all, you had to make a living.

Biff was on the sixth floor. Ever since the afternoon when Mademoiselle had been late, and Biff, becoming bored, had strolled across through the erratic taxis to see what it was like on the opposite sidewalk, and whether, as he explained, “the doorman over there would let me whistle with his whistle,” it had been thought best for him to wait upstairs, not down.

Biff was only seven, after all.

Alison found him putting on his rubbers in a coatroom. There were three other extremely young men in the coatroom, and the quartet was engaged in heated altercation. “You did too,” and “I did not,” and “He did, I saw him,” and “No, you didn’t either see me,” seemed to be the gist of this.

“Hello, Biff,” said Alison.

“Hello,” said Biff. “I didn’t know it was Thursday.”

He was pleased. He liked Thursdays. “Look,” he said, and indicated a spot of mercurochrome on his knee, above the turned-down border of a woolen stocking.

“Biff, how beautiful,” said Alison. “But how sad. What did you do?”

“I fell on a little stone while we were playing.”

He did not say—Alison was happy to note it—that someone had pushed him. He glowered, however, at a cherub in a plaid silk scarf, who promptly muttered under his breath, “I tell you I didn’t either!”

“What’s the matter with the rubbers?” Alison asked, before the argument could be resumed. “Here, sit down, Biff, and let me put them on.”

“One’s on.”

“Other foot, darling.”

This was a part of Thursdays, this kneeling on the floor on her tailored knees, tugging at a muddy rubber with shining finger tips manicured only this noon. Alison thought that she must surely remember, tomorrow morning, to tell Mademoiselle to buy some bigger rubbers. She always thought this, and always forgot. “Biff, remind me,” she entreated now, and her tone was an expression of the comradeship, fraternal rather than filial, which existed between them. “You always promise to remind me, and then you don’t,” she said. “A great help you are, mister.”

“I forget,” Biff smiled.

“So do I. We’re a pair of nitwits. There!” said Alison. “That’s on, and don’t tell me it isn’t. Stamp down on it. . . . All right?”

“All right.”

The coatroom was deserted now, except for them. “May I have a small kiss?” said Alison. “Right here?” She poked her left cheek with her forefinger.

“No, here,” said Biff, poking with his. He kissed her, and put both short arms, pudgy with layers of sleeves, around her neck. “I love you,” he said.

“That’s nice,” said Alison. “And I love you.”

“And that’s nice too!” concluded Biff.

It was a fixed and favorite ritual.

They started home. Sometimes they walked the twelve blocks, but this afternoon they rode. Biff never wished to walk, and today Alison was very tired. She had had a hard day. Thursdays were always, by some ironical chance, her hardest days. She thought of this now. On other weekday evenings she had only an hour and a half with Biff, after her shop closed, and before his bedtime; and that hour and a half was full of distractions and of Mademoiselle.

But on Thursdays she had three hours, uninterrupted, alone with her son. In her whole week there was no better opportunity for knowing him, for watching him and comprehending his development, and for making her own personal, vital contributions to it. For being his mother, in a word. It was almost her only opportunity. On Sundays people came, in crowds, despite her. There were really only three good hours in every seven days for doing the most important job of her life. It was wretched luck that the lesser job went wrong in the preceding hours, invariably, and exhaustingly. But there you were, again. It was another of those little tricks Fate liked to play.

She did what she did always—banished the thought that she was weary, and the hope that Biff wouldn’t be so strenuous as he usually was, and fixed her mind intently upon the rambling tale he was telling as they rode, her eyes absorbedly upon his face.

It was a delightful small face, she felt, and she smiled a little. The nose was so absurd. It was just a bonbon, tipped up gaily. Would it ever really be a nose, full length, with dignity? Would it be straight? Her nose, or Carey’s? Biff had hair like Carey’s, light and curly. And he had—“Heaven help women,” Alison thought, not very piously—Carey’s long-lashed great gray eyes.

He was talking about Carey now. This was a dream he had dreamed last night, or believed he had. Stories occurred to Biff, and he always accounted for them that way, unaware that they were the extemporaneous inventions of his mind, and that until the ultimate, “So then I woke up,” he had no idea himself what would come next.

“So I climbed up the tree fast,” he was saying, “and the tiger began to climb up the tree fast after me, and when I got to the tippety-top I heard somebody say, ‘Jump!’ and I looked down and it was my father. So I jumped, and he caught me, and we ran and ran, but the tiger didn’t suspeck anything, so he kept on climbing up the tree.”

“And he’s there still,” Alison suggested. “Prowling around among the branches.”

Biff shook his head. “No. He’s dead. Because as soon as we got to—to the place where we got to, my father took his gun and went back and shot him. *Bang!*” said Biff, making a gun of his forefinger and thumb and squinting down the barrel at the taxi driver. “Bang! Bang-bang-bang-bang! And that ole tiger was dead.”

“I should think so,” said Alison.

Biff nodded briskly. He settled back into the seat and drew his knees up, locking his arms around them. “My father is very brave,” he said.

“Very.”

“He isn’t afraid of tigers. He isn’t afraid of anything.”

“Not a bit afraid,” Alison agreed.

She thought, “You darling. Think that. I want you to keep on thinking that, always.” . . .

“And you know those dragon things in the Museum?” Biff was saying.

“The dinosaurs? Yes.”

“I guess he wouldn’t even be afraid of those. If they were alive, I mean. Would he, Alison?”

Alison was sure he wouldn’t be.

“That’s how brave my father is,” concluded Biff with satisfaction.

He smiled to himself. He was very proud.

Alison loved her apartment. Its rental was more than she ought to be paying—in times like these, especially—but she had decided on sight that it was worth it. Biff should have this little lofty stone terrace for a breathing space. He should have this big rear bedroom with windows facing south and west. He should know the blessed glow and pop of wood fires in a fireplace, and the airy expanse of a studio living room with a fourteen-foot ceiling. His meals should be cooked in a kitchen, not assembled in a serving pantry.

So Alison argued, versus her requisite financial caution. If you must keep your son in New York, she said to herself, you might give him a break.

When she unlocked the door this afternoon and admitted them, Biff repaired at once to the porch, across the studio and through the french windows, to visit a very small turtle named Bomber—Bomber Sherman Turtle in full—who was living a puzzled life in a pan outside.

Alison examined her mail. A first-of-the-month amount of it lay neatly

stacked on the foyer table. Some of the envelopes were addressed to Mrs. Evans Sherman, others to Mrs. Alison Sherman—and a few of the business ones called her "Miss." There was even one circular which bespoke a very old mailing list, because it said "Mrs. Carey Sherman," and it had been readdressed four times.

There was a penciled note from Mademoiselle on top of all the letters. "Twelve-thirty P.M.," the note said. "Mrs. Sherman: I am going now. A Mr. Harris telephoned. Some red camellias came and I put them in the icebox. There was no card with them. I will be in by eleven o'clock."

"Mr. Harris?" Alison thought. "Who——Oh!" That Southern boy at the party last night; the one who was trying to get a navy commission. "Young Texas," her host had called him. "Young Texas is *épris*, I see."

She gave no thought to the rest of the note. There was no mystery there. Orchids or gardenias or roses might need cards, but red camellias didn't. Red camellias were from Tom.

Depressing mail. Bills, bills, advertisements, pleas for contributions—more bills. One boy's suit, $35. The bill for a hat she shouldn't have bought. Biff's dentist bill, on heavy white paper, like an invitation. Twenty dollars for four exercise-and-massage treatments at Helga's. A liquor dealer's bill for a case of sherry delivered to the shop. "Mrs. Evans Sherman to the Stuyvesant School, Dr. Tuition for second term, February 1 to May 30, $450. Eighteen Luncheons, January, $27. Books and Supplies, $7.85. Bus, $2.00. Extras, $3.40. Total, $490.25."

She had not opened half the envelopes, but she did not open any more. "That will hold me for the moment," she decided. She swept all the bills into the table drawer, and forgot about them. She had that sort of mind, if not that sort of bank account.

She went to the porch door. "And how is Bomber?" she inquired of her son's small crouching back.

"He's very well, thank you."

"I'm delighted to hear it."

"At first I thought he was dead," said Biff, "but then he winked his eye. So I guess he was just cold. So now I'm exercising him."

"I see you are. You won't get wet, will you?"

"I guess not very."

"Not at all, please."

She left him there, and went back through the studio and down the little hallway to her bedroom, which was across from Biff's. She turned on lights as

she went, revealing charming color schemes and decorative effects—all of them unusual, all of them self-designed. She had enjoyed this job, and she was still rather proud of the result, as she should have been. She had done it all very economically, too, compared with the way it looked.

There was a dressing room off her bedroom, all white and silver and emerald-green; and she arrived there now, approached by her own image in the triple mirrors. She put away her gloves and handbag, and pulled off her hat. She had a great deal of the silver hair, and now she combed it loosely, making a soft round fluff of what had been a sleek coiffure. It was comfortable, freed like that. Incidentally, it was also effective. "Like a nimbus," Tom had said the other day, catching her that way. Biff's simile was better. "Like a dandelion," Biff said. "The kind you make a wish and blow."

Tom was coming later, at eight or thereabouts. He always spent these Thursday evenings with her. She would not dress now; she wouldn't borrow the time from Biff. She washed her hands and cleaned her face with cotton soaked in lotion, and made it up again. She was quick at this.

"I'll be right there," she called to Biff, who was calling from the living room.

Her head ached slightly, and she took an aspirin.

It was the usual Thursday from five o'clock on. Biff demanded the usual games—Bear, which was played on hands and knees under tables and the piano; Hide-and-Go-Seek through all the rooms; and Donald Duck and His Three Nephews, with Biff as Donald Duck, and Alison as all three of the nephews. They had assorted Disney-esque adventures, vast in scope, and highly energetic. "Now let me choose a game," she implored when this was over, and chose jackstraws as the least of many evils. She won, and this was a mistake, for jackstraws had to be played four more times, until the score stood Biff 3, Alison 2.

Biff dined at six-thirty, on soup and a soft-boiled egg and toast and a baked apple and a cup of cocoa. Alison could have thought up this menu, but there was no need. The incomparable Mademoiselle, who always tried to spare her every effort, had left things almost ready—the soup in the icebox to be heated, the egg in a saucepan on the stove, the cocoa, in the double boiler, the graham bread for the toast all cut. Biff's place was set at the dining-room table, and another of Mademoiselle's penciled notes lay under a medicine bottle on the kitchen cabinet. "Mrs. Sherman, please," said this note. "Here is Biff's tonic the doctor ordered. One tablespoon *before* supper." Even the tablespoon was there.

“Mademoiselle, bless her heart,” said Alison, “thinks I haven’t any brains. Furthermore, she spoils me dreadfully. I’m glad she doesn’t spoil you.”

“She’s used to not, I guess,” Biff said. “She’s always been here with me. What kind of soup is that, do you suppose, Alison?”

“It’s lovely chicken broth. Go in and sit down, darling, and I’ll bring it to you.”

“Tonight,” said Biff, “I want my napkin in my lap, not in my collar. I hate my napkin in my collar, Alison. I’m tired of that.”

“But you spill, don’t you?”

Biff was hurt. “Certainly not,” he said with dignity. “I haven’t spilled lately at all—except yesterday at lunch I spilled a little potato. But that was the last. And it was only a little, and it slipped.”

“As potato will,” Alison agreed. “Forgive me, Biffy. I keep forgetting how grown up you are.”

“Guess how much I weigh.”

“How much?”

“Guess!”

Alison obligingly guessed wrong three times, and gave up.

“I weigh forty-eight pounds and a half!”

“You don’t!”

“I do. Sir weighed us just today. Sir in the gymnasium,” Biff explained, for if the masters at Stuyvesant had names, their younger charges did not seem to know them.

“I am overwhelmed,” said Alison. “I’ve never heard of so many pounds. Darling, finish your soup before it gets cold.”

“You see,” said Biff, “the thing is, I’m prob’ly going to be big like my father.” He hesitated, anxious. “My father *is* big, isn’t he?”

“He’s very tall.”

“Taller than you?”

“Oh, much,” said Alison. She smiled. “Do I seem tall, Biffy?”

“When you stand up you sometimes do. Well, how tall is he, anyway?”

“He’s over six feet.”

“Is he taller than Sir at the playground?”

“I don’t know that particular Sir, I’m afraid.”

“Well, is he taller than Tom?”

“Than Tom?” Alison’s forehead wrinkled. “Yes, I think he is, a little.”

"Yes," said Biff. "I think he is a little too."

This settled, he fell to eating, and finished his soup. He began on his egg. The conversation veered from Carey temporarily, and the ways and means of growing tall and strong, including vegetables, and bed at seven-thirty sharp, and camp next summer, were discussed. It was agreed that the diminutive stature of one Peanut Rogers was significant: Peanut Rogers never went to bed till eight o'clock. On the other hand, there was Cry-Baby Atkinson, who went to bed at seven—or so scathing rumor had it—but who was littler than Peanut, even. Biff wished to know how this could be, and they reviewed the possibilities and brought to light the answers, which were that young Mr. Atkinson ate nothing but desserts for lunch, if he could help it, and that he spent his Saturday afternoons in movie theaters, while wiser men breathed fresher air in Central Park.

At this point the telephone rang, and Alison went to answer it. "When I come back I want to find that cocoa gone," she remarked as she left, and Biff's shrill, "But it's hot, Alison! *Alison!* I'll have to blow it!" followed her into the foyer and to the telephone. There the transition from divorced mother to popular young divorcée was accomplished with accustomed ease, and Alison's next words were, "Oh, hel-*lo* there, Sid! How are you?" . . . She remained at the telephone for some moments, looking detached but talking brightly, and in the end, having rung off, she turned the leaves of an engagement book and jotted the initials S. McD. and a dinner hour on the page marked Friday, February 6.

She returned to the dining room. "That was Mr. Sidney McDonald, and he sent you his love."

"I don't think I know him," Biff said pleasantly. "Look, Alison. I made this little house out of my toast." . . .

"Mr. Sidney McDonald," Alison said, when the house had been admired and windows to be bitten into it had been suggested, "is the one who gave you the wonderful microscope and all the slides. You ought to remember him."

"I do now. He has those whiskers," said Biff with sudden interest. "Hasn't he?"

"He has a mustache, yes."

"Why? I've been meaning to ask you."

"I don't know. Because it's becoming, perhaps."

"Two or three people have them," said Biff. "Or four people." He enumerated them on his fingers. "Owen—he's the elevator man at school—he has one. And Sir in geography has one. And Jimmy Bassett's father has. But not my father," Biff concluded, dropping his hands. "Not in his picture. I don't

suppose he has one at all, has he?"

"I don't believe so, no," Alison said.

She thought, "And we're back again." It was one of those evenings. There were other evenings, there were whole weeks; when Biff did not even mention Carey; and then there were times like this, when he talked of him incessantly. "My father." . . .

"My father looks better without a mustache," he was saying now. "He looks fine without one."

Alison nodded absently. "Why don't you call him Carey, ever?" she wondered aloud. "You call me Alison."

"But he's my father."

"I'm your mother."

"Well," said Biff, "it's different. I've known you a long time, and I haven't ever met him yet."

"Oh yes, you have. You just don't remember."

"I was a baby," Biff assented. Nibbling toast, he thought about it. "Did he like me?" he inquired.

"Of course. He loved you very much."

"Does he still, do you think?"

"Of course he does."

"I think he does too," said Biff contentedly. He was meditative again, and added, "Those are good roller skates he sent me for Christmas."

"They are, aren't they?" said Alison, who had bought them.

"Those are the best roller skates of any boy who goes to the Park. How does he always know what I want?" Biff asked unexpectedly. "He always does, Christmases and birthdays both."

"I know," said Alison. "Isn't it amazing? He must get thought waves. Eat your baked apple, Biff."

"I am."

He did. He became engrossed in eating it, and Alison glancing over at him thought, "That's that, I hope." But it was not.

"Look," said Biff, when he put his spoon down. "There's a boy——"

He broke off, and laughed, because Alison had looked at him cross-eyed. It was the established reprimand for saying, "Look."

"I forgot," he apologized. "But listen. There's a boy at school named Tubby Lee whose mother is divorced, too, but his father isn't in South America, like my father. He's here. Tubby sees him every Sunday and they go

to the Zoo. Unless it rains," Biff added doubtfully. "I don't suppose that if it does they do."

"No, probably not."

"And then there's another boy, named Alan Maitland, and guess what!"

"What?"

"He's got *two* fathers!" Biff crowed, holding up that number of fingers. "Two!"

Alison was appropriately impressed.

"I never heard of that before," said Biff chattily. "Did you? Two fathers for only one boy?"

"Well, yes," Alison admitted. "It sometimes happens." . . .

She tried to be honest with him on all subjects except one. She elucidated now, Biff listening with deep attention.

"What I don't understand," he observed at the end, "is why people get divorces. Oh, of course," he corrected himself, "I know why you and my fa—you and Carey did. Because he had to go away and you had to stay here. But why do people get divorces when they *both* stay here? Why don't they both stay here together, Alison?"

The Bear game would be much more restful, really. Even Hide-and-Go-Seek—through all the rooms—would be. Alison, explaining that people sometimes liked living alone better than they liked living together, wound up by saying, "And look at that clean plate! That's marvelous. Now we can play some more. What shall we play? Or shall we read?" she added hopefully.

"No, let's play Seal."

"Seal?"

"It's a new game. I just thought it up," said Biff. "It goes like this: you're a seal in the circus, and I'm your teacher of your tricks——"

Seven-thirty was Biff's bedtime. Tonight it was almost eight before she got him tucked away, he having remembered belatedly, while the windows were being opened, that he had some arithmetic to do. Alison was obliged to bundle him up in bathrobe and slippers, hunt the apartment over for his book, and set him to work at his desk. She was obliged to say exactly twenty times in as many minutes, "Now, Biff, pay attention. Drop that marble, you wretch! Four times three is what, exactly? Well, of course. And six times six——?"

When the arithmetic was done, and Biff was in bed, and covered, and thoroughly kissed, and the light was out, and Alison had left him, she heard

him shouting.

"Go to sleep!" she answered from afar.

"But I want to ask you something!"

"Save it for tomorrow morning."

"No, *now*! Because it's very in-portant! Alison, *please* come back!"

In the end, she went, though only to the threshold.

"Look," said Biff through the dark, "could a boy have three fathers? Could he have four? How many could he have in all?"

"Biff." Alison was stern. "You know perfectly well this is no time——"

"And another thing I wanted to ask you," Biff said rapidly. "If you would marry Tom, then I'd have two fathers, wouldn't I?"

"Yes. But I'm not going to marry Tom. Now go to sleep."

"Who are you, then?"

"I'm not going to marry anybody, goose."

"Why aren't you?"

"Why, because I don't want to. Because we're very happy as we are, just by ourselves. Because we'd rather not have anybody else here with us——"

"Except Carey."

"Except Carey," Alison echoed obediently. "Of course. Now, young man, will you subside, or shall I shut this door?"

"I'll subside," said Biff, and did at last.

II

Tom Jerome was recent in her life—she had met him in November; and that had been only three months before. It seemed incredible. He meant so much to her nowadays, he was so much a part of her scheme of things—yes, and of Biff's—that she wondered sometimes how on earth they'd ever managed without him. He was the best friend of them both, he was the one she went to for advice and counsel, he was the one who helped with everything, from Christmas trees to budget systems. Moreover, he was genial and amusing and attractive—"You are a paragon, my pet," said Alison, to sum it up. "You really are. There's just nobody like you in the whole wide world."

"Could this be love?" Tom inquired hopefully. He was trying very hard to marry her these days, as everybody knew. Even Biff knew it—and even that fact was no mystery. Tom had discussed it with him several times of late, as man to man.

“Platonic love,” Alison answered.

“There’s no such thing.”

“Of course there is,” she said, although she wasn’t sure herself. “How else can I define it? I love you dearly, but I’m not ‘in love’ with you at all. What’s that, if it isn’t platonic love?”

“Well, now that you ask me,” Tom said mildly, “it’s stuff and nonsense. It’s that old anti-marriage fixation of yours rearing its ugly head again. Stop confusing me with Carey Sherman, will you? The name’s Jerome.”

“As though I could!” said Alison, rather indignantly.

He was nothing at all like Carey, as a matter of fact. That was one of the most comfortable, reassuring things about him. He wasn’t too handsome, to start with—Carey had been spectacular, and as a result she was cured of any weakness for masculine beauty, forever and ever.

Tom looked the way she thought a man should look. He was pleasant-faced and blue-eyed, big and rugged, with the world’s best smile. He had straight brown hair, and his barber knew enough not to cut it too short, and he himself never let it get too long, and between the two of them it was quite a nice thing. “I even like the back of your neck,” thought Alison fondly; and once or twice she had said it. She also liked his ears, which protruded slightly and looked inquisitive; and his hands, which suggested power and sensitiveness at the same time. She liked his clothes, about which he himself cared just sufficiently and not too much. He dressed like a well-scrubbed tramp at his house in the country.

He was thirty-five years old, to Alison’s twenty-seven, and by profession he was a consulting engineer, and he was even a pretty good one. The recent times hadn’t been very prosperous for consulting engineers in general, but Tom and his partners had some government contracts, and the firm was keeping busy even though it wasn’t getting rich. Alison didn’t know, and didn’t care in the least except for Tom’s sake, just what his financial status was. He seemed comfortable enough. He had a part-time manservant to look after him, and a workaday car to get around in. He had the Connecticut farm for the week ends, and a bachelor’s three-room apartment in town—one of those fine old high-ceilinged apartments, in a brownstone building on a street near hers. He had remodeled both of these places himself, and both of them were charming, in a casual, unpretentious, highly masculine sort of way.

He and Alison had many mutual friends, and this had been true before ever they met each other—in fact, the only wonder was that it hadn’t happened sooner than it did. “They kept threatening me with you,” Tom had since told her, more than once; and she had said, “Well, and vice versa.” It was from

these mutual friends that she had heard about his early marriage, some ten years before, and about how his wife and baby daughter had been killed in a motor accident—with Tom himself at the wheel of the car, to make it still more tragic.

Everybody had thought he would never get over it. Alison remembered their saying that, and subsequently Tom had told her that he had thought so, too, for a long time. "Till lately, really." His blue eyes, unusually grave, had looked straight at her when he said "Till lately." That was before he had begun to say "I love you" in so many words.

Nowadays, all of Alison's most important dates belonged to Tom; and she was secretly even getting a little impatient of all the other dates. She kept them up more out of habit than out of actual enjoyment—habit and resolution. It was the only sensible thing to do. You couldn't suddenly abandon a variety of escorts, and cleave only to one favorite one, without being suspected of imminent matrimony, or of the well-known New York alternative. The second suspicion was always preferred to the first, of course, in certain circles. And it wouldn't be true, and it was far better to avoid the very appearance.

This was sound policy, Alison felt; but in practice it was boring her strangely. Things had even reached the point where the quietest evening with Tom was more fun than the merriest with anyone else. She loved Thursdays, for instance—these nice, peaceful, almost humdrum Thursday evenings in her living room. Sometimes they simply talked, sometimes they played backgammon or gin rummy; sometimes Alison did wartime sewing while Tom read aloud to her. Occasionally they both had work to do, and did it, Tom at a card table strewn thickly with papers from his office, and Alison in another corner at her drawing board.

This was what she had missed in her life for the past six years, ever since her divorce—yes, and even before that. This was it: this kind of intimacy; this particular sort of homely contentment. Not to have to go out, not to have to be gay, not even to talk unless one felt like it. . . . She was glad to have been so popular, knowing well that otherwise she would have been helplessly lonely, as so many women were in New York. But there was an emptiness and a futility about a program of existence in which dinner was always a restaurant meal, and men friends were escorts primarily, and all the other friends you had were business ones, or people you saw on parties—and there was nobody really close to you, no one you could really relax with. This was better. This was almost blissfully restful, by comparison.

Tonight when she got Biff into bed, and finally quieted down, she made a

few swift preparations for Tom's imminent arrival. In the kitchen she loaded a cocktail tray and carried it into the living room. She collected Biff's scattered possessions, spanked the cushions of the couch, and touched a match to the fire that was already laid in the fireplace. It blazed up in rather a temporary-looking way—but it would probably burn until Tom got there, at which time he could poke and prod it, as men loved to do. She left the front door a little ajar, because she certainly wouldn't be ready to open it for him when he rang. She was still in her office clothes, and here it was practically eight o'clock, and punctuality was one of Tom's masculine vices.

She went down the hall to the bedrooms again, and shut herself into her own unit, after pausing to ascertain that Biff's room opposite was now dreamily silent. In the next few minutes she took a quick, hot shower bath; ended it up bravely with a dash of cold—but was nimble about hopping out as soon as the cold water hit her—and thereafter robed herself in one of those big shapeless Turkish-toweling robes, the kind that dried you automatically while you yourself did other things.

She was still wearing this capacious blotter, and meanwhile pulling bits of silk and lace from dresser drawers, when the buzz of the front doorbell reached her from afar, accompanied by a cheerful bellowing sound that had no words. From the front rooms of the apartment Alison's bedroom door was invisible, so she opened it and thrust her head out and called, "Tom?"

"Who's Tom?" she heard him answering. "Hello, how are you?"

"I'm fine—but I'm late. Mix the cocktails, will you? And I'll be there in a minute."

"Don't hurry."

"Don't be silly. I'm hurrying like mad."

She closed the door, and dressed, humming a little to herself. She put on a hostess outfit of her own design, from her own workrooms—it was powder-blue velvet, and Tom's red camellias would go well with it. When the dress was on and fastened, she bibbed it carefully with a towel, and made her face up, and arranged her hair. On her way into the living room she made a detour into the kitchen and fished the camellias from their wax-paper nest in the icebox. There were two of them, and she tucked one into her coiffure and the other into her belt.

