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# KINGDOM ON EARTH





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For My Family



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*PART I*

*August 1938*

SOUTH WALES  
CONNECTICUT





**A**LTHOUGH it was August, the night was very cold, and Harriet sat close to her new husband and kept her right hand in his pocket. They could see the moonlight through the windows of the station wagon, but it was yellowish, distorted by the smoky isinglass which showed the prints of dogs' paws and human fingers.

In the front seats, Harriet could see the heads of Joel's family. The car lights silhouetted them into four black knobs. They were singing, soprano, tenor, alto and a tuneless bass. In the darkness Harriet smiled at them tenderly. Joel had said that she would like them, but he had forgotten the important thing, which was that they would like her. Joel hadn't realized yet how uncertain she was, and afraid of people. But there could be no fear where people were so friendly. Harriet had never known that a family could be as affectionate as this and at the same time as unpossessive. The only other warmth she had ever known had been grasping.

The station wagon rode crunchingly into the driveway and stopped with a little splatter of gravel against the wheels. They sat in silence for a moment, their song stopped, enjoying the fresh, clear night. Joel's oldest sister, who had been driving, made the first move. She got out abruptly, and the others, moved by her action, opened their doors and joined her. Together they turned towards the house and saw the porch lights go on. Elaine, Joel's mother, stood on the doorstep to welcome them, and they greeted

her hilariously. Harriet was as eager as any of the rest of them, and she could hardly recognize herself as she took Elaine's arm impulsively, joining Joel in describing the movie they had just seen. They all followed into the house.

In the living room, drinks sat waiting on a tray by the couch. There was a fire in the brick fireplace, so huge that it nearly lit the room. Only a few lamps in far corners supplemented it. Even they wouldn't be needed, Harriet thought, in an ordinary-sized room, but this was the biggest living room she had ever seen. It was long and low, like the great kitchen it had once been. Hooks still hung from the ceiling where they had once supported bacon sides and hams. The Dutch oven beside the fireplace had been turned into a woodbox. Harriet had always imagined that people who had money lived stiffly; she had not realized that comfort could be a luxury too. Attractive as this room was, there was nothing useless in it. The great armchairs had been built for softness, there were ashtrays and cigarette boxes at every hand, and there were knitting bags, tennis rackets, golf clubs, and magazines lying about. It was only because it was all so big that it was not untidy.

Elaine poured beer and highballs and the girls sat down while the men carried their drinks to them. Joel brought Harriet a glass of beer and set the bottle down by her side so that she could refill her glass. After he had gone back for his own he sat down beside her, leaning against her legs. The firelight pinkened his long, thin hand, and made the glass in it glitter.

Pris, Joel's younger sister, had turned on the big radio-victrola in a corner and was dancing with Fulke Whitehead, the young Harvard boy. Harriet smiled at them; they were so much like puppies, frank and not too passionate in

their affection. Pris's blue eyes looked a little sleepy, but the skin of her round face was taut and freshly colored and her movements were energetic. She looked like a charming baby. It was always surprising to hear the tough, clipped speech that she affected coming out of that childish mouth. They swooped past Harriet and Joel now, and Pris leaned down and took Harriet's glass out of her hand.

"Mmmm," she said, sipping the beer and then handing it back. "Thanks." They went on dancing without having stopped.

Joel flung his pillow at their legs. "Get some of your own," he said in mock anger.

"The Randolfs always defend their brides," Kit, his other sister, said lazily. She stretched out her long legs in their scarlet corduroy slacks and looked at them. She was older than Joel, and married to Gray Beavers, who sat on the couch beside her. "They don't start beating them until the third month of marriage, generally," she added. Gray smiled down at her and the firelight caught his glasses and the polished height of his forehead.

"I didn't know that tradition," he told her. They all laughed; Gray looked so slight and his shoulders were so narrow. Beside him, Kit was very dark and vigorous. He looked around at them and then joined good-naturedly in the laughter. When Kit took his hand he grinned at her.

It was odd that they had married, Harriet thought, looking at them. They were such different people. Kit was a Randolph, with beauty, poise and assurance. And Gray was quiet and shy. He was taking a Ph.D. in English literature at Columbia, Joel had told her. The family was rather funny about that; they were a little awed by it and yet they couldn't quite take it seriously. Harriet, whose father

was a professor, and who knew Gray's academic world so well, liked him, but she could not quite be as easy with him as she was with the others, in spite of all they had in common.

Pris broke away from Fulke and sat down on the arm of Elaine's chair. "That's enough," she said. "I'm exhausted. Get me a drink, Fulke."

Fulke went to the table smiling a little. He was a tall, thin boy and his eyes were always faintly bloodshot. He would have been handsome except that there was already a weak look to him like an animal who had slept too long in a cave. He reminded Harriet of a younger Gray. And she thought, Pris probably liked Fulke for the same reason that Kit loved Gray. Or, for that matter, she thought, smiling self-consciously, that Joel loved her. She and Fulke and Gray were all strange creatures in the Randolf tribe, inferior creatures really, but fascinating to the Randolfs because they were strange.

Elaine put her hand up and touched Pris's knee affectionately. "You drink too much beer, darling," she said. "You'll get fat. When I was a girl, ladies never drank so much beer."

"That's the trouble," Pris said. She looked like a round blonde child, with her bare legs swinging from the chair. "I'm not a lady. Fulke said so." She looked mockingly at Fulke, who had brought a stool closer to her and was sitting on it with a highball in his hand.

"Well," Fulke said, embarrassedly. "That wasn't exactly what I said."

"Yes, it was," Pris told him. She laughed down at her mother. "A big, fat Irishman, who hadn't shaved for a week, asked me to dance with him last night. When we

were at the Silver Slipper. Fulke got mad because I said yes. But he was fun. He gave me quite a whirl."

Fulke shook his head. "Maybe it was fun," he told her. "But you nearly got us into a brawl. Did you realize that? The guy was cockeyed."

"I wish I'd been there," Joel said lazily. "I'd have given Pris the beating she deserves." His left hand reached for Harriet's ankle and caressed it.

"Fulke dances so nicely too," Elaine said mildly. "I should think you'd rather dance with him." Harriet watched her smilingly. She had a very fine face, she thought. Her bones were so clearly marked, and the flesh on them so meager. She looked like one of the gray-haired ladies in those aristocratic cigarette ads, who are so well groomed and have such slim figures. She had good long hands and feet like Joel's, and her head was set on her shoulders with perfect balance.

"Pris is too confined, that's all," Kit said. She had finished her sandwich and got up to brush the crumbs in her lap over the fireplace. The light silhouetted her profile. "You're too strict with her, Mother. There's no spice to her life. She has to cut loose when she's away from home."

"You're all idiots," Elaine said, and laughed. "Except Harriet. It's a good thing we've got you, Harriet. We need somebody sensible in this family."

Harriet was grateful and at the same time embarrassed at being singled out. "I'm only sensible compared to the rest of you," she said. She hadn't altogether caught the trick of their humor yet. Joel's long fingers went around her ankle, forming a ring against her bare leg. He squeezed lightly and she moved so that she could rest her arm against him unobtrusively. She could not quite get used to the openness of

his affection and she was grateful that he seemed sensitive to that and had become more discreet before other people.

They were all quiet, as if Harriet had failed to return a tennis ball batted to her, and stopped the game. She felt no discomfort though; there was too much peace in their attitudes as they sat looking into the fire. And she was a little sleepy. Her eyelids closed and opened again, her eyelashes making a mist against the red blaze. Joel turned and looked up at her. "Sleepy?" he asked her.

She nodded, smiling.

"We'd better be going to bed," he said, but he made no move.

She sat there with the padding of her heavy chair cloaking her, her head against its back. Sleepiness came completely and she heard the others talking as if through an anaesthetic. They were subdued now, and their sentences were short. Gray turned on the couch and stretched out his legs, putting his head on Kit's lap. She put one hand under his chin, and held her cigarette with the other, putting her arm out over the arm of the couch so that the smoke would not get into his eyes. Elaine smiled at all of them, her back still straight in contrast to their relaxed positions. She must have had a rigid upbringing, Harriet thought drowsily, she never slumped.

The voices rose now and then when the women spoke, and descended into bumbling when the men spoke. The fire subsided so that there was no longer a flame, but only coals, red in the blackened chimney. Joel's weight was pleasantly heavy against Harriet's legs, and he reached up once and took her cigarette out of her hand where it hung limply, and threw it in the fireplace.

She was nearly asleep when he moved again and she saw

that the others had got up now and that Elaine was moving back to the tray with her glass.

Somebody turned out the lamps, but aside from that they made no move to straighten up. A maid would do that before they came down to breakfast in the morning. Joel got up, groaning at the effort, and turned to pull her up with him. She came limply, and he put his arm around her shoulders. "Bed now," he said, smiling down at her. "Don't fuss."

"I won't," she told him. They moved with the others to the stairway. The hall, outside the living room, was cool, and Harriet shivered a bit. Joel felt her movement and his arm tightened. "Look at the moon," he said. She turned to peer out through the branches that came across the little, many-paned hall window. The moonlight lay magically across the lawn, brightening it except where the black shadows of trees fell. "Let's go out for a second," Joel said. With his other hand he opened the front door and kicked open the copper screen. They passed through out into the night and stood on the grass looking up. They were quiet together, and tender. Harriet thought of the times when she had walked home after dark, and seen the moonlight, and wished there had been somebody to share it with her. She had always been alone, she realized. Her father had not noticed things; he got his pleasures from books and talk. He seemed to lack some of the senses; he took no notice of the visual pleasures, or the physical ones. She had once accepted her father's life as the only desirable one. He had taught her to enjoy things by herself and it was not until she had met Joel that she had learned that enjoyment could be extended by sharing it with another person, even wordlessly. Thinking about it now made her feel grateful and

soft. She looked down at the ground, a remnant of her old training making her hide her emotion.

Suddenly Joel turned her to him and kissed her on the mouth. The soft, nearly sentimental feeling she had had united with something stronger and more definite. This was another sort of companionship too, this desire, and as she leaned against him, she took an almost wanton pleasure in meeting his kiss with an equal passion.

They turned back into the house through the empty hall and climbed the stairs to their room above. The moonlight came through the windows and paled the floor beside the bed. Harriet walked over to the bureau and began letting down her hair without turning on a light. She was unwilling to say anything; they had caught a mood and brought it upstairs with them. Speech might interrupt it. Joel was standing behind her, motionless, and she looked back over her shoulder to see what he was doing. He was watching her reflection in the mirror, she saw, and she smiled at him and turned back. She had never been particularly pleased with her face and her body but she liked them tonight because they pleased Joel. In the moonlight color was strained away and what she saw was black and white like a photograph, her wide-spaced eyes, her dark hair and her white shadowless face.

The hand with which she was holding the hairbrush trembled and there was a strained feeling in her throat. The moment seemed somehow static, the quiet room, the moonlight and Joel standing wordlessly behind her. Now she had a new impulse not to hurry but to continue brushing her hair and hold the moment there. Anticipation was so perfect that she was unreasonably afraid that nothing else could be better.



But Joel came to her and took the brush out of her hand. "That's enough for now," he said. He kissed her half impatiently, and she pressed against him with sudden gratefulness.

## 2

They ate breakfast casually on a table on the terrace. When Harriet and Joel came down the next morning, Pris and Fulke had already eaten and gone riding. Kit and Gray were still there, and so was Elaine. She always sat at the coffee pot until the last one of them had finished.

It was late enough so that the sun had reached the terrace and spread beyond it on the lawn. Below them there were gardens, not very formal and planned so that their true pattern could be appreciated only by an airplane. Immediately below the terrace was a thick bed of golden glow, the yellow heads showing slightly above the flagstones to the people sitting at the table. Beyond all this were the woods rising up on the hills, making green and purple and blue. The house was very isolated and its beautifully kept grounds seemed all the stranger with the woods for background.

Harriet took her seat and spread her napkin across her lap. Joel, beside her, looked his handsomest, freshly shaven and in a clean white shirt open at the throat. Elaine was smiling affectionately at them and she gave Harriet a pleasant feeling that they could share Joel without friction or jealousy.

"It's almost lunch time," Elaine said. "I never saw you sleep so late."

Kit laughed and brought her coffee cup to her mouth and Harriet felt her face warm with embarrassment. Joel looked undisturbed. "Privilege of a bride and groom," he said to his mother and she blushed too.

"Joel, for heaven's sake!" she said.

Harriet smiled. She was beginning to see that there was a pattern to the way they talked. Each of them had his own part. Elaine was a sort of gentle stooge and her remarks were a springboard for the flippancies of the others. She liked it too; it was teasing, but it was a sign of their affection.

Gray looked up from his newspaper at Harriet. "You and Joel want to play some tennis after breakfast?" he asked her.

"If you'd like to," Harriet said meekly. She played badly and would have preferred watching, but no Randolph could understand that, she thought, half ruefully. They took part in everything.

"That's a good idea," Joel said. He put a spoonful of scrambled eggs on Harriet's plate and she smiled at him, although the helping alarmed her. She was not used to such large breakfasts. Joel looked at her proudly. "This country air is giving you an appetite," he said. "We'll be getting some meat on your bones pretty soon."

"Joel, don't talk to Harriet that way," Elaine said reprovingly. "She's got a nice figure. You'll make her feel she's too thin."

"I am, a little," Harriet said, looking down at her wrist with its bones showing clearly. She wished that she had the strong, rounded arms of Kit or Pris.

"Nonsense," Elaine said. "You're like me—aristocratic." She looked proudly down at her own wrists and hands, which were of a very different type of thinness, boney and long. All of them laughed at her.

"Madame la Marquise," Kit jeered.

"Just the same," Elaine said mildly. "It was very fashionable to have my kind of figure when I was a girl."

Harriet, watching her, wondered if she had ever had any sort of love except her husband's or her children's. She had no feeling that conventional barriers would stand in Elaine's way, but she felt that she was genuinely absorbed in her own home. She wondered what sort of a person Mr. Randolph had been. Joel had told her very little about him except that he had died about five years before and had left his wife and children two large houses, this one and one in New York, and an income to make them comfortable forever.

Pris and Fulke came clattering up the terrace steps, their riding boots hitting against the stones solidly. "Give me some coffee, Ma," Pris said, sitting on the edge of the terrace and letting her legs dangle in the golden glow. "I'm hungry again."

"We're going to play tennis," Kit told her. "Want to join us?"

"Sure," Pris said lazily. "After we change our clothes."

Fulke groaned. "You certainly lead a wearing life," he told Pris.

"Now don't try to back out," Pris said. "Tennis will be good for you. Take the kinks away."

Elaine said sleepily and almost irrelevantly, "I wish Mr. Graham didn't have to come today. It's so nice, I'd like to watch you playing tennis."

"Why don't you?" Kit said. "Bring Mr. Graham along. Ask him for lunch and you can talk about business afterwards. What are you seeing him for, anyway?"

"I don't know," Elaine said. "He's the one who made the appointment. And he has to go back to town on the after-

noon train, so I won't be able to persuade him to stay until later. Oh, dear, I wish people weren't so businesslike."

Kit laughed. "I bet you do," she said. "Who's going to meet him?"

"William went down to the station," Elaine said.

Joel and Harriet had finished their breakfasts and Joel got up, beckoning to her to follow him. They climbed down the terrace steps and sat down on the lawn, Joel leaning on one elbow. The sun felt hot and lazy. Harriet bent down and picked up a blade of grass. She smoothed it between her fingers. Joel had taught her yesterday how to make a whistle but she was afraid to try. "Go ahead," Joel said, grinning at her. It excited her that he knew what she was thinking. She brought the grass into her joined hands and put it awkwardly to her mouth. The only sound was her own breath which felt hot against her palms.

"I'm afraid you're hopeless," Joel said, laughing.

Harriet felt ridiculously disappointed. "I guess I am," she said. She threw the grass away.

Kit and Gray came down and joined them. Gray carefully put his newspaper under him for fear the grass was still damp. Kit lay sprawling, her brown legs looking lovely against her white sharkskin shorts. The four of them were silent, both thoughts and speech absorbed by the sunlight. Harriet wished feebly that she didn't have to play tennis. She would like to lie here all morning.

"There's Mr. Graham now," Elaine said suddenly. Joel straightened up and Harriet looked with him down the driveway. The heavy, shining station wagon was coming along the road with dust hovering around it. William's dark face was familiar at the wheel and when he saw them

watching them he smiled so that his teeth looked white. A gray-haired man was sitting beside him.

"Who's Mr. Graham?" Harriet whispered to Joel.

"The old family adviser," Joel said in an open tone of voice. "Of Graham, Graham, Graham & Humperdinck."

"Don't be silly, Joel," Elaine said. "Graham and Tyson. He's our lawyer, Harriet. I don't know what I'd do without him. He takes care of everything for me. It's so complicated being a widow, you know. But Mr. Graham doesn't bother me with details."

"He's probably robbing you for all you're worth," Joel said cheerfully.

Elaine got up as the car turned into the driveway. "Don't say things like that, Joel," she said. "They bring bad luck."

She came down the terrace stairs and passed them to greet Mr. Graham. Harriet couldn't hear what she said, but she admired her gracious gestures, the ease with which she stood, the casualness with which she turned towards the house, taking Mr. Graham's arm to draw him with her. He was a funny, citified little man in his gray suit and stiff straw hat.

"I don't believe you've met Joel's wife, Mr. Graham," she said as she came near them. Harriet sat up and straightened her skirt. "This is Harriet," Elaine said.

"I didn't even know Joel had married," Mr. Graham said. He had a rather old-fashioned New York accent.

"Oh, yes," Elaine told him. "They got married last month. They're just back from their honeymoon in Mexico to stay with us for a week before Joel goes back to work. Don't they look sunburned and nice?"

Again Harriet was embarrassed, but Joel laughed and got

up to shake Mr. Graham's hand. "How are you, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Graham shook hands with him and greeted the others.

"Now I suppose you'll be wanting to get right down to business," Elaine said. "I couldn't offer you a cup of coffee before we start, could I? You can't have had time to get a decent breakfast."

"Thank you, no," Mr. Graham said. "I'm afraid I've got quite a lot to talk over with you, and I must be back this afternoon, I have another appointment at five."

"Whatever you say," Elaine said. She shrugged. "Well, good-bye, children. We'll see you at lunch. It's at two o'clock so that Mr. Graham can make the three o'clock train. Don't be late."

They went into the house together, and Kit rolled over on her stomach. "Well," she said. "How about that tennis?"

Harriet let Joel pull her up. "Oh," she said mournfully, "I certainly feel lazy."

"This will be good for you then," Joel said. "Shake you up."

He held her hand and they followed Kit and Gray down the road. The tennis courts were a hundred yards or so away from the house. There were two of them, white and well kept by William. On one side there was a little house, weathered and unpainted, which held the rackets and balls and sneakers. There was a wide enough space around the courts within the high, chicken-wire fence to allow benches and wooden armchairs to be placed here and there. The benches were painted red and the chairs yellow. It had the air of pleasant ease that the Randolph belongings always

wore. Like their station wagon, and their faded carpets, and their careless but expensive clothes.

Harriet and Kit sat on one of the red benches while Joel went to get their shoes. Gray, who was already wearing sneakers, began hitting the ball against the back fence, to practice his serve. Each stroke swished and then hit the wires so that they gave a little, with a metallic sound, and the ball came back more weakly. Harriet was watching him and forgot to take off her shoes until Joel came back and told her to hurry up. Then she fumbled with her laces, feeling awkward, and when she laid her saddle oxfords down beside Kit's scarlet clogs, she thought they looked very dull. The comparison of the two pairs of shoes started her on a morbid line of thought. Kit and Pris were a dashing pair; Joel must have grown fond of her because she was small and shy and a contrast to them. But wasn't that a false basis for affection? How could she live up to it? She was moody for a second, and then her common sense returned and she laughed at herself a little—what thoughts for a young bride to have. At that moment, Joel took her right foot in his hand and began to put on her sneaker for her. She felt the warmth of his palm against her instep and when she looked at him he was smiling up at her with only amusement for her slowness. She didn't tell him what she had been thinking.

Kit had already made her change and was batting balls across to Gray now. Harriet let Joel finish lacing her shoes and stood up to join them. The tennis racket that he gave her was a child's racket, the only one that seemed light enough for her, and she swung it, trying to look nonchalant. The ground was very bright. It would be hot again

and already she felt the ebbing of strength that came to her whenever she got out on the courts.

The game immediately became a contest between Kit and Joel. Gray was competent, but not as good as either of them, and their play covered their partners' errors so that Harriet and Gray were quite unimportant. As Harriet grew tired, she gradually stopped concentrating. If she thought hard enough she could usually get her racket on the ball and return it over the net. But now the ends of thought were slipping, she forgot to keep her eye on the ball, she forgot to hold her racket in the right position and she forgot to shift her grip for the backhand. Her timing went to pieces and she felt helplessly weak. Joel was magnificent. He covered the whole court and she began to try to keep out of the way, only taking balls that came directly to her. They won the set finally, although her serve had been so poor that they lost it each time.

There was an ache to Harriet's back now, running along her spine and gripping her shoulders. The sun had given her a headache and when she moved it was hard to lift her feet. She hoped that nobody would suggest another set.

Pris and Fulke had come out during the game and were sitting on a bench watching them. "Fulke doesn't feel like playing," Pris said. There was a little good-natured mockery in her tone but no sullenness. "How about taking me on for a set of singles, Kit?"

Kit agreed and Joel and Gray decided to take the other court for singles of their own. Harriet was tacitly left out. She sat in one of the yellow wooden chairs, her feet stretched in front of her, and wished that she had a glass of water. Fulke moved over to the end of his bench so that he could talk to her. "They look nice, don't they?" he said



of Pris and Kit, who were hitting balls back and forth to each other. Harriet watched them. Beyond, in the other court, Joel and Gray were having a noisy game, but it was not always as easy to see them; the girls got in the way.

Fulke talked to her desultorily and she made no effort with him. She was used enough to his undergraduate type. They had come to her father's house for tea and she had had to entertain them. You didn't try to project your own personality, but only to encourage theirs. He was telling her now of a student peace movement in which he had been involved. She had heard undergraduates talk peace demonstrations for a good many years. The boys who were excited by it now were more one-tracked than ever. She sympathized with them in theory, but there was a sort of unworldliness about their movements that made them unsympathetic. Demonstrations used to make your throat heavy and move you to tears. They seemed a little futile now. There would be a war soon and she visualized Fulke and his friends going off to training camp, still waving their flags, but going nevertheless. They had no idea how to resist.

"We were going to send a bus load of students to Congress," Fulke was saying. "Only the term ended before we got a chance to. Then a lot of the boys had to go home and we couldn't get a big enough group together. It's too bad. It would have been a good idea." He looked wistfully at his long, grimy sneakers.

Pris howled as Kit sent a long, low ball straight at her feet and she had to jump aside to make an attempt at it. Fulke and Harriet looked up and lost the impetus of their conversation. Without Harriet's sympathetic prodding,

Fulke had nothing more to say, and they watched the game for a while.

Watching became monotonous again, though, and Harriet's head turned from one side to the other, following the ball absent-mindedly. Fulke stirred beside her. "I wish there were something I could do after I get out of college to help the movement," he said sadly. He laughed at himself. "I'll probably be too busy fighting to do anything, though," he added.

Harriet smiled too. "What do you want to do?" she asked. She encouraged him amiably to talk about his ambitions.

"Writing, I guess," Fulke said, and went on with his plans, trying hard to seem practical.

Harriet answered him with her eyes still on the courts. Here, with the sun on her and her arms and legs bare, she had forgotten about cities and jobs and wars, and it was hard to think about them. This boy, though, was used to idleness and sunshine, and he was probably eager to get away from them. His mind had already left them. She tried to seem interested.

"What about newspaper work?" she asked. "A lot of people try that."

"No," Fulke said, shaking his head. "I think it's bad for your style. That business of having to grind out stuff day after day. Very bad. Journalists seldom write with any distinction."

"Perhaps," Harriet said, without taking him up.

There was no excitement to her in Fulke. She supposed that his type was rarer than most, but she had met more of them than of any other. Joel, now, she thought, looking across at him, he was much stranger than Fulke. She had

never known men who didn't use words to express themselves, whose sensitivity was almost entirely physical. She wondered if perhaps Fulke's kind were not overrated. Her father would not have agreed with her. But in her father's life there were a lot of spaces. Perhaps contact with Joel's sort of person could have filled those spaces. Her own life had become so filled. Every little experience could mean excitement or pleasure with Joel. The touch of a hand, a good meal, fine weather, storms, new clothes, sports, you couldn't list all the things which had so suddenly become important. Fulke, perhaps Gray, certainly her father, pursued their ideas and learning so single-mindedly that they cut out real living. They were trying to analyze life, and they had lost it. Joel had it without trying. She smiled as she watched him, with his good long body lunging for the balls and his feet fast in the whitish sand of the courts.

Gray was laughing, and lost a point because he had laughed. To Joel the game was as important as anything else he did, and he was excited now, his pleasure in it had become heightened. He served a fast ball for the last point, and Gray missed it completely. They laughed again, together now, but for different reasons. Gray was laughing at himself, Harriet knew, and Joel was laughing because his body had obeyed him so well and he was delighted. They shook hands across the net as they walked along it to reach the side of the court. Joel came over beside Harriet and sat on the arm of her chair. "Whew!" he said. "It's hot, darling."

She put her hand to his forehead and felt it moist and warm. "Poor thing," she said. "You ought to sit in the shade for a while and cool off."

"I think some beer will be good," Joel said. "I'll telephone William."

There was a house-phone extension in the small shack and Joel went in to use it. Fulke smiled at Harriet. "This is certainly the life," he said. "A telephone by the tennis court!"

Gray joined them after putting the frame on his racket. They watched Kit and Pris, and Joel, coming back, sat down on the arm of Harriet's chair again. Pris was serving the last point when William arrived with the beer, the copper cans still looking icy and wet. Pris deliberately threw the game by serving extravagant doubles. "Oh, boy, beer," she said, and flung her racket down on the court. "Gimme." Kit leaned her racket against the net and followed more slowly. William filled glasses for all of them.

"It's nearly two o'clock," Gray said, looking at his watch. "Elaine wanted us to be back promptly."

"That's right," Joel said. "Drink up. I want to find out what Mr. Graham was so bothered about."

"If Elaine can remember," Kit said. She sipped the cool beer. Her face was darkened and more handsome than ever. Her smooth, black hair had curled in little wisps around her forehead where she perspired, but there was nothing tired in the way she held her back.

Finishing their drinks they left their glasses on the benches and chair arms and put on their shoes. Harriet's feet dragged in the sandy road on the way back. There were no trees in this particular stretch and the sun made it look pale, with the long wild grasses by its side seeming tropically rich.

Luncheon was set on the terrace and they found Elaine and Mr. Graham already waiting for them. Harriet was in-

stantly aware that something serious had happened between them. There was an unfamiliar puzzled look on Elaine's face. And she greeted her children as if she wanted them to share the trouble. She took Joel's hand possessively, urging him to sit on her left. Harriet had the feeling that she wanted protection from Mr. Graham, who was sitting on her right.

The others seemed not to notice that anything was wrong. Pris sat sprawling on her chair and reached immediately for a piece of bread. They were laughing and talking quite naturally, but their good humor seemed awkward, while Mr. Graham was embarrassingly silent. Harriet saw his smooth old face watching the table and she felt as if he were reproaching them. Pris leaned across Harriet and reached for a radish in front of Joel. Joel slapped her hand, laughingly. "Wait until you're served, young pig," he said. Harriet thought, something's wrong. Their boisterousness seemed inappropriate to her. Elaine laughed nervously and more shrilly than usual.

"Children," she said. "Behave!"

Their hunger seemed wrong, too. They ate so heartily, while Harriet had lost all appetite, and she noticed that Mr. Graham and Elaine barely touched their food. She wondered what had happened. She didn't know Elaine well enough to guess the depth of her trouble, and it occurred to her that this might be something quite minor and Elaine was dramatizing it.

Kit and Gray were discussing their plans for the winter and the others were taking part. Gray had two more years in which to finish his studies, and until he could earn a living he and Kit lived with Elaine in a small apartment on the top floor of her New York house. Kit wanted Gray to take

some time off so that they could go to Florida at Christmas time.

Gray felt that this would interrupt his studies too much and he was arguing mildly. There was nothing quarrelsome about the discussion. Harriet would have enjoyed it if she had not been abstracted.

"Darling," Kit said. "Shakespeare has been dead for so long, he can afford to wait a little longer, can't he?"

"Not Shakespeare, Kit," Gray corrected patiently. "John Galt. Yes, I suppose he could wait, but please consider my manly pride. I don't want your mother to support me any longer than she has to."

"But, Gray," Kit said, "she loves to. Gives her something to do with her money. She thinks of herself as a patron of the arts, sending you through college. Puffs her up no end. Makes her feel like a de' Medici or something."

"All very nice," Gray said. "And Elaine is a sweet and forbearing woman. But what about me?"

"Oh," Kit said, waving her hand at him laughingly. "You know darned well you don't want to finish that thesis. You're having the time of your life working on it. When you finish you're going to have to get out and grind, and you know you'll hate that. Come on, baby, let's stall a little while longer and go to Florida. The Maysons are down there, they want us to stay with them. We'll have a picnic."

"Kit and Gray," Elaine said, looking up at them. "Sorry to interrupt you, but Mr. Graham has to catch his train."

Kit looked quickly at her watch. "Why, it's a quarter to three!" she said in surprise. "I didn't realize it was that late. Shall I drive him down, Elaine?"

"Thank you, Kit," Mr. Graham said, getting up with a scrape of his chair. "But I believe William had planned to

take me. I think I hear him bringing the car around now. It's very kind of you."

They stood up casually, still holding their napkins in their hands, and told him good-bye. His presence had made very little impression on them, and after he had gone down the terrace steps, carrying his black briefcases, and William had driven him off, they took up their conversation again as if it had not been interrupted. Only Elaine sat looking after him, and when Kit appealed to her, she turned in surprise and said, "What?"

"Elaine's in a black study," Joel said. "What's the matter, darling, didn't somebody declare a dividend?"

"Children," Elaine said. She laid her napkin down by her plate. "The strangest thing has happened. I can't quite take it in yet."

Fulke looked embarrassed. "Wouldn't you like me to go, Mrs. Randolph?" he asked. "If you want to talk business?"

Pris said strongly, "Oh, for heaven's sake, Fulke, stop being a gentleman. It's all right, we have no guilty secrets. What's the matter, Elaine?"

"Why, most of our money seems to have disappeared," Elaine said. She looked at each of their faces in turn, as if she could get help from them.

"What do you mean?" Joel asked. His tone seemed no sharper than usual. Harriet had put out her hand instinctively to touch his, but he made her feel as if she was making too extravagant a gesture.

"That's what Mr. Graham said," Elaine said. "You know, Gray, he told you about it when you went to see him with me last spring."

"He told me that you were living on your capital," Gray told her. "But somehow I didn't realize it was serious—I

thought there was enough for your lifetime and more than that."

"That's what I always understood," Joel said.

"But the thing is, we've been living on the capital for years," Elaine said. "And then we lost a lot of it. John hadn't invested it in the right things or something. I know Mr. Graham told me that my investments had depreciated, but I just thought he meant I had to economize temporarily. Since we didn't go to Europe this summer, I thought everything would be all right."

"Whoa, hold on a minute, Elaine," Joel said. His voice was still calm. "Are you sure you've got this all straight? It doesn't seem possible that we've just lost everything. I thought Dad left you a good income for life."

"Well, I thought so too," Elaine said sadly. "He always talked about how he was going to take care of us. But Mr. Graham says that he hadn't settled his affairs very well when he died—he had borrowed most of his life insurance, for one thing, and for the other, he had invested a lot of money in some stock that's practically worthless now."

"Graham spoke to me about the life insurance," Joel said. "But I thought that was just a drop in the bucket." He looked at Harriet. "It's too bad I didn't look into this more closely," he said. "But to tell the truth, I thought we were all right. After all, Dad was a banker—and I don't know much about those things."

"Well, you can see," Elaine told them, "that we've never had much income. I felt the same way you did, Joel. John had always talked so much about those wonderful stocks of his, and how I should always keep them, that I didn't want to let Mr. Graham reinvest the money. I thought he



was just rather prissy, you know, lawyers are always telling you to economize."

Joel looked across the table at Kit. "I think we'd better go in and see Mr. Graham ourselves," he said. "And see if Elaine's got this right."

Kit nodded and so did Elaine, evidently without taking offense. "I wish you would," she said. "I seem to have been awfully muddled about it. But I'm afraid that I'm right this time. You see, he thinks we ought to sell the New York house. That's definite enough, isn't it?"

"More easily said than done, I'd imagine," Joel said. "Nobody wants to buy those big old houses nowadays. And real-estate taxes are going up, I see."

"Well, Mr. Graham's found a man who wants to buy it," Elaine said. "He'll take it over for the mortgage. Why John left me a house with such a huge mortgage on it, I can't imagine."

"You mean you won't get anything?" Joel asked incredulously. "But what's the sense of selling it, then?"

"I wish I had Mr. Graham here to explain it all to you," Elaine said helplessly. "But it seems that the house isn't worth anything like what he paid for it, and that the mortgage is for thirty thousand. We couldn't possibly get more than that for it, Mr. Graham says."

"Then why sell it?" Kit asked. "Joel's right."

"Because it costs so much to run," Elaine told her. "The taxes, and the amortization and interest on the mortgage, the coal bills, the servants, the furnace man, repairs, all those things—you'd be surprised how much they cost."

"Oh," Kit said considering. She looked down at her plate and picked up a fork for a second, then put it down again.

"Well," she said, laughing. "If you're right, I guess that settles our argument, Gray. No Florida for us this year."

"I told Mr. Graham to go ahead and offer the house to this man he knows," Elaine went on. "We'll have to move to an apartment."

"I don't think that'll be so bad," Pris said thoughtfully. "Joel was going to get a place of his own, anyway, weren't you, Joel?"

Joel nodded and Harriet smiled at him timidly. "If this is true, Harriet and I can take care of ourselves, Elaine," he said. "You don't need to worry about us. My salary's enough."

Fifty dollars a week, Harriet knew he made. He had a comfortable job in an advertising agency, where he did some copy writing but was generally a sort of an account salesman, eating and having drinks with college friends of his who were in prominent firms of one sort or another.

"Then Elaine and Kit and Gray and I will find us a nice roomy apartment somewhere," Pris went on. "Say, I think it'll be fun. We can do our own housekeeping."

"Oh, we're not that poor," Elaine protested. "At least I don't think so. We can afford a maid, Pris."

"Well—maybe somebody to do the laundry and the heavy cleaning," Pris said thoughtfully. "But it would be fun to do our own cooking, Elaine. I always wanted to learn to cook."

"Heaven help us!" Kit said, putting her hand over her stomach.

Gray said slowly, "If things are really this serious, Elaine, there's no reason why you should have to take care of Kit and me. I can look for a job."

"Oh, no, darling," Kit said quickly. "I won't have you

giving up all these years of work. I'll look for a job myself. I won't have anything else to do."

"What could you do, Kit?" Gray said. "No, I don't like that idea. You're not trained to work, it would be too hard on you."

Harriet watched them eagerly. In a way, this was delightful. It was like starting to read a book and finding it unexpectedly good. When she married Joel she had perhaps been foolish not to consider what he would be like under different circumstances. But now she was seeing that and she could find no fault with him. He and his family were brave people, she thought. They had never been used to anything but luxury; the prospect of being without it must be more frightening to them than it was to her. She knew, even with her limited experience, that pressure of this sort can bring out all sorts of uglinesses in people. But here were the Randolfs, not only being strong, but actually making a joke out of the whole thing.

"Oh, I can do something," Kit said carelessly. "But, Gray, it would be foolish for you to quit studying now. Think of it practically, darling. You've made a big investment, and now you're going to throw it up just before you're ready to cash in on it."

"Two more years—" Gray murmured.

Joel interrupted. "Not if you work all summer too, Gray," he said. "You can help best that way. Kit's right."

"I suppose so—" Gray said reluctantly. "I suppose it's just my pride. But I hate to have Kit supporting me for such a long time."

"But I want to, darling," Kit said. "It isn't as if it would be a hardship. I'd be bored stiff, just sitting home doing nothing. That's why I wanted to go to Florida. Well, in-

stead of going to Florida, I'll look for a job. I may not be trained for anything, but I'm intelligent and I'm strong. There must be something I can do."

There probably was, Harriet thought, although before she had met Joel she herself had tried to look for work and she knew how hard and humiliating it was. But there were two differences between her and Kit. One was that if they were really broke, Kit would need a job and because of that she would be more likely to get one. But the important difference was in their manner. Kit was not only handsome, she had a great deal of assurance. She always did things well, and she would have that confidence behind her. It couldn't fail to impress people.

Although Kit and Joel kept warning them that all this might be unnecessary, they began to discuss plans. They must go to New York immediately, Elaine said, and start moving.

"If we really have to," Joel added.

"It's going to be a hard job," Elaine went on reflectively.

"Gawd!" Kit said strongly. "It certainly is. What will we do with all that furniture we've got down there?"

"Send some of it up here, I imagine," Elaine said. "And Joel will probably want some of it."

"I'd like that Governor Winthrop desk in the library, Elaine," Joel said. "Be nice for us, won't it, Harriet? Oh, that's right, I forgot. You've never seen it."

"You can't have that, Joel Randolph," Kit said. "I'm saving that for my grandchildren."

"You start producing some descendants and I'll think about turning it over to them," Joel told her. They began to argue good-naturedly about the various pieces of furniture. Each member of the family had favorites they wanted

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to keep. They seemed to Harriet to lose sight of the main problem in discussing the particulars this way, but she was entranced by their good humor and their ridiculous, exuberant talk, and she gradually got drawn into it until she was laughing with them. What pleasant nit-wits they were, she thought. And she began to develop an almost superstitious feeling that people as light-hearted as they were must have some sort of special protection. That sort of confidence could never be destroyed, she thought.

"I must have had this in mind," Joel said, putting his arm around her, "when I married such a good cook."

She laughed. Really, living was an easy matter when you approached it with the Randolfs.



*PART II*

*September 1938–February 1939*

NEW YORK





HOLDING the curtain rod over her shoulder, Harriet climbed the stepladder in front of the tall living-room windows. Through the bare glass she could see the red brick and brownstone houses across the way. Children were playing in the street, and because of the unusual heat they were dressed in sleeveless, scanty clothes. Their voices came in through her opened window like a shrill rhythmless piece of music. Sometimes when she was tired they irritated her, and she wanted to go and call to them to keep quiet. But now their balls bouncing against the stoops were a pleasant sound, and she liked to hear their laughter coming high above the other noises.

She put the rod in its brass holders, one end missing the catch and slipping so that she almost lost it. When she had finally fastened it, she smoothed out the curtains, enjoying their coarse red folds, adjusting them so that they hung symmetrically. She had to climb down again and stand off to make sure they were right. Then she pulled the window shades down half-way and folded up the ladder. Now the living room looked finished. Without the curtains they had felt naked and had sat there in the evenings without turning on the lights.

They had half of the first floor of an old private house which had been turned into an apartment. There was a living room with high ceilings and moldings around the doors, and a small bedroom to the right of it. One closet had been made into a kitchenette and there was a bathroom down the

hall with an old-fashioned tub on legs and a marble washstand. Harriet had chosen the apartment, with its inconveniences, because she hoped the high ceilings would give Joel the atmosphere of his former home. They could have afforded something more modern and perhaps more spacious. The living room here was large but the bedroom was small. Their fourposter bed crowded it, leaving room for a dresser and a small bedside table and nothing else.

Joel had not seen the possibilities of the place. He had complained about it, and was not interested in furnishing it. Harriet worked while he was away at the office. She had made a red monk's cloth slip cover for the studio couch, and the red curtains she had just finished hanging. One wing chair by the fireplace had a worn blue-velvet covering and she had fixed that with pale turquoise-and-white mattress ticking. The rugs were small, goat's-hair with black backgrounds and wild blue and green flowers on them. Joel had some charming Japanese prints in a greenish watercolor, and she had framed them with narrow black molding and hung them. The furniture was good; they had brought it from Elaine's house. There was a handsome mahogany sideboard which Harriet had polished up until it looked glowing. And the Governor Winthrop desk was good between the two windows. It had become an attractive room. The curtains completed it. Bookshelves lay along the wall on either side of the fireplace and they had plenty of books to fill them. Harriet had sent for all of hers and her father had added some to them in a sudden thoughtful impulse. The books were gay, in red, blue, black and green bindings with their golden letters catching the last light from the street.

Harriet had planned a cool meal because of the heat. She went into the kitchen now and made hot tea and put it into

the icebox to cool. There was a can of jellied madrilene waiting to be opened and she had sliced raw carrots and arranged them on a plate with celery. She lit the oven so that it would be hot enough to broil the swordfish quickly, and set on a kettle of water for the vegetables. She moved efficiently in the little room, because this was a ground in which she was expert. It was exciting to take out her new knives and spoons, part of the "Bride's set" of cooking utensils she and Joel had bought with a good deal of laughter. She strung the beans deftly, splitting them so that they would be slim and tender. There was summer squash too to be prepared. She tried not to economize on food; there were other things they could do without which Joel would not miss so much. The frozen raspberries thawing now on top of the icebox were expensive, and she could have made some pudding for desert, but she knew Joel hated such dishes. Besides that, if you bought carefully you could do rather well. She had already discovered the push-carts on Bleecker Street where the vegetables were cheap if you bargained for them, and fresher than those in the stores. It was not much of a walk, just enough to give her some exercise. She could not manage her home as Elaine and Pris and Kit did, making gaiety out of the mistakes, and eating cheese and crackers one day because they had had steak the day before, but she could provide steady comfort and she could do that without bothering Joel with her problems. She laughed to herself silently as she remembered Pris struggling with a recipe from *The Ladies' Home Journal* and then throwing the mess into the garbage can and swearing, "Who the hell would want to eat this junk anyway! Damned fluff. Run down to the corner, Gray, and buy

some lamb chops, will you? You just have to stick those in the oven, don't you, and they get done by themselves?"

She finished her preparations and turned out the kitchen lights so that it would be less hot. Joel was late, she thought, looking at the little wrist watch corded onto her wrist. She went into the living room and pushed the Cogswell chair around so that it faced the window. Even such temporary disorder disturbed her, her room had become so fixed in her mind. But she wanted to see into the street where there was noise and people. She was lonely sometimes, which was queer, because she had lived alone a great deal and had always been self-sufficient.

As she sat there she heard a small noise at the front door and she knew it was Joel's key in the lock. She jumped up hastily and pushed the chair back into its correct position. "Joel," she said, and he came in, laying his hat on the little table by the door.

He looked very neat, although it had been so sticky all day. His tropical worsted suit had held its creases and his white shirt looked smooth around the collar. Only his face had a higher flush on it, and there was a little red mark where his hat band had pressed.

"Hello, darling," he said. His voice had the light tenderness in it that she looked for every evening as if she were afraid it might not be there some day.

"Hello," she said. She went to him to be kissed, and rested against him for a minute afterwards. "Did you have a good day?" she asked. She smelt liquor on his breath and supposed that was why he was late. He had been having a drink with some prospective client.

"Fair," he said. "I've been up to see mother and the kids."

"Oh," she said, smiling at the thought. "How are they?"

"Pris has taken to feeding them so many cocktails they don't mind what they eat," he said, laughing. "Or at least I think that's the theory."

He came further into the room and looked around him. "What have you been doing?" he said. "Did you put curtains up?"

"Yes," she said proudly. "How do you like them?"

"They're good," he said. He looked around him. "This is a fine room now. You're a clever gal, Harriet. I really didn't think you could get it looking so nice. It's funny what a difference those curtains make. What else have you done today?"

"Rearranged the furniture a little bit," she said. "Look, I put this table over here so you can use the ashtray when you're in your chair."

He laughed delightedly. "Darling," he said. "Maybe I'm not a very satisfactory young husband. I know I ought to be aware of every detail, but I'm afraid I hadn't even noticed it before."

He went over and sat down in the armchair. "This is swell," he said. "Where's my pipe and slippers, baby?"

"You're too young for slippers," she said. "They come after our second child. Along with a dog and a good book."

She came over and sat on the arm of his chair. "Do you really like it, Joel?" she asked. "The apartment, I mean. I'm always so worried that you'll miss your old home."

"This is nicer," he said. "It's beautiful and it belongs to us. I like it better." He put his arm around her waist and pulled her down on his lap. She leaned against him happily. "You shouldn't worry so much," he said tenderly. "I'm not so hard to please."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," she said hastily. "I know you

aren't, you've been sweet. But it's not what you've been used to and I want to be sure you like it."

He put his mouth against her hair and blew gently so that a little wisp went fussily across her cheek and tickled her. She brushed it away with her hand and he grinned at her. They were quiet for a few seconds, first a quiet of contentment, and then Joel's hand came up against her breast, and she felt the change of his mood. She stirred a little and kissed him on one cheek so that he would not be offended. "I've got to get dinner," she said.

"All right," he told her, smiling. "I'll lay off." He embarrassed her and she laughed awkwardly. As she got up and walked to the kitchen she felt self-conscious, knowing that he was watching her. She switched on the light overhead and he came in behind her and put his arm lightly on her shoulder. "What have we got?" he asked her.

"Oh, swordfish," she said. "And vegetables. All right?"

"What do you have to do to swordfish?" Joel asked her. "Does it take much cooking?"

"Not long," she said. "You just broil it for about twenty minutes."

He leaned past her and pulled the broiler door open. "Say," he said. "This is fiendishly hot, Harriet."

"It has to be," she said. "To do a good job."

"I don't want you cooking in that heat," he said. "Let's go out for dinner."

"I don't mind, honestly, Joel," she said. "And everything's fixed."

"It can last another day, can't it?" Joel asked. "Or you could eat it for lunch tomorrow, couldn't you?"

"I suppose so," she said slowly. The fish probably

wouldn't keep in this heat, but the vegetables would be all right. "Do you really want to eat out?" she asked him.

"Yes, let's," he said coaxingly. "I hate to have you fussing around in there on a day like this. Let's go to Enrico's and have a cocktail and a fine spread. I feel like celebrating."

"Have you got any money?" she asked, hating to seem so unenthusiastic.

"No," he said. "Not enough. But Enrico knows me, he'll let me sign a check."

She hated that too, but she disliked the idea of nagging. "All right," she said. She reached up to the top of the ice-box for the raspberries and put them inside where they would keep. Joel turned the oven off for her, and stood holding the light chain for her to pass by him. Her hat was in the closet by the front door and she stooped to put it on in front of the little mirror. Joel went into the bedroom and brought out her purse and gloves.

"Is this all you need?" he asked. She smiled at him.

"Yes," she said. "I don't even really need that. It's quite empty."

He handed it to her. "We'll take it along anyway," he said. "So you can at least look prosperous."

She saw that he had forgotten to turn out the central light, and reached her hand back through the door to press the switch. He laughed at her. "You must have taken a Home Economics course in college," he told her.

"I learned that stunt before I was out of swaddling clothes," she said. "It's inbred in me." She wondered if those little thrifty instincts of hers would cause trouble between them one day. She would try to give them up except that they were still necessary. But perhaps she worried too much. Joel didn't seem bothered, he was amused by them.

They walked down the dark sidewalk, feeling young and well-dressed beside the tired, carelessly clothed men and women who watched them from the stoops. A band of boys whom Harriet had been watching a moment ago from the window were standing by the drugstore on the corner and they had to break apart to let Harriet and Joel pass. One of them whistled tauntingly and it gave Harriet a queer feeling to hear it. A little while ago she had been so sympathetic with those boys. It seemed impossible that they should think of her as a strange young woman passing them in the street.

Enrico's, on Fifth Avenue, was not a typical Greenwich Village restaurant. It had space and elegance, and it looked like an old Murray Hill house. They went up a flight of brownstone steps to the first floor, where a quiet young hat-check girl in a black dress met them. Beyond her, Enrico, wearing a well-tailored suit, bowed to them and took them, smiling, to a little table. The walls were papered handsomely in a green paper with white rope designs, and the high ceilings and doors had carved molding around them. There were long white curtains, draped naturally at the windows. Each little table had its own lamp so that there was no overhead glare, and the linen was white and the silver and glassware shining. Harriet smiled as Enrico called her Mrs. Randolph and asked Joel about his mother and sisters. The Randolphs had eaten here for a good many years and now Harriet was a member of the family, to be greeted enthusiastically. She had been here once or twice before and it was always pleasant to have so much attention, to be advised about the best foods and wines, and to have a special salad mixed for them. But as she picked up the menu she was reminded again of how expensive it was, and her eye automatically sought the cheapest dish.



Joel would not let her order it, however. He had planned a dinner himself and Enrico agreed with him that it would be a good one. She leaned back in her chair and left the ordering to them, but she was tense and she could not relax. She heard Joel asking for broiled mussels, swordfish steak, salad and raspberry ice. Enrico suggested a Chilean-type Rhine wine which he said was good, and they decided on half a bottle. It was ironic, Harriet thought, that the menu was so similar to the meal she had deserted at home.

She watched Joel's animated face and his easy gestures. This was the sort of thing he knew better than his present kind of living. It seemed like the greatest sort of luxury to her, and unfamiliar. To Joel their apartment must be unfamiliar; he must think of it as a sort of camping place. If he did not get back to these old ways of his every now and then, roughing it would lose its humor and he would begin to dislike it.

This was necessary, then, as a tonic for Joel. She might have spent the money otherwise. On something permanent, or put it away in savings so that they could have two or three evenings of pleasure instead of one expensive one. But perhaps Joel was right. Perhaps it was better to be free of money for one evening, not to worry about the cost of things, be extravagant and gay. Perhaps it was better than squeezing it out to cover several evenings, each one limited.

A waiter laid the mussels before them and Harriet felt hungry now in the cool dining room. She picked up her little fork and tested them. Joel grinned at her.

"Nice?" he asked. "Isn't this better than bending over a hot stove?"

She nodded smilingly.

"I have a special reason for taking you out tonight any-

way," Joel said. "I haven't told you yet. But I had lunch today with Henry Tyler."

"Who's he?" Harriet asked him timidly.

"He's a fellow I went to college with," Joel told her. "He was a year ahead of me, but we played on the tennis team together. He's in the advertising department of Conway's now." He smiled to himself at the thought.

"Conway's drugs?" Harriet asked him. "You mean you want to get their account?"

"Ummm," Joel said, nodding. He played with the mussels, pulling them gently out of their shells. "They're dissatisfied with their present agency, or so Tyler says, and he's going to introduce me to his boss. If I can get that account it will be a big thing for me. I'll get a commission, and I think maybe a promotion."

"Oh, swell, darling," she said, leaning across the table in her eagerness. Hearing Joel talk, hearing him use the business vocabulary which she had met only in books, she wondered suddenly what he was like in the world of his office. She realized that she had no idea. Did his charm and good manners help them there or were they so evident? Probably, she decided. There would be a definite place in his business for a pleasant sort of person. Somebody who knew how to talk to people. Those very qualities that had always made her fear for his success might be the ones that were useful to him. It didn't matter perhaps that he wasn't efficient and he wasn't hard. There were enough people like that.

"You're the perfect little woman," he said, laughing. "So encouraging."

She laughed too.

"The funny papers are right," he said. "Young married

people always act true to type. Even two unusual, brilliant, startling young people like us. Here you are, lighting the lamps at dusk and kissing me at the front door when I get home, and here I am, telling you what sort of a day I had at the office."

"I think it's nice," she said contentedly. "I like being like all the young married couples."

"So do I," he told her. "It just surprises me, that's all. Do you think I'll pace the floor and all that when we have our first child?"

Harriet finished her last mussel and laid her fork down on the plate. He had jerked her back to insecurity again. She remembered Mr. Graham's stern old face when she and Kit and Joel had gone to interview him. "You've been brought up very luxuriously. *Very* luxuriously." He had looked at Harriet as if he expected her sympathy. "It will be hard for you to adjust yourselves," he had told them. Joel had laughed at him after they had left the building, but Harriet had felt that Mr. Graham had appealed to her to keep an eye on them, and she had been aware that he thought of all of them as babies. Now it seemed to her that Joel was being too careless. "You don't have to think about children for a while yet," she said slowly.

"Now, now," Joel said. "No gloomy thoughts. Darling, be cheerful. This is no joke. I think I'll be making enough money for us to have quintuplets in another year."

The waiter cleared away their plates piled with the mussel shells and brought the handsomely arranged dinner dishes, the swordfish flanked by browned potatoes and stringbeans delicately cut and pale green.

"I hope so, Joel," Harriet said. She watched him salt and

pepper his vegetables as he always did. He liked a lot of seasoning.

"If I get this Conway account," Joel said, "I think I'll go in and talk to old Mr. MacCrae and ask for a raise. Commissions are all very well, but I want a good regular salary."

She must be feeling as a mother does when her son gets his first job. Joel was as strange to the rôle of wage-earner as a sixteen-year-old sweeping the floor in a grocery store. Until now, she had been doubtful of his ability. A mother must feel that too, she thought. When someone you love is forced to go out and get along with others, you find it impossible to believe that his virtues and his charm will be as evident to them as they are to you.

