







THIRTEEN  
WOMEN



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TIFFANY THAYER

ILLUSTRATED BY DAVID BERGER

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TO POPS

FOR WHOM THE MORAL  
WILL BE CLEAR





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# PART ONE





## CHAPTER ONE

**P**ICTURES like that weren't decent. Mary focussed incredulous Catholic eyes on the contours of the rotund huzzy lolling in nudeness and lace. *Itching*; was it? Mary poked a vicious fist into the master's pillow. *Itching!* If

a daughter of hers should frump around like that she should certainly have her itching scratched.

The O'Neills were forever shocking Mary. She shocked as easily as she bruised, and any little knock left a purple spot on her flesh for days. Poor Mary. She'd have left them long ago if it hadn't been for Bobby. The way they were *raising* that child! Never a piece of meat to eat. A little *lamb* now and then. Nothing really substantial. Nothing but calories and carbo-hyde-something or other. . . . And precious little he'd know about his Saviour if she hadn't taught him.

Devil a piece of candy or pie did he get, until the poor chick was so starved for a sweet that he'd snap at a bit of chocolate like a dog, just like a dog. Mary gave the tinted silk bed-spread one last, long, wide sweep of her hand and sniffed her regular farewell sniff at the offensive bawd of the picture. Bringing things like that in the house for the boy to see and denying him Christian baptism! A disgrace to the name of O'Neill, they were. Lavender bed sheets—and black underwear without an ounce of warmth in it!

Mary's disapproval of practically every O'Neill activity was the family's one, sure-fire joke at dinner, especially when there were guests. They dressed, then, and Laura's bare arms and

back invariably straightened Mary's thin lips into an agate line of suppressed criticism.

"If it weren't for Mary," George often said, "this family'd have gone to hell long ago."

"She's convinced we're on our way as fast as we can go," Laura would laugh. "But she's so good to Bob."

"That's the main thing," a barren neighbor moralized. "You can't be too careful with the servants you get out here. You can't trust them out of your sight with children."

"The stories you hear!"

"Most of them came to get into pictures. They hob-nob with a few of that wild crowd and before you know it they're doing all sorts of perverted things—taking hop."

"And they *play* with children. I know of one case—my dear Laura, you're fortunate."

"Someone was telling me—Norton, I think—you know him, George; he was telling me just the other day about this friend of his who has a boy a little older than Bob, about six, I think he said. And the parents hired this girl; pretty, looked to be decent, you know? She hadn't been there more than two or three weeks when the mother noticed the boy acting strangely every time he had to urinate. He was ashamed to tell her about it, but they finally got it out of him that it hurt him. They took him to a doctor and

so help me God this girl had infected him. At six, mind you."

"What did they do to her?"

"Oh, of course she denied it, but they finally scared the kid into giving details he couldn't possibly have imagined at that age. I think they gave her time."

"I should think they would."

"Well, we needn't worry about Mary," Laura said, and the party laughed heartily at the utter incongruity of the picture conjured.

"I don't think Mary knows about those things," George thought. "She's been taught that that part of the body has only one use."

"And that she does sparingly."

"*Mister Brennan!*"

"I'll bet it's true. . . . How old is she? Fifty? Fifty-five? Let's ask her if she still thinks babies are found under cabbages."

"No. . . . Don't do that. We never kid her. She'd leave us."

"She's a splendid cook."

That day had started peculiarly. Mary's favorite dream had been interrupted just before five that morning by the extraordinarily insistent ringing of the telephone. Instead of ringing and stopping and ringing and stopping in its wonted manner, the instrument had set up one long, loud, continuous ri-i-i-i-i-n-n-n-n-ng, almost

like a scream—just before five o'clock; the very worst time of night for anything like that to happen. Everything was so dead and still.

Mary's dream, her favorite, has connotations for the initiated. In it she climbed a long flight of steps. They stretched endlessly before her and endlessly behind, and she was somewhere middle-way up, walking with a free and easy stride, as she had walked as a girl, her hips swinging gladly without a twinge of the rheumatism which bothered her on steps now. Every ten or twelve lifts she ascended seemed to be a unit, a lap in some race she was running. At the end of each lap she experienced a delightful falling sensation, briefly, and the ascent began again. One, two, three, four - - - nine, ten elev - wheeew! . . . One, two three - - - nine, ten - wheeeew! At the top of each group of steps, the eights, tens, elevens and twelves, a tingling, warming sensation pervaded poor old Mary's withered middle, as if her blood would course in veins it had not known before. Then—down again, with that swift-sinking, elevatorish feeling, which sometimes wakened her. If she could but once have stepped on that thirteenth, or perhaps fourteenth, step, she always felt something unusually pleasant would happen to her. But twelve was the limit before the set-back, and, although she thus seemed ever on the point of learning some-

thing, experiencing some startling revelation, nothing ever really did happen; not even once.

She dreamed this strangely pointless yet gratifying dream on an average of twice a month. Court it as she would between times, it would not come, and then, occasionally, she'd dream it two or three nights running.

Mary was on the twelfth step with her toe seeking the next notch, a smile on her sleeping face, when the phone deprived her of imminent bliss.

In an outing-flannel wrapper, she stumbled frantically down the hall to still that clangor before it woke Bobby. Her pulse was high, her breath short and her jaw and hands tremulous.

Such a strange hour! Some psychic force told her of danger. She fumbled with the French phone, dropped it once and chattered "H-he-hello—?" It must be important. Illness. Death.

George O'Neill looked sleepily through the crack he opened his door.

"He-he-hello. Hello."

"Six, neyun, thrrree one?"

"Y-yes."

"Just a moment, please. Chicago calling. Ready with Chicago? . . . Ready with Chicago? . . ."

"Long distance," Mary said vaguely to the



chill greyness of the dawn, filtering eerily in the hall window.

George climbed into a dressing gown and smoothed his red wire brush of sleep-stiffened hair with a nervous hand. "Long distance," he told the undisturbed and soundly sleeping form of Laura.

"Just a moment, please," said the operator.

"Long distance?" George asked Mary.

"Yes, sir; long *distance*. . . . Chicago."

"Chicago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who do I know in Chicago?"

"I don't—know."

"Mrs. O'Neill's asleep."

"Yes, sir."

"Shall I call her?"

"Maybe you'd better talk." Mary held out the phone.

"What are they saying?" He held the instrument to his ear. "Hello. . . . Hello!"

"They aren't saying anything now; just buzzing."

"Hello."

"I wonder if it woke Bobby." Mary started toward the nursery.

"Wait, Mary. . . . Hello!"

"I'm sorry, sir," the operator apologized, "Chicago's hung up."

"Hung up?"

"Yes, sir."

"But who was it?"

"I don't know, sir. We're trying to get them back. If you'll hang up we'll call you when they're ready."

"But look here," said George, his dignity affronted, "find out who that was. It must have been something important."

"We're trying to get them back, sir. If you'll hang up, we'll call you."

"You try to find out who called here. My goodness. . . . You can't wake a whole house full of people up at—at this hour and then get out of it by just saying somebody's hung up. You can't do that, you know. My bill is paid regularly the first of every month. I was sleeping—" But the operator had twitched a little nubbin or wiggled something that prevented her hearing a word. Operators are like that.

That had started the day wrong. Mary couldn't get back to sleep and all through their breakfast George and Laura had worried and wondered who could have called them from Chicago. George did most of the audible wondering. Laura maintained a rigid, frowning, perplexed silence, answering her husband in monosyllables and studying her plate with worried concentration. He noticed it, finally; which is when most

six-year-husbands notice any irregularity in the behavior of their wives. "What's the matter, Laura? You're acting strangely."

"Oh, am I? . . . Well, it worries me. That's natural; isn't it?"

"Oh, well—I don't know. After all, it was probably the wrong number."

"Yes, probably."

"Don't worry about it. If it was anything important they'll call again."

Then, as soon as George was out of the house, Laura had told Mary to dress Bobby at once. "I'm taking him down town. . . . And, Mary."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Don't make any preparations for his party tomorrow. No cake or anything."