Tom had attended to the fire, she saw at once; and he had mixed the cocktails. Now he sat low-lounging on the couch before the fireplace, reading the evening paper. The back of his head was toward her, and the top line of the breadth of his shoulders. He had a fine look of belonging there—a permanent and solid look, as though you couldn't ever possibly uproot him.

“Hello, you,” said Alison lightly.

He hadn’t heard her coming, and when she spoke he threw the newspaper aside and jumped up quickly and came around the corner of the couch to meet her. He leaned down and kissed her on the forehead, as he always did. “How are you, darling?” he said. “Was I early? I’m afraid I jumped the gun a little. Hey, let me see the dress——”

He backed her off, and looked her up and down appreciatively. “That does it,” he said. “What a color! It’s terrific on you.”

“It’s the red camellias,” Alison said. “They make the dress. You’re so good to me, Thomas, my dream prince.”

“It’s a pleasure, madam.”

They sat down, holding hands in their accustomed friendly way. With his free hand Tom poured a cocktail for her, and refilled his own glass, saying meanwhile, “Well, and how are things? What kind of a day did you have?”

“Oh—the usual. A touch hectic, in spots. What about yours?”

“Mine was a little gem,” Tom said. “All hell broke loose on the Brooklyn job. Let’s not even talk about it. How’s my friend Biff?”

“He couldn’t be better. . . . But I want to hear about it, Tom.”

“After dinner, maybe. It’s a longish story. I want to hear about Biff, first of all.”

So Alison gave him the complete report she knew he really did want. Tom listened like a father—proud, amused, affectionate. “I miss him,” he said at the end. “I haven’t seen him since Sunday, do you know it?”

“You should have come earlier, then.”

“I wasn’t invited earlier.”

“Nevertheless, we needed you,” Alison said. “There were complaints. We played the Bear game—among several dozen others—and it seems you make a better bear than I do. A bigger bear, and louder, and more nearly the right color.”

“Well, there, you see?” Tom said triumphantly. “I am indispensable to this ménage. It’s just as I keep telling you.”

“This menagerie, you mean.”

“For example,” he said, ignoring the correction, “I’ll bet you forgot about the potatoes, since I wasn’t here to remind you.”

“I’ll bet I didn’t. They’re in the oven. They must be nearly done.”

There was a restaurant on the first floor of this apartment building, and sometimes they had dinner sent up on these Thursday evenings, but at other times they cooked something themselves. Tonight was to be one of those

nights. “I brought the rest of the stuff,” Tom said now. “Your kitchen table is groaning with goodies, in fact. Drink up your cocktail, darling, and let’s get going.”

So they got going. Tom was a famous cook in the way that men are and like to be—his specialties were thick black-and-red steaks, and thin golden-brown toast, and superlative coffee. Alison prepared whatever else they had. Tonight they were very busy and blithe about it, and they ate voraciously, and afterward lingered long over their coffee, at the candlelit table. They talked about the many things that interested both of them—the war news, Biff, each other, what they had done today, the trouble on Tom’s Brooklyn job, the party Alison had been to last evening, and the little chitchat things they’d heard at lunch from other people. . . .

Finally the last of the coffee was cold, and the tall new candles were no longer tall, and Alison said suddenly, “Look at us! Here we sit—elbow-deep in crumbs and confusion. Let’s get out of here, for pity’s sake. The chairs aren’t even comfortable.” So they became briefly busy again, clearing the table and carrying the dishes into the kitchen, where they stacked and left them. “I’m a good dishwasher,” Tom suggested, but Alison said no to that. She knew that they were both tired; and enough was enough of the culinary department.

Tom even looked tired—she had been struck with this fact in the kitchen light—and when they were settled in the living room again she spoke about it. “Darling,” she said, “I think you’re working far too hard these days.”

“Listen to who’s talking!”

“No, I mean it. You look exhausted. And you’re thinner, aren’t you?”

“I’m a wraith,” he said. “I must be down to a hundred and ninety-eight. It’s unrequited love, that’s what it is. I’m just wasting away.”

“All right, if you won’t be serious——”

She didn’t pursue the subject, or try to. It was true that Tom was overworking; and she knew the reason why as well as he did. It was because he wanted to finish up the various current jobs as quickly as possible, and get on to his next job, which would be something in a uniform—and something active, if he had his way. He was already pointing toward it; studying for it; filing applications. This was the winter of 1942, and he was thirty-five and able-bodied, and it made no difference that the work he was doing now was government work, and useful in the war effort. It was civilian work, and he wished only to be through with it.

Alison knew—she knew so well. She thought of almost nothing else these days. It wouldn’t be long now, as Tom had told her recently. Another month, perhaps; another six weeks at the very most. When she considered how she felt

about his going to war—how proud, how terrified—she thought, “I am in love with him. I must be.” In such moments there was no lingering doubt at all. She would miss him unbearably when he went, and that was only the beginning. *If anything should happen to Tom . . .*

All of which was why she changed the subject now. This should be a happy evening—an escapist evening, with the war shut out. And it was too. They even missed their favorite news broadcast at ten o’clock, forgetting it entirely. Tom had brought Alison some new phonograph records, a catholic assortment, and they played all those—first closing several doors, and changing to a softer needle, so that neither the Philharmonic nor Dinah Shore would waken Biff. At one point Alison said, “Look, darling. You read for a while, will you? I’ve got some little odds and ends of things to do.” Tom pretended to read, but actually watched her, while Alison labored briskly at her writing desk in the corner, jotting memos for tomorrow, making out a check or two, and once saying absently over her shoulder, “What’s twelve times seven, Tom?”

“Suppose I won’t tell you?” he said quizzically.

“That would be mean.”

“So it would,” he said. “All right, then. Twelve times seven is a hundred and fourteen.”

Alison nodded with feminine matter-of-factness, and she was writing it down when Tom’s snort of laughter stopped her.

“You little bubblehead,” he said. “I love you. It’s eighty-four, if you must know. How did you ever get into business in the first place? And how did you ever stay there?”

“Sheer luck—the whole thing.”

“So I gather.”

“Plus an indulgent grandmother,” said Alison, “who put up most of the money, poor lamb—— There’s the phone,” she added, rising.

“I thought it was time that phone rang,” Tom observed, as she crossed the room to the foyer. “I’ve never known such a courteous silence on the part of my competitors. You’re not slipping, are you, darling?”

“It could be.”

When she came back she said, “Wrong number. Aren’t you pleased?”

“I’m delighted,” Tom said. “And now who’s that at the door, if I may ask? Complete with latchkey?”

Alison made a face at him in lieu of reply. It was Mademoiselle returning, as he knew very well. This meant that it was eleven o'clock—you could set your watch and be accurate. It also meant that Tom could stay for another hour or so, quite respectably. He himself commented on this fact, with a mocking grin at Alison, whose rather strict little conventionalities always amused him. "Ah, the chaperon!" he said. "You're saved again, my pretty one."

"From what?"

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"No."

They both smiled cheerfully, and let it go at that. Alison was back at her desk, and after a minute of scribbling silence she slapped her checkbook shut. "There, now, that's done. Now what shall we do? I'll take you over at gin rummy, if you like."

"I'd rather talk," Tom said. "Come back over here where you belong." He indicated her favorite chair, which stood adjacent to his favorite corner of the couch. The chair had a footstool, and he pushed it toward her with his shoe, and they both shared it. When she was settled comfortably, Tom added, "I'd like to hear a story, as a matter of fact."

"You and Biff," said Alison. "You're getting more alike every day, you two. What kind of a story?"

"Yours."

"But how dull for you!" Alison demurred. "And anyway, you've heard it." She really believed he had, and she looked at him in surprise.

"That's just where you're wrong," Tom said. "I haven't really heard it—you've told me practically nothing, as a matter of fact, in all this time. I agree that it's ridiculous, but there it is. Three solid months of this doormat devotion of mine, and I never knew till three minutes ago that your grandmother backed you in business, for instance. And that's only one example. If all the other things I don't know about your past history were laid end to end——"

"Now, stop it," Alison said. "You're not serious. I distinctly remember telling you lots of things, at different times—about Carey, for instance——"

"It's true I've collected some bits and pieces," Tom said, "here and there, and now and again. Suppose I tell you which ones, and you can fill in—and high time too. You were seventeen when you met him, and you were living in Baltimore with your grandmother, because your parents were divorced and both of them had remarried and you weren't happy living with either one of them—— Why was that, by the way? Stepparent trouble?"

"No, I was lucky there," Alison said. "It wasn't that at all. Both my stepparents were darlings, as it happened, and lovely to me."

She hesitated, choosing words. “So it wasn’t that,” she said again. “It was my own parents. They didn’t mean to make me miserable, of course; but between them they certainly managed it. I adored them both, you see, and they’d ended up hating each other—and they made no secret of it. Quite the contrary. They were divorced people of the old school, if you know what I mean—polite, cold, deadly on the subject of each other. And I couldn’t bear it, feeling the way I did about both of them. They tore me in pieces emotionally. They did it every time I saw them. So I was really much better off at my grandmother’s, and much happier there.”

“But that’s very interesting,” Tom said. “That explains your reverse technique with Biff, of course—the exact other extreme. You even lean ’way over backward to be generous about Carey. I’ve always wondered why that was, exactly.”

“Well, now you understand it,” Alison said. “It’s not really generous at all. It’s just that I learned my lesson young—and I learned it the hard way. And besides——”

“ ‘Besides’ what?”

“There are other reasons for it,” she supplemented thoughtfully. “A couple of other good reasons. One of them is that I don’t hate Carey, and never did—it wasn’t that kind of divorce, and I couldn’t be vindictive about him if I tried. I’m just sorry for him, that’s all. I’ve never been so sorry for anybody as I am for him. So there’s that. And then, over and above everything else, there’s the fact that I don’t want Biff to have the psychological handicap of knowing that his father isn’t really any good. That couldn’t possibly do him anything but harm—knowing that. So I’ve tried to make it seem the other way.”

“You’ve succeeded very well,” Tom said, but his tone was somehow tentative; and after a minute he added gently, “A little too well, I sometimes think. Because, after all, it’s dynamite, isn’t it? You’re actually bringing Biff up to believe that his father is one of Nature’s noblemen—and there’s going to be a terrible awakening someday, isn’t there? Inevitably? For instance, what’s going to happen if Carey ever comes home?”

“I know,” Alison said soberly. “I’ve thought about that so often.” She thought about it now, with her eyes intent and her forehead wrinkling. “But the thing is,” she argued aloud, as she always did in her mind, “I’m perfectly sure he’ll never come home to stay—he loves it down there. That’s his home now. He’s even become an Argentine citizen, he wrote me proudly, not very long ago. So not even the draft can bring him back here, as I used to be afraid it would. There’s nothing to bring him, really, except perhaps for a visit sometime, and in that case he wouldn’t stay long—and of course he’d be on his good behavior whenever he saw Biff. He’d probably be enchanting, as a

matter of fact—which he can be—and fascinate Biff and charm him, rather than disillusion him."

"I see."

"The things that are wrong with Carey don't show on the surface," Alison went on, in the same thoughtful voice. "They just aren't that kind of thing. He doesn't drink—I mean he's a fairly moderate drinker, or he used to be—and there's nothing conspicuous about any of his failings, unless you know him. And, furthermore, they're not the kind that a child Biff's age could ever recognize, or be aware of. It takes a certain sophistication——

"In other words," she said, having stopped there, "what I'm trying to say is simply that Biff would have to be much older than he is now to be disillusioned by Carey, and by that time he'd be old enough to forgive me for the illusion, wouldn't he? And to understand why I thought I had to lie to him when he was little? I think he would. That's what I hope, at least," she added, almost prayerfully.

Then her voice grew uncertain again, and there was a near-break in it. "But I don't know," she said. "I just don't know. And it's so important it terrifies me. How can anyone ever know what's the wise thing to do, and the best thing?"

"My sweet," Tom said, in quick concern, "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I only meant——"

"But you haven't," Alison assured him, managing a little smile. "It's not you. It's just that the whole situation upsets me—and always has. As a matter of fact, it's probably doing me good to talk about it," she wound up, as one just making a discovery.

"Certainly it is. So talk some more," Tom said. "Tell me what Carey was like—try to give me a complete analysis, will you, for once? Just what were his failings, exactly? I'm still a bit vague about that."

There was a barely perceptible pause, during which Alison's lips parted to speak impulsively, and then closed again. She had almost said, "The chief one is that he has always lived on women." It was the truth, but as a first answer it was too stark and brutal—and she still wasn't quite certain that she was going to say it to Tom at all. It might lead to a corollary confidence that she wasn't sure she was ready to make.

So she said instead, "Well, to begin with, there was the fact that he really wasn't grown up at all. He just didn't want to be, ever. I think that was really his basic trouble. I suppose it was also part of his charm—in fact, I know it was. That perpetual adolescence, and that complete, gay irresponsibility. It made people want to take care of him—women especially, of course.

“It was his mother’s fault,” she continued quickly, because that was verging too close. “His mother ruined him, in the first place—she was an utter fool. And then they’d had quite a lot of money at one time, and that was another factor. Carey still thought it grew on trees, and he never got over the notion. And, furthermore, there was the way he looked—he was always much too beautiful. I’ve told you that before,” said Alison, “and you’ve seen his pictures, but it’s only fair to stress the point, because it accounted for a lot of things. He really was magnificent. I suppose he still is. Women just took one look at him, and you could almost hear them say ‘Oooh!’ ”

“He sounds godawful,” Tom grunted, so disgustedly that Alison laughed outright.

“That’s strictly a masculine reaction,” she observed. “Men never did like him much, as a matter of fact.”

“I can’t imagine why. Well, but go on. How old were you when you married him, by the way? You weren’t still only seventeen?”

“No, eighteen. Just.”

“I see. Practically an old maid. Look here, didn’t anybody in your family raise any objections at all? What about your grandmother?”

“Oh yes, Grandmère did,” said Alison. “She objected strenuously. She was the only one who’d met him—she knew all about him, in fact. She told me right away that he was a ne’er-do-well and a weakling, but of course I was too young to believe that—and too infatuated—and it only made me furious and stubborn. So finally Grandmère sent for my father to come and help her cope with me, and as soon as I knew that he was coming, I ran off and married Carey anyway. In Elkton, Maryland,” Alison concluded, with a little shake of her head. “You know—where everybody gets married who doesn’t get married in Greenwich, Connecticut.”

“We’ll get married in Greenwich, Connecticut,” Tom decided aloud in passing. “Well, but go on. That was when, exactly?”

“Nineteen thirty-two. In June.”

“And so then——?”

“I hate long stories,” Alison said. “You don’t want all the lurid details, do you? We were married for not quite four years in all. We lived in Baltimore, and then in New York, and I went to work the second year, and Biff was born the third year—and we were divorced a few months later. Then Carey was around New York for about a year after that, and then he got into some sort of jam at Palm Beach—angry-husband trouble, I think—and he went down to Buenos Aires while it cooled off, and he just never came back. He’s got some sort of business down there—I wouldn’t know just what.”

She hesitated, looking dubious, and smiling slightly. “I hope it’s something that makes sense at last, poor Carey.”

“It never used to, then?”

“Never by any remotest chance.”

“Just what business was he in? What kind?”

“Well, that’s what I mean,” said Alison. “All kinds. All the familiar get-rich-quick kinds. He played the market, and he was full of schemes, and he talked in millions all the time, and he was always borrowing money, or scraping it up somehow, and investing it in things like rumored gold mines, and alleged oil fields, and even treasure-hunting expeditions to Yucatan and Cocos Island——”

She was laughing now, in the same sad and sympathetic way. “You see?” she said. “That was how he was. He just had fun, and he believed in luck instead of effort, and he mistook all his romantic dreams for smart ideas. He never really worked at all, of course—except at raising money. He just didn’t know how to work. He didn’t even know you had to. And of course there was always some fool woman who believed in him enough to help him—first his mother, and then me, and then the others——”

There it was. Now she had said it, in plain words; but mildly, as she’d wished to. This was much better than it would have been at first. And even now she had stopped short of finishing the sentence, of going all the way, of saying, “And now it’s back to me again. I’m still a fool, and I’m still helping him.” Definitely she wasn’t ready yet to confess that—not even to Tom, who loved her, and who understood almost everything. She thought despairingly now that she would never be able to make him understand that ultimate folly of hers. He would think she was still in love with Carey. It wasn’t true—it wasn’t that at all—but he would think it.

She looked over at him, casually, being careful that her face and eyes should give no hint of this dilemma in her mind. His own expression made her smile again, because it was so grimly eloquent of his distaste for Carey’s kind of man. His voice was dry with this same animosity. “I see,” he said. “Nice going. First his mother, and then you, and then the others—— Who were ‘the others,’ incidentally?”

“It doesn’t matter, does it? Various ones. They came a little later.”

“All right,” Tom said. “Give it to me chronologically. So you had to help support him—and right from the start, was that it?”

“No, not quite,” said Alison. “His mother still had a little money left, and for a while after we were married we lived with her—and on her. At first I didn’t realize that that was how it was, because Carey had an office at that

time, and he seemed to have a business, he and another man. They had a telephone, and a secretary, and business letterheads and everything. ‘Gallimore and Sherman, Management Consultants.’ It sounded very impressive, but nothing whatever came of it, so presently they dissolved the firm, and Carey gathered together what money he could—that was where I began to come in—and he and I went down to Buenos Aires on a long trip. I had a little money that an aunt of mine had left me. It wasn’t very much, really,” she added, as if in extenuation of Carey.

She took a cigarette, and accepted a light from Tom before she went on. “We stayed down there about six months in all. It was supposed to be a business trip, of course—or, rather, a research trip. That was when Carey first discovered South America, and he never got over it. He was vague about what he was going to do there, but oh, so optimistic! He kept pointing out that there was a continent which was new and fabulously rich, and hardly discovered at all by North Americans—which was true at the time—and he thought you couldn’t miss. I remember he said to me on the boat going down, ‘They’ve got whole hills of emeralds.’ Somehow he sounded as though he and I were just going to start out with a picnic lunch, and wander around on the hills of emeralds, and pick them up like pebbles—filling his pockets and my pinafore ——

“Well, we didn’t,” she said, with another little smiling sigh for Carey. “And finally we came home—completely broke, and bringing no bacon at all. Carey was still optimistic, though. I was the frightened one. He’d made a lot of Contacts—there was always an upper-case *C* in his voice when he said ‘contacts’—and the idea now was that he was going to establish some sort of import-export office in the States, in New York specifically, to do business with his Contacts in the Argentine. All it would take, as usual, was a little money to get going——

“There’s no use stringing this out,” said Alison abruptly. “We moved to New York, but it was always the same story, no matter how the backgrounds changed. Nothing ever came of any of his big ideas, and meanwhile he got more and more involved financially, and somebody had to do something, so I went to work myself—although what I could earn at that point was nothing at all, of course, compared to what we owed. Still, it supported me, in a drugstore-lunch-counter fashion, and that helped the situation a little. And it helped my own pride too,” she said, with her quick voice slowing down again, “because by that time I was beginning to realize what the situation was, exactly, and how it happened that Carey could always scare up some more money, in spite of consistent past losses. He always could. For a long time I thought, in my innocence, that the banks were lending it to him.”

She smiled faintly at Tom. “I’m not very bright in money matters—as you so recently pointed out.”

Tom didn’t smile back. Instead, he looked scowling and stern. “So the women began then,” he said. “ ‘The others.’ And you knew about them?”

“I always knew about them. Carey always ran and told me, sooner or later—usually very soon. He omitted the financial angle, but not any of the rest. He was one of those people who feel all right about an infidelity as soon as they’ve confessed it. Then he could go on with it, you see, and his conscience would no longer hurt him.”

“And never mind who else got hurt,” Tom said. “It all sounds like a hell of a life for you, to put it mildly. I can’t think why you stood it as long as you did.”

“I can’t either, now,” Alison said meditatively. “Except that of course it was all a little more gradual than it sounds. And by the time it began to be really bad—I mean by the time I knew how bad it *was*—Biff was coming. So there wasn’t much I could do about it, until that was over.”

“I suppose not. No, of course you couldn’t.”

“I did leave him,” Alison said. “It was just that we weren’t divorced until afterwards. We were separated for several months before Biff was born. I was living alone in a little one-room apartment down on Tenth Street, and working at Victorine’s—you know, the dressmaker. I’d started there as a model, the year before, and now they were letting me do some designing—although more to keep me out of sight, I’m afraid, than because they thought I’d ever be much good at it! But Victorine was a friend of mine, and she was very kind. And the job was all I had, you see, at that point. I was still too proud to appeal to my grandmother—who was still angry with me for marrying Carey, and who never did forgive me until after I divorced him.

“Well, so poor little Biff bowed into this world in a public hospital ward,” said Alison, smiling cheerfully. “It was the best I could do for him. Furthermore, it was a solitary sort of occasion, as such things go. I mean I went to the hospital late one night in a taxicab, all by myself, without telling anybody. There wasn’t really anybody to tell, except possibly Carey, and I took the strangest joy in not letting him know that his son was arriving, till it was all over. Funny, wasn’t it? It was a kind of fierce, jealous possessiveness. I kept thinking, ‘This is *my* baby. It isn’t his, or anyone’s but mine. Look, I’m alone.’ It was as though that proved it. And I remember the doctor asked me where the baby’s father was, and I said proudly—even triumphantly—‘He’s not coming. I don’t need him.’ ”

She shook her head, still smiling. “Women are very odd.”

“But there was nothing odd about that,” Tom said gently. “That was perfectly understandable. And of course the fact of the matter is that you’ve lived completely for Biff from that day to this—as I suppose you realize. Never at all for yourself.”

The final phrase surprised her a little, and she said, “Why, Tom, that isn’t true!”

“Certainly it’s true.”

So she thought about it for a minute longer. “Well, in the way you mean it,” she said then, “perhaps it is. It’s still purely selfish of me, though. It’s because he’s all I’ve got—and vice versa. It’s my way of trying to be both parents to him, don’t you see? I mean, all divorced people know that they’ve got a lot to make up to their children for——”

“And that reminds me,” Tom said firmly, breaking in. “Don’t stop me if you’ve heard this one. You might try giving him a stepfather—and I know just the man. Good, honest, faithful, reliable, trustworthy, and sober. Makes his own money, such as it is. Loves no woman but you—and loves your son as he would his own son. Highly recommended, all in all. You could do worse.”

They were both smiling fondly now. “I could do much worse,” Alison agreed.

“Please kindly think it over, then. And seriously—for once.”

“All right, I will.”

She thought, “Darling, I do, I have. I think about it all the time.” But she said lightly, “I promise. And now will you go home? I’ve talked your ear off, and it’s late—it must be after midnight——”

She rose as she spoke, and Tom got up, too, although not without amiable grumblings. Alison went to the door with him, as she always did; and when they said good night Tom kissed her on the forehead again—still according to custom. “Not good enough,” he said then, suddenly, and with his forefinger he tipped her chin up and kissed her on the lips. He had done this once or twice before, but never in this way. Nor did he end it now; instead his lips became more urgent, and his arms went around her and locked her tightly in. It was a long kiss, after that, and it wasn’t by any means one-sided. They were both a little pale and shaken when it was finally over.

“So, now, you see?” Tom said. “What’s so platonic about that?”

“It wasn’t very, was it?”

He took both her hands, and held them hard. “Look at me, Alison,” he said; and waited till she did so. His eyes were very blue and grave, although his voice pretended to be casual. “You’re quite right—I’d better go home,” he said. “And I will in a minute. But first there’s one more thing I want to say,

and it's just this: you are going to marry me—no matter what you think. Some one of these days you're going to get over that final hurdle in your mind, whatever it is—and I'll admit I still don't know quite what it is, in spite of all you've told me tonight—and you're going to realize that we could be happy together, and so in the end you're going to say yes. It's inevitable, darling. It's in the stars, and in the tea leaves. So would you please hurry up about it, in view of the fact that there isn't a great deal of time?"

Here he smiled at her, and his voice took on a more elaborate casualness than ever. "Because there isn't, you know," he said. "I've got a kind of a date with a war. I hate to hurry you too much, but there it is."

"I know," she said faintly.

"Sleep on it, darling," Tom said, and he went away then, after kissing her quickly once more.

But she couldn't have felt less like sleeping. She returned to the living room, and sat there alone for a while, with all the lights on. After a time she went to her writing desk and unlocked a drawer and found Carey's cable—the one that had come four days ago, requesting money, as usual. "LETTER FOLLOWS EXPLAINING FULLY," was the final phrase of the cable; and she had been waiting for the letter. Well, but she wouldn't wait any longer, she decided definitely now—and she wouldn't send the money. For once she would say no. She had the courage now to say no; and she had all the world's best reasons.

She walked directly to the telephone and called the cable office. She gave Carey's cable address, and then the name of the far-off city, and then the message itself, which was extravagantly long. She felt too happy to be economical. She began by saying, "SORRY CANNOT POSSIBLY HELP OUT THIS TIME," and then she added deliberately, "OR AT ANY FUTURE TIME." And then all at once, in her search for a finishing phrase, and for a reason to give him, she forgot caution entirely, and told the simple truth.

"AM TO BE MARRIED SOON," she dictated to the cable operator; and the strange thing was that she never even dreamed that that would bring Carey home. It did—and very quickly too—but no prescience of any such danger was granted her now; and her thought was merely that, after all, they were still friends, and she might as well tell him.

It was only in retrospect that she said to herself, "I must have been out of my mind."

III

Tom called her on the telephone at the shop the next morning to tell her that he had to go to Washington, quite suddenly. He was taking a plane in less than an hour, so there wasn't going to be time to see her. He would probably be back tonight, though; or tomorrow at the latest. "It's a little mysterious," he said. "I don't even know what it's about. But I've just had this phone call from some brass hat's office, in the War Department——"

He added that it was probably about another construction job; and Alison thought prayerfully, "That's all it is. Let it be that." Because the alternative possibility was that his application for an army commission was coming through more quickly than he had expected—and sooner than she could bear thinking of. Suppose he were suddenly sent away somewhere, just as she had discovered that she was in love with him? It would serve her right for having been so slow and stupid about it—her mind admitted that, but her heart cried out that it would be too cruel.