But his confidence engendered a confidence in her that she became aware of physically before it reached her mind. Slowly she felt more gay, more sure. It was completely without explanation, a rising of the pulse, a strengthening of the stomach, that influenced her more profoundly than all the reasonable things she might have said to herself. The feeling grew until she met his own mood. She could feel the point where they touched, and she suddenly smiled and shoved her glass over to him with an abrupt gesture to have him refill it with the pale wine.

Enrico appeared to mix the salad for them, making a great ceremony out of it. Harriet watched his skillful hands manage the green stuffs and saw that although he poured out his dressing materials carefully he did it with speed. The greens were turned in the wooden bowl until they became limp and oily wet against its sides. Then he transferred them to their plates and they looked coolly tempting. Harriet and Joel took up their forks while Enrico watched for their reactions. Harriet smiled at him to show her pleasure,

and Joel smacked his lips exaggeratedly. Enrico looked delighted.

"You should tell my wife your recipe, Enrico," Joel said to him. "Now that I've got to eat her cooking."

"No, no, Mr. Randolph," Enrico said, grinning. "Then you don't come to Enrico's. Eh? That's not so good. I keep it a secret."

They laughed together, Enrico a good deal longer than they, and Harriet felt childishly happy. She wanted Joel to say something funny so that they could keep on laughing, she wanted to have more wine and to be spontaneous and witty. The salad was good and she ate it with appetite, almost wishing she could have more of it, she had enjoyed it so keenly. After that the waiter brought them ices and coffee, and Joel ordered brandy.

They sat for a long time over the cups of coffee and the brandy. The room was cool and Harriet felt prosperously stuffed. She heard the voices of the other diners dwindle as the hour grew later and the waiters passed them less often. The business of the room became even more subdued and she felt as if she and Joel were alone together. She leaned lazily against the wall and fingered her little brandy glass. She was a fool to worry about the future and their happiness. Joel didn't worry, his family didn't. Why should she? Gaiety and carelessness took you along just as easily as forethought, she decided fatalistically. She was banded together now with Joel and his family and she would impede them if she followed stiffly.

"What'll we do after dinner?" Joel asked her. He had called for the check and was signing it without looking at it.

"I don't know," she said blissfully. "What?"

"Dancing?" Joel asked her. "On some roof? That's what I'd like to do."

She felt heavy-legged and enchanted, as if she could not move. But she knew that the air outdoors would waken her and she liked the idea of the dancing. She liked the thought of moving to another little table and having another drink, and now and then getting up leisurely when the orchestra played a particularly languorous tune and dancing with Joel's arm around her, pressed against his body. She smiled a little bit at the thought.

"That would be nice," she said approvingly. "That would be lovely."

## 2

On Sundays Harriet and Joel had dinner with Elaine and the rest of the family. The Randolfs always had Sunday dinner together. Joel told Harriet that even when he and the girls were away at college they came down on weekends so that they could eat with their mother. She had not quite realized, Harriet thought, what a devoted family they were. In spite of their carelessness, they rested on traditions that were as firm as a Puritan's morals. There were the Sunday dinners, the weekends together in the country, dozens of small things which held them together. Even when they were away from each other, they listened to the same radio programs, they read the same newspapers and the same books. There were so many small habits a family could have in common. It was rather nice to think that Kit and Joel were marrying and branching out, carrying those habits to their husbands and wives and later to their children so that that particular way of living would not break up.

Elaine had chosen an apartment just off Riverside Drive in the neighborhood of Columbia. It was one of those old-

fashioned houses that rent cheaply and that are pleasantly but not smartly situated. Joel and Harriet looked in the mail-box as they rang the door bell and Joel used the telephone to tell Pris that there was a letter for them downstairs. "Haven't you been out yet?" he asked.

Harriet heard Pris's voice squeaking through the transmitter.

"No," she said. "I'll come down. Wait a minute."

Joel lit a cigarette and he and Harriet leaned against the vestibule wall, talking softly together while they waited. Through the glass door, with its iron bars, they could see the slow old elevator coming down, first its ropes and then the floor of the cage, and the elderly operator opening the gates for Pris. She was wearing lounging pajamas of turquoise wool, and she was a bright, contrary figure in the dark hall with its potted palms and oil paintings and red carpet stretching like a little path from the elevator to the front door.

She let them in, still laughing over her shoulder at something the elevator man had said to her. "Hi," she said. She kissed both of them, standing on her tiptoes to reach Joel's face.

"If this is just a bill, I'm going to be sore," she said. She brought the little key out of her pocket and opened the mail-box. "I hate to think how long this has been here," she said, turning the letter over in her hand. "We all keep forgetting to look. We're used to having the mailman throw the letters in the window. Remember, Joel, how he did down at the house?"

"There's no delivery on Sunday," Harriet said. "So it must have come last night at the latest."

"That's right," Pris said. "It's from Fulke. Haven't heard

from him for ages. I thought he was deserting the sinking ship.”

She put the letter in her pocket and pushed the door wide with her foot. “Come on in,” she said. “I hope you’re hungry. I have a magnificent dinner planned for today.”

“We always eat a full meal before we come here,” Joel said, letting Harriet pass before him. “In preparation.”

“Oh, shut up,” Pris said laughingly. She kicked sideways at Joel, her blue-sandaled foot coming flashingly out and down before Joel could catch it.

The elevator man stood smiling at the gate, waiting for them to come in. “May I run it, Mr. McCready?” Pris asked.

“Now, Miss Randolph, you know that’s against the rules,” Mr. McCready told her. He smiled at Joel and Harriet. “She never gives up trying,” he told them.

The gates closed and he brought his lever over so that the cage rose slowly. There was a creaking sound as they passed the three floors before they came to their own. They could smell cooking in the apartments they passed, and the halls themselves had a musty old smell.

“I love this mausoleum,” Joel said, after Mr. McCready had let them out at the fourth floor. “It’s always nice to think of Pris and Kit here. Such a good safe place for young women.”

“Oh, you don’t know the vice that goes on in this building,” Pris said. She had left the front door of the apartment standing open and she went in ahead of them. “Mrs. Perkins down on the floor below is some man’s mistress—a kept woman. You ought to see her, Joel, she’s wonderful. All pink and white and cheap perfume, and I saw into her



apartment once, it's just covered with little silk cushions."

"You certainly are a nose-y piece," Joel said.

Elaine came down the long narrow hall to greet them. "Hello, darlings," she said. She kissed them too and took Joel's hat away from him. "Just leave it here, Joel," she said, putting it on the hall table. "Come on, Harriet, you can fix up in my room."

Harriet followed her, catching a glimpse of Kit and Gray in the living room as they passed it, and waving to them. Elaine's room was at the far end of the hall which ran straight through the apartment. It looked a bit overfurnished because her bed and bureau were huge, relics of the old house. The bed was a four-poster with a white canopy above it. It was so high that there were little steps beside it. The bureau was a great chest with a high, heavy mirror. Besides these pieces, there were a chaise longue upholstered in chintz and several little tables and chairs. Harriet had seen Elaine's room only once in the old house before they had moved out of it and she had thought it lovely then, with its great, dignified furniture and its simplicity of coloring. Now the room in the apartment looked foolish and a little sad, like an old woman wearing a wig and rouge.

Harriet laid her hat on the bed and smoothed her hair. Elaine had seated herself on the chaise longue, and was watching her with one hand curved gently across her lap and the other resting on the back of the couch.

"I think you're gaining a little weight, Harriet," she said consideringly. "It's becoming."

"Four pounds," Harriet said proudly. She looked at the new fullness in her throat and her cheeks and thought of how Joel liked it.

Elaine got up slowly and came over to her to comb her

own hair. "I can't find a good hairdresser in this neighborhood," she said. "You know, when you're my age you've got to take more care of yourself. Pris and Kit can do their own hair and look all right, but I have to have a good finger-wave or I look hopeless. I miss Monsieur Henri. I never realized how nice he was until I left him. Goodness!" she sighed reminiscently. "He used to give me a little massage at the back of the neck when he was shampooing me. It was so lovely."

Harriet sympathized. "I know," she said. "You get used to one person." Actually, she had never been to a hairdresser's. But she wanted to comfort Elaine, who was looking so sadly at her lifeless grayish-blond hair in the mirror.

They finished powdering their noses and went down the hall together back to the living room. Kit and Gray greeted Harriet when she came in. The room looked untidy, as if they had been living in it all day. The Sunday paper was spread out on the floor and on the couch in various sections, and the ashtrays were full of stubs, some with lip-sticked ends. There was a coffee cup on the little table before the couch and its creamy dregs were unappetizing.

Kit had on a scarlet housecoat, bound in around her waist with a great blue-green sash. Like Pris, she looked exotic and alien to the frowsy surroundings. The furniture for the living room was all too delicate, the light colors went badly against yellowish cream walls, and the curtains were too long for the windows and trailed along the floor on either side. There was a huge piano in one corner and it dwarfed the room. Their books had overflowed the bookcases and were piled in the corner behind the piano. The desk had been opened and papers came out of its cubbyholes and were left carelessly on top of it.

Gray was in his shirtsleeves, reading the book-review section of the paper. The little table beside him was meticulous, as if he had made a lone protest against the house-keeping arrangements. His ashtray had been recently emptied and there was no overflow of ash beside it. The matches in their little paper folder were closed and the lamp stood in the exact center of the table. He got up for Harriet and folded his paper neatly in his hands. When she had spoken to him, he took it to the other side of the room and laid it with the other parts of the paper, gathering them together and stacking them neatly on the radiator.

Elaine sat down on the couch beside Joel. "How's the job, darling?" she asked him absent-mindedly.

"Splendid," Joel said. "Horatio Alger, Jr., they call me at the office. The boy who makes good."

"What are you going to do about the boss's daughter?" Kit asked idly. "An old married man like you."

"The fellow they had before me married her," Joel said. "He's retired."

Pris, who was standing against the mantelpiece reading her letter, exclaimed suddenly, and their heads all turned to her. Facing them as if she were on a stage, she began to read the letter aloud without any preface to it.

"'I don't have to go on with college,'" she read. "'I can quit now and look for a job, if you'll marry me. It may be hard going at first, but I'd like to take care of you, Pris.' This is from Fulke," she added, looking up at them. "Isn't he sweet?"

Elaine said excitedly, "Pris, darling! Are you going to get married?"

"No," Pris said abstractedly, still reading the letter. "But it's nice of him."

"Why not?" Joel asked. "I thought he was the big moment in your life."

"Oh, no," Pris said. She finished the letter and folded it to put it back in its envelope again. "Not to marry," she said. "He's a nice boy, but he couldn't support me. We'd starve to death, you know that, Joel. I'm not practical enough to keep house for him on twenty-five dollars a week, or whatever he'd make."

"You're right, there," Kit said laughingly. "But it's too bad. I liked Fulke."

"Who's Fulke?" Gray asked.

"You remember him," Kit said in surprise. "Fulke Whitehead. He visited us in South Wales last summer. Don't you remember? He was there that last weekend before we came down to New York."

"Oh, yes, long, skinny boy, wasn't he?" Gray said. "He was a nice fellow. Seemed intelligent."

"Not necessarily a requisite for Pris," Joel said.

Pris came over and pulled his nose and then sat beside him on the arm of the couch. "How about changing the subject," she said lightly. Harriet thought she saw a little tightening along her jaw line. "What do you want for lunch?"

"Don't you know what we're going to have?" Joel said in horror.

"We have cans of everything," Pris said casually.

They laughed.

"Maybe I can help," Harriet said timidly. She could fix a dinner for them easily, but it seemed obnoxious to point it out.

"No, ma'am," Pris said emphatically. "You starve or eat my own food. I don't even let Elaine help. Not that she'd

do much. I've got to learn sometime and it's good to have a whole family to practice on."

"Good for everybody but the family," Joel said. "Let Harriet help you, Pris. She's a marvelous cook."

"No," Pris said. "Don't be so selfish, Joel. Let the poor girl relax for one day."

She got up, flipping her pajamaed legs into their natural folds, and smoothing back her hair. "I'll go and see what can be dug up," she said. "Don't talk about me while I'm gone."

She went down the hall whistling, and Harriet smiled at the sound. "No kidding," Joel said to Kit. "Do you get enough to eat?"

"Oh, yes," Kit said negligently. "We tease her a lot, but we manage. You can't go very wrong on canned goods, you know."

Elaine said thoughtfully, "I don't know why I never learned to cook. I just never had to, I guess, and I wasn't much interested in it. It would be useful now. I don't like to have Pris doing all the work."

"What about Kit?" Joel asked.

Kit crossed her legs and looked down at her swinging foot. "I'm out looking for a job every day," she said. "I'm not at home much."

"Any luck?" Joel asked her.

"None," Kit said. "It's strange. You wouldn't think the world would let a girl of my caliber go unappreciated, would you?"

"That's true, Kit," Elaine said. "I don't see why somebody doesn't leap at the chance. You're so capable and intelligent. There aren't many girls like you."

"Elaine," Kit said getting up. She went over and kissed

her mother. "Trouble is, you don't have an employer's mentality. I know you'd hire me."

"Of course!" Elaine said.

"I can't do anything for you at the moment," Joel told Kit. "But just wait until old Mr. MacCrae dies and I'm running the office. Then I'll take you on."

They continued to joke about it and Harriet listened to them with the little, continuous smile she always wore when she visited their home. Even though Kit had been looking for work for three months, there was no fear in any of them that she wouldn't find it. Their laughter was genuine, not to cloak uneasiness. Only Gray worried a bit; she could see that he was puzzled by their attitude. His gentle eyes went from one face to the other, and now and then he smiled hesitantly, as if he were not quite sure of the joke.

Pris came back with a white apron tied around her waist and a large, dirty spoon in one hand. She told them what there was to eat. "Take your choice," she said.

They discussed the menu without energy.

"Sounds magnificent," Joel said ruefully, laughing at Harriet. She smiled back at him, still wishing that she could help Pris but afraid now to offer.

"Meanwhile," Pris said, looking at Joel, "Gray will mix a cocktail and maybe that will stop your grousing."

"In time you'll probably take to opium as cheaper and quicker," Joel said. "We can all sprawl out on the floor here and have a sniff."

Pris stuck out her tongue at him. "Come on, Gray," she said. "The stuff is all in the kitchen."

Gray took the trouble to smile apologetically at them while Pris left as abruptly as she had come in. Nobody paid

any attention to him. Kit had picked up the newspaper and had read one of the headlines out loud and Elaine had started to complain about it.

"What I don't understand," she said fretfully, "is why we have to go through all this awful business all over again. We did once—but of course you children won't remember. Does anybody want to fight? I don't believe they do. Why do they talk about fighting, then?"

"I believe you've just said something very profound, Elaine," Gray told her.

Kit laughed. "Don't scare her, Gray," she said.

"No," Elaine said. "Don't tease me now. I may not be a good housewife, but I'm older than all of you and I know what I'm talking about."

"Well," Kit said. "There isn't anybody to blame, Elaine. Except the Germans. Everybody else is trying to stay out of this in spite of every cost."

Gray listened half smilingly, and Harriet found herself watching him. Kit and Elaine were like children when they talked politics. Everything became names to them. All Germans were this and that, all English were so and so, there were truths and lies, and good and bad. She kept herself out of such conversations because she was at a disadvantage in them.

"That poor Mr. Chamberlain," Elaine said sadly. "He did everything he could, didn't he? I felt so sorry for him when he failed."

Gray said, "That poor Mr. Chamberlain indeed. He nearly wrecked a whole nation."

Elaine and Kit turned on him in horror. Their exclamations came together and confusedly, and Gray put up his hands laughingly.

"Sorry, sorry," he said. "I didn't know I was wounding your hero."

"No, but Gray, you've got to be human about this," Kit said. "You can't just stand on the sidelines and sneer. What would you have done in his place?"

"I won't argue with you," Gray said. "I wouldn't have been in his place. Too much responsibility for me."

"No, you can't back out that way," Kit said excitedly. "Don't you try it, Gray Beavers." Gray smiled sideways at Harriet.

"Yes, what would you do, Gray?" Joel said.

"One thing or the other," Gray told him. "I would either have been firm from the beginning, which Chamberlain wasn't because he was more afraid of Russia than he was of Germany; or I would have really tried to conciliate. After all, a few airplane trips to Germany doesn't do the trick. If you're trying to pacify a fellow you offer him something, don't you?"

"Would you want him to offer Hitler all of England?" Joel said heatedly. "Just sit back and hand it to him?"

"I wasn't advising either course," Gray said non-committally. "I simply think either one would have accomplished more."

"You wouldn't have wanted him to fight, would you?" Kit asked incredulously.

"I said I wasn't on one side or the other," Gray said patiently.

"Fighting would have been better," Joel said fiercely. "If Chamberlain were a man he would have fought."

"I don't seem to agree with anybody," Gray said, a little pathetically. Harriet knew how he felt; he had been caught into the argument unintentionally and would have



liked to stay out of it, yet he couldn't let Joel's statement go unchallenged. "It isn't a question of manhood, Joel. That's why I said I wouldn't take such a responsibility. Any statesman in Chamberlain's position has to be more than a man. There are no personal considerations in such a position."

Harriet watched Joel leaning forward in his excitement. She supposed that any man, thinking or otherwise, felt militaristic in times like these. She herself didn't, and Gray didn't seem to. But then, Gray was superannuated by years of university life. He was the perennial college boy, the Fulke of later years, and it was people like Joel who made up their country. People who could be fair and honest, who were often wise, but who had some bug of virility, some temper which could be aroused on occasion and which then threw off all the peaceful teachings on which they had been raised.

She tried to imagine Joel going off to war, but she found only moving-picture images in her mind, the man in khaki, and the girl clinging to him at the quay, but the man inevitably coming back, and happiness at the end. She could not imagine what warfare would actually be like. She knew the words—mud, horror, lice, panic, terrific noise, blood, bravery and cowardice, but none of them meant anything to her.

How did Joel feel about war, she wondered. She had heard him exclaim against the Germans sometimes and he used violent, childish expressions when he was particularly troubled by something. She had often heard him wish that he had a good rifle and could take a potshot at Hitler, that would solve everything. But they had laughed at that. Now the way he was leaning forward was more alarming. Per-

haps that same bug had been aroused in him. She suspected that at that moment he itched to fight, and she was frightened. Although he was silent in the face of Gray's speech, she could see from the stubborn position of his head that he wanted to express something else. Gray saw that too, and spoke to him again, breaking into the silence.

"Anyway," he said, "nobody's omniscient, Joel. God knows what I would do."

"I probably would want to fight," Joel said, still stubbornly. Harriet saw his face turn strange. She had never seen that line of tautness around his mouth or his eyes become so fixed. There was something very righteous and strong about his look, but it was frightening, because it was not Joel.

Gray said rather abruptly, "Maybe I'd feel differently if it were our country that was involved. Let's wait until that comes up before we discuss it any further."

Joel smiled suddenly and Harriet felt relief to see his face change. She hadn't quite realized how depressed and intimidated she had been for a minute by his mood. Now he was the Joel she knew better, the Joel who laughed at everything.

"All right, Gray," he said, still smiling. "I didn't really know how to answer you, anyway."

They laughed together and Harriet and Kit joined them.

"Whew!" Kit said thankfully. "My husband! What made you ever marry me, anyway, Gray?"

"Because you were so rich," Gray said calmly. "I'm thinking of an annulment at the moment, since I find you deceived me."

"Oh, Gray," Kit said. "Don't talk like that." For a second her face was as serious as Elaine's might have been,

and then it changed back to its old mockery. "I'll take you up on that if you aren't careful," she told him. "At the time I thought you were a luxury I could afford, but I'm not so sure now."

Gray smiled. "Looks like we both got a bad bargain," he said.

Elaine said timidly, "Don't you think somebody ought to set the table, children? Pris shouldn't be left to do all the work."

"I'll do it," Kit said, getting up. She rolled up the long flowing sleeves of her housecoat and Harriet watched her, thinking that she hadn't learned yet to take care of her handsome clothes and that she would have to when they began to wear out.

"I'll help," Joel said, getting up. Harriet started to get up too, but he pushed her down into her chair again. "You relax," he told her. "You heard what Pris said. Entertain Elaine, she looks bored."

"No, darling," Elaine insisted. "I'm not bored. I was just thinking about something else."

"Oh," Joel said. "Well, come out of your coma, and talk to Harriet. We're going to set the table."

"Remind me," Elaine said. "I have something to tell you all at dinner. I had forgotten all about it."

"The last time you told us something at mealtime, it was pretty bad," Joel said. "You frighten me."

Elaine laughed. "I think this is good," she said. "Go on, help Kit, Joel. She'll be finished before you get out there."

Gray stood up to offer Elaine and Harriet cigarettes, which they both took. He lit them and one of his own before he sat down again. "Sorry to embroil your family

in argument, Elaine," he said leisurely, putting the match in the ashtray.

"Oh, that's all right, Gray dear," Elaine said. "I like to hear you all argue. As long as you don't get to fighting. Don't you, Harriet?"

Harriet smiled at her, because Elaine was trying to draw her into her own womanly world where politics were left to the men. She tried to step into that world to please her. "They're very good-natured," she said maternally. Evidently her effort was successful, because Elaine smiled, and the remark was let pass as an ordinary one. They went on to talk about Harriet's apartment.

"Have you finished that little hooked rug you're making?" Elaine asked.

"Not quite yet," Harriet said. "The wool's getting so expensive I can't buy it as fast as I work it."

They discussed her decorating plans, which went only as she could afford them. Elaine was always interested in this and Harriet liked to have her advice about it, because she had a nice sense of color and form. If some of her more extravagant ideas could be disregarded they got along very well on the subject.

They were quite absorbed when Pris came into the living room. "Kit and Joel say you have something to tell us, Elaine," she said. "What is it?"

"Oh," Elaine said. "I thought I'd wait until we were all together."

"Come on, Elaine," Pris said coaxingly. "Don't be mysterious. Tell us now. Kit and Joel!"

They came up behind her from the dining room. "The forks go on the left side, you poor goop," Kit was saying to

Joel, and he had his elbow up before his face in self-protection.

"Listen," Pris said. "Elaine is going to tell us the news."

"What news?" Kit said. "Oh, yes, what is it, Elaine?"

"Well, you make it sound so dramatic now," Elaine said. She looked up at all of them standing around her. "It's about the house."

"You mean they want to give it back?" Joel asked her laughingly.

"What do you mean?" Elaine said. "Oh, no, I mean the South Wales house. Mr. Graham's found a man who wants to buy it."

"Tell me, girls," Joel said. "What do you honestly think? Is Mr. Graham helping us, or making a profit off of us? What is this, Elaine?"

"Oh, Elaine, you're not going to sell the South Wales house!" Pris said.

"Well, we don't have to if we don't want to," Elaine told them. "It doesn't cost much to keep up. The taxes aren't big, that is, and there's no mortgage on it. But without servants we can't run it the way we used to, and anyway, we don't seem to have any other money. We can sell the house and that will give us quite a bit to live on until all of you can find jobs."

"You mean we don't have anything beside that?" Joel asked her.

"Very little," Elaine said, shrugging her shoulders.

"But where does it all go?" Joel asked her. "Graham said that if we economized—"

Nobody answered him. Harriet, remembering how they had taken the first piece of bad news, watched their faces. This was harder, she could see, and no wonder; it was the

last stage instead of the first. She hated it, it wasn't fair that people like the Randolfs should have to worry and think about money.

Kit finally laughed and sat down on the arm of Gray's chair. The sound was good. "Well," she said. "At last we're going to see how the other half lives, aren't we?"

Gray sitting beside her put his hand on hers and she looked at him affectionately, but without any plea for pity.

Joel said thoughtfully, "With all of us working we wouldn't be able to use the house so much, anyway, would we?"

"No," Pris said. "I suppose it'll be all right to sell it. I was just surprised, that's all."

Harriet thought they were marvelous. Behind their childishness and inefficiency, they had real strength, she thought. They took the news so gallantly.

Elaine said, "Is that your decision? To let it go? I have to tell Mr. Graham tomorrow. I'm sorry I forgot to tell you about it until now."

"No sense in thinking about it any longer, is there?" Joel said. "If we've got to, we've got to."

"And after that we'll be rich," Elaine said. "It will be kind of nice, won't it?"

"You bet," Kit said. "A forgotten feeling. Now I can buy that green wool dress at Saks that I've been wanting so long. I really think selling the house is the only thing."

"Are we going to sell the cars and the horses too?" Pris asked Elaine.

"We might as well, Mr. Graham says," Elaine told her. "We would have no use for them down here, and they're expensive to keep in New York."

"Well, then," Pris said. "We'll be richer still. Maybe I can afford to support Fulke after all."

The others laughed with her, but Harriet was made alert by her remark and watched her after the laughter died down and the conversation went on. It was hard to know Pris and what her childish face concealed. Sometimes Harriet had suspected that she was not very sensitive, but she seemed to be thinking about Fulke quite a lot, and in spite of her jokes, perhaps she was fond of him. Harriet wondered why Pris didn't go ahead and marry him. She was foolish if she thought that poverty would make it impossible. The difficulty was that Pris had such grand ideas for a future, she couldn't believe, as none of them could believe, that they were the sort who would lead ordinary lives. She felt that so sincerely that she was letting this faith make her miserable.

Pris saw Harriet's stare and smiled. The long lines of her jaw bone and the depth under her eyes disappeared and her round cheeks filled and her nose wrinkled.

"What's the matter, have I got a speck on my face or something?" she asked, still smiling.

Harriet shook her head, returning the smile. "No," she said. On the other hand she might not be miserable at all. You couldn't really tell about Pris.

## 3

Kit called Harriet up one day and asked her to lunch. It was February now, a wet and tired February, and Harriet and Joel had gone through Christmas together and New Year's, the strange first celebrations in a new family.

Harriet joined Kit in the "Blue Boar," a restaurant she suggested in a basement on Ninth Street, dark and with

tilting, wide-boarded floors. They sat together, silently holding their menus up so that the colored waitress could wipe the table.

Harriet had a little cold and she was tired. Her feet felt stuffy under the table in their galoshes. She put her coat back from her so that its dampness would not touch her. Kit looked handsome in a twisted blue turban and heavy tweeds. Harriet wondered what made a woman look infallibly lovely. Surely Kit must have colds too, or chose the wrong clothes sometimes. There must be days when her hair was not glossy and some of its wave was out. She must have pimples sometimes. Everybody did, didn't they? Or be tired and have circles under her eyes.

"Have a cocktail first," Kit urged.

"Oh, no, thanks," Harriet said. "They make me so sleepy afterwards."

"This is a special celebration, though," Kit said. "Have it on me."

"All right, then," Harriet said.

"Two Daiquiris," Kit said to the waitress. "What else are you going to have, Harriet?"

"The mixed grill, I think," Harriet said, looking at the menu in its celluloid cover, faintly spotted with grease and thumb marks.

"I'll have that too," Kit said to the waitress. "But bring the Daiquiris first, will you?"

She, by some trick which Harriet could not analyze, had become friends with the waitress in those few sentences. The girl smiled at them sympathetically and nodded at Kit. "I'll bring them right along," she said.

Kit returned her smile but not attentively. Not as Harriet did, forced and embarrassed. Perhaps Kit got the girl's



liking because she was so effortless. Harriet was self-conscious and the girl could sense it.

The waitress put their Daiquiris down in front of them, spilling Kit's a little and gasping an apology. They waited until she had cleaned it up before they began to talk. Harriet sipped her drink, feeling its warmth penetrate immediately, and glad now that she had accepted it.

"I've got a job," Kit said dramatically.

"No! Kit!" Harriet said delightedly. "I'm so glad! What kind of a job?"

"At Considine's," Kit told her. "As a salesgirl. To begin with."

"How did you ever get it, without any experience or anything?" Harriet said.

Kit laughed. "It's a sort of funny story," she told Harriet.

Harriet waited anxiously while Kit interrupted herself to take a drink.

"I was very nervy," Kit said. There was no apology in her voice, only a sort of laughing pride. "I didn't go to the personnel department. I've tried that all over the place—Macy's, Best's, Lord & Taylor's, Altman's, everywhere. They just took my name and said they'd let me know. So I decided I'd do things differently at Considine's. We have a charge account there, you know."

"What'd you do?" Harriet asked. People as sure as Kit were strange to her; she could not guess how they would act. She felt, as she listened to her talk, that she was reading a novel. The people she had always known had neither boldness nor brilliance. They acted on carefully thought-out lines and planned their lives far ahead. Because they relied on thought rather than instinct, they were slow in

making decisions. They didn't trust their impulses as Kit did. It made them very predictable and perhaps, Harriet thought, rather dull. How much more exciting it must be to have an idea suddenly, to walk into a department store and get a job, just like that. There was no possibility of things like that happening to the people she had known.

"I went to the Misses' dress department," Kit told her, "and told one of the salesgirls that I had a complaint to make to the manager. She tried to steer me off to a floor-walker, but I insisted, and finally they took me into the manager's office." She chuckled thinking about it. "They were all scared stiff—probably thought they were going to lose their jobs or something. Even the manager was worried. You could tell, because he was so polite and jumpy. He kept offering me cigarettes and matches and things."

"What did you have to complain about?" Harriet asked her.

"The service in general," Kit said. She took another sip of her drink, finishing it this time. "Let's have another," she said to Harriet. "I really have to celebrate."

Harriet nodded, impatient of the interruption, and Kit held up a finger, getting the waitress quickly. "Stall off the mixed grill a little longer, will you?" she said to the girl. "And get us another round of these."

The girl giggled and agreed. Harriet watched her thin, brown hands, which, although young, had stiff creases in them, take up the glasses and mop the table under them. She had in her mind a visual picture of Kit sitting in the manager's office. She would have been wearing her short skunk jacket, Harriet thought, and she would be leaning back in her chair, casually, one hand flicking the ashes from her cigarette. Probably on the rug. The manager, a

faceless person in a double-breasted suit, would be standing before his desk, bending over her solicitously. Bent from the waist like a little doll.

Kit went on. "You know Considine's," she said. "All those snotty girls. Standing around and talking, coming up to you slowly with one hand fixing their hair, raising their eyebrows when you ask for something, looking as if they didn't give a darn whether they made a sale or not."

"I know," Harriet nodded.

"Of course I outshot them," Kit said grinning. "But they do scare off people; I've heard them say so."

"They scare me," Harriet said.

"That's it," Kit said. "They scare anybody who's the least bit shy or timid.

"Well, I told this manager, Mr. Devereux, his name was, of all things, about them. I said, 'Mr. Devereux, your store carries some of the smartest and the best clothes in town. But your selling methods are among the most antiquated!'" She smiled. The waitress set their fresh drinks before them and Kit picked hers up instantly. "Pretty good line, that," she said, nodding to herself. "It worked too."

"What did he say?" Harriet asked her.

"Oh, he was all apologies," Kit said. "You see, he still thought I was just a customer. He asked me what I would suggest."

"Did you have anything to suggest?" Harriet asked her.

"Ummm," Kit said. "I sounded very authoritative. You know, I sounded as if I had taken a course in mercantilism, or whatever you would call it. 'Mr. Devereux,' I told him, 'most of the modern stores are hiring young women who are courteous, well bred, and who treat the customers as if they had a right to be in the store. The college-girl type,

if you know what I mean. What's more, it's been a very successful move. I'm really amazed that Considine's has done nothing about it.' "

"You sound impressive," Harriet said. Her drinks had warmed and loosened her, and she giggled now like a little girl.

"He said, 'But, Mrs. Beavers, these employees of ours have been with us a long time, we can't fire them all in a bunch because of a change in policy.' "

Harriet nodded. "I was wondering about that," she told Kit. She knew the ending of the story already, because Kit had told her, but it was as fascinating working around to it as if it were still a surprise.

"Oh, sure," Kit said carelessly. "Well, to tell the truth, I hadn't thought about that, but I had a bright idea, and I think probably a better one than if I'd tried to get them to change things entirely. I acted very matter-of-fact. I said, 'Naturally, that couldn't be expected, Mr. Devereux. But I would like to make a suggestion.' He said 'What?' and I said, 'Change your policy and institute a training course for the employees you already have. In addition, hire one or two girls to be scattered throughout the store who are the type you want. To be a sort of example to the others. If their type of selling results in more commissions—which I'm sure it will—the old girls will be more impressed than by anything you can say to them.' "

"That's good!" Harriet said. "That's terribly good, Kit."

"I think so," Kit said. She lowered her eyelids with mock modesty, the eyelashes making a dark curve for a second. "Well then, after that it was easy, although I thought the hardest part was yet to come. He liked the idea, it was obvious, and he kept repeating it to himself and nodding

his head. After a few seconds to let it sink in, I said, 'If you decide to do something like that, Mr. Devereux, I wish you would consider hiring me. I want a job very badly, and I think I'm the type you want.' He was flabbergasted! Honestly, Harriet, I wish you could have seen his face. He was like a vaudeville comic. His mouth dropped open and his eyebrows went up. It was too funny. I felt a little nervous, and then all of a sudden he started laughing."

"Laughing?" Harriet said. She could not have predicted this reaction.

"He howled!" Kit said emphatically. "So I began laughing too. It really was funny, Harriet, you know. Here I was the wealthy customer, making a valuable suggestion, apparently with perfect disinterest. He had considered it just because of that. If he had known I was looking for a job, he would never have let down his defenses that way. I really had caught him with his pants down, if you'll pardon the vulgarity. There wasn't anything he could do. That's what he said. He told me that anybody with such unmitigated crust as I had ought to do a good job, and that he'd hire me. Just like that. I start work on Monday. And he's going to follow my other suggestions too. He was a pretty nice man, now I come to think of it. He saw his situation so quickly and gave in to it so gracefully."

The waitress took away their empty glasses and laid the mixed grills before them. Harriet was stimulated enough to be hungry and she picked up her fork, still laughing a little at Kit's story.

She wondered, though, as they ate in silence for a few moments, if Kit knew what sort of job it was that she was getting. A salesgirl. That would be pretty tiring. Standing on your feet all day, having to be courteous to people,

whether you liked them or not, having to be lively no matter how you felt. It wasn't Kit's training and it would be harder for her than for most girls. She said hesitantly, because she didn't want to spoil Kit's enthusiasm, "Is that what you really want to be, Kit? A salesgirl?"

"Not on your life!" Kit said scornfully. "But I do want to do department-store work. Assistant buyer, buyer, something like that." She continued to eat perfectly casually and Harriet admired her.

"You're quite confident, aren't you?" Harriet said.

Kit put down her fork and leaned forward a little bit. "Yes," she said. "I am. You know why, Harriet?"

Harriet shook her head, waiting silently for what Kit was going to say.

"It's because I learned a trick today," Kit said. "And I'm going to use it for all it's worth. When I first started looking for work, I thought of myself as going into a perfectly strange world. I thought if I was going to succeed in that world I'd have to act according to its rules. I went around like a sheep, applying at the personnel bureaus, being meek and quiet, not myself at all. Then I had an inspiration today, and I got myself a job. Just like that. Because I acted like myself. I should have realized that earlier. I've always been successful with the people and the things I've dealt with in my other life. Why should I change my tactics just because I was trying something different? After all, your own personality is the only one you can have. A false one is just a negative one; it couldn't possibly impress anybody. Well, I see all that now, and from now on I'm going to go on being myself. I'm going to be fresh, I'm going to be frank, I'm going to be friendly. I'm not going to agree with anybody unless I really do,

and if I have any suggestions about how things should be run, I'm going to make them. And I'm perfectly confident that I'll succeed if I stick to that line. How could it fail? I've never failed in private life by acting that way, why should I fail in my job?"

She lit a cigarette, with most of her food still on her plate, and threw the burnt match into it. Harriet sensed her tenseness, born of the excitement and the drinks, and sympathized with her lack of appetite. She laid her own fork down, and took a sip of water.

"Let's have some coffee," Kit said. "That's what I need." She called the waitress and ordered it, saying something laughingly about the left-over food in her plate. The waitress cleared away swiftly, as if she understood that she must not interrupt Kit's high arc of feeling.

They were silent for a moment, Harriet relaxed after the strain of anticipating, and Kit thinking about something, stubbing her cigarette in the ashtray endlessly long after the coal had gone out.

Harriet felt she must say something more. She and Kit were friendly, but they didn't know each other well enough to leave things unsaid. "It will be good for Gray," Harriet said. "Now he can go on studying."

"Yes," Kit said quickly. Her expression changed, not to softness, but to consideration. She put one eyebrow up, unconsciously. "It will be good for him," she said. She took another cigarette out of her case and lit it. Afterwards she remembered Harriet and offered her the case. Harriet shook her head.

"I don't know what else Gray will ever do," Kit said thoughtfully. "After he leaves the University. It isn't that he's lazy, you know, but he's timid. Sometimes I think he's

like you, Harriet, only I don't think you're as afraid of the world as he is. Or at least you go ahead and face it."

"We're not much alike," Harriet murmured. "Except that we're both of us different from you Randolfs."

"It's more than that," Kit said impatiently. "If you were both men, I think you'd be just alike. But you're a woman and you are less shocked by the world, so you're a little less afraid of it. At least that's the way I figure it."

"I'm really not afraid of things—I mean, of life," Harriet said defensively. She wanted Kit to understand how she felt, but there was a limitation, she knew. Not in Kit, but in Kit's experience. "I just think about it a lot," she said. "I worry about things, and I try to plan them out. I'm not afraid, I just feel that I have a responsibility for myself and my family."

Kit said carelessly, "Perhaps that's it." She dropped the subject after that, but Harriet was grateful for the small interest. None of the other Randolfs, not even Joel, bothered to try to explain her personality to themselves. They thought of her as different, and in Joel's case he thought the difference was charming, but they made no attempt to analyze her. Kit showed that interest every now and then. Her mind was more active than Elaine's or Pris's. She ventured into more speculations than they. Sometimes she seemed less intelligent, because she was trying to cover wider ground. The quality made her perhaps more sympathetic to Harriet, because she could understand her more easily. But apart from that, Harriet was no fonder of her than the others, whether she understood them or not. They were all of them strange to her, but she was caught by them. They made her feel, as Joel had one night, that she could drop her own worries and float with them. Their



single-mindedness was hypnotic, it could carry her along too.

"Anyway," Kit said, "Gray and I are fixed now. We're going to take a separate apartment, I think. Mother can lend us the money for a while until I'm earning a bit more."

Harriet was struck in the middle of her gently admiring thoughts. She opened her mouth stupidly for a second before she could speak.

"You're moving out!" she said. "But there's all that huge apartment. What are Elaine and Pris going to do there?"

"They can use the room," Kit said carelessly.

"But, Kit," Harriet said. "It's so expensive. Elaine will be maintaining two homes instead of one. Why don't you wait until you're earning more money yourself?"

"No," Kit said. She put out her cigarette in the saucer of her cup, disregarding the ashtray. Her face looked grim and silent for a moment, and then she looked up at Harriet and smiled. Harriet had hung on her somberness, depressed by it, and now she was so relieved to see it change that she forgot her other distress for a moment.

"It's foolish of me," Kit told her. "But I want my own home. I think Gray does too. I want to furnish it myself and run it myself. I want the things around me to be mine."

"You've always lived with your mother before this," Harriet reminded her.

"I know it," Kit said. "I've changed, though, Harriet. Just the feeling of earning my own money has changed me. I want to be independent all the way through. Can you understand that?"

"Yes," Harriet said slowly. She was held back by something that she found difficult to explain. "It's a normal reaction, and with anybody else I'd understand perfectly.

But it seems to me that your family has an unusual solidarity. I don't know, I don't know much about family life, but I've never seen people who were as close to each other as you are. I hate to see it broken up, because I'm afraid it'll hurt all of you. I think that the others are as important to you as you are to them, Kit. I'm afraid that losing them will be bad for you, too."

"It won't be broken up any more than it was before the debacle," Kit said smilingly. "Gray and I had a separate apartment then, and we had things our own way. Even if it was in the same house. I don't think we'll see any less of Elaine and Pris than we did before."

"I suppose that's possible," Harriet said reluctantly.

"Listen, fuss-budget," Kit said, laughing at her. "Don't wet-blanket me now. I'm in a mood where I can't be stopped. Say you think it's wonderful."

"All right," Harriet said. The muscles of her face felt weak as she grinned. "It's wonderful."

"You'll see," Kit said. "Even if I haven't converted you now. You'll see."

*PART III*

*June 1939*

NEW YORK



HARRIET'S little kitchen made a warm wall around her. She thought, perhaps there's something petty about me that makes me like small rooms. When she had been a little girl she had had a recurrent nightmare about space. She had had it again the other night and woke up screaming to find herself lying against Joel's chest, his troubled face above her, his eyes dark in the night. It had been about a little man and a little woman who floated on a little platform through infinity, sometimes bobbing terrifyingly near her. It had been the infinity that was frightening, although the little man and woman were ominous too, in their woodenness. They were like dolls, those two, and their faces were painted on.

She thought, the dream has some connection with fear, I don't know what it is. I used to be afraid of school and of strange people when I was a little girl, that's why I had it then. But why do I have it now? Perhaps I'm afraid again, but I don't really know. There are a lot of little things that worry me. I wish, for instance, I knew what was wrong with Joel these days; there's something on his mind that he doesn't tell me, and I don't dare ask.

And Kit had been worrying her too. She seemed to be the same person, but she was different because she was hurting people. She hurt Elaine when she moved away. And now she wasn't coming to Sunday dinner, the first time that ever happened. Harriet had asked Pris and Elaine to her apartment for a change, hoping to distract them that

way. But she remembered Elaine's voice over the telephone and the bewilderment in it. I am a little afraid about Kit, she thought.

She finished the beans which she was stripping, and scraped them from their neat pile into a dish, setting them aside. The onions must be fixed now, and she reached down under the table to get them out of their paper bag. It was hot in the kitchen. She brought her wrist up against her forehead to wipe away some perspiration. It made her realize that here it was June again and she and Joel had been married nearly a year.

She smiled a little to herself, thinking about it. They knew all about each other now. You have to go through a whole year before you really know a person. You have to learn all the things they like in the different seasons, their tastes in food, in sports, in clothes and in amusement. She had discovered that Joel liked oysters and liked asparagus but that he hated strawberries. She had found out that he liked plain-colored dresses rather than prints. She had gone bowling with him and to football games and to baseball games, and this summer they would go to the tennis matches. Some things, too, which they had shared had become more delightful than they had ever been. Spending the last money in their pockets on the first daffodils, for instance, or eating outdoors in a sidewalk restaurant, or coming home in the winter evenings with a bag of hot chestnuts held in their ungloved hands so that they could enjoy the warmth. Those things would become more exciting every year because they would remember the other times they had done them together. Most of the things they did from now on would be repetition.

She moved over to the sink to peel the onions under the

faucet. Mr. and Mrs. Joel Randolph, a couple of long standing, she thought with satisfaction.

The doorbell rang and she heard Joel moving in the living room to answer it. She laid down her paring knife and went out to see who it was.

Elaine and Pris came in and there was the noise of laughter and chatter. Harriet kissed them smilingly and took Elaine's hat from her. Pris was carrying hers and she laid it on a table.

"You know, it's very cool in here," Elaine said, looking around her. "Much cooler than our place, isn't it, Pris?"

"Anything's cooler than our place," Pris said. She was sulky, which made Harriet realize that she had never seen her anything but good-natured. And yet the sulkiness didn't seem out of place. Perhaps it was because she had such a babyish face, Harriet thought.

Elaine moved over to the couch and sat down, smoothing her dress around her. She looked pretty and expensive in her silk Liberty print. But someone had taken up the hem of it for her, probably Pris, and had not pressed it, so that it hung baggily about her knees. Elaine patted the couch beside her. "Come over here, Joel," she said. "I have to talk to you."

"Will you excuse me?" Harriet said slowly. She was almost reluctant to leave them; she had seen an unwilling look come on Joel's face, and she wondered what they had to talk about. "I have to go on with the dinner," she said.

"Of course, dear," Elaine told her graciously. "Pris, you go along with Harriet. Perhaps you can help her."

Pris looked annoyed and Harriet spoke quickly. "Come on, Pris," she said. "And keep me company, anyway. You'll

have to sit on the kitchen table; there isn't room enough for two people to stand."

"That's all right," Pris said. She didn't respond to Harriet even with a smile.

Harriet heard Elaine say to Joel, who had sprawled beside her on the couch, "Joel, dear, what's this about American Tinware?"

She didn't hear Joel's answer. Pris was hoisting herself onto the table, and she had kicked her heels against the leg, drowning out whatever Joel said.

Harriet turned on the water again and began to peel her onions.

"What's the idea of doing that under water?" Pris said. "Is that a labor-saving device or something? To peel them and wash them at the same time?"

Harriet laughed. "No, it's so I won't cry," she said. "It keeps your eyes from smarting."

"Oh, really?" Pris said. "The world's full of tricks, isn't it?"

Harriet nodded smilingly.

"Anything I can do to help?" Pris said.

"No, thanks," Harriet said. "There isn't much to do and you deserve a rest today."

Pris leaned back against the wall. Her plump, shapely legs hung over the edge of the table, and Harriet, looking sideways at her, saw that she had a run in one stocking.

"Do you know you've got a run?" she told her timidly. Sometimes people resented being told.

Pris looked down at her leg carelessly. "Um," she said nodding. "But it's my last pair."

"Let me lend you a pair of mine," Harriet said. She put down her knife and turned off the water. Without its noise



she could hear clearly what Joel was saying to Elaine in the other room. Distracted by it, she hardly noticed Pris's gesture of refusal.

"H-Honest to God, Elaine, I'm so damned sorry I don't know what to do," she had heard Joel say, and then Elaine's voice, usually so gentle, answered him sharply. "*You're* sorry, Joel!"

She turned on the water again with a quick, twisting gesture of her wrist, feeling shocked. She had a strange reluctance to hear any more. They had sounded so naked, and unhappy. She was afraid to know what it was about.

Pris evidently had heard nothing; she had bent her blonde head to the stocking and was licking her finger and dampening the end of the run. "Maybe that'll hold it," she told Harriet. She wriggled back against the wall and leaned her head against it.

"You're good at this sort of thing, aren't you, Harriet?" she asked.

Harriet was too absorbed to be embarrassed. "I've always done it," she said absently. "That's all."

"I suppose so," Pris said, sighing. "Gee, it bores me stiff."

That caught Harriet's attention. She looked up at Pris quickly. "I didn't know that, Pris," she said. "I thought you enjoyed keeping house."

"It was kind of fun at first," Pris said frankly. "But it's beginning to get me down."

Harriet was vaguely troubled. "It comes hard to you still," she said. "But when it gets easier you'll like it again."

"No, I won't," Pris said definitely. "I don't like routine. I'm sick of it."

Harriet forgot her again for a moment. She had finished

peeling the onions and automatically put her hand up to the faucet to turn it off. But now she hesitated, worried about Joel and Elaine out there in the living room. Had they finished, she wondered? Abruptly, she turned the faucet off. Their voices had lowered, however, and she couldn't hear what they were talking about. She moved to the stove and opened the oven door to look at her chicken. It was still pale, with its legs crossed as if in prayer. In the room beyond she saw Elaine and Joel, Joel with his head turned away and Elaine leaning towards him. Something about her tight hands and anxious face looked wrong in one so gentle and protected. The fighting instinct was not becoming to Elaine; she looked taut and brittle, like porcelain under a strain.

Harriet banged the door shut and turned back to Pris, who had crossed her legs again and was watching her curiously.

That was right, Harriet thought, Pris had been saying something. With an effort she remembered what it was. "Perhaps you ought to try to get a job," she said. "You might like that better. Then you could afford to hire a maid."

"A job would be the same thing," Pris said. "Routine. I can't stand doing the same thing day after day. I would die if I always knew what was going to happen when I woke up in the morning."

"Some jobs are not routine," Harriet said. "There are exciting jobs."

"Not the kind I could get," Pris said, with a little twist of her mouth, full of scorn at herself.

Harriet looked at her with concern. She had always felt uncertain about Pris. She looked so sturdy and calm, and

actually she was the most highly strung of the lot. "Have you heard from Fulke lately?" she asked irrationally, as the result of a new thought. Perhaps marriage was what Pris needed.

"I stopped writing to him," Pris told her defiantly, accepting Harriet's meaning. She kept her face down for a long moment and then looked up suddenly, her eyes brightly blue in her round face. "It was no use," she said.

Harriet nodded with her forehead wrinkled. She had started to say something again, when Elaine's voice suddenly rose and she heard her say, "But Joel, what am I going to do? What can I do?"

Joel's answer was still low and indistinct. Pris had heard too, this time, and she and Harriet looked at each other. Then Harriet heard the water for the vegetables begin to boil and she moved to put them in their pots. In the action they lost their shared thought and Pris evidently forgot about it.

"You're thinking I ought to have married him, aren't you?" she asked Harriet.

"What?" Harriet said, bewildered. "Oh." She forced her mind back to Pris's problems. "I don't know, Pris," she said slowly. "Depends on whether you were fond of him."

"I guess not," Pris answered. "I don't know, really. I'm not sure I know what it is to be in love."

Harriet smiled. "I wish I could tell you," she said.

"Well, how do you feel about Joel?" Pris asked her.

She was too honest in her curiosity to make Harriet feel resentful or embarrassed.

"Golly, Pris," she said. "I don't think I know how to express it. It's hard, anyway, because you and I are so different. You see, I spent most of my time with older peo-

ple—older and more fussy—my father was kind of a fussy man, and he was too absorbed in his work to pay any attention to me. So that when I met Joel, I thought he was more exciting than anything I've ever known. He was like a different animal, if you know what I mean. I didn't know that people could be strong and sure of themselves except in books. And I had never known what it was like to have somebody take care of me. I've always had to take care of other people. I took care of my father and of the boys who used to come to see him and of myself. And then Joel wanted to take care of me. You wouldn't know what it was like, you see, because you haven't had the same background. To have somebody else take over all your responsibilities."

"Is that being in love?" Pris asked curiously.

Harriet thought back on what she had said and laughed. "No," she said. "Not exactly. For one thing, there's the physical side of it. I didn't say anything about that. And then—well, what I meant was that love is respect and admiration. I was really trying to explain *why* I respect Joel. Maybe I didn't do a good job of it."

"I don't think I respect Fulke," Pris said. "I think that's the trouble." She nodded her head, as if she had solved something for herself.

She was too abstracted to hear Joel and Elaine in the living room. But Harriet, whose mind was like a windmill, caught what they were saying immediately. Joel's voice had risen slightly. He was almost whispering, but it was with so much intensity that it carried.

"Damn it, Elaine," he said. "It's not my fault. It could happen to anybody. I told you how sorry I was."

Harriet's hands trembled and she felt a need to keep her

lips tight. What had Joel done? Was this the reason he had been so abstracted lately? Was this what she had sensed that had frightened her?

Pris said, "What I need is to marry a rich man." She was only following her line of thought, but it was maddening to Harriet to be swung back so constantly from one distraction to the other. She saw that Pris was laughing, and laughed with her, not sure whether or not she was serious. "I guess you do," she said.

She felt guilty; she was dividing her attention and she didn't want Pris to notice it.

I'm going to interrupt them, she thought suddenly; I think Joel needs help.

She said out loud to Pris, "I guess I'd better set the table," and started taking knives and forks out of the drawer.

"I'll do it," Pris said. She slipped down easily. "I think I know where everything is."

Harriet heard the voices in the living room stop as Pris went in. She was fiercely glad that she had stopped them. She went to the door herself and spoke to Elaine so that she could let them know that the conversation was permanently ended.

"Dinner's nearly ready," she told her. "Do you want to wash up or anything?"

Elaine glanced absently down at her hands, but Harriet was watching Joel. She saw him look up at her gratefully. His mouth was tense, and when he smiled at her it quivered a little bit. Oh, Joel, she thought. What have you done?

She tried to make them solid and friendly again, and spoke cheerfully, as if she were not aware that anything had happened. "Are you all hungry?" she asked them.

Joel responded quickly, and Elaine's face relaxed. The

tight little muscles in her neck loosened and her color began to die down a bit. She smiled. "Yes, I am," she said. "I didn't realize it."

Now only Pris, moving gloomily between the dining room and the kitchenette, was still unresponsive. Harriet looked thoughtfully after her, wondering how she could draw her in too. But it wasn't necessary; on the last trip she was smiling, and Harriet saw that she had finally softened.

"Everything ready?" she asked her, and Pris nodded, still smiling.

"I'll dish out then," Harriet told her.

She heard the murmur of their voices behind her, and because it was gentle and of a placid rhythm, she paid no attention to what they were saying. She took down the dish-holders so that she could get the chicken out of the oven. This had been a strange morning, she thought. Everybody had been so raw; she had never before had the feeling that any of Joel's family should be handled delicately.

She brought the platters out to the table, placing the chicken before Joel and the vegetables by herself. Pris and Joel were laughing at something and Elaine was standing beside them, smiling tolerantly. In any case, it was all right now, Harriet thought to herself.

"Shall we sit down?" she asked them, and waited for Joel to hold out Elaine's chair before she sat down herself.