"No cake?" Mary was proud of her birthday cakes. There had been one every year, although Bob had never been permitted to taste any of them. "No cake at a birthday party?"

"There isn't going to be a party. Here—" Laura wrote a few sentences on a scrap of paper. "You have that message sent—a telegram, understand?—to everyone who was invited. . . . There isn't going to be any party."

Then a taxi had been called and Bobby and his mother had driven away in that instead of waiting for the car to come back from Mr. O'Neill's office.

So. It was a funny day no matter how you looked at it. Calling the party off; taking the child shopping with her; leaving the house in such a hurry.

But Laura was not shopping. As the belated chauffeur returned to the house for instructions for the day after delivering the boss at his office, Laura and Bob were, of all places, in the office of Chief-of-Detectives Yeager, telling him about the telephone call and about the cause of the worried frown George had noticed at breakfast.

Mary and Allen hit it off very well. He was the eighth chauffeur she had seen come to the O'Neill's service. When he left, and they all did that, of course, he would be the eighth she had seen to go. But Mary hoped he would not leave soon, for Allen—of all the eight—was the first one to show her the respect she felt duty-bound to exact from such an itinerant, tinkering breed as these chauffeurs were. Only ten days in the house, and he thoroughly recognized her priority in all things. More, he was thoughtful and helpful and handsome; and he liked Bobby.

Just see this, even now: "I bought the boy a ball." He held it in his hand, a bright red rubber ball.

"Did you, now?"

"Is the missus sore because I'm late?"

"She's gone out—and taken the boy with her."

"Yeah? How'd she go? Gee; I'll bet I catch it for not rushing right back. I just saw this in the window and went in and got it for him."

"Ain't that thoughtful, now?"

"Wasn't she sore?"

"She said nothing to me."

"Where'd she go?" Allen put the ball back in its wrapping.

"Shopping, I suppose. . . . All the money that's spent in this house for *nothing*."

Allen went toward the garage.

## 2

You liked Bobby the moment you laid eyes on him. He was a man's boy; sturdy, round and brown. He looked less like a condemned person, less like an individual marked for death, than anyone else in the room. Yet, according to prediction, little Bobby would be the next to go. It was this prediction which had brought Laura to Detective Headquarters.

They were distinctly out of place here, but Bobby had made friends with all the burly men in the first three minutes of the visit. He stood on the desk of the Chief, imitating Douglas Fairbanks for an admiring group. Laura made

no effort to conceal her pride; and the love she bore this young son shone in all but visible rays from her eyes. There was a fidgeting, furtive adjusting of collars and neckties among the plain-clothes men as those wide, handsome eyes circled the grinning group making so much fuss over Bob.

“He certainly takes after his mother,” one said. “Look at those eyes.” Bobby cracked an imaginary whip, this was Doug in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The Chief returned with the city chemist. Both frowned—and the group interpreted the executive expression in various ways. The force took it to mean that their undue familiarity with this lady and her son was not in the line of duty. They bade the boy clumsy, awkward farewells and made off to their own desks or the locker room. Mrs. O’Neill, ill at ease in the place and not at all sure she was not being a very silly woman who would be laughed at by these men the moment her back was turned, thought the officer resented the boyish heels on his desk top. She started to lift him down. A reporter begged the honor and set Bobby on the floor beside her. Whereupon Bobby began to pummel the news-gatherer’s knees with both fists. This was the custom at home as bruises on Mary’s legs, Mary’s *limbs*, could attest.



"HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD THIS POWDER?"





Another scribe, one of the gifted ones who senses big stories while his colleagues are chasing fire engines, squinted at the drawn brow of the Chief and heard his precious inner voice yelping and gibbering: "It's a *whale*. It's a *whale*! Watch *everybody*." His was the only correct interpretation of the frown. A big story was about to break, a very *whale*.

"How long have you had this powder, Mrs. O'Neill?" the Chief asked solemnly as he turned his squeaky swivel chair and sat down.

"Since before Christmas. It came—about—about the middle of December."

Yeager looked up at the doctor. "This is May twenty-fifth," he said. "Five months."

"Is—is it—poison?"

Yeager made a non-committal, knowing grimace and rolled his eyes toward the chemist again.

"It is more than fifty per cent bichloride of mercury, little lady. If you had given it to your son he would have strangled to death in thirty seconds." Laura gathered Bobby to her and held his tousled head against her thigh. The doctor went on: "Corrosive sublimate, a common—er—vermin exterminator. It closes the wind pipe, throat, *instantly*. Doesn't have to reach the stomach to kill."

"My God, Yeager—who would want to kill this kid?" one reporter burst out.

The Chief only nodded his own amazement at the enormity of the crime so fortuitously prevented. "What made you suspicious of the powder, Mrs. O'Neill? You've had it a long time."

"Well, I don't know, exactly. The telephone call, of course, but I was suspicious before that. . . . I don't even know why I kept it. I never really intended to give it to him, but all these—these other dreadful things kept—kept piling up. . . . Oh, Bobby." Her pretty features were convulsed with grief and pain, almost as if the unspeakable catastrophe had actually come to pass. She bent over the boy.

The psychic reporter was bursting with questions, but he held his peace. So far it was Yeager's job. What a picture she would make for the story! BEAUTIFUL YOUNG MOTHER— Si began thinking of headlines.

"What's the matter, mama?" Bobby asked, big-eyed. "Don't c'y, now."

She dried her tears and the expression of her face was little less than divine. She smiled and kissed one small brown hand. "It's all right, Bobby, son. Mother won't cry."

"Sit down, Doc." Yeager introduced Mrs. George C. O'Neill and Doctor Blundein, the city chemist. "You fellows draw up too," Yeager said

to the two reporters. "You don't mind if the reporters hear your story, do you, Mrs. O'Neill?"

"Oh, goodness! Does—does it have to be in all the papers? I've tried so hard to keep it from George."

"Well, I'll tell you, Mrs. O'Neill; you can't keep it out. They'll get it somehow, and it's much better to let them have it all from the start. Si, here, will tell you, if you give the reporters a break, they'll be friendly. You can *ask* 'em to leave out this and that—and they will. But if you fight 'em and hold back from 'em, they'll cut your throat."

"Well, not quite that bad," Si remonstrated. "But if it's news, we want it."

"We've found, here at Headquarters, that friendly newspapers are the easiest ones to get along with. They make bad enemies."

"I don't suppose I can keep it from my husband any longer, anyway. Now that I've come to you, I'll have to tell him all about it."

"Yes. He ought to know."

"He's such a busy man. I—I've hated to bother him."

"Perhaps he can help us."

"Yes. Perhaps."

"Sit down, Si. Sit down, boys. . . . Buck! . . . Charlie! . . . Not *you*, Charlie Silver." Two detectives came through the swinging gate.

"This is Mrs. O'Neill, boys. . . ." He rose with belated courtesy. "Mrs. O'Neill; Mr. Olsen and Mr. Silver. . . . Sit down. I want you to hear this story."

"Where shall I begin?" she asked.

"Well, if there's a beginning, begin there."

"I don't know."

"Suppose you tell us first where this powder came from."

"It came from Camden, New Jersey, from Swami Yogadachi, an astrologer."

"Um-hm. And how did you come to be in touch with this bird—eh—this chap?"

"Oh, well, that's a much longer story. A schoolmate of mine told me about him."

"Um-hm. He told fortunes?"

"Yes—you see, last fall, well, I don't remember the exact date, I received a circular from him in the mail. But it wasn't an ordinary circular—at least, there was a letter with it, addressed to me personally."

"You said a schoolmate told you about him."

"She did, Anne Jessup told me—but that was after I got his circular."

"His letter."

"Yes."

"Addressed to you, personally?"

"Yes."

"Name spelled right?"

"Yes—and it mentioned my son and told me I would hear from an old friend very soon."

"Whoever wrote that letter must have known you."

"They knew something about me. They knew I had Bob."

"And Anne Jessup?"

"That's not the Anne Jessup of Akron, Ohio, is it?" Si asked.