"If I have to stay over," Tom was saying, "I'll call you tonight from Washington. And meanwhile"—his voice deepened, intimately, and remindingly—"meanwhile, be thinking about what you promised to think about, will you?"

Then she was amused, because it would be gay and silly to say something like, "Oh, by the way, it's all settled. I'm your fiancée, my darling. I've even already notified my ex-husband." It seemed so absurd that Tom himself still didn't know what Carey knew by this time, six thousand miles away. And now here she was, and she couldn't tell him now, because, after all, you couldn't get engaged over the telephone, in the middle of a business morning, with your lover dashing to catch a plane. You could only say demurely, "Yes, darling. I'll be thinking hard."

She said this, smiling to herself; and then she supplemented, "Hurry back."

That evening she broke a dinner engagement, and dined at home quietly with Biff; and after their early meal was over, they had a rememberable talk about things.

This took place in Biff's own room, which was their favorite room to be in when they were by themselves. Biff was playing with his trains on the floor, and Alison had been helping, but now she was relaxed in the deepest chair.

"Come and sit on my lap," she said presently, in a persuasive voice. "You're not feeling too big and grown up to sit on my lap this evening, are you? Sometimes you do, I know—and that's quite all right, I understand that ——"

"But tonight I don't," Biff said promptly, because he was bored with the

trains. “Tonight I feel big, but not grown up.” So he approached, and climbed into her lap, and said, “Are you going to read to me, or what?”

“I thought we’d talk a little first,” Alison said. “Because I’ve got something I want to discuss with you, and ask your advice about.”

Biff nodded responsibly. “What?”

“It begins with last evening,” Alison said. “Do you remember last evening, just before you went to sleep, you asked me whether you’d have two fathers if I married Tom? And I said yes, you would—but that I didn’t think I was going to marry Tom. Do you remember that?”

“Yes, I remember,” Biff said, snuggling comfortably against her shoulder. He seemed matter-of-fact, and he was even helpful. He said, “And now you are?”

Alison had a fantastic moment of feeling younger than he was. She said meekly, “Well, that’s what I wanted to discuss with you. I really thought I wasn’t, you see—I didn’t mean to tell a fib about it. But the thing is that I’ve kind of changed my mind, and now I think it might be a very good idea for me to marry Tom—and for him to be a second father to you. Because, after all,” said Alison, “you love Tom, don’t you? We both love Tom.”

Biff’s affirming nod was quick and vigorous against her shoulder. “I love him very much,” he said. “I love him best of anybody, next to you and my own father—and Mademoiselle,” he added, as an afterthought. “Only that’s different, because she’s no relation. Mademoiselle is Swiss. She was born on an Alp.”

“Yes, darling,” Alison said hurriedly, because he seemed to be getting off the subject. “Well, that’s what I thought,” she said. “And Tom loves you, too. Devotedly. And he’s very lonely, and it would make him happy if we could all three live together. And I think perhaps it would make us happy too—you and me.”

Once again Biff agreed. He said, “We could all three live at his farm, and play with the rabbits.” And then, because he was a businesswoman’s son, he amended that by saying, “I mean we could on Saturdays and Sundays.”

Then he said abruptly, “But what about my father?”

Alison thought, “Here it comes”; and she said carefully, “What about him, darling?”

“Maybe he wouldn’t like it, if Tom was my father too. Maybe he’d rather be the only father I’ve got. Carey, I mean.”

“That’s possible,” Alison admitted. “So the only thing to do is ask him, don’t you think? I thought of that myself, so I sent him a cable last night, to ask him.”

“And what did he say?” Biff inquired, with interest.

“Well, he hasn’t had time to answer yet. It takes a little time, you see—even for cables.”

“Supposing he says no,” Biff said. “Then we can’t do it, can we?”

“Oh, but I’m sure he won’t say no,” said Alison. “He wants us to be happy. So he’ll probably say yes—and if he does, then it will be all right, don’t you think? If we have his permission?”

“Yes, then I think it would,” Biff said, after thinking it over.

His face continued thoughtful. “Only it will seem a little bit funny at first, I guess. I’m used to having only one father—a long way off. Will Tom live here with us, do you suppose? Except for Saturdays and Sundays? Where will we put him?” Biff said suddenly, in the practical voice of a host and a housekeeper. “He could have my room—only then where would we put me?”

“Darling,” Alison said, laughing softly, and hugging him. “I love you so much. Perhaps we’ll have to take a larger apartment, don’t you think? And anyway, it isn’t exactly that Tom will be living here with us—it’s much more likely that we’ll be living somewhere with him, don’t you see? At least a little later, when we all get settled permanently. Maybe not until after the war is over.”

“Yes, I know,” Biff nodded. “Tom is going to the war.”

He sounded proud about it, which was pleasant. Then immediately he said, “Is my father going to the war too?”

“Perhaps,” said Alison. “I haven’t heard.” She hesitated, because that was not enough, she must say more. She said, “You see, it’s a little different with him, because the country where he lives now isn’t in the war—at least, not yet. So there isn’t the same reason for him to go that there is for Tom to go.”

This was the closest she had come to telling Biff that Carey had changed his nationality; and it was as close as she wanted to come. To her relief, the explanation seemed to satisfy him, and he didn’t pursue the point, except to say, “But if there is a war down there, then he will go.”

“Oh yes. Then he would surely go.”

“He’d probably be a pilot,” Biff said hopefully. “A bomber pilot, maybe. Can he fly, do you suppose?”

Alison said she didn’t know about that. Perhaps he would have to learn.

“Tom is going to be an engineer in the war,” Biff observed next. “Not the runs-engines kind, but the builds-things kind. That’s because he is one anyway, so he knows how. And then there’s another thing—he’s learning how to be a camouflager, too, did you know that, Alison?”

"A camoufleur, darling. Yes, I did know that. Isn't it interesting? The Army wanted him to learn, so he's been going to a special school in the evenings—four evenings a week, when he isn't with us."

"He told me about it," Biff said, with relish. "We had a long talk about it the other night. You build things that look like other things, and then you paint them as though they were the other things instead of what they really are, and it fools the Germans."

"That's a very good definition. That's exactly what you do."

"Like forts," Biff said romantically. "Or hangars for the bombers. For instance, in the desert—in Africa or somewhere. Sir in geography was telling us today about the war in the desert, and how they have to build everything there, because there isn't anything. So that's where Tom will probably do it, I expect. In Africa, or Egypt. Or maybe in Australia, or maybe in Russia, or maybe in China——"

"Yes," Alison said faintly.

Biff was stirring in her arms. "You are holding me a little bit too tight," he said. "It's hurting."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Was I? I didn't realize it."

She released him, and Biff finished what he had to say. "Tom is very brave," he said; and he thought about it for a minute, and then added generously, "He's just as brave as my own father."

So there it was—and Alison supposed that she couldn't have asked for more. It was his very highest accolade.

That was on Friday evening. Carey arrived in New York on the following Wednesday. Tom was still away when that happened—which was no help. They had held him in Washington over the week end, and then on Sunday night he had called her to say that he was going to have to fly down South, and might be away for several days more. She had since had two wires from him, sent from the oddest-sounding places—tiny little lost towns, they must be, in Mississippi and Louisiana. She didn't know quite what he was doing there, but it wasn't hard to guess that he was looking over possible sites for some sort of future army installation. It sounded routine, in any case, and not alarming.

From Carey there had been no word at all in answer to her cable—a fact that didn't surprise her, although it did disappoint her a little, because when all was said and done it seemed so very unfriendly of him. By Monday she was thinking, "He hasn't even wished me luck. I thought of course he would. I really didn't think he'd be such a bad loser, in the end."

Then he appeared. Alison found him waiting in the showroom of her shop at about two-thirty on Wednesday afternoon, when she returned from lunch. He was sitting on one of the little low gray velvet couches, looking patient, with his bared head tilted back against the wall and his arms folded. She caught a glimpse of him through the plate-glass door as she pushed it open, but even then she wasn't warned, not truly warned, because in six long years she had seen many men who—for an instant, and from a distance—reminded her of Carey, just as this one did. It was a case of her mind crying "Wolf!" again, and herself not really afraid. . . .

She was inside the shop, with the door falling shut behind her, before she saw that it was really he.

She said, "Why, Carey!" And stood still.

"Hello, Alison."

He smiled as children smile when they have a surprise for you—eagerly, mischievously. It was as though he had just said, "Guess what!" It was Biff's elfin smile. The velvet couch was very low, and he himself was so long-legged that there was a little struggle about getting up from it. Alison watched this with a kind of faraway detachment, and yet at the same time with a strange sharp perceptiveness. She even noted that it was a graceful struggle, not an awkward one, nothing he did was ever awkward—that was the way it had always been.

And she saw also, all in this one comprehending fraction of a minute, many other things about him. What he was wearing, and how well he looked, and the fact that he seemed no older. He was deeply sunburned—even the side part in his blond curly hair was bronze with sun. He was still Carey, still the same, still quite enough to take your breath away—and it was frightening, it was staggering, how much Biff looked like him. Her mind kept coming back to that. She hadn't realized it was so precise. . . .

"How are you?" Carey was saying. "You're looking simply marvelous."

"And you," she heard herself replying mechanically. "You haven't changed at all."

They weren't alone in the showroom, as she was uneasily aware. Violet was telephoning at the desk at the other end; and the little stock girl, Emmy, was arranging perfumes in a near-by cabinet. Alison said over her shoulder, "Thank you, Emmy, that will do." It didn't matter so much about Violet, who was too far off to hear.

Emmy departed, through the stock-room door. They faced each other now, and Carey took her hand and kissed it—simply and naturally, like a Latin born. That would have been the first of all the things he'd learned by living down

there. Then he retained the hand, still smiling at her, while he lifted up her left one and looked at it and saw that it was bare of rings. “Not yet, then?” he observed, in a bantering voice that—as such—wasn’t quite successful or credible. It had too clear an undertone of profound satisfaction. “That’s fine,” he said. “Then I’m in time for the wedding.”

Alison said, also lightly, “Is that why you came?”

“Of course it is. You didn’t think you could get married without me? I grabbed the first available plane, after I got your cable.”

“Yes. You must have.”

“The very next day, in fact.”

She thought wearily, “You even raised the money somewhere. Even that didn’t delay you.”

“And who’s the lucky man?” Carey was saying. “Not anyone I used to know, is it?”

“No. Hush,” said Alison, as she might have said it to Biff. She nodded warningly toward Violet. “The whole thing is still a secret.”

“Oh, really, is it?” Carey said. Even that seemed to please him.

Alison sat down, although she didn’t know just why. They couldn’t stay here long—they couldn’t talk about anything here. But it was a relief to sit down, and she realized with surprise that her knees were a little weak. This wasn’t like her, and she thought severely, *Stop it, now*.

“I’m still a little dazed,” she said to Carey, in case he had noticed.

She felt that she kept staring at him, but she couldn’t seem to help it. She had trouble finding casual words—she wanted terribly to ask him questions right away; all sorts of burning questions, such as “What are you really here for?” and “When are you going back?” and “Why did you come, oh, why did you ever come?”—questions like those kept crowding her mind, and even getting as far as her lips, and having to be repressed. Those weren’t the things to say now. Well, what were the things to say now? What would she say if he were just anybody—any acquaintance, absent so long?

“When did you get in?” she asked. “And where are you staying?”

He named his hotel, and it was one of the smart and costly ones. Well, it would be, of course. None but the best. . . . He had arrived in Miami yesterday, and at Washington airport early that morning, and his mother had met him there, and he had stopped over with her for several hours. Then he had taken a noon plane for New York, and here he was. . . .

While he spoke, Alison listened and watched him and had all sorts of curiously irrelevant thoughts, such as that Violet must be talking to her beau,

to talk so long; and that Mrs. Reed and daughter Diane were coming in at two forty-five for fittings; and that Tom had picked a perfectly horrible time for being away from town; and that it would have been funny if he and Carey had run into each other at the Washington airport, without ever knowing it; and that it was very strange indeed that Carey hadn't yet asked about Biff, or mentioned him. . . .

Just as she thought that, Carey did ask about Biff, suddenly and warmly.

"He's very well."

She had almost said "thank you." But probably one didn't, in a case like this.

"I'm wild to see him."

"He'll be delighted to see you too," Alison said, a little stiffly.

"He knows he has a father, does he?"

"Why, of course. He talks about you a lot. We've always talked about you, he and I."

Carey looked interested, and he said, "In what vein, I wonder? Flattering or unflattering? Pro or con?" He was asking her, of course, but it was as though he were merely thinking aloud. He added, "I suppose I ought to know before I see him."

"Yes, you should," said Alison. "You have to know. The answer is that you're his idol, Carey. You really are. He thinks you're—everything that's grand."

"But does he really?" Carey said, in a kind of glad astonishment. "You mean you've deliberately implanted that idea? Lying in your teeth?" he put in parenthetically, and laughed. "But how very swell of you, Alison! I didn't expect that—or deserve it."

"Don't thank me too much," she said succinctly. "I didn't do it for your sake. I did it for his."

"Well, but even so. I call it handsome of you."

He kissed her hand again, as a reward.

"Where is he now?" he inquired next.

"He's at school. He doesn't get out till four-thirty."

It was preposterous, but Carey became paternal all at once, and disapproving. He frowned. "Not till four-thirty? But he shouldn't be going to school for such long hours! A boy six years old——"

"Biff is seven," Alison said expressionlessly. "And his actual school hours aren't really long. He has classes only in the mornings. They play outdoors all afternoon."

"Oh, well, then," Carey said, "if all they're doing is playing, let's go and get him. I want to see him. Why wait till four-thirty? Where is the school? Near here?"

Alison thought, *Might as well. Might as well get it over with.*

She rose. "All right. We'll go up there now, if you like. We'd better start right away—before they leave for the playground. Just a minute till I tell my people I'm going."

In the taxi Carey was cheerful and talkative, and excited about being back in New York. He kept interrupting the things he was saying to comment on changes he noticed, new buildings they passed, the new colors of taxicabs, shop windows, the weather, women in uniform. . . . In the intervals of these exclamations he questioned Alison about Tom again, and she said merely, evasively, "You'll have to meet him. I'm no good at describing people." Some instinctive inner caution restrained her even from mentioning Tom's name, and when Carey asked her what it was, she said, "You wouldn't know it."

"So you won't talk!" said Carey, smiling at her. Then his own phrase amused him, and he smiled at that, and explained it. "We get the North American slang from the movies—I suppose a little late."

The pronoun seemed to make him completely an Argentinian. Well, that was all right. "You do?" said Alison encouragingly.

Afterward she seemed to remember that all the other questions Carey asked her during that taxi ride were about her business—not about Tom, or Biff, and not personally about herself, but about the shop. He was candidly inquisitive; he didn't try to be subtle about it. "You've done very well, haven't you?" he said, among other things. "I had no idea. It's a very impressive setup you've got there. And I loved the clothes I saw."

"Oh, did they show you some?"

"Quite a few went by, on your two models, when I first arrived. Some dowager was there, looking. It's a beautiful collection, Alison. And you designed most of it yourself, didn't you? That's what they told me."

"Yes."

"Smart girl. I'm very proud of you."

"Thank you," she said, trying not to say it dryly.

"Did you get my letter, by the way?" Carey asked unexpectedly.

"The one you mentioned in your cable? No, it hasn't come yet."

She thought he looked relieved, although perhaps she was imagining it. It

made her wonder why he had said, “By the way?” Just what was the connection? It would be monetary, yes; but what exactly?

All at once she said to him, “Carey, why did you come back?” Bluntly, directly.

“Oh, for a lot of reasons.”

“Tell me.”

Carey seemed at least half serious. “Well, chiefly because I wanted to see you and talk to you. I should think that was obvious.” Then his voice took on its teasing note again, and his smile returned. He said, “You didn’t really think I’d give you up without a struggle, did you?”

Alison said coldly, “I can’t think what you mean by ‘give me up.’ We’ve been divorced six years.” She hesitated, wondering whether to be really cruel, and feeling tempted. It would be so easy to say, “Unless you mean as a meal ticket——”

She didn’t say it. Carey was speaking again. “After all,” he was saying, “I’m still in love with you myself, you know. Nothing ever changes that—or ever has, or ever will.”

Then she thought contemptuously, “Oh, I see. So that’s the approach.” She said impatiently aloud, “Oh, nonsense, Carey. Don’t be so absurd.”

“It’s true, though.”

He even made it sound true, for a stupefying half-minute.

Thus they arrived at the school, with Alison feeling worse prepared than ever. Carey waited outside in the cab, while she entered the building in search of Biff. “I think I’d better go in alone,” she had said when the taxi stopped, “and—tell him you’re here. It’s going to be pretty sensational for him, of course. As you realize.”

Biff was being read to in the solarium on the roof, with the other small boys. A teacher went in from the hallway to get him, while Alison waited near the elevators. He came presently, looking surprised. “Am I going home now?” he asked at once. “Sir says I’m going home now. Why am I going home now? We haven’t even been to the playground.”

Alison stooped down, until her face was level with his. She sat on the back of one heel and took Biff’s upper arms in her two hands and smiled into his face. “Biff, darling,” she said, “guess who’s downstairs?”

“My father!” Biff said, without an instant’s hesitation.

His gaze sought Alison’s for confirmation. He smiled radiantly, and his eyes were stars. “Isn’t that the funniest thing?” he said, with his breath short. “I was just thinking about him. We had South America in geography today, and

that made me think about him. Isn't that the funniest thing?"

"Isn't it?" Alison echoed.

In the coatroom she could hardly get his things on him, he was in such a flurry to be downstairs. When his coat and hat were on he flew through the door ahead of Alison, leaving her with his woolen muffler still in her hands. "Here!" Alison said. "Come back, Biff. Here's your muffler——"

Suddenly she had a surge of desperate emotion. "And aren't you going to kiss me?" she said, low and tragically. Which she knew was silly.

And after all that it seemed very strange and puzzling and anticlimactic to find Carey nowhere in sight when they arrived on the sidewalk. The taxi was still waiting at the curb, but it was empty. Alison stared inquiringly at the taxi driver, while Biff strained at her hand, crying, "Where? I don't see him!" and looking wildly in all four directions.

"He went down that way," said the taxi driver, pointing backward with his thumb. "I guess to get some cigarettes. He said he'd be right back."

There was a drugstore at the corner. "Oh yes, probably," Alison said. She made Biff get into the taxi and got in beside him, to wait. It was a very cold day. Biff immediately knelt on the leather seat and watched for his father through the rear window. Once a tall man rounded the corner, coming their way, and he said, "There he is! Or is it? Alison, is that my father?"

"No, darling," Alison said compassionately. "No, that isn't he." She was thinking, "Oh, Carey, how could you?—when he was so wild to see you." She knew it was just a little thing, really, and perfectly understandable, but somehow it seemed like a big thing, and grossly unfeeling.

She watched for him, too, and presently she said quietly, "There he comes now. Do you see him?" Because Carey had emerged from the drugstore and started leisurely toward them, opening a cigarette packet as he came.

"Yes!" Biff shouted. "There he is! There's my father now!"

He was out of the cab in an instant, and running down the sidewalk to meet Carey. Alison watched him—biting her lips; fighting back the swift, hot tears in her eyes. "Oh, Carey," she thought beseechingly now, "don't disappoint him. Don't let him down." Nothing else mattered in this moment. She had forgotten herself. The flying blue figure of her son filled her whole consciousness; and the only additional thought in her mind was that children were really too wonderful sometimes. "Look at him. He's never known his father at all, and yet he isn't a bit shy."

Just as she was thinking this, she saw Biff stop dead in his tracks, as though a sudden tremendous shyness had caught up with and engulfed him. He stood that way, looking small and frightened now, and infinitely touching, so

that Alison's whole heart cried, "Oh, poor baby!" But it was all right, Carey had seen him running, and he had recognized himself in miniature, and he strode forward now, and Alison could see his smile, which was quite all it should be. In another instant he had picked Biff up and swung him high, and kissed him with quick ardor. Still holding him aloft, he was talking to him, fast and gaily; and Biff was also talking. Alison couldn't hear what they said. She even stopped watching them then, and sat looking straight forward.

IV

Tom finally got back on Saturday—three interminable days later. He arrived by train in the early afternoon and telephoned Alison from the station, reaching her at home; and it was arranged that they should meet at about five-thirty, at Tom's apartment. "I'll come there," Alison stipulated, in the lowered tone of one talking under difficulties. And when Tom suggested that five-thirty seemed a very long way off, she said, "I know. I quite agree with you. But I just can't do any better."

So she and Biff and Carey spent the afternoon at a Disney movie, and had ice cream somewhere afterward—all of which was Carey's little Saturday treat, as planned. It was nearer six than five-thirty by the time Alison reached Tom's apartment. Ringing the doorbell, she thought despairingly, "It's late already—and it's going to take me hours to tell him all I've got to tell him." And she was supposed to meet Carey again at half past eight, for dinner. That also was as planned. It was Tom's fault for not letting her know just when he was coming.

He looked wonderful to her. She kept saying, "Let me look at you," during those first moments. She felt almost hysterically glad to see him, and she said so, mumbling it against his shoulder—getting lipstick on his coat. She thought of Carey's shoulders, which were just as wide as Tom's, but made for showing off good tailoring, and for no other useful purpose. Tom's solid breadth was made to lean on, and she clung to him, being pleasantly crushed by his arms; and for the first time in three days she thought, "It will work out somehow. It's going to be all right." . . .

They reached the living room eventually, after this first reunion in the little hallway, and Tom helped Alison off with her coat, and she herself removed her hat and dropped it somewhere. The room was full of firelight, and it was a happy room anyway, and they sat together on the couch, but not so close together that they couldn't see each other's faces as they talked. They both knew that there was a lot to say. Alison asked for Tom's news first of all, but he pretended that there wasn't any, except that he had had a full and interesting

seven days.

"We'll get to that," he said. "Something's been happening to you—I could tell by your voice on the long-distance phone Thursday night when I called you. And again today. I want to know this minute what it is."

She told him, in the fewest words. "It's that Carey's come back, Tom. He's been here since Wednesday."

"My darling, no!"

"Yes."

"And you never even mentioned it——"

"You were too far away. I had to wait till you got home."

Helped by Tom's questions, which came out in rapid-fire fashion whenever she paused, Alison filled in a few of the details, describing the hour of Carey's return, and the prodigal-father scene on the sidewalk with Biff, and the things that had happened since—all of them predictable, as she said herself. All of them inevitable, even. "As I see it now," she said wearily, "it couldn't have turned out any other way. I had it all set up for Carey, like—like tenpins."

"Yes, so you did," Tom said. "And Biff adores him—that's the sum of it, isn't it? Well, but what distresses you so about that, my sweet? You didn't want him to be disillusioned—which was the only other possible alternative."

Alison said, "The trouble is, I'm not telling you this in the right order. I haven't explained yet what Carey is up to, or how he happened to come just now—so soon after you and I had that long talk about him. It wasn't just a coincidence, you see. I made the mistake of my life, that very same evening, after you left me. I sent him a cable——"

But even that was not the right narrative order. Now she would have to go all the way back, to the very first causes. "Tom, listen," she said. "Hold my hand, and let me explain from the beginning. This is the part I didn't tell you the other night because I thought I just *couldn't*. I didn't know what you'd think of me, and I didn't know how to make you understand it. But this is the kind of fool I've been, where Carey is concerned——"

It was soon told. She blurted it out quickly, giving only the main fact at first. "So that's it," Tom said thoughtfully, when she had finished. "That's the missing chapter, then. You've been helping him all this time—you who work so hard for your money, my darling. You've been supporting him all these years since you divorced him——"

"Oh no, not entirely," Alison said. "Not really 'supporting' him. I didn't say that. I've just helped him out from time to time, when he needed it."

"Which has been often."

"Which has been fairly often," she admitted. "But always for reasons that seemed valid—and urgent. Once it was a note he had to meet, and another time it was a gambling debt, and still another time it was a hospital bill, a rather big one, because he'd got himself smashed up in a polo accident down there. And still another time it was an operation for his mother. Emergencies like that. But in betweentimes he's managed for himself, without any help from me at all. It's really only when he's in great trouble that he cables me for money."

"And you always send it. You've believed these hard-luck stories every time?"

"Yes, I have," she said defensively. Her color was a little heightened. "And I still do. I really think they happened, Tom."

Tom said, "All right, if you say so. I'm only trying to follow your reasoning on all this. It's a little difficult, you know—in view of all past circumstances. It even seems extraordinarily quixotic of you ever to have helped him at all. Why should you have felt it was up to you? Give me just one good reason, Alison."

"I didn't know what else to do. . . . I told you I was a fool," Alison's tired voice said. "And I told you I couldn't explain it. It's got something to do with his being Biff's father. I suppose I don't want him disgracing himself too badly, with debts and things. I suppose that's partly it, and then there's the fact that I've always been sorry for him—and still am. And he's been better about it lately, anyway," she added. "Much better, this whole past year. In his letters he's even talked about repaying the loans I've made him—although I know he never used to think of them as 'loans' at all, any more than I did. So there must have been some improvement, you see. And it's been over a year now since I've had to send him anything more."

She stopped there, being unwilling to amend that final statement just at this particular moment, when she was still defending Carey. There was the recent request, of course, but she postponed mentioning that until a little later.

Instead, she said now, in full confession, "The plain truth is, Tom, that I've always really believed in him, in a funny way. Nothing ever seems to convince me that there isn't some good in him, somewhere. I suppose it sounds illogical—after the picture I've painted of him for you—but I've honestly always felt and believed that he wasn't entirely worthless, and that the right woman could have made something of him—and that it was once my job, don't you see? And my failure. And because of that, I've always felt responsible, and—still involved."

Tom said, "Look here. Are you quite sure you're not still in love with him?"