They bent their heads to their food, eating silently for a few moments, enjoying the first mouthfuls.

Pris said, forking a small onion, "Harriet, did I tell you that Kit is going to let me buy a new dress on her discount at Considine's?"

"No," Harriet said. "How swell."

"Particularly swell," Pris said, "because I'm going to a very spiffy party Thursday night, and I haven't anything to wear at all. This will redeem the family honor."

It was delightful that they were all normal again, Harriet thought. Even Joel had begun to show that familiar boredom that appeared whenever they talked about clothes.

"I'd like to see you get something white," Elaine said thoughtfully. "You look so girlish in white."

"That is not my aim, Ma," Pris said, grinning. Yes, it was all right, she was amused. In her touchy mood she might have taken offense at the suggestion.

"Why not?" Elaine asked wonderingly.

Joel laughed at her. "Can you visualize Pris reeling home in white organdie?" he asked.

"Oh, shut up, Joel," Pris said, still grinning. "Mother hasn't learned some things about me yet."

"Yes, I have," Elaine said firmly. "But I try to be modern. I shut my eyes to them."

They laughed at her. "That's not the real reason," Joel told her. "I can remember from my own college days. You were afraid to speak to me. I caught you once, rehearsing a motherly speech in front of your mirror. But you never delivered it."

"I hate to be unpleasant," Elaine murmured.

"That's the secret of our upbringing," Joel told Harriet. "Our mother hated to be unpleasant."

"I think it turned out very well," Harriet said admiringly.

"Oh, yes," Joel said. "Elaine could earn a fortune analyzing her method for *Parents' Magazine*."

"But there wasn't any method," Elaine said in a troubled way. "At least, I never thought of one."

"That's what I mean," Joel told her. "The Randolf Sys-

tem. Untouched by human hand. Better babies with less trouble."

"Sometimes I think you children tease me too much," Elaine said firmly. "I'm not a complete nincompoop."

They laughed at her again, and Harriet was warm and sure of her footing now. She dished out second helpings of the vegetables and ate some herself. She thought, I would get fat if I didn't worry so much. Worrying keeps me thin. She grinned to herself, and Joel saw it. "What's amusing you so much?"

The others turned to look at her. "Oh, nothing," she said, embarrassed, and casting around for something obvious. "The Randolph System," she said. "I was just thinking about it."

"Oh, Harriet!" Elaine said, with so much emotion that Harriet was bewildered.

Joel understood, however. "No," he said firmly. "No, Mother." Harriet looked at him and he smiled at her again. "You're not going to be a grandmother yet," he told Elaine.

Elaine shook her head sadly. "Oh," she said. "I was excited for a moment. It's too bad, you know. Two of my children married and no grandchildren. I would so like to have one."

"Cheer up, Mom," Priss told her. "I'll marry a man who can afford twins. How would you like that?"

Suddenly the whole pleasant atmosphere changed. Joel spoke sharply. "If you can find one," he said, and Harriet looked at him with concern, understanding the thought that underlay his words. His fine, thin face, so like his mother's, was drawn into two long lines on either side of his nose extending to his mouth. He looked like a high-strung animal for a moment, like a stallion she had once



seen, which a second later had reared up and kicked out at a man.

She said swiftly, "Pris is going to get herself a millionaire, she told me so." She laughed, trying to turn it all into a joke, so that Joel would laugh with her. At first he refused to respond, but as she continued to face him, holding the smile on her face until her muscles began to get tired, his shoulders gradually lowered and his face relaxed.

"Oh," he said. "Deserting the college boys, eh?"

Pris looked uncertainly at him. She had seen his momentary anger too, and evidently she didn't want to arouse it again. "They were too much of a strain," she said. "I got tired of having them wave their Phi Beta Kappa keys in my face."

They laughed with her a little unsteadily. The small episode had shown all of them how precarious their humor was, and its effect was to subdue them for a while. They spoke politely and slowly to each other, and Harriet felt more and more depressed. She was grateful, though, to Pris for having averted a quarrel. Fulke, she knew, was still a live affection for Pris, and it must have hurt her to laugh at him. It was kind of her, she thought. Pris was kind. All of them were. They were hurting each other only because they had become absorbed in their own separate problems. It took something visible, like Joel's anger, to make them considerate.

Gradually they crept back into their old tempo and Harriet followed them, half afraid of another outbreak. There was a constant reminder behind their gaiety. Every now and then somebody would make a sharp remark and then they all became individuals, each one lashing out for himself. It was tiring, like a fever chart; they were up one

minute and down another. It was not safe to relax, because as soon as she did there would be another flare of tempers and she would be jerked back to alertness with too great a harshness. She began to brace herself for the next one, straining her nerves and her attention to meet it when it should arise. They have never been like this before, she thought. Something is happening to all of them. She began to feel that if they could get away from the table they would somehow be more peaceable. But they ate slowly, interrupting themselves to make conversation, and it seemed as if they would never finish.

Finally Elaine laid her fork down on her plate and sighed. "I've eaten too much," she told Harriet. "I'm not used to such good food."

Pris's round face went grim. "You ought to be more loyal, Mother," she said. She was not joking.

Elaine stood up from the table and wandered over to the couch. "Well, dear," she said over her shoulder to Pris, "you couldn't expect to be as good a cook as Harriet in so short a time."

"No," Pris said. She got up too, and Harriet and Joel were left sitting at their table. Harriet stared unthinkingly at the unpleasant litter in front of her. The dessert dishes were stained with blueberry pie, and napkins were crumpled by the plates. She automatically began to stack the dishes. Her wrists and ankles were weak. She felt as if she had been sitting with a bunch of firecrackers. The explosions had kept her jumping and blinking so long that she was tired of them; they no longer had such an effect on her. She made no effort to smooth over this new trouble, and as she went out into the kitchen with the plates, she heard Joel say something to Elaine and their voices rise sharply

for a moment and then die down again. She deliberately took her time with washing the dishes.

When she finally came back into the living room, with the table cleared and the dishes put away, she found the three of them sitting on the couch together. They were quite amiable again. Pris was sprawled out in one of her familiar, lazy positions and Elaine looked fresh, the little color remaining in her cheeks only making her prettier. Joel was telling them an unimportant but amusing story about his office, and they were all laughing quite naturally.

Harriet sat down quietly without saying anything to any of them. This new shift was almost as unpleasant as the other one, she thought, because she simply couldn't keep up with them. She kept remembering Joel's angry face when Pris had implied that he could not afford a baby, and Pris's face when Elaine had so blithely dismissed her cooking. Had they forgotten those things already, she wondered? If so, she was not able to follow them; they changed moods too quickly. It made her feel lonely and strange with them. She didn't understand them at all.

They stayed late as they always stayed after a Sunday dinner. Whatever upset Harriet left them completely untouched. They were troubled by something; she could see them remember it every now and then, but it never occurred to them to go home and think it out in peace. It was almost nine before Pris and Elaine got up to leave, and by that time Harriet was very tired. She was rather glad to have Joel go out with them to take them to the subway. For just a minute, she wanted to be alone.

Moving through the apartment, righting the chairs, emptying the ashtrays and putting highball glasses in the kitchen sink, she began to get the hangover feeling that

used to seize her in her father's house whenever they had given a party. There was something terrible about the dregs of people, even when you've enjoyed them. When you've been tense and unhappy, as she was now, and as she had been at home, they were loathesome. Every sign of life reminded her of something somebody had said, and alone with the memory she would turn it over and over in her mind, exaggerating it until it seemed enormous. It was so familiar to think this way that she almost saw the cream-colored walls of her father's living room around her, and she was startled when she heard the key in the front door and Joel came in. He put an arm around her shoulders as she bent to pick up Elaine's crumpled linen handkerchief which had been dropped beside the couch. As she straightened up again, he kissed her. "Tired, baby?" he said.

She nodded, smiling a little. Some of her loneliness began to go away now that he was here. She spoke openly, thinking that without his family he would be frank as he had always been. "Everybody seemed so touchy today," she said. "I guess it was the heat."

"Yes," Joel said. He dropped his arm from her back and walked over to his armchair. "Must have been," he said thoughtfully. He didn't look at her.

She went over to him and sat down on the floor by him, resting her arm on his knees. "You, too, darling," she said. "What was the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," Joel said carelessly. "The heat too, I suppose."

His silence, instead of hurting her, made her ashamed that she had pried. She put her chin down and leaned her forehead on her arm. All right, she thought. We'll leave that alone, if you want.

But there was something else that had troubled her; perhaps he would feel free to talk about that. "Joel, I'm sort of worried about Pris," she told him.

"Why?" Joel asked her. He seemed genuinely surprised, and perfectly willing to talk about it.

"She's unhappy," Harriet told him.

Joel laughed. "Pris unhappy!" he said scornfully. "She was just having a mood. She couldn't stay unhappy long, you know. She's like a rubber ball. She bounces."

"Perhaps," Harriet said thoughtfully. "She seemed so troubled this afternoon. In a very grown-up way."

"Well," Joel said. "She's twenty."

"But she's always been so young," Harriet said. "For her age."

"Don't let her trouble you," Joel said. He leaned down and kissed her on the top of her head.

"Don't you think it's a little dangerous?" Harriet asked him, still frowning a bit. "The way she talks? She did turn Fulke down, you know, and I always thought she was fond of him. And now she's off on this funny track about marrying a rich man."

Joel laughed, throwing his head back. Harriet, looking up at him, caught for a moment the bony triangle under his chin with lamplight bringing out the structure of it. "Listen," Joel told her. "Every young girl talks about marrying a millionaire. You don't take that seriously, do you?"

Harriet said thoughtfully, "Well, I know they do when they're children."

"And Pris is still a child," Joel told her. "You had such an unnatural, grown-up adolescence that you don't realize that some girls mature a good deal later. Pris hasn't ever

had any responsibilities and she's always been with kids her own age. She's still a little girl, that's all, darling."

Harriet drew a pattern on his knee with the tip of her index finger. She and Joel discussed whatever was in their minds, they had no secrets from each other. But the discussion was always from two points of view which could never be reconciled. In some ways that was enriching, they learned a good deal from them, but once in a while Harriet wanted desperately to make Joel really understand her, and then she had a sense of futility.

"There was something about her today that made her seem grown-up to me," she told Joel stubbornly.

"Listen, honey," Joel said. He reached down and caught her hands, pulling her up so that she could sit on his lap. She leaned against him, feeling the heaviness of his coat, and the bulk where the lapels crossed, all softnesses compared to the hardness of his chest. "You think too much about people," Joel told her. "You analyze and wonder and get upset about them. Why don't you just take them the way they are, accept them for what they seem to be? Honestly, you get along just as well that way."

"Do you really think so?" she asked him curiously.

"Of course," Joel said. "Listen, those physiognomists have the right idea. People are what they look like. I don't see any reason for making it more difficult. I know a lot of guys have written stuff about how complicated they are—I had to plow through some of those books in college. But it's nonsense. Actually, people are simple. You can divide them up into types and there you have them. There are exceptions, of course, but—well, look at our family. Now you're the quiet, shy type. And Pris is the cute, outdoor-girl type. And Kit is the smart type. See how it goes? It fits,

doesn't it? That's all you need to know to understand people. All this worrying is silly."

Harriet was quiet. How her father and her friends would make fun of such an analysis, she thought. And yet Joel spoke with such authority that she was tempted to take him seriously. After all, she decided reluctantly, Joel got along well with people, better than her father did. Didn't that argue that he understood them better? She knew what he meant; he explained it badly. She knew that he meant intuition was as reliable as thought. And that was something that had always confused her. Her training told her no, but here were Joel and his family as successful in human relationships as you could wish, and there was her father, fighting out every inch of his way rationally, and hardly enjoying anything.

"The trouble is," she said, thinking out loud, "that even if you're right, I can't think that way myself. I'm no good at it. I can't make lightning decisions about people and feel sure that they're true." She saw his face and knew that he didn't want to talk about it any more. "But then I couldn't," she added laughingly, to end the discussion. "I'm the quiet, shy type, after all."

He held her tightly against him and they were silent for a few minutes. Harriet could hear the faucet in the kitchen dripping softly and monotonously. A little cool breeze had come with the dark, and was blowing through their high French windows. The red curtains stirred. The noises in the street seemed to go further away from them. They were left alone by everything now; there was only one light in the room and it shone on their heads, making them complete in their circle, with darkness on every side of them. She realized that Joel had felt this for some seconds while

she had gone on talking, keeping words between them. Joel smiled at her, and yawned. "I'm sleepy," he said. "What about bed?"

"I really ought to finish cleaning up," she said smilingly, anticipating his answer.

"The hell with that," he said.

"But, Joel—" she said, teasing him.

"The hell with it, I said," he told her. He got up, lifting her with him and standing her on the floor again.

"All right," she said, smiling. She leaned against him and he turned out the light. They walked into the bedroom slowly. There were children yelling outside and the street-lamp cast a yellow light into their room, but there was so much understanding between them that they were as solitary as they had been in Joel's bedroom in South Wales. Only there it had been the moon that had lit up the room, and its light had been blue-white instead of yellow.

Later in the night, Harriet lay beside Joel and half opened her eyes. The street-light still slanted across them and now that she had been used to the dark for a while, it hurt them a little bit. She squeezed them shut a second and turned over, with her head towards Joel's shoulder. He moved slightly and she realized that he was still awake.

"What's the matter, darling?" she asked him. "Too hot to sleep?"

"No," he said. His voice came cool and strange from the darkness. She could see the heavy outline of his face but she couldn't recognize the features in it. Now he turned towards her a little bit and she saw his eyes, dark too, but bright against flesh. "I was just thinking," he told her.

"At this hour?" she said laughingly.

"Ummm," he said. His tone remained sober, and the



smile on her face died away. Whatever had been troubling him all day, whatever it was that had made Elaine quarrel with him, was in his mind now. But she was half afraid to probe. She wanted to know and she wanted to help him, but even more acutely she wanted to feel that he was strong and didn't need her help.

"Why don't you try to get some sleep?" she said gently.

"Can't," he told her. The dark had impressed them enough to make them whisper. His voice sounded very impersonal that way.

There was something about his tone and his manner that made her realize he wanted to be questioned. His body, pressing against her side, felt tense. Perhaps he had wanted her to draw him out all evening. He had been so deliberately mysterious. If he had wanted to hide anything he could have evaded her more subtly.

"What's the matter, Joel?" she asked timidly.

"Matter?" he said. His voice sounded almost relieved.

"What were you and Elaine talking about?" she said. "This afternoon. She seemed upset."

"Oh, just some business," Joel said carelessly. But his tone was not careless, and she closed her eyes for a second, waiting for him to go on.

"It's that American Tinware stock," he said. His voice was lower and thicker now, almost sullen.

"What about American Tinware?" Harriet said. "You didn't tell me anything about any stock."

"I didn't think it was important," Joel said. His voice was honest and a little bewildered.

"But it is?" she asked.

"Rather," Joel said. He spoke drily, as if he were holding his breath a little. He let it out with the next sentence,

which came forcefully. "I invested all Elaine's money in it. The money she got for the South Wales house."

"You did?" Harriet said incredulously. "But you don't know anything about stocks, Joel."

"No," he said impatiently, as if he expected her to know the details. "I didn't invest it myself, of course. John Gordon did."

"Who's he?" Harriet asked. It was exasperating trying to learn the story this way. Joel squeezed out his information so slowly.

"John Gordon?" Joel said to her. "I went to college with him. He works down in Wall Street. He told me about this American Tinware and it sounded like a good thing, so I told Elaine about it."

"You mean you persuaded her to invest her money in it?" Harriet said. Her voice sounded sharp, and she frowned to herself. She didn't want to frighten him.

"No, I didn't," Joel said. He sounded a little angry now. "That's just the thing. I just mentioned it to her, and said that Johnny was all excited about it, and she jumped on me to invest her money in it for her. It was her idea entirely."

"What did she want to do that for?" Harriet asked him.

"She feels pinched," Joel told her. "Now that Kit has left. You know she gives them money. Kit's managed fairly well, but she's had to have help from Elaine every now and then."

"Poor Elaine," Harriet said. It was the sort of gambling that she would do since she knew nothing about money. "She lost it, I gather." Again her voice sounded tart and she was annoyed.

"Yes," Joel said sullenly. "All of it."

Harriet breathed in sharply. "All of it!" she repeated.

"That's what I said," Joel said. He sounded angry, and she realized that to be helpful she should be alert and get the story with the least amount of questioning.

"Did she buy on margin?" she asked him.

"Yes," Joel said, his voice a little higher. "That's what happened. It dropped very suddenly and she couldn't cover. Johnny is terribly upset about it, he can't understand it."

"I should think so," Harriet said, not with reproach but sympathy. Her sympathy was not for Johnny Gordon, but for Joel, who was Johnny's friend and who had vouched for him.

They lay silently for a while. The walls of the little room were close about them, and Joel's bare arm and side pressed against Harriet, but she was still afraid. The room seemed to enclose the infinity that frightened her so much, and she was lost in it, trying to realize all the implications of what Joel had told her.

But this was calamitous. How would they manage? Elaine and Kit and Pris, they had been used to comfort and to living the easiest sort of life. They weren't equipped for poverty, and that was what this was. Without Elaine's money, they had nothing except what Joel and Kit could give them. And Joel made fifty a week and Kit made around twenty-two. How could they run three apartments on that—especially when one of them was run by Pris and Elaine, who didn't know how to economize? The knowledge sank down on her slowly like a heavy weight, and as it sank it began to seem to her that there was no way of escape.

"Elaine's simply lost," Joel said suddenly. "I've never seen her like this before. Did you hear her talking? She was so violent! Like somebody else, another woman."

The gentle aristocratic type, Harriet thought bitterly, and then was shocked at her impulse to make fun of him. But she couldn't help it; earlier this evening she had heard his views on people and thought that he might be right. And now it seemed his idea of Elaine was completely wrong. It was the first time he had ever seemed vulnerable to her.

"What will she do?" she asked him gently, trying in her tone to apologize for her thoughts.

"I don't know," Joel said. "That's what I've been thinking about. I don't know. It's an awful mess, Harriet."

"That apartment's too expensive for them," Harriet said thoughtfully.

"They have to stick to it, though," Joel told her. "They signed a two-year lease. Unbreakable, too; Elaine took it to Mr. Graham when Kit left. She thought she might get out of it then."

"And they have nothing left?" Harriet asked him. Her mind began to work more clearly now, exploring the possibilities, trying to discover what must be done. Something could be done, she knew now, losing her first hopelessness, but whatever it was would be drastic.

"Elaine has some jewelry she thinks she might sell," Joel told her.

Harriet stirred, suddenly uncomfortable in the bed. Its softness and the darkness seemed to obscure her thoughts, no matter how frantically they worked.

"Pris won't look for a job, Elaine says," Joel said, still sullenly. "And God knows Elaine isn't fit for anything."

"No," Harriet said absent-mindedly. "Pris told me this afternoon that she didn't want to work."

"But she's got to!" Joel said violently. "What does she think she is? They can't starve!"

"Does she know about it?" Harriet asked him.

"Oh, sure, you know Elaine would tell her about it as soon as she heard," Joel said.

Harriet realized that he was taking out his distress in anger at any little thing.

"At any rate," she said, thinking vainly of something to soothe him, "Kit and you have jobs. Perhaps between us we can carry them along until they find something." She laughed. "Maybe Pris will marry her rich man, after all."

"It's so hopeless," Joel said desperately. His speech came in jerks, as if each thought exploded him.

"No, Joel," she said. "Not hopeless. It's darned hard, but we can manage. Somehow."

As she spoke she realized what it was they must do. Her body stiffened as the thought came to her. She tried to examine it more carefully before she spoke of it to Joel. He was quiet too, evidently having his own thoughts.

The problem, of course, is all the different establishments, Harriet was thinking. Seventy-two dollars a week would be a good deal if we were together. Joel spoke suddenly as if he had read her mind. "If only they weren't saddled with that big apartment," he said.

She nodded, forgetting that he probably couldn't see her in the dark. Yes, he was thinking along the same lines, she could see. But did the same ideas come into his head? Did he think, for instance, of the red curtains which had faded a little bit and which she had decided to have re-dipped? Even their fading made them more personal, made their apartment more of a home. And what about their books, neat in the shelves, and their pictures on the walls? Did he

think about them or of her furniture which was so well polished it looked beloved?

Joel moved impatiently and she realized she hadn't answered him. "Yes," she said, still stalling. "That's the trouble, isn't it?"

Joel took her hand.

She felt pityingly that she couldn't let him go on, it was too hard for him to ask it of her. She said before he could speak, "Why don't we move in with them, Joel?" She felt his movement beside her and knew that it was half relief and half bewilderment because she had robbed him of his carefully planned speech. She went on hastily. "We can take Kit's and Gray's room," she said, "and we can help with the rent. It's silly to pay two rents, isn't it, when Elaine has so much room?"

Joel squeezed her hand. "That would be rather hard on you, Harriet," he said. "Wouldn't it?"

She saw that this was no time for honesty. "Oh, no," she said quickly, trying to make her protest sound spontaneous. "Of course it wouldn't. You know how I like Elaine and Pris."

And really it was foolish of her to be so reluctant. It was only the first shock that made it hard, the realization that she and Joel and their possessions would lose their individuality now, that their privacy would be gone. But I do like Elaine and Pris, she thought; it's only that I haven't got used to thinking about it.

"I don't want you to do it unless you really feel you want to," Joel said to her tenderly. His voice protected her, and she responded to it unconsciously. It made her feel grateful, although she knew it was ridiculous, since it was she who was protecting him.

"Really, Joel," she said. "It will be all right."

He brought her hand up suddenly and kissed it, not on the palm as he did sometimes, but on the back. He must have been nervous, she thought, to be so relieved.

"Harriet," he told her. "You're so lovely—"

She laughed at him affectionately. "Darling," she said, "you're like a little boy. When you get your way everything's beautiful."

She saw his eyes catch the light as they looked at her and now that she was used to the dark she could see his face more clearly and that it was smiling.

"Don't laugh at me," he said. "I was so afraid you wouldn't want to."

She sobered as she saw he wanted her to. "Of course it's all right," she said again, and she put enthusiasm in her voice. "I think it'll be fun. You know, in a way it'll be better. I get lonely sometimes when you're away at work. Now they can keep me company."

"You're being honest?" Joel said dubiously.

"I am, Joel, really," she said. Now she believed it. She began to think about the Randolfs and how they had always fascinated her. Perhaps, living with them, she would become more really a part of their fun. She tried to tell Joel how she felt.

"I'm not used to living with a family," she said. "You're always laughing at me for being afraid of people, maybe it's because of that. Maybe I'll learn something now. Your family wouldn't let anybody be afraid for long."

Joel said, "Hey! I'm not arguing with you. I'll take your word for it and be glad to."

She laughed. "All right, then," she said. "When shall we

tell Elaine? By the way, do you think she'll like the notion?"

"Oh," Joel told her carelessly. "She'll be tickled pink. I think Pris was getting to be too much of a strain for her. Probably you'll be able to help out there."

"I'd like to," Harriet told him.

"We'll call Elaine tomorrow," Joel said. "And tell her we're moving in. Good thing we didn't get a lease on this place. Remember how hard we tried to persuade the landlord to give us one?"

"Yes," Harriet said. "We were lucky."

She was quiet for a while and her mind involuntarily went back to her belongings which she had collected with so much trouble and arranged with so much care. Where would she put them in Elaine's apartment, she wondered? There was not too much space.

Joel yawned beside her and moved his long legs under the sheet so that it was pulled off her. It was warm and she was rather glad to be uncovered. She lay feeling the little breeze on her hot flesh, pricking her and making goose-pimples. Joel began to breathe heavily and she saw that he had gone to sleep. She wished that she could sleep so easily, but her mind had been too sharply awakened and she kept thinking about the strangeness of this life with Joel. It wasn't what she had visualized its being; they seemed to be going steadily downhill instead of up as she had believed. But they would reach their level soon, she thought, frowning in the darkness, and in the meantime they were learning a lot of things about each other, things that would help them to live more closely together.

Joel said something in his sleep, a word through his opened mouth which he didn't enunciate properly. She



tried to hear what it was but it was only a sound with no sense to it. It was very late, she heard the muffled clumsy sound of the milk-wagon in the street outside, and it made her feel lonely to be listening to it with Joel asleep at her side.

Suddenly she turned and puffed up her pillow, burying her face in it as if she could close out sound and sight. This depression was ridiculous, she thought, now that everything was settled. Why did her mind stay so heavy? When she closed her eyes, she suddenly saw such a world of space that she grew dizzy. She put out her hand to touch Joel to reassure herself. But when she went to sleep that touch would no longer be comforting, she thought, and it was on such a night as this that she might dream of the little man and the little woman on the platform again, bobbing at her out of infinity.

## 2

Harriet straightened the silver candlesticks on the Governor Winthrop desk, and stood back to look at her new room. The space was too small, her furniture was crowded now, so that the room was as cluttered as any other room in Elaine's apartment. She tried to think of something else that might be eliminated, but they needed everything, the desk, the studio couch, the armchair and the bureau. The bookshelves took up a lot of wall space, but she couldn't let them go. Her books were her only personal possessions.

The red curtains looked hot in the bright south light and the faded parts showed too clearly. She went over to them and pulled at them, trying to adjust their folds to the old gracious lines, but they continued to fall stiffly and she finally shook her head and let her arm drop.

She thought, it was a mistake to get so house proud, I

might have known we would be moving someday. I shouldn't have let myself get attached to the apartment.

Somebody knocked on her door and she turned her head jerkily. "Come in," she said.

Pris came in, closing the door behind her. She was wearing a pair of tailored white-silk pajamas. Her firm, pink-fleshed body showed through them as she stood in the light from the window, but the light also showed a worn place on the elbow, and a jagged rip in one trouser leg.

"Good morning," she said.

Harriet smiled at her, watching her warily. There was something strange about her manner.

She came into the room and put her arms around Harriet's neck, hugging her briefly and letting her go almost as instantaneously. "I'm so glad you're going to be living here," she said impulsively. But it was a funny sort of thing to say, there was no visible reason for it, and it made Harriet feel uncomfortable. "We'll have fun, the two of us," Pris went on. "You can tell me anything you want to do, and I'll do it, Harriet. I'm going to try to learn how to work, you can teach me. I'll do all the dirty work, scrubbing floors, and washing dishes and all those things. I won't be any trouble to you."

"Oh," Harriet said. "You mean housework."

"Yes," Pris told her. "Joel gave me a talking-to. I guess I've been kind of selfish. But it'll be different if you're here. I'm so happy, Harriet."

She went over and sat down in the armchair. Sun, coming in the window, hit her blonde head, and she looked little in her boyish pajamas. She had pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around them.

Harriet looked at her a minute and then went over to the

studio couch and sat on it. She lit herself a cigarette from the box on the table there, and leaned against the wall.

Why was Pris so effusive? It wasn't natural, she was a generous warm person, but she had pride too, and she had never thrown herself at people's feet. This was a mockery of some sort.

"You don't need help, Pris," Harriet said slowly, wondering what was the right thing to say. "You're doing all right."

"Oh, no, I don't know anything," Pris said urgently. "You're so full of helpful hints and things. That's what I need. And you're economical. I've got to learn to be economical."

Harriet stubbed out the cigarette helplessly. Now she sounded almost openly antagonistic.

Pris smiled at her. Her teeth were white against her warmly colored face. "I want you to tell me just what to do about everything," she said.

Harriet stood up suddenly and walked over to the window. It must have been that Joel had hurt her. And it was very likely; he still felt raw about the whole situation and took out his grievances on innocent things. Probably, too, he had held Harriet up as an example, which was bad. She wondered how she could smooth Pris down. Unfortunately, Pris had created this very artificial pretense of being delighted, which made it all the harder to get at her. If she were only openly angry it would be easier.

"Pris," she said, "this is hard on me too. Heaven knows I'm not used to bossing people and I don't want to do it. But keeping house and being thrifty happen to be things I can do. Just as you can play tennis. I can't play tennis and you don't know how to wash windows. At the moment,

the housekeeping has become the most important talent because we're hard up. That brings me into the limelight. But if you have any friendliness towards me you won't rub it in. I don't like it a bit, honestly I don't."

She thought out each sentence as she said it, trying to appeal to Pris's generosity.

Pris said, still smiling, "Harriet, dear, you're talking nonsense. You sound as if you think I hold it against you. Of course I don't. I was just telling you how happy I was that you were here to take over."

Well, that was a failure, Harriet thought wearily. She caught the window curtain in her hand and twisted it into small pleats. When she let it go again she looked absently at the wrinkles she had made.

"Damn it, Pris, stop being so sweet and forbearing," she said, her anxiety suddenly bursting out. She turned as she spoke and saw the smile leave Pris's face. She went on, pounding in her words to take advantage of the moment. "I wasn't being polite," she said. "I really meant what I said. You're angry at Joel, that's the trouble; he must have hurt your feelings. But you know him too well to take him seriously. Can't you see he's so upset about this mess that he was taking it out on you? He blames himself for losing Elaine's money. He's not angry at you, he's angry at himself."

Pris's face was completely exposed now. "He'd no right to talk to me that way, just the same," she said.

In spite of her firmness, Harriet felt relieved. At least Pris was being natural again.

"I know it's hard on you," she said, still trying to press her point. "But you've got to make allowances for him, Pris. Please, think about his state of mind right now and try

to understand how unhappy he is. You can't be angry with him."

"You'd be surprised," Pris said, but with less violence.

"We've all got to be as forbearing as we can," Harriet said. "Because he's got a very big responsibility on his shoulders. It's not pleasant for him."

"It's not pleasant for me," Pris said furiously. "Do you think I like being cooped up in this mangy apartment, never having any decent clothes, or any spending money?"

Harriet saw that she was no longer blaming Joel; her anger was against something unseen now, something bigger. She spoke quickly. "But that isn't Joel's fault, is it?" she said, smiling at Pris. "Or mine, or Elaine's or anybody's?"

"No," Pris said, unbending suddenly. Her face looked good-natured again and she grinned. Harriet let out a breath, the danger was over. "No, I see what you mean," Pris said. "But at the time he made me so darned sore, I—" she paused for a moment searching for words—"I wanted to kick his teeth out," she finished. Her extravagance showed that she was entirely won over, and was laughing at herself. They grinned at each other and Harriet realized the incident was closed. The Randolfs never discussed anything; they didn't bother to explain things even to themselves. Harriet thought now that it was a pleasant habit; discussions too often hang on the unimportant things.

She took some stockings out of her workbasket and sat down in the armchair to darn them. Pris made a face at the sight. "I just throw mine away," she said. "I guess I'll have to learn to darn too." She stood indecisively for a second and then made an awkward gesture and went out the door. Harriet's smile lasted after she had gone.

She threaded her needle and put the polished white egg

into the foot of the first stocking. As she stitched, she thought some more about the problem of Pris. The main trouble with her, she thought, was that she had nothing interesting to do. But what was there for a girl like Pris to do? She didn't want a job and she didn't like working around the house. That seemed to leave only marriage. But even marriage could be a mistake. If Pris wanted it too badly and thought about it too much, she might make a poor choice and be unhappy.

Harriet shook her head almost as if she had been talking out loud to herself and the stockings she held slithered from her lap into a soft brown pile on the floor. As she bent to pick them up the telephone rang. She hesitated, poised over the stockings, waiting to see if someone would answer. When it rang a second time, she got up, letting the stockings lie there, and went out into the hall. Elaine, however, came out of her bedroom door just before she reached the telephone and picked up the receiver. She was still undressed, wearing a sheer negligee which was a little crumpled.

"Hello," she said. Harriet stood waiting to see if it was for her.

"No," Elaine said. "She's taking a shower at the moment. Can I have her call you back?"

She was silent for a moment and Harriet heard the sounds of a voice coming squeakingly through the receiver.

"All right," Elaine said. "Herbert Winters. I'll tell her." She hung up the receiver and smiled at Harriet. "For Pris," she explained unnecessarily. Harriet nodded. Elaine's hair was stringy on either side of her face and her blue eyes looked tired. She caught at her negligee with an absent-minded gesture to close it over her throat.

"I wish she wouldn't go out with that Herbert Winters person," Elaine said. "There's something so unpleasant about him. I don't know quite what it is. He's perfectly well mannered and all that, perhaps too well mannered. But I'm always afraid he's going to tell me a dirty story. Isn't that ridiculous? He looks so confidential all the time."

Harriet laughed. "I suppose most of Pris's friends are still in college," she said.

Elaine frowned. "I don't think she's been seeing any of the college boys and girls," she said. "That nice Fulke, you know, and there were lots of others. To tell the truth, I can't remember all their names, but it's been a long time since I've seen any of them."

"Well, perhaps they're not in the city at the moment," Harriet said. "And Pris has to know somebody."

"Of course," Elaine said. "You know, it's rather strange, but I haven't seen any of my old friends for a long time. And I don't think Joel sees his. Except in the way of business. Does he?"

"No," Harriet said. She had been worried about that. Joel had felt that he couldn't entertain his friends and he had stopped seeing them. But it would have been perfectly possible if they had been willing to do things simply. A couple for dinner one night, beer and sandwiches for some friends another night, they could have done it. The trouble was that Joel went at things so completely. Fifty dollars a week had represented absolute poverty to him; he couldn't believe that people lived comfortably on that little. He had no idea of compromise, he had felt they must give up everything.

Elaine went into the living room and Harriet followed her. It was still untidy from last night. The ashtrays were

full and there was a cushion on the floor where Joel had sat. Looking at it, Harriet wanted to do something vigorous to change it. She began emptying the ashtrays and plumping up the sofa cushions. Elaine stood idly watching her.

"It seems to me that things get dirtier up here than they did down on Sixtieth Street," she said. "Or is that my imagination?"

"Perhaps they do," Harriet said non-committally. Elaine's servants had taken care of the Sixtieth Street house, and it had been dusted before she even got up in the morning.

Pris came into the living room, dressed now in a skirt and sweater, with its sleeves pushed up. "What are you doing up, Mom?" she asked Elaine.

"Something woke me up," Elaine said. "I can't remember what."

"The telephone," Harriet said. She hoped Elaine would give Pris her message, but she only nodded and reached for a cigarette. She held it for a moment and Harriet realized that she was waiting for a light. She struck a match and held it for her. Elaine drew a long puff and made a face. "I hate smoking before breakfast," she said. "I suppose it isn't ready yet?"

"Yes," Harriet started to say, and Pris interrupted her. "Sure it is, Mom," she said. "Come on, let's eat, I'm starving. Put that cigarette out if it bothers you so much."

Elaine put the cigarette down obediently and they filed into the dining room, where Harriet had left the table laid for them. She had already eaten with Joel, but she poured herself another cup of coffee and sat down at the empty end of the table to watch them. It was nice, she thought, to have companionship. She liked being with people; even when she had been a little girl she had invented friends to



take the place of dolls. Now she had live human beings for company.

"By the way," she said to Pris. "There was a telephone message for you." She spoke about it because she thought Elaine had forgotten it, but she saw Elaine frown.

"Yes," Elaine said. "I forgot to tell you. Herbert Winters. He wanted you to call him back."

"I'm going out with him tonight," Pris said. "I wonder what he wants." She continued to eat, but Elaine had put down her fork and was watching her.

"Do you like that man, Pris?" she asked.

"Not much," Pris said carelessly. "But he's fun."

"How do you mean, fun?" Elaine said. "How could he be fun if you don't like him?"

"I mean he takes me to nice places and he's good-natured," Pris told her.

"Oh," Elaine said. She looked at Harriet and then down at her plate again. "Well," she said. "I suppose you know what you're doing."

Harriet had been waiting for some kind of argument, she realized, as she felt her muscles relax. It amused her to see that Pris had not been at all tense. She went on eating placidly and her face was neither troubled nor surprised. Evidently Elaine's protests never went any further than this. The Randolph System, Harriet thought, smiling to herself.

Pris finished her breakfast long before Elaine had done with hers, and excused herself.

"I want to call up Herbert before Mom finishes," she told Harriet laughingly. "So that it won't distress her to overhear our crude conversation."

Elaine smiled at her remonstratively. "You talk such nonsense, Pris," she said.

Pris put down her napkin. "But some of my remarks hit home, don't they?" she said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Elaine told her. "I don't care what you say to that Winters man. You exaggerate so much, Pris."

It was hard to tell when they were joking and when they were angry.

Pris grinned again now and went over and kissed Elaine. "I get that from you, darling," she told her, and Elaine's irritation disappeared. She put her arm up and patted Pris affectionately. "Go ahead, you imp," she said. "Make your phone call."

They watched her leave the room and then Elaine sighed and brought her befrilled arm up to rest on the table. She stirred her coffee, taking the spoon around and around the cup, without purpose, since the sugar must have dissolved long ago.

"I wouldn't worry about her," Harriet said. "Pris has lots of common sense."

"I just can't understand her any more," Elaine said. "She's taken up with some of the most dreadful people. Her friends used to be so charming."

Harriet made no comment, although inwardly she felt that Pris's friends were chosen for the amusement they could give her as an unconscious protest against their life. She watched Elaine eating a biscuit, her fingers holding it delicately. She took tiny bites, and chewed them well before she took another.

Pris's voice came distinctly from the hall, speaking too loudly and laughing a great deal. Her laughter was irritat-

ing to both of them because they couldn't know what it was about, and Elaine was obviously straining to hear.

She put the last piece of biscuit in her mouth after Pris had finished. "There," she said, nodding her head. "I am right about that man, he's so vulgar he influences Pris. She never used to be so loud."

"That's probably defiance," Harriet said, smiling. "She wanted you to hear."

"I don't know why," Elaine said. "She made such a point of being secretive."

Harriet was quiet again. She didn't want to get involved in the arguments between Elaine and Pris; they were both awfully touchy.

Pris came back, switching her shoulders a little as she walked. "I'm not going to be here for dinner," she told them. "Herbie made a lot of money at Saratoga last weekend, he wants to celebrate."

"My heavens!" Elaine said. "What is he? A gambler?"

"No," Pris said scornfully. "Gambling is merely one of his gentlemanly pleasures, darling. Don't be so snooty. I've seen you at a race track more than once."

Harriet almost laughed at Elaine's expression. It must be particularly maddening, she thought, to make a good point in an argument with her, and have her look as if she had suddenly thought of something else and not even heard what you said. Pris waited for a second and then walked indignantly out of the room. Elaine picked up her coffee cup again and deliberately took a sip out of it, although only the dregs had been left. Evidently she wasn't going to say anything.

Harriet stood up and began to clear the table, and as she went out into the kitchen, Elaine followed her. She pulled

out the little kitchen stool so that she could be close to Harriet, and sat down on it, her long sheer skirts falling around her. There was something incongruous about her in these surroundings; her elegance disappeared in them because it was so out of place.

Harriet filled the dishpan with soapy water and began washing the dishes. She worked quickly, developing a sort of rhythm, and the kitchen became very quiet. The work and the quiet almost numbed her mind for a while. She was startled when Elaine interrupted her.

"I'm glad you and Joel are going to be here," she said.

Harriet smiled past her shoulder, without commenting.

"You're a lot of help, you know," Elaine said. "I can't seem to get used to this kind of life."

"You will, though," Harriet assured her. "And it won't always be so bad. Joel will do better at his job and so will Kit. And Pris will find something for herself." She had finished the dishes and now she got out the utensils for mixing a cake. Elaine got up and followed her to the kitchen table, pulling her little stool behind her.

"It's all right for them," she said. "They're young. But I'm too old, Harriet, to change my whole way of living."

"It is harder on you," Harriet said consolingly. She lifted up the flour cup to the light to see that she had made the right measurement. "But we're all here to help you as much as we can," she said.

"You're all sweet," Elaine said. She twisted the stool to a position where Harriet need not turn to look at her. "But it doesn't do any good." She looked down at her hands suddenly and Harriet saw with alarm that her lower lip was trembling. She watched her for a second, afraid to say anything. Elaine was fighting to control herself. "Everything

seems to be around our ears," she said, still looking down and then, lifting her head to meet Harriet's eyes, she went on, pouring herself out as if she had thought about it for a long time. "We lose our homes, we lose our money, even the little bit I thought would tide us over." Her lip quivered again. "And it's not just that. Everything is going, that's what's really frightening. The whole world is crumbling. Just crumbling. War will come any minute, I can feel it, and then that will be the end of the things I was brought up to expect."

"Oh, that's gloomy," Harriet said. She laughed a little bit. "You know what it says in the Bible. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'" She offered it jokingly, too embarrassed by Elaine's distress to dare take it seriously. But Elaine could not be distracted.

"Mr. Randolph said that to me once when I wanted something," she said thoughtfully. "I've forgotten what it was, but he couldn't afford to buy it. I told him then that I didn't give a hoot about the kingdom of God. I'm not very religious, anyway, Harriet, and if I'm going to have a kingdom, I want one right here. I want my kingdom now."

It was impossible to continue being flippant with her. Harriet laid her spoon down and looked at her. "I'm not religious myself," she said. "As a matter of fact, I was just kidding. But you know, Elaine, there's something to the thought. I've been realizing it lately. Having a great deal of money doesn't fit you for living. When you've been poor and had to do without things, and had to be inventive and resourceful, you're better off in a way." She laughed at herself. "I sound terribly sanctimonious," she said. "What I

mean is that if you interpret the 'kingdom of God' as the greater happiness, perhaps there's a lot to that saying."

Elaine said firmly, "I don't agree with you. I don't care about anything so ephemeral. I want the things I've always had. I want my homes and my cars and my servants. I want to be comfortable again and to have my children all around me, and to protect them. Especially now, when everything else is so uncertain. I want to make sure they're all right."

"But if they're independent, Elaine," Harriet said, "they're much more able to take care of themselves, no matter what happens. Aren't they? You can't take care of them always."

"I could if we were living in the old way," Elaine said stubbornly. "Or at least I think I could. I felt so secure then. I'm so frightened now, anything frightens me, I don't have any props any more."

She put her elbow on her knee and leaned her chin in her hand thoughtfully. Her fine face looked soft as she thought. But Harriet watching her got no impression of gentleness. The sorrow in her expression was the sorrow of self-pity. There was a droop to the corners of her mouth that suggested a whine.

"When I was a young girl," she told Harriet abruptly, "we lived in New York here, on Gramercy Park. One of those old brownstone houses, you know. We used to have a key to the park and we played out there when we were children. My sister always wanted to play with the children who weren't allowed in the park, but I didn't. They were dirty, and they were so rough. One of the little boys hit my sister once, and she laughed and hit him back. I was furious. I didn't dare tell my mother, because I was afraid of my sister, but I wouldn't play with those children any more."

"Where is your sister?" Harriet asked her gently.

"She died," Elaine said. She acted as if Harriet's question had interrupted some train of thought. "She never got married; she was all worked up about woman's suffrage at the time. Mr. Randolph used to laugh at her."

She went on as if the question had not been asked. "We used to go up to Stockbridge for the summers," she said. "My father had to stay on in the city—he was a banker, you know—but he sent Mother and my sister and myself away, and we used to live in a lovely old house. It was something like the house in South Wales. That's where I met Mr. Randolph, up there. He was in my father's bank, and Father brought him up for a visit. I think Father wanted me to like him; he told me that Mr. Randolph was one of his ablest assistants, and that he would go far."

Harriet remained quiet, afraid to check Elaine, although the cake-batter was now mixed and she wanted to get out the tins.

"Everything was so easy for us," Elaine said. "I didn't realize that at the time, of course, but I do now when I watch you and Joel. Mr. Randolph had some money of his own, and my father was right, he did awfully well at the bank, he became one of their youngest vice-presidents. We bought the house on Sixtieth Street, and then when Kit was born we bought the house in South Wales. We didn't want to send the children away to camps; in the summer we wanted to keep them with us."

The old worlds she had met in books about New York before the war came into Harriet's mind. She thought she could guess what kind of life the young Randolfs lived, and how secure it was.

"Even the war didn't bother us," Elaine said. "Mr. Ran-

dolf didn't have to go, of course. Joel was four, and Kit was two. We had friends who went over, but I didn't know anybody who was killed, and it was all so far away. It seemed rather glorious to me. I can't think why."

Harriet nodded.

"Then Pris was born," Elaine went on. "We used to have so much fun. John, that's Mr. Randolph, was very handsome and I was pretty. We had a lot of friends, we liked parties and dancing and gaiety. And all the children were so attractive, we used to be terribly proud of them. I can't actually remember ever wanting anything awfully much that I couldn't have. I think once I wanted a horse and John was feeling a little pinched at the time and wouldn't let me have one. Probably that was the time he told me about the rich man. But it was only a notion I had, I didn't have my heart set on it. Anything else was possible. Good clothes, nice homes, servants, good food, the best education for the children. We never had to worry about those things."

She got up suddenly from her stool and came closer to Harriet to take hold of her wrist. "Do you see what sort of life it was?" she asked her earnestly. "I'm trying to give you a picture of it. We were so happy. That's what I would like to have now. I thought I would always go on that way, it never occurred to me that anything like this could happen to us. I knew people lost their money, but I didn't think we would. John thought he was leaving me well provided. He thought I would be taken care of for the rest of my life. It isn't fair, it isn't right, that these things should happen to us."

She looked frail and pettish. Harriet's sympathy ebbed a bit. She had worked into Elaine's mood for a moment, fol-



lowing her reminiscence with interest, fascinated by the story of a kind of life she had never seen.

"It all seems to tie in, somehow," Elaine went on relentlessly. "I mean our own troubles and the world's. Everything's changing, Harriet, and the old things are collapsing. Why can't it keep on a little longer? Just through our lifetime? The lifetime of people who were brought up like me."

Harriet felt her lips quirk, not through amusement, but through embarrassment at Elaine's inanity. She tried to think of something that might be comforting, but she could only think of platitudes.

"Everybody's going through this, Elaine," she said. "It affects everybody. But the world has changed before, you know, and people have survived. Don't be afraid of it." She watched Elaine, troubled by her inability to soothe her.

"Why shouldn't I be?" Elaine said jerkily. "I'm not young and adaptable. I never was adaptable. It will kill me, even if the rest of you survive."

There was something so gloomy about her feeling that it became big. A minor prophetess might have talked like this. She was impressive because she was so despairing. Harriet entered into Elaine's mind for one of those seconds of communication that are really complete, and her proportions shifted. She saw with fear the human race reduced to a smaller scale, millions of small people as tiny as the man and the woman on the platform in her dream. Something had disturbed them and they were running in terrible confusion. The confusion involved thousands of them who hurt themselves by running over each other.

She paused in her movements and the big apartment seemed very quiet. Street noises were far away from them

in their height above the sidewalks. Only the kitchen alarm clock made any noise and it was too regular to draw her back into her own level of humanity. There was loneliness and fear around her, and Elaine seemed a fragile companion to it. She wanted to take Elaine's hand, hoping by contact to break the moment for both of them.

Then Pris, in the other room, began to whistle. She carried the tune well, but whatever she was doing evidently distracted her, and she left out snatches of the song. Its impudent gaiety was very realistic, and Harriet smiled at the sound. It jerked her back into her own scale again. Even Elaine went back to her stool suddenly and when she spoke it was evident that she had been brought back too.

"Are you going to make white icing?" she asked. "The children love white icing."

PART IV

*September 1939–December 1939*

NEW YORK



KIT took Harriet into the bedroom to show her their new rug. She closed the door behind her, shutting out anybody who might follow. There was something new about her, almost a belligerency. Harriet thought, amused, that even if she didn't like the rug, she wouldn't dare say so.

But it was really lovely. It lay green and thick-matted under Kit's handsome new modern furniture and tied the room into the picture that Kit must have seen when she first started redoing it. The cream candlewick bedspreads and the soft blue-green chairs, the little touches of vermilion in narrow picture frames and a cushion on the arm-chair were perfect, and more than that, their perfection had not lost them personality. They were as individual as Kit's clothes or anything else she bought.

Harriet touched the crystal bottles on the dressing table gently. "It's lovely, Kit," she said.

"Makes a difference, now that I have a maid, doesn't it?" Kit asked.

Harriet nodded smilingly. It was a well-kept room now, and only the scarlet slippers showing beneath the bedspread and Kit's white toweling robe hanging on the open bathroom door showed that it was lived in.

Kit touched the collar of Harriet's fur jacket. "Let me take your wrap," she said.

Harriet let it go reluctantly. She wished that she had had a better dress for Kit's party. It had been a long time since she had cared what she wore, but seeing Kit in her new

black-and-gold-striped taffeta, she was afraid that she might not do her justice. This party was evidently important to Kit. She looked at her reflection in the dressing-table mirror, seeing her pale, summery dress as too informal and a little dowdy.

“Are you having a lot of people?” she asked Kit.

“Dozens,” Kit said. “A lot of people from the store. My boss is coming too.”

“Then you must be excited,” Harriet said. “Are any of Gray’s friends coming?” She had met one or two of them and liked them. They made her comfortable, although she had not realized it until now, when she hoped they might be there.

“No,” Kit said. She frowned. “They’re not the right sort for this kind of party. They’re too stuffy. They wouldn’t get along with the people from the store.”

“Oh,” Harriet said, rather disappointed. She took her pocket comb out of her little bag and began to smooth her hair. “Your apartment looks so nice, Kit,” she said. There was something terribly fidgety about Kit tonight which wasn’t like her. Harriet wanted to be reassuring.

“It’s nice to be able to afford to fix it up,” Kit said, looking around her. “I borrowed a little money on the Morris plan, and we bought some things on installment. Now that I’ve got my promotion and my raise, it looks as if I was right to do it.”

“You were right, weren’t you,” Harriet said, smiling at her, “when you said that you’d be successful.”

Kit sat down on one of the little armchairs. “I didn’t know how right I was,” she told Harriet. “It’s almost like magic. Everything click-clicks along, I can’t make a mistake. I wasn’t surprised when they made me an assistant

buyer, and I won't be surprised when I get to be a buyer. It's all a trick, and I've got the hang of it. I'm going to be a good business woman, Harriet."

"I always thought you would be," Harriet told her. She thought to herself that Kit was really a Randolph; she relied on intuition even in a field where most people would try to rationalize.

"Thanks," Kit said. "Gray thinks I'm screwy." She stooped to see her face in the mirror. "Do I look all right?" she asked Harriet.

"Lovely," Harriet said, smiling at her.

"Come on, then," Kit said. "Let's go back into the living room. I'm afraid Gray and Joel will mess something up if we leave them there too long."

Harriet followed her down the hall into the gray-and-gold living room. Joel and Gray were standing beside the mantelpiece with drinks in their hands. They looked uncomfortable, as if they were still remembering Kit's warning against sitting on the couch before the guests came. And Gray looked a little amused.

Harriet joined them while Kit went to mix a drink for her.

"Where's Elaine and Pris?" Gray asked. "I thought they were coming with you."

"No," Joel said, speaking for Harriet. "Pris got one of her young men to take them out to dinner. She broke a date with him to come to this party, so she's trying to pacify him by letting him buy herself and her mama a good meal."

Gray laughed, and Kit joined them with Harriet's highball in her hand. "I hope she's not bringing the young man

with her," she said sharply. "Some of Pris's specimens lately have been rather unpleasant."

"You ought to see this one!" Joel said. "Herbert Winters. He's a honey!"

"Is she bringing him?" Kit asked insistently.

"No," Joel said casually. "I don't think so."

The doorbell rang and Harriet saw Blanche, Kit's little mulatto maid, go to answer it. Her gray uniform and sheer apron and cap harmonized so well with the room that you hardly saw her pass through it.

Kit's hand went jerkily up to her hair and she pulled it down again. Harriet watched her sympathetically. She was desperately nervous this evening, whatever her principles of relaxation might be. This must be terribly important to her. In her job, it was probably necessary to have tasteful, expensive surroundings. This was the first time she had entertained all these people, Harriet knew, so that it was like a kind of test. Her career was built on her taste and originality, and the party would be a demonstration of them. It must be hard, Harriet thought, to have to reflect your ability even in your own home.

The maid came in with the guests, two of them, a man and a woman, and Kit rose to greet them. Harriet watched from a distance, noticing that the man stayed several steps behind the woman and that he was obviously the unimportant member of the pair. He fussed with the woman's wrap and waited for her to speak to Kit first before he spoke himself. Kit treated him as he evidently expected to be treated. She made one remark to him and then spoke entirely to the woman. He stood by hesitantly while they went off to the bedroom, and when Blanche offered to



take his hat and coat, he jumped as if he had not realized she was there.

There wasn't anything about his appearance that could ever be remembered afterwards. His hair was pale and thin, he wore eyeglasses, and he was stockily built. Nothing was distinctive about him; even when he smiled his face remained nondescript. He wandered hesitantly towards the little group by the fireplace, evidently nervous because he had not been introduced. Harriet took pity on him and told him her name. "I'm Harriet Randolph, Kit's sister-in-law," she explained. "And this is Gray Beavers, her husband, and Joel Randolph, Kit's brother."

The man made a timid little bow. "I'm George Stevens," he said.

"Oh," Gray said and then hesitated. "Mrs. Stevens' husband?"