Mrs. O'Neill appeared nettled. "Ye-es," she admitted. "Anne and I went to school together."

"The one who killed her husband?"

"Yes." Laura lowered her eyes.

"But Jessup was a New York girl."

"We were all New York girls. I met my husband there and moved to Los Angeles after we were married."

"I see. Go on."

"Well, I didn't pay much attention to his circular. I never believed in astrology or any kind of fortune telling very much. It might be easy enough for a man to find out that I had a son. And hearing from Anne was no surprise. She had corresponded with me on and off ever since we left school."

"How long ago?"

"Nearly seven years."

"Uh-hm."

"But about a week after I received Anne's let-

er telling me about this Swami, the round-robin came.”

“What round-robin?”

“What *is* a round-robin?” Silver asked.

“It’s like an endless chain letter,” Yeager said and turned back to Laura. “But you spoke as if you knew of it—what was that?”

“Anne mentioned it. That was the funny part.” Laura was becoming involved. “I don’t know if I can explain this or not. If I had Anne’s letter—well, anyway, she said, ‘I had a letter from Jo Turner.’ Jo is another schoolmate. We all belonged to the same club.”

“Oh, yes?”

Si Lenz, the *Examiner* star, was miles ahead of the slowly unfolding tale. He twisted in his chair. “What happened to Jo?” he asked. “Is she dead?”

“No. . . . Not yet.”

“Not *yet*,” Yeager ejaculated, rising. “What do you mean by that?”

The sharpness of his tone made Laura nervous. She bit her lip and looked at Si appealingly. “The—the Swami predicted that she would die about the fourth of July. But Jo is a very strong minded girl. She doesn’t take it seriously.”

“Has she got one of these powders?”

“I don’t think so. I don’t know.”

“Do you hear from her? Do you correspond?”

Do you know her address? . . . We ought to find out at once if she has one, and if she has, tell her not to take it. It would take more than a strong mind to stop one of those from working.”

“Yes. She lives in New York. I hear from her now and then. I had a letter from her just after Hazel died.”

“What killed Hazel?” The question had been *shot* at her.

“Anemia. Pernicious anemia.”

“Wait! Wait a minute.” Si Lenz could contain himself no longer. “Let me get these addresses, Yeager. This is the biggest yarn that ever broke in California.”

Laura helped Bobby crawl heavily into her lap.

“Go ahead,” said Yeager. “I want them too.”

The reporter wrote rapidly. “First, there was Jessup. She’s in the Ohio Penitentiary. Right?”

“Yes.”

“Then who was next? What was that other name?”

“Jo?”

“Yes. Turner?”

“Josephine Turner.”

“Address?”

“Nine—eh—nine—let’s see. Nine, o—*seven*. Nine, o, seven, Riverside Drive, New York City.”

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And Hazel? Hazel who?"

"Hazel Cousins."

"Right. Address?"

"She's—dead."

"I know, but where'd she live?"

"She lived in New York too. I—I don't remember her address. . . . I have it at home."

"What was the name of this school you girls all went to?"

"Mount Albans Seminary."

"New York?"

"The Bronx."

"Yes. . . . Now, Mrs. O'Neill, can you recall any other names on that round-robin?"

Yeager looked a little ruffled at Si. The reporter was taking the inquiry into his own hands.

Silver had to know. "I wish somebody'd tell me just what a round-robin *is*. It's the first time I ever heard o' one in a murder case."

"That's a hell of a clue," said Buck Olsen, and at a glower from his superior: "Excuse me, Mrs. O'Neill."

"Will you please tell him?"

"A round-robin?" Laura smiled. "Why, you take a sheet of paper and draw something like a spider web on it and you write your name between the lines. Girls do it. You mail it with a letter to an old friend, some one you went to



school with. She writes her name on it and sends it to another girl you both know. It goes the rounds like that until it comes back to the one who started it. It holds you all together—you know?—renews old acquaintances. You remember girls you hadn't thought of in years and start writing to them."

"What became of this one?"

"Oh, I don't know where it is by this time. I sent it to Ellen Koons."

"Ellen Koons," said Si, like a parrot, writing the name on his list. "Where does Ellen live?"

"She lives in Brooklyn. Central Avenue. . . . I've forgotten the number."

"You have it at home?"

"Yes, of course."

"May I come to your home and get such information as I need?"

"Well—I—I'd rather—you see, as I told you, I haven't mentioned this to George, my husband. He has no sympathy with fortune tellers or for women who believe in them. You know how men are."

"Of course."

"But he has to know about it now, doesn't he?"

"Of course."

Yeager had been left out long enough. "Did you keep these letters from your friends?"

"Most of them, yes. I'm not sure I have them all."

"Will you please collect them—as many as you can possibly find—and turn them over to me at once?"

"Certainly."

Silver had a thought. "You weren't going to give that powder to the youngster without telling your husband; were you?"

"No—no! Of course not. I—I didn't really intend to give it to him at all. But this Swami had been right so many times before and he said it was the only way to save Bobby's life."

"Have you got that letter?"

"There it is," pointing to the desk. "It's the only one I brought."

Yeager handled the envelope carefully. "Swami Yogadachi. . . . Yogadachi. Why, he's dead!"

"Yes," Laura concurred. "That's—that's what started it. He predicted his own death almost to the minute, and that made all the girls believe he couldn't be wrong."

"Whe-e-e-ew," Yeager gave a long, low whistle. "I'm a monkey's uncle!"

Si raised his brows and winked at the other reporter. "Is it a daisy?"

"Never heard one like it."

Yeager shook his big head like a dog coming

out of water. "Now, let's get *at* this thing. A man predicts a lot of deaths, tells when they're going to happen. Sends powders around to make sure they will happen, then commits suicide to give his predictions strength!!! *I don't believe it.*"

"There's more than meets the eye," said Silver. "Why should he pick on one club of women?"

"I've thought of that," Laura volunteered. "I don't think he did. I think we girls brought our troubles on ourselves by writing back and forth and telling each other about him; about how good he was."

"You think the round-robin was a coincidence?"

"It might have been."

"Who started that round-robin?"

"I don't know. It had half a dozen names on it when it came to me."

"You sent it to Ellen Koons?" Si made a note. "Who sent it to you?"

"I don't remember."

"I thought you said this murderess sent it——"

"Anne Jessup is no murderess!" The detectives were surprised at the sudden display of emotion, the raised voice, the flashing eyes of Bobby's mother.

Si grimaced. "She killed her husband."

"She knew he—he was—being untrue to her."

"She didn't convince the court."

Yeager interrupted. "Never mind that, Si. Anne Jessup's been tried once. Drop it. . . . Is it true that she sent you the round-robin?"

"No. Anne wrote to me, saying that she had received the round-robin from Josephine and that she had received a letter from the Swami saying she would hear from a number of old friends."

"Who got that letter? Anne or Josephine?"

"Both of them. Just like mine."

"All you girls got letters from this Swami, saying 'you will hear from an old friend—unexpectedly'; then a few days later a round-robin turns up. Is that it?"

"Say—that Swami *started* the round-robin," Buck Olsen discovered aloud.

"Naw," Silver contradicted. "What does he get out of all this killin'? What's little Bobby here got to do with him? It's a revenge thing and the Swami is hired to do the predictin'."

"And to kill hisself, I suppose."

There seemed to be no answer to that.

"Telegraph Camden," Yeager directed. "Get all the dope you can on Yogadachi." He unfolded the letter.

*"It has been my unfortunate duty, in justice to my science and to my profession, to predict a number of calamities among your intimate friends. You will hear of these deaths and disasters from time to time all through the winter. It also pains me to tell you that within a very short time, according to my reading of your own horoscope and that of your son, that he will be stricken with a terrible disease, at about the time of his fifth birthday, from which he may not recover. As I see it now, the symptoms of this disease will develop within twenty-four hours before his birthday or after it."*

"When is the boy's birthday?"

"Tomorrow."

The entire group exchanged meaning glances. They looked at the sturdy boy in his mother's arms, and Yeager continued to read aloud.