"I was afraid you'd think that," Alison answered. "No, I'm not. I haven't been in love with him for years and years. I'm in love with you."

"Say that again."

"It's true," she assured him softly. "I think I have been, all along." Then she said, "Oh, but Tom, there are such complications now—and all of them my fault."

She explained about the cable sent to Carey, and its wording. She said heartbrokenly, "And that's what brought him back, of course. I can't imagine why I told him. And now his coming has changed everything, in the most frightful way. Because it seems he doesn't want me to marry you or anybody else, and now he's using Biff——"

Long before she had finished amplifying that broken sentence she was weeping helplessly, held in Tom's arms. It was a little while before she could proceed at all. Then, with her eyes still wet, but with her voice under some measure of control again, she went on speaking narratively. It was a siege on Carey's part. He had seen instantly where his advantage lay, and he had enlisted Biff on his side; and one of the results had been that in less than twenty-four hours Biff was saying to her, to Alison, "It's a good thing you didn't marry Tom without asking Carey, isn't it? Because Carey wouldn't have liked it a bit. He told me he wouldn't. It would have been an awful thing to do." . . .

"You see?" said Alison desolately to Tom. "You see what a simply incredible situation I've got myself into? What can I say to Biff now—after saying what I've said for seven years? It's almost not fair to blame Carey at all, because really I brought it all on myself. If ever a woman was hoist by her own petard——"

Tom said, "But just what does he want, will you please tell me? What's his game? I'll be damned if I understand. Of course if it's only money he's after, that's——"

"It isn't, though," Alison said. "At least, not entirely—and not even primarily, as far as I can discover. I know, because I've sounded him out on that since he's been back. Only last night I asked him about it, point-blank. He says he doesn't need any money now—and isn't going to take any more from me, ever, in any case."

"And yet he cabled you for a thousand dollars only ten days ago. Isn't that what you just said? I thought your own cable to him was an answer to that."

"He must have got it somewhere," Alison sighed. "Don't ask me to explain him—I just can't. I don't even know what he wanted the thousand dollars for, to begin with; and now he won't tell me. There's supposed to be a letter of

explanation on its way up here by air mail, but it still hasn't come, and I haven't any idea what was in it. I'm not even sure he ever wrote one, though he says he did. Meanwhile, it's all too baffling—and too insane for words. He thinks he wants to marry me himself, you see," she wound up miserably. "That's what it's all about—or that's what he pretends, at least."

Tom said, "I thought so."

"He even keeps insisting that he's still in love with me. That's ridiculous, of course," Alison said, "but he keeps saying it. Moreover, it's amazing how convincing he is about it——" She hesitated a moment, remembering not one but several instances in the past three days; and wondering whether to describe them; and deciding not to. She said merely, "He's almost made me believe him, once or twice. I hope that doesn't sound too silly to you."

"Not to me," Tom said, "of all men. It couldn't sound less so. He undoubtedly is still in love with you—whatever else he may have on his mind."

"And there's one other thing I want to tell you," Alison said, "because it's important in all this. Carey is simply mad about Biff—it's a completely mutual fascination. I know he's sincere about that part of it; he couldn't possibly be acting. I think it surprises even himself—but there it is. It happened right away. And of course that makes the whole thing even easier for him than it would have been—and even harder for us. Oh, Tom, what are we going to do? How are we *ever*——"

"Now, now," Tom said. "We're going to fix it. There will be a way. Look here, my sweet, when are you seeing Carey next?"

"I'm supposed to have dinner with him this evening, but I'll break it, if you like. I want to."

"No, don't break it," Tom decided. "Let it stand. We'll be a threesome, then."

"Oh no, Tom," she said in panic.

"Oh yes, Alison."

"But that's a dreadful idea! I'm afraid you'd quarrel with him, wouldn't you?"

"I'm afraid so too," Tom said cheerfully. "But why not? The sooner the better. This has got to be settled."

"But not in public, surely! And we've got to go out—or else do without dinner. There's nothing to eat at home."

They argued about it for some little time, with Alison losing the argument. "Well, all right," she said at last, still very dubiously.

“As a matter of fact,” Tom said then, becoming serious, “I don’t think you need to worry about it. I doubt very much if we’ll quarrel at all—at least not openly. I admit it would be a pleasure, but I really don’t think it would help matters any.”

“Neither do I. So promise me you won’t.”

“All right, I promise. . . . What time are you supposed to meet him?”

“He’s picking me up at the apartment at eight-thirty. And we’re dressing. Black tie, that is. What time is it now, by the way?”

It was after seven, and she said, “I’d better go home and get started.” She had her handbag open, and now she looked at herself in its little mirror, and added, “Oh, dear. I was afraid of this. I wish I wouldn’t cry with mascara on.”

She would have to bathe her eyes before she faced the outside world. She murmured, “May I?” and started for Tom’s bedroom, at the far corner of which was the door to his bath. She knew the way, but Tom accompanied her into the hall to turn on lights. He said in a troubled tone, “I’m afraid you’ll find the room in a shambles”—but Alison thought only that he meant he’d been unpacking. It wasn’t until after she had left him in the hall, and crossed the threshold of the room itself, that she saw that he had been shopping—he must have shopped all afternoon. The room was littered with cardboard suit boxes and wrapping paper, with string and sales slips; and laid out on the bed, all over the bed, were pieces of army clothing. There were the tunics, the trousers, two caps, an overcoat, shirts, socks, everything. Brand-new, in piles. Ready to pack into traveling bags and suitcases. Ready to wear.

She turned slowly and went back to Tom in the living room. She said, “Oh, Tom—when?”

Her voice was quiet; it gave no hint of the thing her heart was doing, the sickening, downward-swooping thing. But her face must have given her away, or her eyes, because Tom’s answer was quick and soothing.

“Darling,” he said, laughing at her, “don’t look like that! I’m not going anywhere for the present—except Fort Belvoir, Virginia. And I’m not even going there for a couple of weeks, or possibly longer. It’s to be Washington first. I have to report there on Monday, in uniform, which is why I had to buy the stuff today, before the stores closed.”

“And you didn’t tell me,” Alison said. “I’ve been here an hour—but I didn’t even give you a chance to tell me, did I? I was so full of woe and self-pity——

“Fort Belvoir, Virginia,” she repeated then. “That’s for the camoufleurs, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

"It's what you wanted," Alison said. "I'm so glad you got what you wanted. Will you be——" She stopped short.

"Will I be what, darling?"

"I don't suppose you know how long you might be stationed there, or—anything about it."

"Oh, quite a while, I should think," Tom said lightly. "In fact, if what I've still got to learn about camouflage is any criterion, I'll probably be right there for the duration."

Alison said, "Just tell me this. When you've learned all there is to know, will there be anything to be done about it in this country? Or does it mean foreign service—inevitably?

"I'm sorry," she said an instant later, burying her face against his chest. "Oh, *damn*, I'm sorry!" said Alison, who almost never swore—not even mildly. She said, "I always thought that if I ever had to send a man of mine to a war, I'd be so brave. . . . But that was before I ever really thought there would be a war in my time. My adult time. And it was before I knew you."

Tom's arms again were tight around her. "My sweet, you're trembling," he said. "You mustn't be such a silly little girl. I'll probably never get any nearer the Japs or the Nazis than I am right now."

She said, "It's sudden, that's all. I thought you were going to finish the Brooklyn job first, and the other government jobs—I thought it would be another six weeks at least."

"Um-hmm, that's what I thought," he said. "But it's all been switched around since I've been away. So now the partners are going to take over the various jobs, while the Army takes me over. They seemed to think I'd be more use to them in than out."

"And what are you?" Alison suddenly remembered to ask. "Those were officers' hats I saw on the bed."

"Seems I'm a captain," he said, looking sheepishly amused. He snapped his fingers. "Just like that. It's a funny war, damned if it isn't. You get your commission first and earn it afterward—you hope."

" 'Captain Jerome,' " Alison said experimentally. "That's very nice, Tom. Oh, that's really very nice indeed. Biff will be thrilled—and so am I."

V

Biff was asleep by the time she got back to the apartment. It was a quarter of eight. She dressed methodically, feeling listless about it, and absent-minded.

She had no heart whatever for this evening. . . . She put her most becoming dress on, but this was more for courage than for coquetry. She made her face look gaily pretty in the mirror, but her eyes were shadowed with apprehension, and she kept thinking, “I’m still not a bit sure this is wise.” Once or twice she almost started for the telephone to rearrange things; or at least to hear Tom say again that everything would be all right.

She was ready before the doorbell rang. She was pacing around in the living room, smoking cigarettes, too restless to sit down for long. When she heard the bell she thought, “Which will it be?” She let Mademoiselle answer the ring. “Good evening, Mr. Sherman,” she heard Mademoiselle say in the hall. Even without the name, Alison could have told by Mademoiselle’s tone that it was Carey. The tone was polite, but it was not as warm as it would have been if this had been Tom. Mademoiselle worshiped Tom, and she was clearly not impressed with Biff’s sudden father. . . . She had an instinct about people.

Carey came smiling in, saying, “Hello, Beautiful,” at sight of Alison. It was an automatic word with him, a kind of nickname for most women. If they were really beautiful, he added something to it; and he was lavish now with compliments on Alison’s appearance. “I love you in white, anyway,” he said, “with your Christmas-angel hair. I wish you’d wear white oftener than you do.”

That made her smile a little, and she said, “How do you know I don’t?”

“Well, oftener than you used to, then.” . . .

Mademoiselle brought in a cocktail tray, and Carey mixed the cocktails. It was the sort of thing he did better than other people, and everybody always let him do it. Alison watched him, thinking, “Mix enough for three,” and wondering whether she would say it that way, or some other way. Meanwhile, Carey was still talking about what she used to wear. He was recalling certain dresses—a blue velvet, a green moiré. She had forgotten them herself, but he remembered.

“You’re remarkable,” she mused aloud. “But, then, you always did like women’s clothes.”

“I love them.”

He poured out the cocktails, noticing the third glass as he did so. “Why three glasses?” he asked idly. “Are we having company—or has my son taken to drink in his old age? Here you are, Beautiful, here’s yours.”

Alison took a sip of it, and then said, “Tom is coming.”

“Oh, really?” Carey said, with apparent calm. “Tom, your fiancé?”

Which was unnecessary. He knew well enough who Tom was, after these three days. Biff had first mentioned Tom to him after three minutes—and by

name. Her own original discretion in the matter had been useless.

"He got back this afternoon," she said now. "I saw him for a little while after I left you. He wanted us both to dine with him this evening, and I accepted for us both. I hope you don't mind." Her sudden glance was challenging, although her voice was not. "After all," she said mildly, "you have to meet him sometime."

"Yes. I want to. Well, no, I don't really," Carey said, and smiled. "But as you say, it's got to happen sooner or later. So tonight's the night, then. When's he coming?"

"Any minute now."

"The thing to do is drink this cocktail," Carey instructed himself, still smiling. "And this one," he said a minute later, having drained and then refilled his glass.

"You're not afraid, are you?" said Alison.

"Of what?"

"I was just wondering."

"I couldn't be more interested," said Carey, "as a matter of fact."

Tom was prompt, as usual. The doorbell rang just at that instant. "There he is now," Alison said automatically, and Carey for once was silent, looking gravely down into his glass. It seemed to give her a slight advantage, in an obscure sort of way, and she looked at him until he raised his eyes and met her glance. Then she said, "I really love him very much, Carey."

It was a kind of plea. Carey said nothing to it. She saw him nod his head, but that was just to signify that he had heard—it promised nothing, and committed him to nothing.

They met quite undramatically, in a commonplace, everyday fashion. An almost offhand fashion, as Alison remembered it afterward. It was like introducing two disinterested strangers at a cocktail party. They shook hands, they smiled civilly, they uttered the amenities, but it was all entirely casual, and if their eyes took any measure of each other in that moment, it was too quick for a third pair of eyes to see. "It's time we met, I think," Tom said, and Carey agreed with that, and he added something pleasant about how Biff had been singing Tom's praises. He didn't even say "my son," as he did usually when he spoke of Biff.

The evening, from that moment on, couldn't possibly have been predicted. Sitting at dinner, listening attentively, letting Tom and Carey do most of the talking, Alison thought that she still didn't know quite how she had thought it would be—she only knew that she hadn't dreamed it would be like this. Everybody was very polite and nice to everybody. You would have said that

Tom and Carey got on famously. You would even have said that they liked each other better than either of them liked her. And Alison kept thinking, with ironical amusement, "What civilized people we all are, to be sure! This is fantastic." . . .

She even felt that she ought to be enjoying herself—that if she had had just a few fewer problems on her mind, she could have relished such an evening as this. After all, it was rather piquant to be out on the town with your past and future husbands. They both looked marvelous in their dinner jackets. They both fought to light her cigarettes. They talked about all sorts of things—Biff and the war and South America, chiefly. Tom drew Carey out on the subject of the Argentine, and in particular about how they felt about the war down there; and Carey talked well. Alison had forgotten that he could talk so well, on any impersonal topic. He seemed to have developed a genuine, grown-up interest in world affairs, and even really to know a thing or two about them.

He showed off so beautifully, in fact, that she began to be a little worried for fear Tom would think she had been much too harsh in her descriptions of him. This was that famous charm of Carey's—turned on full. One should beware of this, as she well knew. He made neat little speeches expressing his appreciation of Tom's good influence on Biff; he seemed sincerely pleased and grateful. He asked intelligent questions about Tom's recent trip. When it developed presently—with Alison bringing the fact out—that Tom was to be inducted on Monday, Carey's response was like a friend's response, not like a rival's. There was no gloating note in what he said, no "so-you've-got-to-go-away" note. It was all pleasantly congratulatory, and even enviously admiring.

"I must do something of the sort myself," Carey wound up, "one of these days."

Surely that was conversational. It was his next remark that was surprising. He said lazily, "It's just a question whether to do it here or down there."

"You mean *enlist*?" said Alison, sounding as startled as she felt. But that wasn't very flattering, so she covered it up hastily, saying with belated matter-of-factness, "But you'd have to do it down there, wouldn't you? You're an Argentinian now."

"I've even got papers to prove it," Carey assented, smiling. "But it's doubtful whether anyone ever gets over being born an American, so I don't know quite what I'll end up as. I could enlist up here, I find, without much trouble."

He seemed to mean everything he was saying, but neither Tom nor Alison could make out exactly what its real substance was, and they both waited, watching him intently. Carey chose to meet Alison's gaze, not Tom's, and his

next observation was addressed to her.

"After all," he said, still lightly, "no father of your son could stay out of the service for very long when there's a war on. He's like a little recruiting officer, that Biff."

"What on earth has he said?"

"In a way," Carey answered, "it's what he hasn't said. It's what he takes for granted. It's all the result of the elegant build-up you've given me, my dear, and it's pretty embarrassing, really. He assumes great bravery on my part, together with all the other virtues. He confidently expects me to do the big thing under all circumstances."

"That's true. He does," said Alison.

She couldn't think of anything else to say, so she just left it there.

"It's a little out of my line, as you know," Carey said, in the same self-mocking voice. This time he included Tom in his smile. "Makes me feel like the world's worst hypocrite—and through no fault of my own. It's even making me act like one, because I keep trying to live up to his picture of me. It's a chore, I can tell you. Only this morning in Central Park I damned near broke my neck, vaulting over a high stone wall, just because Biff thought I could do it. I don't know why I'm not a hospital case right now."

They all laughed a little at that, although somehow nobody felt much like it.

"Well, and there you are," said Carey in conclusion. "That's the kind of thing I mean. And that's why I say he's quite likely to herd me into the Army, or Navy, before he's through."

"You mustn't let him do that," said Alison firmly, "if you don't want to be herded."

Carey said, "But I'm not so sure it's such a bad idea, at that. It all depends."

After which no one said anything at all for just a minute.

It wasn't late when they left the restaurant, it wasn't much after ten o'clock, and Carey suggested a bar he'd found where there was a good piano-player; but Alison vetoed that, insisting that she must go home. Yes, she knew it was early, and she was sorry, but she really must. She didn't say, "I am worn out with you two," though she might have said it. Both of them took her home in a taxi, and left her at the apartment-house door. She didn't ask them up—she wanted very much to talk to each of them alone, but not to both, and she couldn't ask the one without the other. She rather hoped that Tom would

behave like a fiancé and come up anyhow, without an invitation. He didn't, though. . . . She found out afterward why he didn't.

"Well, good night," she said to them both, and shook hands formally on the sidewalk. She thought, "This seems too silly," but there didn't seem to be anything else to do, or even anything further for her to say, except that she'd had a very nice time. She left them there, and the doorman opened the door for her and she went inside; and just before the door closed she heard Carey saying, "Can I drop you somewhere?" She couldn't hear what it was that Tom replied, but she was aware that it wasn't brief enough to be a mere yes or no—it had the length of a counter-proposition.

Upstairs in her own apartment, she undressed slowly; then when she was ready for bed she thought, "No, what's the use? I couldn't sleep. It's much too early anyway." So she got partly dressed again, in a warm black wool pajama suit that had a brief bolero jacket over its white crepe blouse. There was a scarlet cummerbund for a belt, and she fastened this around her waist; to keep her feet warm she unearthed a gay little pair of after-ski boots—the knitted kind, with the soft velvet soles and the bright worsted embroidery. She even put a small velvet bow in her hair, and as she did so she smiled at herself in the mirror, and said to herself, "Are you expecting a caller, by any chance?" Well, and she was, now that she thought of it. Surely Tom would come back, for a little while, when he was through talking to Carey. She felt suddenly certain that that was just what he was doing.

She lay down on the living-room couch, with a book that she didn't read. It was a good light book for holding in your hands, and you could turn the pages at regular intervals, or forget to turn them at all, and it didn't matter. She killed an hour in this fashion, thinking and worrying all that time—worrying increasingly toward the end. Tom might at least telephone, and report. He couldn't be thinking that she was asleep, could he? She got up and went to her own telephone and called his apartment, but there was no answer. She even tried Carey's hotel suite while she was about it. No answer there either. Whatever was happening, was still happening; and it shouldn't be taking so long as this. She knew that that was an unreasonable thought, but nevertheless she had it.

At eleven-fifteen, when she was back in the living room again, but not lying down any longer—not even pretending to be relaxed—she heard the house telephone in the kitchen, buzzing with its own peculiar urgency. She went rushing out to answer it. But it wasn't Tom, it was Carey. The hollow subterranean-sounding voice of the doorman arrived from fifteen floors below, saying, "Mr. Sherman calling in the lobby, Mrs. Sherman. He says he'd like to come up, if it isn't too late."

"Yes, send him up, please."

She left the front door open for him, as she had for Tom that other time—was it only a little over a week ago? It seemed forever. She went back to her bedroom and ran a comb through her hair and flicked a powder puff over her face; she made her mouth up again, with a lip brush and lipstick. When she emerged into the rear hallway she heard Carey in the kitchen, and she found him there, pouring himself a drink. She was aware at once that this was the latest of several stiff drinks since she had last seen him. He wasn't drunk, not really, but on the other hand he wasn't quite sober.

He said, "I had to talk to you."

"Yes, I know," said Alison gently. "It's all right. I hadn't gone to bed."

"I've helped myself to the scotch, as you see. Shall I mix you one?"

"No, thank you. Not now."

In the living room Carey remained standing, while Alison sat down. He leaned one elbow on the mantelpiece and held his drink in the other hand. He looked as haggard as so handsome and so young a man could ever look, and Alison thought, "This is the way it will be in another ten years—no, twenty years. This is the way he will look when he is quite old."

Carey said, speaking abruptly, "I've just left Tom. We had a long heart-to-heart talk. You knew we were going to, didn't you? I did—from the very first minute I saw him."

"I knew you liked each other."

Carey nodded. "And that was my hard luck," he said bitterly. "I wanted to hate his guts."

Alison was silent.

"Because you love him," Carey said. "It's as you told me. I kept hoping it wasn't true—but it is true."

"Yes, Carey. It is."

"I only had to be sure," Carey's husky voice said. "I know what to do now."

Then he said, "I always knew it was a hundred-to-one shot anyway."

"You mean your coming up here?"

"I mean that—and all the rest of it. Everything else I've done, or tried to do, this whole past year."

His voice broke then, as if self-pityingly. He flung away from the hearth and went across the room to a window. He stood there, with his back to her—his good, broad-shouldered back. She thought, "He looks so strong, to be so weak. It's just incredible." . . . She lighted a cigarette, noting that her hands

were not quite steady; she sat back, holding the cigarette but not smoking it, and again waited. She thought, "I won't say anything. He'll go on talking in a minute." But he didn't, and after a while she said, "Why don't you tell me about it, Carey? What have you tried to do this whole past year? What does that mean?"

He made a choked sound—vague and wordless—and it was then she realized he was crying.

"Oh, Carey, *don't*!" she said. "Please don't do that." And then, "My dear, I'm sorry. I'm so terribly sorry, if you feel that way."

"But men just don't cry," her mind kept thinking. And: "What if Biff should see you?" She even almost said it to him, coaxingly, maternally.

Then Carey's tortured voice began to tell her a story—the whole story. He still kept his back turned. It was evidently easier for him so. "I've tried to get over loving you," he said. "I've tried everything. Other women, other countries—time, and distance, and long separation—all the standard panaceas. It was never any good, though. Nothing ever worked. I even tried to drink myself to death a couple of years ago, but even that didn't work. It seems I'm even hard to kill." . . .

This was the preface of the story, this reiteration in new words; and this time she believed him absolutely, because you couldn't doubt that broken voice of his, or what it said. You couldn't even doubt the chapter which came next—the much less likely chapter. It had begun about a year ago, he told her now, and it had been a definite attempt at a reform. "I'd tried everything else," he said. "I thought I'd try pulling myself together, and seeing if I couldn't make some sense in life, just for a change. You get sick of floundering around forever. I was sick to death of my own uselessness. And I thought that maybe, someday, if I ever succeeded in making a decent human being out of myself, I could come back up here and start all over again with you——

"That was the dream," he said. "And now you know."

He made the rest of the narrative fairly brief; the words after that seemed less difficult, for him. He left the window presently and returned to the mantelpiece and picked up his drink again. Meanwhile, he recounted some of the things he had done in that year of improvement, and some of the steps he had taken toward the fulfillment of the dream. He didn't speak now as though he felt that they had been altogether futile; he seemed rather proud of his achievements, for their own sake. "He will go on with them," Alison thought, "now that he's started." She sat listening absorbedly, her chin on her hand, her whole face glowing softly. She had been right in thinking there was good in him. Now she was justified.

“I even went to work, believe it or not,” Carey was saying, with grim levity. “I got myself a regular job, with regular hours and a regular salary. It was a pretty good job, too, with a manufacturing firm down there. Moreover, I stuck right at it, to everybody’s vast surprise, and I lived on what I made, and I even managed to put a little by. And I haven’t had to borrow anything this whole past year—from anybody. You must have noticed that yourself,” he added, smiling wryly. “I mean until my recent cable spoiled the record.

“That takes a little explaining,” he said now. “About that thousand dollars I wanted, the trouble was——”

“I’m sorry now I didn’t send it,” Alison put in quickly. This was a compliment to the new Carey, and she really meant it. She said, “I picked the wrong time not to help you, didn’t I? Things always happen that way. But if you still need——”

“No, wait,” Carey said. “You’re sweet, but—no, that’s out. And I won’t be needing it.

“Anyway,” he said, “let me finish telling you this whole damn thing.”

He looked wretched again now, and miserably ashamed. “It didn’t last, you see,” he said, with all his bitterness returning. “Or let’s just say my halo didn’t fit me, and it slipped. Anyhow, I fell from grace again in a big way. I guess I’m incurable, after all. It certainly looks like it. Here things were going along all right, and I was feeling kind of pleased with myself, and I was beginning to think that pretty soon I could be planning a trip North to see you—and then all of a sudden everything went to pieces again, and I was right back where I started from. I got myself into a jam of the same old kind—I mean, involving a woman—and it cost me so much to get out of it that it took all my year’s savings and then some. It even cost me my job before I was through.”

“Oh, Carey, no!”

“But certainly it did,” he said, with his lip curling. “She was the boss’s woman.”

Alison said in a quiet voice, “When did all this happen, Carey? Recently, you mean?”

“Yes. January. Just a few weeks ago.”

She waited pityingly. She didn’t feel censorious, she didn’t even feel as disappointed and discouraged as she supposed she should feel. She only thought, “Well, anyway, he tried.” Somehow the uphill struggle he had had was measured and made steeper by the sheer precipitateness of this backsliding of his. She had never felt more sorry for him in her life.

“Well, and there you are,” he was continuing now. “You can fill in the rest yourself, I guess. The whole thing was a return to the old pattern—obviously. I

even ran to you for help, in the old way. I wanted to get the hell out of there, and come North, and all my money was gone, so that was why I cabled you for the thousand. It was for transportation up here. . . . This was all in my letter, by the way," he added parenthetically. "The one that still hasn't come. That will confirm everything I'm saying when you finally get it."

Alison said, "I understand now. Go on, Carey."

"So I came along anyway," Carey said, "even after I got your answer. Even after I knew you were going to be married to somebody else. It was a case of my having made up my mind to come back up here in any event—if only to escape from things down there—and that was really the reason. It wasn't that I thought there was going to be anything I could do or say to make you change your mind about marrying this other man. I admit I was going to try, but I didn't dream there was any way to do it. It was Biff, of course, who gave me the idea."

"I know."

"It would have been so easy," Carey said, smiling a little. "You had it right there for me—a weapon for my hand. It still would be the easiest thing in the world, you know, Alison. Only the trouble is," he said regretfully, "I can't be such a low-grade rotter as all that. I'd love to be, in this case—I've even tried to be—but I just can't."

"Of course you can't," she said, "because you're not one, and you never were one. You're a better person than you think you are, Carey. I've always known that."

"Well, thanks. That helps a little, anyway."