"Yes," the man said. He lowered his eyes and gave a queer little smile as if he were refusing a compliment. Harriet had an impulse of pity for him. His wife had been so stout and red-headed and domineering. Even the way she dressed showed the kind of person she was. Her black dress had the kind of unimaginative smartness that marks a certain kind of tough business woman. Her hair, too, had been arranged in an almost ridiculous perfection, and it had been a shock to look lower and see her middle-aged face with its shrewd, firm lines. Harriet wondered who they were and if Kit was fond of them, or if she had asked them for business reasons.

"Mrs. Stevens is Kit's boss," Gray explained to Harriet and Joel. Her husband's boss too, Harriet thought. She had disliked the woman immediately, even without speaking to her. There had been something in the way she had looked

quickly around the room, taking them all in and dismissing them in the same glance, which had been very annoying. She had had an arrogant manner, like a person who was used to servile people.

Gray asked Mr. Stevens if he would like a drink and he looked at them hesitantly. "Are you all having one?" he asked, and then seeing that they were, he said, "I don't mind if I do." The phrase was a conventional one, spoken without thought, but his manner was really grateful, like a man who has been thirsty for a long time. Harriet watched them at the bar where Gray mixed the drink and asked Mr. Stevens' advice about the amount of whiskey. She felt sorry for Stevens again, seeing how eagerly his hand was poised for the glass, before Gray could even finish filling it with soda.

Kit and Mrs. Stevens came back into the room, making a sweep with their long dresses. Mrs. Stevens looked like a poor copy of Kit; her clothes were evidently worn to imitate the sort of handsome grooming that came naturally to Kit, but everything about her seemed fussy and too deliberate. Harriet decided that she would like to see her in a gingham house apron where she would look more comfortable. Her plump body was so rigid in its girdle and her large ridge of a breast was like iron in its brassière. Even her face was stiff; there was a coating of foundation cream and powder over it that took away all expression. But her mouth was thin-lipped and generous lipstick couldn't make it anything else. She was a hard, unattractive-looking person. Harriet didn't envy Kit working under her. If ever anybody will cut Kit's throat this woman is it, she thought.

She had a polite smile for all of them, but it was not modest, like her husband's. Instead, she gave the impression

of condescension as if she thought that she was doing them a favor by meeting them. She would probably, however, be annoyingly effusive if she met somebody whom she considered important, Harriet thought. She tried to be pleasant for Kit's sake, but she was repulsed by the woman and it was difficult. She saw that Gray had the same reaction. He had a blank look which deliberately concealed his feelings. Kit seemed annoyed at him.

"Gray, get Gladys a drink, will you?" she asked him curtly.

He bowed almost formally to her. "What sort would you prefer, Mrs. Stevens?" he asked. "Irish, like your husband?"

She laughed. "No, thank you," she said with too much emphasis, implying that her tastes were never the same as her husband's. "Scotch and soda, please."

She watched Gray for a second as he passed her to get the drink and then turned back to Kit.

"You have a charming little place here, my dear," she told her. "Perfectly charming."

Kit looked around her as if she were seeing the rooms for the first time. "Oh, do you like it?" she said. "Gray and I are thinking of moving very soon. This neighborhood is so disgraceful."

"That's the first I've heard of it," Gray said, coming back with Mrs. Stevens' drink. He handed it to her without taking his look from Kit. Kit frowned. "You know we've discussed it, dear," she said. "Let's not talk about it now."

Their irritation passed like a bridge over Mrs. Stevens' head, and Harriet was angered by seeing Mrs. Stevens half-smile to herself, as if she were aware of the friction and approved of it. Something in her manner implied that all

husbands and wives disagreed, that it was a great law of human nature and an amusing one.

Joel said to Mrs. Stevens, "I understand you're the buyer in Kit's department, Mrs. Stevens."

She smiled up at him and made a little motion beside her on the couch with her plump hand. He obeyed her and went over to sit down.

"Yes," she said. "And I can't tell you how pleasant it is having Kit with me. My dear, I had the most atrocious young assistant last year. No taste, no manners. Kit is such a pleasant change. She has such breeding."

Gray and Harriet looked at each other involuntarily and to conceal her smile Harriet went over behind the couch. She noticed that Mrs. Stevens watched her pass by without lifting her eyes, but with real attention. She wondered why until she saw Mr. Stevens standing there. Then she was annoyed, thinking to herself, she ignores poor George, but she probably never lets him get out of her sight with another woman.

Mr. Stevens smiled at her timidly. "Did I understand you to say you're Kit's sister-in-law?" he asked her. "You must be Mr. Randolph's wife then." He nodded at Joel to indicate whom he meant.

"Yes," she said. "Kit has a large family. Some of the rest of them will be arriving later."

"Oh, there are more?" Mr. Stevens asked her.

"Her mother and another sister," she said.

They talked in conventionalities and with only half their attention. Mr. Stevens was obviously watching his wife, whose back was towards them, and Harriet was watching Joel. She wondered if he were putting on a good show or if he really liked Gladys Stevens. He was talking to her

very attentively, his head bent towards her. She noticed, too, that he was drinking a good deal. Gray, who wandered around without talking to anybody, filled his glass a third time within the hour that they had been there.

The maid came in with a tray of little canapés and while she was passing them the doorbell rang again. Kit turned her head around and waved at Gray. "Get it, will you, dear," she said impatiently, seeing that he hadn't moved. "Blanche is busy."

He went silently to the door and opened it, bringing in a new batch of guests, five of them this time, three men and two women. There was a rush of voices as Kit stood up to greet them and as they came into the room in front of Gray. Harriet noticed that Mrs. Stevens kept her seat on the couch without even turning her head, so that they had to come around in front of her to speak to her. From the eager way in which they did it, she guessed that they were all of them Mrs. Stevens' inferiors in the store.

With their arrival, Harriet lost some of her sense of detail and she no longer followed every look of the people around her. She began to talk to Mr. Stevens more attentively and she saw that he, perhaps emboldened by a second drink, was becoming alert too. Nobody interrupted them. People passed them on the way to the bar to get drinks, and once in a while Gray stood beside them for a few seconds, but he said nothing to them and he was obviously distracted.

The party had really begun. Mrs. Stevens held her court on the couch and there were always one or two people there, but as the party grew, other groups were formed in the room. The doorbell began ringing steadily now and

Blanche went back and forth to answer it, interrupting her trips with drinks or food.

Harriet didn't know anybody. Probably because of that, they looked so alike to her that she was sometimes confused. All of the women wore black or dark colors, most of them were too plump, they were all a good deal older than Kit. The men were either quiet, like Mr. Stevens, or very noisy. The noisy ones drank a lot and were extremely hearty. Harriet noticed that a great many of them were not native New Yorkers. Their accents spotted them from various parts of the Middle West and a few from the South. In the case of the women, though, the accent was overlaid by a new accent, one which she had seldom heard before. There was something very refined about it, and very vulgar. It was aggravating to see Kit in the middle of them, laughing and obviously happy. She was so outstanding among them.

Harriet finished her drink and shifted from one foot to the other. She was growing tired of standing there. Mr. Stevens was telling her a long story about a fishing trip. She listened, not because the story was good, but because there was something so revealing about the way he grew enthusiastic, then recalled himself and lowered his voice, and then grew enthusiastic again. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Mrs. Stevens turn jerkily once or twice to look at them. Finally she got up clumsily, like a big animal rising from its wallow. She said something to Joel, waving her highball glass at him and raised a hand to keep him from getting up too. Harriet saw her coming near them and realized that it was not a drink she wanted so much as to see what her husband was doing.

"Hello, Mrs. Randolph," she said over her shoulder to

Harriet while she was filling the glass. "It's nice of you to entertain George. George doesn't get on with the people from the store. He says he doesn't know what they're talking about. I don't know why; he hears me talk shop often enough."

"It does sound like rather a strange language," Harriet said. She had heard phrases all around her that were meaningless.

"Oh, now, dear, you know any woman would understand it," Mrs. Stevens said, moving over to join them. "It's just dress talk, that's all. But George has never learned a thing about clothes. He wouldn't know what I had on if I didn't say anything about it. Is your husband that way, dear? That's a sweet dress you have on. Where did you get it, if I may ask?"

"Oh, I had this made," Harriet said, looking down at it. "It's an old dress, I'm afraid." She recognized the term "sweet" as a condescending one.

"Your husband is such a charming man," Mrs. Stevens said. "He's Kit's brother, isn't he? He's like Kit, I think. Both of them so charming."

Mr. Stevens spoke up. "Mrs. Randolph says that Kit has a mother and sister who are coming too," he told his wife. She nodded, hardly bothering to notice him.

"Kit has a large family," she said, to show him she knew all about it. "Your husband's in advertising, isn't he?" she asked Harriet. Harriet barely managed to nod before she went on. "I know several people in advertising," she said. "It's a nice job. So pleasant and leisurely. Honestly, my dear, they don't know what work is." She put her hand up to her hair, smoothing some unseen strand behind her ear.

Harriet told her, "He likes it."

"Heavens," Mrs. Stevens said. "I'd like something like that. How I have to work. You know, sometimes I think I'll go mad. George worries about me, I have to work so hard. I bring things home at night, and we have to cancel so many engagements. I think George would rather I gave the whole thing up, but I'm not happy unless I have something to do. Do you work, dear?"

"No," Harriet told her. "I keep house."

"Oh, yes, that's nice," Mrs. Stevens said. She reminded Harriet of an overbearing type of salesgirl. There ought to be a fitting-room manner as well as a bedside manner, she thought, smiling to herself.

Mrs. Stevens caught the smile and disliked it, evidently. "You don't get bored with staying at home, I suppose," she asked. She went on without waiting for an answer. "I just have too much energy, I guess. It's not strength so much, just energy. It keeps me going continually. I couldn't be happy unless I was busy. Sometimes I wish I were the sort that could just stay quietly at home."

"I enjoy it," Harriet said. "It's work of a sort." Then she felt angry at herself for being put on the defensive. Mrs. Stevens had a peculiarly annoying way of talking on ingenuously and getting in little digs now and again. Her hard eyes stared at Harriet, making her feel young and awkward.

The questions that she continued to ask were shrewd ones, Harriet thought, about her family and their way of living, and Harriet tried to answer them civilly. But she disliked the woman intensely and out of self-protection she tried to see her as amusing. Her attention went to the part in Mrs. Stevens' hair and she saw the little dark line there



which indicated it had been dyed. Unconsciously, she smiled and Mrs. Stevens saw it again. She broke off into a second of silence this time, before she commanded her face. Harriet was appalled to think she might have revealed herself. She hadn't wanted to offend her, and besides, she hated to have the woman think she was being rude about something as personal and unimportant as her dyed hair, when it was actually the really unpleasant, hard things about her that she disliked.

They talked warily after that, and Harriet was relieved when Mrs. Stevens turned to her husband finally. "George," she said. "Will you come with me and meet Marge Patten, you know I've told you about her. You'll excuse us, Mrs. Randolph." She smiled sweetly at Harriet. "I want George to meet this girl."

"Of course," Harriet said. She was a little amused. Probably this long, tiring conversation had simply been a preliminary to getting George away. Poor George, he would be pleased if he knew his wife had been battling for him. But he had followed her so dully, blinking a little bit and holding tightly to his glass, that Harriet knew he hadn't realized it. She waited until they had gone, and joined Gray at the liquor table. She was tired of being polite and she wanted his comfort.

"Whew!" he said, looking down at her. "Have a drink?"

"Thanks," she said, holding out her empty glass to be refilled. He said something else to her but just then she saw Blanche passing a tray of mixed highballs to Joel, who helped himself to one, putting his emptied glass in its place. It distracted her from both Mrs. Stevens and Gray. Without paying much attention, she answered, smilingly, something Gray said. Why was Joel drinking so much this

evening, she wondered. He had had one drink after another without stopping.

"Excuse me a second," Gray said. "There's the door-bell." She realized then that he had been talking to her still, and she followed him with her eyes as he went out into the little foyer.

It was Pris and Elaine whom he let in. Harriet, watching the door, saw them and went over to say hello. She was delighted to see them, they looked so familiar and pleasant in the midst of all these strangers. Kit came up too, still talking over her shoulder to the man with whom she had been sitting.

"Hello, dears," she said, holding out her hand to them. She was flushed now, but her manner was easy again. The nervousness evidently had passed and had given place to an excitement which carried her still higher but more evenly. "What have you been doing all this time?" she asked. "Harriet, be a lamb, will you, and take them in the bedroom to leave their wraps. I'm right in the middle of a good story about old Mr. Considine."

Elaine smiled at her gently and confusedly. "Go ahead, Kit," she said. "We know where the bedroom is; Harriet doesn't have to bother."

Harriet went with them, however, and sat on the dressing-table stool while they took off their coats and powdered their noses. She thought to herself that they would really do Kit justice. Even though their clothes were not very new, they had once been expensive and they were chosen with real taste, not the sort of mass instinct that gowned all the women outside.

Pris said, "I want a drink first thing. What a lot of people I never saw before!"

"Are these all Kit's business friends?" Elaine asked Harriet. "Aren't they strange looking?"

"They're quite a bunch," Harriet said, smiling. She ushered them before her into the living room and Gray came to meet them with a highball in each hand. "Drink it down," he told them. "It's the only way you'll get along."

"Where's Joel?" Elaine said, looking around her.

They saw Joel in a corner of the room with Gladys Stevens. He was facing them but he was looking down at Mrs. Stevens attentively and they couldn't attract him. Mrs. Stevens was talking and her gold earrings shook and caught the light as she moved. She was using both hands for her gestures, but every now and then her right hand relaxed and settled on Joel's arm as if to hold him there.

Elaine waved her handkerchief and the flash of white must have caught Joel's eye, because he looked up. Recognizing them, he smiled and beckoned. Harriet followed Elaine as she went over towards him, curious to see whether Joel was really being entertained or just polite. Perhaps if he was having a hard time she could rescue him in some way.

"Mrs. Stevens, this is my mother," Joel introduced Elaine. "This is Kit's buyer, Elaine. She's been talking about Kit. It would do your heart good."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Randolph," Mrs. Stevens said. "Such a lovely girl your daughter is. And so bright. Smart as a whip. It's a pleasure to work with her."

Her manner with Elaine was not patronizing as it had been with Harriet. Perhaps something about Elaine's fine face and her handsome, dark-green dress impressed her. As Harriet had suspected, however, effusiveness was even less becoming to her than haughtiness.

"I'm very glad," Elaine murmured gently. She turned to Joel almost as if she had dismissed Mrs. Stevens. "Joel, dear," she said. "Kit seems to be busy, won't you introduce Pris to some of these people?"

Mrs. Stevens looked disconcerted as Joel nodded and went off, but she renewed her vivacity in a second and fastened on Elaine. "You must be proud of such a handsome family, Mrs. Randolph," she told her. "All so nice looking."

Elaine looked around at her various children. "Yes," she said, as if she were discovering it for the first time. "They are nice looking, aren't they? I imagine it's because they're all so healthy. And I always had their teeth straightened and things."

Her manner was charming and completely impersonal. Harriet felt maliciously pleased, because she could see that Mrs. Stevens was aware of it and was trying to win her interest. She was not in the least an insensitive woman, although her way of talking gave that impression. She would try very hard to make Elaine like her, but she probably wouldn't succeed, because there was a gentle unconsciousness about Elaine that would never become the warmth Mrs. Stevens wanted. They talked about Kit at some length while Harriet stood by silently. Mrs. Stevens had looked at her coldly when she first appeared and after a while Harriet saw that it would be all right just to drift off. As she left, she heard Mrs. Stevens saying to Elaine, "It's hard to believe Kit has never worked before."

She was rather depressed. She hated to see the Randolphs among these people. She didn't like the thought that they were being admired not for any genuine qualities but for their superficial ones, their ease and their good looks and

their smart clothes. Look, for instance, at Gray, who was now standing over at the bar being neglected. That was because he was shabby and a little stooped and rather quiet. But anybody with any real sensitivity liked Gray.

Before she could get to the bar, Kit came up to Gray and Harriet saw him say something to her in a low voice.

Kit jerked her head up as if he had slapped her. "I can see Mother and Pris every day," Harriet heard her say. "But I can't be nursing them along at this party. Why can't you get it through your head that the party means a lot to me?"

Harriet checked herself, embarrassed and afraid to join them, but Kit saw her then and held out a hand for her. "Come on, Harriet," she said. "Talk to Gray, he's being such a pest."

Gray said, paying no attention to Harriet, "Kit, this is very rude of you."

Kit held firmly onto Harriet's hand so that she couldn't leave them. "I don't know why you should talk about rudeness," she said. "The way you've been snubbing my guests all evening. You haven't talked to anybody but Harriet and now Pris. You're a fine one!"

"I don't know what to say to them," Gray said. "They all talk about Paris and what the war is doing to fashions, and honestly, Kit, you've got enough sense of proportion to see that that's a little more than a person can reasonably be expected to take. What the war's doing to fashions! Oh, my dear, did you hear Schiaparelli has moved down to the South of France," he mimicked. The bitterness in his tone was not for Kit, Harriet realized, but she took it that way.

She said in a low, violent voice, "They may not be little

embryo professors, but they're the people that I work with and they're doing their job just like anybody else. Please have the decency to be courteous to them." She let Harriet's hand drop abruptly and moved off. Harriet turned compassionately to Gray.

"Shop talk is always hard," she said. "It's so impossible to take any part in it. But this is really interesting, Gray. I like listening to it."

Gray said sulkily, "I would, too, if my wife weren't involved. But I can't stand to see Kit acting like a damn fool."

He took Harriet's arm and started to walk away with her before she could say anything else. "Pris is getting along all right, I guess," he said. "It was foolish of me to worry about her."

They joined Pris, who was talking to a thin, large-eyed young girl in one corner. The girl was tight, Harriet realized, as soon as she heard her first words. "Gladys is wonderful!" she was saying. She was gazing earnestly into Pris's face. Pris held her chin up a little, as if she were trying to get away from her look. "Gladys is wonderful!" she went on. "Nobody's as smart as Gladys. She has a flair. That's the word. A real flair. Do you know what I mean? A flair."

"Yes, I see what you mean," Pris said solemnly. She winked at Harriet. The girl was looking down at her drink now, still earnestly, and missed the wink. "A flair," Pris repeated.

"I want to be like her," the girl said, jerking her head up suddenly. She saw Harriet and Gray and stared at them blankly for a second, as if they had robbed her of what she was going to say. Then she went on. "I want to be

smart and hard-boiled." She looked around her secretively. "She is hard-boiled, you know."

"Do you think you could be?" Pris asked disinterestedly. She was hardly polite.

"No," the girl said sadly. "I just don't seem to have her ability. I just don't have it. Now Kit, your sister, she has it. She's not like Gladys, 'cause Gladys worked her way up and she had to learn everything she knows. Kit was brought up with good clothes and smart people. She didn't have to learn it. But she's good too. I wasn't surprised when they made Kit assistant buyer. Even though I've been in the department for two years more than she has. I wasn't surprised."

Harriet felt suddenly sorry for the girl. Evidently she had expected the position herself and that was why she was drinking so much now.

She said soothingly, "You look very young to me, perhaps that's been the trouble. In another year or so you'll probably be an assistant buyer too."

"By that time Kit will be a buyer," the girl said savagely, and then her voice smoothed down and she looked imploringly at Harriet. "You think so?" she asked.

"Of course," Harriet said. Gray came around to the other side of the group and flanked the girl's other elbow. Harriet could tell from his expression that he was concerned for her too.

"Excuse me," Pris said to all of them. "I want to meet Mrs. Stevens. Kit said she'd introduce me." She left them abruptly, but evidently the girl hadn't noticed that she had gone. She had caught hold of Harriet's arm now, and was saying, "Maybe you're right. I don't know. Maybe you're right."

Gray said to her, "Wouldn't you like some coffee? I'm going out to make myself some. I wish you'd come out and help me; I'm not quite sure I know how to do it."

The girl looked at him suspiciously. "You think I'm tight, don't you?" she asked him. Then again her defenses crumpled pathetically. "Maybe I am," she said, shaking her head. "I've had an awful lot."

"I don't think so at all," Gray said, taking her arm. "But I would like you to help me."

She looked at him eagerly. "Would you?" she asked. She let him lead her away towards the kitchen, and he looked back past her and nodded at Harriet, who smiled.

Kit, standing in a little group with Mrs. Stevens, Elaine and Pris, waved to Harriet to join them.

"What's Gray doing with Cassie?" she asked her.

"They've gone to make some coffee," Harriet said. "Gray seemed to want some." She didn't like to mention Cassie's state in front of Mrs. Stevens.

"Honestly!" Kit said in exasperation. "Why can't that girl hold her liquor! She's as boiled as an owl. I've been watching her. It's so disgusting."

"Cassie drunk?" Mrs. Stevens said, turning sharply to look after her. "That child has so little character. It's too bad."

Harriet felt sick for the girl; she suspected that she would never get her promotion now.

"Young people don't seem to know how to drink as well as they used to," Elaine said mildly. "I don't understand it, because they all drink so much more. They start younger, too. You'd think they'd learn to hold it. Look at Joel, Harriet. He's had too much. I've rarely ever seen him that way."



They turned to watch Joel, who was bending over a woman across the room. His highly colored face, and the way he was poised as if the smallest blow would knock him over, showed that he had been drinking a lot.

Mrs. Stevens said, with her mouth drawn together into a smile, "Oh, well, I think it makes a difference with men, don't you, Mrs. Randolph?"

"I suppose so," Elaine said carelessly. Harriet was amused to see Kit half open her mouth to speak and then check herself. Ordinarily she could never have resisted such a remark.

The party lasted late. Kit had an impressive amount of liquor on hand and at about twelve-thirty Blanche served sandwiches and coffee. All of the people there drank too much, and Harriet, now that she had begun to know some of them, suddenly grew interested in the way they drifted towards each other. During the first part of the evening the women had banded together and the men had kept themselves separate. Now they were beginning to pair off, each man with some other man's wife. It was like a clock-work pattern, it moved so mechanically. Harriet supposed that all their parties were the same way, they went about it as if it were routine.

There was very little general talk. At first they had talked shop and everybody had joined in. But when they split up in groups they began talking in personalities. Harriet, as she passed among them, heard a great deal of discussion of Mrs. Stevens, or old Mr. Considine, who seemed to be a sort of mythical character, of this or that person in the store. None of it was friendly; she was shocked sometimes at its maliciousness. She heard nothing about Kit, but she suspected that it was because she scared them off that

subject. Once, when she joined Cassie and a strange young man, she saw the man take hold of Cassie's hand warningly, and Cassie stopped in the middle of a sentence to smile at her rather self-consciously. This is a cut-throat crew, she thought.

Very late in the evening, Joel came over to her and put his arm around her shoulders. "Having a good time, darling?" he asked her. He had hardly spoken to her all evening.

She smiled at him affectionately. "Yes," she said. "I like it. I feel a little out of it, though. All these people know each other so well."

Joel said carelessly, "You're not so good at mixing, you never are. I think they're very easy to get along with." His drinking hadn't changed him much, except that he seemed absent-minded. As he stood there with his arm around her shoulder he kept looking around him, watching the various people in the room. "I'm having a wonderful time," he told her. She had been wanting to suggest that they go home, but she didn't like to as long as he was enjoying it. She let him walk her over to Pris and Elaine, who were sitting on the couch with two strange men around them, and let him desert her again. She could wait it out, she decided. She noticed that even Pris and Elaine were drawn into the party now; they were talking animatedly and evidently having a good time.

Later she found herself with Mr. Stevens again, and listened to a sort of outpouring of his troubles with Gladys. He was quite drunk and pathetically roundabout in his methods. Each sentence started with "Gladys is a wonderful woman," and ended with something derogatory. "She makes more money than I do," he would say, "and I sup-

pose it's natural that she should think she's the most important member of the family." Or, "We don't have any children. I rather wish we did, but Gladys doesn't want to give up her job." Harriet was sorry for him, but she didn't know what to say to such half-hearted accusations. She was glad when Gladys finally rounded him up, putting her hand on his arm and telling Harriet with her cold simper that it was sweet of her to keep him company.

She watched them leave. Kit was making a great to-do and fuss over them, but as soon as they had gone, her high spirits faded. There were only a few other guests still there, and there didn't seem to be enough energy left in Kit to keep up her gaiety. They felt it, perhaps, because they started to go soon afterwards. All of this party was for that woman, Harriet thought; Kit is frantic to impress her. She doesn't mind in the least sacrificing Gray or any of the rest of us as long as Gladys was pleased.

She watched the slow preparations for departure as the guests went. Gray took over Kit's duties and found their wraps for them, took them to the door and received their thanks. Now, when he was needed, he was pleasant and friendly, and it was fortunate that he was, because Kit was neglecting them outrageously.

Within half an hour the last of them had said good-bye. Only the Randolfs had stayed behind, and Kit sat down on the couch and swung her feet up wearily as the last person went out. "I'm exhausted," she said.

Gray, coming back from the door, looked down at her. "No wonder," he said. "You've been spinning like a top all evening."

"I noticed you were pretty active too," Kit said sweetly. "Thanks for taking care of the drunks, darling."

They looked at each other angrily, not bothering to hide their irritation from the others. There was a sharpness in their voices which showed they had been cherishing a grievance against each other all evening. Only Elaine seemed not to see it; she interrupted them. "Kit, dear," she said. "It was a nice party, but we've simply got to be going."

"All right, Elaine," Kit said. She relaxed against the arm of the couch again, as if Elaine had taken the fight out of her. "Excuse me if I don't stand up, will you, dear? I'm glad you all could come."

Gray said almost fleetingly, "You *are* tired, aren't you?" His voice and expression had gentled, and Harriet was relieved to see Kit look up at him gratefully. "Worn to the bone," she said. She put her hand up and Gray took it. He stood holding it behind his back while he turned to say good-bye to Elaine.

"I think your apartment looks so lovely," she told him.

He smiled politely and rather disinterestedly. "I'm afraid I had very little to do with it," he said. Harriet felt that all his thoughts and attention were centered on Kit, whose hand he was holding, and whose head rested against his arm.

She wished that Joel would hurry with their wraps. She could hear him coming down the hall and saying something to Blanche to make her giggle, and it seemed to her that he was taking a long time. If only they could get away quickly now and leave Kit and Gray alone before some new irritation would burst out all over again. Joel came finally, carrying the wraps wadded in a lump, and threw them all on the couch to be sorted out. Kit lay back with her eyes half closed, watching them prepare to leave.

“Good-bye, darlings,” she said as they went towards the door. “See you all tomorrow at Sunday dinner, won’t I?”

Elaine nodded. “Come early, Kit,” she said. “Good-bye, Gray, it was a lovely party.”

“I’m glad you think so,” he told her. He went to the door with them, still smiling. There was both unhappiness and mockery in his face as he looked at Harriet past Elaine’s shoulder.

## 2

The party had tired all of them and there was something limp about the Sunday meal. Conversation went slowly and pointlessly, and after lunch most of them disappeared. Elaine and Kit went to lie down, and Pris, after helping Harriet for a few minutes with the dishes, went back to her own room. Only Joel and Gray stayed in the living room, talking.

It was a long afternoon. It had been raining and the sky was just beginning to clear at the edges. Overhead it was still gray so that the light was dim in the living room. They had not turned on the lamps and it was like a sort of twilight in there with the two men. When Harriet joined them she felt oppressed, not being able to see their faces clearly. They were discussing Gray’s future. He had nearly got his degree and was already looking around for a teaching job. Unfortunately, he was saying to Joel, even if he found one, he would not be able to start work until the next year.

“Kit’s doing so well,” Harriet said. “There doesn’t seem to be any reason why you should worry about that.”

Gray turned to look at her, but he was sitting with what light there was behind him, and his face was completely dark. “Kit’s done enough already,” he said. “I want to

start contributing my share." His voice might have come from anywhere in that corner of the room. It had no relation to his body, since he made no gesture to go with it. It gave Harriet a strange feeling that he was being oracular. She remembered when Kit had first started looking for work and Gray had said much the same sort of thing. Then she had thought of the protest as unimportant, but she was impressed by it now. She felt he was right, he should start doing something soon. She was embarrassed that she couldn't honestly contradict him, and had to let his sentence drop without answer to it.

Joel moved a little and took out a cigarette. The flame of his match showed her his face for a moment and she realized for the first time that he looked older. His face had always been lean, but there had been a kind of softness of flesh over the bones, a curve over the little projections that they made. Now every bone was angular, and in the match flame shadows brought out their outlines. She smiled across at him and thought he winked back, but she couldn't be sure.

"Why don't we all have a drink?" Joel said. "The ladies seem to have deserted us for good. It's five o'clock already."

Harriet felt no desire for one but when Gray agreed she got up to get out ice and glasses. When she came back into the living room with a tray, Pris had joined them and turned on the lights. She looked fresh. She had probably been taking a bath, and she was wearing one of her best dresses. It was black and had been bought to make her look mature, but it made you more aware of her round, childish face with its pink skin.

"Oh," she said, "a drink, that's good. I need one, sort of."

"What are you up to?" Joel asked her.

"I have a new beau," Pris told him, "and I want to be my girlish best."

"Somebody nice?" Harriet asked her.

"I don't know," Pris said. "I think Elaine would approve of him."

"You sound rather dubious yourself," Joel said.

"I don't know him very well, that's all," Pris told him. "And he's kind of young and callow."

Joel and Gray laughed. "Get a glass of milk ready for him, Harriet," Joel said. "He'll probably arrive in diapers."

"Leave me alone, will you?" Pris said, smiling at him. She seemed very easy and calm, and Harriet had the impression that she had made some kind of decision which allowed her to relax. Joel and Gray began to tease her and they could get no response out of her. Her answers were light and untouched, and she didn't attempt to hit back. Harriet enjoyed listening to them; it was a sort of pleasantries she had missed for some time. Gradually the room began to liven up. It was as if they had all been sleeping and were now stretching and gathering energy. The tempo of their speech increased and they made more gestures and moved around more. The lights helped the effect.

Elaine and Kit came in together with their arms around each other's waists.

"Oh, look, a drink," Kit said. She looked fresh and wide-awake. She went over to the tray and mixed herself a highball, splashing the soda carelessly into her glass so that it flowed over the side, and caught it with a swipe of her finger which she sucked. "Want one, Elaine?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Thanks, dear, I think I do," Elaine told her. She sat

down on the couch by Joel and smiled at him happily. "That nap made a difference," she said. "I feel much better."

"Good," Joel said. He patted her knee affectionately. "You look like a new woman."

"You're all dressed up, Pris," Elaine said, her look shifting to Pris, who was sitting on the piano stool with her knees crossed. "Are you going out?"

"Yes," Pris said. "For dinner. But I asked my young man in for a drink first. Hope you don't mind."

"He's not that awful Herbert Winters, is he?" Elaine asked.

"No," Pris told her. "This is a young man you'll just adore. He's the *crème de la crème* of Long Island. Has the most *aristocratic* family. You'll love him."

"God!" Joel said heartily. "Sounds worse and worse. Who is he, Pris?"

"His name is Kenneth Tryson, if that means anything to you," Pris said casually. She finished the last of her drink, letting the ice slide down her glass to hit her teeth and then fall back again when she put it down.

"It's nice that he has a good family," Elaine said, wrinkling her forehead a little bit, "but I hope he isn't one of those young degenerates, dear. You know, the inbred sort."

They laughed at her, Pris joining them, but she answered before the others had finished. "He hasn't got much of a chin," she told Elaine, "but he's full of good, red blood, and I haven't heard any rumors of incest in his family, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, no," Elaine said in horror. "Just first cousins or something like that. That's all I meant."



"Is he the café-society type?" Gray asked with an air of such academic interest that they laughed again.

"I don't know about that either," Pris said. "Although he's taking me to dinner at Twenty-One."

"That sounds nice," Elaine said complacently. "You'll get a very good dinner, dear."

"I'm getting more and more curious," Kit said. "Where'd you snag him, Pris? Has he got any sisters or mothers or things that might want to buy their dresses at Considine's?"

"Listen," Pris said. "You lay off him. You can get your commissions later. When we're married."

"Married!" Elaine said. "How long have you known him?"

"Oh, I've met him once or twice before," Pris said carelessly. "This is the first time I've been out with him. I'm just talking about the future, Elaine. We haven't reached any agreement yet."

"Oh," Elaine said. "You frightened me. You do talk such nonsense, Pris."

"Come on," Kit said, still eagerly. "Where'd you meet him?"

"He was introduced to me, strangely enough," Pris said, "by my good friend, Herbie Winters, whom all of you love so dearly. We met at a party given by a friend of Herbie's. Then we met again the other night at the Stork Club. And he asked me for a dance, and he joined us at our table, since he was alone. And, of course, with a little attention from me and the proper amount of digging, he asked me to dinner. It was hard work, but it was worth it."

"My God," Joel said. "The poor man. You've certainly got your hooks in him, Pris."

Pris looked down at her pointed pink finger-nails complacently. "I'm doing my best," she assured him.

"Hadn't we better mix some cocktails?" Harriet asked her. "Since you asked him up for a drink?"

"Oh, yes," Pris said. "I forgot to tell you, I bought some vermouth. Wait, I'll get it."

She got up hastily and ran down the hall, her high heels hitting the hardwood floors with sharp clacks, interrupted every now and then when they touched one of the little scatter rugs.

Kit went over to the mirror hanging on the wall and began to finger her hair. "Sounds like Pris has got a good thing," she said.

"She's not really serious, is she?" Gray asked her. "About marrying him, I mean."

"Who can tell?" Kit said. "Pris is an unfathomable wench."

"But it would be rather horrible if it were true," Gray said.

"Don't be so solemn, Gray," Kit said, coming back and sitting on the arm of his chair. "She certainly isn't going to do anything foolish if I know Pris. And anyway, the young man doesn't sound any too eager."

Joel got up and went over to fix himself another drink. He poured a heavy measure of whiskey in the bottom of his glass and added very little soda. "What I love about my sisters," he said, not speaking to anybody in particular, "is that they're all so practical."

"What I love about my brother," Kit said sharply, "is—" She stopped whatever she was going to say and said instead, "Haven't you been drowning your sorrows in drink a good

deal lately, Joel? Seems to me you were hitting it pretty hard last night."

"For the love of mud!" Joel said, and then commanded himself and grinned. "Hair of the dog," he told her.

Why am I always so afraid they'll quarrel nowadays, Harriet thought. They've always said rude things to each other, but they've never seemed to mind it. They seem to attack more vulnerable points now. Maybe they have more points that are vulnerable.

Pris came back, carrying the bottle of vermouth and trying to unwrap the tinfoil from its neck. She looked up at them as if she had not expected to see them there.

"By the way," she said, putting the bottle down on the drink tray, "I hope you'll all do me credit with Kenneth. Be your most charming, won't you?"

Elaine looked down at her gray velveteen housecoat. "Oh, dear," she said. "I wonder if I should put on a dress. Is this all right, Pris?"

"Oh, sure," Pris said, looking her over. "I want it to seem casual, you know. I'd hate to have you all sitting around looking dressed-up."

Elaine stood up. "I'll just put on a little lipstick, though," she said. Her skirt swept the floor as she walked across the living room, and Harriet thought she looked tired. She slumped a little, and it was odd to see Elaine slump when you thought of uprightness as part of her appearance.

"I hope to God Elaine doesn't make any of her breaks," Pris said, looking after her.

"Listen, darling," Kit said. "You ought to know Elaine well enough by now to know that she doesn't make any breaks except on purpose. She'll behave, don't worry."

"Say, you're giving me the jitters," Joel said. "What has this young man got that we haven't got?"

"Money," Pris said. It came out so swiftly that Harriet suspected it was involuntary. "If you want to know," she added defiantly.

"But Priss," Joel said laughingly. "How crass. Haven't you heard? All is not gold that glitters?"

"That's right," Pris said curtly. "But what Kenneth has isn't sequins."

"Boy!" Joel said. "What a hard-boiled little cuss you're turning out to be."

"The four-minute egg, they call me," Pris said. She still looked defiant, but Harriet thought that she was uncomfortable. She wished they would stop teasing her. They still treated her as if she were a child, she thought. They would be worried if they thought she was serious, so they laughed at her, and maybe in doing that they were driving her to the very things she joked about.

Elaine came back, looking around for their approval. In the yellow lamplight she was soft and pretty and the gray velveteen was very becoming. She had added a pair of heavy silver earrings.

"You'll ravish him," Joel said, getting up and putting his arm around her. He made the movement an excuse to go over to the drink tray and pour himself another drink.

A little pause came over them and they sat around uncomfortably. Harriet wanted to say something to start them talking again. It would be too bad if Tryson should come in when they were all feeling so stiff. Before she could think of something, though, the doorbell rang and Priss jumped up nervously to answer it. She took a last look around the living room before she went out, and the look

affected all of them. Harriet almost smiled to see Joel and Gray straightening their ties and stamping out their cigarettes, and Elaine putting her hand up to her hair again. Kit took an unnatural pose against the mantelpiece, one hand lying along it like a tragedienne. They were all of them ridiculously self-conscious. Harriet was glad that her chair was in a distant corner of the room where she would be inconspicuous.

In the hall they could hear Pris talking to someone, and his voice in reply, rather low. They didn't come in for a minute, and Harriet guessed that he was standing beside Pris while she hung up his hat and coat in the hall closet. She thought, this is awful, we mustn't be sitting around like a bunch of mummies. "Joel, you'd better get the cocktail shaker," she said to him, and her voice released all of them from their tense attitudes. Elaine smoothed her dress out over her lap and crossed her legs, and Gray got up with Joel. "I'll get some ice too," he said. They went out together hurriedly, as if they were glad to get away. Their movement through the room distracted the others for a second and when Pris brought her young man in none of them looked too self-conscious.

"Where's everybody?" Pris asked in bewilderment. "Elaine, this is Kenneth Tryson; my mother, Kenneth." She brought him over to where Elaine was sitting on the couch, and he bent down to shake hands with her. Harriet was glad to have the chance to look at him before he would be aware of it. He was not at all what she had imagined. She thought he would be a lean, bony faced young man with a small chin and blond hair. Instead, he was heavy and red-faced, and although his chin was weak, he had a very full red mouth over it which looked perpetually sulky.

Even when he smiled to speak to Elaine he looked as if he were frowning. His eyebrows were dark and his forehead had a great many wrinkles in it for a young man.

“And this is my sister-in-law, Harriet Randolph,” Pris said, bringing him around to Harriet and pausing a second to allow him to shake hands with her. “And this is my sister, Kit Beavers.”

Kit gave him her quick, friendly smile. “It’s quite a family, isn’t it?” she said. “There’re still more out in the kitchen. They’ll be in in a second.”

“Pris didn’t warn me,” he said, responding to her friendliness.

“I didn’t want to scare you away,” Pris said. She took his arm as if to lead him away from Kit. “Come on and sit down,” she said.

He picked one of the small straight chairs near the couch and sat on it uncertainly. Pris perched on the arm of the couch. Her position was casual, but she was obviously taut, and she held her hands tightly in her lap.

Elaine said sweetly to him, “I hope you don’t mind our informality, Mr. Tryson. Sunday afternoon is our time for rest. We’ve all just been sitting around ever since dinner.”

“I hate formality,” he said quickly and defensively. Harriet got the impression that he disliked the idea that he should be ceremonious. He’s got a chip on his shoulder about something, she thought. I never saw such a self-conscious, angry-looking young man.

Joel and Gray came in with the cocktail shaker and the ice. They looked cheerful, as if they had been telling each other jokes out in the kitchen. There was an atmosphere

of conspiracy about them; you could see them straighten their faces as they reached the living room again.

"My brother, Joel Randolph," Pris said, not getting up to make the introduction. "And Gray Beavers, my brother-in-law."

Tryson stood quickly and held out his hand to them. Their manner was very nice, Harriet thought. Joel was his easiest and Gray's reticent smile was pleasant. They set about fixing him a drink immediately, and drew him along with them in an unspoken invitation. The four women watched their backs as they stood before the little liquor table. They were held for a moment in silence, as if it were important to watch every commonplace movement. Then Pris leaned down and took up a cigarette but didn't light it. She twisted it in her fingers, tapping first one end, then the other, monotonously.

"Here, darling," Kit said, and lit a match for her. It was an impatient gesture, like a reproach to her for being so nervous, and Pris lifted her eyes to look in her face while she held the cigarette to the flame. They smiled very faintly at each other and Pris got up from her uncomfortable seat and settled herself down on the couch, crossing her legs and looking more natural.

The men returned with their own cocktails and one for each of the women. They sat down again and smiled at each other. Having the glasses to hold made them less awkward. Elaine looked with widened eyes around the circle of their faces. "Isn't it nice to be all cozy inside here?" she asked Tryson invitingly. "When it's such a depressing day."

"Don't talk to Kenneth about its being depressing," Pris said laughingly. "He likes rain, he's a farmer."

“Oh, are you really, Mr. Tryson?” Elaine said. “I didn’t know that. Where is your farm?”

“Up in South Norwalk, Connecticut,” Tryson said. He took a large swallow of his drink and looked defiantly around at the rest of them.

“What sort of farming do you do?” Joel asked him. “Dairy?”

“Both dairy and truck,” Kenneth said. “Although I’m thinking about adding an apple orchard too.”

“Oh, apples,” Elaine said. “They’re nice. Do you remember that farmer near us in South Wales, Pris? He had such charming little trees. I liked to see them, all cut so round and neat.”

“Does your whole family farm?” Kit asked him. Harriet smiled. She wondered if Kit still had an eye on his mother and sisters.

“Oh, no,” he said. “My family believe in leisure. I don’t live with them, their home is in Long Island. I run the farm by myself.”

“Do you make it pay?” Joel asked. Harriet was afraid that he was being offensive, but she remembered back to when she had first married him and how the whole family had asked her questions about herself. Their manner had been flattering more than anything else. They looked so genuinely interested, and you felt it was so important to them to know your background so that they could be more intimate with you. Probably young Tryson would have the same reaction.

He spoke rather stiffly, however. “Yes, of course,” he said. “It’s not just a hobby for me. It’s my real work.”

“Oh, yes,” Joel said, nodding to himself. His manner was respectful and pleasant and Tryson responded to it.



"I didn't like not having anything to do," he explained, "but I thought it was rather foolish to look for a job. You get so tired of these independent young men who take twenty-five-dollar-a-week jobs just to play at them. Not to mention their keeping somebody else out of work. So I decided that I'd put some of my capital into a farm and try to create a job for myself."

"That sounds like fun," Kit said. She left her position by the mantelpiece and came to sit nearer. "Did you know anything about farming before you started?"

"I took a year's course at Cornell," he said to her. "And I've got an excellent man working for me who's had a lot of practical experience. You find after a while that that's more important than all the things you learn out of books. He's apt to laugh at me for some of my notions, and I'm bound to say he generally turns out to be right."

Joel brought the cocktail shaker around and poured them all another drink. Tryson put his glass up so eagerly that Harriet suspected he felt awkward.

"Tell them about your research, Kenneth," Pris urged him. "They'd like to hear about that."

"It's not very interesting, really," he said to her. Harriet got the impression that he drew away from Pris every time she spoke to him so possessively. She's going to have a hard time with that young man, she thought. He's very wary.

"Yes, go ahead, tell us about it," Kit said. He responded to her more easily than to Pris. Harriet wondered with amusement if it were because Kit was married. "I've got a little laboratory," he told her. "And I'm doing some experimental work on breeds of cows. It's rather interesting. You see, cows can't sweat. And they've discovered that in hot climates cows run a perpetual fever, which is why they're

not very successful at dairying in the South. I'm working on a breed that can stand hotter climates. It doesn't affect my own farm at all, of course, but it would be a great thing for the country if we could find something out." Harriet got a curious impression that he was explaining himself so simply not because he was trying to make himself understood by them, but because he thought of the problem that way in his own mind. There was something of the dilettante in the way he spoke. "A great thing for the country" seemed to be a phrase that somebody else had used and he was quoting. She had no feeling of conviction in his excitement. He was interested in his experiments, she suspected, as you would be in a crossword puzzle. They were fun, but he probably didn't sacrifice anything to them.

"I have a friend who's an excellent biologist," he went on. "He works with me. Or rather I work with him. Harry doesn't think about anything else. He's a real slave-driver, and I let him have a free hand. He even carries the key to the laboratory; I can't get in unless he's with me."

"Doesn't seem to leave you much time for anything else," Joel said. "Your farm and your laboratory and all. Sounds rather confining."

"It doesn't have to be," Tryson said quickly. "The place is in good hands. I can leave it for months at a time if I want to. And it's so near New York that I can drive in for an evening any time I want."

"That's true," Elaine said, nodding her head. "That's a very nice arrangement. I envy you, Mr. Tryson."

"Oh, do call him Kenneth," Pris said impatiently. "Shouldn't she, Ken? You sound so formal, Elaine."

"I wish you would," Kenneth said, but he sounded a little

resentful. "Pris called me Kenneth the first time she met me," he added, grinning a little.

"You can't restrain Pris," Joel said. "She'd call the President by his first name within an hour after meeting him."

"I can't get used to 'Mr.,'" Pris said. "I'm still a little girl at heart, I guess." She smiled to Kenneth, mocking herself, and he smiled back at her reluctantly.

"I suppose we all get the same freedom?" Kit asked. Her voice was too light.

Kenneth didn't reassure her immediately and there was a momentary awkwardness. It must be a strange sensation for the Randolfs to feel brazen, Harriet thought. People are usually so charmed by their bluntness. Kit made some remark, to show that she was not offended at Kenneth's silence, and they recovered again, but it had been embarrassing and their conversation for a while after that sounded like a formula for polite social intercourse. They're behaving as if this were terribly important; probably Pris's joking beforehand scared them, but it's ridiculous for them to be awed by this stiff young man, Harriet thought. Why can't they see how superior they are to him, a clumsy, rude boy like this. She watched Joel get up and begin mixing another cocktail. He carried the shaker around, pouring it into the outstretched glasses, and when Kenneth tried to protest, he overrode him and filled his glass again. Pris reached out and touched Kenneth's arm. "You've got to keep up with me," she said to him. Harriet noticed that he looked down at her hand sharply as if it disturbed him, and she saw suddenly that Pris was tremendously attractive to him in a way he tried to resist. He's afraid of it, she thought. He smiled now nervously, still looking down at Pris's hand, and finally covered it for a second with his own. "All right," he said.

Joel, who had gone back to the table with the shaker, was filling his own glass again and he came over to sit down by Harriet with it still full. "You haven't drunk yours," he whispered to her.

"I don't feel much like it," she said. He took her glass out of her hand. "I'll take care of it for you," he told her, and drank what was left in it quickly, giving her back the emptied glass when he had finished. He began sipping his own drink immediately, while she watched him with concern. The others had left them alone for a few moments, but that didn't suit him and he got up and interrupted something Elaine was saying, drawing himself back into the conversation.

The drinks had begun to take their effect on the party. The process was too subtle to follow, but suddenly Harriet saw that they were talking easily and that gradually they were drawing Kenneth into it. He didn't become lively as the rest of them, but more serious, and he got into engrossed conversations with Elaine or Kit, talking heavily and keeping his eyes on the ground or his glass while he spoke. Still, as time went on, he expanded, dropping some of his fears and tightnesses. He's a solemn young man, Harriet thought, but at least he's not so afraid of us all now. Pris watched him a good deal and every now and then she spoke up to show her intimacy with him. It was a rather obvious way of going about things, but it grew more effective. Finally Kenneth was looking up at her and including her in his conversations. She got up once to empty an ashtray, and coming back, she pulled up a little footstool and sat by his feet. He seemed to pay no attention to her, but Harriet noticed the same little jump when she touched him, and this time she was almost shocked. Goodness, she thought, such a re-

pressed young man could be dangerous. She wondered if Pris knew how she affected him; she rather suspected she did.

It was aimless talk for all Kenneth's seriousness, but now and then Harriet learned something about him. "Hey, by the way, Joel," Pris said once. "Kenneth knows Mark Tillingier. Did you know that?"

"No," Joel said enthusiastically. "Do you know Mark? I haven't seen him for a long time. How is he?"

Kenneth shrugged his shoulders. "All right, I guess," he said. "You knew he got married, didn't you?"

"Yes," Joel said. "I hear she's a swell girl. Have you met her?"

Kenneth nodded. "She's very pretty," he said non-committally.

"That sounds damning," Kit laughed. "What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing, really," Kenneth said. "Maybe it'll work out all right."

"What do you mean?" Kit asked. "The marriage? What's wrong with her? Come on, Kenneth, let us have the dirt. Mark used to be an old beau of mine."

"Well, she was his secretary, you know," Kenneth said. "She married him for his money. Once in a while that sort of thing turns out to be all for the good, but there's a lot against it. I was very bothered about it. I tried to persuade Mark not to marry her. It was so clear to anyone else. But he said I was hipped on the subject." He looked down at his glass again, his face gloomy. "Maybe," he said.

"Did you have anything to go on?" Harriet asked him curiously. "Besides the fact that she was his secretary?"

“Well, it speaks for itself, doesn’t it?” Kenneth said beligerently.

Harriet leaned back in her chair as he went on talking. The boy was very revealing about himself. That little incident, his cautiousness with Pris, his frowning attitude towards all of them, all added up. As he loosened up more and more he went on confirming her feeling. He was self-conscious about his money to an almost pathological degree and he was mortally afraid of the effect it had on people. He distrusted everybody; all of his remarks were the crudely cynical remarks of a little boy who has only recently learned that there is no Santa Claus. In somebody else it might have been an affectation, but he was unquestionably genuine. He kept talking about the uselessness of the rich, and how much he wanted to do for the world with his money. They got a past history of all the different ventures that he had tried, ranching, sponsor to a concert organization, theatrical failures, book publishing, all of them projects which had either been unsuccessful or in which he had lost interest. It was going to be rather hard on Pris, with her obvious poverty, Harriet thought, to convince him of any real liking.

She moved over to the couch to sit beside Elaine. Pris said something particularly flippant about his farm and suggested that he raise silver foxes because she “wanted a new coat.” His face grew redder and more sullen than ever and Harriet saw that he was offended.

“Silver fox farming is a very delicate business, and an expensive one, isn’t it?” she asked him seriously. He looked immediately grateful and swung around in his chair so that he faced her.

“Yes, it is,” he said. He launched into a long discussion

of its problems and why he had decided against it. It was only when he talked about his work that he showed any sort of liveliness, Harriet noticed.

"Gee, I'm sorry you gave up the idea," Pris said. "Think of all those nice pelts. You could have a whole string of blondes on your trail, Kenneth, if you'd taken up silver fox farming."

"That certainly wouldn't be what I'd want," Kenneth said stiffly. He looked down fleetingly at Pris's blonde head, and Harriet smiled, it was so apparent what was going through his mind.

They went on like that, striking some sensibility every now and then which made him pull up stiffly, but in a blundering way they were winning him, Harriet thought. Perhaps it was because they made him laugh. She suspected that he was seldom treated with so little ceremony and that he probably liked it. He looked as if he wanted to stay on and on. It was too bad, Harriet thought, but Pris was beginning to look restive. She was only waiting for a good opening to suggest they leave.

"Listen," Joel said, looking across at Harriet. "I'm starving, darling. Can't you rustle up a sandwich or something?"

Kenneth looked down at his watch reluctantly. This was the chance for which Pris had been waiting.

"I hope you're thinking about dinner," she said to him. She smiled apologetically. "I've been longing to have you say something about it, but I was too polite to remind you."

"Hah!" Joel said, laughing.

"We should be going, you're right," Kenneth said. He still lingered and Elaine and Kit were not very helpful to Pris in encouraging him to go. None of them made the sort

of movement that would release him and he leaned back in his chair again as if he had given up for the moment.

Pris stood up and reached down for his hand. "Now that it's been suggested," she said, "did I mention that I was hungry?"

He looked up at her impatiently, and his hand jerked back from her momentarily. Then the touch must have softened him. His fingers curled around hers. "Well, if you think we ought to," he said, looking back at the others for support. But none of them tried to keep him now, the moment of warmth was broken. He stood up slowly and began saying good-bye to them, with Pris by his side to hurry him on. Harriet felt that she was only restraining herself from grabbing his arm and tugging at him. She's afraid we'll monopolize him, but it's a shame, he was just beginning to have a nice time, she thought.

After they had gone, she went into the kitchen to find the others something to eat. She heard them talking behind her in the dining room, and now and then there was a laugh which made her feel lonely. I wonder if Pris really likes this boy, she thought, there's something so calculated about the way she treats him. I hope she doesn't get too involved with him, he's such a neurotic, tortured kind of a person. I kind of like him, really, and I feel sorry for him, but heavens, it would be hard to get along with him. I wouldn't wish that on Pris.

Joel came out after her and offered to help. "Thanks, darling," she said. She handed him the carving knife and he started to slice the ham.

"How do you like young Tryson?" she asked him. She waited anxiously for his answer. She wanted him to tell her



that she was right, that they had all seen what she had seen, and that they were all worried.

She could only see his blond head bent to his work, with the bare electric light shining on it from above. "Oh, I don't know," he said. His voice was casual, and he picked up a little snippet of the meat and put it in his mouth. "Seems like a nice enough guy to me," he said.