*"If you will save your baby's life, give him the contents of this paper, a powder to be dissolved in water, two days before May twenty-sixth."*

"You should have given it to him yesterday."

"Yes, but I was suspicious. I brought it here instead."

"And it's a lucky thing you did," said the doctor. "A very lucky thing."

*"I have been powerless to prevent the crimes and deaths the stars have ordained in the families of so many of your friends, but in your case there is this one ray of hope.*

*"My own life is endangered. I do not expect to live to know if I have read the stars correctly. Perhaps, even as you are reading this I shall be dead."*

"Was he?" Si asked.

Laura nodded. "Yes."

*"My own horoscope indicates an end of some vital function of my body on or about December tenth."*

They looked at the envelope. It was post-marked New York City, December tenth.

*"I am not sure that this means death, but it is very probable since no mathematical formula I know can carry predictions for myself beyond that date.*

*"In the meantime; between December tenth and May twenty-sixth, you will hear of a supposedly honest friend turned thief. You will——"*

"Have you heard anything like that?"

"Yes," Laura said grimly. "Mary Thompson is in an asylum. They say she is a kleptomaniac. They don't know whether they can cure her or not."

"Good Lord! It's uncanny!"

*"You will hear of another friend turned murderess, killing a sister or a husband or a mother. You will hear of suicides——"*

"But, look, Yeager. All that hocus-pocus doesn't make the writer guilty of anything."

"It's suggestion," said Si.

"He's guilty of sending this woman mercury to give her baby. He's guilty of that."

"But he's dead!"

"What a mind!"

"He was a fiend," Si said. "It's the most diabolically conceived plot I ever heard of."

"Um-hm," Yeager hmmd. "But if it wasn't for this one powder, the rest of it might be no plot at all."

"You mean, he might have seen all that in the stars? That he *could* read the future? Don't be silly. . . . Oh, excuse me. I—but it's impossible."

"It's not all impossible. The powder could have been changed in this lady's home. . . . Have you any servants, Mrs. O'Neill?"

"We have three, but none of them knew of this. I have kept the powder locked in my desk."

"Any one else have a key to that desk?"

"My—my husband."

"Well, I guess we don't need to suspect him."  
Yeager finished the letter:

*"—of suicides and deaths. I would do anything in my power to prevent these terrible*

*disasters as I would do anything in the world to save my own life. But I am helpless. Give your son this powder secretly and destroy this letter. I knew too much about the stars. They are killing me because I knew too much.*

*"In desperation,  
"Swami Yogadachi."*

"Can I take a picture of that letter?" Si asked.

"I guess so," said Yeager. "Is it all right, Mrs. O'Neill?"

"I suppose so."

"Will you pose too? Holding Bobby? Just like that?"

"I'd rather not."

"Oh, please, Mrs. O'Neill. We can catch the Home Edition and break the A.M. boys' hearts." He was a likable fellow, this Si, sharp featured, a little bald over each brow.

"I wish you wouldn't ask, Mr. Lenz. I don't see how it can help the—the investigation a bit. I—I've never wanted my picture in the paper; don't you understand?"

"Is this Los Angeles, or am I dreaming?" the other reporter said facetiously.

Laura laughed. "I'm not ambitious to be a movie star. I wouldn't be, even if there was some reason for thinking I might."



"But wouldn't you let us print your picture with the story—as a favor to me?"

"Well, if—if you put it that way, of course; I don't suppose there's any harm in it."

"All the society women do it," Yeager aided his friends.

"That's scarcely any reason why I should," Laura said quietly. "It has always seemed a little immodest to me. But I suppose it has to happen sooner or later. I'll pose for you, Mr. Lenz." A photographer was summoned from the *Examiner* office, and the other reporter followed the veteran's lead by calling his paper for a camera man.

"Well, Boss," said Silver, "where's your case? It's a swell break for Si and Pete, it'll sell a lot o' papers, but it ain't a job for the law as I see it."

"Not if he's really dead."

"Oh, he's dead," Laura assured them. "It was all in the papers. He was famous. His real name was Danbury, Samuel Danbury, but he used a great many pen-names. He was a novelist, playwright, all sorts of things."

"Samuel Danbury!" Yeager said in amazement. "Why—he—he was a wealthy man; a success. He used a lot of names—I know. Run over by a subway! Was *he* Swami Yoga—what's-this?"

"That was one of his pen-names."

"Well, what the devil would he want to kill that baby for? Did you ever know him? Did he ever have anything to do with this girl's club? Was he ever in love with one of the members?"

"I don't know, Mr. Yeager. I never met him. He wasn't in love with me."

"It's preposterous!"

"There's more to it," Silver opined, "more than meets the eye."

"He wrote detective stories," Si suggested, "under the name of G. H. Eckler. Do you suppose he could have gone crazy trying to plot the 'perfect' crime? And instead of putting it in a book, actually committed it?"

"That's an idea," said Olsen.

"That *is* an idea that might occur to a writer," Doctor Blundein said with authority. "The whole thing is too diabolical for real life. It's *too* clever; you know? Nobody could be that clever. I've studied criminal psychology for years and when I try to imagine a man with such a mastery of human minds, with a command of detail, such an intimate knowledge of the functioning of a woman's nerves and brains and emotions—I come back to a writer or a doctor. No one else could figure it out so perfectly. He has actually murdered from the grave, without

striking a blow. If this mercury hadn't turned up, he would be innocent of crime."

"Do you actually think that's possible, Doc?" Yeager asked. "Do you honestly believe that suggestion can go so far?"

"Do I? My dear Yeager, did you hear Mrs. O'Neill mention pernicious anemia? One of the girls *died*, died—mind you—of pernicious anemia. I'll wager she was a healthy girl and I mean to get in touch with the attending physician just as soon as I can to bear me out. She was killed by suggestion."

"Good God!"

"The power of the mind is almost boundless. Sometimes it is the power of the *weakness* or twistedness or the prejudice of a mind. I have seen hysteria break bones; actually snap a tibia, while the patient was prone on a bed—apparently unconscious."

"A woman?"

"Of course. Men are seldom hysterical."

"And the murderer was already dead! Think of that."

"I can't think of anything else."

Laura O'Neill held her fingers to her forehead. "I've developed such a headache," she sighed. "The doctor is right. When I show you the letters from all these girls you will understand just how it preyed on their minds. Mrs. Frey—her name

was Haenkel before she married—was the first to go. She shot herself on December twelfth—just as he said she would.”

“You didn’t give me her name before. What was it; and her address?” said Si.

Laura could not remember Helen’s address and then the photographers arrived. Bobby imitated Douglas Fairbanks for the camera.

### 3

Well, there’s the makin’s. You can almost go on alone. That’s the way with books. They just tell you a lot of stuff you knew already but never happened to think of.

There’s the makin’s—and a few of the women; Mary Kelly, a maid at fifty, obsessed by Freudian dreams, and Laura O’Neill, *née* Stanhope, a young and beautiful and happy mother. And there’s what looks like a mystery, at first glance, what with banshee telephone calls in the middle of the night and a round-robin circulating disaster. But it isn’t really mysterious. The person guilty of whatever crime you find here was an half-caste, born in Java, an extraordinary woman; a woman with wide, full, undulating hips—strong shoulders and bust to match; a

woman not unlike Mrs. O'Neill in general outline—if Mrs. O'Neill had not worn a girdle.

That girdle had become necessary only after Bobby's birth. Before that, her flesh had been solid and firm and resilient, which the guilty one's never was. But we can say they were both Junoesque—if Juno can be imagined just a little softer than marble has translated her. If we can imagine a Juno so soft that one's finger might leave a dent in a thigh, say, for twenty or thirty seconds? No one wants to think of a Juno like that, but neither did George O'Neill want to think of a wife like that, yet, there *Laura was*. One never knows, at twenty-two, what six or seven years will bring. And George half blamed himself. After all, she couldn't have had Bobby without his help, so the breaking down of her constituent tissues was at least fifty per cent his fault. It takes a broad-minded man to look at it that way. George was all of that. "You can't have your cake and eat it too," he always said—and until his meerschaum was thoroughly colored, he kept it covered snugly in chamois.