They were both smiling now—both rather tremulously. Alison's eyes were shining. She said, "What made you realize that you couldn't do it?"

"Oh, everything," said Carey. "The whole combination. Yourself—and Biff—and now Tom. He's the kind of guy you both deserve. He's exactly right for both of you, and he'll be wonderful. He'll never let you down, or—anything I might have done."

"Carey," Alison said, "and what about you in all this? What are you going to do yourself?"

"I told you tonight at dinner, didn't I? I thought I did. I'm going to enlist in something or other."

"Here in America?"

"Look, Beautiful," Carey said. "You must learn to say 'North America.' If you leave off the 'North,' it hurts the feelings of the South Americans. Try to remember that, will you, while I'm off flying bombers—for Biff?"

Alison said, “Carey Sherman, you are *not* going to fly any bombers, just because Biff has some beglamoured——”

“I’m afraid you’re right,” said Carey. “I was exaggerating a little. After all, I’m thirty-one, which it seems is a hoary old age for a would-be pilot. I doubt if they’ll take me for that, but maybe I can train as a gunner or something. They run older. Anyway, I’m going to try to find out about it on Monday. I’m going to fly down to Pensacola—if I can get on a plane—and see what’s what.”

“Oh, then it’s going to be the Navy Air Corps?”

“I look better in blue,” Carey said. “And besides—Biff’s got to have a way to tell his two fathers apart.”

Alison thought, “The gayer he is, the more I feel like crying.” She also thought, “And so does he, as far as that goes.”

Carey said now, with a kind of boyish diffidence, “Biff will be pleased, don’t you think? If I do that?”

“Biff will be very pleased,” she said shakily. “And oh, Carey, so *proud*!”

Carey left the next day, as it turned out. He could get a seat on a Sunday plane, but nothing at all for later in the week. He came over to the apartment during the morning to say good-by to Biff—though not a good-by for long, he kept promising. He’d be back some day soon in his uniform. “And in your hat,” Biff reminded him. “Will it have wings on it? What is your hat going to look like?”

There was a good deal of that sort of thing. It was a pleasantly flurried fifteen minutes, and not emotional, except just at the last. Then there was a little scene in the foyer that Alison knew she would always remember. It was just at the final minute, and just at the door, when Carey was leaving.

He knelt down, so as to be eye to eye with Biff, and the same height as Biff. He gripped him gently by the shoulders. Their faces—so alike—wore the same sort of steady smile. They were really both being very good, and brave.

Carey said, “Well, so long, old man. Be seeing you.”

“When, though?” Biff said.

“Very soon. I promised, didn’t I?”

“I might come down to Florida to see you,” Biff suggested. “Maybe Alison would bring me, or Tom, or Mademoiselle. I would like to see you flying around there. Could you take me up, do you think? I’ve never been up in a bomber, or in a pursuit plane, or even in a plane at all. Alison doesn’t thi——”

“Biff darling,” Alison said, laughing, “speaking of planes, you’re going to make Carey miss his. You must save all these things to tell him when he comes the next time.”

“I’ll write them down so I won’t forget,” Biff said to Carey.

“Do that. And you’ll be a good boy, won’t you?”

“I’ll be good.”

“And remember the secret message,” Carey said. “Don’t forget to deliver it.”

“I won’t.”

They both looked wise and merry, and they looked at Alison, who said, “Aha! I knew it! I saw you whispering together in the corner, you two imps. Just what is the secret message?”

“It’s for you,” Biff said. “But I can’t tell you yet. It’s for after Carey is gone.”

So after Carey was gone, Biff told her. He could hardly wait. “It’s about Tom,” he said. “Carey thinks Tom will be all right to be my second father, and for you to marry, and for us to live with. Carey likes him very much, he says. He couldn’t tell before, because he hadn’t met him. But he says that last night he did meet him, and now he thinks it’s fine. And that’s the message.”

“That’s a very nice message,” said Alison. “I’m—very glad to hear it.”

She was looking searchingly into her son’s small, cheerful face. There was no shadow there at all, as far as she could see; and so she dared to say, “And you’re glad, too, darling? I mean—you still think it’s the thing for us to do?”

“Why, yes, don’t you?” Biff said, looking astonished now. “If Carey says to?”

Alison couldn’t speak. She merely nodded.

“We have to do what Carey says,” Biff pointed out. “He’s my *first* father.”

“Yes, darling. That’s true.”

And then she found the words she wanted. “And isn’t he pretty fine?” she said. “Didn’t I always tell you?”


Charm
Bracelet

ON ONE of those wild September days when she was getting ready to move—packing everything up, dismantling the little apartment, for the duration—she found the charm bracelets, in an old cardboard candy box on a remote high shelf. She had almost forgotten them, but there they were. There were four of them in all—no, five—now that she disentangled them from all the other outmoded pieces of novelty jewelry which the box contained. She sat on the floor, with a packing case for a back rest, sorting all the contents over. She took her time about this task, enjoying its easiness. It made a nice little restful break in a punishing morning.

Her name was Margery Cowles, and her age was twenty-eight, if the truth were known. (It wasn't—at least, not very widely.) She looked about twenty-four. She had an attractive face, which at the moment was as dirty as a street urchin's, but which was still triumphantly symmetrical and brilliantly blue-eyed. She was dressed for the day's exigencies in slacks and beach shoes and a cotton shirt; and her hair was pinned up on the top of her head, to keep it out of the way. There was a pencil stub thrust through it, and there was also—less explicably—a wooden champagne swizzle stick, marked "R.M.S. *Queen Mary*." She had found this an hour ago, behind a desk.

Like her face, her hands were grimy with the special dust of the work in progress; and her day-before-yesterday's manicure was not holding up well at all. There was no use being gentle with it, and she had ceased to try; and now she dug her finger tips into the mass of tarnished metals in the former candy box and poked around assiduously among the buttons and the buckles, the necklaces and clips, the broken pins, the mateless earrings—all the usual accumulated junk. Everything caught onto something else, and finally she dumped the whole box out on the carpet and began to sort it there and to extricate what seemed worth extricating. Presently there were three little separate hillocks of jewelry around her—one to keep, and one to give her maid, and one to go for scrap metal.

Some of the things were sterling silver, of course, and some were real gold; and she would keep all those. The five charm bracelets were among them. Each bracelet consisted of a thin gold chain, strung thickly with the gay small gadgets that had been so popular and ubiquitous in—well, when was it exactly? Sometime during the middle Nineteen Thirties. She couldn't

remember the precise year when the fad had reached its pinnacle, because it had lasted a long time anyway, and longer for her than for most people. She had begun collecting bracelet charms in 1931, when she was in high school. That was ahead of the general craze—it was even ahead of the manufacturers, and you didn't buy things for your bracelet at that early stage. You thought them up.

Now she shook the last chain free and laid it with the others on the carpet. She stretched them all out horizontally, one above another; they looked a little like a bar of music that way, with the charms for notes.

She surveyed them, smiling gently, because they were so reminding, and so poignantly nostalgic. All these foolish little baubles. Each of them had stood for something most important once upon a time. She wasn't usually sentimental, but today was a good day for it; and now she rearranged the chains into the right chronological order, and she thought, "Here is the story of my life—almost to date." . . .

She had been sixteen in 1931, in high school; and so the first charm bracelet had a small gold football dangling from it, and a swimming medal, and a watch charm, and a fraternity emblem that had been a pin originally, and a five-dollar gold piece that had been a prize (second, not first) for public speaking. She had won that herself, in sophomore year. The other things were gifts, with the exception of the West Point button—she had stolen that off a cadet's coat in a coatroom at a Christmas party. An unknown cadet, as she remembered it; not her cadet at all. But she had had the button dipped in gold and fastened to the bracelet, and she had explained it proudly, saying, "A man from West Point," which was true enough.

The small gold football was marked "G. H. S.," with the year's date. "G" stood for Glenport, Indiana. She had been born and brought up there. Her maiden name was Clayburn—Margery Clayburn—and it was a good name in that town. Episcopal, substantial, comfortable. The Clayburns owned the town's one big department store, and they lived well in a plump pompous house on Forest Boulevard, where all the houses were set far apart, designed by architects from cities, and surrounded by the better efforts of the local garden club.

Margery at sixteen tried to look nineteen, and succeeded sometimes. She was one of the prettiest girls in Glenport, and one of the most popular, and she and her mother went to Chicago or even New York for her clothes. She had eyes the color of blue morning glories, and her long eyelashes began to be straight and then turned up abruptly, as if bent. This was because she curled

them with a small cold iron. She had a face like a white valentine, and lustrous black hair, which she could always wear in any current fashion. It did nice things, her hair. It stayed where you put it, and it curled of itself at the ends, and although she went to the hairdresser regularly, hairdressers really couldn't improve it—they could just bring out the best in it, and that was all. It blew beautifully and becomingly in the wind.

She had many beaux, both in that town and in the towns near by. The telephone rang all the time, and the crowd was always convening at Margery's house—girls didn't like her as well as boys did, but the girls came too because the boys were there. It was always the same crowd, though—that was the trouble with it. She had known all these boys from babyhood, and there was no excitement in them.

So—for excitement—she developed an infatuation for a man named Keator Chadwick, who was twice her age, or more. She never knew how old he was exactly, and it didn't matter anyway—he was as fascinating as his reputation, which was very bad. He was the town's romantic playboy, called wild and dissolute and dangerous—"He's always been too rich and too good-looking for his own good," everybody said. He had been married twice, but was a bachelor now again. He spent very little time in Glenport, by and large, but he was there that summer. Margery used to drive out the main highway to a certain crossroads and meet him there and leave her own car hidden up a lane near by. They rode all over everywhere, stopping at roadside places where Keator could get drinks (this was still 1931) and where no one from Glenport was at all likely to see them. "The family would kill me if they knew," Margery kept thinking. Thrillingly.

It was on one of those afternoons that Keator gave her a key to wear on her bracelet—a key that looked like one of those Phi Beta Kappa ones, till you examined it closely. Then you saw that the Greek letters were reversed and that the symbols on the key were a bottle and a beer mug—nothing in the least scholastic. "What is it?" Margery asked, and Keator said, "It's what I got for being a drunk in college, many years ago."

"Not really a drunk," she demurred. "I don't believe it. And not so very many years ago, either. It can't have been."

"Well, thanks," he said. "That helps."

"How many was it, really?"

He smiled at her, with his dark eyes that always seemed so flattering, so intimate and personal.

"Too many," he said. "Infant. You could be my daughter easily."

"I'm glad I'm not."

"And I," he said, "am glad you're not—for several different reasons."

"Such as——?"

"Such as these afternoons, for one," said Keator. "You can't think how they're enlivening my summer. And for another thing, I'd hate to have to worry about you—I mean paternally—and I would. You're going to cause a lot of trouble in the next few years, you wait and see."

The grown-up Margery still remembered that prediction and still liked it. "Well, and I have," she always thought. "In one way or another."

There was trouble with her parents over Keator Chadwick in the end. Sometime in August they found out about the roadside rendezvous, and there was a terrific scene in the Clayburn living room, with Margery's father stamping up and down, and Margery's mother weeping, and both of them seeming convinced that something dreadful must have happened. They did not specify what this might be, but it was in their frightened faces and in their many searching questions which they tried to make so subtle.

"I don't know what you mean," Margery kept saying, in a calm little voice. She knew quite well what her parents meant, but she wasn't really supposed to know, because they had told her nothing about the facts of life in all her sixteen years—or at least, not since the birds-and-bees-and-flowers version, when she was six or seven. So it was their own fault, and not hers, that she couldn't comfort them now by assuring them that their fears were groundless—although this was the case. She wasn't even supposed to understand what the fears were made of.

All in all, it was one of those times—not infrequent in her life—when she felt older than her parents, and a little sorry for them. They never came right out with anything—that was the trouble with them. They belonged to a generation that just didn't know how. Now they were saying things like, "Did you ever go to his house?" and, "Did he ever—er—try to kiss you?" Margery said no to the first question, truthfully. To the second she said, "Why, yes, he did. He's kissed me lots of times. But just in a little quick way, like—like a relative."

She saw her parents exchange a glance in which relief and incredulity were plainly mixed. "Is that so?" said her father, rather lamely.

"He has a girl," Margery added, being as helpful as she could. "He has a lot of girls, I guess—but there's this special one he likes. She works in an office in the daytime, though, so he can't see her till the evenings. That's why he was just kind of filling in the afternoons with me."

She did her best for her parents, in short; and with no outside aid at all. Keator, luckily for himself, was away that week at a golf tournament. By the time he came back, the furore in the Clayburn mansion had somewhat subsided; and Mr. Clayburn's original threats to shoot that Chadwick, or to wring his neck, were now reduced to mere rumbling promises to have a talk with him when he returned. This Mr. Clayburn did, but it was apparently a civilized interview, with no blows exchanged, and with no real opposition encountered. Keator courteously agreed that he was not a suitable companion for Margery and that he had better not see her again. To make quite sure that he did not, Margery's parents suddenly decided to send her East to boarding school—a thing she had always very much wanted. As a matter of fact, she had nagged them vainly about it for the past two years.

Now, all at once, she was going. It was a queer victory, the more she thought of it. Good behavior had not won it for her, and long, tearful pleading had not. On the contrary, it seemed that a little deception was more effective and that if you played with fire all summer you could scare your parents into yielding. This was a lesson in reverse; a rich reward in place of punishment. Or to put it as Margery herself would have put it, this was getting away with murder—and it was unquestionably very bad for her, in the long run. It contributed to her growing notion that you always could.

So the second charm bracelet commemorated the years 1932-3, when she was seventeen and eighteen, at Miss Breckenridge's, in New England. She had even been allowed to pick the school herself, out of a stack of catalogues. It was the one with the best-looking buildings, and it was geographically divine—being fairly near New York, to start with, and being practically ringed around by Amherst, Williams, Dartmouth, Wesleyan, Brown, and even Yale.

And it worked out well and merrily, as she had known it would. If girls were useful, she could make them like her; and they were useful here. She could always choose her friends, and from her first few weeks at the new school she cultivated in particular the New York girls—for week-end invitations—and the girls with brothers. Slightly older brothers, preferably six feet tall, and beautiful, and blond rather than dark. They needn't be athletic, but if they were, so much the better. They mustn't be too intellectual—wise men made her uneasy—but on the other hand they must be superficially bright, and glib with answers, and capable of gestures which were novel and diverting. They must be always fun, and never serious, except in love.

There were a lot of them like that. A few out of the many were represented on the second bracelet. It was still before the days when the jewelry

manufacturers took to making tiny replicas of every object you could think of, from skis to skyscrapers; but they were making a variety of emblems even then. And other things on Margery's bracelets had been fashioned specially.

Here were gay little souvenirs—a small gold heart that said, "Do Not Disturb"; a minute purse marked "Mad Money"; a red enamel Harvard pennant; a compass, and a padlock, and a polo mallet, and a saxophone, and lucky charms of various kinds, and several funny little men.

They all meant something—most of them meant something more than met the eye. She could have told you. The champagne bucket was a memento of the night in 1933 when prohibition was repealed—the first night she ever drank too much. The mousetrap with a heart caught in it was from a boy named Fletcher Haynes, who had believed that he would love her always and who'd kept believing it for three whole months. The lighthouse was a house party in Maine, the sailfish was a spring vacation spent in Florida. The little doghouse was a mute perpetual apology from Bill McClellan, who had left her between halves at a football game to meet a friend at Portal 10 to have a drink with him, and who had wandered off, and then passed out, and never reappeared at all. And the miniature grindstone, so complete and perfect (it even had a tiny handle that could turn the wheel), was the grindstone to which a collegian called "Handsome" Harrison was keeping his nose—so he claimed—for which reason he couldn't take her to a prom he had asked her to. Later she discovered that he took another girl. She had her failures, Margery. But very few.

In her second and last year at the New England school she fell madly in love with a medical student who had come to school to see somebody else originally, but who had seen her instead. It was just one of those things—an instantaneous thing, and mutual. It had happened in November, and it absorbed her completely for several months thereafter; and in the spring—in March sometime—she managed by dint of much arrangement and lying and maneuvering to get away for a week end which she spent with him in Atlantic City. That was the time they bought a wedding ring at a ten-cent store on their way through New York; and when Margery got back to school on Sunday night she still had the ring in her handbag. . . .

For a while she kept it in a box in her top bureau drawer; and then, because there was an empty link on her second bracelet, she had the metal ring dipped in gold and added to the chain. And that completed that string. She was eighteen now, and an adult eighteen, experienced, sophisticated. She would be nineteen in a few months more, and she had finished school.

II

That was the summer she went to Europe with three other girls who had been her classmates, all of them chaperoned by one of the teachers from Miss Breckenridge's—a cute one named Miss Kingsley, who was young herself and not too strict. You could call her by her nickname to her face; so she was Kingy. Under her amiable management, they sailed at the end of June and ran quickly through London and Paris and Rome and Berlin and Munich and Vienna. . . . They were dutiful about museums, but it was mostly fun and shopping, and they even met quite a few men, considering how they rushed around.

Margery didn't wear the charm bracelets during the first part of the trip—having forgotten where she'd packed them—but later they turned up, tucked into the toe of a tennis shoe, and after that she wore them constantly because she found that they amused the foreigners. In the end she started a third chain, having collected two European items for it—a regimental medal that a boy in London gave her, and a button off an officer's uniform on the ship coming home. Both these had to be gilded too, but they made fine additions.

Meanwhile she was still unofficially engaged to the medical student, and she wrote him long fond letters twice a week, or oftener, while she was gone. He met her at the boat when she returned, and even brought his mother, and Margery stayed with them for a few days at their small house in New Jersey before proceeding home. It was a shabby little house, so drab and humble that it startled her. . . . It wasn't that she was a snob about money, but she had always taken a certain amount of it for granted. This looked like downright poverty, compared with anything she'd ever known.

She felt subdued and rather touched about it, and she was gentle and tactful outwardly, and she tried hard to help Dick's mother with the incessant housework, and even to do the menial tasks as though she were used to doing them and knew how. This fooled nobody—and certainly not Dick's mother—but it was a gallant effort, which Dick himself at least appreciated. He said laughing little things like, "Nice going, baby," but he really meant them; and once he told her, with grave admiration, that he'd never seen this side of her before. Margery said blandly, "What side?" and Dick said, "Well, I can't quite call it domestic—but it's sweet and unselfish, and shows the right spirit. For a girl who was born to sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam, it's a damned good try."

He leaned down and kissed her hard and quickly on the mouth. "In fact, you'll do," he said. "I love you very much."

"I love you too."

This was the real thing for them both, and they both knew it now. The summer's separation had made no difference in the way they felt. They confessed mutually that they had rather hoped it would—because for both of them this was a badly timed betrothal from every practical point of view. Dick was working his way through medical school; and he had only begun his long training. It was going to be years before they could be married—seven or eight years. He had produced this estimate quite matter-of-factly, being used to it, and Margery too was accustomed to the idea now, though not resigned. At first she had said tragically, "Oh, darling, *no*! It can't be that long! We'll be *old* by that time—practically. I'll be an old woman."

She had said also, "And what am I going to do in all the years between now and then? You'll be busy, studying hard and working hard—but what will *I* do?"

"I've thought of that," Dick had answered. "It all depends on how much you really love me. If it's enough, you won't mind waiting. You'll find things to fill your time. But if it isn't enough, of course you'll mind, and sooner or later you'll drift away from me. It's as simple as that. I've thought about it a lot, and I know."

They had a long, bleak talk about it on her first evening back. They kept going over the same ground; and this was Margery's stubbornness, not Dick's. She couldn't believe that there wasn't some solution—there was always a solution. "Darling, look," she said at one point. "Let's be sensible about this. If it's only the lack of money, I don't see why we have to wait. My father would help us; he'd be glad to. You're the kind of man he'd like for me. And then later on, when you're established in practice, you could pay him back—if you felt that way about it. And in the meantime we could be married and be happy."

But even as she proposed this plan, she knew that Dick would never agree to it. She didn't even have to look at him, to see him shake his head, or to know how his chin hardened and stuck out. "No, thanks," he said shortly. "No part of anything like that. I'll make my own way—as I always have. Nobody has ever helped me, and nobody's going to start now."

It developed in the course of this and many subsequent discussions that Margery's father's money was a liability and not an asset in the opinion of Dick and his mother. It was obvious that they magnified this family affluence in their minds and that they thought of Margery as a spoiled little rich girl, brought up in the greatest luxury. Margery took pains to correct the misconception, but it proved difficult to do so, because Mrs. Conwayne's purposes were better suited by believing in it and by making Dick believe in it. The corollary was quite clear, of course—it was that Margery would never

make a good wife for a struggling young doctor. Never in the world, said Mrs. Conwayne by her attitude. Ridiculous even to think of it.

Here was a mortal enemy, as Margery well understood. Dick's mother was implacably against her from the very start. There was even something preconceived and foreordained about this animosity—it was as though it had been waiting ready-made, for any victim Dick presented; and you couldn't really take it personally, when all was said and done. "She would hate any girl he liked," Margery thought. "She's one of those mothers."

It was true. Mrs. Conwayne was an Army doctor's widow, with this one beloved son. Dick was her life—he was her world, to have and hold. She spoiled him, dominated him, leaned on him and chained him, all at the same time. She was a frightening woman, even as Margery had sensed; a terrifying woman; and the more so in that she seemed so small and sweet and frail and gentle. Dick even believed she was. He called her Dearest—like Little Lord Fauntleroy—and he waited on her, and worshiped her. Margery, watching him, thought despairingly after a day or two, "Don't they teach you any psychology in that medical school?" . . .

She searched her mind for euphemisms mild enough to use with Dick, and safe to use; and finally, on the evening of her second day at their house, she said to him experimentally, "I'm afraid your mother doesn't like me very well, darling. What could I do about that?"

To her despair, Dick looked completely blank. . . . He was completely fooled, then. "Why, sure she does," he said in a surprised voice. "What on earth makes you think that?"

"I don't know. It just occurred to me."

"You're crazy," Dick said comfortably. "She thinks you're wonderful. I knew she would."

So this was exclusively a women's war; and the man involved not only wasn't a participant—he didn't even know there was a war on. It was incredible that men could be so blind and stupid as they were sometimes. Margery was thinking this and pondering it miserably, when she heard Dick's voice continuing—saying something else, or making some amendment, which she missed.

"What did you say?" she asked abstractedly.

It was the money thing again. "The only trouble is," Dick said, "it worries her that you should be so rich. She thinks the way you've been brought up might make it hard for you to live the way I'll have to live—and of course she may very well be right. You're used to everything——"

"Dick, stop it," Margery said impatiently. "Just this once, please listen to

me. I'm not 'rich'—as I've told you before. Not by anybody's standards. You and your mother both have an exaggerated idea of that, and it's not fair to me, because you both hold it against me. When you come to visit us in Glenport, you'll see how wrong you are. My father's store is the biggest one in town, but that doesn't mean it's anything huge. When times are good, and the factories are all working, it does pretty well. In depression years like these past few, it doesn't. We live in a big old house, but it's more comfortable than it is swanky, and it needs doing over but we can't afford it, and we only keep two full-time servants. I'm not saying that that's not something—but it isn't what you think. You're behaving as though I were an heiress."

Dick was impatient too; and his answering voice matched hers. "I'm not," he said. "You're misunderstanding me. What I was trying to say was simply that you're used to more than I can give you—including trips to Europe and all the rest of it. You're going to miss those things, of course you are, because you've always had them. You can't even imagine what it's like to worry along with no luxuries at all. As my mother says, it's not your fault, but it's such a wholly different background——"

"There you go again," said Margery quietly. "It's as your mother says."

"Well, and she's right!" Dick said. He was angry now. "She's absolutely right, in this case. It's my hard luck that I had to fall in love with somebody like you who's never done a stroke of work in her life, who won't know how when the time comes, and who furthermore likes fun and gaiety and parties—and isn't going to want to have to give them up."

"And must we give them up? I don't see why. You can't work all the time."

"Certainly I can work all the time," said Dick. "I always have, and I expect I always will. I've always *had* to. Some people are born to that—and I'm one of them. And you're not. It makes for trouble between people, a difference like that."

Margery looked at him in silence. She thought, "And you're still quoting her." But this time she didn't even try to say it. It was just no use.

Nothing was settled when she left, and nothing was decided, and she felt as though her head were buzzing deafeningly with all their words. She would go home and think it all out, she kept promising herself and Dick. She would get perspective on it. . . .

But they both felt dreadfully depressed, and the years ahead seemed worse than uncertain, and their parting now had a kind of sad finality about it, of which they were both aware. It was because of this that they kept talking about New Year's, when Dick would visit Glenport; and about Margery's next trip

East. They talked and talked about their future meetings—fearful lest there be none. And they were right. There were never any more meetings.

Margery had two ordinary letters from Dick in the next week or two; and then finally one special one, whose very thickness put her on her guard before she opened it. He was usually too busy to write more than a page in his strange, quick, hen-track handwriting (born for prescriptions, that handwriting was). This time there were ten pages, all of them written on both sides. "Darling," the letter said, "I have been sitting here tearing up paper all evening, trying to find the right way to make you understand . . ."

She knew then what it was going to be, and what had happened. She almost didn't need to read the rest, although of course she did. She read it many times. It recapitulated all the weary arguments against their marriage—it destroyed love with common sense. There was no mention of his mother in it; but there didn't need to be. His mother had won, as she would always win.

In the days and weeks that followed, Margery was able to say to herself, "It was always hopeless anyway. It wouldn't have worked. I am well out of it." But at best this logic was cold comfort—and usually it was no comfort at all, because she had really loved Dick very much, and it took her a long time to get over him. The result was bitterness, and she reacted very badly, and in the end she got into trouble again; although that didn't happen as soon as it might have. There was the heartbreak first, and then the palliative. Or rather, then the counterirritant.