## 3

The little Christmas tree standing on the table beside the window had been pretty at first. The packages around it had made it seem fat and prosperous. But now they had taken them all off and opened them, and some of the candy canes had gone too. It looked tawdry now in the middle of an untidy living room with its pieces of red or green paper and scraps of ribbon all over the floor.

Kit and Pris and Elaine had gone to an afternoon movie, leaving Joel to go to sleep. He had been drinking too much again, and Harriet was glad that the heavy Christmas meal on top of the cocktails made him sleepy instead of wanting to go out and do something. She sat on the couch with her feet curled under her and watched Gray doing the last part of the crossword puzzle. She was too lazy to bring out her knitting and yet was a little restless with having nothing to do with her hands.

"I can't get this 'African antelope,'" Gray said. He put the paper down and lit himself a cigarette. "It'll just have to go unfinished."

"It's 'gnu,' or something, isn't it?" Harriet asked carelessly. He picked the paper up again and looked at it.

"Ummm," he said. "That fits. Thanks. Now I have a perfect record."

They smiled at each other happily. "Don't you feel smart when you finish the whole thing?" Harriet asked him.

He nodded. "And so weak-minded when I don't," he said. He leaned over to offer a cigarette and she took one from him. She tapped the end on her hand while she waited for him to get out a match. He was always a quiet person, she thought, but he seemed unusually so today. Perhaps because Kit had been so gay. Gray had sat back in his chair and said nothing all morning and afternoon. It wasn't very normal; you usually felt he was enjoying everything and sharing it, even if he didn't talk much. But he had been abstracted. She wondered if this ceaseless looking for work was beginning to depress him. He hadn't talked about it for a long time.

"What luck with finding a job?" she asked him, not to remind him of it needlessly, but because she hoped that in talking about it he would be able to say out some of the things that had been worrying him.

"I can't find anything," he said. "And I don't know what I'd do if I could. Kit won't want to leave New York now that she's getting along so well at Considine's."

"Oh, golly," Harriet said. "I hadn't thought about that."

"I hadn't either until the other day," Gray told her. "When Kit reminded me. It seems there's a quiet little plot on foot to ease Gladys Stevens out of her job. It's all part of the new policy of smart, well-bred employees that Kit sold them when she first started there. Naturally, Kit will take Gladys's place. And when she becomes a buyer, she'll be making too much of a salary to even think of quitting to go with me to some little middle-western college."

"Gladys Stevens!" Harriet said in surprise. "But I thought she was so good."

"Good, but not elegant enough now," Gray said. "You remember how Kit used to stick up for her? Well, now she dislikes her violently. Every other word is a criticism of her. She has no 'tone,' Kit says, whatever that is."

"That doesn't sound like Kit," Harriet said. "I'm sure this wasn't Kit's idea, at any rate."

"You don't think so?" Gray said bitterly. "Because it doesn't sound like Kit? Well, what does Kit sound like now? She isn't the person she used to be. And she hasn't yet become the person she's going to be. She's nothing now, she's in the process of renovation. Kit hasn't got a character any more."

"Gray, you've been quarreling with her and you're still angry," Harriet accused him. "Or you wouldn't talk like this."

"No, I haven't," Gray told her. "We don't quarrel any more. We used to for a while, but Kit's too indifferent now to be bothered by my objections."

"She's just excited by her work, that's all," Harriet said. "The excitement will die away after a while and she'll pay more attention to you."

Gray stood up and walked across the room to the mantelpiece. He leaned against it, and Harriet, looking at him, remembered how Kit always stood there, it was her favorite position, with one elbow up, leaning on one foot.

"It isn't attention that I want," he said. His voice was restrained and a little scratchy. "I want her to be as simple and as generous as she's always been—and as lovely. She's losing her loveliness for me, Harriet. Do you think I'm crazy? I think her face is changing, it looks harder, it looks more like Gladys Stevens's."

"Yes, you are crazy," Harriet said, smiling a little bit.

“And you’re more upset than you should be. Kit’s growing older, she’s becoming more complicated, that’s all.”

“Look, Harriet,” Gray said. “I’ve been wanting to talk to you about this for some time. You’re an outsider too, and you’re married to Joel. Aren’t you worried about the change in him?”

“Joel’s not changing!” Harriet said indignantly. “I’m as much in love with him as ever. More so, I think.”

“He’s changed,” Gray said emphatically. “I know all about you, Harriet, because we both have the same background, the same kind of upbringing. I know why you fell in love with Joel. I fell in love with Kit for the same reason. We think they live life more completely, they feel things physically, because they act by instinct. We think they’re complete naturals. That charms us; they have more fun, we think, than the thoughtful people. Isn’t that true?”

Harriet started to say something and then closed her mouth again to think. “I suppose that’s a simplification of it,” she said finally. “I know that’s what I like about the family, and I suppose Joel is part of it. Only there’s more than that, Gray, he’s stronger than me, and I love that too.”

“Of course he’s stronger, or he was,” Gray said. “He never had anything to worry him. None of them ever did. They just went their way blithely without any distractions or hindrances. And they got a terrible amount of enjoyment out of it. That’s what fascinated us, Harriet. And that’s what they’re beginning to lose now, that’s why I’m frightened.”

“But they aren’t,” Harriet said. “They can’t change their natures. People can’t change their natures.”

“No,” Gray said. “Not exactly. But they can come up against problems that are too much for them, and then they

begin to break down. Joel and Kit are being forced to think, and they're not used to it. It's too hard on them, Harriet, it's making them crumble."

"That's nonsense!" Harriet said indignantly. She almost hated Gray for a second; he made her think of Elaine and her despair. Elaine was crumbling, but not Kit. Not Joel. She tried futilely to argue with Gray.

"Kit and Joel are doing magnificently at their jobs," she said. "Not many people with their training could have sailed into business and done as well at it as they've done."

"I don't know about Joel," Gray said. "Except that he's drinking a lot too much nowadays. But as for Kit, she's sacrificing so much to do well at her job that it isn't worth it. No intelligent person has to become as hard, as cut-throat, as Kit is becoming. I love her a lot, Harriet. As much as I always did. But I can't bear to see her grow so hard."

"You have to be tough to do well at business," Harriet said.

"Frankly, I think a good deal of that is a myth," Gray said. "But if it isn't, I'd prefer to see Kit a dismal failure. Listen, Harriet, you know other successful people, they're not pirates. Kit and Joel, and even little Pris with her wealthy young farmer, they've all lost their generosity, their unselfishness. It seems to me that they're going at things too hard. They're beating against a wall they don't understand. They're not thinking people, they're not geared for it, everything's been too easy for them. When things become hard suddenly they have no weapons, they go on acting instinctively and unreasonably. Only it isn't charming any more, it's terrible."

"Don't, Gray!" Harriet said. "I don't like the way you're talking." She was frightened and upset by his words. They

put into speech things that had been worrying her for months, and there was just enough truth to them to make her wonder if he could be right about the rest. "They are trying to adapt themselves," she said. "And maybe they're making mistakes, everybody does. But they'll get settled soon. They've had to change their lives so suddenly, Gray, most people never have to do that. Most changes come gradually, not all at once like theirs. But Kit will straighten out. I'm not worried about Joel. I don't care what you say, he hasn't changed."

"I used the wrong word," Gray said heatedly. "It's not that they're changing. It's that events are changing and they're being made to look unpleasant by them."

"I think you probe and analyze too much," Harriet said. "It's just what I told you. Kit is growing up. Perhaps she's lost some youthful qualities that you liked. But she'll have others just as good. And you're trying to find an explanation for it. You're trying to force her into some sort of frame. I know people like you, my father was like that. Everything has to fit into an outline, with 'a' here and 'b' there. And I think it's nonsense. People like Kit and Joel don't try to figure people out that way and they're better at human relationships than either of us."

"They used to be," Gray said gloomily. "But are they now? That's what's worrying me."

"I don't see why you say that," Harriet said. "You think Kit is knifing Gladys Stevens in the back. Well, if she is, it's because Gladys taught her those tricks. The only time Kit's been dishonest was when she said she liked Gladys. You can't blame her for that. She was simply trying to kid herself into it. That's not harmful, is it?"

"It wouldn't be if it were the whole story," Gray said. "But it isn't."

"Don't just say 'it isn't' so flatly," Harriet said. "I can't argue with you if you're being dogmatic."

"I don't want to argue with you," Gray said. His voice was quieter now. "That's why I didn't go on. You're angry because you're afraid I'm telling the truth. You won't admit it to yourself, but it's so, isn't it?"

"No," she said. "You're all wrong. You're the kind of person I'm trying to escape from. I married Joel to get away from your kind of person. Like my father and his friends. Always uncertain, always arguing, never happy. I hated that, and I got out of it. I'm happier with Joel than I've ever been in my life. Joel and his whole family. I love them all. They make me feel gay and sure of myself and comfortable. They make me think that worrying is foolish and that thinking doesn't help."

"In other words, you want to live like an animal," Gray said.

"No," Harriet said. "Not like an animal. But like an ordinary human. I don't want to be ahead of the crowd. I want to be with them and share their feelings. That's the way to feel the world move."

"But you can't," Gray said gently. "That's the trouble. You're not built like that. You're intelligent. You're sensitive. You can't repress those qualities all your life. You'll always be looking on at the Randolfs. Maybe you'll continue to admire them, but you won't be one of them."

"I'm one of them now," Harriet said proudly. "I'm part of them."

"You're becoming more and more necessary to them,"

Gray said, still gently. "Because you're stronger than they are."

"I don't see how you can talk that way," Harriet said angrily. "And still claim you love Kit."

"I'm not kidding myself, that's all," Gray said. "But I do." His face grew warm and affectionate. "She's still the most delightful person I've ever known, I don't think I could do without her. But there's no sense in trying to fool myself about it, is there?"

"You're fooling yourself more than you think," Harriet said. "You've got it all figured out and you don't look at anything that doesn't fit in with your theory. You're—"

The doorbell rang three times, interrupting them, and they began to look at each other sheepishly, ashamed of their heat. Joel came down the hall, rubbing his head and his face to get rid of his sleep, and pushed the little buzzer.

"Must be the family," he said. His speech was a little thick and his eyes were bloodshot. He saw Harriet and grinned, holding out his arm to her. "I'm going on the wagon," he said. "This holiday season has been too much for me."

There was a knock on the front door and Gray went past them to open it. Elaine and the two girls came in.

"I forgot my key and Pris forgot hers," Elaine announced. "Isn't that strange? I'm glad you all are still here. Joel, you look terrible!"

He stuck out his tongue at her and she looked at it seriously. "It's quite coated," she told him.

"Now that she's satisfied herself about that, she'll forget him completely," Kit said laughingly. "I remember when we were kids, how she used to murmur something vaguely about castor oil, but we never had to take it."



"Didn't you?" Elaine said, trying to remember. "I thought I gave it to you."

Gray took her coat for her and went over to Kit for hers. She smiled at him and stood on tiptoe to kiss him on the cheek. "It was a lousy movie, darling," she said. "You're lucky you didn't go. What have you and Harriet been doing, you look very lively?"

"A crossword puzzle," Gray said. "We just finished it."

"So that's what professors are for!" Kit said.

They came into the living room in a body, laughing and talking all at once, and Harriet backed up in front of them. She saw Joel look at the bottle of whiskey still out on the little liquor table, make a face, and pour himself a glass of water. She smiled at him tenderly, and smiled too at Pris, who went over beside him and put her arm around his waist. "Give me a sip?" she said.

Their happiness and good nature was thick around them, and Harriet looked across at Gray. He shrugged his shoulders slightly and she would have been angry at him again except that just then Kit said something to him and he looked down at her smilingly. He was simply upset because of some row or other, Harriet thought, and I took him too seriously. He'll forget all about it in another day.

## 4

Harriet stood with her hands deep in the soapy water in which she was washing underclothes. The bathroom was steamy and it was the first time all day she had really been warm. She must call the superintendent about the heat, she thought. It was snowing outside and damp, which made the cold more penetrating. Although Harriet's hands were warm, she could see, whenever she looked up at herself in

the mirror, that her nose was still reddened, and she shivered a little from memory of the chill in her bones.

In Ohio, her father's little frame house had been hard to keep warm. The wind came through the cracks, it was badly constructed, and in winter she had had to go about nailing weather-stripping to the lattice work around the foundations. They got used to it by wearing sweaters and woolen tennis socks over their stockings. And at night they slept heavily under dozens of blankets, dressed in flannel pajamas. The worst had been getting up in the early morning. Her father had been delicate ever since they got out there and Harriet had had to build up the fire in the furnace. It had been an agony each morning to exert the will-power necessary to put the first foot out of bed and to close the window left healthily open. Then going quietly downstairs in the gray, still house and down the cement cellar steps, which held the chill so that if her bare ankles brushed against the wall she was made colder still. Then the water to be put on for coffee, and then climbing the stairs again to dress in a cold bathroom. She thought now, how easily you get out of such hard habits. Thinking back on it, I don't know how I did it every day. It's good to know that no matter where we live now, there will always be Joel to go down and light the furnace, to put the water on for coffee. To take care of her and cherish her as if she were frail and had never taken care of herself for so many years.

She let the soapy water out, holding up the mass of wet, pink underwear, and turned on the hot-water faucet to rinse out the bowl. When she had plugged it again and mixed cold with the hot water, she dropped the underwear back in and watched the little, cloudy bubbles of suds come out in the clear water.

As it so often did when she was alone, her mind strayed back in her past, wondering about it, contrasting it with her life now. But, she thought, there's a difference. I'm getting more tolerant, I know now that it was good training taking care of Dad the way I did. It's given me a sort of confidence. I'm afraid of people, but not of things. I feel I could always take care of myself. I enjoy having Joel take care of me, but it's really a luxury to let him do it.

She ran the clothes through several rinsings and took them out, squeezing them carefully and gently in her hands. When she had been a little girl, a sister of her father's had taken her on yearly shopping expeditions and bought utilitarian clothes for her, clothes that she would not grow out of within the next year. She remembered, looking down at her soft, lace-trimmed brassières and panties, that she had worn long woolen underwear to school in the winter, although the other children never had. And in gym, when they took off their shoes and stockings so as not to dent the floor, the legs of her long drawers would come tumbling down although she stuffed them in her bloomers to hide them. They had been so hideous and nobody else had ever worn them. She had rebelled against them finally and taken a pair of scissors and cut the legs off. Her father had never said anything and that was the first time that she had learned that she could go her own way. It had given her a sense of responsibility, curiously enough, and instead of running wild she had become more thoughtful and careful about her behavior. She had even lied sometimes to other children and pretended that her father had told her she could not do this and could not do that because their mothers forbade them things and she would have felt neglected if she had not had some authority to obey.

In those days, before she was old enough to keep house herself, her father hired a maid who slept in. Harriet had never known one maid for any length of time because most of them left after a while. The quiet that must be maintained for her father's sake, and the dullness of the household, drove them all away. The last one they had, when Harriet was sixteen and in her last year of high school, probably would have stayed longer. She had discovered how to cheat Harriet's father on the marketing expenses, and was making a good thing out of it. It was Harriet's discovery of this that made her take over the housekeeping herself. It had started temporarily, but nobody had ever been able to keep her father so comfortable, and except for a weekly maid to help with the heavy cleaning, they had never had another one since.

After she had come to New York, her father had moved to the faculty club, leaving the house empty, and was living there. It probably was what he would have liked to do for years. There he could go his own way completely and there would be no household arrangements to disturb him. She thought of him now and wondered if he missed her. His letters to her were warmer than anything he had ever said to her personally. But then, she thought, smiling a little, her father was always better on paper.

There was a sound in the hall, which she heard now that the water was no longer running. She hung the last of her clothes on the wooden rack which ran up to the ceiling on a pulley, and hoisted it up. The noise came again, like somebody stumbling, and she opened the door and looked across to their room to see what it was.

Joel was standing just inside the door, rubbing his shin where he had bumped into a chair. He looked untidy,

and she realized as he put his leg down and looked at her in embarrassment, that he had been drinking too much again. She wondered what he was doing home in the middle of the afternoon.

"Did your boss give you the day off or something?" she asked him.

"No," Joel said tantalizingly, without anything to follow it up, and he sprawled on their studio couch, stretching his legs out in front of him. She came slowly into the room. "I just took it off myself," he told her finally.

"But why, Joel!" she said in bewilderment. Since they had been married, Joel, who was never ill, hadn't missed a day at the office. She had been proud of him for that, and pleased because she guessed that it stayed exciting for him; that was what made him so regular, he was always eager to go there.

"I'm supposed to be seeing a guy," Joel told her. "But I decided not to. They don't know at the office."

"What about the man you're supposed to see?" Harriet said. "Didn't you have an appointment with him?"

"I called it off," Joel told her. He looked up at her with mock penitence. "Don't scold me, Harriet, darling Harriet," he said. "Don't be a gloom. Rejoice. You've got your husband home with you"

She forced herself to smile. Poor Joel, she thought. It must be rather hard on him to be married to a girl like me. I didn't realize that I put him so on the defensive; he expects a scolding.

"I do," she said. "You're just in time to fix this chair. Look, the stuffing's coming out the bottom of it. I wish you'd nail some canvas over it to hold it up." She squatted

on the floor to show him, and he came over beside her and got down, rather unsteadily, to look.

"Sure," he said. "See, I knew you needed me. I'm psychic, that's what I am. Psychic."

"I'll get a hammer and the canvas," she said. "I bought some yesterday."

She went swiftly down the hall, feeling afraid to leave him alone long, and bumped into Pris, who was coming out of the living room. "What's my little brother doing home so early?" Pris asked her. "He's tanked, isn't he?"

Harriet smiled. "He's playing hookey," she said. "I'm putting him to work." She got the hammer and nails down off the closet shelf where they kept them, and knelt down to undo the package of canvas she had left on the floor.

"Here, I'll do that," Pris said, stooping too. "Can I watch? I bet it'll be a picnic. He bumped into the wall four times going down the hall."

"Well," Harriet said dubiously. She didn't want Joel laughed at, and she was afraid that Pris was in no mood to be gentle with him.

Pris took it for an answer, and throwing the paper and string aside, picked up the canvas and preceded her down the hall. Harriet followed her reluctantly.

Joel was still sitting on the floor beside the chair, staring at it thoughtfully. He turned when they came in and held out his hand for the hammer. Obviously he was making an effort to seem sober. "This won't take long," he told Harriet with great dignity. He got up stiffly and turned the chair over on its side. "Now we'll just have to cut this canvas," he told her. He looked around him helplessly and she went to her workbasket for a pair of scissors.

"I'll do that, Joel," she said.

"No, no," Joel said. He pushed his head forward argumentatively. "You just sit down, Harriet, I'm going to do the whole thing."

Pris, as an indication to Harriet, seated herself on the couch and crossed her legs with an air of great interest.

Joel picked up the scissors clumsily and began to cut the cloth in great jagged strips. It made Harriet nervous to watch him, she found she was holding her breath, but she forced herself not to interfere. Pris was grinning happily.

"There," Joel said. "That's enough." He nodded to himself. "Plenty," he added. He put some of the nails in his mouth and took up the hammer. "Now, let's see," he said seriously, studying the bottom of the chair. Even though he was co-ordinating so badly, he handled the hammer expertly, and although he missed the nails several times, he drove them all in finally. It was a ragged, untidy job, but when he put the chair back on its feet again, it served; they could no longer see the bottom of it, hanging down below the frame.

"Thanks, dear," Harriet said. "That's fine." She wished that Pris would leave them alone, she wanted to get him to take a nap. But she only leaned back comfortably and Harriet saw that she intended to stay.

"Hello, Pris," Joel said, as if he saw her for the first time. "How's your love life?"

"Barren," Pris said.

"Barren?" Joel asked solicitously. "My little sister barren. Oh, I see, that's good, ha, ha, ha." He began to laugh as if she had made a great joke and Pris frowned.

"Evidently you're in no condition for idle banter," she said, and stood up. Harriet was sorry that she was peeved, but glad that something could make her go.

She put out her hand to touch Pris's, and Pris, looking down at it, smiled suddenly. "He's looping, isn't he?" she whispered to her. "I'll leave him to you. I don't envy you.

"Good-bye, children," she said out loud. Joel came over to her and put his arm around her shoulders. "You going?" he asked her. "What for? Did Harriet tell you to go away? Don't go."

"What's the matter?" Pris said bluntly. "Afraid to be alone with your wife? Let go of me, Joel, I've got things to do."

"Oh, yes," Joel said, dropping his arm from her shoulders. "Of course, I'm sorry, Pris." He was pulling himself together again with the same air of extreme gravity. Pris smiled at him and then at Harriet and went out. He stood looking after her, as if he weren't sure that she had gone.

Harriet moved slightly on the couch, and put her hand up to her forehead. He was so strange, and childish, she didn't quite know what to say to him. It wasn't that she minded so much his being drunk, but that she was out of touch with him completely, and she didn't know how she should treat him.

"I'm sorry, Harriet," Joel said, turning around suddenly. She jumped a little and looked up at him. His face was very serious, he looked almost as if he were about to cry, and she felt suddenly stirred by it and put out her arms to him. He came over and sat down beside her, resting his head on her shoulder. Her sweater muffled his speech so that she could hardly hear what he was saying.

"It's that damn Tyler," he said. "I didn't know a man could be so dirty. And I was a friend of his, too. It was dirty."

"Tyler?" she asked. "Who's he? What did he do, Joel?"



"You know," he said impatiently, making a gesture with his hand that caught her cheek and brushed against it roughly. "I told you about him, Henry Tyler. He got me that Conway account, remember?"

"Conway's drugs?" she asked, thinking back.

"Yes," he said. "He's taken it away. I've lost the account."

"Oh, darling," she said, genuinely troubled. She put her arms around his shoulders, holding him like a baby. "What happened?"

"That's the terrible part of it," Joel said. "He didn't like the way I handled it. And he went to old MacCrae and told him so. Said that I was careless and didn't have any decent ideas. Didn't have any ideas! Isn't that dirty?"

"What did MacCrae say?" Harriet said, wrinkling her forehead.

"He bawled me out good!" Joel said. He put his head up now and looked at her, taking her hand. "Said he'd give me one more chance, that they'd never had a complaint like that before about a man in a responsible position. That I wasn't fit to hold it if I couldn't do better. God, it was awful!"

"Oh, darling," Harriet said again. She was shocked and frightened.

"Can you imagine anything so dirty?" Joel insisted. "All right, if he doesn't like my work, let him take his account away. But going in to see MacCrae and making a special point of telling him it was all my fault. Doesn't he know that people lose jobs that way? Isn't that dirty?"

"It is," Harriet said emphatically. "Didn't you go to college with him?"

"Yes, but that's all over now," Joel said. "That's what

he said to me. 'This isn't college any more, Randolph,' he said. 'This is the world, and I'm trying to earn a living just as much as you are. I can't try to cover up for you just because we used to play tennis together.'

"When did he tell you that?" Harriet asked him.

"Afterwards," Joel said. "I went over to see him and told him what I thought of him. I told him plenty, the dirty skunk. He talked big, but he won't forget what I said."

"Oh, Joel, darling," Harriet said, her throat stretched to tears. "That won't help."

"I know it won't," Joel said. He put his head down against her shoulder again. "But I had to do something, Harriet. I had to do something."

She held him against her sickly, thinking about the time they had had dinner together in Enrico's and he had given her such confidence in him. She had been sure of him ever since that night, he had not talked about his work, and she had thought that it was going well. Now she realized sickeningly that since she had had no hint of this trouble, she might have been deceived all the time. Perhaps he had been doing badly all along; she couldn't tell. There was no way of knowing. The old lack of confidence came back, and bewilderment.

"Harriet," he said softly.

She bent down to him. "What, dear?" she asked him.

"I'm no good, Harriet," he said. He refused to look at her and continued to pour out words into her shoulder. She began looking at the wall in front of her, sightlessly, holding her head up as if she were afraid the tears which were growing in her eyes would spill, if she leaned down. "I've never been any good," he said. "I thought it was easy at first, but everything's gone wrong. All my mistakes, one by

one, every day when I go in there's something else turned up. I try to hide them or cover them up, but I can't do that all the time. I'm a failure, that's all, I can't conceal it any more."

"Joel, dear," she whispered miserably, convinced, but trying to reassure him. "Aren't you just worried about this Conway business? There are other accounts, Mr. MacCrae gave you another chance, you'll get along all right."

"No," he said. "I'm not fitted for it, that's the trouble, Harriet. Tyler showed me that. He's a skunk, but he's right, Harriet. Men have to earn their living. You can't trust them and get along with them the way I did in college. I didn't know that, I've been a fool, everybody's made a fool out of me. Tyler told me you've got to be thinking about your work all the time, how to do a good job, trying to think of bright ideas, watching out to see that somebody else doesn't trip you up. I hate him, but by God he's right. And I just don't fit into all that. It scares me, Harriet, can you imagine, I'm scared? I don't know what to do."

"There, there," she said unconsciously, as if she were trying to put him to sleep, stroking his forehead, and his rumpled fair hair. "It'll be all right in the morning, Joel, you'll see."

She began to think about their future and what she could do to help it. She really ought to look for a job, she supposed, but she had no actual training for that either. She remembered a clipping she had seen in the Sunday papers advertising a home course in stenography. I'll borrow Pris's typewriter and try to learn it at home, she thought. Then I won't have to scare Joel, and I can be prepared if he should lose his job. She couldn't tell from his wild way of talking whether he was in danger of losing it or not. He

was drunk, she must remember, and it was true MacCrae had thought enough of him to give him another chance. Maybe he was unnecessarily scared, she'd never have to look for work. But it would be a good plan to be prepared; she'd send for that course tomorrow. She would study while Joel was away, and perhaps she wouldn't even have to tell him what was in her mind.

"Do you despise me, Harriet?" Joel said. She thought she had never seen him so defenseless, and it touched her, but at the same time she lost some of the feeling she had had of his superiority. She quarreled with herself for feeling that way. It's unjust of me to dislike him for being really honest with me. People rarely ever talk so freely; he's using me to argue out all his feelings. He's telling me everything, all the things that people may think to themselves at night, but that they keep to themselves in the daytime. I should be pleased and love him more deeply for it. He's talking to me as he would to his mother, but that's the trouble, it makes me feel like a mother.

Joel looked up and pulled at her hand and she realized that she hadn't answered him. "Do you, Harriet?" he said again, and she made herself speak warmly and instantly. "Of course not, darling," she told him.

"I wanted to take care of you, you know that," Joel told her. "When we got married, I thought, you would never have to worry again, and never have to work so hard. But since then everything's gone wrong. You haven't got your own home any more, you have to work all day, taking care of my mother and sister. I've brought you more worries than you ever had before."

"But, Joel, dear," she said. "I don't mind. I'd want to

share everything with you. This is just temporary trouble, we'll get out of it."

"No, no," he said insistently. "That isn't what I wanted. I wanted to make everything easy for you. I wanted you to have servants and nice clothes, and parties and things. I wanted to teach you not to be afraid of people and to know how lovely and attractive you are, and how people like you. I wanted you to have children and have nurses to take care of them, and I wanted to take you traveling and show you all the places you've read about. Honestly, Harriet, I thought I could give you all those things. I thought I could be so good for you. I didn't know what I was asking you to take on."

"But, honey," she said. "It doesn't matter. I've never had those things anyway, how could I miss them?"

"I wanted to teach you not to worry," he said, not paying any attention to her. "How do you like that! Not to worry. Now every minute of your day is something new to worry about."

"I'm perfectly happy, Joel," she said. She made her voice firm so that he would listen to it. "Listen," she said, shaking him slightly. "Do you hear me? I'm happy, really I am."

"Sure," he said. "You'd be happy, because you're used to taking care of people. But I wanted you to have something more than that. I promised your father. I told him—"

"My father!" she said sharply. "What do you mean?"

"Sure," Joel said. "I got a letter from him when we were married. I never showed it to you, he asked me not to. He said that he knew now he'd never given you a normal childhood. He said you'd worked hard for him all your life, and that he hoped that in marrying me you'd be getting your reward. That made a big impression on me," he said, nod-

ding his head. "I was your reward. I really thought I would be, Harriet. Your reward." His voice grew softer, it sounded almost as if she were going under ether, only it was he that was fading away, not she. Abruptly he had gone to sleep on her shoulder and she continued to sit there for a while, listening to his deep breathing and thinking. So her father realized that he had given her a meager life. And hoped that Joel would give her something better. She was touched, and repentant that she had thought he was so unaware. She wondered what he was doing now; it would be nice to see him again, she thought. But she couldn't afford to travel right now and he would never come away from his work. She looked down at Joel and realized that his neck was a little twisted. Slipping away from under him, she held him up with her arms until she could put his head down straight on the pillow and pull his legs up so that he lay along the whole couch. She went to their closet and pulled down the down quilt that she stored up there during the day, and spread it over him. He rolled over, still in his sleep, and put his cheek on his hand contentedly. He looked relaxed and very defenseless, that way.

PART V

*January 1940-March 1940*

NEW YORK





HARRIET took the bottle of hand lotion from her bureau and began rubbing it into her hands. To keep them soft in this weather she had to use the lotion whenever she finished washing the dishes. She looked regretfully down at their redness. The girls she had seen in offices always managed to have such white, well-manicured hands. Hers would have to be like that if she started looking for a job.

The apartment was quiet now. Joel had gone some hours ago to work, Pris had left, and Elaine was in her room doing something or other. Harriet opened her desk and brought out the typewriting exercise book she had bought, and a sheaf of five-and-ten-cent-store yellow typing paper. She had borrowed Pris's typewriter, and she set it up on the floor beside her. She had a set of blank rubber caps for the keys which she began to fit onto them. Her hands were so dry and chapped that once or twice when they slipped in forcing on the caps, they bled. The sharp metal edges of the keys hurt her and she bit the inside of her lip with pain.

When she finished she opened up the book to the first page and poised her fingers in the position required. Keeping her eyes on the book, she began to type, feeling very conscious of her own clumsiness. Gradually, as she had to do the first exercise over and over again, she began to acquire a certain rhythm, and she noticed that as long as it went steadily she made no mistake. Only now and again her mind interfered, interrupting the monotony of her

movements, and then she stumbled and pressed the wrong key, or hit one unevenly.

After a while the work became pleasant. She enjoyed the little struggle of every fresh exercise, trying this time to do it perfectly, trying to keep her fingers steady and sure, and her touch even. Time after time she had to rip her paper out and begin again until she got the three copies of the first exercise perfected. But then she was pleased to realize that she had only spent an hour on it. The book said this was one day's work, but she went on ahead to the second page. The sooner she could get finished, the better.

There was snow falling outside, and once or twice she glanced out of the window at it. It paled the gray sky, but it was not the large-flaked, pretty kind of snow. It suggested dampness and cold and she was glad she was not outdoors. Her fingers even after all this exercise still felt stiff. Joel had to go to see a man downtown today, she knew, and she wondered if he would be warm enough.

Joel was so strange these days, she thought, her mind traveling freely, ahead of her fingers. He seemed to be ashamed that he had confessed his inadequacy to her and he had never mentioned it again. But he told her all about his work now, where she had never questioned it before. It gave him a kind of support, evidently, to talk to her about it, and she liked to hear. The only bad thing was that she felt she was gradually growing ahead of him in strength and independence. She tried to reproach herself for reacting that way. Probably every man was as full of doubts and uncertainties as Joel. Every man who was really honest. If she loved him genuinely, she should be glad that so many things were open between them. It wasn't fair to expect to lean entirely on him, she must be able to give him support

too. But in spite of all her arguments, she knew that she had been happier the old way. There had been something exciting and poetic about their marriage then. Perhaps, she thought, they were settling down. That period where both people seem strange and fascinating was over, because they knew each other too well. That was normal. The trouble was that she hated to lose that sensation now. It was wrong and unintelligent of her, but she hated to see it go.

Her fingers worked better when she was preoccupied with something else, she noticed suddenly, and as she thought about it she made a mistake at the bottom of the exercise. She pressed her lips together in irritation and patiently finished the page before she started it over again. It would be so long, she thought, before she would be expert. Three months, the book said. Three months of working hard and never seeing an end to accomplish. But she would feel safer for all of them if she had this ability. She went steadily through the work again and this time did it perfectly. One out of her three copies now. Before the day was over she would finish the second lesson.

As she rolled another sheet of yellow paper into the carriage, somebody knocked at the door, and she frowned a bit to herself. It must be Elaine, and she wondered what she wanted. She had so little time that was free for working, and she hated to be interrupted.

"Come in," she called, and turned to look over her shoulder.

Elaine came in timidly, closing the door carefully behind her.

"Hello, dear," she said. "What are you doing? Busy?"

"I'm practicing typewriting," Harriet explained to her. "I thought I'd like to learn."

“That’s a good idea,” Elaine said. She came over to the desk and sat down on the window seat, blocking Harriet’s light. When Harriet looked at her inquiringly, she only smiled and made no explanation of her visit.

“Is there something I can do for you?” Harriet asked, finally, impatient to go on with her work.

“No, thanks, dear,” Elaine said. “Go right ahead, don’t let me disturb you.” She settled back against the corner of the window. She was still wearing her padded bathrobe, Harriet noticed. She rarely ever got dressed until dinner-time now, and she made no attempt to fix her hair or make herself attractive. It looked strange, she had always been so immaculate.

Harriet thought, I’ll go ahead with my work and not give in to Elaine’s obvious desire to talk. She wanted to keep her company, but this was more important and she must establish a precedent. If she could only have these morning hours free in the next few months, she would devote all the rest of her time to Elaine. She was sorry for her, she had so little to do and so few resources to fall back on. But she mustn’t give in now or she would have to give in entirely. She switched the desk lamp on and began to type again. Elaine sat quietly, swinging her feet a little, and the room grew still, so that Harriet’s typing sounded loud and metallic.

Presently Elaine moved, and put her feet down on the floor and her hands on either side of her as if she were about to get up. Harriet couldn’t resist looking at her, and Elaine smiled immediately. “There’s a draft coming in the window here,” she said. “I’m going to sit in the armchair, I believe.” She moved over to the little armchair on the other side of Harriet, and picked up the typewriter cover to use as a footstool. “There,” she said. “That’s more comfortable.”

Harriet tried to force herself to smile. She wanted so much to be left alone, but there was something pathetic and sweet about Elaine; she shouldn't be hurt.

"I'm sorry I can't be more hospitable," she said; "but I want to finish up today's lesson."

"Of course," Elaine said reproachfully. "I don't want to interrupt you at all. Is the book divided into regular lessons?"

"Yes," Harriet said. "I don't have much more to do today."

She went ahead slowly, but Elaine's sitting there disturbed her and she kept making mistakes. She tried to go too fast, and the keys went up together and stuck, so that she had to reach out and pull them down again. Her finger tips became inky and she left blotches on the paper when she handled it.

"You'll be able to write all our letters for us, when you learn," Elaine said happily. She was watching Harriet earnestly as if she hoped to entice her attention away from her work.

"Yes," Harriet said, smiling at her. She went on typing, her fingers clumsy and her mind restless under its irritation.

Elaine sat quietly for a while and then got up and walked across the room. Harriet forced herself not to turn and see what she was doing, but she could hear her pulling books out of the bookshelf and putting them back again.

"You certainly have a lot of books here," Elaine said finally. Harriet found that she had been waiting for her to speak. "Do you read all of them?" she heard her ask.

"I have at one time or another," Harriet said. "I've been collecting them ever since I was a little girl."

"My," Elaine said. She came back to her armchair and sat

down again. "I think that's awfully nice," she said. "My children never read much and neither do I. Mr. Randol read, but he didn't like novels and I never cared for his books. They were generally about economics or history or something dull like that. You read novels, don't you?"

"Yes," Harriet said. "I've got quite a few of them. Do you want to pick out one? Maybe you'd find something there that would interest you."

"Oh, no, thanks, dear," Elaine said. "I can never concentrate long enough to read a book. The minute I pick one up I start thinking about something else."

Harriet could think of nothing to say. She had hoped for a moment to find something to occupy Elaine, but evidently that was useless.

She held her hands poised over the keys, not wanting to seem rude, but anxious to go on, and then, when Elaine said nothing more, she continued with her work. She finished another perfect copy of the exercise and felt pleased. As she rolled a piece of paper into her carriage, Elaine stood up and picked up the lesson book. "May I just look at this a second?" she asked Harriet. "I wanted to see what sort of things you had to do." She turned the pages of the book. "Why don't they teach you real words?" she asked. "These are just letters."

"They want you to learn the keys and familiar letter combinations first," Harriet said. "Words come later."

"Oh, yes, I see," Elaine said. "Then you get to write real letters and things, don't you? Perhaps I ought to try to learn. It might be something for me to do."

"I'll lend you the book when I'm finished with it," Harriet said firmly. She reached up her hand for it and Elaine gave it to her, reluctantly.

"All right," she said. She sat down again and crossed her legs. The pause had evidently encouraged her, because she went on. "I think I ought to get myself something to do," she said. "I get awfully bored sitting at home all day."

Harriet swung around in her chair to face her. "Why don't you take up knitting for the Red Cross?" she said. "You knit, don't you?"

"Not very well," Elaine said. "I used to enjoy doing it every now and then, but I couldn't knit something that would really be good. I'd be embarrassed to send any of my work in."

"Oh," Harriet said. She gave up the idea quickly. If she encouraged her, Elaine might decide to experiment and if she was a poor knitter, she would waste a lot of money on materials.

"No," Elaine went on. "I ought to have some real work that would be useful to the family, I think. Do you think typewriting would be useful?"

"Well," Harriet said slowly. She would like to find something to keep Elaine busy, but she couldn't believe that she would have much use for the typewriting once she had learned it.

"I thought of trying to write a book," Elaine said. "Those Clarence Day books seem to be so popular and you know I was brought up in New York too. Maybe I could write something like that. Sort of memoirs. Do you think so, Harriet?"

Harriet was embarrassed to know what to say. "I don't know, Elaine," she said. "You have to write very skillfully and charmingly to do that sort of thing, you know."

"Well, I had a very interesting childhood," Elaine persisted. Harriet was silent, thankful at any rate that Elaine

didn't seem to want answers. She was using Harriet as somebody to think out loud to. "I don't know though," she went on. "That might be a great deal of work. And I don't think there's much money in books. I used to know a man who wrote, and he never had much."

"Don't worry about that, Elaine," Harriet said. "We're getting along all right. Now that Kit is doing so well for herself, Joel doesn't have that responsibility."

"Oh, I know we won't starve," Elaine said. "But I want to give the children something more than that. The little luxuries, you know. What my father used to call gracious living. That's what I'd like them to have."

"Well," Harriet said, unable to answer since she wasn't particularly sympathetic. "Perhaps, but they're happy enough this way, don't you think?"

"Joel isn't," Elaine said shrewdly. "I'm sure you know that, Harriet. And I'm worried about Pris too."

Harriet didn't want to discuss the new, unhappy weakness in Joel with her, and she tried to pass over it lightly. "They just like to fuss," she said, smiling. "The trouble with you, Elaine, is that you're bored. Why don't you try calling up some of your friends? You don't go out enough."

Elaine said bitterly, "What sense is there in calling up my friends? I can't entertain them, and it would be embarrassing to me to accept their entertainment. I don't have any decent clothes any more. I haven't bought one new thing this year, except a couple of pairs of stockings. I'm not fit to be seen."

"But they won't care about that," Harriet said. "I mean your real friends."

"It wouldn't give me any pleasure," Elaine said stubbornly. "No, Harriet, I've made up my mind about that."



Harriet sat looking at her in despair. It was obvious that she must give up the typewriting for today, and put her mind to this development. It was true that Elaine was alone a great deal of the time, and that she had nothing to do with herself. At night when Joel came home and Pris and Harriet were there, she brightened up, and the others had no indication of the bored, whining person she became when they were away. Harriet had once tried to talk to Pris about it, but Pris had only laughed and said, "Don't worry about her, Harriet, she'll learn to get along in time."

The trouble with Elaine was that she was really stupid. Her children had been amused at her for years, and it had taken Harriet some time to realize that Elaine's gentle, inane remarks were generally made quite seriously. Only she was used to having people laugh at them and she was never offended by it. She had no sense of humor and very little strength of mind. But because she happened to have a lovely, sensitive face, and excellent taste in dressing herself and arranging her home about her, none of this was very apparent to the people who didn't know her well. She was a delightful background to the family when they were all together. She was a part of their charm, she presented some of their humor, she was a talking point, and she was interested in their comfort. But without her family, and they were away a great deal now, she had no function at all. She didn't know how to amuse herself and she hated work. There was nothing that entertained her except her own children and their families. It was ironic that the two people who took the most care of her were Harriet, and Gray who often came over to take Elaine for walks. And they were neither of them directly related to her.

She said gently to her, "What about that dress you were going to fix over, Elaine? Have you done that yet?"

Elaine looked across at her rather shrewdly. "I'm in your way, aren't I?" she asked.

Harriet held her breath in exasperation for a second and then let it go. Well, that was that. You couldn't be harsh with Elaine even if you knew it was the worst of foolishness to encourage her. "No, of course not," she said hastily. She pushed her hair back from her forehead and began stacking the papers and exercise book together, and putting them away in her desk drawer. She would simply have to give them up for the time being.

She looked around the room helplessly. There wasn't even anything to talk about. If she let Elaine start reminiscing, she would become frightened and tearful again, and apart from reminiscence, she had very little to say. What would amuse her? Joel had brought a new copy of *Vogue* home from the office. Perhaps they could look at that together. Elaine wouldn't look at it alone, but she liked clothes and they would be something to talk about.

It was too bad, Harriet thought. Even most children, if you gave them a magazine, would at least be amused by cutting out paper dolls or looking at the pictures by themselves. But Elaine had to have company when she was reading.

"By the way, Elaine," Harriet said to her. "Did you see the new *Vogue* that Joel brought home last night?"

She got the magazine out of the little rack beside the desk and perched on the arm of Elaine's chair to show it to her.

## 2

Joel had come home late from the office and was in the bathroom washing his face and hands. He had taken off his coat and opened up his shirt collar, and Harriet, who was sitting on the edge of the tub talking to him, looked lovingly at the dark strong line of his throat coming out of the starched white linen.

"How was it today?" she asked him finally. He expected that now. He came home wanting to tell her about all the things he had done that day, but he could never find the start himself.

"I tried writing some copy for the Saunders account," he told her. "I think it was pretty good, too."

"Is that your account?" she asked him. The name was unfamiliar to her.

"No," he said. He turned the water on again, letting it run over his soapy hands and gathering it up in them to rinse his face. "It's Tim Wilson's. But I didn't like the way he's been running it lately and I thought if I could do a sample of what I meant I'd have a better talking point when I took it to MacCrae."

Harriet reached behind her and flipped down a towel for him. He turned towards her to take it, bending his head to plunge his face into it. "Isn't that rather hard on Tim Wilson?" Harriet asked him.

"Oh, no," he said, taking his face out of the towel and looking at her. "We're encouraged to contribute any ideas we may have. It's all right, everybody does it, it won't hurt Tim." His skin was splotched red and white from the hard rubbing he had given it, and she watched the color gradually even out into its normal areas.

“Well,” she said slowly. She was afraid whenever he was confident now. Ever since he had told her all his doubts, that afternoon, she had had them too. She tried desperately to guess what effect the things he did would have on his employers, but it was hard to see things from that point of view.

“Do you think I ought to shave?” he asked her abruptly, looking at himself in the mirror and fingering his chin.

“No, you look all right,” Harriet said in surprise. “Anyway, we’re not going out tonight, are we?”

“Pris is bringing Kenneth to dinner,” he said. “I met her on the bus coming up, and she was in her usual dither about him.”

“Oh, Lord!” Harriet said. “She didn’t say anything about it to me. I wonder if we have enough. It certainly isn’t very elegant.”

“I think she wants to impress him with our simple, homey surroundings,” Joel said casually, throwing the towel down. Harriet automatically stooped and picked it up again to hang it on the rack.

“Well, all right,” Harriet said. “It’s her young man. Personally, I think she’s using the wrong tactics. He’s never going to marry anybody who has less money than he has. He’d distrust them too much.”

“What makes you say that?” Joel asked her.

“I don’t know,” she said thoughtfully. “The way he talked, I guess.” She laughed. “He’s scared to death of being married for his money.”

“I didn’t get that impression at all,” Joel said. “And I think you’re just imagining it.”

“Maybe,” Harriet said. She looked at her own face in the

mirror and picked up Joel's comb to run it through her hair. Joel laughed.

"That lad certainly impresses this family," he said. "Even you're dolling yourself up."

"It's Pris that impresses me, not Kenneth," Harriet said. "She's so set on him."

"I feel sorry for that poor fellow," Joel said, smiling to himself. "She's going to get him sooner or later, by golly."

"Joel, we oughtn't to joke about it," Harriet said, putting down the comb. "I'm worried about her. You don't think she'll really marry him, do you? She's not in love with him."

"She will if she can," Joel said.

"Doesn't that shock you?" Harriet asked him. "Don't you think they'd be unhappy?"

"There's always divorce," Joel said. He picked up his tie and began running it under his collar, bending his knees a little so that he could see into the mirror.

"And alimony, I suppose," Harriet said. "You're as ridiculous as she is."

"It's her own business," Joel said. "Personally, I married for love." He grinned and turned around to kiss her, and she was distracted for the moment.

Joel returned to his tie, knotting it firmly and turning down the ends of his collar over it.

Somebody knocked on their door. Harriet went out through the bedroom to open it and Pris stood there with a bottle in each hand. "Did Joel tell you I asked Kenneth to dinner?" she said.

"Yes," Harriet told her. "What's that? For cocktails?"

"Umm," Pris said.

"Well," Harriet said, laughing. "Maybe you'll make up

for the quality of the food. Joel, why don't you help Pris get ice and things. I've got to take a look at the dinner."

They went down the hall together and Harriet turned off to go into the kitchen. There a large pot of Irish stew was bubbling and it seemed like something human in the room, animating it. Her dishes had been stacked neatly in the wire dryer, and the dinner plates were piled on a corner of the stove to warm them. She wouldn't start the rest of the meal yet, she decided. Kenneth hadn't come and they would probably like to take their time with the cocktails. She looked around to see if she had forgotten anything. Elaine came in behind her and stood with her arms out as Harriet turned around. "I got myself a new dress," she said. "How do you like it?"

Harriet realized, shockingly, that she hadn't seen Elaine lovely like this for a long time. She was almost speechless in her excitement about the dress. It was impossible not to smile at her pleasure, although Harriet knew that she must have taken the money out of their savings and they couldn't afford it. She said something admiring and Elaine squeezed her elbows to her sides and spun around girlishly, so tense and edgy in her pleasure that it looked as if she were going to burst out of herself. Harriet put her hand on her arm trying to calm her down. "You look lovely, Elaine," she said. "That blue is your best color." She kept her hand firmly clasped, holding her so that she could not dart away, making her gradually quiet down. She smiled finally, gently, and Harriet let go of her. "Why don't you show the others?" she asked. "Have they seen it yet?"

"Not yet," Elaine said. "Pris will be so jealous." She looked down at the soft folds of the silk. "But she doesn't need a new dress as much as I do."

Just then Pris and Joel came in with the silver ice-bucket. Joel whistled extravagantly. "Elaine!" he said. "You look like an angel." She was pleased and coquettish. "Do you think so?" she asked, slowly turning around for him.

"Beautiful," he said.

"Goodness!" Elaine said, smoothing her skirt. "I love having new clothes." She looked at all of them radiantly and they smiled at her. None of us could be angry at her for spending the money, Harriet thought. She hasn't been so happy for a long time.

The doorbell rang, startling all of them.

"Oh, Lord, that's Kenneth," Pris said. "Joel darling, you get the ice, will you? I'll go answer it. Do I look all right?" She dashed off before they could answer her.

"I'll go and say hello to him," Elaine said. "Come along as soon as you can, Harriet and Joel. You're going to hold the dinner a while, aren't you, Harriet?"

"Yes," Harriet told her smilingly. She watched her leave and Joel moved to the icebox to take out a tray of cubes. "Here, darling," she said. "I'll do that."

She turned the icetray under the water faucet, waiting patiently for the cubes to loosen and fall into the sink. Joel fixed a tray with the shaker and some of Elaine's fine crystal cocktail glasses. "Ready?" he said. He was eager to get out into the living room, and she hurried to put the ice into the bucket and set it on the tray for him. "Wait a second," she said, untying her apron and throwing it over the back of a chair. "All right," she told him. She went through the dining room slightly ahead of him, but he came abreast of her as they reached the living room and they entered together.

Kenneth, who had been talking to Elaine, stood up.

"Hello," he said to them. Harriet had forgotten how big and red-faced he was and what an awkward manner he had. He continued to stand while Joel put the tray down on the little table, and Harriet settled herself in a chair. He made all of them feel uncomfortable because of his clumsiness.

"Come on, Ken, sit down," Pris said.

"Yes, do," Elaine urged him. "Joel will fix a cocktail for us."

He sat down, still watching Joel, rather constrainedly. Harriet saw his big hands on his knees, sliding gently back and forth as if he found some kind of reassurance in the feel of the cloth.

"How's your farm?" she asked him. He turned gratefully to her.

"Oh, it's doing well," he told her. "Of course there's not so much to be done during the winter. That is, the truck-garden part of it. But the cows are in fine shape, and some of my breeding experiments have turned out very well."

"You mean the laboratory experiments?" Harriet asked him.

"No," he said. He looked a little embarrassed. "Not those. Somebody else beat me to that, unfortunately. A paper came out the other day in one of the cattlemen's trade sheets. But my experiments with my own cows are working very well. I'm trying to get an increased butter-fat content, you know."

"Oh, yes," Harriet said, nodding.

"You don't have those nasty Holsteins, do you?" Elaine said. "They have so little cream, their milk is almost blue, it seems to me."



"I have some," Kenneth told her. "But most of my herd is Guernsey."

"They're pretty," Pris said. "I like Guernseys the best."

Joel came over with their drinks, walking carefully so as not to spill them. "Why don't you make these women lay off you?" he said to Kenneth. "They don't know a darned thing about cows, anyway."

"I can be interested, can't I?" Pris said, smiling at him. Harriet got the impression that it was because Kenneth was there that she smiled.

"Well, there isn't much else for a hick like me to talk about," Kenneth said. His banter was awkward, just as everything about him was. "I don't know what city people talk about, anyhow."

"What everybody talks about," Joel said. He took a large swallow of his drink, and Kenneth, imitating him, lifted his glass too. "The war, the stock market, the Republican candidate for 1940, and so forth." His voice sounded a little bitter; Harriet guessed that he was tired of endless conversations in Wall Street bars on those subjects.

"Let's don't talk about the war," Elaine said nervously. Harriet knew that although her objection sounded frivolous, it was because the idea of war affected her more powerfully than it did her children. To Elaine, the world belonged to her, linked somehow with her own career, and it was depressing to be reminded of it.

"Yes," Joel said. "By all means, avoid it while you can." He looked at Kenneth with a sympathetic expression.

They began to talk about the farm again, it was one of the few subjects which seemed to interest Kenneth, and Pris went over to the cocktail table for another round of drinks. She started to fill Kenneth's glass.

"Oh, I don't think so, thanks," he said, interrupting something Joel was saying.

"Come on, Kenneth, you're in the bosom of the family for the whole evening, you might as well relax and let your hair down," Pris said. She moved his hand away and filled the glass. "Drink it down, now," she said. His face looked weak and young for a moment as she touched him, and Harriet guessed that he had to repress himself in his drinking as well as in almost everything else.

"All right," he said feebly, and Pris went on to fill up the others.

Harriet got up to go into the kitchen, but Joel caught her hand. "What are you doing?" he asked her.

"Just going to fix dinner," she said. She smiled down at him.

"Not yet," he said. "Give us time to enjoy our drinks, darling. It doesn't matter if dinner's a little late. Does it bother you, Kenneth?"

"No, not at all," Kenneth said. "Don't go, Harriet."

Pris moved almost jealously close to him. "Harriet is always worrying about time," she said. "I feel like a real party tonight. Don't you, Ken? I don't want to think about time at all."

"What's time?" Kenneth said, smiling foolishly. He had finished the second cocktail and the drinks were already beginning to affect him. Harriet felt alarmed. Evidently he repressed himself for good reason, if he couldn't hold his liquor better than that.

She gave in to them and sat down on the couch between Elaine and Pris. The two men faced them on chairs which they had drawn in a little, out of their ordinary positions.

"Before we were so rudely interrupted once before," Joel

said to Kenneth, "we were discussing women and the war. Now, women don't like to hear men talk about war. They're all afraid we're going off to fight, isn't that right, Harriet?"

"Yes," she said. "I suppose so. You make me nervous." She smiled at him, watching his young, excited face, and not feeling hurt that he made no response to her.

"You see," he said to Kenneth. "It's purely personal, their attitude. If they didn't have any men, they wouldn't worry."

"I don't have any women to worry about me," Kenneth said. "My mother's dead and I'm not married."

"We'd worry about you, Kenneth," Pris said. "You're our friend."

He turned to look at her gratefully, and Harriet watched his face slowly change to suspicion, and saw him turn away without saying anything. Poor boy, she thought.