No—this isn't a mystery, unless you find thought mysterious, because that's what we have here, a book about what goes on in people's heads; God, be merciful!

Of what goes on in people's heads. Of what went on in the heads of a baker's dozen of

women—some of them ladies—one of them almost a man. And a little about what goes on in their hearts, perhaps. . . . You'll know more about that than I.

Perhaps it isn't important that Laura was getting fat, or that she *would* get fat if she weren't careful. That doesn't seem to have played so very large a part in her life. Some of the other girls took it more seriously. May and June Raskob capitalized their grossness, and the time and thought and patience Josephine Turner devoted to the maintainance of her silhouette were certainly reflected in her character, or *vice versa*. What I should like to learn, without becoming too technical, is how greatly the texture, quality, substance, nature, weight, color and general effect, finish and appearance of the flesh and skin of these thirteen women contributed to the determination of what they should be in this world and to what should happen to them in this life—and, for that matter, in the life to come.

But I cannot parade them before you thus unclothed. The result would savor of the abattoir and so much meat viewed at one time is repellent. 32 *Rue Blondel* has converted thousands to a strictly vegetable diet.

But there is a definite connection. Look at Ellen; Ellen Koons. She was the oldest girl in the Delphian Society at Mount Albans Seminary in

the Bronx and a finger has never dented her thigh unless it was her own finger. So, you see, the flesh which covers or pads the bones of a human figure has some bearing on what goes on in that figure's head. If we consider a lady like Ellen with an undented thigh and compare her thinking and feeling and sensing with the corresponding phenomena in such a wench as June Raskob or so compelling a personality as Josephine Turner, we must see that the inherent capacity to inspire a desire to dent does indubitably affect the psychology—and perhaps the life-work—of the owner of the thigh.

No one had ever been inclined to that extraordinary experiment with Ellen Koons. She was an old-maid at nine. The boys had pulled her pig-tails, but if the thought of kissing her had ever entered their minds it was at the same gate where entered and departed thoughts of the Spanish Inquisition and castor oil. The only way Marvin Ethridge, bespectacled and despised by his fellows, could be made to fight was by calling him Ellen's beau.

She was:

*"Ellen Koons*

*Lives on prunes!"*

or:

*Ellen, Ellen's*

*Got a felon."*—though she had not. And she

hated prunes. She was stringy, though not tall, and her hair was merely brown.

I'm ashamed of myself for singling her out thus for special attention, for the vulgar to gaze upon. Ellen has never been singled out before. Even the taunting verses just quoted were heard but seldom in the Binghampton streets. The boys never bothered Ellen if fairer game were available. In her school classes there were best boys and worst, prettiest girls and plainest, brightest students and dullest—but Ellen was none of these. Ellen blended like a chameleon into her background and only a naturalist trained in the wonders of protective coloration could have discerned her presence in any group. Her nature was not retiring; more often than not she knew the answers. But it never seemed to make any difference if she did. Probably she didn't wave her hand hard enough.

In her home Ellen all but disappeared. She was a middle child. Her older sister, Janet, sang. Her younger brother, Don, played the violin. Ellen was a self-appointed claque of one, trained through the ear-tortured years to know exactly when to applaud. Neighbors and friends relied upon Ellen for that. New compositions in the repertoire of either of the other children were often confusing to their elders, especially "classical" music. One could never be sure when the



performance was finished save by watching Ellen. But the very nature of that service kept her from her just reward. No one would admit his debt.

But, if Ellen is such a drab, why do we scrutinize her so closely? If Ellen is but one of the Great Intermediates, how shall we wrest romance from her unremarkable exterior, her puny spirit, her eyes with their rabbity outline of pink? Of what interest are the dreams of such as she? Or do they dream? They do. They must. Ellen did. She went haywire on the subject of spiritualism and she wrote a devastating series of letters about death and the life to come. She was almost as guilty of the nameless crime with which we deal as was our Java-born villainess who named herself Ursula—after a saint.

The story broke, more flaming than Si Lenz had imagined it. It dominated the front page and covered three more inside. The letters appeared, verbatim. Laura O'Neill turned over every vestige of evidence to Si and Yeager, and her amazed husband read this in his evening paper as Allen drove him home:

## DEAD AUTHOR KILLS THREE

---

Diabolical Cunning of Samuel Danbury  
Revealed by Mrs. G. C. O'Neill

---

MERCURY CRYSTALS INTENDED FOR CHILD  
MAY RE-OPEN TRIAL OF ANNE JESSUP  
CONFESSED HUSBAND SLAYER OF AKRON, OHIO

---

*One Woman Driven Mad! More  
Deaths Predicted in the Future*

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(Pictures and complete text  
of correspondence on  
page four.)

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The most fiendish as well as the most amazing crime in local police experience if not in all history was revealed today, more than six months after the death of the man, who, it is said, is directly responsible for the death of two women and one man, for the imprisonment of one woman in the Ohio State Penitentiary and for the incarceration in the New York State Hospital for the criminally insane at Matteawan, New York, of still another. Samuel Danbury, novelist, essayist, dramatist; author of more than two hundred books, thirty plays and innumerable articles, short stories and essays on a variety of subjects,

was today accused of murdering, inciting to murder and attempting to murder from the grave in which he has lain since December fourteenth.

This strangest of accusations was given substance by the testimony of Mrs. George C. O'Neill, of 1515 Bay Street, who appeared before Chief of Detectives Yeager this morning and told a story which indicates a plot to bring disaster upon a group of nearly a dozen women who attended Mount Albans Seminary, New York City, at the same time, a little over six years ago. Mrs. O'Neill was the President of the Delphian Society, a literary and social group of undergraduates which has kept school memories alive through correspondence since the graduation of its members.

Anne Jessup, confessed husband slayer of Akron, Ohio, now serving a twenty-year sentence in the Ohio State Penitentiary for the shooting to death, on March 2, of Thomas Jessup, was Vice President of the Society. If Mrs. O'Neill's story is substantiated, this murder will be laid at the door of the late Samuel Danbury, alias Swami Yogadachi, who is said to have incited the woman to commit the crime.

Other officers and living members of the

Delphian Society enmeshed in this spider's web are:

Miss Ellen Koons, 32, of 787 Central Avenue, Brooklyn, New York; Mrs. Josephine Turner, of 907 Riverside Drive, New York City; May and June Raskob, twin sisters known to vaudeville audiences as "Frankie and Earnestine," now on tour; Mary Nolan Thompson, 28, of 46 West 71st Street, New York City, now confined in the New York State Hospital for Criminally Insane. According to Mrs. O'Neill's story, Mrs. Thompson's mind was affected by poison-pen letters from "Yogadachi."

*Danbury Charged With  
Two More Deaths*

That the predictions of Danbury, in the guise of an Hindu "Swami" were directly responsible for the suicide on December 12, of Mrs. A. Ogden Frey of Montreal, Canada, another Delphian, seems conclusively established by correspondence which Mrs. O'Neill has turned over to the police. The full text of these letters is on page four of this issue of the *Examiner*.

Eminent local authority headed by Dr. N. N. Blundein and Dr. Peter Mercredi, noted alienist, are of the opinion that the

death of one Hazel Cousins, another Delphian, said to have been caused by "pernicious anemia," could have been the result of mental suggestion which, according to these men, is a phenomenon of sufficient power to induce not only symptoms of this and other diseases but to foster the very ravages of the disease itself and thus substantially to create an affection and to ravage healthy body tissues even to the point of death. Dr. Mercredi says: "Mental suggestion, in extreme cases, may operate for evil as well as for good. Very few medical men will dismiss the evidence of Christian Science cures *in toto*. The case of a woman told that she is suffering from pernicious anemia and thereafter aggravated by subtle suggestions of her decline is no more than a testimonial for what might be called un-Christian Science. It is the same half-understood phenomenon, working to destroy instead of to preserve."