That was in the early spring. She was still in Glenport then, having spent the endless autumn and winter there, wondering among other things what on earth to do with herself. You finished school, and you fell out of love—perforce—and then what did you do? Glenport was worse than ever, it was simply deadly now; and boredom was not only added to her grief, but mixed up with it, so that as time went on she was no longer certain which was which.

She must get out of here—she couldn't stand this, she kept thinking. This was a waste of youth and charm and smartness and good looks. Nowhere to go but the country club, nothing to do but play bridge, day and night—and the only man in the whole town who interested her in the least was Tony Winfield, who was married to one of Margery's cousins. Luckily it was a cousin she disliked.

In some respects this was a repetition of the Keator Chadwick episode—there were the roadside rendezvous; and there was the fact that Tony was much older than herself. It was otherwise quite different, though. It was a more grown-up affair.

Sometimes she wondered how she had got into it—she hadn't really meant to—and in a way it was a little less than half her fault. Tony was bent on dalliance; the pursuit had been all on his side. It had begun with whispered nothings at the dances at the country club, and then with kisses snatched from her on the dark porches of the clubhouse, and then with daytime visits in the Clayburn living room—Tony simply took to dropping in on his way home in the late afternoons, as any husband of a cousin might, to have a drink with Margery, and with her parents too if they were there.

Even their first real date together had a cousinly motive, to start with—Tony had asked her to help him pick out a birthday present for Ellen, his wife. This was the avowed purpose, and they drove to Indianapolis to do this errand, and they did pick out a very nice string of beads for Ellen—and very quickly too. It took them about fifteen minutes, after the three-hour ride. They also had lunch and saw a matinee and then had cocktails, before driving home. "Let's do this again," Tony said when they parted; and Margery said lightly, "Why not?"

That was in February. Now, at the end of April, there were four new items on Margery's charm bracelet—one of them acquired during a New York visit over Easter, and the other three contributed by Tony. His selections were a pair of spectacles; a baby carriage; and two gold nails. . . . Margery's cousin Ellen noticed them all one day across a bridge table and asked about them.

"You've got some more new gadgets," she said, reaching across to finger them. "What are they? Oh, how cunning—the little spectacles! What do they mean?"

"They mean that love is blind," said Margery, smiling to herself. That was exactly what they did mean. *So your husband says*, she added mentally; and almost laughed aloud.

"Who gave you those?" Ellen inquired. "Somebody new?"

"Well, new to me."

One of the other women at the table said, "Is that a baby carriage?"

"Why, so it is!" cried Ellen. "Meaning what? Why, Margery! I hope and trust not!"

Ellen's little joke. Ellen was full of little jokes. Everybody smirked appropriately, and Margery said, "No, no. Sorry to disappoint you all. The baby carriage is supposed to be for me—because I'm so much younger than the man who gave it to me. A man in New York," she thought it best to say in passing.

"How old is he?"

"Forty-some."

“Oh dear,” said Ellen. “My age. I never think about it till I hear it—and then it sounds as old as God.”

“Margery always did like older men,” somebody else observed. “Remember that terrific crush she had on Keator Chadwick?”

They all seemed to remember, and everybody smiled, including Margery herself. She felt a little startled, though; and she said, “I didn’t know that that was common knowledge.”

“Anything anybody does in a town this size is always common knowledge,” Ellen said placidly, “—sooner or later. And usually sooner. Surely you’ve discovered that, by this time.”

Margery let someone else affirm this comment. She herself said nothing. Ellen was still fingering the new things on the third charm bracelet—peering at them closely, because she was nearsighted. She said now, “And what are these two little dangles on the end? They look like nails.”

“They are,” said Margery. “He gave me those, too. The same man. They’re not very complimentary, either—they’re what I’m supposed to be as hard as, if you can imagine it. That’s what he thinks, at least. He says the baby and the nails represent the contradiction in my character. Bid, will you, Ellen? It’s your turn.”

“I’ve never thought you were hard,” said Ellen loyally. “Maybe you’re a little bit spoiled—but what does he mean by ‘hard’? Who is he, anyway? I’ll bid two spades.”

“Nobody important,” Margery said. “Just a man—and not even very attractive. And kind of a bore, come to think of it. I’ll bid four diamonds. Five, in fact.”

But Tony was important in her life, as it turned out. He double-crossed her, in the end, by telling Ellen the whole story. Margery never understood just how or why this came about, or what induced it—what intimate domestic mood; what sudden twinge of Tony’s conscience. She only knew that it had happened, because Ellen herself told her.

That was a strange scene—sharply etched on Margery’s memory to this day. It had taken place at Margery’s own house, at teatime; Ellen had invited herself to tea. There was a wood fire going, and they both sat on the couch near it. Ellen looked as Ellen always looked, plump, matronly and dowdy. There were tendrils of hair falling loose in her neck, as there nearly always were; and her hat was even worse than usual.

“You see,” she said, explaining patiently, “Tony always tells me

everything, in the long run. All about his little flirtations. There've been lots of others before this. And he knows that I know that they don't really mean anything—so he always tells me all about them in the end. He likes to get them off his chest, I suppose you might say."

"No matter who else he involves," said Margery furiously.

"Well, but my dear," Ellen said, still in that same patient explanatory voice, "you asked for it. You really did, you know. And men do tell on women—on the women who don't really matter to them. Tony loves me, you see."

She said, "That's what girls like you never seem to understand. Married men do sometimes love their wives a great deal—more than you'd think, from the way they sometimes behave. Much better than they do their little flirtations, in the last analysis."

There was a curious beauty and dignity about Ellen just in that moment; a serenity so deep you couldn't touch it from outside. Nothing could ever shatter this, and you were sure of it. "Tony isn't worth it, either," Margery thought in passing.

She said, "And did he send you here to talk to me? Or was it your idea?"

"No, it was his," Ellen said. "I didn't really want to come. I thought it would be easier for you if he just told you about it himself, but—well, he wanted me to do it."

"Men are so brave," Margery said witheringly. "He couldn't face me. I don't wonder."

It was the most humiliating thing that had ever happened to her, and she thought she couldn't bear it, and she hated him, and hated Ellen . . . but in her heart she knew that in all this there was a bitter justice. She had asked for it, as Ellen said. It served her right. And it would teach her to let other women's men alone—"Especially," she thought now, with futile rage, "when I don't *want* them! When I wouldn't take them as a *gift*!" It was quite true, really. She never had liked Tony very much.

One thing was certain now, she couldn't stay a minute longer in this town—she simply had to get away, and live, and breathe. She delivered this decision as an ultimatum to her father; and this time she was so much more emotional and insistent than she had been in any previous similar scene in recent months that now she won her point, and it was settled almost easily.

She wanted to be in New York, and as an excuse she was going to study art. You had to have an excuse, after all; and this was the best she could think of. She had no real artistic talent, as she herself knew, but her father believed

that she had, because she could draw girls' heads pretty well and she could copy things nicely without tracing. It had always been enough to convince her parents that she was an artist; and they were rather pleased than otherwise that she now proposed to do something about it. "Well, now, that makes good sense," her father said approvingly.

She went almost immediately. She was to live at one of those chaperoned residences that flourish for out-of-town girls in New York—this one was on the West Side and it was called Miss Upshaw's. The house itself was a kind of monument of former grandeur; a great gloomy stone affair with iron gates at the front, and the coat of arms of the original owner emblazoned in the iron.

There were about fifteen girls in residence here; and there were three or four servants to take care of them. It was a sufficient number, in view of the fact that no meals were served except breakfast. Miss Upshaw herself lived somewhere downstairs—in a broom closet, it was rumored—from which she popped out anxiously from time to time, to fulfill her role of hostess-chaperon. She was a dim, vague woman in nose glasses, perpetually fluttered and helpless. She called all her charges "darling" and could never learn which was which; and how she had ever convinced herself or any of the parents involved that she was a good and successful mentor for young girls at large in New York was a ceaseless mystery.

It was true that there were certain rules, and that they were more or less adhered to—no men were allowed above the first floor of the house, and all the girls had to be in before two A.M., at which time the doors were locked on the assumption that all of them *were* in. Sometimes it was so and sometimes not. Anyone staying out later could tweak a string which hung from an open second-story window, and which at its upper end was attached to the wrist of a sleeping friend, who would wake and descend and open the door and admit the culprit, and nobody ever the wiser.

There were other factors that reminded you of boarding school in the same way; but for the most part, life at Miss Upshaw's was urbane and worldly and New Yorkish. The girls who lived there hailed from all over the country—usually from small towns. They made enthusiastic metropolitans, not to say giddy ones. Miss Upshaw's was expensive, so they all came from fairly prosperous families; and by the same token they had generous allowances. Most of them were studying something—art, dramatics, dancing, dress designing—and a few had jobs; but these activities were secondary. They were all in New York primarily to enjoy themselves and to escape their homes. They would probably never go back, except for Christmases and funerals. That was how it was.

Margery's particular friend among them, almost from the first day, was a

girl named Gloria Gordon, formerly of Illinois. Gloria had been in New York a year or more and was thoroughly acclimated; in fact you couldn't believe she hadn't been born at Fifty-seventh and Fifth. She and Margery liked each other at sight, and in a week they were inseparable. They went to the same art school, and they shared a large double room at Miss Upshaw's. People said, "They even look alike—only in different colors."

Gloria was a blonde, with wonderful hair like pale yellow satin. She had gray eyes, and a thin smart figure, and essential chic. She always reminded you of that phrase about just having stepped out of a bandbox, and you thought of it as a good bandbox, with a spanking big bow on top. She was the most up-to-date person Margery had ever known, and she kept herself that way, in dress, in looks, in vocabulary, in opinions, in tastes, and in the things she liked to do and the places she liked to go—she was forever changing those things, because when she didn't she was bored. Only novelty assuaged a dangerous restlessness in her.

She and Margery could wear each other's clothes, and did; and they pooled their spending money, more or less; and they shared the men they didn't care much about, while leaving each other's favorite men strictly alone. . . . In other words, they got on beautifully. Furthermore they were becoming to each other, in their blonde-and-brunette contrast; they were picturesque together in public places. They had a highly popular summer, and the only dreary feature was Miss Upshaw's—and in September they decided to move and take a small apartment. "Let's get out of this nunnery," as Gloria said. "This is no fun."

On Margery's part it required a good deal of parental persuasion by letter; and Margery's mother even made a special trip to New York to argue, but she returned defeated in the end. Gloria's parents were no problem—you gathered that they never had been. "I don't ask them, I just tell them," Gloria said.

They got a list from a renting agent and went apartment hunting, looking as everyone does for something unusual and falling in love with it, both of them, at first sight when they finally found it. Living room, bedroom, kitchenette, bath. The studio type of thing, with one whole wall a vast sheet of window. Three steps led down to the living room from the foyer, and there was a good high ceiling, and there was also a wood-burning fireplace—although they couldn't remember to buy wood. They found the world's best part-time maid, one Hattie from Harlem, who came in the mornings and got their breakfast, and swept and dusted, and looked after their clothes. . . .

They fixed the apartment up for living, which to them meant parties; every chair should be comfortable, and every visitor's elbow should have a little table near it, for setting down a glass; and there should always be plenty of ash trays, and fresh cigarettes in the boxes. The place had been furnished when

they took it, and not badly either—in fact rather well—but they replaced a few of the pieces with new ones of their own. These included an enormous couch, as wide as it was long; and a cornerwise cellarette-bar arrangement; and of course a radio. They gave a housewarming which was very successful and typical in that there were few girls besides themselves, mostly young men.

It inaugurated a festive and frivolous year—the gayest year of Margery's life; and the most exhausting in retrospect. She always thought, "I don't know how we lived through it." They were almost never at home, and the apartment was strictly for sleeping and dressing, as it turned out—and the living room was a mere waiting room for their young men to pace around in. They themselves were always a little late, so the room was useful.

Both of them went to school in the mornings—usually they did, unless they overslept or something. It took up the only slack there was in their time; and they liked that about it. Lunch was important and amusing—they always lunched in some popular mid-town place, either by themselves, or with two of their mid-town young men (the ones who were in advertising, or publishing, or radio, or whatever). You saved the Wall Street young men until evening, because in the daytime, of course, they had too far to come. These were long lunches, in the New York manner, beginning with a dry martini, perhaps two, and going on through an egg Benedict and a green salad to coffee.

That took till three in the afternoon, if properly managed, and then there were the things you had to do to keep beautiful—hairdressing appointments, manicures, fittings. These until six. Then sometimes a cocktail party, and always an evening date. . . .

They were seen in all the right places, in all the right clothes. You saw them in the smartest night-clubs, looking young and fresh in the tired air; you spied them at the theater on opening nights; you met them on Football Specials. The best headwaiters not only knew who they were, but knew what they liked to eat. They developed a trick of little special instructions—lemon peel instead of an olive in the dry martini, please, and a certain brand of scotch in the scotch old-fashioned; and no fruit. Concise little directions, which they delivered to their escorts and their escorts relayed to the staff. They had a long, slow stare for a whole room, a way of looking everybody over.

Margery became wholly and completely a New Yorker. It was achieved by imperceptible degrees, but it was quick and thorough. She had the point of view, the slang, the shibboleths, the newest gossip out of columns, the little funny stories, good or bad, that always seemed to emanate from Wall Street; she held the right opinions about plays and radio programs, books and pictures, restaurants and food and entertainers. . . . This adaptation even expressed itself in such physical acts as the crossing of streets in a certain way, and the

automatic bending of the head just enough in getting into and out of a New York taxi. . . . And she was proud of living in Manhattan, and a little lofty about people who didn't; always a little amused by out-of-towners such as she had been.

And the year was 1935, and she was twenty, and then twenty-one. It was the year she sometimes wore her hair in a page-boy bob—at other times she combed it high, so that it climbed her head. She liked black dresses with big white cuffs, like the cuffs of a London bobby; she liked snub-nosed slippers, tall with heels, and—this year—top-heavy with bows. She had lately given up dark-red fingernail polish because her nails were breaking. She wore a flower in her hair at night, or a butterfly, or a pair of stars.

And that was the year, too, when everybody wore charm bracelets, and Margery felt rather as though she herself had started a national craze. New additions to her own collection came thick and fast, and she filled up the third string in no time, and most of a fourth. . . . In retrospect, this was a somewhat hazy period, and she found that she couldn't remember who had given her some of the things on the fourth string, or what they had stood for at the time, if anything. The little ice-cream cone, for instance, and the opera glasses, and the compass, and the infinitesimal whistle which you could actually blow. These reminded her of nothing now at all, and no one in particular. Just party men.

There were really a great many of them, and in memory they were much alike—they had good dinner jackets and well-barbered hair and nice American faces, and they were quick and merry in their speech and cheerfully superficial in their point of view. It was a pattern, and precise; they had almost all come off the same assembly line, as Margery once remarked to Gloria. "That good old reliable Ivy League assembly line," she said specifically. "Is it our fault that we don't seem to attract any wider variety? Yes, I suppose it is."

But this was a passing comment, and not a real complaint. It was the pattern she was used to, after all, and the one she still liked best. And it was true that these were very pleasant, very personable young men—even if they did sometimes seem a little lightweight and a shade monotonous. They were still Margery's own kind; and out of such a horde of them, you would have thought there would be somebody whom she could really fall in love with—and she tried, all winter long. Somehow it didn't work, though. None of this was real at all.

Gloria said morosely, "Cheer up, my pet. You're lucky." Gloria herself was in love, deeply and miserably in love with the only man of her acquaintance whom she couldn't possibly get; and there were tears and floor pacings in the little apartment late at night. Margery had to listen to the endless

tale of woe; he had said this, and Gloria had said that, and afterwards she had been sorry, and he had gone slamming out, and now he hadn't phoned for days, and what was she ever going to do? . . . What she did was drink too much, and she did it deliberately and consistently, and often on these late nights Margery had to help her to bed, and in the mornings her hang-overs were pitiful to see. "And if this is what comes of losing your head over somebody," Margery thought, "may I never do it."

It was a temporary aberration, fortunately; and in the course of the spring, Gloria worked herself out of it and went on the wagon and was all right again. But the object lesson had been striking while it lasted. Margery would not forget it.

To fall in love, but not to lose your head—that was the trick. Not to go off the deep end about anybody, ever.

"And the wedding ring?" said the man on the boat. "Who gave you that? It's not a real one, is it?"

This was later in the same year, and the boat was a liner returning from Europe at the end of summer, and the man was a man she had met the second day out. His name was Garrett Cowles, and he was different and quite wonderful. Here was a man to marry, at long last—to marry well, to marry sensibly. "And I'm in love with him," Margery kept thinking. "I really am in love with him—I guess."

This was what was called a four-day crossing—which actually meant that it took nearly six days, counting it from pier to pier. It was now the last day out before New York; or the last evening, rather. Very late. The bar had closed, at least as far as service went, and the big smoking room was almost vacant now, but they still sat there, at an alcove table. They had been exchanging autobiographies—and not just the highlights, as they had at first, but the more intimate revelations. They had reached that stage. Margery's charm bracelets, which Garrett hadn't seen before, had started it all.

"Oh, the wedding ring," Margery said lightly, in the full intention of saying that it was just a gag—of inventing some amusing little story to explain it. She had done this before, when other people had inquired. But now she touched it with her finger tip, and suddenly she changed her mind and told the truth about it—she didn't know quite why. It was a risky thing to do, she was aware of that. But on the other hand it was a kind of test, both of herself and of this man.

He heard her out, the whole story of Dick—including the Atlantic City week end which explained the ring—and at the end he said, "I hate that. You knew I'd hate it, didn't you?"

“Would you rather I hadn’t told you?”

“No,” he said. “No, I suppose not.”

“I needn’t have told you,” Margery pointed out. “I could have pretended that I—that nothing like that had ever happened in my life. But you asked me, and I thought you’d rather have the whole truth.”

“ ‘The whole truth,’ ” he echoed quickly. “No other episodes like that.” He left the question mark out of his voice, but somehow it was there.

“No, none,” she said; and she was very glad that it was true. Well, almost true. Garrett had said “like that,” and so the lie was just a white lie. There had been one other episode—but nothing in the least like that.

“You were so young at the time,” he was saying thoughtfully now. “You were too young to know what you were doing. I understand that, Margery. It’s all right.”

“You’re sweet,” she said, believing it. Feeling ashamed and humble.

That night when she got back to her cabin the dawn was gray beyond the portholes, gray sky and dark gray water, with a line of pinkish red between. She was engaged to marry Garrett Cowles. “Mrs. Garrett Cowles,” she said to herself in the mirror. “Margery Cowles.” It sounded nice, it sounded right. She thought about it for a minute, watching herself gravely in the glass. She thought again, “And I’m in love with him. I’m sure of it. I really am.”

If she was not, she couldn’t think why she was not. He was so eminently suitable, in all the ways that were important. He was a sensible age, he was thirty; and he seemed even older than that. He had the stability she knew she lacked; he was a sound and solid citizen. Her first impression of him had been that he was a little too serious-minded, but this had come to seem a relief, after all the flip young men. It even seemed like wisdom, by comparison.

He was the product of a proud old family, sometimes wealthy, sometimes less so. Margery gathered that at the moment they were merely well-to-do. He had a widowed mother in the Social Register; and he himself was in business with his uncle—a successful manufacturing business. He owned a house on upper Fifth Avenue, and his mother lived in it—“But we won’t live with her,” he had stated. That point was settled just as easily and satisfactorily as that, before Margery had had time even to begin to worry about it. He was always decisive anyway; he liked to make up your mind for you; and she was in a mood where that was pleasant.

There were things about him which bothered her, of course, but they were trifling little things—mere mannerisms, for the most part. Surely it was petty of her even to notice them. There was his way of repeating the last phrase of the last sentence of any speech he made. There was his habit of interrupting

and of correcting people—but after all, he did it smilingly, and he was right in his corrections. He talked with his teeth so nearly closed that they looked tight shut, and you were very conscious of them; but they were good straight teeth, and extra-white. He was attractive anyway. She liked his looks.

She summoned up his image now and let it fill her mind. It was an unusual face, long without being thin, and pale with a special pallor. Heavy black eyebrows marked it dramatically. He had a straight nose; a deep dimple curiously misplaced high in his cheek, that showed when he smiled; and gray-green eyes, not very large, and not very wide open. One of his mannerisms was to narrow these eyes to mere slits when he was talking—notably when he was speaking of people or things he didn't like—and his whole face then took on a new and almost crafty expression. "Darling, don't look like that," Margery had exclaimed involuntarily, once or twice.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. So—so cryptic."

The word was mischosen, and this was deliberate on her part. She couldn't quite say "mean." But that was what it was, and it had alarmed her. It still did. She tried not to think about it now.

She thought instead, "He was marvelous about Dick. He simply couldn't have taken that better." And she felt again the gratitude, and the secret shame, that she had felt before. Garrett had trusted her and believed her, even when she'd lied. He might so well have narrowed his eyes suspiciously just then; but he had not. He wasn't mean about the things that really mattered.

She wished she had Gloria here to talk to and to think aloud to. She was going to miss Gloria badly anyway—and that was another thing. They had sailed for Europe together in mid-July; and early in August, in Como, Gloria had met the man of her life—the unmistakable man. He was a lean, young, beautiful Englishman, the kind you always thought of as typical, but seldom actually encountered in such a splendid version; and there had never been any doubt in Gloria's mind as to how she felt about him. Instead Gloria had said simply, at first sight of him, "He is for me." It hadn't even sounded like the slang it was, as she had said it.

So Gloria had married him, and she was going to live in London. The wedding had been a week before, and Margery had waited for it, helping with the trousseau shopping and acting as the maid of honor. Then she had sailed, alone, feeling happy for Gloria, but sad and depressed for herself. A planless future was no fun to face, and she was tired of last year's kind of life, in any event—and what to do when she got back she simply didn't know. That is to say, she hadn't known till she met Garrett.

It was all clear now. He was the answer—and the wise answer. Here was security; good solid ground under her feet. This was a man she could look up to, and depend on, and be safe with always. There was a song that had been popular years ago, when she was a little girl—when she first began listening to popular songs and singing them and remembering the words. It kept coming back to her now, because it seemed to apply so well. “Someone to Watch Over Me.” . . .

The ocean sang it, from beyond the portholes. It was in the rhythm of the ship. She began humming it herself under her breath, unaware that she did so. She was still sitting at the dressing table, and now her fingers twisted the charm bracelets, finding the clasp of each string and unfastening it. The one with the wedding ring on it lay before her, and the ring looked at her like an empty eye socket; and she stopped humming suddenly and frowned at it. She said to herself, “I must take that off and throw it away.” Garrett must never be reminded again.

So she tried to get the ring off—she tried hard, pulling and yanking—but the thin little chain that attached it proved to be stronger than it looked. She had to give it up finally; and she thought, “It seems to be there to stay”—and although of course that was ridiculous, because a jeweler could easily do the job, it was nevertheless a thought whose double meaning made her feel a little scared and queer about her failure to remove the ring. It was almost like an omen, and not good. Not good at all.

III

They were married six weeks later, at Margery’s parents’ church in Glenport, in the presence of three hundred of the local gentlefolk, all very much dressed up. “Brilliant Ceremony,” said the Glenport *Daily Beacon*, “Unites Margery Clayburn and Garrett B. Cowles.” And the society editor, beginning on Page One, ran over onto Page Fourteen and practically covered it. There were six bridesmaids and twelve ushers, and there was a big reception at the house, with an imported orchestra and copious champagne. Garrett drank more than Margery had ever seen him drink, and it unbent him surprisingly, and everybody thought that he was very gay and charming, as well as very handsome, in his striking black-and-whiteness.

They motored as far as Indianapolis for overnight. It was the short first lap of a wedding trip that would take them to the west coast and thence to Honolulu. Margery’s father’s chauffeur drove them, and Margery was glad of that; she wasn’t sure that Garrett himself would have been quite steady enough to drive. He was still very talkative, in a wound-up sort of way; and he said

himself that he was a little tight—"Well, and why not?" he supplemented jovially. "If a man can't get a little tight on his wedding day, when can he? Darling, do you love me? Are you as happy as I am? Tell me. Keep telling me you're happy—Mrs. Garrett Cowles."

". . . wife of Mr. Garrett Cowles," said Margery, smiling at him. "Darling, of course I'm happy! Happier than I've ever been."

Neither of them doubted it, as long as Garrett was in this high mood. It was a little later in the journey, after the champagne went flat in him, that the strange trouble started. . . . He grew quieter; and presently, after a brooding interval, he said, "You didn't look happy. I wonder why that was."

"I didn't——" Margery began repeating blankly. "When?"

"In the church," he said. "During the ceremony. I watched you, and I noticed it."

"But darling, I was so *scared*! And I had so much on my mind. Does anybody ever look happy at a moment like that?"

"They ought to—if they really are."

"Did you look happy, do you think?"

"Didn't you even look to see?"

Margery thought, "What on earth is he doing? What is this all about?" It was as though he were trying his best to find some fault, where no fault was. . . .

"If you want the truth," she said, "I had all I could do to keep from crying. But that was excitement and emotion—it certainly didn't mean that I wasn't happy, Garrett. Quite the contrary. I was so moved, I thought I couldn't bear it."

Garrett said, "You weren't thinking about somebody else, were you, by any chance?"

Her eyes flew open. "Somebody *else*? While I was being married—— Some other man, you mean? Garrett, how absolutely idiotic! You know better."

"As a matter of fact, I don't," he said. "We know very little about each other, when it comes right down to it. This whole thing happened to us so suddenly—and we've seen so little of each other, actually, in the six weeks we've been engaged. Do you realize that we've almost never been alone together, since those days on shipboard? I suppose I could count the actual hours on the fingers of my two hands."

"Yes, I know, but what——"

"It's been all parties," Garrett said, "and meeting one another's friends and

relatives—and when we weren't doing that, you were shopping for clothes with your mother, and closing up that apartment of yours, and commuting back and forth between New York and Glenport . . ."