"Anyway," Pris went on. "If women don't like to talk about war, why bring it up now, Joel? This is a party, why don't we be pleasant?"

"All right," Joel said easily. "If that's the way you feel. I'll mix another drink, instead."

"Oh, I don't think—" Kenneth said, evidently alarmed. But the others seemed to want one, and his speech faded off. He accepted the cocktail which Joel poured for him and looked at it dubiously.

"Here's to war!" Joel said, raising his glass.

"Well, I don't particularly like it," Kenneth protested. "But I want to help. See, I'm a farmer, I can help right now. We farmers, we're important, you know that?"

"Sure you are," Pris said eagerly. "And there's no need for you to get into the actual fighting. You're doing as

much good, maybe more good, by sticking to your work as you would be if you went out with a gun.”

“I don’t know about that,” Kenneth said. “If our country gets into this, I think I would enlist. I couldn’t bear just to sit back and see other men doing the fighting for me.”

“So would I,” Joel said carelessly. “But I don’t think we’re going to get into the war. There hasn’t been much action in Europe, anyway. It looks to me like they’re just in a deadlock. Either they’ll sign a peace soon, or they’ll just keep on the way they are until the Allies starve the Germans out. That’s the way it looks to me.”

Harriet looked at Elaine. She saw her face, which was crumpled and depressed, turn with hope towards Joel. Ever since they had talked that day out in the kitchen, Harriet had been disturbed about her. She had no talent for escapism; the news in the paper, the war and its hatreds, were affecting her terribly. It would be better to give her some hope, Harriet thought, and she agreed with Joel, making her voice hearty and keeping her eyes on Elaine. “I think so too,” she said. “I think you’re right, Joel.”

She saw Elaine raise her head slowly, her face growing clearer.

“Animals are nicer than people anyway,” Kenneth said abruptly. “Animals don’t fight wars. You can trust animals, you know just what they’re thinking and how they’re going to act. They’re never selfish, except honestly selfish.”

“What a thing to say,” Pris told him lightly. “You don’t trust anybody, do you, Ken?”

“Why should I?” he said sharply, and then, realizing perhaps that he had spoken too strongly, he smiled at them

all. "Very few people are worth trusting," he went on, speaking more lightly.

"Actually, I agree with you," Pris said. "I tease you about it, Ken, but you're right. You can't trust anybody. We've learned that, haven't we, Joel?"

"Yes," Joel said. His gray eyes were lowered and his face was sullen for a minute. Harriet felt a twist of compassion for him, knowing that he was thinking about his job again, and reached out to touch his foot with her own. But she was thinking about Pris too, and this new tone of hers. There were a great many hidden bitternesses in Pris, and there was no way of telling whether this was a real one.

She watched her lean forward and put her hand on Kenneth's knee. "But you shouldn't worry so much, Ken," she said. Her tone was, to Harriet, almost unbearably possessive. "If you've made up your mind that you can't trust anybody, you're safe. Just go your own way and don't let them get away with anything. You can be happy that way."

"Is that honestly what you think?" Kenneth asked her. It was as if they were the only ones there. Harriet felt embarrassed, as if she were eavesdropping.

"Sure," Pris said. "Shoot the works. Have a good time, and don't worry about what people are thinking and doing. Don't bother about whether so-and-so wants something out of you or not. Just take his friendship while you have it. That's all."

"That's all right," Kenneth said. "But what about your real friends? What about falling in love? Then you have to know whether people are sincere or not."

"Why?" Pris said. "Pick the person that suits you most

and to hell with their motives. You'll get along just as well that way as any other."

She's tight, Harriet thought. She's talking like a lunatic. But Kenneth seemed to be taking her very seriously. There was a sort of community between them; their minds had reached the same fever height. Elaine and Joel and Harriet were fascinated by them as they went on. They were discussing past experiences, disregarding every honest motive in anybody they might have known.

"Now I knew a girl in school," Pris said. She launched into a complicated story of schoolgirl treachery and her own disillusionment. It was told badly, full of "I saids" and "she saids," but Kenneth listened attentively.

"Yes," he said. "I had something like that happen to me once," and he told his story, just as circumstantial, just as long. Harriet saw Joel yawning, but she was too caught by this wild, ridiculous talk to be bored by it. She began to wonder again if Pris were really sincere or if this were a carefully thought-out scheme to win Kenneth's trust. If it were it was very shrewd. By attacking the things he feared, she made him sympathetic with her, and in sympathy there was more real trust than in reason. But was Pris as clever as that? It was hard to tell about her. As far as ordinary conversation went, her vocabulary was as limited as a ten-year-old's. On the other hand, a lot of people deliberately limited their speech and their expression of ideas. With people of Pris's age particularly, it was a hang-over from the Hemingway tradition, their slang was florid, but nothing else was. So that she had never been able to feel she really knew Pris. Everything she thought about her was guesswork. Elaine and even Kit tried to express themselves, but Pris held herself back. Maybe now she was tell-

ing Kenneth things she really thought, or maybe it was part of an elaborate scheme, but whichever it was, she was having more success with him than she had ever had before.

"I think this is all very depressing," Elaine said fretfully. "I thought we were going to have a party, Pris. I hate to hear you talk like that. It's shocking, really."

Harriet saw Pris smile sideways at Kenneth and receive a sympathetic return smile before she reached over and patted Elaine's hand. "All right, darling," she said. "We'll stop."

"Excuse me," Harriet said, this time firmly, and got away to the kitchen before the others could stop her. She hated to leave. Her imagination and her curiosity had been stirred, and she wanted to see the end of it. But she knew that if she continued to listen, she might stay there all night and none of them would be fed.

She went absent-mindedly about her preparations, feeling cold and lonely out in the kitchen, with the friendliness of her drink still warming her stomach, and her longing to hear more of what was going on in the living room. How thoroughly I've become one of the family, she thought to herself. Pris is almost as important to me as Joel would be and so are the others. I hadn't realized before how anxious I am to see things turn out well for her. I hope she's not making a mistake with this boy. He's twisted, he'll be hard to handle. I don't think he wants to marry her, and if she tricks him into it, he'll resent it.

Laying the table in the dining room, she heard snatches of their conversation, and found that they were commonplace. But the clink of ice told her that they were having another drink and she heard their voices rising higher,

whether friendly or in argument, and the tempo of the party increasing.

Once Joel came out to her with a cocktail and insisted on her taking it. "What are you doing out here, darling, you've been away so long," he said.

"I'm nearly through," she told him. "You can tell the others to come in and eat now if you want."

She watched him summoning them in before she went out to bring in the platters of food. They came unwillingly, and none of them ate much. She had a feeling that they wanted to get back to their drinking, to the living room where they could cluster around each other without a table to interfere. They were in for a strenuous evening, she thought, smiling to herself, but it didn't matter much, since Joel didn't have to go to work in the morning.

In the living room again, having left the dishes on the table after a protest from the others, she curled up her feet under her in the big armchair, and settled down almost sleepily to watch them. Joel had started mixing highballs right away, and she looked at the one in her hand, watching its yellow light with the lamp reflected through it, but her stomach revolted at the idea of drinking it and she held it off from her so that she couldn't smell the whiskey. Everybody else, even Elaine, attacked their drinks instantly. Pris had overridden all of Kenneth's protests, and Harriet had a feeling that after this he would put up no more argument. Pris is deliberately trying to make him tight, she thought. I wonder why.

A warmth, from cigarettes and closeness, settled down on them and they shifted their chairs. Their heads bent closer together. The smoke lay gray above them in the room, and Harriet's eyes began to smart. They had started



talking as soon as they were settled down again, about the government's reforestation scheme, but Pris was tired of that very quickly and she kept introducing little digs and amusing distractions.

"Listen," she said finally. "What do I care about the government? I'm not even a social security number to them. I'm a nonentity."

"Why don't you get a job?" Kenneth said abruptly.

"Because I don't want to," she said, just as sharply, and immediately saw that she had made a mistake. His face grew sullen again, the lowering of eyebrows, drawing together of lips, and wrinkling of the forehead made it darker. "I don't really need one," she said hastily. "And I don't approve of taking work away from people who need it."

It was a specious argument, but Kenneth seemed to accept it, and instantly his face went back to its earlier smoothness. Harriet watched it with fascination, it was like seeing the sun rise, everything brightened.

"Pris likes working around the house," Elaine said. "She does a great deal for us here, doesn't she, Harriet?" Harriet nodded, thinking of Pris's late mornings, and how she was away most of the afternoons. Lately she had given up all pretense of doing any of the work.

Pris looked at both of them and frowned momentarily. She's realized that we're helping her, Harriet thought, and she doesn't like it, because she hadn't thought her intentions were so obvious. Why am I helping her, anyway? I don't want to, but Elaine drew me into it. Elaine is working hard for Pris, and so is Joel, the way he keeps filling Kenneth's glass. They refuse to talk about her plans, or laugh me off when I worry about them, but they're all helping her. She began to feel resentful and for an instant had a

wish to meddle. But her old instincts came back and she kept silent. It's not my business, she thought. It's Pris's own affair, I have no right to interfere.

"Turn on the radio, Joel," Pris said lazily. "This is a party, isn't it? Let's get some dance music."

Joel got up obligingly, and turned the dials, waiting until the hum began and the little green magic eye lighted up before he adjusted them. They're all so amiable tonight, Harriet thought, that's part of the scheme. Just one big happy family for Kenneth's sake. The music, sweet and undistinguished, poured suddenly into the room, and behind it you could hear people laughing and talking. It made Harriet suddenly lonely to think about them. They were having a good time as she and Joel had once, when they had gone dancing and drunk and eaten together and thought about nobody but themselves.

"Come on, Ken," Pris said, getting up. "Let's dance." She held out her arms to him and he got up, almost reluctantly. They swung into the rhythm, and Joel came over to Harriet and put a hand on her arm. "Come on, darling," he said. "We haven't danced for a long time. Do you mind, Elaine?"

"No, of course not," Elaine said. She looked happier than usual, and she moved her knees closer to the couch to give them room. Harriet stood up and went into Joel's arms. The strong, familiar feel of his body and the half-forgotten pleasure of dancing lulled the irritating suspicions in her mind. For the moment she let the worries go by and drifted in his lead. This was how she had once drifted always, whether in dancing or in anything else, following Joel, trying to think how he would want her to go. They moved smoothly together across the carpet which roughened their

steps but which never tripped them, avoiding the movements of Kenneth and Pris, keeping out of their way. Once, Harriet, looking over Joel's shoulder with her eyes half closed, saw Pris lurch and Kenneth's arm tighten around her waist, so that she was caught up to him, her legs dangling stupidly. His young, prematurely grave face reddened and she saw muscles along his jaw stand out for a second and then subside. Joel turned and she could not see them any longer, but she pictured them still and for a moment her body was stiff and she followed badly. Then a pressure from Joel's arm reminded her of what she was doing and she relaxed again, smiling at him while they obeyed the rhythm. She was looking now at Elaine, sitting on the couch with her head nodding gaily to music and her eyes following their feet. She thought again, how easy it would be to make Elaine happy. A new dress and her children gay and amiable together, and she blooms out. We ought to be able to give her that. Joel and I together, when we get on our feet and Joel's job is going better, and perhaps I'm working too, we'll give her the luxuries that mean so much to her, we could do that.

The music ended and they heard the splatter of applause from the audience. Kenneth and Pris joined, their clapping sounding loud and solitary against the other blurred sound.

"That was lovely," Elaine said. "You haven't danced for a long time."

The next piece began, a waltz this time, and Joel released Harriet and led her back to her chair. "Come on, Elaine, this is your specialty," he said, and she got up, looking about at the others half apologetically. "Do you really want to,

Joel?" she asked him. He grinned at her. "Sure," he said. "I had to dance with Harriet first to be polite."

She giggled and let him put his arm around her. "Not too fast, Joel," she warned him, but her slim feet followed him skillfully and gradually their circles became more swooping and free and he increased his tempo as the music grew faster.

Harriet watched them smilingly. They were nice together, Elaine's body was light in Joel's arms and you got the feeling of delicacy and precision from the way she set her feet down. Pris and Kenneth had subsided onto the couch together, throwing themselves down as if they were very tired and blowing out their breath. Now she looked at them to share her pleasure and was immediately embarrassed. Pris had taken Kenneth's arm and was looking up at him. She had just whispered something and her eyes, turned up, looked doglike and foolish. He had bent over her, there was an atmosphere of secrecy and heat about them. They make me uncomfortable, Harriet thought, there's a quality that's sly and pent up to their feeling. She remembered how Fulke and Pris had been together, so frankly affectionate. There was something too furtive about this sort of desire.

She turned back to Joel and Elaine again for a pleasant contrast. The last emphatic bars of the music began and Joel tightened his hold and swung Elaine off her feet so that she spun around wildly. She laughed out loud, and when he put her down again she half staggered back to the couch, her cheeks very pink. "Oh," she said to Harriet. "That was wonderful! I haven't danced like that for ages."

Harriet smiled at her affectionately and up again at Joel.

He winked at her. "Don't try to kid us, Elaine," he said. "It's obvious that you've been practicing on the sly."

"No, really," she protested and then saw that he was teasing her and laughed. "I wish I had," she said.

Pris got up and collected their empty highball glasses to fill them again. "This party is getting good," she said joyously. "Here, Ken, drink it down." She put the glass in his hand, and sat down beside him again, handing Elaine hers.

"I don't know why you always scream and howl when anybody suggests a dance, Ken," she said. "You're perfectly good."

"I don't know, I just don't care for it usually," Kenneth said with a little embarrassment.

"I know why," Pris said. "It's because you're scared of girls, that's why. You're scared to dance with them, aren't you, Kenneth?"

"No," he said indignantly. "I'm not scared at all. Where'd you get that idea?"

"Yes, you are," Pris insisted. "I can tell. Every girl you meet makes you tremble. Isn't that true, Kenneth, be honest now."

Joel laughed. "If they're all tiger women like you, Pris, it's no wonder," he said.

Kenneth responded to his support. "That's right," he said. He was a little incoherent already, Harriet noticed. "They're tiger women," he said. "No wonder. But Pris isn't a tiger woman, are you, Pris?"

"No," Pris said bitterly. "I'm the girl-graduate type. Damn it!"

They laughed at her together, but Harriet felt troubled by their nervous quality. What's the tensile strength of a spirit, she thought? At what point does it break?

"Now, the way I look at it is this," Joel said seriously. "It's very polite of you to insist that Pris is not a tiger woman, but I think you're doing her too much credit. Pris is a wolf in sheep's clothing, even if she is my own sister."

"Joel!" Pris said, pushing at him half playfully, half angrily.

Kenneth regarded Joel with equal seriousness. "Of course, you're her brother," he said, "and you ought to know. But I think you're mistaken. If you don't mind my saying so."

"Not at all," Joel interrupted.

Kenneth went on. "I grant you that her face is probably deceptively innocent. But just the same, there's something strong and honest about Pris. Good clean American womanhood, that's what she is."

Joel laughed. "Oh, Lord," he said.

"What's wrong with that?" Pris asked him indignantly. "Don't pay any attention to him, Kenneth. Have you ever seen me make a fire by rubbing two sticks together?"

"Listen!" Joel said. "She can't even boil an egg."

"She can too," Elaine said indignantly. "Joel, you've had too much to drink. She cooked for all of us for months."

"She's a fine girl," Kenneth insisted drunkenly. "And I want another drink."

"Already!" Joel said. "My God, man, you're ahead of me." He drained his glass with one swallow, making a face after it. "We can't let that happen, can we?" he said to Harriet, who nodded worriedly.

"Now Harriet is a really fine woman," Joel said over his shoulder to Kenneth. He had taken both of their glasses and was filling them. Harriet noticed that Pris had refused

to have hers refilled. She's beginning to taper off a little, Harriet thought with relief. I wonder if she's as tight as she seems?

"Is that so?" Kenneth asked politely.

"Yes," Joel said. He came back and handed Kenneth his glass. "Harriet can do anything. She doesn't talk much, have you noticed that? But she really knows more than any of us. Harriet's real educated, aren't you, darling?"

"I like an educated woman," Kenneth said.

"And more than that, she's efficient," Joel said. "She could do anything. See. She's the kind of woman you'd want to take along with you to a desert island."

"Kenneth is going to take me," Pris said. "I don't care what you say. You can have Harriet, but Kenneth is going to take me."

"No," Kenneth said, drawing away from her. He looked suspicious again. "I'm not going to take anybody to a desert island. I'm not going to a desert island, anyway."

"I was just joking, Kenneth," Pris said humbly. "We were just pretending."

"Oh, Lord," Harriet thought. She looked at Elaine, but Elaine had a sleepy look, as if she were thinking about something else. As long as she heard the sounds of gaiety around her, she didn't mind what sort it was. Harriet suspected that she probably often didn't listen to them.

"I'm going to take Elaine with me too," Joel said persistently. "Not that she'd be much good, but after all, damn it, she's my mother."

"What, dear?" Elaine asked gently. The others laughed at her and she looked around at them confusedly.

"Can I get you another drink, Elaine?" Pris asked her affectionately.

“No, thanks,” Elaine said. “To tell the truth, I’m feeling awfully sleepy. I think I’ll be going along to bed. What time is it, anyway?”

“It’s early,” Joel said, looking at his watch. “It’s only eleven.”

“I don’t know why I’m so sleepy,” Elaine said. “But I just can’t keep my eyes open.”

She made her excuses to all of them, but her departure didn’t affect the conversation. Harriet began to wonder whether or not she could go to bed herself. Elaine was more privileged, being older, and it might look rude if she deserted.

“Eleven o’clock,” Kenneth said thoughtfully. “I didn’t bring my car. I’d better be thinking about going. The last train leaves at 11:30.”

“Oh, no, Kenneth,” Pris said. “The evening’s too early to go. You can’t leave now.”

“Oh, hell no,” Joel said. “Don’t run out on us now, we’re not ready to go to bed yet.”

Harriet saw that it was Joel’s appeal rather than Pris’s that made Kenneth hesitate. He’s not really fond of her, she thought, he’s attracted by her, but it’s not real affection.

“I suppose I could stay in a hotel,” Kenneth said. He was still reluctant.

“No, stay here,” Joel said. “We’ve got room. The couch is really a bed, you know, we can make that up for you.”

“No,” Pris said. “We’ll put him in my room and I’ll sleep on the couch. Then you can sleep late in the morning, Ken.”

“No, that’s too much trouble,” Kenneth said. They argued with him, Pris excitedly, much too much so, and Joel putting in a more effective word every now and then.



Kenneth finally gave in, looking almost despairing as he did. Harriet felt sorry for him again. He was obviously tempted. It was cold outside, and they were feeling warm and close with their drinks. To leave now would be interrupting a mood. But his normal caution was probably against the idea and he had held out for a long time.

"Now that that's settled," Pris said comfortably, "let's get back to the real business."

"What was it?" Joel asked her.

"Darned if I remember," Pris said. "What were we talking about, Kenneth?"

"I don't know," he said. "I feel kind of woozy. I think I'm tight."

"Oh, no, oh, no," Pris said, laughing. "What a thing to say. Isn't it, Joel?"

They began to pound him on the back, and evidently his qualm passed, because he began to laugh after a second, and protect himself. Pris was more ardent than Joel, and Kenneth finally caught hold of her hands and swung them around to his lap, letting her squirm. Harriet was annoyed to see how she continued to wriggle and rub up against him, and how, although he started to talk to Joel, he was conscious of it, and made uncomfortable by it.

She decided fiercely that the next time Joel started out on a binge like this she would follow him drink for drink. If that's what he wants, I'll have to keep up with him, she thought. I'm miserable this way, it makes me feel sour and prudish to sit here and disapprove of them and think they're silly, but I can't help it.

They continued drinking as they talked, not the sort of drink that was leisurely or an accompaniment to the conversation, but a sort of desperate seeking of the bottle, as

if they hoped something new would come out of it each time. Kenneth was drunker than the others, she saw; his was a sort of stupidity, a haze came over his movements and his speech. Joel and Pris were foolish, but there was a sharpness to them, even so. They continued as quick, while Kenneth slowed down in all his actions.

She began wishing that they could go to bed. She was bored and distressed, and once or twice she felt almost like weeping. Joel had lost consciousness of her altogether, he was talking to Pris and Kenneth entirely, and the three of them thrust back and forth at each other with a kind of boisterous teasing. It was two o'clock before Pris began to yawn. Harriet was not surprised, Pris hadn't taken another drink since the first one she refused, and the effects must be wearing off on her. "Come on," she said imperiously. "Let's all go to bed, I'm sleepy."

"Oh, hush," Joel said. "Nobody wants to go to bed, Pris."

"Yes, they do," Harriet said, finally deciding to help. She couldn't keep awake any longer. "Come on, darling, it's awfully late."

"You want to go to bed?" Joel asked, looking at her for the first time.

"Ummm," she said, nodding, and smiling at him so as to coax him.

"Everybody's got to help me make up the couch," Pris said. She got up so as to settle the argument and Kenneth got up too, looking awkwardly back at the couch as if he wondered how it could be made into a bed.

Harriet got sheets and blankets and a pillow slip, and they went to work, all of them taking a hand. Only Harriet's corner was neat; they fumbled, and made a great fuss

about some minute wrinkle, leaving larger ones everywhere else. When it was finished it looked depressing in the middle of the living room with the glasses and bottles all around, and none of them wanted to stay up any longer. The white covers spelled an end to the evening very definitely.

"Come on, Kenneth," Pris said. "I'll show you your room and get my pajamas and bathrobe out. Come on, this way." She took his hand and led him off down the hall. Harriet and Joel followed sleepily and turned into their own quarters. The apartment was suddenly quiet, and when Harriet turned on the light it was pleasant to see her own tidy room, and their own personal possessions around them.

Joel took a long time about undressing. With every garment he took off he turned around to tell Harriet something else, a jumble of stories about his office, about college days, about the number of drinks he had had. She would have been annoyed, except he was both amusing and touching, standing there and waving his hands, with his hair mussed up. She was in bed long before he was and sat waiting for him with the covers pulled up under her chin, and her arms wrapped around her knees underneath. But when he had finally turned out the light and gotten into bed, he was the first to go to sleep. She lay awake for several minutes more, listening to his breathing. Kenneth and Pris were still talking together in Pris's room, she heard, and she wondered if Pris were having trouble finding her things. But she was sleepy herself, and she went to sleep before she thought any more about it, turning so as to bury her head on Joel's shoulder.

It was nearly dawn when she woke up again and she lay for a minute wondering why her eyes smarted so and

her mouth felt so dry. She was desperately thirsty but it was cold and she hated to get up. She argued with herself for a long time, trying to go back to sleep again, but her brain became more active and the thirst became more important. She got up finally, climbing over Joel's relaxed body, finding her slippers and her flannel robe on its hook on the closet door. When she got out in the hall, she saw a patch of light coming in from the living room windows, part dawn light and part street lamp, a cold, mixed, grayish-yellow glow that made her feel lonely. She filled her glass quickly in the bathroom and drank all of it and half of another. Some water fell on her chin and she wiped it off with the little hand towel hanging over the basin. She had not bothered to close the bathroom door and now she heard a noise out in the hall and turned silently in her felt slippers to see what it was.

Someone was standing in the gray pool and Harriet was suddenly frightened. Instinctively her hand reached out and she switched on the electric light. It was Pris, wrapped in her light blue quilted robe, her face above it rosy and her eyes bloodshot. Her fair hair fell forward over her forehead, unbecomingly. It looked as if it had been rumpled unceasingly. Harriet stared at her stupidly for a second, wondering why she looked so defiant, and why she was so silent. Then she noticed that her hand was still holding the doorknob to Kenneth's room. As she saw Harriet's look, she dropped it and turned half away. She smiled now, a smile that dared Harriet to say anything, and went off down the hall without speaking. Harriet stood still watching her, shocked and afraid.

## 3

Harriet sat in one of the stiff-backed chairs of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It had been raining when they had come in and now that the concert was nearly over, the combination of human warmth and wet wool was stifling. Joel, beside her, was listening with an attentiveness that told her he was bored. She felt a little stir of repentance now, although she had held him to his promise to come. She had bought the tickets so long ago and looked forward to it for so many weeks. But now she was not listening herself, her thoughts kept dumbly going over the last few days trying to make a pattern of them.

The pianist was playing the Schumann *Davidsbündler* pieces which she had heard so many times that her mind no longer had to strain to follow them. She leaned back a little and the music became a background rather than the important thing in her mind. Her father had always liked the *Davidsbündler* and when they had heard them at the rare concerts in Ohio, New York and Illinois that he could afford, he had told her what to listen for in them. Later they had bought a recording of them to play for themselves whenever they wanted. It was the sort of music her father would like, she thought; there was very little emotion attached to it, for those who wanted a surface emotion. But underneath there was something truer, because to reach it you had to have real understanding. Just as her father had understood her and she had never realized it. The day he had died, she had received a telegram from her Aunt Lucy, letting her know of his death, and also a letter from her father himself, which must have been written several days before. She had found it hard to make herself open it, and

when she had read it, it had made her even more unhappy.

He told her of his illness, and that he had been thinking of her a great deal. "An old man in bed revives his past," he had written in his formal way. "The fullest part of my past were the years with you. I think now that I was remiss, in not paying the attention to you that a young girl probably wants. I always thought that you would develop better by yourself, and I think I was right, but I'm also afraid that I made you unhappy sometimes and ever since you have married, I have been afraid that that unhappiness drove you into something you might not have chosen if you had felt that the life I gave you was good. You write me about the Randolfs and how fond you are of them and how happy you are with them. But there are sentences and phrases in your letters now and then which make me wonder why you should be. Forgive me for my frankness, it's only because I'm ill and I love you, but they sound to me like a pretty superficial lot. Isn't that so? If it is, why do you love them so much? They are handsome, you say, and seem to attach importance to that, and they are gay. But I am afraid of that kind of gaiety. It so often comes from a sort of thoughtlessness. Heaven knows, I don't want a somber life for you, especially now when you're so young, but I want a safe life for you. There are people in every civilization who swim along with the crowd because they are carried by them. These people have no qualities of real independence, they are not reliable, but they are charming in the manner of the time, and somebody takes care of them. What troubles me now is that we are in a changing time, and I am afraid that the charm which has carried the Randolfs will go out of fashion and they will be left stranded. If that happens, either you'll break away

from them with a great deal of pain and disillusionment, or you'll carry the whole burden of them yourself. You could do it. You're small and shy, you used to touch me, you were so gentle, but you have a hard core of self-reliance, and you won't admit there is anything you can't do. You won't starve by yourself, or sacrifice whatever principles you cherish. But with the drag of that family on you, you will have a much harder time than you would have by yourself. Is this terribly gloomy, my dear? Undoubtedly you will think so, perhaps you are even now fresh and happy after some party. But don't throw it away in anger. I am worried about you, and in a sense this is my apology for what I see now must have looked like years of neglect to you. Don't let it make you angry.

"I have been thinking about wills," he went on to say, "which is gloomy too, but which it would be silly to ignore. I have left you what I have, which isn't much. The house and a bit of money. Please, my dear, save the money if you can. I want it to be an escape fund for you. I want you to have it as a reserve in case these Randolfs prove too much for you. And even though you probably can't imagine such a thing now, will you hang on to it for a while at least, for my sake? I've always felt that you can't impart experience to anybody else, and I brought you up on the theory that you must discover things for yourself. But I may have to leave you and then there will be nobody to stand by and perhaps pick you up when you fall. So forgive me for trying to prevent the fall."

Perhaps if the letter had reached her before the news of his death it would have made her angry and she would have forgotten about it as quickly as she could. But coming afterwards, she was softened towards him and she

read it over again more than once, giving it a consideration she might not have otherwise. That was why it had been troubling her ever since. That was why, when she made the bleak trip to Ohio, and went through all the sad business of closing up the house, arranging for its sale and packing her father's few things, most of which were books, she had thought about the days she had spent here with a kinder feeling than she had ever had for them before. She told herself it was an unnatural sort of nostalgia, caused by her sorrow, but it was unmistakable that there had been a kind of evenness to her life there which seemed more real to her now than the full, disturbing life of the Randolfs.

When she had returned with all the business attended to, she had been disappointed in Joel. Something had settled on him and he was sulky and moody. She had expected him to cheer her up, to console her, but he had acted towards her like a bored stranger, like someone who sits next to you at a party and wants to talk to somebody else. In the three days she had been back he had not shown her one sign of real intimacy. Even coming to this concert tonight, he managed to look unwilling and unhappy, and she would have preferred one of their amusing arguments in which he always won, simply by taking it for granted that he would.

The pianist struck his last chords and she was roused by the noise of applause. Joel, next to her, clapped his hands, holding them cupped so that he was very loud. The pianist bowed, and with little further urging sat down again for an encore, and Harriet, half smiling, saw Joel turn his eyes up in despair. "Come on," she whispered to



him. "I don't care about the encores, we might as well go now."

He accepted her decision immediately and reached around to help her into her coat. She was still enough absorbed in her own problems not to feel self-conscious as they went out under the curious stare of the elderly ladies and gentlemen sitting there. The rain on her face was good as she stood waiting for Joel to put up his umbrella, and when she caught his arm she felt pleasant again. Joel, however, was silent as they walked to the subway, and she had been sufficiently drawn out of herself now to notice his moodiness. Her brief content disappeared as they plodded along and she watched his heavy face. Why didn't he say something pleasant, she thought, what was the matter with him nowadays, he was always gloomy!

They went down the subway steps through dark, smelly puddles and stepping over ground, pulpy bits of paper. Very few people were on the platform; it was not the atmosphere that makes the subway friendly or a good haven from the rain. It was quiet and moldy and underground, and it made Harriet want to whisper. The one or two men and women who were there looked at them with curious eyes, and she wished that Joel could talk to her in his old unself-conscious way and draw her out of herself so that she wouldn't care.

"Well, did you like the concert?" Joel asked her, half defiantly, and she flared up at him without reason.

"I don't see how I could," she told him. "With you sitting there glooming all the time."

"I didn't say anything, did I?" Joel said. "You were the one who wanted to go. I didn't argue. I can't help it if I don't enjoy music, you know."

“Well, there’s no need to spoil my enjoyment,” she said. “You could have at least pretended you were having a good time.”

Her throat felt scratchy and she knew her nose was red. She was beginning to catch a cold, her bones were tired. She hated herself for being so unpleasant, but she felt weakly that she couldn’t do anything about it.

“You should have gone by yourself,” Joel said sullenly. “Then you could have had a good time.”

“Oh, yes,” she said angrily. “And come home all by myself in all this rain, at night on the subway. All the way up to 110th Street.”

“Well, my God!” Joel said. “You’re certainly hard to please. What do you want, a lap dog, for a husband?”

She felt curiously vicious, as if she wanted to lash out at the weather, at her wretchedness, at the vague thoughts her father had caused to torment her, all at once in the person of Joel. It wasn’t really a mental process at all, something in her brain had released and she was going in neutral without control. “No, not a lap dog,” she said. “Just somebody that’s a little civil. Or would that be too much to ask?”

The subway train came in just then drowning out Joel’s answer, and she could only see his lips moving. It was strange, he didn’t look angry, there was a sort of irritable, whining expression on his face.

He took her arm roughly and helped her onto the train. There were plenty of seats. The yellow light was harsh on the few people there. A drunk sprawled against one arm of the seat near the door, and two colored women, loaded down with paper bags and bundles, were talking together, their soft, high voices coming intermittently over

the noise of the train. A very young boy and girl sat with locked arms, and she smiled up at him intimately. They made no attempt to talk against the noise, only smiled at each other as if everything were beautiful and a joke.

Harriet sat down, feeling the water which had come over the tops of her rubbers squelch against her shoes. Her feet had been hot in the concert hall, but now they were cold and wet, and she felt as if she could hardly bear them.

Joel shook the drops off the folded umbrella and leaned it against his knee. His heavy raglan-sleeved coat looked warm and prosperous and his face was ruddy in the right places from the damp. Only the sour, injured look to his mouth spoiled his effect. She frowned and looked away from him, absent-mindedly reading the ads overhead. All the people in them looked so bright and warm. Women in gaily colored woolen bathrobes leaned forward at her, showing white teeth and holding up a can of tooth powder. Two men in a locker room had their feet up on a bench clad only in underwear and looking warm in spite of it. The train jerked, and she was thrown against Joel's arm. He moved slightly and said to her, raising his voice a little to be heard, "I suppose you'd rather have one of those powder-puff intellectual boys your father always had around. They'd like your damned concert, all right."

"Oh, let's not talk about it," she said tiredly. She still had no control, but she was too weary even to argue.

Joel's mouth shut firmly. "It's damned hard to have a wife who thinks she's superior to you," he said.

Harriet flared for an instant. "I don't!" she said indignantly. "I've never done one single thing to make you think that, either."

"Oh, no," Joel said. His voice was like a nasty little boy's,

jeering at her. "What about learning to typewrite behind my back the way you've been doing for three months? You thought I didn't know about it, didn't you?"

"I can't see anything about that that would make you think I was being superior," Harriet said coldly.

"I suppose you're just learning for fun," Joel said. "What are you doing it for if you don't think you'll have to go out and get a job? You're afraid I can't support you, aren't you?"

"I never thought it would come to that," Harriet said angrily. "But you must admit that you were pretty worried yourself a few months ago, and that's what started me." She tried to make her voice softer and to speak more gently. "You know yourself, Joel, it's easier for a girl to get a job. She doesn't have to ask for such a high salary, or to keep up appearances. I thought that if you should lose yours, I might try to get some temporary one that could keep us going while you looked around. That way you could afford to try for something you wanted instead of taking just anything."

"Very nice!" Joel said, still petulantly, and she grew angry with him again, her brief impulse to pacify him left her.

"And I don't see why you should worry about that, anyway!" she said, with heat again. "I'm entitled to help too, aren't I? Or do you think woman's place is in the home?"

"I don't care where you stay," Joel said. "But I don't like you implying that I'm not capable of supporting you. You and Elaine and Pris and all the other damned responsibilities that have been hanging around my neck."

"Oh, I won't argue with you, if it's simply a question

of your pride," she said nastily. "I thought you had some valid objection."

He was stopped by that, and opened his mouth and closed it again without saying anything. "Oh, hell," he finally said weakly, and she nodded and turned her head away again.

There were tears standing in her eyes now. This was all her fault; Joel was feeling down in the dumps, but he hadn't looked for the argument, and he wasn't trying to keep it up. She could have laughed once at the things he was saying. It was her fault, and it was her father's fault. Poor Dad, he wanted to help her, but he had made her doubt herself instead. Now she didn't know how she felt. Gray had implied that her affection for Joel was entirely physical, but he was wrong. Her father had implied that it was an escape from the life he had given her. He was wrong too. She didn't believe either of them, but it wouldn't trouble her so much if she didn't feel so annoyed with Joel now. Why couldn't he beat her or something? Why did he allow these troublesome thoughts to stay in her mind? Why did he let her nag and sting and say mean, sharp little things to him?

The train stopped and started monotonously at the stations and people came in, shaking off their wet umbrellas. Nobody looked pleasant except the two young lovers and they were too ecstatic. They were even more annoying than the gloomy ones. She began watching impatiently for their street, but the train was against her, it made innumerable stops, it was like a personal injury the way it dawdled along. They passed 103rd Street, finally, and she began to feel more comforted. Next came 110th Street and it was time to start to arrange her bag and pull her

coat around her so that she could get up hastily. Joel never liked to stand up while the train was still going; he liked to make a last-minute dash after it had stopped and the doors were opened. She sat, poised for that moment, and felt him grab her arm and pull her up. He walked ahead and she followed him, feeling like a squaw, but when they got to the door he stood aside with a great deal of mock ceremony to let her pass through.

The 110th Street station was cold, great drafts of air coming in the upstairs door, and they climbed the steps slowly, Harriet forcing the pace down. She was surely going to have grippe, she thought, her bones hurt her so much. Joel reached down, standing one step ahead of her, and took her elbow again. He looked impatient, and she had another feeble spurt of irritation. Why couldn't he wait for her, her legs weren't as long as his?

Outside, the wind had increased, and blew against them, throwing rain into their faces so that it no longer seemed cool or refreshing but was an enemy to batter against. Joel opened the umbrella, fighting with the wind to get it up over their heads, and they crossed the street holding it lowered in front of them as a shield against the wind, not caring whether or not they got wet.

They passed a little tavern, lighted in the windows by its red neon beer sign. "I'd like a drink," Joel said. "Want one?"

She looked at him in despair. "Honestly, Joel, you know we can't afford it," she said to him. "Pris spent the whole month's liquor budget the other day."

"This is different," Joel said. "Rules are all right and budgeting is all right, but I want a drink now."

"You're drinking too much nowadays anyway," she said,

and then could have cut her tongue off. Her hand went up towards her mouth, instinctively, as if she could push the words back.

"What are you, anyway, Carrie Nation?" Joel said angrily. It was the first real sign of life in him.

"No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that," she said. "But we really can't afford it now, Joel, and it isn't as if it were a party or something. Let's go home, please, I'm tired."

"Well, you would drag me all the way over to Brooklyn to go to that damned concert," Joel said. But he walked on with her, and she was grateful. The little prickling irritability that had made her nag him earlier had gone completely, and there was no other impulse in its place. She felt dead and sodden, she only wanted to cover the streets quickly before they got to their home. She could see the big yellow globes of light out in front of it all the way down the block, and they were like a magnet to her. Her steps grew faster with them in sight. The old hall, with its red carpet and palm trees, was good to see and the elevator didn't seem too slow in spite of her impatience to be in the apartment. Mr. McCready's pleasant old face made her like it.

But when Joel took out his key and opened the door, she stepped back involuntarily, it was so dark and cold inside. She almost wished they had stopped for the drink. She could have had some hot coffee perhaps, and here it would mean boiling the water, and waiting for ages before it would be ready, and all the while her feet would be damp and cold, and her nose would be sore and she'd want to sneeze.

She decided not to bother with it. Joel turned on the hall lights and she went off towards their bedroom without speaking to him. She couldn't get her clothes off quickly

enough. The damp coat she threw carelessly over the chair, and she kicked off her rubbers on the floor. She stripped with cold fingers, leaving her clothes where they lay, and pulled down her bathrobe from the closet door. Its flannel folds were warm and dry and she began to feel her first inkling of comfort again. A hot bath would be good, she decided, and she knelt on the floor to get her slippers out from under the bed. Joel had stayed behind to hang his overcoat and umbrella up in the hall closet and he came in now as she stood up again.

"I'm going to take a bath," she said shortly, and he nodded. She crossed the hall and closed the bathroom door behind her, shutting out the sight of Joel sitting down slowly to take off his shoes.

Surprisingly, for that hour of night, the water was hot and steam came along with it, rising and filling the bathroom until the whole air was damp and warm. Her head felt clearer as she inhaled it, and she lay for a long time in the hot water, drawing in the vapor, feeling the ache leave her bones. As she felt better, she felt more cheerful and she was sorry now that she had been so ugly with Joel. She had seldom quarreled with a person. Her father didn't fight, and except for one or two arguments with schoolmates, she had never lost her temper with anybody. As a little girl she would get mad at inanimate things sometimes, but she was afraid of people and she was still more afraid of them when they were angry. If she had ever spoken sharply to Joel before, he had frightened her with his quick, furious expression. But tonight he had been so limp that he had given her a feeling of power and she had gone ahead, saying things that shamed her now when she thought back on them.



She got out of the tub and dried herself, thinking of how she would apologize to him, and when she drew the robe on again, her body felt strong and warm.

She opened the door of their room tentatively. Joel was undressed, but he had not gone to bed yet. He was standing by the window, in his bathrobe and pajamas, looking out on the rain that made the streets and houses a shining black. "Joel," she said timidly. He turned immediately and came over to her.

"I'm sorry, baby," he said. "I didn't mean to fight with you."

She went swiftly into his arms, losing all self-consciousness. "Oh, darling," she said. "I'm a louse, it was my fault."

"No," he said. He leaned down and kissed her and she stretched her body against him. The contact excited her more than she had been excited by him for a long time. He kissed her again, and reached to turn the light out while she pulled down the covers of the bed, letting the extra cushions lie on the floor. They moved and thought together so perfectly that she could not remember taking off her robe or him taking off his, or their getting into bed together. Their love-making was the strangest they had ever had. It was almost hysterical, or rather a release from hysteria. They clung savagely to each other. She had no objectivity left, there were just herself and Joel together in a dark case of sheets and blankets.

Afterwards, she lay warm and relaxed, with her head on his shoulder, and stared at the darkness. She had forgotten to turn out the light in the bathroom, she noticed half absently; its light, through the crack of the partly opened door, gave a little clarity to the room, and if she turned her head sideways again she could see Joel's thin, handsome

profile, and his eyes opened and staring upwards too. She moved closer to him and kissed him where his neck joined his shoulder. "What are you thinking about?" she whispered, her lips muffled against him.

"What?" he said aloud, his voice disturbing in the room, and then turned into a whisper. "Oh, nothing," he said. She lay quietly for a while soaking in her contentment, but slowly she began to frown and she looked at him again. There had been something withheld in his voice; he was thinking about something and he didn't want to tell her. "Joel," she said. "Something's bothering you. Wouldn't it help to tell me?"

"I wanted to hide it for a few more days, but you might as well know, I guess," he said without preliminaries. His voice was very dry, as if there were no saliva in his mouth. He swallowed. "They fired me last Monday," he said. "I haven't got a job any more."

For a moment she couldn't say anything; she lay in the darkness receiving the shock. "Oh, Joel," she said finally, making her voice tender and sympathetic, trying to sound as if it were only a personal injury to him, not something that would affect all of them. But her heart leaped with fear, and after the first panic subsided, tears came to her eyes, and she kept her face turned away from him so that he couldn't see her despair.

*PART VI*

*April 1940–July 1940*

NEW YORK



THE agency woman said to Harriet, "This is a job you might try. Mr. McIlvaine is a difficult sort of person. We never seem to be able to satisfy him. But he doesn't require short-hand, and he needs someone who can compose letters, so you might do. Do you want to try it?"

"Of course," Harriet said. She was wondering how Nancy Els started her agency. That was the sort of thing she should do, invent a unique service and open an office. Create your own work, really. There was something very charming about Nancy Els and her methods of business. After making the rounds of other agencies, Harriet was amazed at the leisurely, personal atmosphere here. Of course, this was special, it was an agency for odd talents: authors, radio commentators, importers, professors and people of that sort came here to hire secretaries. Education was important here, and the knowledge of foreign languages. Speed and technical ability were not quite as important as they were elsewhere.

"What does Mr. McIlvaine do?" she asked timidly. Some of the jobs required a girl who could travel, and she was not free for that.

"He writes," Miss Els told her. "He's a sort of literary hack. Does all sorts of things. Writes for the movies, for the magazines, writes detective stories, special advertising copy, everything. He's an odd sort of duck, it's hard to get on with him. None of our girls have succeeded. But it's a very well-paid job. Thirty a week and only five days out

of seven, and half the time you get the afternoon off. You have to copy his stuff and write his letters for him. He works like a dog himself, night and day, but of course the copying doesn't take nearly as long."

"Doesn't he travel?" Harriet asked nervously. She was tempted at the thought of the job, it sounded like the sort of thing she would like and she was afraid there would be something about it that would make it impossible for her.

"No, he hates it," Miss Els said, smiling. "He goes off for weekends sometimes, but never more than a day's distance from New York."

"Good," Harriet said. "I'll go up right away. What's his address?"

"East Thirty-seventh Street," Miss Els said. "Wait a minute, I'll have to look up the number." She fingered through a little card file and found the slip with McIlvaine's address which she handed to Harriet. "Take it with you as a reference," she said. "And you'd better run along. He's in a *terrible* hurry." She smiled again.

On the subway, Harriet held her purse tightly, trying to decide how she should behave with Mr. McIlvaine. Miss Els had given her no idea of what his peculiarities were. She hoped he was not the sort who lost his temper easily, she felt she could cope with any other kind of person. She was embarrassed to find herself smiling into space as she set her face for the interview. A young man across the way from her was watching her too closely, as if he weren't sure whether or not she was smiling at him. She turned her head away from him and looked at the ads. But he had made her self-conscious and she didn't think about Mr.

McIlvaine again until she reached the Thirty-third Street subway station and had to get out.

She walked along the broad sidewalks of Park Avenue, enjoying the sunshine. Her winter coat felt a little too warm for the day, but she liked that, it had been so long since she had felt too warm. Now she began thinking about her interview again and suddenly she lost her confidence. For some reason she had assumed that it would be a simple matter to get along with the man. But she remembered the other girls who had been unsatisfactory. Maybe Mr. McIlvaine wants somebody more colorful or more intelligent than me, she thought. She tried to decide whether or not it would be worth while to assume a false personality, but she hadn't the courage for it even if she could convince herself that it would be wise.

She turned down Thirty-seventh and walked almost the length of the sloping block until she found the address she wanted. It was an old brownstone house which had been converted into apartments, and Mr. McIlvaine's doorbell had printed beside his card, in neat letters, "first floor." She hesitated a moment before she rang it and as her finger in its pigskin glove pressed the little button, she felt afraid. She had been trying for two weeks to find a job and she had spent days crowded with unsuccessful interviews. Joel, for all that they needed the money so badly, had seemed almost pleased that she had been unsuccessful. In a way she was touched by him. It was foolish and vain, but it was based on a real desire to protect her. Only she couldn't humor him. They were already living on the money that her father had left, and it couldn't last too long. Besides, she wanted to save it as her father had wanted her to, not as an escape fund, of course, but for some other emergency.

She thought wearily, the good weather cheered me up, but why should I think this was any different from the others? Of course, it was the first time she had gone out from Miss Els' agency, but because Miss Els was pleasant didn't mean that Mr. McIlvaine would be. In fact, just the opposite; this would be a difficult interview, it would be harder than the impersonal bureaus she had been to before, where they typed out her name and address on a slip and told her they would notify her if anything turned up.

The front door clicked and she jumped nervously to catch and twist the door knob. Now she was in and she could have no more hesitations. She saw a door open down the hall, letting a streak of light out, and a face peer around it.

"Who is it?" a man asked.

"Mr. McIlvaine?" she said.

"Yes," he said. "What do you want?"

"I'm from Miss Els' agency," she told him. "I understand you wanted a secretary."

"Oh, yes," Mr. McIlvaine said, and opened the door a bit wider. "Come in, Miss—"

"Mrs. Randolph," she said. She followed him into the apartment, so nervous that she could hardly look around her. She concentrated instead on watching him. He was a little man, and neatly dressed, with a starched collar. He had gone bald, and combed some strands of hair over the spot on the top of his head. He wore pince-nez glasses, and they hung on a cord. He was exactly like the dean of her father's college; she almost smiled, the resemblance was so perfect.

"Oh, yes," he said flutteringly. "Mrs. Randolph, of course. Come in, won't you, and have a seat." He waved his hand



towards the room, although you could hardly call such a precise gesture a wave.

"Thank you," she said. Her self-possession had come back to some extent; he looked so uncertain himself that she felt courageous in comparison. She saw that she would have to manage the interview, since after they sat down, he said nothing. "I understand you want somebody who can typewrite and answer your letters for you," she said. "I don't have any experience, but I used to take care of my father's correspondence, and I think I could do it for you."

"Oh, yes," he said. He looked doubtful. "You're married?" he asked.

"Yes," she said uneasily. Perhaps that would be against her. But he merely nodded. "It's not a difficult job, Mrs. Randolph," he said. "Although I seem to have difficulty in finding a suitable person for it. I am, perhaps, a little fastidious. I insist on perfect neatness, and a great many of the girls that Miss Els has sent me have been very untidy. But the main thing, of course, is personality. That's so important, don't you think?"

"Yes, of course," she said, still nervously. She could do nothing about her personality, if he didn't like it. She looked around the room a bit now, as she was talking. It was very sparse, and extremely clean. There were the two baronial oak chairs in which they sat with a long oak table between them. And on the other side of the room there was a big desk with an office swivel chair in front of it. The desk was the sort with a typewriter built into it which can be pulled up for use. Beside it, like a small child, was an unpainted wooden table with another typewriter on it, and there was a green metal file case beside that. Both table

and desk had goose-necked daylight lamps on them. There was no rug on the dustless floor and no pictures on the walls. The only ornament in the room was the rows of books along one wall, covering it completely. Their colors added an unintentional brightness to it.

Mr. McIlvaine evidently noticed that she was looking around her. "As you see," he told her, "this is my workshop, and I don't believe in clutter. The last girl I had here insisted on bringing in bunches of flowers. I hate flowers, they only fall and litter the room. She couldn't seem to understand it, although I told her very precisely not to bother with them. I hope you won't try to soften up the place, Mrs. Randolph."

"Not at all," she said, feeling a little treacherous to her predecessor who had probably not had the warning she had. "Since this is your workroom, I think it should be kept as one. Everything in its place and nothing to distract you."

"Of course!" he said delightedly. "That's it exactly, Mrs. Randolph. I'm pleased that you can understand me. I'll show you around a bit, shall I?"

She smiled at him and stood up, arranging her purse and gloves neatly on the table. "These are my letter files," he said. "I have a great many dealings with agents and publishers which have to be kept for income-tax purposes. Here is today's mail on the desk." He pointed to a pile of letters on the larger desk. There were about twelve of them, she thought, and wondered if this was an average day.

"Now, which desk do you prefer?" he asked her. "I want you to be perfectly comfortable."

Noticing that he was shorter than she, Harriet looked

back at the two desks and saw that the chair beside the big one was higher than the one beside the table. "The table will suit me very well," she said. "Those two drawers will be good enough for stationery, I should think, and I like a low desk. It's easier to typewrite if you don't have to raise your arms too much."

"Really," he said. She saw that he was pleased. "Well, now, I had never thought of that. Most of the girls who have worked here have felt that the desk would be preferable because it had more drawer space. But I will confess to you, Mrs. Randolph, I really like it myself, and I hated to give it up each time."

She was amused, although she tried not to show it. Evidently most of his troubles came because he was too timid to express his wants. Probably Miss Els had not analyzed the difficulty and had sent him a rather aggressive type of person.

"Now, your duties will be simple, after you have grown used to them," he explained to her. "For the first few days I'll give you advice about the letters, until you feel you're capable of handling them yourself. I shall also want you to pay my bills for me, you know; you're to make out the checks and address the envelopes and so forth, and I'll simply sign them along with the letters when you have finished for the day. Then, of course, there are my manuscripts to be copied. I like three copies, and I must insist on the carbons being neat. It does seem to me that that shouldn't be too difficult."

"It doesn't sound difficult at all," she agreed.

"I'm away a good part of the day," he told her. "After we get you broken in, so to speak." He grinned at her nervously. "So that you will have to answer my telephone

and take messages for me. Miss Els has probably explained to you that I work for a great many people and a lot of my time is taken up in seeing them, and talking over outlines and ideas with them. I do the actual work at night. I prefer it then, since it is quieter. So you see, we shan't interfere with each other a great deal."

"No," she smiled.

"I should prefer that you do not go out to lunch," he said. "I am so often apt to be away myself. It's incredible to me how much business is done at lunchtime. Personally, I feel that it interferes with the digestion, but then we can't choose our times, can we?"

"No," she said. She began to like him. He was fussy and a little ridiculous, but there was a gentleness about him that was very winning, and he was not dull.

"I have an excellent little kitchen here, which I shall show you," he told her. "And possibly you could have your lunch here. I have a maid who comes in at about twelve who will take care of you. She's a fine cook, I believe, and if you will tell her what you want, she will get it for you. Naturally, since I am asking you to stay in, I will provide the lunch. Is that satisfactory?"

"Oh, perfectly," Harriet said. She was pleased at the idea. It would have been nice to get outdoors and stretch her legs a bit in the middle of the day, but she would save a good deal of money by having her lunch supplied to her, and that was worth it.

"Well, now," he rubbed his hands together drily, "I believe that's everything. Will you hang up your hat and coat in the closet there, and we can start to work."

"You want me then?" Harriet asked.

"Oh, yes," he told her. "I have great confidence in Miss

Els, although she hasn't been satisfactory lately. We shan't bother with references or anything of that sort."

"Thank you," Harriet said. She picked up her purse and gloves and took them with the coat and hat to the closet. It was bare, like everything else in the house, an overcoat and a raincoat hung in it, and there were two hats neatly set down on the shelf. She rather wished she had a mirror, but fortunately her hair was straight, and she could smooth it with her hands, hoping that it would be all right.

"Now," Mr. McIlvaine said when she had finished. "Shall we begin?" He looked impatient, and she hurried to her chair and sat down in it. She watched him while he slit open his letters with a paper knife, and unfolded them, smoothing out their creases and putting them carefully beside him. When he had opened all of them he began to read them, passing them over to her as he finished each one.

"There are so many routine requests, you see," he told her. "This institution, for instance, wishes to put *Conestoga Wagon* into Braille. I simply refer them to my publisher, partly because it saves trouble and partly because that is a book which I wrote in collaboration with another man, and I do not have the exclusive rights to it."

"Yes, I see," Harriet said. "Incidentally, is there some list of your works and their publishers? I should be familiar with them, I think."