George O'Neill's eyes spread to their widest, like two grains of heated pop-corn in slow motion. Laura had been hiding all this from him for months! Some part of this had caused her absorption at breakfast. Hidden here somewhere was the explanation of that telephone call. He

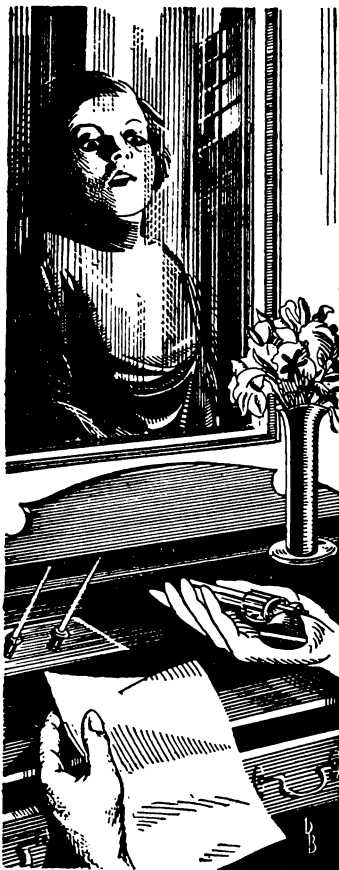
slammed the door of the car behind him and started up the short walk, carrying his rolled newspaper like a club.

“Oh,—Mr. O’Neill.”

“Yes.”

“I got the little fellow a ball.” Allen extended a paper bag, holding his uniform cap in his other hand. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“Uh? No—no, of course not. Thank you, Allen. That—that’s very thoughtful of you. . . . Thank you.” George hurried on into the house.



## CHAPTER TWO

November 25.

Dear Laura:

I was extraordinarily glad to hear from you and I must beg you to excuse me for not answering until now. I have never been so

upset in my life. I *did* start that round-robin but I almost wish I hadn't now. It has put me in touch with a lot of the Mount Albans girls, which was its aim, of course, but this Swami Yogadachi seems to have the name of every Delphian—and my life has been made miserable by the old fool.

Just listen to this, I'll copy part of the "horoscope" he sent me. I got it a few days after your letter came.

*The stars are very unfavorable for you. I hesitate to say this, but it is written so plainly in every accounting I have made, Cabalistically, astrologically and numerologically that I feel it is my duty to warn you. You will not live until Christmas. Virgo, in its relationship to your house indicates a fit of great melancholy following worry and fear and I find a score of indications that you will meet death at your own hands before the fifteenth of December.*

Did you ever hear anything like it? I never heard of the man before and he has the nerve to tell me I'm going to kill myself. Of course it's bosh—but I can't help *thinking* about it. And he read my past so accurately that it makes me creepy to go outside on clear nights. I look at the stars—



and I can't help wondering. Of course, I shan't do it. But only yesterday I had another letter from him and he predicts his own death too. Can you imagine that? Now if he should eat a bad shrimp and die of ptomaine—as Frey nearly did—I'd feel like a fool. You know?

I've tried my best to shake it off but I go and look at my little revolver Frey gave me when we were married—and I can hardly close the desk drawer. I *know* I'm crazy, Laura, but there it is. The other night, after I had his letter predicting his own death near the first of next month, I went and unloaded the gun and threw the cartridges out the window. I did it without thinking—what if one of them had exploded!—but they didn't and now the big German police dog next door has found one of them in the yard and he *plays* with it. Tosses it up in the air and growls and throws it around like a pea. I'm scared stiff. What if it should go off in his mouth? Poor dog. But I can't *tell* the people. I stand at the back window, watching him for hours, waiting to hear that report. His teeth are so long and pointed. It's a wonder his owner wouldn't find out what he's

playing with out there. Wouldn't it be funny if it was the dog's horoscope the Swami made? Not *funny*, I don't mean, but strange.

You are the fourth Delphian to write me about this Swami. Mary Nolan Thompson, Anne Jessup and Ellen Koons had all had letters from him, saying they would hear from old friends. I got a letter from Ursula Georgi the other day too. I know you never liked her, but she wasn't such a bad kid when you got to know her.

I sent the robin to Mary Nolan first. She sent it to Hazel Cousins and answered my letter right away—that was last September. She told me about the Swami but said she wasn't interested. I lost track of the robin then until Anne wrote that she had it and that Jo Turner had sent it to her—and both of them had letters from this suicide predictor. Of course, he hadn't predicted suicide for *them*. He told Jo about a mole on her back and he told Anne to watch her flighty husband, but neither of them had sent him their birthdays yet. He got the mole and the "low-down" on Tom Jessup from reading the papers! Or—somehow. How do you suppose? "It ain't nat'ral"—it

ain't. How would some Hindu faker in Camden, New Jersey, know about Jo's mole—and Tom's failing for the ladies—or the things he told me about myself?

It's too much for me, but I certainly wish he'd been a little less vital. He could have left the suicide out. What do *I* want to kill myself for? He's crazy.

Then Ellen Koons wrote. That nut. You know how *she* is. She's always believed in ghosts. I don't know how you two ever got to be so thick. You were so calm and deliberate and sensible and she was just the opposite. Well—*she* had a letter from him too. She said she'd heard from you but she didn't say *you* had a letter from Kill Joy of Kamden. She fell for it, of course. Goodness; to read her letters you'd think I was as good as dead already. Remember how she was always telling fortunes with cards or tea leaves or peanuts or any old thing she could lay her hands on. Then I got your letter and two other notes from Mary Thompson, Mary *Nolan* Thompson, if you please.

And this is funny too. I sent her a night letter when I found out I was going to kill myself—whoopee—and she wrote back that she had sent the Swami her money two

weeks before but had received no answer. That gave me a start. I figured he had his dates mixed and had eaten his bad shrimp and gone ahead to prepare *my* heavenly couch.

Say! I joke about this but I'm far from feeling gay.

Anyway, he wasn't dead, because her reading came the next day and she wrote me at once. Now, don't breathe this to a soul—especially not to Ellen Koons or any of the Delphians—but do you remember how little things used to disappear at the dorm? and how they'd turn up in Mary's room? Of course, she was only doing it for fun and she always returned everything—but listen: the Swami has told her she has a screw loose and that she must watch herself closely or she will get into trouble. Now, please don't repeat it. It's strictly *entre nous*, but, my dear!

I'm writing to a lot of the other girls to-day too. I've got to find out what other delightful surprises the stars are offering this season.

Tell me what he told you.

I'll close now. I'll be seeing you on the banks of the Styx—but not soon, I hope.

That's terrible, isn't it. But you know what I mean—I haven't got an eraser. So long,

Helen Haenkel Frey

## 2

There was naught of Juno in Helen, not this Helen, and nothing of *Helen* either. She *had* flesh, and skin too, but there's not much use looking at it. It had pores—inescapable. She tried to close them up. She spent a lot of money for ice and alcohol treatments, on her nose and chin especially, but all she got out of it was receipts and the latest smutty stories from the operators. Did those girls know the stories!?! Who on earth got them all up? She carried them home to Frey. He was entitled to something for his money.

A dyed-in-the-wool Britisher was Frey, engaged in some vague but remunerative business which called him often across the jolly old pond. Helen looked incuriously at that part of her married life, as she did at the *paterfamilias* of a

cartoon strip. There was a family whose ups and downs she followed daily, whose affairs were known as intimately as her own, but the cartoonist never made clear where the money came from. Pa had an office, that seemed to suffice. The money came from the office. Well, so did Frey's. Only Frey had two offices, one in London. Probably that accounted for his possession of twice as much money as her father had ever had.

There had been no surplus for pore-shrinkage in the Haenkel budget. There had been precious little for any amusement. Old man Haenkel was a bookkeeper. He had saved the firm thousands of dollars a year every fiscal he had been there, but their gratitude took the shape of an heart-to-heart talk whenever he asked for a raise. Those talks made him almost a part of the firm; they never seemed to Haenkel to be refusals of his requests.

"I talked things over with Senior Ellery to-day," he always put it to Helen's mother.

"Did you get it?"—Laconic but tolerant.

"Get what? More money? No. . . . It isn't in the wood just yet."