He went on and on about it, with Margery listening distractedly. It was all true, of course—but what was he saying it all now for, what was it leading to? She waited for his peroration; and finally Garrett said, "So we're really almost strangers to each other. We still are. I've been thinking about that—I thought about it a lot today, seeing all those people who've known you since you were a baby—who know you so much better than I do. Boys you grew up with, and men who've been in love with you, and all that. Some of them probably still are in love with you."

"Nonsense! They're not. I would have told you——"

"Are you quite sure of that?" Garrett said, cutting in; and Margery knew by the tone of his voice that his eyes would be narrowed in the darkness, in that way they had. Then he said, in quite a different tone—one that she couldn't analyze, "After all, there are things I didn't tell *you*. For instance, this . . ."

And suddenly now he told her about a former affair of his own—a recent affair, of long standing. The woman was a Mrs. Ransome, a divorcée, and she lived in New York, and Garrett had kept her for years. He hadn't broken the thing off, in fact, till after he became engaged to Margery—and he was still helping to send the woman's son through school. He brought that in. "It's not my son, you understand," he said. "But just for old times' sake."

Margery's swift distress over this revelation was not occasioned by the thing itself. She had taken it for granted, when she had thought about it at all, that there had been such a woman in Garrett's bachelor life, or several of them, or perhaps even many. What dismayed her now was his timing of this unasked-for confession, his almost brutal—and surely it was deliberate—choice of a moment so inept.

She said heartbrokenly, "Oh, Garrett—please don't tell me now. If you didn't tell me before, why do you tell me *now*? This is our wedding night! And now you're spoiling it——"

She stopped just short of saying, "I even think you're *trying* to spoil it! Oh, but why? You're trying to punish me for something—but what is it? Is it Dick?"

It was Dick. She learned that almost immediately.

"I admit I should have told you before," Garrett was saying. "I'm sorry I didn't. But after all, you have no right to object too much to it, have you? Long ago you told me about that school-days episode of yours—and I didn't object. And after all," he said, "men have much more right to their pasts than women

have. That's always been true."

"Oh," she said, moaning. "That old double-standard thing! I thought the world was rid of that."

"Your world, perhaps. Not mine."

"Are they so different, then? Our worlds?"

"Well? Aren't they?"

"If they are," said Margery miserably, "this is a fine time for us to find it out. Oh, Garrett—if you felt this way, why did you ever marry me?"

"So you're regretting it already," Garrett said.

"I'm not—but you are. Obviously."

It became a real quarrel, and a bitter one. There was no stopping it; there was no mending it. When they arrived at the hotel at last, they were not even speaking, except for polite, cool monosyllables. Tired as she was, and overwrought, Margery felt hysterical about it—she was profoundly shocked that such a thing could happen to a bride and groom, married three hours. She would not have believed that any bride and groom so new had ever quarreled before, in the whole history of the marrying world. This was uniquely horrible, and dreadful, and incurable.

In the hotel lobby, while Garrett was registering, she had a wild, blind impulse to hide somewhere, to run away—to go back home where she belonged. Or she could find the local railroad station and take the first train and go anywhere. She thought, "It's never, *never* going to work. It could be annulled. If I leave now——"

But she stood her ground. You didn't and you couldn't run away at this point. She stood prettily in her new traveling clothes, in her new mink coat that her father had given her, making the immemorial effort not to look self-conscious, not to let anybody know that she was a bride-of-this-afternoon-at-six-o'clock. She glanced casually at Garrett as he bent to sign the register; she saw the motion of the pen, quick and authoritative, writing "Mr. and Mrs. Garrett Cowles" (or would he be writing "Garrett Cowles and wife"?) . . . She heard the room clerk's deferential voice, *yes, Mr. Cowles, the rooms are ready*; she heard the key chime on the marble of the desk and saw the bell captain spring forward for the key and for the bags.

"All right?" said Garrett, turning to her; and she said, "All right." The phrase kept echoing in her mind ironically, through all the time that followed. . . . Nothing in the world would ever be all right again. She was convinced of it. She thought of it all through the stark and sleepless hours, while Garrett slept.

He had not even said good night to her. Not that it mattered, but he hadn't.

Daylight brought them sanity, and that first quarrel was made up, and they agreed that it had been madness—emotional fatigue, strained nerves, and too much champagne, as Garrett admitted—and that they would forget it and never allude to it again. He was really rather humble in his apologies. He said, "Drinking always makes me irritable—so it's lucky I don't do much of it. The stuff is almost poison to me, as I've discovered in the past. Perhaps I should have warned you. Or maybe," he said jokingly, "it's my true nature coming out!"

He smiled at that, and Margery smiled blithely too. She scarcely heard it.

The honeymoon continued. California was interesting, because she'd never been there, and the voyage to Honolulu was smooth and comfortable and peaceful. Margery realized on the ship how very much she needed rest, and how exhausted she had been by all the wedding preparations. It was good to be managed by Garrett and not to have to think for herself. When you were as tired as this, it was dreamily pleasant just to do as you were told.

They spent a month in Honolulu, in the gaudy sunlight, in the painted scenery. They had a luxurious suite with a *lanai* in the big pink stucco hotel. Garrett had been here before, and these were his Hawaiian Islands, and he was proudly proprietary and showmanlike about everything. He made an indefatigable guide—but that was all right, because Margery, for her part, made an appreciative sight-seer. She loved the place and loved the life; and things went pretty well. They swam, and sat about the beach, and took long drives, complete with picnic lunches, and went shopping in the town, and visited all the bars and restaurants that tourists liked. . . .

The hotel was fairly full, and they might have met a lot of people, and Margery thought privately that it would have been nice if they had, but she said nothing about it, because Garrett liked to keep aloof. He was very suspicious of new people, especially if they were men. He said, "Is that fellow trying to flirt with you?" He said, "Do you think that man over there is attractive?" He said, "Let's just stay by ourselves, and the hell with everybody." So they did.

Once at the luncheon table he remarked to Margery suddenly, "You never wear your little charm bracelets—and I should think they might look very well with sports clothes. Didn't you bring them along, or what's the reason?"

"Oh, those," Margery said lightly. "They're a little young, don't you think? For an old married woman? I just thought it was time I put away childish things."

As a matter of fact, she hadn't meant to bring the bracelets on this trip; but

her mother or one of the maids who had helped with the packing had put them in. The wedding ring was gone, by now; there was a little gap where it had been; but still she had hesitated to wear the chains, for fear even the gap might be reminding. You couldn't be too careful, as she knew.

"But I liked them," Garrett was saying now. "Of course there was one item I could have dispensed with——"

"I know," said Margery quickly. "That's gone. I had it taken off."

Their eyes met levelly, without expression.

"Then why not wear the rest, if you've got them with you?" Garrett said. He reached into his pocket. "Here. See what you think of these."

It was a little jeweler's box, full of bright new gold charms—Hawaiian ones. There was a hula dancer, and an outrigger canoe, and a tiny grass shack with a palm tree beside it, and a pineapple, and that very small Hawaiian fish with the immense long name, and a ukulele, and a replica of the Aloha Tower. . . .

"Darling," Margery said, "but these are wonderful! Where on earth did you get them all? I'll have to start a new chain, with so many."

"That's what I thought," he said, and he produced another jeweler's box, a smaller one. He looked like a pleased boy. "So here's the chain itself."

It was the wrong kind of chain, of course; but never mind, she liked it. She was touched by this whole gift and by its recognizable significance. She saw it as a very special pledge of peace and of forgiveness; and she smiled gratefully at Garrett, saying, "You really are so sweet to me." Saying also, "And you love surprises, don't you? So do I."

But she hated the next surprise. She was a long time hearing about it—Garrett kept hinting that he had a secret, but not telling her what it was. He saved it for the homeward voyage, for some reason; and then he sprang it. That was the precise word. Without consulting her at all, without even mentioning the transaction until it was a *fait accompli*, he had bought a house in a Westchester suburb, for the Cowleses to live in. "It's a good investment," he said now, in the course of his matter-of-fact explanation. "And it's a nice house—you'll like it. You'll have fun fixing it up. And after all, we don't want to live right in the city all our lives, do you think? Out there the air is fresher, and we'll sleep better, and we can get some golf."

"But I don't play golf," Margery demurred forlornly, as though this were the main point.

"You will, though. You'll take it up. You'll be crazy about it, when you

learn."

"But Garrett, it's the *country*——"

"Why, not at all. It's quite a town. And it's only fifty minutes from New York, with good train service. And after all," said Garrett cheerfully, "I'm the one who's going to suffer, if anybody does, because I'll have to commute. I'll probably hate that, but I think it will be worth it, for the advantages."

He began to describe the house and the surroundings, and Margery tried to listen; but her own protesting thoughts were louder than his spoken words. It wasn't so much that she minded the idea of living in the suburbs—she might get used to that idea, given a little time—but she did very much mind what she thought of as the highhandedness of this act of Garrett's; and she found it incredible that he could have taken a step so all-important without discussing it with her. She kept thinking, "How did he know I wouldn't mind *terribly*? He didn't know that—but he went right ahead just the same." She said now, in a voice that threatened tears, "But Garrett—you didn't even *ask* me! You're so used to deciding things for yourself—you forget that you have a wife, and that she might like some voice in the matter of a place to live. After all, we're *both* going to live there, aren't we? Not just you."

Garrett said, sounding a little impatient, "But I told you we wouldn't live in my town house—I remember distinctly telling you that, on the very first night we talked about plans. The night we got engaged. Don't you remember, when we were sitting in that smoking room——"

"Of course I remember," Margery broke in. "What you said was that we wouldn't live with your mother."

"Well, exactly."

"But I didn't realize that you meant we wouldn't live in town at all. I thought you meant we'd take an apartment or something."

"Oh, but I'd loathe an apartment," Garrett said. "New York apartments give me claustrophobia—they always have. I need space to move around in, and stairs to climb, and windows on all sides—and something to look at out of the windows besides stone walls. Now in this house——"

"And I need *people*!" Margery was saying passionately. "Doesn't it make any difference what *I* need?"

There was a short, cold pause on Garrett's part, during which he merely looked at her. "Oh, now, that's silly," he said then. "You're just being childish. There'll be plenty of people."

So it was settled. Margery didn't even try to argue any more. She knew that look of Garrett's—she had been married to him nearly two months now—and the look meant that one more word from her would make the argument a

quarrel, another of their major quarrels, which in its own turn would accomplish nothing. There was never any use in trying to cross him; you were always sorry. The way to get along with him was to agree or to be silent.

She knew him thoroughly now—except, of course, for the surprises. She had spent almost every waking minute of the two months quite alone with him. Sometimes she faced the things she knew, though usually she tried not to know them. Her husband was dogmatic, stubborn, self-opinionated, smug. The reserve that she had admired at first was like a stone wall when you lived with it. The dignity now seemed to her a little pompous and absurd. The wisdom was sententiousness. She wondered how many women, returning from their honeymoons, knew as she knew now that they had made life's worst mistake. She wondered how they felt about it when they did know. She thought, "This is my story and I'm stuck with it." She even thought, "I guess you get what you deserve."

There were these moments of appalling clarity, but they were not as frequent as they might have been. She really fought them very hard. She concentrated on her own faults—which, after all, were numerous too—and on the qualities in Garrett which she still found likable. There were a lot of good traits with the bad, and she must not forget them, and she did not. She stressed them resolutely; she kept helping him to show them; and she still thought it might be possible, in time, to change the things she didn't like, and also to make changes in herself, and make a go of it. And when they got back home and settled down, she tried. No one could say she didn't *try*. She often said that, in the later years, when it was over.

The town of Garrett's choice wasn't one of the fashionable suburbs; it was just a suburb. Many young couples lived there who would have preferred to live in New York—because it was cheaper, or because it was good for the children, or because the men could play golf. The reasons were usually expedient, and people vouchsafed them rather defensively. It was a suburb with a definite inferiority complex.

But Margery was pleased with the house itself when she saw it—it was really charming—and Garrett was extremely generous in the sums he provided for furnishings and decoration. She enjoyed selecting everything, as he had prophesied she would; and she did the whole house herself, and it took her several months in all. She had excellent taste, and the house delighted them both when it was finished. She was very busy and quite happy all the time the work was going on.

Then suddenly she was idle—there was nothing more to do. They were in

the house, and settled, and the new life had begun. They had been staying in town with Garrett's mother until now. This was quite different, and at first it was so lonely all day long that Margery thought, "I'll die here. I'll never be able to stand it." They had two competent servants—Garrett's generosity again—and so there wasn't even any housework to keep her occupied. She supposed she wouldn't have liked the work if there had been any, but sometimes it seemed to her that even drudgery would have been better than this nothingness.

Later they made friends, in Garrett's slow and cautious fashion; and it was a little better then, but not much better. She was never very happy in those four suburban years. It never seemed a satisfactory or contenting way of life—and not only not for her, but not for any of the couples with whom she and Garrett chiefly lived it. All the men commuted to New York in the mornings, and all of them played golf on Saturday and Sunday, all day long; and all the women played bridge all week, or went to the movies, or went to town shopping. There wasn't enough for the women to do, and that was a fact. They got bored, and they got into trouble—they even tried to get into trouble. They flirted resolutely with each other's husbands at the local parties, and sometimes—feeling very wicked—lunched with them in town. Margery thought that this was understandable, but a little pathetic. Nothing about these feeble philanderings tempted her at all.

There was always too much drinking at the country club on Saturday nights, and all sorts of things happened, and there were quarrels on the way home. Garrett and Margery invariably quarreled on the way home. She had danced too long with one man, she had looked too soulfully at another—it was ridiculous, it wasn't true, there wasn't anybody in that crowd to look soulfully *at*, but that was what Garrett always said. And very often, from these accusations, they got back to the ancient and weary subject of the wedding ring on the charm bracelet. They were forever and forever coming back to that.

"After all," Garrett would say, "there was that episode before I married you. That medical student. What's become of him, by the way?"

"How should I know? I haven't seen him in years."

"Haven't you?" Garrett would say. "I wonder."

He really half believed that she still saw Dick.

He was always insanely jealous, and the thing was that it was nearly four years before he had the least reason to be. Afterwards Margery always thought in self-justification, "He drove me to it." Meanwhile she behaved most circumspectly—she led a model matron's life, truly above all the reproaches Garrett heaped upon her. Sometimes she hated him, but in a weary, hopeless

sort of way. Submissive and resigned. She rarely even fought back any more. Occasionally she was acutely miserable, thinking, “It can’t go on like this. Why don’t I *do* something?” But misery was a habit, dulling heart and mind and spirit. It was better not to think at all, and she tried not to. She just lived along.

The record of those married years was sparsely written on the fifth—and last—charm bracelet. The Hawaiian honeymoon tokens took up more than half the chain, and next to them there was a microscopic house with trees around it; and then two crossed golf sticks, to commemorate Margery’s dutiful learning of the game; and then a tennis racket, and a locomotive, and a little horse and rider. Then there was a ship—they went to Europe during that second summer—and beyond the ship, there had been for a while the Roman numeral II, cut out in gold. This also had been Garrett’s gift, when Margery first knew that she was going to have a child—a son, of course. Garrett Cowles Second. That was what the “II” had stood for; and that was why the emblem was no longer on the bracelet. Margery had lost the baby in the sixth month, and neither she nor Garrett could bear to be reminded after that.

The winter of the baby had been 1938. She would have liked to try again, almost immediately; and when her own doctor forbade it, she went hopefully to another specialist—only to hear him echo and substantiate the edict of the first. Not for at least two years, they said. She must not even think of it.

So that was that. She must find something else—a job, or something. This was the next urge, and she felt it actively. The transient prospect of the baby, and then her grief over its loss, had roused her just a little from her state of deadening lethargy. Now she began to plead with Garrett to let her get some sort of job in town. She even said, “I’ll find one in a place where there are only women, if you want it that way.” She thought that that might make him yield, but it did not. It only made him angry.

She said then, in a rash moment in the midst of their discussion, “You’re not being wise about this, Garrett. I haven’t enough to do—I haven’t *anything* to do, really—and that’s not right for anybody. No good ever comes of that.”

“Satan and the idle hands,” said Garrett. “Is that what you’re threatening?”

“I’m not threatening anything,” she said. “I’m simply saying it isn’t smart of you.”

“And I say I don’t want you working,” Garrett said, in his flat voice. “I want you here. There’s plenty for you to do around your own home, if you’d just stop fretting and find it. What do you want a job in town for, anyway? Who’s in town?”

“Oh, Garrett, nobody. Please don’t start that.”

She understood so well now the psychology and the motives of the merry young wives of Suburbia—the flirtatious ones, the philandering ones. She had never felt critical of them, and nowadays her tolerance was tinged with a kind of wistfulness, and she thought, “Yes. I see what they mean. It’s not so pathetic, after all.” You had to have something to occupy your mind; to enliven the parties you went to; to make it worth while to go, in your prettiest dress. . . . It was a question of the way you felt about your husband, first of all; and after that it was a question of morale. If you were unhappy, and if there was nobody, you felt the result in yourself, and you saw it. There was a little letting down; gradual; just not quite imperceptible. Margery was wryly aware of it now, in her own case. She wasn’t quite so sleek and soignée as she used to be; she was more careless, she slapped her make-up on, she gained a little weight around the waistline. . . .

And then suddenly a new man came to town, and all this ended. Suddenly she had a new reason for living, and for feeling young again, and for being beautiful. A new man could take years off your life, all in an evening. The evening you met him. Or all in the next few days, when you bought clothes and had your hair restyled and did a thousand things.

His name was Don McCarroll, and he was married, of course; everybody was married. It was a little different with Don, though, because his wife didn’t seem to care very much about him, or he about her, and they were oftener apart than they were together. Mrs. McCarroll had been Elaine Haversack, of the North Carolina Haversacks, which meant that her father had millions—tobacco millions—and she herself was his only child. She was a great traveler, and she spent most of her time in Europe. Nobody thought that she liked Don very well or that he liked her.

And nobody could understand why they had moved to this particular suburb, dull as it was; but presumably they were here, like everyone else, for the sake of the children—they had two children—and for the reason that it didn’t matter much to Elaine where she lived anyway, since she was so rarely at home. They took a vast luxurious house—one of those that had been built with the paper profits of 1928 and lost when the crash came—and almost as soon as Elaine’s architects and decorators had finished with it, and she herself had installed her children and her servants in it, she packed up her labeled luggage again and was off on a liner for Italy.

She was gone about six weeks that time; and it was during her absence that Margery met Don—and Don met Margery. It happened at a small dinner party

at a neighboring couple's house. There were eight of them in all, and the hostess, Kitty Eldridge, had said to Margery over the telephone, "I'm having that new McCarroll man who's just taken the old Harris house. Have you met him yet? Well, he's divine. Wait till you see him." There had been a special gaiety and a kind of suppressed excitement in Kitty's voice. . . . A new man was an event, of course, in this town; even a married one; and as a result the dinner party would be a little more festive than usual, a little less routine, and all the women would have their hair done specially, and those who had new dresses would wear them. . . .

Margery knew; and she thought cynically, "He won't be worth it—and even if he is, it's silly." And in this rebellious mood she did her own hair for the party, and she wore a three-year-old black dinner dress—but a favorite one, for all that. She had had it made in Paris, and it was still the most becoming thing she had, being both severe and slinky, in a subtle Paris fashion. She had curved her hair into a pompadour in front and brushed it smooth in back and made soft cloudy ringlets of the ends. She looked extremely well, and she could see at once that the new man thought so. "Who are *you*?" his eyes demanded when she came into the room. It was as plain as speech, and it seemed even louder.

She liked him too, in that same moment. She had to be careful not to show it—not to let her glance speak out as candidly as his had spoken. Acknowledging Kitty's introduction, she was casual enough; and she turned away from him immediately and sat down with someone else, on a couch opposite the one where he had been sitting when she entered.

During the next fifteen minutes, while the cocktails were consumed, she watched him from this vantage point, always pretending not to. She thought, "What *is* it about him?" She kept thinking that. He was certainly one of the most attractive human beings she had ever seen—and yet she didn't know why, exactly. No one could have called him handsome. His attractiveness was made of inner things, like personality, like charm, like magnetism, and like humor—all these things came shining through, so that it almost wouldn't have mattered what kind of face he had had. Margery said to herself, "He could be downright ugly and you wouldn't even know it."

At the dinner table she sat across from him again—but closer now. She could hear everything he said, in his nice voice. An easy, cheerful voice. Whether the topic called for sense or nonsense, he was good at it, and very quick. It was difficult to talk herself, for listening, or for wanting to. She still kept watching him covertly, knowing he was watching her. She liked his silhouette against the white dining-room wall, the shape of his head, the slope of his shoulders, the somehow streamlined slenderness he had. She liked his

hands, and his wide smile, and the healthy color of his skin—so brown and good compared with Garrett's—and the blue blaze of his eyes, out of this sunburn. She liked everything.

Later they reminisced about it, she and Don. They agreed that it had happened to them both at the same time. They matched their recollections of that first evening, their emotional reactions, their intense awareness of each other. And they said the things that sudden lovers always say in retrospect—"I knew it the very first minute," and "It hit me just like that." It seemed amazing too, this sure and fatalistic recognition, because in all that evening they had scarcely spoken to each other, except optically and indirectly.

Back in the living room again, with dinner over and the bridge tables not yet set up, they had had opportunities—they could have sought each other out, and talked alone together in a corner—but they had not done so, by some tacit mutual consent. They'd stayed apart instead, in different groups, for Garrett's benefit and everybody's. They had been careful even then, knowing that they were going to have to be.

Only their eyes had said, "When can I see you? Soon? *Tomorrow?*"

In the crazy, dangerous days that followed, in the course of many secret meetings, they found out all the things about each other that they had merely sensed before. This wasn't so much a process of discovery as it was of corroboration. "I knew you'd be like this," they both kept saying, with infinite delight. Margery said it even oftener than Don did. He was such wonderful fun to be with, he had so much gaiety and vitality—in every way he followed the pattern for men that she kept always in her mind and heart. She had departed from it when she married Garrett, but that didn't count; that didn't mean it wasn't still the pattern for her. Oh, it was. It was.

They were at the same time wildly reckless and extremely circumspect, depending on their whereabouts. There were their rendezvous in New York; and there were their chance encounters around home. At the local parties they continued to display indifference towards each other, and eventually it was remarked by all observers in their crowd that Margery Cowles and Don McCarroll didn't seem to like each other very well. This puzzled everybody, because everybody liked them both; and people kept treating each of them to earnest sales talks regarding the other. Don and Margery discussed this in private, exchanging quotations with gleeful amusement; and they agreed that it wouldn't be prudent of them to lean *too* far over backward. "The lukewarm attitude," as Don said, "—that's the one to stick to. The idea is to damn each other with faint praise, my beautiful darling."

So when their mutual friends said to Margery, “What in the world have you got against Don McCarroll? He’s really such a swell person; I don’t see how you can help liking him”—when they said things like that, Margery looked at them in mild surprise and said, “Why, but you’re mistaken. I do like him. He’s all right.” And when it was Don who was being questioned, he adopted a cheerfully rueful tone and said, “Well, but of course—Margery’s a cute thing. I admit I love to look at her. But after all, one isn’t *allowed* to look at her, with the Storm King around.” And everybody nodded, and smirked, and said, “ ‘The Storm King’ is good! Yes, that’s certainly so.” And—for the present anyway—no one suspected anything at all.

“Not even Garrett,” Margery observed wonderingly to Don. She always touched wood when she said it, which was fairly often. “It’s really marvelous. I’ve never known him to be so relaxed—I mean, about *any* attractive man. He actually *likes* you, Don; he’s so convinced that I don’t.”

And that was how that part of it was—also for the present.

At first their rendezvous in town were held in little hole-in-corner bars and restaurants—the kind that nobody who didn’t need them ever even dreamed existed. Don and Margery needed them, and so they found them easily. New York was full of friendly little hideaways, it now turned out. New York was vast for the protection of forbidden couples like themselves, and taxicabs in Central Park were fairly safe for stolen kisses in the dusk of afternoons, and the doorways of the unknown restaurants were inconspicuous along the mid-town side streets, and you just walked along, and turned in suddenly, and there you were.

The proprietors were usually Latins, and they understood you perfectly and gave you the remotest table in the back room on the second floor. This would be a banquette table, and ideally the banquette was semicircular, with a curved booth around it, rather high. Here you sat drinking something long and slow, and not particularly alcoholic—a glass of ale for Don, and a vermouth *cassis* for Margery. There was sufficient stimulation just in being here, close together. There was in fact a heady, high intoxication, just in that.

At first it was enough for them, though they both knew it wouldn’t be for long. During those first weeks they met in some such restaurant nearly every day. They hated Saturdays and Sundays, when it could not be managed. They worried for fear Garrett would begin to realize how often Margery came to town—how much more often now than formerly. Sometimes they only lunched, because Don had only an hour or so that he could spare from business. At other times they spent whole afternoons together at their banquette table, sitting close, and holding hands, and seldom even looking up; absorbed in an endless, murmurous conversation full of gravity and pronouns

—the first- and second-person pronouns, and then ultimately the third-person ones. He. She. Your wife. Your husband. Elaine. Garrett. Even Don's two children.

There were so many things to talk about—so many future complications. The future was implied in everything they said, though for the moment they were talking all around it. Meanwhile there was the past, their double past, to be caught up on. There was the present, to be mutually explained and understood.

Margery said, "But you *know* Garrett. You know just exactly how it is with me. That's where you have the advantage, because I've never even seen Elaine, and I don't really know how that is, at all. I wish you'd try to tell me more about it than you have so far."

"Well, but I thought I had," Don said. "What more do you want me to tell you, my darling? It's a very friendly, pleasant sort of marriage—but without love. That's the way it's always been, and there isn't much else to say about it."

"How did it happen in the first place—'without love'?"

"I don't know. It just did." He smiled at her fleetingly. "How did yours?"

"Garrett was in love, I suppose. Somebody has to be."

"Not necessarily," Don said. "Neither of us was. I really mean it. We were simply companionable, that was all. And tired of being single. It was just one of those things."