"Yes," he said. "Now you see here, this letter is from a high-school girl who wants just such a thing. I have the lists mimeographed, it saves time. They're in this drawer here. You might take one home with you and study it, Mrs. Randolph. It will be useful, I believe."

"Thank you," she said.

"Now here," he said, "is a letter from my agent. It is in

regard to an outline for a series of articles which he has submitted to *Cosmopolitan* for me. Naturally, you will not be able to answer this sort of letter, but in the future I shall pencil a brief summary of what I want to say on the top of it, and you can compose something suitable for me to sign."

"Oh, yes," she said, picking up the letter and examining it.

He smiled shyly. "I should tell you," he explained, "that I dislike writing letters intensely. Perhaps it is too much like my regular work."

"Of course," she said. "It would be terribly annoying, I should think."

"And tiring," he said, nodding. "Yes, I decided long ago that since I have to employ a secretary anyway, there was no reason why she shouldn't take that burden off my shoulders." He went on looking through his pile of letters. "Of course," he said, showing her a handwritten one, "this is from my aunt in New Hampshire, and I must answer this by hand. But there are not many of this sort, Mrs. Randolph."

She thought he was a little pathetic, although he evidently did not think so himself. He seemed pleased that he had so few personal letters. He went on through the pile, indicating the routine ones, making little comments on them, sometimes amusing, sometimes pettish, and Harriet nodded patiently, trying to store all of these things in her head so that he would not have to go over them too often. Tomorrow I'll suggest that I do them by myself, she thought, and he can check on me.

He showed her the stationery and gave her the manuscript of a short story to type. He composed on a type-

writer evidently, and then wrote in corrections in a neat little handwriting. It would be easy stuff to copy.

"I think that will be all for today," he told her. "We don't want to overwhelm you, do we?"

She smiled at him. "Please don't worry about that, Mr. McIlvaine," she told him. "This doesn't look difficult at all."

"Fine!" he said heartily. "Well, then, I'm afraid I must leave you for the time being. I have a luncheon engagement. The maid, as I said, will take care of you. She should be in almost immediately. Her name, by the way, is Cora. You'll take care of any telephone calls, won't you?"

She nodded.

"Good," he said. He had gone to the coat closet and was taking out his overcoat. She noticed, with amusement, that although the sun came in the window, he carried a rolled-up umbrella. "I shall be back around three," he told her. "I think this will be satisfactory, Mrs. Randolph. I sincerely hope so."

"Thank you," she said, smiling. She got up to see him to the door. "I hope so too."

Left alone, she got up and looked through the rest of the apartment. Beside the room where she worked, there was a bedroom, furnished with a cot, a bureau and a leather arm-chair; a kitchen with the most handsome of modern equipment, lined with gleaming tiles, a curious note in the rest of the apartment, and a bathroom, equally well equipped. The effect of bareness was mostly created by the lack of curtains, she decided. Catch dust, probably, she thought, smiling to herself. She ran her finger over the edge of the big desk. It was spotless. This was very pleasant, she decided, and she picked up the stack of letters and arranged them beside her typewriter. Now, stationery and carbon

paper were in the right hand drawer, and manuscript paper in the left, she discovered. She sat down and began to work.

She had typed the third letter when she heard a key in the lock and the maid came in. She was a tall, thin colored woman, very neatly dressed. She looked as bare and austere as the apartment, but she had a nice smile.

“You the new secretary?” she asked.

“Yes,” Harriet said. “My name is Mrs. Randolph. Mr. McIlvaine told me about you. You’re Cora, aren’t you?”

“That’s right,” the maid said. She took off her hat and coat and hung them in the closet. “He’s very fussy, I can’t leave them lying around,” she explained over her shoulder to Harriet. She began unrolling the parcel she carried and brought out a starched white apron and a white scarf. She tied the scarf over her head like a bandanna, and put on the apron over her silk print dress. “I’ve got to clean in here first,” she said. “I hope I don’t bother you.”

“No, of course not,” Harriet said. “Go ahead.” She began to work again, listening to Cora sweeping behind her, and hearing her rub the dust cloth over the furniture. When she finished the preliminary cleaning, she got out a bucket of soap suds and scrubbed the paint around the doors and windows. “Windows get washed on Thursdays,” she told Harriet. “Bring a sweater then. It gets chilly in here.”

Harriet smiled at her. “Thanks, I will,” she said.

She got back into her work again and became enough absorbed in it so that she didn’t hear Cora finish and go into the kitchen. The first sign of it was when Cora put her head around the door. “You ready to stop for lunch now?” she asked Harriet. “I got it all ready. We had some food in the house I thought I’d use, but tomorrow you tell me what you want and I’ll get it.”



"Oh, thanks," Harriet said. "Yes, I'm ready whenever you are."

Cora brought in the food on a wooden tray and set it down on the oak table. "Come over here and stretch your legs a bit," she said. She had fixed a small lunch, but it was delicious, and Harriet found she was hungry. While she ate, Cora worked on, cleaning the bedroom now. Harriet could hear the thump of her mop. She came out when Harriet had finished.

"You all through?" she asked. Harriet nodded and Cora picked up the tray. She stood, balancing it on her hip, strong and tall. "Think you going to like this job?" she asked.

"I think so," Harriet said. "Mr. McIlvaine seems like a nice person. I hope I suit him."

"Maybe you will," Cora said, looking her over. "Them other girls, they scared him to death, but you don't look so rambunctious. And they didn't like him either, that was the trouble, they thought he was crazy."

"Well, he is a little eccentric," Harriet said. "But I thought he was pleasant. Don't you?"

"Oh, me!" Cora said. "He's my favorite man. Maybe he's fussy, sure, but I don't mind. I wouldn't work for anybody else."

"That sounds swell," Harriet said, grinning at her. She liked Cora, there was something vigorous and clean about her. She was kindly too, in spite of looking so harsh. She made Harriet feel very young.

"Yep," Cora said. She started taking the tray out to the kitchen, talking as she went. "He sure is good. Don't you worry, if he likes you, you're going to like him."

"Good," Harriet said. She started to light a cigarette and

then noticed that there were no ashtrays around and decided against it. She could do without during her working hours, she thought. Lots of people had to. She walked back to the desk again, impatient to finish her work before Mr. McIlvaine came back. As she was rolling a new sheet of paper into the typewriter, the telephone rang and for a moment she made no move to answer it. Then she remembered and walked over to the little stand where it was kept to pick it up. There was a neat white pad beside it, she noticed, and a pencil for messages. Cora put her head out of the kitchen and watched her as she said "Hello,"

Somebody asked to speak to Mr. McIlvaine. "He's not here at the moment," she told them. "But can I take a message?"

"Who is this?" the voice asked her.

Harriet hesitated for a moment, and then looking across at Cora, smiled. "This is Mr. McIlvaine's secretary," she said.

## 2

The May sunshine came in through the window which Harriet didn't dare open. However, the high ceiling of the room kept it cool, and she had rolled up the sleeves of her silk blouse. Even Mr. McIlvaine had left his umbrella behind today. She felt, seeing the yellow warmth through the glass, that she could smell spring, something sweet and clean. It was entirely imaginary in this dustless, scentless room, but she guessed that Cora felt it too. She was singing in the kitchen, one of her gayer spirituals. There were high "hallelujahs" at the end of each chorus which she shouted triumphantly. Harriet smiled to hear her.

She stacked the finished letters for Mr. McIlvaine's signature on his desk, and laid the three paper-clipped copies of

his new article beside them. She could have sent the original and first carbon of these off, and filed the other, but she knew that he liked to finger them, reveling in their neatness, enjoying phrases of his own creation which caught his eyes as he looked over them. Sometimes he read bits aloud to her, forgetting that having just copied them she was already familiar with them.

Lately she had begun offering criticisms and he had been pleased with them. He had given her several articles and stories to revise and had told her she had a real ability for that sort of thing. She liked to hear that. For so many years she had thought of herself as simply a person who was mildly competent in several fields, but not more than that in any one particular field. Now she had a special talent or bent on which to concentrate.

The telephone rang and she went to pick it up. It was Coles Hanson, Mr. McIlvaine's agent.

"Is this Mrs. Randolph?" he asked her.

"Yes, Mr. Hanson," she said. "I'm sorry, but Mr. McIlvaine isn't in right now."

"That's all right," Hanson told her. "It's you I'm calling."

"Me?" Harriet said in surprise.

"Yes," Hanson said. "I wanted to congratulate you on the swell job of revision you did to Mac's pearl article. Really, an awfully good job—a creative job. Ever think of writing?"

"No," Harriet laughed. "I know which side my bread's buttered on."

He laughed with her. "Seriously though," he said, "you're good at that sort of thing. I have an assistant who's hovering on the brink of matrimony. If she takes the leap

would you consider coming to work for me? I have Mac's permission to ask you."

"I'd love to," Harriet said enthusiastically.

"Swell!" he told her. "Just keep it in mind now. And if you're interested in making a career for yourself, it's a job with a future to it. Are you interested?"

Harriet said, "Yes," although there were reservations in her mind. Joel might want her to stop working if he got himself a job. Just the same, it didn't hurt to think about it. And she rather liked the idea.

"Good," Hanson told her. "Don't forget."

She hung up smilingly.

Her work for the day was done and she began putting on her hat and jacket absent-mindedly, standing before the little closet mirror she had persuaded Mr. McIlvaine to buy.

"I'm off, Cora," she called out to the kitchen, and Cora came out smiling.

"I'm off, too, in a few minutes," she said. "Ummmmhum, it's so pretty outdoors I can hardly wait to go."

"Don't blame you," Harriet said, smiling. "Good-bye. See you tomorrow."

She closed the door carefully behind her and went out on to the brownstone stoop. There was a shining green roadster parked in front of the house, glorious with chromium finish and white-walled tires. The radio in it was going loudly; as Harriet walked by it she could hear the news announcer's frantic voice. "Liège has been taken," she heard, and then the list of other names, places in Holland and Belgium which she barely knew, suddenly taken out of their picturesque, geography-book charm into a world where invasion swept terror, scattering the lace caps and the wooden shoes, bombing the great cathedrals, letting

loose the dykes, killing, burning, terrorizing. The sunshine and the sweet air seemed ironic. She paused to hear the rest of it. Each day there was some tenuous hope to fasten on to.

Somebody called her and she looked back to see Pris putting her head out of the car door. "Harriet," she said again, and Harriet turned back to her.

"Hello," she said. "Where'd you get the car?"

"It's Kenneth's," Pris said. She opened the door near the sidewalk and motioned Harriet in. "Come on," she said. "I came to get you."

Harriet got in beside her and closed the door. Pris had turned the radio down and now she reached out and clicked it off. "I didn't dare come in for you," she said. "I was afraid Mr. Mac was there. So I waited."

"I hope not long," Harriet said. The little shelf behind her was crowded with long cardboard boxes, and one of them slid forward against her neck as Pris put the car into gear and turned it out into the street. "What are all these?" Harriet asked.

"My trousseau," Pris said carelessly, keeping her eyes ahead of her on the street. Her gloved hands slid expertly on the wheel as she turned the corner onto Park Avenue.

Harriet leaned back a moment speechlessly. "Your trousseau?" she repeated. She felt, stupidly, that something was happening she ought to grasp, but which was not clear to her.

"Yes," Pris said. There was a little smile in the corner of her mouth. "Present from the groom."

"You mean Kenneth?" Harriet asked. "You and Kenneth are going to be married?"

Pris nodded. "Aren't you pleased?" she asked.

Harriet thought, pleased! She tried to say something pleasant, but in her mind was Pris's hard, stubborn little face as she came out of Kenneth's bedroom that night, wrapping her bathrobe around herself as if she were holding in a precious thing. At any rate, Harriet thought, the method worked. "I am, if that's what you want," she said finally, unable to be completely cordial. Afterwards she was sorry. What was the point in trying to make Pris unhappy if she had already made up her mind.

"I worked hard enough for it," Pris said defiantly. She braked the car for a red light, and after it had stopped, turned to look at Harriet. "I wanted to tell you myself," she said, "because the rest of the family don't know what happened. I thought you ought to know. I'm going to have a baby."

"Oh," Harriet said, nodding. That was what had forced Kenneth into this. "Why are you telling me about it?" she asked. Her voice was not cold, but detached. Even to herself it sounded disembodied, like a victrola record.

"Because you saw me that night," Pris said. "Partly, at any rate. And partly because—oh, I don't know, you'll disapprove more than any of the rest of them, but you'll understand why, too."

This is a dubious compliment, Harriet thought, but I suppose it's true. "You wanted money so desperately?" she asked, dropping her pretense of approval.

"Of course," Pris said. The light changed and she started up again. Harriet thought she was probably glad to have an excuse to look away, to keep her eyes ahead of her. "We couldn't have gone on like this on thirty dollars a week, could we? I had to do something. I'm the little heroine at home now."

"It wouldn't be thirty a week forever," Harriet said. "As soon as Joel gets a job it would have been more. And you could have tried to work yourself."

"The only asset I have is my looks," Pris said, turning the wheel. "So I went out and sold them. It's simple enough, isn't it?"

She sounded so adult; Harriet was more horrified at that, curiously, than at her hardness. It seemed worse to have Pris grow up so quickly than it did to have her cheat.

"When are you getting married?" she asked her.

"Tonight," Pris said. "That's why I came for you. The ceremony," her mouth twisted scornfully, "is to take place at Ken's hotel. Joel and Elaine and Kit and Gray have gone on ahead. I hope they're consoling the groom."

"I suppose he didn't want to get married," Harriet said stiffly.

"No, he didn't," Pris said. She put out her hand for a left turn. "He's chronically opposed to marriage, anyway, and just now he's all excited about the war. He wanted to go over to England and join the army there. But nature put a stop to all that." She smiled to herself.

"You are really pregnant, aren't you?" Harriet asked.

"Oh, yes," Pris said. "Don't worry, Kenneth went along to the doctor's with me. He wasn't going to have anything put over on him." She stopped for another traffic light and turned to look at Harriet again. "Listen," she said. "It's not quite as bad as you think. He doesn't dislike me, although he's pretty sore at the moment. He's as fond of me as he'd be of any girl. But he would never have married unless he had been forced into it like this. Perhaps he'll be glad, afterwards. I'm going to be as good to him as I can. I'm not a complete crook, you know."

“No,” Harriet said. “I didn’t think that. As a matter of fact what worries me so much is that being hard-up made you so desperate. It’s a sort of weakness.”

Pris was astonishingly meek. “I know it is,” she said. “I don’t have any guts, I guess. I thought I did. I never was afraid of snakes, or the dark, or all the things that frighten a lot of girls. But I’m afraid of being poor, of not knowing what’s going to happen to me.”

Harriet went on mercilessly. “You weren’t afraid of the other things because you don’t have much imagination,” she said. “But this was forced on you, it was something real, not in the mind.”

“Yes,” Pris said. “Do you dislike me for it?”

“No,” Harriet said. “I don’t, or I wouldn’t be talking to you this way. I’m sorry for you and worried about you. I’m not at all sure that you’ll be any happier this way.”

“Maybe not,” Pris said. She had to start up the car again, but Harriet saw that she was crying, and once she took her hand off the wheel to wipe away the tears. She sniffed, and Harriet opened her purse and got out her handkerchief. “Here,” she said.

“Thanks,” Pris said. “I knew you’d bawl me out, but I guess I kind of wanted it. I couldn’t go on keeping this to myself. I’d rather have you bawl me out than anybody else. It’s like I said, you don’t just blow up, like Elaine would, you see my side of it. Maybe you don’t approve of it, but you understand it.”

“You haven’t told Elaine, then,” Harriet said.

“No,” Pris told her. “And I’m not going to. Or Joel, or anybody. I just told them we were going to get married a few minutes ago. I don’t particularly care about secrecy, but I couldn’t bear to have Elaine fluttering around and be-



ing happy for me for five whole days while we got the license. Kenneth felt the same way. This isn't the usual joyous occasion, you know."

"No, I know," Harriet said.

Pris steered the car to the side entrance of Kenneth's hotel, and they got out of it, confronted by the walls of the building, so steep that they could not see the top without stretching their heads back. The doorman took the key from Pris. "Mr. Tryson's car," Pris told him. "Will you park it for him?" He nodded and she opened her bag for a tip. It's true, Harriet thought, they know how to treat money. This is the life that is natural to them, they know how to make liberal gestures, they are not abashed by door-men in uniforms, or headwaiters, or expensive hotels.

They went into the handsome dim lobby and took the elevator. The boy seemed to know Pris, and Harriet suspected that she had been here often with Kenneth. She had a key to the room, Harriet noticed, and she opened the door easily, as if she was used to it.

Kenneth had a suite, a living room and a bedroom off of it. The living room was more handsomely furnished than the hotel rooms Harriet had known. There was some personality to it, and the colors were good, not the standard cream and chintz. There were long green-and-white-striped curtains at the windows, and the couch was upholstered in a brick-colored brocade. Elaine was sitting on it, wearing her best hat and looking pleased. Joel and Gray sat on the window seat which covered the radiator. The spring sunshine colored Joel's hair so that it was a bright gold. Kit was sitting in an armchair, with her long, expensively clad legs crossed and a cigarette in her hand. She smiled when they came in. "Well," she said. "Here's the bride at last."

Harriet could see that she was delighted, all of them were delighted with the wedding. Of course, they didn't know what had actually happened, but there was something so eager about all of them that she was afraid they would approve even if they did know.

"Where's the groom?" Priss asked. She had grown important to all of them and she knew it. The meekness she had had with Harriet disappeared, now she was with people who were proud of her, and whom she could help. From being the youngest member of the family, she had suddenly become the most important. Perhaps she had suffered from that too, Harriet thought. Perhaps she had resented Kit's business success and her own efforts to help. It was bitter to watch her, seeing her become poised and smiling, filled with the knowledge of her own superiority.

"He went down to buy a bottle of champagne or so," Joel told her. "We persuaded him to. Thought it was the proper gesture."

"I bet you did," Priss said. "He wouldn't have done it himself."

She went over and sat down on the edge of the little coffee table by the couch. The uncomfortable position made her look as if she was crouching, ready to jump up.

Kit leaned forward to her, smiling and eager. She had lost the attitude of the elder sister as quickly as Priss had lost her youthfulness. She was almost humble. "I didn't get a chance to congratulate you, darling," she said. "We're all so happy for you."

Gray stirred in the window seat, and looking across at him, Harriet thought that he wanted to protest. He saw her watching him, and she turned away quickly. She wasn't anxious to meet Gray's eye these days.

"Thanks," Pris said. Her voice was haughty, dismissing any need of Kit's good wishes. It was painful to see the eagerness die out of Kit's face, leaving only the humility. She leaned back in her chair as if she had suddenly realized that her posture was over-anxious.

The door clicked and they all turned as Kenneth came in. Harriet looked at him curiously, wondering if he had changed as Pris had changed. But he seemed very much the same. He was always sulky. The only difference was that there was a jerkiness to his movements that showed nervousness, and his eyes went quickly from one object to another, as if he were a small animal caught in the palm of somebody's hand. He was carrying a paper bag, which he set down on the coffee table. Kit got up and opened it, bringing out the bottles of champagne with their gold tinfoil wrappings. "Hooray! And already iced too," she said.

There was a little jerk of gaiety to the party; they smiled as they looked at the tall bottles and they began talking more freely.

"I love champagne," Elaine said happily. "It's the only thing to have at weddings, I really think. Did you have champagne when you were married, Harriet?"

Harriet started to answer but there was a knock on the door that interrupted her and Kenneth jumped and went to open it. A bellboy stood there with a long white cardboard box. "For Mrs. Kenneth Tryson," he said, looking down at the label.

"Who?" Kenneth said, "Oh, yes." He took the box and felt in his pockets for a tip. Pris got up eagerly and came over to it, taking it from his arms before he closed the door. "I wonder who these are from?" she said. "Did you send them, Kenneth?" She had been untying the string and she

opened the box now without waiting for his answer. Harriet saw him shake his head, but Pris didn't. She took out the little card and read it to herself. "Oh," she said. Harriet thought there was a little disappointment in her voice. "It's from Joel. That's sweet of you, Joel," she said, looking up at her brother.

"It's the best I could do," Joel said somberly.

"Get the boy back to put these in water, Ken," Pris said. She pulled the mass of peach blossoms out of the box, holding them across her arms. "They're lovely," she said, bending to smell them. Elaine got up and with Kit came over to admire them. They formed a little group around Pris, intimate and feminine, and Harriet hung back uncomfortably, feeling alien. Everything was so traditional suddenly; they were trying to invest a hurried, graceless ceremony with sentiment and beauty. She saw Joel looking at her and smiling. Even Joel, who had been miserable for so long now, felt that this was a happy occasion.

Kenneth was standing by the door waiting for somebody to answer his ring. She saw him open it and heard him say to the boy outside, "A vase to put these flowers in, and some champagne glasses. Seven." He was like somebody under an anaesthetic. His face didn't change for anything, even when Pris came and put her arm under his to make him admire the flowers. "Yes," he told her. "They're lovely." He seemed almost stupid. This is like watching torture, Harriet thought. The elegant room filled with her smiling relatives suddenly gave her a kind of claustrophobia. She felt that she must breathe somewhere, she wanted to get to the window and throw it up, but even that wasn't enough. I can't stay here too long, she thought, and smile as if everything were lovely and watch them all pretend to

the minister. She remembered her own marriage down in City Hall, where even with grim surroundings and the wholesale feeling it gave them to be shunted along with the other couples, they were happy.

"Did you get hold of the judge, Ken?" Pris asked. Her voice was sharp now; she had seen that Kenneth wasn't going through the pretense of blissfulness, and she had dropped her own.

"He's supposed to be here at four-thirty," Kenneth told her. He took out his watch and looked at it, and then looked at it again as if he hadn't seen it the first time. "It's that now," he said. "He should be here soon."

"Whom are you getting, Kenneth?" Elaine asked him. "Somebody you know?"

"Yes," Kenneth said. "Judge O'Grady, a friend of my father's." Even to Elaine he made no pretense of good-nature. Why should he, Harriet thought? Pris is the only one who's obligated to go through this with good grace.

"That's nice," Elaine said, nodding contentedly. She must be very obtuse, Harriet thought. Or else she's doing a good job of acting. If she weeps, I'll die. "It makes it so much more friendly," she said, "if you can get someone you know."

"Yes, doesn't it," Kenneth said. He brought a package of cigarettes out and put one in his mouth.

"Me too, darling," Pris said, reaching out her hand. He looked at her as if he wondered who she was for a moment, and then brought the package out again to give her one. She had to nudge him when he lit his own before he remembered to light hers.

Harriet thought grimly, well, it won't be long before she whips him into shape.

Kit came over and put her arm around Pris's neck, smiling up at Kenneth. "You're a lucky man, Ken," she said. The gesture turned Pris's face soft, as she looked up to Kenneth and almost involuntarily he smiled for a moment. Harriet felt some relief. There's something between them, at any rate, she thought. But he didn't answer Kit, probably because there was nothing he could honestly say, and Kit had to laugh again and pass over it so that it wouldn't be too noticeable.

"Let me look at you," she said to Pris. She turned her around so that they were facing each other. "You got that at Considine's, didn't you? It's very pretty."

They both of them looked down at the neatly tailored little black suit Pris was wearing. "I haven't had a nice suit for so long," Pris said. "I kind of feel afraid to sit down in this."

"Well, you look darned good in it," Kit said. She shook her head sadly. "If you could see some of my customers in that job! It's a pleasure to see it on somebody who can really wear clothes."

"I bought a whole trousseau," Pris told her. "That's what I've been doing all morning. Ken gave it to me for a wedding present."

Elaine stirred on the couch. "I hated to have you do that, Ken," she said. "I wanted to outfit Pris myself. It doesn't seem right somehow."

She clings to the old customs so, Harriet thought. It was such a foolish, unnecessary little protest.

Through the opened windows they suddenly heard newsboys shouting an extra, their rough voices coming up through the golden air. Gray looked out and down. "I wonder what's happened," he said. He was obviously anxious to

go down and buy the paper, but Kit said to him sharply, "For God's sake, Gray, leave Europe alone for a minute. This is Pris's wedding day, or don't you remember?"

"Sorry," Gray said. He looked across at Pris with something strange in his face, and she lost her haughtiness for a moment and went up to him and put her arm through his. "Just for a while, Gray," she said pleadingly. "Let's forget about the disagreeable things. Please." She was begging all of them, Harriet thought, she was looking at her too, and at Kenneth, trying to force them into her pretense, and perhaps she was right. Harriet took a cigarette out of her purse and lit it to make herself relax. She saw Joel feeling in his pockets for a match while she was doing it and realized that she had become almost too independent about such things lately. Joel usually carried the cigarettes for both of them, and gave her one when she wanted it. But since she was away from him during the day, she had taken to providing for herself. I must be more careful, she thought, Joel is in a tough spot nowadays and a small thing like that might be important to him. She smiled at him, and surreptitiously patted the couch beside her, begging him to come over and sit there. He got up, pathetically grateful, and came across to her. "That judge is pretty late," he said, sitting down. He had lost so much of his lightness. His heavy remarks were hard to answer; they sank like little lumps into a conversation.

"Yes, he is," Harriet said, looking up at Kenneth, who brought out his watch again and looked at it. "I wish he'd hurry," he said impatiently.

"Well, we might as well open the champagne, don't you think?" Pris said, trying to smooth over Kenneth's sourness

with her own smile to all of them. "What are we waiting for?"

"The boy hasn't brought the glasses yet," Kenneth said. "What the devil's keeping him, I wonder."

Somebody knocked on the door at that moment. "Oh," Kenneth said, going to open it. "Here he is. About time."

There were two people outside, however. The bellboy with a tray of glasses and a large vase, and a small, white-haired man in a loosely fitting blue-serge suit.

"Judge O'Grady!" Kenneth said. For the first time he smiled, and his face looked pleasant. "Well, we'd almost given you up."

"I'm sorry, Ken," the judge said, coming in. The bellboy waited hesitantly behind him. "And at your wedding, too; it's a shame, I know how impatient you must be. But I got into a traffic jam. I should have taken the subway."

"You're here now, anyway," Kenneth said, putting a hand on his arm and drawing him into the room a little further. The bellboy made a small sound like a cough and Kenneth looked around at him. "Excuse me a second," he said to the judge and went back to take the glasses and give the boy a tip. The rest of them stood looking uncomfortably at the judge without an introduction. Only Pris kept her poise. She moved forward to take his hand. "How do you do, Judge O'Grady," she said. "I'm Priscilla Randolph."

"Ah," the judge said. "The bride?"

"Yes," she smiled at him. Kenneth came over to her and took over the rest of the introductions. "And this is Mrs. Randolph, Pris's mother," he said, and made the rounds of all of them, the judge bowing and smiling to each one. Kenneth was easier with this older man, Harriet thought, than



she had ever seen him with anyone. It was nice to see that it was possible for him to relax.

They talked politely about the traffic problems of New York and the lovely weather for a few minutes, and then the judge looked down at his wrist-watch.

"You're anxious to have it over with, I imagine," he said to Kenneth, "and I've kept you waiting as it is. Shall we begin?"

Harriet was amused at him; he had an air of haste which suggested that he probably had another appointment somewhere else, but he was implying that the hurry was for Kenneth's benefit.

They formed into a suitable order, Kenneth and Pris standing before the judge and the others grouped in a semi-circle in the background. Now that they all had to be silent, they were forced to drop their pretense. It was impossible to keep smiling while Kenneth stood there like a large calf and Pris stood by his side with her face hard and still a little red around the eyes. Harriet thought back to when she had first known Pris and how lovable she had been then, with her tennis and her horseback riding and her puppy-dog flirtations. All that same roundness and bloneness was still there, but it had been galvanized into a woman, it was not a child who was being married. The sun came in the windows, making the judge squint as he went through the ritual in his dry little voice, his sharp eyes going from one face to the other, as if he too were beginning to see that this was no ordinary ceremony. Some of his rather professional good-humor left his face and you could see the serious man, still likeable but tired, and a little troubled.

"Have you a ring?" he asked Kenneth at the end, and

Joel jerked forward to pull it out of his pocket. "Here you are, sir," he said.

The judge took the little circle, so small that you could hardly see it, in his pudgy hand, and handed it to Kenneth. "You'll want to put it on," he said, and Kenneth turned dumbly towards Pris. As she stretched out her finger she smiled again, genuinely this time, probably from relief that it was nearly over. "And now you may kiss the bride," the judge said to Kenneth. He watched them somberly as Kenneth bent over and kissed Pris, almost missing her mouth in his awkwardness. "Well," he said when they turned towards him again, "that's all." And as they still seemed to wait, "You're married now," he said. "Will you sign the license?"

He brought it out and a fountain pen, and laid them on the table. Kenneth came over to sign and the others surged around Pris, released from their silence. Elaine was weeping, Harriet saw, but she was no longer indignant, she wanted to put an arm around Elaine's shoulders. Whatever else had happened couldn't change the fact that she was seeing the last of her children marry. It must have finally made her realize that Pris was grown-up, and it was forcing her to say good-bye to a part of her life.

"Darling," she said, putting her arms around Pris and holding her. Pris let her stay there for a moment but her face had tightened and Harriet saw that it was making her miserable. She went over to them and took Elaine's arm. "Now, Elaine," she said, smiling at her. "This is no time to cry. Come on and have some champagne. Joel's opening a bottle." She led her off and saw Pris look at her gratefully. For a time then, Pris stood alone. In the fluctuations of the

room, she had been unintentionally deserted, and Harriet, who was still watching her, saw her look around her suddenly as if she were trying to find a way to escape. There are so many things for her to think of now, Harriet thought. The marriage, Kenneth's unhappiness, the child she is going to have. All of them must have struck her at that minute. But it was very fleeting. In another second Kit came up to her with one of the glasses of champagne, and her face opened again and she smiled.

## 3

Harriet rang the doorbell to Kit's apartment and stood, holding out her umbrella. As she waited she looked down at the oiled silk with the raindrops sliding off it. Joel had given it to her that morning for her birthday, and as he had given it to her before she had gone to work, his usual good humor had slipped for a moment and he had made an unpleasant little speech. "I bought this out of my own allowance," he had said bitterly. It had spoiled the birthday entirely. The others had made quite a fuss over her. Elaine had given her an amethyst pin which had belonged to her mother. It was ringed with small pearls and it was a lovely thing. Pris had sent her a present from Norwalk, an expensive, fitted leather pocketbook. And now Kit had brought her a dress from Considine's and asked her to stop by after work and try it on. But Joel had spoiled all of this for her. He had seemed to resent that she had a birthday. Probably it was because he remembered the last one, when they had gone out to dinner together and he had given her a wrist-watch. She pitied him, it was so hard for him to be happy these days. He sat round the apartment aimlessly and had nothing to do. Elaine had persuaded him to wash the dishes

once, but he had broken two of them and after that she had saved them for Harriet when she got home.

Kit opened the door for her and put her head out cautiously. "Oh, hello," she said. "I'm not dressed, I wanted to see who it was." She let Harriet in, standing with her white toweling robe held around her. Her face was flushed and Harriet guessed that she had just been taking a bath. She had not yet unpinned her hair from the top of her head. "Come on back to the bedroom," she said. "I've got your dress there. I hope you like it."

"Am I too early?" Harriet asked.

"Oh, no," Kit told her. "I'm just loafing around and packing."

"Oh, that's right," Harriet said. "You were going to move. But I didn't realize it was so soon. I thought you'd wait until October."

Kit, who was preceding her down the hall, looked back at her curiously. "No, we decided to go ahead now," she said, and looked as if she wanted to say something more, but evidently changed her mind.

In the bedroom there were opened trunks standing around and the curtains and rugs had been put away. Only the bed still looked splendid with its heavy spread. The dress was lying across it, and Kit picked it up and held it out to Harriet.

"Here it is," she said. "Now if you don't like it, be honest about it, I can change it for another one."

Harriet stripped off her gloves and took it across her arms. It was an afternoon dress of a pale yellow Chinese damask, and there was a row of little crystal buttons down the front. It was more expensive and beautifully made than

anything she had ever had before. "Oh, Kit!" she said. "This is too nice!"

"Well, I got it at a reduction," Kit told her. "And with my discount it wasn't so expensive. Try it on, I want to see how it fits you. Do you like it?"

"It's the loveliest thing I've ever seen," Harriet said. She took off her linen suit hastily, throwing it across the bed without folding it. It looked somber and prosaic beside the yellow silk. When she picked up the dress, her hands, which were slightly roughened, pricked against it so that she felt as if she were catching each tiny thread. She slipped it over her head and buttoned it without looking at herself in the mirror. Kit exclaimed, "It's perfect for you!" and she moved over towards the dressing table to see it.

It had broad shoulders and was narrowed through the body to emphasize the smallness of her waist. Below that it flared out generously. It was the most cunningly cut dress she had ever worn, she had not known that a dress could change her appearance so. She had thought of clothes before this as ornaments, rather than creative things. The yellow made her face look soft and not as pale as usual, and her hair seemed very dark.

She stood looking at herself speechlessly and smoothing the folds of the skirt. "Look at it in the back," Kit said to her and she turned sideways, seeing a stranger in the glass, a stranger with the perfect figure of the magazine ads, nipped in at the waist, flaring to lovely breasts above and smooth hips below. "I didn't know they made dresses like this," she said. She had no feeling of possession about the garment, it was too beautiful, it was like the things you saw in windows to be admired but not owned.

"We used to be able to afford things like that," Kit told

her. "I still can pick them up, of course, and now Pris will be able to buy them again. Maybe you'll see now one of the reasons we hated to give all that up so much."

Harriet looked at her quickly. "Heavens," she said. "You make me feel guilty. I must have been preaching at you. I never mean to, really I don't, Kit."

"I know," Kit said soothingly. "You haven't preached, I didn't mean that. Well, you like the dress, don't you?"

"I've never had anything nice," Harriet said. She looked down at herself. But still she didn't envy women who owned this sort of thing. It was a responsibility to wear it, she felt nervous in it. And it was so lovely that she would never feel free to use it, it could only be saved for a special occasion. How ungrateful I am to think about it like this, she thought. Kit was so nice to get it for me. She smiled warmly at Kit.

"I'm glad you like it," Kit said. She moved out the dressing-table bench and sat down on it. "Do you have to go home right away?" she asked. "Stay and talk to me a while, will you?"

"I'd love to," Harriet said impulsively, touched that Kit should want her. And then considered. "But I ought to be getting home pretty soon," she said. "I have to get dinner."

"Listen!" Kit said. "Why don't you let them get their own dinner for a change?"

"They don't know how to cook," Harriet said. She began taking off the dress, holding it carefully so as not to pull at it. Because it was so exquisite, she felt it must be fragile.

"Well, anyway," Kit said, crossing her legs. "They can wait a while, can't they?"

"I guess so," Harriet said, smiling at her. She began put-

ting on her suit again, smoothing it down so that it wouldn't look quite so wrinkled.

"I have a box for the dress," Kit said. "I'll wrap it up for you before you go."

"Oh, thanks," Harriet said. She leaned down and touched the dress again to feel its softness once more. "It certainly is a beautiful thing, Kit. I love it."

Kit smiled at her and stood up. "Come on in the living room," she said, touching Harriet's arm. "We can be comfortable in there. I haven't seen you alone for a long time, Harriet."

"No, I know," Harriet murmured. She followed Kit down the hall again, looking at her straight white back. Kit had something she wanted to tell her, she suspected, she was making a great point of their talking together.

The living room had been dismantled too. The rugs were up and the long, golden window curtains had been put away. The window panes had not been washed for a long time and in the gray of a rainy evening the spotty light coming through them made the room look lonely. There were packing cases on the floor for the china and the books and all the pictures had been taken down off the wall. It was not like June, it was like the end of summer, in the room. Harriet sneezed. She was beginning to catch a little cold.

"How's the job going?" Kit asked her. She sat down on the couch and patted a cushion beside her for Harriet to sit on.

"All right," Harriet said. "I'm branching out. Didn't Joel tell you? I thought he saw you yesterday."

"You ought to know better than to think Joel would talk about your job," Kit said. "That dog-in-the-manger!"

Harriet was shocked and must have shown it in her face, because Kit reached over and took her hand. "Don't be sore," she said. "I just had a hard session with Joel. I don't know how you put up with him. He seemed to think that all I had to do was to stretch out my little finger and I could get him a job in the advertising department at Con-sidine's. Well, in the first place, there's no opening, and in the second place, I'm darned if I'm going to recommend relatives of mine to my own office. Think how embarrassing it will be for all of us if he does a bad job."

Harriet was still troubled, and she forgot what she had been going to say. "Kit, you don't really mean that," she said. "You sound too callous for words."

Kit's face softened. "You know why we're all so fond of you?" she asked Harriet.

"No," Harriet said, feeling embarrassed. "Why?"

"Because you always think the best of us," Kit said. "We're a bunch of bums, really, but you couldn't be persuaded of it, could you?"

Harriet laughed. "I hate to have you make me out so virtuous," she said. "If you said I was a scoundrel, I'd be more pleased. I think you're exaggerating, anyway. About yourselves, I mean. You're all nice people, that's way I like you."

"I won't argue with you," Kit said. "Because I know I'm right. What did you mean about branching out?"

"Oh," Harriet said, remembering what she had meant to tell Kit. "It's Mr. Mac's agent, Coles Hanson. He's giving me some manuscripts to read. He's the man I told you about who offered me a job when his assistant gets married. It isn't steady work, you know, but I can do it in my spare time, and it's fun, and it brings in some extra money."



"What do you mean, reading manuscripts?" Kit said. "Do you say whether they're good or not?"

"I make a report on them," Harriet said. "Describe the plot, and criticize them. It's pleasant work, I always liked to read."

"And you do it in your spare time," Kit said, nodding to herself. "At night, I suppose."

"Sometimes," Harriet said. "Sometimes at Mr. Mac's when there isn't anything else to do. He suggested it himself. I have to be there to answer the phone, anyway."

"That's just ducky," Kit said. She looked at Harriet indignantly. "And in between times you cook for my family?"

"Mine, too," Harriet said. She wanted to resist Kit's anger, without making it seem important. "It's fun, Kit," she said. "I like it."

"I bet you do," Kit said. "Why don't you have a baby too? That would be all you needed."

"I can't do that," Harriet said, answering her seriously so as to avoid the implications of her irony. "For a while yet. But when Joel gets a job, maybe we'll be able to. Then I can quit Mr. McIlvaine."

"You stick to Mr. McIlvaine," Kit said. "And birth control. If you want my advice."

Harriet went on, still ignoring her. "In September we can move out of that big apartment," she said. "The lease will be up then. And find something smaller. Now that Pris is gone, we rattle around up there."

Kit leaned back against the back of the couch and reached up to unpin her hair. It fell on either side of her face, dark and curly, and made her look younger. She stretched out her long legs in front of her. There was a fly

buzzing around the room somewhere, it made the only noise in it, and the two women said nothing. Harriet listened, half-hypnotized, to the little sound as it zoomed closer to her and then darted away. The rain had stopped, she noticed absent-mindedly, and the sky was a little lighter now, there were streaked clouds which she could see through the windows. She wondered what Kit was thinking. She didn't want Kit's championship, although it flattered her. She didn't want it, because she was not like Kit. Kit was becoming too independent, and she expected others to be the same way. She had forgotten what it meant to belong to a family, that when you live with a number of people you must make adjustments. That it was worth it, for in return you got gaiety and support, a greater strength than you could ever have alone. Kit would argue, if you discussed it with her, that the true strength was in being able to stand alone. Her father would have agreed. But she thought they were both wrong, even though they had come to their conclusions so differently. All the theories of government were built to help men and women to live together. That was what civilization aimed at. By remaining an individual, you were perhaps admirable in yourself, but you were missing the point, and avoiding the harder thing: the art of living with other people, which was more difficult, but which had such a great reward.

She said, because the silence had become too long, "Where's Gray? Isn't he around?"

She saw immediately that Kit had been thinking too, she had forgotten Harriet. She turned towards her now as if she were realizing she was still there. "Gray?" she said dazedly. "Oh, no, he isn't here." She paused and Harriet was uncomfortable. What was the trouble? she wondered.

Shouldn't she have asked? She smoothed her skirt down over her knees and started to say something else, but Kit interrupted her. "I didn't know quite how to tell you," she said. "But Gray and I are getting divorced."

She let the statement fall flatly, and Harriet sat looking ahead of her as if she could see it printed in the air and was reading it over again before she could take it in. "You are?" she asked. Then it penetrated more vividly and she turned. "Kit!" she said. "You're fooling! Not really?"

"Yes," Kit said, still with monotony. "We talked it over and decided it was best. We've been thinking about it for some time but we haven't been able to afford it up to now."

"Where are you getting it?" Harriet asked. She felt that she must ask all the standard questions, learn all the small details before she dared ask the bigger ones.

"In Reno," Kit said. "Gray's going to get it. He left yesterday. I couldn't quit my job, and he doesn't have anything to hold him here." Her mouth quirked bitterly.

"But Joel told me he was getting a job this fall," Harriet said. "Isn't he?"

"In New Mexico," Kit said. "How could I go out there? He seemed to think I should just throw up everything and follow him like a squaw."

Harriet remembered the talk she had had with Gray long ago, last December or January, it had been, about this very possibility. He must have known then how this would end. And she had thought he was foolish.

"If that's the trouble," she said to Kit, "don't you think you ought to wait a while? Maybe Gray can get a job in the East later. You could separate for a little while now and see how you feel about it then."

"No," Kit said. "We're all washed up, anyway. We're

not the same sort of people. Gray's too spineless, I couldn't respect a man like him. I want a husband that I can respect or none at all."

"But you didn't use to feel this way," Harriet insisted. "I remember when you were first talking about getting a job, it was you who insisted that Gray go on with his work."

"Sure," Kit said. "But I've changed, just like the rest of us. We never worried about anything then. I didn't know how things like this can work on people. I didn't realize that every little word would have to be watched, that I would be stepping on Gray's toes continually. I can't go on living that way, Harriet, it's too damned much of a strain. I had to be so careful not to hurt his pride, not to offend his notions about me, everything I said had to be thought out ahead of time. It was impossible."

Yes, Harriet thought, it would be hard for her to be tactful, she says things so impulsively. "But Kit," she said. "I always thought Gray was so swell about his position. I never thought he had false pride about it. It was one of the things I admired about him, that he accepted it, and he wasn't super-sensitive about it."

"Hell!" Kit said. "How would you know? You never said anything rude in your life. But me, I was always putting my foot in it. And it wasn't just that he wasn't working, Harriet. The worst thing was the way he objected to my job. He thought it was spoiling me, he thought I was getting mean and vicious, a regular harpy, he called me once. You'd think I was taking candy away from babies, the way he talked. I couldn't stand it, nobody can stand being a villainess for long."

"But he didn't think you were a villainess," Harriet said. "He was so much in love with you. He just hated to see

you change, that's reasonable, isn't it? He fell in love with you as you were at first."

"Was he talking to you about it?" Kit said suspiciously.

"Yes," Harriet said with honesty. "He talked about it once, a long time ago. It just sort of spilled out, I guess, he was feeling particularly upset at the moment. I didn't take him very seriously, I'm sorry to say."

"My God, that's the last straw," Kit said. "Going around complaining to other people! It wasn't bad enough to hammer at me every night when I came home!"

Harriet thought, it's hard to tell how much truth there is to this, Kit exaggerates so. Knowing Gray, I can't believe that he nagged at her. He had too much intelligence to do that.

Kit looked at her sullenly. "I suppose you're on his side," she said. Some of her warmth and youthfulness had gone, she was dignified now.

"How could I be on anybody's side?" Harriet said swiftly. "When I'm so fond of both of you. Oh, Kit, I wish you hadn't done this. I remember when I first met you, you made such a nice couple, you balanced each other so well. I hate to see you break it up."

"We balanced each other only because we were so different," Kit said. "But when things got serious, and we couldn't be casual any longer, we found out that it was a mistake. The differences only rubbed against each other. Anyway, it's done now, there's no use weeping about it."

"I suppose not," Harriet said limply. So many things are happening, she thought. When Joel and I got married, I knew my life would change, but I didn't think it would keep on changing. I feel breathless from trying to readjust myself all the time.

Kit said softly, "It will seem a little strange at first, I guess." She looked around at her sad, graceless living room. "I'll move to a smaller place and set up housekeeping for myself. I'm not sorry, you know, Harriet, but when you've always lived with somebody it seems empty to live alone."

Harriet said quickly, moved by Kit's first sign of weakness, "Come and stay with us. You can have Pris's room. We don't need to move. It'll be nice for us all to be together again."

Kit looked at her, her black eyes narrowed. "Not me," she said. "I know when I'm well off."

They were silent for a moment, Harriet absorbing what Kit had said.

"What do you mean?" she asked finally.

"You know what I mean," Kit said. "Even you can't kid yourself that much. I mean that my family is a bunch of parasites and I'm not going to saddle myself with them."

"Oh, Kit," Harriet said pleadingly. "For heaven's sake, you don't mean that. They're having bad luck now, that's all."

"Bad luck!" Kit said. She laughed and her voice was harsh. "You don't think it will ever change, do you? Joel will never get a job, or at least not a decent one. Elaine will go on weeping and being sorry for herself. You'll go on supporting all of them, taking care of them and changing their diapers."

"No," Harriet said, closing her mouth tightly after the word.

"Can't you stand to recognize the truth about them?" Kit said to her. "I suppose not, or you wouldn't stay on."

"It isn't the truth," Harriet said. She suddenly wanted to

cry and she could only let a few words escape at a time, or tears would come with them.

"Why do you stay?" Kit said. "Why don't you get out?"

"Because I don't want to," Harriet said, still tightly.

Kit turned sideways on the couch and took Harriet's two hands in hers. "Listen, Harriet," she said. "Please don't be angry with me. I'm worried about you, I want you to be free of them while you can. You can take care of yourself, you can have a fine life for yourself alone. But it's too much for you to take care of all of them. You're so little and thin, I'm afraid for you. You're doing too much work, you're not getting any fun out of it. Please, Harriet, listen to me. Take this seriously."

"I am," Harriet said. The impulse for tears had gone just as suddenly, and she felt brave. "I know you mean what you say."

"Then take my advice," Kit begged her. "You're better than any of us. It's not fair for us to swamp you. You didn't know what you were getting into when you married Joel."

"I hadn't thought about it much," Harriet admitted. "But if I had I would have known that there would be hard things to look forward to. I didn't expect anything to be easy. Very few people have everything the way they want it."

"Oh," Kit said angrily. "That's all very well. If you want to lie down and accept everything that happens. But you can do something about it, that's what I'm trying to tell you. You can get away from all this, you can be happy and independent. You're not the kind of person to stand around and take whatever comes to you without doing anything about it."

"I suppose not," Harriet said. "But I am doing something about it. I have a job which keeps all of us living. I'm hopeful. . . ."

"But what are you doing for yourself?" Kit asked.

"That's what I'm doing for myself," Harriet said angrily. "I'm not being unselfish. It's important to me for Joel and Elaine to be happy. And you and Pris, too. Darn it, Kit, can't you understand that?"

Kit sighed and let go of Harriet's hands. She twisted a lock of her hair thoughtfully. "I suppose there's no arguing with you," she said. "You're a tough, stubborn little thing, aren't you? You look so soft, too."

Harriet smiled, unwillingly. "Kit," she said, "I'll make a bargain with you."

"What's that?" Kit asked her.

"I won't say anything about Gray if you won't say anything about Joel," Harriet said. "I'll take your word for it that you're not in love with Gray. Will you please take my word for it that I'm in love with Joel?"

Kit laughed. "I didn't mean to meddle," she said. "All right, I'll make the bargain. But damn it, Harriet—"

Harriet held up her hand warningly and Kit smiled again. "O.K., O.K.," she said. She stood up and looked around the room at her bare walls. "Will you excuse me a second?" she said abruptly. Harriet watched her leave thoughtfully. Poor Kit, she was so savage against her family because they made her feel in the wrong. She knew they wouldn't sympathize with her about Gray, she was encasing herself in a hard, defensive mood so that they couldn't attack her. She's ashamed of staying away from them, Harriet thought, of cutting herself away from the responsibility. That's why she wants me to do it too, I would justify her if I left them.



She heard noises from the bedroom, Kit's footsteps moving around and the rustling of tissue paper, and wondered what she was doing there. There was a defenseless feeling to sitting alone here, sunk in the deep, heavily cushioned couch, with her back to the door. She stood up and walked around the room. It had given her a strange feeling, this talk with Kit. She had not just been the listener, she had been the important person. Kit had been begging her for something. Kit has changed, she thought, she used to be so sure, I used to be almost afraid of her. But today she only made me feel sad. It was so easy to understand her and so hard to refuse her.

She heard Kit's footsteps coming down the hall, her mules clacking on the bare boards. She came in, carrying a long cardboard box, tied with red string. "Here's the dress," she said briefly. "I wrapped it up for you."

There was something about the way she kept her eyes turned away and stretched out the box to Harriet that looked almost as if she were begging her to leave.

It's my fault, Harriet thought; in a way I shut her up and now she feels that I'm against her. She would have liked to tell Kit that this wasn't so, but she didn't know how to express it without bringing things into the open which they hadn't mentioned. Instead she took the box with a smile. "Thanks," she said. "I guess it is getting late."

Kit remained stiff, and Harriet leaned towards her, putting one hand on her shoulder. "Good-bye," she whispered. "Don't worry too much." And kissed her. Under her hand she felt Kit's shoulder relax as if it had melted.

## 4

There was so much humidity in the air that her hair would never dry, Harriet thought, looking sideways at it as it lay spread on her shoulders. It was heavy against the sides of her face and it looked lifeless. Even if it did dry, it would be limp and stick too closely to her head.

She stretched her legs out in the deck chair and leaned back to close her eyes. Six days of this heat, one after the other, had finally taken the vigor out of her. She was glad that today was Sunday, that she didn't have to dress and go down in the street. She was glad that she didn't have to sit tightly and correctly beside Mr. McIlvaine and look neat for his benefit. Through her eyelashes she saw the chimney pots and the brick railing of the roof, all grimy and blistering from the sun. It was no cooler here, really, than it was in the apartment. There was a little breeze, but it was hot and moist. And it was so dirty. Her hand left the arm of the chair and she looked at it. It was already streaked gray.

Joel by her side lit another cigarette and blew the smoke through his nose with a quick puff. Harriet wished that he would shave, today at any rate. He was so slovenly now, he hung around the apartment in a pair of shorts and some old bedroom slippers, rarely shaving, hardly combing his hair, his eyes a little bleary from having drunk too much the night before. He got much too much to drink now that Pris kept them supplied. On the occasions when he was gay and pleasant, it seemed incongruous under that exterior. She looked sideways so that he wouldn't notice her. He had such a cleanly built face, it was a shame not to wear the starched collars and the freshly pressed suits that should complement it. One of the first things that had impressed

her about him was his neatness. His clothes had hung so straight from his broad shoulders, there had never been wrinkles in them. Her father's suits had always wrinkled at the knees and around the waist, showing in their creases how his body creased when he sat down. Joel was not fat enough to affect his clothes that way now, but there was a hollow look to them, the knees bagged out, and so did the seat of the trousers. You felt, as you looked at him, that perhaps there was nothing inside of his clothes, they were like the garments on a scarecrow.

What was it that bothered her so much? It's that I'm so numb to him, she thought, almost afraid to put it into words. He's like a piece of furniture to me, the way I sit looking at him, speculating whether he should be repaired here or there, wondering how long he'll last, and whether he was a good buy. It's inhuman, do married people get this way, do they get so that they are simply accepting the other person as part of their life, whether good or bad?

Suddenly something quivered in her stomach and she felt nauseated. I must have eaten something for breakfast that disagreed with me, she thought. Or maybe it's the heat. But it made her miserably limp and she was afraid to move, for fear it would precipitate the sickness. She forgot what she was thinking about, this feeling took hold of her thoughts and she must have turned pale, because Elaine on her other side suddenly said, "What's the matter, Harriet? You don't look well."

Joel sat up and looked at her, and she felt an impulse to clasp her hands over her stomach to hide it from them. It was the same impulse an animal feels which wants to hide when it is wounded. "I'm all right," she said to Elaine. "The heat's got me a little bit, I guess."

“Poor baby,” Joel said tenderly, and she forgot her wretchedness for a moment and responded to his affection. “It isn’t anything, really, darling,” she said, turning her eyes to look at him without moving her head. She smiled and watched how his answering smile changed his tired, dingy-looking face.

“Shall I move your chair around so you’re more in the shade?” he asked her. “Maybe that’ll help.”

“Oh, no!” she said quickly, and then, so she wouldn’t alarm him, she said, “I don’t mind the sun, my hair will never get dried in the shade. This is fine, Joel.”

“Well,” he said doubtfully, and leaned back again.

She wanted to get their minds off her, she didn’t want them to know about her queasiness, but her own mind was too concerned with it to find a change of subject easily. She tried to smile reassuringly.