"After all the money you've saved them!"

"Well—that's what I'm there for. . . . They appreciate it."

"You don't tell them about it often enough. Did you mention that freight business?"

“Well,—no. I can’t go around blowing my own horn, Frieda. They know about it. Mr. Ellery told me right out he didn’t know what they’d have done the last few years if I hadn’t been there to watch the pennies. It’s something to have your employer feel that way about you.”

But Helen never heard these conversations and Frieda’s quasi-interest in freight rates was not handed down to her daughter with her squat figure.

Helen “went out to play” as soon as the supper dishes were done up, and that—to her parents—meant that she was frolicking, running and laughing with the groups they could hear in the street below. Instead, Helen was standing in serious consideration of certain weighty problems in the dim-lit entry with two other girls about her own age, possessed of approximately the same degree of pubertitious pulchritude.

The activities of that noisy bunch were much too juvenile for these three who planned the dresses they would wear, say, four years hence; decided if marriage interfered with a career and debated various methods of repelling detested advances and insulting familiarities of boys. It is not recorded that any of the elaborate breast-works of defense they erected were ever called upon to withstand an armed invasion.

The funds which permitted Helen to leave

Public High School No. 43 and enter Mount Albans were the result of an happy accident; a simple little accident, one which has happened to all of us, a collision in a doorway between Haenkel and the senior Ellery. It occurred about 3:30, just after lunch—just after Ellery's lunch, old man Haenkel had been back since 12:45. And a crock of Champagne had been broached where Ellery ate, releasing in the old skinflint such sweet juices of human kindness as he had long forgotten were in him.

"Haenkel," he said, as his bookkeeper bowed and scraped apologies, "listen. . . . You been here a long time."

Hank was sure the boost was coming.

"You haven't thrown your money away. You've saved it. . . . Well, listen, Haenkel. You call Miller and Wellman right now and order every damn' share of Michigan Power your savings will cover. Tell him I'll O.K. the account."—and Scout Ellery of the Bull Patrol went on into his private office.

A family conference was called that night and the now famous Haenkel Pool of twelve hundred dollars was amassed from such solvent cousins and connections as could be reached by telephone and street car.



Thus Patty went to college.

The Delphians were Miss Kersten's pets. She taught American Literature and Modern Eloquence and coached the debating team. Her hair was the color of dirty sawdust and her memory stirred painfully as she watched Helen Haenkel gasp her way through Portia's "power of mercy is not strained".

Laura Stanhope and Josephine Walther were asked to remain a moment. Miss Kersten went directly to the root of the matter. "Josephine, you are Chairman of the Membership Committee; don't you think you should propose Helen Haenkel for the Delphians?"

Alone, the President made a snoot at her Membership Chairman. "I don't see much use in having by-laws if she's going to tell us who we can have and who we can't. I didn't mind the twins even if they are Jews. They're good kids."

"But a nigger!"

"And now this!"

"Well, what can we do?"

"Nothing. If we turn her down like we did Ursula she'll just make another scene. We'll have to take her."

"It's going to be a fine society by the time she gets through with it."

"Ursula's not really a nigger, I guess. They wouldn't have taken her in if she were."

"Oh, they'll take just *anybody*," Josephine should know, "anybody who has the price. I'm going somewhere else next year."

"Oh, no! Jo! Not really?"

"I *am*, Laura. My guardian is very particular. I wouldn't dare breathe a word about Ursula to *him*. My! He'd just take me right out. I'm scared stiff Mr. Madison'll *see* her some time on the campus."

"Oh—is he coming here?"

"Well, I never know when he may come to see me."

"I think it's just wonderful to have a guardian," Laura thought. "What's he like? Just like a father?"

"W-e-l-l,—” Jo held it a second. "—I call him Daddy sometimes."

"Oh, *do* you?"

*Did* she? But that's a different chapter.

So Helen and her fine, sandy hair and hopeless figure and large pores were welcomed into the Delphian Society. What is the specific gravity of a girls' literary society? What is specific gravity? if you want to be catty. Anyway, the first month of the term showed the Raskob twins

floating on the surface from sheer light-headedness for all their enormous displacement; Laura and Jo, Hazel Cousins and Anne Blackmere—the officers—forming the real upper crust; Mary Nolan and Ellen Koons for the middle stratum, Ursula Georgi (born in Java) and her only friend, Helen Haenkel, for dregs.

A picture of those ten kids, grouped around Miss Kersten, their mentor, is on page 31 of the Mount Albans Yearbook, 1925. The six standing in the rear are Ursula, swarthy, exotic, defying the camera; Helen, grinning; May and June broad and pert and like, very like in expression as well as outline; Mary Nolan, one eyebrow raised, a little surprised, perhaps, but scarcely mad; and Ellen in *pince nez*. Seated are the beauties. Jo—from whose eyes innocence is already fled, but who cares, with that mouth to look at? Laura, competent, handsome, a little proud to be President but hiding it just so it shows; skip the teacher; Anne, snappy, alert, poised for flight; and Hazel—prettiest of all—Dresden and platinum and rose worked by a da Vinci, no less.

You can see the tendency to flesh in Laura's neck, just at the edge of her hair. Don't marry a girl with a neck like that unless you are prepared for *avoirdupois* later. Ursula, full bosomed even here, encourages a comparison of all the girls. Perhaps we shall find a true votary of Rumilia.

Helen wears a tight brassiere. It's probably just as well. The twins' spread all over their facades, shapelessly. Mary is small and compact. Ellen hasn't any. Jo—ah! Jo. If you can take your eyes from her lips long enough,—dwell on Josephine's other charms. Don't hurry. Don't hurry. You can't see the Louvre in a day.

. . . Enough?

Well, you've seen Laura before, a little too healthy, eh? Too damned substantial. Skip Kersten again. That's Anne. . . . Neat, sharp, no extra fooling around. Tom Jessup was a fool! Then Hazel. What is a man to do about a girl like Hazel? You're afraid to touch her although you know she won't chip. But no matter how often you wash your hands, they always feel sooty by comparison to those delicious, milky hemispheres. That alabaster and ivory blend of coloring with its petal-texture is a handicap to the woman as well. The poor child wants to be loved, if it's done decently, but any male with grace enough or presence enough to do it right is either a fairy or he's too modest to go after it. That was Hazel's trouble. Her blood was warm, then; her pulse quick and her imagination active and fertile, but men avoided her; the ones she'd have. Until she got mixed up with a rich dyke from Denver, Martha Viborg.

When that picture was taken, Helen Haenkel

was the only friend Ursula had and that made Helen less popular than her stodginess. In fact, as the mid-term recess approached, the girl's natural good spirits had raised her considerably in the collective Delphian opinion and only her championing of the ostracised half-Javanese kept her from being fully accepted.

But the Delphian Society was only a small part of life at Mount Albans, and the school did wonders for Helen. She learned to dress and she developed a sense of humor. Ample return for her tuition. The proficiency she acquired at secretarial duties was a bonus, but it found her a husband. It got her Frey.

## 4

Leaving the old homestead, a flat on 9th Avenue, and going to live in Montreal grieved Helen about as much as leaving his little grey home in the West is going to grieve Tom Mooney. Everyone told her she was a "radiant" bride, and her face *was* shiny. Mother Frieda bawled all through the ceremony. I can't help it if it's hackneyed; I'm telling you what old lady Haenkel *did*.

Ogden had a drawing room for the ascension, and probably he was just as well satisfied with

the trip as you or I would be if Nessus' shirt and Jurgen's sceptre were loaned to one of us for the same journey—with Hazel instead of Helen. Before the Customs men interrupted them to frisk their hand baggage, Frey had told her the old one about "it's much too good for them", and Helen had practically had a spasm.

Frey's position in Montreal required a woman cut after Helen's general pattern. No breath of scandal could be permitted. Check. She must be neither old nor young nor beautiful nor ugly. She must be a wife and not a social climber nor a butterfly. Check, check, check. They got on very well. The same incuriosity which had kept Helen from learning any more than she needed to know to pass exams at school, kept her nose out of the business of her neighbors and Frey's associates. Helen could have been a gossip under other circumstances, no moral suasion nor idealistic notions prevented. She was a poor source of pithy information for the simple reason that she was not sufficiently interested in flying dirt or any other chit-chat to retain what she heard. Cornered, she would listen, but she immediately forgot what had been said. Her bump for scandal was an hollow.