"And now?" Margery asked. "How is it now, exactly? You lead your own lives, both of you—you told me that before. It's more of a partnership than a marriage, and you do as you please, and neither one questions the other. It all sounds highly civilized—but is it really true? Does it really work out that way, or doesn't it?"

"It's absolutely true," Don said, looking amused at her expression. "And it works out very well and peacefully, and always has. It was Elaine's idea in the first place, you see. Elaine is a highly civilized person. I think you'll understand the whole thing better when you meet her."

"What does she look like?" Margery inquired, after a little pause.

"Like a thoroughbred."

"Well, but I mean—is she very beautiful? Or not?"

"She isn't beautiful at all," Don said. "But she's—well, aristocratic-looking. It keeps coming back to that. Pam looks very much like her," he added.

Pam was Pamela, aged nine. She was the plainer of his two small daughters

—the rather stringy, sandy one. The other little girl, the seven-year-old Janice, was the charmer.

"And Janice looks like you," said Margery involuntarily. "Well, but go on about Elaine. Tell me exactly what she's like."

"She's got great character," Don said. "She's a terrific person, really. I respect her more than anyone I know, and I like her enormously. As a matter of fact, I think you'll like her yourself—and you'll see what I mean. She's the most——"

"Nonsense! I won't," said Margery. She even laughed at him a little. "My sweet, you're living in a dream world! I shall hate her, and you know it. You don't expect me to be *fair* about her, do you? You're not fair about Garrett."

Don smiled back at her imperturbably. "Ah, but that's something else again," he said. "Garrett's a bastard—net. Elaine is different."

Elaine wasn't really so different, in Margery's subsequent opinion. Elaine came wandering home at about that time, as a guest might come for a visit. She was the sort of woman Margery had always disliked and yet reluctantly admired—the sort whose superb, calm self-assurance made you feel uneasily inferior because you couldn't match it. Every now and then you met a woman just like that. There was some shining inner confidence in this one—generations old—and in her presence you felt new, and raw, and crude, and not quite bright. It was illogical, and you could say to yourself, "Look here, now, this is absurd. I am much better-looking than she is, I am infinitely better-dressed, I'm just as well-educated—or nearly, anyway—and as far as I can tell from such of her conversation as I've heard, I'm much more entertaining. Also there's the fact that people like me, and they don't like her. . . . So why on earth should I let her get me down the way she does?"

It happened, though. It happened every single time. Somehow it seemed to be a genealogical sort of thing, and you found yourself summoning up the shades of your ancestors to aid you, and reminding yourself that, after all, you came of good stock too. . . . It didn't help, though. Nothing helped. That was Elaine for you.

In appearance she was one of those almost colorless creatures, with careless flaxen hair and pale thin skin through which faint freckles showed. She had a shield-shaped face, like something off a coat of arms; it was even a little flat. Elaine's green eyes gazed out of it—disinterested, incurious—and she had a mouth which articulated very definitely and distinctly and actively, making ever-changing red designs in the otherwise motionless facial mask. She painted her mouth, which surprised you. She used no other make-up. In

dress she was the tweedy type, with the right sports shoes and the brown Dobbs hat. She talked dogs and horses, skiing and tennis, art and music, France and England. . . .

Home on this visit, she was kind to all Don's friends—no one could say she wasn't. She remembered their names, she attended their parties, and twice she had them all to dinner. Everybody dressed the first time, only to find Elaine in her tweeds. The second time she wore a batik hostess gown, while everyone else wore sports clothes. It was just a little thing, of course, and it shouldn't have been so infuriating. It probably wasn't even deliberate of Elaine, but merely absent-minded.

She never called Don by his nickname, as everybody else did—he was always Donald to her; and she had a faintly autocratic way of saying it. She ordered him about a good deal, making him fetch and carry. "She actually *bosses* him," Margery thought with astonishment and dismay. It seemed so utterly unlike him to allow it. But Don was a different person, anyway, when Elaine was around—everybody noticed that and spoke about it. He was moody, he was quiet, he was not himself at all. "I think he loathes her," Kitty Eldridge said, rejoicing Margery's heart. And everyone agreed that Elaine cramped Don's style completely.

Garrett had a blunter version, which he expressed to Margery. "McCarroll acts scared to death of that wife of his," said Garrett, not without a certain gusto. "I never saw such a change in a man. Well, but there it is—when you marry for money you earn it, as they say."

"What makes you think he married for money?" Margery asked, in the requisite light voice.

"Why, sure he did. Everybody knows that. He doesn't make any of his own."

"I thought Tom Eldridge told us he had quite a nice little business."

"Elaine backs him," Garrett said positively. "I know that for a fact."

Margery was silent. "Don't say it," she was thinking fiercely. "Don't say a word. You'll give yourself away." So she said nothing, smothering a pretended yawn instead.

"And besides," Garrett argued conclusively, "why *else* would anybody marry a stuck-up sourpuss like Elaine, for heaven's sake? Unless it was for money?"

That was better. "You have me there," said Margery idly. That much she could say.

Elaine was not around for very long. It was predicted that she wouldn't be, when she first arrived; and she was not. After two weeks at home she took the children down to North Carolina to visit her relatives there, and she remained away for nearly a month. When she returned she brought a horde of house guests with her, and there was another fortnight during which they reigned supreme and Don's duties as host kept him so busy that Margery scarcely saw him at all. When she did see him next, he said to her, "Elaine is sailing again on the eighth."

"Sailing where? You don't mean for Europe again?"

"Yes. England."

"But she just got back!" Margery exclaimed. It had only been two months in all. She was immensely glad that Elaine was going away so soon again, and yet she couldn't repress this comment, for the note of criticism there was in it—just as, at the same time, another and more grudging kind of honesty induced her to add, "Are you sure you dare to let her go?" Because this was the early summer of 1939, and the war clouds were thought to be gathering; and although Americans were sailing for Europe in the usual numbers, it was fashionable for them to say with gay bravado as they did so, "We don't know *what* we may be getting into over there!"

Don rejoined gravely now, "I know. I tried to talk her out of it—I did my damnedest, a couple of evenings ago. But I didn't get anywhere with it. Her mind's made up."

So Elaine went, expecting to be abroad until sometime in September. She sailed at noon on a hot July day, and Don saw her off at the pier, and an hour or two later he himself left town for a long week end, which he spent fishing in the Maine woods with a couple of other men. This had been prearranged, and Don hadn't had to explain it to Margery, and he hadn't tried, except to say that he thought a quick breather would do him good. He wasn't taking any real vacation this summer.

He came back on schedule, and Margery met him at three o'clock on Monday afternoon at their favorite restaurant. He was a few minutes late, and she was already at their table, waiting for him; and when he appeared he didn't even sit down. Instead he took her by the hand and said, without preamble, "Come along, my sweet. We're not going to stay here. We'll go somewhere else." And Margery said "Yes," quite simply, and she rose and went with him. She knew it would be a hotel, and it was a hotel.

So that was the next stage. It had always been inevitable, from the very first; and the only thing about it that seemed wrong to Margery—grieving her heart in secret, and mortifying her spirit—was the fact that Don still hadn't

said the definite things she wished to hear him say about the future, and about their two divorces, and their ultimate marriage. She thought, “Well, but it’s understood. He knows I know that’s how it’s going to end.” And it was true that he was still implying it, unmistakably, and often. It was just that he still hadn’t said it in so many words.

Then all at once he did. That wasn’t until weeks later, but it happened finally. “I should have told Elaine before she left,” he said one day to Margery—abruptly, out of a frowning silence. “About us, I mean. I’m sorry now I let her go without telling her. What in the hell did I do that for?”

Margery waited without speaking. She even held her breath.

“Here we are,” Don’s sober voice went on, “we’re in love with each other—terribly in love. There’s never been anything like this. It’s just one of those things that were meant to be. And you and I both know it. So I should have told Elaine and got it over with.”

Again Margery waited. Don had paused, but she could see that he was not through speaking.

“I suppose I was afraid it might delay her going,” he said, “—and I wanted her to go. I just wanted her to go and leave me free to be with you again. I couldn’t think of anything but that,” he said. “I was a fool, I realize now. It was very shortsighted of me. Now we’ll have to wait till she comes back—whenever that may be.”

“This is August,” Margery murmured. “She said September. That’s not very long.”

“It’s long enough,” Don said. “I’m sick of all this sneaking and this secrecy. I want to marry you—you know that. I don’t have to tell you *that*, do I? You know as well as I do what’s going to happen, and what we’ve got to do. We’re going to divorce them both, so that we can marry each other and be happy. That’s the way we’ve got to work it out—and the sooner the better.”

“Yes,” said Margery faintly. “Yes, I do know.”

She felt close to tears. It was such a great and wonderful relief to hear him say it—not that she’d doubted him, of course. Not that she hadn’t always known he would, in his own time.

IV

So the next memento on her fifth charm bracelet—the last trinket on the final string—was a little covered wagon, symbolic of her trip to Reno. Don had given it to her at the train, the night she left New York. A Sunday night in mid-

September 1939. Three years ago exactly. Three centuries ago. Three aeons.

Now it was 1942. The Margery of this new September—the twenty-eight-year-old Margery who was closing her divorcée's small apartment and beginning a new wartime chapter of her life—this Margery came to the covered wagon that Don had given her, that long-ago night, and thus to the end of the autobiography which was written for her in bracelet charms. Her memory went right on, however, filling in the years between. It wasn't that things had stopped happening to her; it was just that the tokens had ended.

Now she held all the bracelets in her hand, and she shut her fingers over them, feeling the little spikes and corners of the charms dig softly into her palm in a hundred places. She thought again, as she had thought at the start, "Here is my story—almost all of it." She leaned her chin on the closed fist that held it, while her mind reviewed the rest. . . .

Her divorce from Garrett. That had been a bitter struggle at the outset—and it was still incredible that Garrett had behaved so well about it, in the end. He had been terrifying at first, when she first told him. She had said to him simply that she felt their marriage was a hopeless failure, and that she wasn't happy, and that she wanted to be free. She hadn't given the real reason, because that would have been fatal; but Garrett had said instantly, "So there's another man, is that it?"—even as she had known he would—and he had gone almost insane enough to kill her, and had threatened to. She could still hear his raving voice and see his face.

He had frightened even himself before he was through; and that had been the saving thing. He had struck Margery so hard that she had fallen, and although she wasn't even stunned, her intuition had directed her to lie there motionless and wait. It hadn't even taken any courage. "He won't do anything more to me, after this," she thought. "Now he won't dare." She knew it in that moment, having been afraid before. So she just lay there, until Garrett—trembling now, so that she felt him tremble—picked her up carefully himself and put her on a couch. She kept her eyelids closed, continuing to feign unconsciousness; and it was almost funny, in a sickening sort of way, to hear Garrett moaning to himself, and calling her name, and praying that she wasn't hurt badly—the murderous avenger, now slavering with fear. She had the weird thought that she would have liked him better if he *had* killed her.

In the days of argument that followed, he was never dangerous again, and never quite so angry as he had been at the start—but there were other stages; there was verbal violence, there were oaths and accusations, and there were even piteous pleas to Margery to reconsider. Once Garrett wept, and once he got down on his knees and begged her not to leave him. Margery thought coldly, "You might almost think he really cared about me—but he doesn't. It's

his pride."

When he gave in at last, he did it suddenly and with belated dignity. Margery learned long afterwards that a psychiatrist had helped him. He now agreed to the divorce; and having yielded on this main point, he went all the way to the other extreme and said to Margery—through his lawyers now—that she must be the plaintiff and not the defendant as she had suggested. He, Garrett, would not contest the suit—but she must bring it. This collusive promise was conveyed to Margery verbally, as it had to be, and so it wasn't that she read between the lines—she *heard* between them. She could actually almost hear Garrett saying, in his best booming voice, that the Cowleses were gentlemen, after all. Their women might divorce them; they would not divorce their women.

So in the end it wasn't Garrett, but Elaine, who delayed everything—Elaine and the war in Europe. A formidable combination. The war in Europe had been two weeks old when Margery left for Reno, and it was two months old when she got back—and Elaine was still in London. At first they thought of her as being caught over there—prevented from returning—unable, in the general American rush for home, to get passage, in spite of all her influential London friends and connections. This was the impression given by her earlier cables to Don, which were at once reassuring and rueful. She was safe, but she was stuck. . . . Don kept showing the cables to Margery, and gradually he became a little quizzical about them, as though Elaine were being amusing. Once or twice he said, smiling indulgently, "I think the plain truth is, she's in no hurry to come back. She loves excitement, and she hates to miss anything. She's probably having the time of her life over there with a war on."

He seemed to be right. As the autumn advanced, and as shipload after shipload of Americans returned, it began to be all too clear that Elaine was in no hurry whatever. Her cables had ceased by this time and were being replaced by letters—longer, more explanatory. She would be home sooner or later. In the meantime things were fascinating here. She was doing a lot of war work. All her London friends were urging her to stay and help. . . .

"If it weren't for the children," she wrote Don in December, "—and for you, of course—I really believe I'd stay right here in England for the duration. These people are being so marvelous—it's a privilege to work with them. And there's really such a lot that one can do."

"And what about *us*?" Margery wailed to Don, when she had this excerpt. "What are *we* to do—if she's going to stay over there indefinitely?"

"Oh, she won't," Don said. "Don't worry. She'll get tired of it after a while

and come home. It's the novelty that she finds exciting, and when that wears off she'll be back like a bird. It can't be much of a show, you know," he added reassuringly. "Even the British are calling it the Bore War. Elaine won't like it for long."

"We-ell," Margery said, "I certainly hope not. And I suppose for the present there's nothing we can do but wait, is there? I mean—you couldn't *insist* that she come back, could you? For reasons of safety, or something? You couldn't cable her that she's *got* to come? After all, you're her husband——"

"Her husband who wants a divorce," Don said mockingly. "No, my sweet angel, I could not. In the first place, the coming back is the dangerous part, as you very well know. And I can't quite see myself ordering Elaine to get back here from London before she's ready, just so I can tell her that I don't care where she goes, from here on in. That wouldn't exactly be cricket, do you think?"

"Don't make fun of me, darling."

"Why not? You're being a funny baby. And besides," Don continued, more soberly now, "it wouldn't work anyway. You overestimate my authority. Nobody's ever been able to make Elaine do anything she doesn't want to do. She'd come home if one of the children were ill—or if I broke both legs and an arm and my neck—but offhand I can't think of anything else that would bring her, till she brings herself."

"You've always said that she wouldn't oppose the divorce," Margery said reflectively; "that she'd be generous, and sympathetic, and not want to stand in our way. If that's all true, and if she's going to stay away much longer, I don't see why you couldn't just write her and tell her the whole story. Wouldn't that be the simplest thing anyway, darling? Couldn't you cover it all in a letter?"

But the answer, once again, was no. Don was very definite about it. "There are too many complications," he said, "too many problems we'd have to talk over in person. The children, the house, all sorts of business matters—Elaine has all the dough, you know, my sweet," he stated matter-of-factly. He seemed to assume that he had told her that before, although he never quite had. Other people, yes—but he himself never quite had.

"You'll be marrying a poor man," he concluded now, in a cheerful voice.

"See if I care," Margery retorted, in a tone to match. "The only question is, *When?* It's the waiting I mind."

She waited two and a half years, as it turned out. She lived on an allowance from her father. When she first got back from Reno, she had taken a hotel suite

for herself on a transient week-to-week basis—later she rented a furnished apartment, subletting it by the month from a decorator friend of hers who had gone off to work in Hollywood. A year's lease on the apartment would have reduced the rent, of course; but Margery still wasn't willing to sign a lease, because surely she and Don would be married before a whole year was over—oh, surely long before that!—and the apartment really wasn't big enough for them both to live in. It was just right for what it was, and for them now, but not for later.

So here she lived alone—at least officially. Don still officially occupied Elaine's great mansion in the suburbs. His children spent the winter there with him, and then went South to Elaine's parents for their long summer vacation, during which Don moved to his club in town. That was the summer of 1940—the summer of the fall of France, and of the retreat from Dunkirk, and of the threatened invasion of England—and Elaine's letters were few and brusque and brief, and they were always typewritten, and the business letterheads she was using now said, "American Ambulance, Great Britain." Once she sent a snapshot of herself in uniform, standing beside a surgical van, which—as she explained—she had donated. "I gave them four in all," she wrote, "with the proviso that they'd let me drive one." Don seemed proud of that letter and of the snapshot, and Margery told herself earnestly that you couldn't blame him, and that after all Elaine was his great friend. This wasn't a husbandly pride, in other words; it was just comradely.

Margery herself worked for the Red Cross in New York—sporadically at first, and then, after Pearl Harbor, really steadily and faithfully. She was never to know where the two and a half years went, till Elaine finally did come home. As interminable as they were in retrospect, they were hard to account for, since only the world events stood out—the rest was the sameness of waiting. You just lived along from week to week and from month to month—and it was only once in a while that you counted back and found that it had been a year, and then a year and a half, and then two. . . .

She wasn't unhappy, not really, because she saw Don every day—and it was almost like being married to him, and he couldn't have been more devoted. They made a whole new set of friends in New York, and they were like any other engaged couple—they were Don-and-Margery, hyphenated, and you invited them always together. It was understood by everybody in their new circle that Don still had a wife, but that as soon as she came back from Europe—where, it was said, she was running the war—there would be no difficulty about a divorce, and no further delay or postponement. And finally there came a day when Margery said ecstatically to one of these intimates, "She's *here*! Don's wife, I mean. I can't believe it, but she is. She arrived this morning on

the Clipper."

Don spent all of that afternoon with Elaine, and he called up at seven to say he was dining with her, and it wasn't until ten o'clock or later that he reached Margery's. When he came in the door she saw immediately that he looked very tired, and she said, "Oh, darling, *what*? Nothing went wrong, did it? How is she?"

Even Don's voice was tired. "She's fine," he said. "No—nothing went wrong. Everything's fine, as a matter of fact. It's been a surprising sort of day, though."

"Let me mix you a drink before you tell me. You look done in."

"I am, rather."

"Me, too," said Margery fervently, "—just with waiting and wondering. I thought you'd *never* come! And on the phone I didn't dare to ask you anything."

She mixed two drinks and brought them, and she sat down opposite Don in an armchair, instead of close beside him on the couch as she usually did. She could watch his face from here, and she didn't know why, but it was important to watch it.

"This is the damnedest thing that ever happened," Don was saying slowly now. "I suppose it's something of a joke on us—that's one way to look at it. Anyway, Elaine wants a divorce."

"*Elaine* does?" Margery said. Her voice was a little shrill with incredulity. Her eyes searched Don's face, and she could feel her heart pounding suddenly, and she heard herself saying it over again, with the same incredulous stress on the name. "*Elaine* wants a divorce?"

"That's what she came home for. To tell me, and to get it."

"You mean she's found out about us. Is that it?"

"No," he said, "it's not that. I don't think she has—and she wouldn't care anyway. She wants a divorce for her own sake. She wants to marry somebody else."

"Oh!" Margery cried out, on a little gasp; and she sat backward abruptly. "Who?" she said then. "She wants to marry whom? I don't believe it."

"I do," Don said concisely. "And so would you, if you'd been there. She wants to marry an Englishman by the name of Hewlettson—Howard Hewlettson. I never heard of him till today, but she's been in love with him for years, it seems. He's a wing commander in the R.A.F., and he's over here now —he came over with her. He's got some sort of temporary assignment in

Washington. He expects to be in this country about two months in all, and Elaine wants to go to Reno right away, so she can marry him in time to go back with him. It's all settled, in fact," Don concluded. "She's been making all the arrangements today. She's even got a reservation on the plane for day after tomorrow."

"This is the tenth of June," Margery said. "Six weeks in Reno would make it—let's see—the latter part of July, for the divorce."

Here she stopped short, as though she had completed what she had to say—as though it hadn't been merely a preface, although of course it had been. The rest of it was, "Then we can count on being married before August, you and I."

She couldn't think why she didn't say it—or why it should stick in her throat this way. Surely it was the most natural thing in the world that one of them should say it. But somehow, in this moment, it seemed to her to be Don's speech, not hers; and so now she waited for him, having given him the cue. Her eyes waited, and her still face, and her whole rigid body. . . .

"I can't get over it," Don said instead. "I was never so surprised in my life. I really never thought she'd——" He broke off, and shook his head. "Well, but there you are," he said. "You never know."

"Don," said Margery, "look at me."

His lowered eyelids lifted slightly, and he looked at her. But there was no expression in his eyes, just as there had been none in his face. Only a kind of absent inquiry.

"I think you mind," Margery said. "I believe you do. Oh, Don!"

"Of course I don't," he said indignantly—and promptly. "That's ridiculous. Why should I mind? I wanted a divorce myself, didn't I?"

"I thought so."

"What?"

"Nothing. I just said 'Yes.' Go on."

"And Elaine was to get the divorce," Don went on. "So nothing is altered, that I can see. It all works out the same way in the end."

Margery thought, "But it hurts you. This isn't the way you wanted it to be. You never dreamed Elaine would fall in love with anybody—even though *you* did, yourself—and now she has, and you can't take it. Oh, but why? What difference does it make?"

She said aloud, "You still care what she does. I didn't realize that before. You're still in love with her, I think—in a strange sort of way."

"I've never been in love with her," Don said mechanically. He spoke by

rote, not arguing, not shouting the suggestion down. “As you know damn well,” he added, still reciting, without emphasis. Then he said, “It’s just that it was so unexpected—this development. It takes a little getting used to, that’s all. And I don’t like the man. This Hewlettson.”

“Oh, so you met him!”

“Certainly, I met him. I’ve just left them both. We had dinner together, the three of us. Cozy, that,” Don ripped out bitterly.

He began to tell her about it, but she didn’t know just what he said. She only heard the sound and not the words. This was all wrong, her mind kept wailing—everything had gone terribly, tragically wrong—no one was saying the right things, nothing was turning out the right way. It was as though Don had forgotten her, and all their love, and all their plans, and all their endless waiting. It was as though she, Margery, were not involved in this at all, except as a mere listener, an audience, a confidante. . . . She felt this so strongly that she wanted to do something physical and violent, to bring him back to himself and to her; she wanted to shake him with all her strength, or to slap his face hard with the flat of her hand, as if this preoccupation of his were a coma from which she could rouse him.

She did nothing; she sat there—not moving or speaking—until finally Don finished his narrative. It wasn’t really until just at the end that he said what he should have said at the start. It was quite too late then; and besides, he said it rather heavily and dully—she was aware of that, for all his pretense of a brightening, a return of blitheness. His actual words were, “Well, so that’s that, my sweet. All’s well that ends well. I didn’t mean to be quite so long-winded about it. The main point is that now we can be married, with no trouble at all.”

“I’m not so sure I want to marry you,” Margery said quietly. “Not now.”

If she had screamed it into silence, it couldn’t have seemed louder. They both listened to it, staring at each other, stricken and aghast. But Margery said, “I mean it,” in the same quiet fashion. She felt the gathering tears hot in her eyes, and yet her voice was steady. She knew now what she had to say—she knew the truth, even if he didn’t. She was the woman, she was wiser now than he, with a deep wisdom; and she understood him better now than he would ever understand himself.

She said, “I will tell you something, Don—something I’ve just discovered. You never would have asked Elaine for a divorce, no matter what you think. Not even loving me a lot—because I know you do. Not even with the best intentions in the world. You simply never would have.”

Don said, “You’ve lost your mind. You don’t know what you’re saying. Margery, what is this?”

"It's the truth," she told him sadly. "You can deny it, but I know. In your heart you never really wanted to divorce Elaine, or marry me, or change things as you had them. You liked your life the way it was. That's why today was such a blow to you—because you never really thought it *would* change. And that's why you didn't tell Elaine that you were in love with me, long ago—that time three years ago, before the war, when she was here—and why you've kept saying ever since that you couldn't tell her in a letter. Of course you could have, and I see it now. Only you didn't want to.

"No, let me finish," she besought him, as Don tried to interrupt. "I'm nearly through with this. I've got to say it all—for *both* our sakes. I need to hear it too. All you ever really wanted was a love affair with me, but when I took it in dead earnest, then you tried to, too, being honorable. You even convinced yourself that you wanted it to be that way. And it was easy for you to believe it, because you did really love me—I know that. I know you still do. You probably even love me almost as much as you revere Elaine. But it was never enough to make you willing to throw everything overboard, just for me. You never loved me that much—and in your subconscious mind, you knew it."

"None of this is true," he said. "I can't——"

"It is," said Margery. "It *is*, Don." She was weeping outright now. "You never would have married me—except that Elaine doesn't want you any more. Well, and so now I don't want you either, don't you see? Not on those terms. Not when I couldn't get you on my own terms. And I couldn't, ever."

That had been in June—that tortured evening. It was September now. She hadn't seen Don in the meantime; it was so much safer not to see him. She had been away, spending July in Glenport with her parents; and since her return in August she had been busy with her preparations for the adventure that was coming next. This was a war job, and a real one, and she had her Red Cross training to thank for it. There was a need for trained staff workers and experienced young hostesses for the canteens and recreation centers in the far-flung places where the troops were—England, Ireland, Australia, India, China, everywhere—and she had applied for this foreign service, and she had been accepted.

She had her orders now, although they were only the ones which covered the first lap; and she knew only that she was to sail from San Francisco, without knowing where. She was glad that it was to be west instead of east—glad that it wasn't England, because somehow England still meant Elaine, and therefore Don, for whom her heart still ached. And it seemed to her anyway that the westward voyage presaged a more adventurous assignment, more

interesting, perhaps more dangerous. She wanted something good and hard and tough to do. She wanted to come back from this experience a different person, with a better life ahead of her than the untidy years that lay behind. This might be the answer—this could do it, she thought confidently now. Men were not the only ones for whom war was an escape, or for whom it might even conceivably be a solution.

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 end of *This Man and This Woman* by Katharine Brush]