The huge stairway door opened across the roof and distracted them mercifully. It was Kit coming towards them, dressed in dark-green linen and a huge, natural-colored straw hat. She looked elegant and cool, and Harriet suddenly felt ashamed for all of them, Elaine in her dowdy cotton print, Joel unshaven, and she with her hair down on her shoulders, wet and stringy.

“Why, Kit!” Elaine said, eagerly, leaning towards her. “We hadn’t expected you. I’m so glad you came. I was just thinking this wasn’t like Sunday at all, with Pris away and you.”

“Just us, and we’re here all the time,” Joel said bitterly.

“I thought I was going away for the weekend,” Kit said, “but I had to work yesterday so I stayed in town. Got enough lunch for me?”

Oh, Lord, Harriet thought, I’d forgotten, I’ll have to get

lunch for them. I can't bear the thought of looking at food. Her stomach turned at the idea.

"Hello, Harriet," Kit said almost humbly. Harriet smiled at her, trying to look cordial, although it was hard when she was feeling so miserable.

"Can I sit down here?" Kit asked. She perched on the foot of Harriet's deck chair, and Harriet moved her legs feebly to get them out of her way.

"Are you all settled in your new place now?" Elaine asked Kit.

She nodded non-committally. She and Elaine had quarreled when she had told them about the divorce. Elaine had wanted her to come and live with them, and Kit had refused stubbornly.

"I'm very elegant," she said in her gay, light voice, trying to pretend that there was nothing behind their words. "Very much the bachelor girl. You must come over and see it, Elaine."

"Well, I will," Elaine said. Her blue eyes, surrounded now by little wrinkles, were petulant. "When you ask me," she added.

"Any time," Kit said impatiently. "You sound as if I had something to hide."

"Oh, no," Elaine said airily and irritatingly. "I didn't mean that, of course. I just thought you didn't want to be bothered with your family too often."

Kit said to Harriet, ignoring Elaine very obviously, "How's the job going? Getting any more outside work?"

Harriet nodded, but she was too reluctant to talk. She was afraid that if she opened her mouth too often she would be really sick. "It's going fine," she said, smiling so that she wouldn't sound too abrupt.

“Good,” Kit said. “Say, listen, it just occurred to me. Why don’t you come up to Considine’s and see if you can get some work writing for their house-organ?”

Harriet looked in shocked silence at Joel, and saw him stiffen. Oh, God, she thought. Hasn’t Kit got any sense? After turning Joel down, to offer a chance to me. I’ll never be able to coax him out of this.

“But you said there weren’t any openings,” she said to Kit. She nudged her on the other side with her foot, trying to indicate Joel, and she saw the sudden awareness in Kit’s face.

“Oh, well,” Kit said, stumbling. “There aren’t any, really. I mean any full-time jobs. But I thought you might do odd pieces for them or something. I don’t really know how they do the thing. It was just an idea.”

Joel’s face settled into grimness. He was not appeased, but he had evidently decided against making any protest.

“Gray did a piece for them once,” Kit went on, still trying to smooth over things. “I’ve forgotten what they paid him. It wasn’t much, I remember, but it would be something.”

“Oh, dear,” Elaine said irrelevantly. “I do miss Gray. Especially on Sundays. Do you remember how he always used to do the crossword puzzle on Sunday, Harriet?”

Kit stared at her angrily. “You might be a little more tactful, Elaine,” she said. “Sometimes I think you carry that blank way of talking a bit too far.”

“You’re always jumping on me for being foolish,” Elaine said pettishly. She was not like a woman, but like a little girl. It was impossible to believe that she was talking to a grown-up daughter. “You’re always picking on me, Kit,” she said.

"Well, do you wonder?" Kit said. "Talking to me like that. Listen, I know you like Gray and you're all sore because we're getting divorced, but you don't have to remind me of it, do you? I'm your daughter, after all, it's me you're going to keep on seeing, not Gray. Try to pretend at least that you're glad to have me around."

Harriet turned uneasily in her chair: She felt fuzzy, her mind couldn't follow the two angry women, because her stomach intruded at every sentence. Oh, stop it, she thought feebly. Can't you be quiet and peaceful just for today?

"I didn't say anything, did I?" Elaine said complainingly. She turned to Joel and to Harriet for their support, but neither of them said anything. Joel looked silently down at his hands. "You're too sensitive," Elaine went on. "All I said was that I missed Gray. I have a right to do that, haven't I?"

"Sure," Kit said. "But you might have the decency to miss him to yourself. Or when I'm not here." She opened her purse angrily and drew out a cigarette case. Harriet watched her aimlessly, seeing the flash of the gold case, and the little flare of her lighter, the sun dimming the flame so that you could hardly tell it was lit.

"I don't like you to talk to me that way," Elaine said, falling back now on her dignity, but too late. Her voice was still whining. "I am your mother, after all."

"My God!" Kit said, looking up to the sky and blowing out a cloud of smoke furiously. "This is the first time you ever brought that up!"

"Well—" Elaine said inadequately.

Oh, please be quiet, Harriet thought. Something fluttered in her stomach and she felt a rush of saliva in her mouth.

I can't stand this any longer, she thought, if they don't stop—

Elaine gathered up her forces. "You're becoming so ruthless, Kit," she said. "I can't understand you any longer. I don't see how you can blame me for being shocked. The way you got rid of Gray! It was like kicking out a dog. It was inhuman."

"Sure," Joel said suddenly in a false jocularly which rubbed them all the wrong way. "You're setting a bad example, Kit. If you don't watch out, Harriet will be booting me out too, and then what will we do?"

Kit, infuriated by Elaine so that her face was red and appallingly angry, turned on him. "You shut up!" she said. "You know damn well that you'll be taken care of. Don't start grousing now."

Oh, God, Harriet thought.

"Listen!" Joel said, getting up from his chair and going to lean over Kit. Harriet flinched at the temper in his face, and the movement made her head feel weak. She put one hand up to her eyes. "I'm getting sick and tired of the way you come back here and crow over us. Who do you think you are? Mrs. God? Listen, anybody could lie and cheat and tell tales behind somebody's back. That's all you've done to be such a success. There's no reason for you to come and lord it over us. Leave me alone! Leave Harriet alone, will you?"

"Children, children," Elaine said. Her blue eyes filled with tears and again Harriet found it incongruous to see her upset. The delicate skin of her face stretched over the tautened muscles in it, and she reddened unbecomingly. "I can't stand this bickering," she said. "I can't stand it. Now be quiet."



Her thin, sweet voice hoarsened in an effort to be impressive and it was such an ugly sound that it had more effect than a stronger one would have. That's right, Harriet thought, closing her eyes. Please, just a little peace and quiet. There was a bitter taste in her mouth now, and she kept swallowing to try and get rid of it.

"Sorry, Elaine," Joel said sullenly. He went back to his chair and sat down. The momentary pause made both him and Kit see themselves as they had been. Their bodies relaxed, their faces went back to normal. They were still angry, but they were controlled for the moment.

"I get so sick and tired of all this," Elaine went on, and Harriet felt her heart jump with fear. Why doesn't she leave them alone now, she thought. "Always quarreling, always something wrong. You used to be different, we used to be happy together, what's the matter with all of you? I can't understand it. And you do such terrible things! Joel getting drunk all the time and Kit going around with those horrible people and divorcing her husband. What is it? What's wrong with you? Honestly, I don't feel like you're my family any more. The only one who's decent and normal is Pris. Perhaps she's right to stay away and lead her own life."

"My God!" Joel said, appalled, and he turned to look at Kit. The same ironic smile grew on both their faces.

"Pris is decent and normal, eh?" Kit said, laughing. "Well, I'm glad to get a line on your moral code, Elaine. Pris!"

"Yes, Pris," Elaine said defiantly. "She's married, and her husband is respectable and can take care of her. They're going to have a baby. It's lovely. She's the only one of you who made anything out of her life at all."

"I'll say she did," Kit said savagely. "She lassoed that poor nitwit like an expert. I guess Elaine's right, Joel. Pris did better for herself than any of us."

Joel nodded grimly. Harriet's eyes felt tired from traveling back and forth among them. She shut them, trying to cut them out of her sight, but she couldn't stop herself from hearing them and with her eyes closed she seemed to intensify the effect of their anger. Their words battered around her head until she felt dizzy from them.

"I don't know what you mean!" Elaine said indignantly. Her voice showed that she did know. "When two people are in love, there's no reason why they shouldn't marry, is there?" Her voice grew feeble as if she was not even convincing herself.

"Love is so wonderful, isn't it, Joel?" Kit said. Her voice sounded sharp to Harriet behind her closed eyes.

"Yes," Joel said. His voice, usually so smooth, was scratchy. "Touching, wasn't it? A real romance. Just like the movies."

"Stop it!" Elaine said frantically.

Something big rose in Harriet's stomach, cutting out her breath. She opened her eyes and spoke involuntarily. It sounded more like a groan. "Oh, can't you keep quiet!" she said.

They turned to her, all of them, and something in their appalled expressions made her lash out at them. They don't expect me to ever be angry, she thought grimly. I'm supposed to sit by and simper at them while they tear each other to pieces. "You make me sick, all of you," she said, furiously. "Can't you be pleasant for one day at least? You fight all the time. I'm tired of it. I'm tired of hearing Joel complain. It's not his fault that he's out of work, but it's

not our fault either, and I'm sick of having to take the brunt of it. I'm tired of hearing Kit attacking all of you because she's ashamed of herself. I'm tired of hearing Elaine wailing about the good old days. They're over. That's all. Why don't you make up your mind to it and try to live the way other people live?"

The thing in her stomach boiled and she kept swallowing, between words, fighting to control herself. "You haven't seen Kit for weeks," she went on. "And you complain about it all the time she's away. But the minute she does come to see you, you fight with her. I'm sick of it. I can't stand it any more." But now she couldn't hold back any longer. She couldn't speak, she had to get away quickly. She had to get downstairs. She was going to be sick. They were only obstructions in her way, not figures, not her husband and her family. She got up, spraddle-legged from the chair, pushing Kit aside in her urgency. She had a brief glimpse of Joel with his mouth open stupidly and then she rushed past him to the stairway. If only she could hold herself in, she thought. Until she could get downstairs.

"Harriet!" she heard Joel say behind her and heard his footsteps following her. Oh, leave me alone, she thought, I can't stop now.

The elevator wasn't in sight and she couldn't wait for it. She started down the stairs running, holding her hand to her mouth. Behind her she heard their footsteps, Joel's heavy, taking two steps at a time, and Kit's high heels clacking. The door, the door, she kept thinking. But when she got down there she remembered she hadn't her key, Joel had it in his pocket. Oh, God, she thought and leaned up against the doorpost.

Joel was right behind her. "What is it, darling?" he asked.

She couldn't speak, she motioned with her hand at the door and mercifully he saw what she wanted. It seemed interminable while he pulled the key out of his pocket and fumbled with the lock. The sickness was all over her, all over her whole body, she couldn't hold it back any longer, she couldn't think of anything else but just the terrible mental effort of holding back.

"There!" Joel said. He swung the door open for her and she dashed past him without speaking to him. At last she got into the bathroom, not troubling to close the door behind her. She heard their voices dimly a long distance away, she thought. She retched violently and was ill. It was so wonderful, such a relief to be able to be sick at last. There was another attack of vomiting just as she thought it was over and finally she leaned against the bathroom wall, feeling the cool tiles and closing her eyes to let the beat of blood in her body calm down. Gradually the strength drained out of her, she felt weaker and weaker, but clean, as if she had been scrubbed rigorously. All thought went away; she was aware only of her body. She felt her cheeks cool and the little spring of sweat on her forehead evaporate. Her hair, where she had pressed her face against the wall, was rubbing against her temple and it was wet and cold. This is better, she thought, I feel much better. But she felt terribly lazy, I wish somebody would carry me to a couch somewhere, she thought, and I could lie down and close my eyes, and the window shades would be pulled down and everybody would soften their voices and I wouldn't have to think about anything, I wouldn't have

to think about what I discovered just a minute ago up there on the roof.

Now that she was no longer sick, she had to admit that there had been something else which had hit her up there. It had come as swiftly as the nausea and for the time she had confused the two in her mind. But the sickness had gone and the other feeling remained, she had to see it. It was oppressive too; she couldn't think of anything else.

I am tired of them, all of them, she said to herself. Just as I told them. She let the words lie flatly in her consciousness and for another second she didn't examine them. Her mind was as hollow as her body, there was a mist around her thoughts, which kept other thoughts from joining them, which isolated them until she could gather enough strength to look into them further.

I am tired of them, she thought. Elaine, who's so foolish; Kit with her thoughtlessness, striving so hard to imitate a type of success that only that kind of intelligence would tell her is desirable. And Pris. Pris had wanted more than the rest of the world and she had gotten it even if she had to cheat the rest of the world by breaking their rules.

She was so tired of them. She muttered something to herself, a nonsense word that didn't mean anything, her thoughts now deliriously mixed up. They had lost consecutiveness, she hadn't the strength to organize them. She missed Gray, he had been on her side, Gray would have helped her now, he had already faced these things. And her father, but he was dead and at the time she had hardly even missed him. Only learned a little about him, but what good did that do when it made no impression on her. If he were still living she could go to him and he would be

proud of her because she would be honest and tell him that she had made a mistake.

Why? Why? she hammered at herself. Why did I stick to them, why was I so stubborn, I've known all this, it isn't a sudden discovery, although this is the first time I've admitted it. But it was there. That was why I looked at Joel angrily when he complained, and why I almost felt proud of myself because Kit was afraid of me, and why I told Pris what I thought of her. Each one of those things is a little fact, one of my father's little facts, fact a, and fact b, and fact c. And they add up just the way he said they would. Only I didn't add them because I didn't think they were facts. I didn't think I needed to be rational, I thought the Randolfs did it better, just acting on any stray impulse and taking their chances on whether they were right or wrong. So I didn't add the facts up. If I had, I would have seen long ago that I was tired of them. All of them.

Even weak as she was, so that her mind resisted nothing that came into it, she had an impulse to shove that last thought away. All of them. But it came back again and she let herself look at it. Yes, Joel too.

He had a gray face, and it only occasionally smiled now. And when he smiled it was worse, because his charm was undermining, it made her forget the times she looked at that face with dread, waiting for some new complaint to come out of it, waiting to jump on his words and take them and twist them and try to make them palatable to him.

He spoke to her and for a second she thought it was part of her image. "Harriet, honey," he said, standing at the door, his voice hoarse. "What is it? What's the matter?" He was frightened and tender, but as she jerked to look

at him, she didn't want him to be tender. She didn't want him to touch her, they communicated everything by touch, that was the way they understood each other, and if he touched her he might understand the things she was thinking about him.

She pushed stiffly past him and went down the hall. The others were standing in the living room waiting for her. There were only the two of them and now Joel coming around to stand beside them, but it looked like a whole circle of faces. She felt that if she turned around she would be surrounded; they would be behind her too. They were all so frightened and it only irritated her.

"Poor kid," Kit said to her. "Come on over and lie down on the couch. What was the matter? The heat, do you think?"

Harriet nodded listlessly and went over to the couch. She swung her legs up so that they rested on the cushions. It was not only that she had been sick that frightened them, she thought. They were afraid of what she had said. They were afraid that she really meant it.

Elaine had been crying. She feels something, then, Harriet thought in a detached way. She's worried about me. But maybe it's about herself too. She's afraid I'll go away. And she's right, I think. Only not immediately. I've got to know more definitely what I want. That's the scientific way, one experiment doesn't prove a formula. I've got to think about it a few more days, and be sure I'm right, because it will be a big upheaval to make all at once, my father wouldn't approve of me if I simply said good-bye and left right now.

Joel and Kit were talking about her in soft voices. "She's been working too hard," Kit told Joel. Harriet saw with

grim amusement that he got angry at that for a second, as if it were a reproach to him, and then forgot about it because he was upset. "I think she ought to see a doctor," he said.

"So do I," Elaine said, moving over to him. Well, at least they all agree now, Harriet thought. They agree about me, they're all worried about me. They can't resist giving each other little pricks, but they're too worried to fight. Isn't it funny, I've worked so long to keep them peaceful together, and now when I'm going away it really affects them.

"Shall I telephone one now?" Joel said.

But I don't want a doctor, Harriet decided suddenly. She said to them, "No, don't do that, Joel. I'm all right now. I feel very well, just a little weak, that's all."

"Don't you think you ought to have one? Just to check up on you?" Joel asked her solicitously. They would do anything she said, Harriet thought wryly. But she shook her head. "No, really, Joel," she told him. Her voice was thin, but it impressed him, she didn't even have to raise it.

"You're sure?" he said reluctantly, and she shook her head again.

"Well, you lie down for a little while now," Kit said. "Don't try to talk. We'll be in the other room if you want us. Just close your eyes and don't think about anything."

But I have such a lot to think about, Harriet thought. And I don't want them to go away, I want to look at them and see if I'm right.

"No, don't go in the other room," she said. "Stay here, you won't bother me. I don't feel like talking much, but I'd like to listen to you."

"You're sure?" Kit said. They all of them looked grate-



ful. Isn't it pathetic, Harriet thought, how much they respect me. I must be quite callous not to be touched by it.

She watched them take chairs around her and saw Kit light a cigarette and then start to put it out. "It's all right," she said feebly. "I don't mind it." And Kit looked questioningly at her and then went on to puff at it.

She hardly heard what they were saying, they started talking about her but they drifted on to something else, keeping their voices low. There was something else to think about. I can't just go off and leave them, she realized. I'll have to wait until Joel gets a job at least. I can't leave them until he does. I'll wait until he gets a job, and I'll help them to get settled in a smaller apartment and then just as soon as all that is done I'll go.

But she couldn't tell them about this yet, although it was hard to hold it in her. She would have to wait until just before she left. So that it wouldn't be there between them.

Kit stood up and looked down at Joel and Elaine. "Say," she said. "I imagine I'd better do something about the lunch. Harriet won't feel like cooking today."

"Oh, yes," Elaine said, waving her hand helplessly. She did nothing to help Kit and neither did Joel.

"I'll just get some stuff out of the icebox," Kit said. "We don't need anything fancy. I'm too hot to eat anyway, aren't you?"

Harriet closed her eyes. I've made potato salad, she thought, and there's raspberries, and—then she reminded herself that it was not her concern. I'm like an old fire-horse, she thought, smiling to herself. She heard the others get up and tiptoe out into the dining room. They think I'm asleep, she thought, but I'm too lazy to open my eyes and

tell them I'm not. A little breeze began to come in the window over the couch and flapped the drawn window shades. She dozed off.

When she woke up she saw that the sky through the window had grown gray. It must be very late, she thought, or else it's begun to rain. But there was no sound of rain, and when she got up on her knees and looked down into the street she saw that the street lamps were on. Goodness, I slept a long time, she thought.

There seemed to be an additional noise out in the dining room. The doors were closed but she could see light coming under them, streaking the dimness. She listened, poised on her knees, with the blanket that Kit must have put over her, caught up in her hands. There were more than just Kit and Joel and Elaine, she decided. She heard another man's voice, but she couldn't quite make out who it was. She got up finally and tiptoed down the hall to the bathroom. She wanted to wash her face and comb her hair before she went in, but she knew that if they heard her moving around they would all come out.

She ran cold water over her wrists and then sloshed it over her face, which felt hot and puffy after the sleep. I'm awfully logy, she thought, I don't feel too well, my back is still tired. But the water wakened her a little bit and her face looked more normal after she had dried it. She combed and pinned up her hair and put on fresh lipstick carefully.

When she opened the dining-room door, letting light into her face, she saw that Kenneth and Pris were there with the others. They were all sitting around the big dining-room table drinking beer. The dishes from the lunch that they must have eaten long ago were still there but pushed

to one side, and the ashtrays were overflowing. The room, even with its open windows, was smoky and stale-smelling.

"Harriet!" Joel said, getting up so quickly that his chair scraped on the floor. "How are you feeling? Are you all right? I didn't hear you get up."

"I'm all right now," she said, smiling at him.

Kenneth was standing too, and she smiled at him. "Come on," Kit said, getting up. "Let's go in the other room now and sit. I'm tired of these dining-room chairs."

They moved into the living room and Harriet walked quickly ahead of them so that Joel wouldn't put his arm across her shoulders and found herself a chair that wasn't too close to any of the others.

"Don't you want to have the couch?" Kit asked her. "You'll be more comfortable."

"No, thanks," Harriet said. "I've been on it all afternoon."

Pris was watching her carefully; she turned away so that she wouldn't meet her eyes. Pris and Kenneth were worried about her too, she thought. It should be nice to have all of them concerned about me, she thought.

She hadn't seen Pris for quite a while; it was obvious now that she was pregnant. She was wearing a dress with a smock top which only half concealed her swelling body. That kind of dress is like a flag, Harriet thought. It's a warning that she's pregnant so that you can avert your eyes before you even see the evidence. Her round face was well filled-out and sun-tanned, and her hair was expensively groomed. It lay in a glossy fall on her shoulders, an advertisement of health and money.

"Has it been hot in the country?" Harriet asked her. If

I can make her talk, she thought, I'll keep her from staring at me.

"Deadly," Pris said. "We simply live in the swimming pool now." She looked smilingly and possessively at Kenneth and he returned the smile without looking at her.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" Harriet asked.

"Nothing much," Pris said. Her face grew momentarily sulky, as it had been in the days she had lived there. "I can't buzz around too much, you know. At least Kenneth thinks so. And he's so busy with his farm that it's like pulling a tooth to get him to do any entertaining."

"We have dinner parties nearly every night," Kenneth told Harriet. They made her feel like a judge listening to two complainants. "And the house swarms with guests."

"Well," Pris said. "You have your work to do, but I don't have anything. It's natural that I should want company."

It was evidently an old argument and Kenneth let his words lie without discussing them. The way he raised his eyebrows and changed the subject showed that he thought it too painful to go into again.

"How have you been?" he asked Harriet. "How's your job?"

"Fine," she said. "Mr. Mac is swell. I look forward to seeing him every day."

She could see that Joel and Kit and Elaine were a little impatient. Probably they had discussed all of this already. But she had become engrossed again in the unspoken thing that lay between Kenneth and Pris, and she wanted to find out if they were happy. "Running that big house

should keep you busy, Pris," she said, smiling at her. "Doesn't it?"

Pris waved her hand. "I'm not good at that," she said. "Even with servants."

"That's funny," Harriet said. "Elaine used to do it so beautifully, I thought you would have picked it up from her."

"I never paid any attention before," Pris told her. "Incidentally, that's what we came about, isn't it, Ken?"

"Oh, yes," he said, looking startled. "That's the whole idea. Funny I almost forgot about it." He turned to look at Elaine. "Elaine," he said, "we want you to come and live with us."

Elaine started to say something and he held his hand out to quiet her. "You'll be doing us a big favor," he said. "Pris is rather lonely, you know, since I'm out on the farm all day. And she doesn't know how to run a house. And then there's the baby coming and everything. It would be a lot of help if you would come."

He's sweet, Harriet thought, touched by his rather crude tactfulness. He doesn't fool any of us, we all know that Elaine will be pleased to death to stay with them, but he's going through all the motions. Maybe Pris is making something out of him, after all; he didn't value tact the last time I saw him.

"Oh, Kenneth," Elaine said ecstatically and for once really embarrassed. "I don't know what to say."

"Please don't say no," Kenneth urged her. Why, Harriet thought. What a turn of phrase. But I shouldn't laugh at him, he's very touching, really. And Elaine is so delighted, this is a perfect notion.

“Well,” Elaine said hesitantly. Her face was excited and vibrant.

“Come on,” Pris said, pleadingly. “Say you’ll come, Elaine. Listen, we worked it all out. Joel and Harriet are going to move, anyway, next month, and if you’re staying with us they can get a smaller apartment. It’s a good time, don’t you see?”

“It’s so sweet of you, darling,” Elaine said, looking at her. “And, Kenneth,” she added. “I’m just so pleased I can’t say anything. You’re sure that you’ve thought this over, aren’t you? You don’t think I’ll be in the way?” She looked bitterly at Kit for a moment and Harriet smiled. It was almost as if she had said, “You see!” out loud.

“Of course, we have!” Pris said warmly. “Haven’t we, Ken?”

“Oh, yes,” he said reassuringly. “And I told you, Elaine, it will be a big help to us. Pris needs somebody to stay with her now. Some other woman that’s close to her.”

He’s read that somewhere, Harriet thought, smiling. Pris isn’t the sort that needs female companionship, baby or no baby.

“Well,” Elaine said. She was pleased at the idea, Harriet could see her running over layettes in her mind and intimate womanly conversations. “If you really think you need me. You know I’d be delighted to come. We’ve missed you, Pris,” she added, smiling at her daughter.

Harriet wondered suddenly if Elaine would have preferred her children to be softer. Perhaps she would have liked it better if they had cooed over her and called her “Mother” and been verbally affectionate.

“That’s swell!” Kenneth said. I guess he really likes doing this, Harriet thought, looking at him. He likes to help peo-

ple, it makes him feel useful. "Can you come out with us tonight?" he asked. "It's short notice, but we can wait while you pack. We brought the car in."

"You can take the things you need now," Kit said. "And we'll send the rest on later."

She seemed eager to have Elaine go. One less responsibility for her, Harriet thought. But this is good for me, too. When Joel gets a job he'll only have himself to support. And I won't have to wait so long. So why should I sneer at Kit, when I have the same idea?

She felt tired. But the dizziness had gone and her thoughts were more normal. She no longer felt the almost feverish indignation that she did at first.

They were discussing the details of the move. She remembered how once she had thought them so delightful when they were planning things. When had it been? It was in South Wales, wasn't it, when Elaine had told them she had to sell the house. And they had argued about the Governor Winthrop desk. And it amused me, I loved it. Now, they're all worked up over whether Elaine should take her winter wardrobe with her or not. Every one of them arguing about it, even Kit, who doesn't have anything to do with it, and Joel, who doesn't know anything about it. And it's not amusing at all, it's even a little maddening; how the dickens will they ever get anything done at that rate?

"Take what you need for now, Elaine," she said. "And I'll pack up the rest of the things for you."

There must have been something about her voice which showed that she was annoyed, they all stopped and looked at her. She tried to make her smile normal, to atone for her abruptness. "It won't take long," she said.

"Well, dear, if you don't think it's too much trouble," Elaine said slowly.

"No, really it isn't," Harriet insisted. "It would be nice for you to go out now. It's so hot here in town, you must want to get away."

That decided it quickly. It was easy, really, to straighten out their problems. But she had to do it for them, they couldn't do it by themselves. What will they do after I'm gone, she wondered.

"Come with me, Pris," Elaine said. "And help me decide what I need now. I won't take too long, Kenneth. Don't you want to come along, Harriet?"

"I'd better," Harriet said, leaning forward with an effort. "So I can see what you're taking."

She got up stiffly and followed the others down the hall. She noticed as she left the room that Joel was watching her solicitously. Poor Joel, she thought, this will be hardest on him. But perhaps when he has a job he'll be more self-confident again. The way he used to be, you couldn't hurt him so easily then.

Pris sat down on the bed and lit a cigarette while Elaine began taking things out of her closet and her bureau drawers. She looked up at her daughter. "Should you be smoking, dear?" she asked.

Harriet sat down on the chaise longue, still absorbed in the problem of Joel. She hardly heard them as they began talking about Pris's pregnancy and what she could do and couldn't do.

"Heavens!" she heard Elaine say once. "It seems a long time ago since I had you three. I used to be so miserable while I was carrying you. There were so many rules then. Girls have it a lot easier nowadays."



"I don't mind it at all," Pris said. "Except for looking like a mountain. Now that I've gotten over being sick every morning. That used to be pretty gruesome."

Harriet looked up sharply. What had she said?

"Oh, yes!" Elaine said, waving a hand at Pris. "Nothing, nothing makes you feel more terrible. Just like a dish-rag. Even the smell of food is unbearable. Were you sick a great deal, darling?"

"Not too much," Pris said. She was looking fixedly at Harriet and Harriet stared back at her, fascinated. "It just sort of took me by surprise, that's all," she said. "I'd heard about morning sickness, but I'd forgotten. The first time I was sick I didn't know what had happened to me. I thought for a while perhaps it might be the heat."

There was something almost accusing in the look of her blue eyes and Harriet suddenly closed hers in horror. Oh, no, she said to herself. Oh, no.



*PART VII*

*Labor Day Weekend, 1940*

SOUTH NORWALK



THE fire's heat was too great to stay close to it, but the rest of the room was cold. Harriet wore a sweater as protection for her back and stayed as near the fire as she could. Kit had gone upstairs with Elaine and Pris to look at the layette, but Harriet had made some excuse so that she wouldn't have to go. She was in a queer frame of mind, where so tangible a reminder of her own state would make her burst into tears. She was edgy all over, the ends of her teeth felt harsh and gritty, and her body ran on strings instead of muscles—coarse strings that pulled gratingly whenever she moved. She was afraid of the comparison between herself and Pris. Pris was so proud and everybody made such a fuss over her. She carried her body blatantly, thrusting her burden out before her, and her family considered all her moods and whims. It wasn't fair, Harriet thought wearily, to have to hide her own condition. Even the poorest of women got some satisfaction out of the discomfort of childbearing. If they had no love offered them, they had their own pride. Harriet could not even have the pride, since the child was to be hidden away from everybody.

The fire had settled, lying in a red mass in the ashes, the individual coals fused together so that she could hardly see their outlines. The fieldstone fireplace was so great that there were seats built into it, but you could not sit on them without scorching yourself. Harriet shivered, not so much from the chill as from a cold impulse of the nerves that

suddenly ran along her back. Another wave of self-pity came over her, and she brought her hand up to rub her eyes, trying to force back the tears. She was angry at the weakness, but for the moment she could not control herself.

It was too great an anti-climax to wait day after day for Joel to find work. She itched constantly to tell him that she couldn't stay with him any longer. It was almost impossible to hear his plans about the new apartment when she knew that she wouldn't be there. She had to guard herself constantly against melting to one of his old moments of charm. She saw that she must be detached completely not only when she felt angry with him, but when she felt affectionate. Now that some of the family had their old prosperity back again, they were more good-natured and easy. It was ironical that she couldn't leave until they were all comfortable, and yet the more comfortable they were, the more tempting it became to stay. It meant that every day she was tied down to them like this the strength of her decision was slackening.

If only something would happen quickly. Mr. McIlvaine had already guessed that she was pregnant, she had been ill one day at his apartment. His kindness had made the situation even worse. She could not bear his rather sentimental reflections on motherhood, and she had told him harshly how things were with her and how she intended to leave her husband as soon as she could. She was glad now that it had happened, because Mr. McIlvaine had been so helpful, trying to find work for her, and he had talked to Hanson, his agent, about her, and Hanson had promised to hold open the job as his assistant until she was ready to take it. But in spite of that consolation, she was forced to realize that if Mr. McIlvaine had guessed, Joel himself would soon

guess, obtuse as he was. And if he found out he would make it hard for her to carry out her plans.

She thought, smiling with some bitterness, after all he does have some rights in the child, and I would have to acknowledge them if he ever claimed them. I can't have much conscience. I'm not at all troubled by the thought of clearing out without telling him about it. But if he did find out, then I would be forced to acknowledge his rights. His arguments would serve as my conscience.

She stretched out her hands suddenly to the fire, with a feeling that if she could somehow find comfort her mind would work more clearly. But it was useless, she knew, because it had chewed at the problem for more than a month now, and found no solution.

Somebody laid a hand on her shoulder and she looked up and saw Kenneth. She smiled at him, she had grown to like him a good deal in the past month, and motioned to him to sit down beside her. He moved with his usual awkwardness, but she noticed that there was more ease to him these days and his manner wasn't so defiant. No matter what you may say about Pris, she thought, her very selfishness in giving Kenneth the responsibility of herself and her family has helped him. It's made him more important to himself.

"Have you and Joel finished your golf?" she asked him. They had gone out, in spite of the weather, because Joel had insisted that you couldn't waste a Labor Day weekend.

"Yes," Kenneth said. He leaned back in his chair and arched his back so that he could draw his pipe out of his pocket. He filled it slowly, looking at her and not at his fingers. "Joel's taking a shower," he told her. "I came ahead because I wanted to talk to you alone."

She looked at him questioningly. "What is it, Ken?" she asked.

Kenneth lit a match and held it to his pipe, with tantalizing suspense. "I think I've found him a job," he told her at last. "I wanted to tell you before I told him."

She leaned forward in involuntary response. "Oh, Ken, how swell!" she said. Her mind suddenly sped, touching on the possibilities of the news. This, finally, was her release. But she couldn't bring herself to believe it. She had wanted it to happen for too long a time.

"What sort of a job is it?" she asked him, anxiously.

"Customers' man," Kenneth said briefly. He threw the match into the fireplace. "With my brokers. I know Joel hasn't done that sort of work, but it sounds to me very much like the job he had before. It's a good deal on the social side."

"It would be perfect!" she said. "Kenneth, I can't tell you how grateful he would be."

Kenneth looked embarrassed and turned his head away from her. "There's no need for him to be grateful," he mumbled and she could hardly hear what he was saying. "I want to help."

She wanted to tell him all about her plans. And about the baby too. He couldn't possibly see how really important his offer was without knowing about that. She looked at him eagerly, the words forming in her mouth, but he interrupted her by getting up. "I told Joel I'd get some beer," he said. "I just wanted you to know about this first."

She was instantly thankful that he had cut her short; this was something that she must keep to herself, because other people could hinder her. She nodded and watched him



cross his huge, high-ceilinged living room with long steps. He might be sympathetic, she thought, but I can't take a chance.

Now that she was alone again she could think more clearly. Yes, it would be perfect, she decided. Joel would start work immediately, she would wait one or two weeks to see that he was properly on his feet, and then she would tell him about her decision and go as quickly as possible. It would be wrenching, but on the other hand he would be pretty well absorbed with his new job and that might distract him.

She had thought that she would be happy now that she had come to a decision. But there was something else that troubled her, a reluctance which made her plans seem contradictory. She frowned, trying to face the feeling truly and analyze it. She had to admit that there was a kind of lethargy in her, almost a distaste for the idea now that release was in sight. It's impossible to keep yourself worked up to real indignation for so long a time, she decided. She reached in her pocket for a cigarette as an incentive to calm, and raised her eyes after touching a match to the end of it. She saw Joel coming down the long stairs in the hall. He entered the living room, walking springily, his face pleasant after the exercise. She guessed, half scornfully, half tenderly, that he had probably beaten Kenneth.

"Hello, darling," he said. He sat down on the floor, leaning against the mantel, so that he was out of direct range of the fire and yet some of its light fell across his face. He looked very fresh and handsome. It was good to see him clean-shaven again, and he had changed his shirt to another one, which was open at the throat, white and starched. His hair was still damp from the shower and a little dark-

ened. It made his skin look clearer and emphasized his blue eyes. He's happy up here, she thought. As soon as he gets here he changes. So do the rest of them. They are comfortable again.

She moved uneasily. The resilience of this family was almost immoral, she thought. In the books, weakness and irresponsibility fall when the props are taken away—just as the Randolfs had fallen. But in the books weakness never picks itself up again, and here were the Randolfs bright as day and just as charming as ever. All because Pris has kidnaped a rich man into marrying her, Kit has booted out a poor husband and relentlessly cut a few throats, and Elaine is sponging off her son-in-law.

Perhaps they'd never really changed. Perhaps it was only that poverty and living crowded together in close quarters, magnified their unpleasant qualities. It's like being cooped up in a submarine; they say men get on each other's nerves, jammed in with one another like that.

And it's so confusing, she thought. How can I tell what to do if nothing is according to the rules? Leaving them is such a self-righteous thing to do anyway. How can I do it unless I feel really sure?

"You're awfully quiet," Joel said, watching her, a light from the fire making his eyes reflect brightness. "What are you thinking about?" His voice was easy and tolerant as it had been when they were first married. For a second she went back to the old habit of thinking and felt pampered and insignificant.

"Nothing," she said, uneasily, disliking the reaction. "Absolutely nothing. Just trying to keep warm."

"It is cold, isn't it?" he said, stretching his arms out and yawning. She lost the sense of his dominance again.

"Miserably," she said, letting the word fall quietly so as to subdue him. She didn't want to talk.

The fire crackled and Joel reached over to put another log on it. His clear skin reddened under the glow, and she watched his movements absent-mindedly.

Kenneth came back with a tray of glasses and bottles and set it down on the floor beside them. "The women folk are coming along in a minute," he said. "As soon as they put the things away. Pris has given them a complete fashion show."

Joel said something to him, Harriet hardly noticed what it was. Her thoughts were running like counterpoint to their talk. I'm going to escape at last, she thought, but her mind was still unable to accept the reality of the idea and she kept touching at it as if it were a raw spot, and then drawing back from it.

Ken handed each of them a glass. "Here's to the Tryson son and heir!" Joel said, lifting his in a toast.

"You're a little premature, aren't you?" Kenneth asked him. "Suppose it's a girl?"

"She should be drunk to just the same," Joel said, smiling. "Personally, I like the idea of a niece. I'll take her to dances when she grows up. Harriet won't feel like anything so undignified by then."

Harriet smiled ruefully, thinking about the future. Tonight I'll be destroying all that confidence, she thought. And he needs it so badly.

She wondered what it would be like to live alone.

"I'd like a girl, myself," Kenneth said. "Little girls are always so cute. Like kittens."

"That's right," Joel said, nodding. "They don't seem to go through that gawky stage that little boys do. Not that

I'd object to a nephew either. Could take him to football games."

Harriet thought, what would you say if you knew you were going to have a son or daughter yourself? But the words were not real, it was impossible to think of Joel as having any part in their child. Perhaps, she thought bitterly, it's because he's shared so few of the responsibilities lately that I've just got used to taking care of things by myself.

She saw that Kenneth was looking at her inquiringly. He was anxious to tell Joel about the job, and their chatter made him impatient. She fixed her attention on them with an effort. This is important, she thought. Her expression must have indicated that she was ready and Kenneth looked suddenly back to Joel.

"Say, by the way, Joel," he said clumsily. Joel turned his alert face towards him.

"Yes?" he asked.

Kenneth hesitated for a second and Harriet wished that she could help him. When they had first known him he had been protected by a sort of pride, but now that he had softened he was completely exposed and helpless.

"I was talking to Walter Mayhew," he said. "My broker. He gave me an idea for you, Joel."

Joel's face suddenly changed. He had stiffened it as if he knew what was coming.

"Really?" he asked. "What sort of an idea, Ken?"

Kenneth hesitated another second. "For a job," he said, almost apologetically. "I know you've been having hard luck, Joel, and I don't mean to meddle, but I heard about this job that I thought might be suited to you. It's not the same as your old one—not exactly. But it's similar. Mayhew

wants a customers' man, a salesman. A big part of your work would be entertaining people and that sort of thing. I think you could pick up whatever you need to know very quickly down there. It's not very technical. And I know you'd be good at it. You get along well with people and you're used to doing business that way. What do you think?"

He sounded as if he were arguing with Joel, trying to convince him. Harriet, watching Joel, was surprised to see a sort of stubbornness come into his face and she had the feeling that he actually needed persuading.

"That's very nice of you, Kenneth," he said. His voice was quiet and too polite. "I'm grateful to you for thinking of me." They waited impatiently while he was silent for a moment. "I don't think I'm suited to that kind of work, though," he said, finally. "I hate to sound ungracious, but I honestly don't think I could do it. And it would be so much worse if I was a flop at it. It would be embarrassing for you as well as for me."

"But you don't quite understand," Kenneth said. He looked completely bewildered. "I'm sure it's right for you. I think you'll be quite a success at it."

"You forget," Joel said. His voice and expression were full of a sort of painful irony. "I wasn't a great success at my other job. No reason to suppose I'd be any good at this, is there?"

Harriet thought, how stupid we were! I'd forgotten how he hated his work before. She remembered how he had told her once that he was scared. She had lost sight of that in her excitement, and Kenneth, of course, had never known. She looked at Kenneth and saw that he was examining his glass in a troubled way. She wished that she

could explain to him what had gone wrong, he was so obviously puzzled.

"But, Joel," he said. "You do want to work, don't you? Why don't you just give it a try?"

"Thanks," Joel said. His voice was so polite that it cut out argument. "But I think it would be a mistake, Ken. I honestly do. No, it would be wiser for me to try for a different sort of job altogether. I feel sure that something will turn up soon, I have a lot of leads out."

His words were final and they ended the discussion. Harriet and Kenneth sat looking down at their hands, and Harriet's mind, now that it had received its first shock, began fumbling for a solution. What had happened to Joel, was his confidence permanently ruined? Was this going to destroy everything she had planned? She hadn't counted on his upsetting things this way.

She felt they all expected her to say something, but she couldn't think of anything. The silence stretched out painfully. Harriet to occupy her hands took another sip of her beer, and was momentarily distracted by the now familiar nausea that came over her. Not as strong as it had once been, just a reminder of what her body contained, and of that other part to her problem.

She looked down at her hands almost tearfully. Poor Joel, she thought. We're both in a mess, a terrible mess.

Pris, Elaine and Kit came down the long stairs talking and laughing together. They made a welcome interruption which covered up the silence of the three by the fireplace. Pris came over to Kenneth and sat on the arm of his chair.

"Give me a sip of beer, papa," she commanded imperiously, and he smiled and stretched his glass up to her.

"That baby is going to be so lovely!" Elaine told Ken-

neth sentimentally. "I've never seen such beautiful things."

Harriet, huddled back in her corner of the couch, tried to withdraw herself so that nobody would speak to her. She was trembling. Everything in her life had suddenly been tossed up again into a rubbish heap of confusion, and she had to go back to the dreary task of sorting it out. The others were disconcerting, but her trouble was so important that she could continue thinking about it in spite of the talk.

Some remnant of her mind caught Kit saying, "What's the matter with you, Joel? You look like the last rose of summer." Kit was handsome in the old way. The two nights of good sleep had relaxed her tight face and her skin was smooth under her eyes. Why were all of them so attractive suddenly? It was almost devilish.

Joel looked at her unsmilingly. "Nothing," he said. "I was just thinking."

"Unnatural activity," Kit said lightly. Harriet wanted to try to stop her, Joel was in no temper to be teased, but to her surprise, Joel smiled.

"I'll stop," he said easily.

Of course, it's all right for Kit to tease him, Harriet realized. She doesn't know what's going on. But he doesn't dare face Kenneth and me. She had a savage impulse to take his face between her hands and say, "Look at me!" She watched him telling Kit about the golf and his voice was quite gay again.

In fact, all of them were light and easy, even Kenneth had joined in with them. She was the only one who could not control herself; she found it impossible to laugh or to concentrate on what they were saying. She closed her eyes for a second. I can't stop thinking about this, she thought.

It keeps jabbing at me. Elaine asked her something and she answered absently, half opening her eyes. The red light from the fire made the eyes and hair of all of them seem darker, and flushed their faces. Seen through her lashes they were blurred, just as they were in her mind, vague interruptions to something important.

"Yes," she told Elaine. "I'll go up and look at it this afternoon, if Pris doesn't mind showing it again."

"How's your headache?" Pris asked solicitously.

Joel looked at her sharply, she noticed, and then turned back quickly to Kit again. Harriet half frowned to herself. He was afraid that if their eyes met he would be caught.

"Better, thanks," she told Pris.

He's afraid of me, she thought, with a feeling of pity. Oh, she felt, this is going to be difficult and painful. If I'm going to leave him at all, I've got to tell him now. Right away, tonight, job or no job. Or I'll never do it. I've got to harden myself so that I feel as indignant as I did a month ago, and not wait any longer. But how will I tell him? What can I possibly say? She searched desperately in her mind for words. How do you tell a man you want a divorce? She rehearsed the scene, framing words and phrases that would be the firmest and yet the kindest. Joel, she said to herself. Why did you turn down Ken's job? You can't afford to turn down jobs, don't you know that? I know you've had a rotten experience but you've got to forget it. Because there's something I've got to tell you—but no, that wouldn't be the right way to say it. Her lips moved slightly as she rephrased her thoughts.

Kit, who was standing in front of the fireplace, moved sideways so that the light increased on Harriet's face.



"Gosh, it will be awful to go back to New York tonight," she said woefully. "It's so nice up here."

Harriet immediately visualized that train ride with all of them tired and feeling unkempt. Would she have to sit beside Joel, knowing that she was leaving, that she wanted a divorce? Seeing over and over again in her mind the words she would have to use in telling him about it? No, that would be too hard, she thought weakly.

Now she was growing more and more afraid of herself and the fears which kept intruding into her plans. How could any words be kind, she thought once, when you're giving one more blow to a man who's already crippled? But you can't allow yourself to consider that, she told herself, the words shaping in her mind almost as if they were spoken, because they were superimposed on the pattern that was forming in her true consciousness. I've got to talk to him now, the outer voice said suddenly, before I lose my resolution. If I could just get him away from the others.

Kenneth perhaps sensed her problem, at any rate he was helping her by drawing the others into conversation and leaving Joel out of it, to look around and meet her eyes. But Joel was unwilling, he was hard to catch. In a way it was fortunate, it made her angry and that strengthened her a bit. All right, she thought grimly, if that's the way you want to act.

"Joel," she said. "Come upstairs with me, will you? I want to change for lunch. Keep me company."

In front of the others, Joel couldn't object. She felt like a gangster kidnaping somebody at the point of a gun. He got up slowly, still holding his glass, and looked around for a place to put it down. Kenneth reached up and took it and smiled across at Harriet sympathetically. She was grateful

to him. Kenneth thinks I'm going to straighten all this out, she thought. But he doesn't know how drastically. She moved ahead of Joel, leading the way to the stairs, feeling completely numb.

They were silent without pretense as they climbed the stairs in front of the others. Neither of them spoke until they got into the bedroom. Joel had closed the door behind them and he stood with his hands on his hips looking at her belligerently.

"You think I'm screwy, don't you?" he said, opening immediately with what was in their minds.

Now she was sorry for him again, and she turned away so that she didn't have to look at him. He was so dependent on her good opinion, he was bracing himself for her disapproval. She thought, almost irrelevantly, that there was one thing she had gained from living with him and his family. She was strong now. When she looked back on it, she realized that she never had that dream about the little man and the little woman any more. In a funny way, Joel had given her a sort of security. Not the security of being looked after, but the security of independence.

"I can't understand you, that's all," she said. She picked up her hairbrush from the bureau, and balanced it in her hand, feeling its ivory back cool against her palm.

"Well, I knew what I was doing," he said, still belligerently.

"Oh, I understand in a way," she said.

"You ought to know I'd be no good at that sort of thing," he said. He crumpled suddenly, appealing to her. "I was such a flop at it before. I want something different, Harriet. I want to work somewhere where I can bury myself behind a glass partition and grind out a day's work.

I don't want to be the party boy, I don't want to take the responsibility."

"But, Joel," she said. She was miserable for him, and her pity had almost completely distracted her from the things she had planned to say. "You mustn't let yourself be so upset about that one failure," she told him. You can't change your whole life because of it. You must try again, you haven't given yourself a fair chance."

He looked at her sullenly. "I'm not going to kid myself," he said. "Harriet, listen to me. I hate that kind of world, and I hate the people in it—God, you don't know how wretched I was before. I'm not a shirker, but I want something more definite to do, I don't want to rely on personality. Listen, you don't know what it's like! If you have a hangover one day and feel lousy, you've still got to be gay and charming. If you've had a row with your wife, say, the night before, or if you're worried about money, you can't let anybody know about it, you have to keep on smiling and having drinks with the boys, and telling dirty stories. God, how I hate it, Harriet. I don't want that kind of work ever again."

"Oh, Joel, darling," she said. He wanted her sympathy so terribly he was begging for it. "I'm sorry you feel that way about it."

"I can't help it," he said childishly.

It was like beheading a person, you had to strike quickly and at the vital point. "I was only upset because we can't afford to be tossing jobs away right now," she said, hardening her voice. "I thought you ought to take it."

Her excitement and distress were working on her. She was aware once more that her legs were trembling and that she was weak. So much depended on what she would

say, she was losing her strength and her coolness, she didn't know how to begin. She grew dizzy and put out her hand for the bureau. She missed it and felt foolish, fumbling for it again. But she was too far away and she staggered a little, falling against it heavily. She must have shown that she was feeling ill, because Joel suddenly came up to her and took her by the shoulders. She wanted to shake his hands away, she felt fretful at his touch. Leave me alone, she wanted to say, you're confusing everything.

"Harriet," he said. "What's wrong? You've been feeling badly an awful lot lately, I've noticed it. What's wrong with you?" He paused, looking down at her. "You're not going to have a baby, are you?"

She straightened under his hands. "Yes," she said dully. Now it was out and she would have to go on with what she was going to say. But he interrupted her.

"Oh, my darling," he said, and pulled her up to him to kiss her. She wanted to resist him, but she felt it would be too cruel. She closed her eyes and was limp. "Harriet, dearest," he said.

"Joel," she said, opening her eyes. "There's something I want to tell you—"

But he interrupted her again. He hardly seemed to have heard her. "Why didn't you tell me before?" he asked her. "Were you too shy? My sweet, I'm so happy."

Shy! she thought bitterly.

"Listen," he said. He took her hand and led her over to the bed, making her sit down and sitting down beside her. "Have you been to a doctor yet? I want you to have the best attention, maybe you ought to go to Pris's man."

"No," she said. She was still trying to tell him.

"Won't the others be surprised?" he said. "Wait till we tell them. We can tell them now, can't we, darling, they'll

want to know. They'll be so happy, all of them. We all love you so much, you know that, don't you, Harriet?"

He was rubbing her nose in the dirt.

He put his arm around her and drew her tight against him so that her head rested on his shoulder. "Why didn't you tell me, you little bum!" he said again, shaking her tenderly.

"Joel," she said, stiff in his embrace.

"I wonder what it'll be," he said. "You know, it's funny, isn't it, we were just wondering about Pris's baby a moment ago. You must have been grinning to yourself. And now I have my own to think about. Isn't it marvelous!"

Your own, she thought almost angrily. What will you do for it? You've just finished telling me you don't want to work for it.

"You know, if it's a boy we ought to name it for Dad," he said eagerly. "Elaine would be so tickled. Shall we do that, darling? John. I think that's a good name. Something solid about it, isn't there? A respectable citizen he'll be, our John. I like that." He nodded to himself.

She wanted to put up her hand and take his chin in it and force him to look at her, to be still and think. Listen, she wanted to say to him. But she couldn't. He had been sunk before, he had had no job, and no self-respect. But now suddenly he was happy because he was going to have a child. She couldn't say to him that she was going to go away, to take his child somewhere else, never to see him again.

My God, she thought, I've been completely idiotic. I thought I was a realistic person, but I've never visualized this or I would have known how it would turn out. This is what Joel needed. He's self-confident suddenly, and proud of himself.

"I'll take Kenneth's job, by heaven!" he said exuberantly. "And what's more, I'll show them a thing or two."

It was too ironic, to get what she wanted this way. But now she must go ahead and tell him, mustn't she? This was what she had been waiting for, wasn't it? But he went on talking about his son. His plans were extravagant and ridiculous. She listened to him going on and on, growing wilder with every suggestion. She knew him so well, she knew that actually none of this would last. He would go to work, she told herself, and be excited for a while and then everything would collapse all over again. It isn't fair, she thought, it isn't fair for him to want me to lead that kind of a life with him. To expose my child to his ups and downs. But in spite of everything she was being convinced by his sureness. It was impossible to believe that anybody so happy and so alive could revert to being the weak, unshaven man she had known in the last few months.

As she listened something began ebbing out of her. It was like taking part in an argument. She had something pertinent and devastating to tell him, but he was getting further and further away from the point. She would have to resist his sidetracking, and when he paused draw him back to the beginning. But in the meantime the things he was talking about tempted her. I must concentrate, she thought, I must stick to my point. If I begin talking about the baby with him, I'm lost.

"I want him to go to college," Joel told her, flinging out his hand grandly. "He's going to have everything, by golly."

It was like hypnotism, the way her determination was slipping away.

"He'll be blond, I'll bet," Joel told her, smiling. "My influence."

She opened her mouth and closed it again. No. No! she told herself firmly. If I let him draw me in, it will be the end of everything. Really the end. She saw it clearly. It was funny, just one little sentence would commit her completely. Once she let him assume that everything was what he supposed it would be too late to go back on her tracks.

"Think of Elaine when she hears about this," Joel said. "Two grandchildren at once! She'll go crazy."

Now, she thought, be careful. You know you can't share this delight and then tell him you're going to go away. You can't do that.

"If he has crooked teeth or anything, he's going to wear a brace," Joel told her. "I know it's hard, but it's worth it. It really is."

It was so trivial. She slipped.

"Suppose it's a girl?" she asked him. And then stopped. But now it was too late. He seized on that little wedge of admission as if he had been waiting for it. They were sharing it together now, their child and their plans. Now she could never tell him, she thought desperately. Her eyes went all around the room looking at everything but Joel. Just one little sentence.

"I hope it is a girl, as a matter of fact," he said.

In a way she felt almost relieved. Well, she thought. It's over now, anyway.

"Just like you," Joel went on, smiling down at her.

Harriet closed her eyes to hide the last spurt of her rebellion. Behind the shut lids it died away.

















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