But Frey had not married her for her suitability alone. He actually thought he loved her. Probably he did. Damn little poetry could be

written about that kind of love, but it builds fine houses. And likely Helen loved him. Sonnets don't keep much rain out, come to think about it.

Children weren't mentioned, not even by God, and the Freys went to England twice yearly. Ogden sometimes made swift trips between times, but she went with him every six months and for this the other Delphians envied her.

The Paris beauty doctors were as helpless before those pores as the Canadians had been, and—as everyone knows—you can't even get your hair curled decently in London.

Unassuming, unprepossessing, equable, Helen Frey sent foreign trinkets to the other girls, and wrote to them without guile. She was happy; she hoped they were happy; that they wished her any less well would have surprised her greatly. She was the only alumna of Mount Albans who ever wrote to Ursula Georgi after graduation and for her kindness she was the first to die. Like a good general, Ursula struck at the only portion of her enemy's front which was exposed. No vestige of gratitude was in her. She wrote to Helen, cunningly.

September 25.

Dearest Helen:

Your letters are all here before me. I have kept every one of them because they are the only spark of kindness I have found in your country since I was thrown here as a child. Other girls leave school with a host of happy memories, with friendships and attachments which they carry through life. I left Mount Albans with nothing but bitterness in my mind and gall in my heart, put there by those pure white Christians who were forced to accept me in their activities, but never touched my hand without a shudder of loathing.

There's no use going over all that. You, at least, were always kind. But, Helen, the years have made me feel differently about those girls and the way they treated me. As I grow older I see that they were not to blame for what they did almost through instinct.

Oh, Helen, I am so lonely. Although you know my handicap, you can never half imagine how much it has caused me to suffer. Because my skin is dark and my hair jet black, every one thinks I am at least part negro. I have never had real friends. I suspect even the kind ones of *thinking* these



things when they do not say them. I have felt that way about you. It is dreadfully monotonous, being a leper.

And, Helen, deep within me I loved those girls even then, in spite of their cruelty. They didn't mean to be cruel. They just couldn't help it. I loved the Delphian Society and the things we did; the things the rest *let* me do because the faculty forced them to. I go over the parties and good times in my mind, and I am a little girl still. I thought, the other day, that it would be a lot of fun to start a round-robin among the Delphians, and I almost did it. But no one would go on with it if they saw my name at the top. Why don't *you* start it? You know where several of the girls live. *Do*; won't you? It will get us all together again, after a fashion, and if it comes back to you eventually—you can send it to me and I'll write my name last. That's where it belongs, I guess.

I can't ask any of the others to do it. You are the only one sympathetic enough to understand how my heart longs to hear from some of them. Be a dear and start it—and let me know if you do.

There's not much news about me. I am doing some special work for the telephone

company, still living in the Bronx. Write again, soon, won't you? Tell me about Paris. Although I travelled a lot in the Orient as a child, I have never been there.

With love,

*Yours* George

## 5

And that crater in Helen's head which should have been a bump of curiosity caused her to accept that letter at its face value only. Not even the coincidence of receiving in the same delivery of mail her first letter from Yogadachi aroused any suspicion in her.

*You will hear from a friend who has not written to you in many months.*

Helen told the ice-pack girl about it that afternoon. Did she believe in the stars? In ten minutes it was established that every girl in the place, including *Madame Girofla* and all her customers, believed implicitly in the stars, and enough evidence of their infallibility as prog-

nosticators was recited to give the most sceptical pause.

So Helen sent for a complete reading, more because it seemed to be the thing to do than because she cared to look into the future. Then she forgot about it until the horoscope came.

. . . *You will meet death at your own hands . . .*

Well!—

Why!—

*What* a thing to say! People shouldn't say things like that. *Death*. That was a serious matter. How—how had he dared? Through the mails! Weren't there laws about sending such things through the mails? Why—suppose she were just some empty-headed little chit, and she got such a message. She might actually *do* it.

Helen went to the telephone, outraged. Frey would have to do something about this. But she paused with the receiver in her hand and replaced it on the hook. After all, she'd been a fool to send the man her money. Since she wasn't empty-headed and in no wise a chit, all she had to do was tear the letter up and forget it. But the nerve of him!

Then she laughed. Suicide! Her! Oh, my!

Oh, *oh*, my.

Helen had never read Poe's *Black Cat* nor his *Imp of the Perverse*. She did not know that in

her as in all of us there is a propensity "for persisting in a course of action simply because we should not". But Ursula had; had and did.

Mrs. A. Ogden Frey decided not to mention Swami Yogadachi to her husband again. She would just forget it. For goodness sake; how *could* she kill herself even if she wanted to? Jump out of a second-story window? Ha—ha—hee! She'd probably sprain her ankle or break her wrist if she tried that. Gas? Well, she supposed she *could* do that. But it would probably make a terrible mess. There was that pretty little pistol Frey had given her the first time he went to London alone. Theoretically *that* would kill a person. She had almost forgotten where it was.

Helen folded the letter, stuck it in a pigeon-hole of her desk and the next time she was conscious of her actions or her whereabouts she was standing in the middle of the kitchen floor, scratching her ear. She frowned. "Now, what did I come out here for? I was going to do—something; what was it?"

The cook came in through the service door with a basket on her arm. "Do you think a seven-pound turkey will be enough, Mrs. Frey? I was looking at them today."

"Seven. . . . Yes,—I'm sure it will. . . . Will you pour me a glass of cold milk, Betty?"

"Yes, ma'am . . . my hat . . . now!"

That wasn't it, though she *was* thirsty. Helen sipped the milk as the servant chattered of the quality of the harvest goods shown in the market. "The squashes are lovely."

Oh! That was it. She was going to see if she could find her gun. The crazy Swami should be told that; to take some of the cockiness out of him. The woman he predicts is going to kill herself is so little apt to do it that she doesn't even know where her gun is. . . . She really *should* find it; after all, Frey had thought enough of her to want her to be protected and then she had been so careless of his wishes as to mislay her means of defense. She rummaged through two drawers, conscious, as she turned over handkerchiefs and laces, that she knew very well where the pistol was. She had known all along. And when she had gone to the kitchen—she had been running from sight of it—why? What had she to fear? She could live in an *armory* without shooting herself. The idea! Helen stumped into the library and opened the desk drawer where lay her sealing wax, some extra ink—the revolver. She'd show him! She picked up the gun, looked into its muzzle, laughed, and put it down. The whole business was just too silly. The *stars* predicting that *she* would "meet death at her own hands"! She half closed the drawer. Pooh! She could go even

further. She could actually put the gun to her temple and then put it away. The man was insane to say such a thing. Helen did just that, pressing the ring of steel against her head, then almost tossing the nickel and pearl toy back into the drawer. She closed the desk with a flourish.

## 6

Then Samuel Danbury—also known as Swami Yogadachi, the papers said—was taken fragmentarily from the rails of a subway in New York City. The stars had thrown him there. Perhaps she should tell Frey about it. No, no, she would *not* be so weak. She would not live in the house with that unloaded gun a moment longer. It was unbearable to be such a coward, to pamper herself and make it impossible for the thing to happen. Was she afraid she *would* do it? Danbury's death had been nothing but coincidence. She drove to a sporting goods store and bought a box of cartridges, determined to show sun, moon *and* stars that they were dealing with sterner stuff in her case. As she rode home she looked at the snow-banked curbs and bade the grey sky adieu. She knew she was seeing them for the last time, yet she denied it. She listened

to the wheels crunching the chunks of ice and a part of her mind took farewell of that comforting sound.

She left her hat and coat in her room and took her purchase to the library. She reloaded the gun and laid it on the desk under her hand while she reread the Swami's letter. Her mouth drooped in a deprecating, sceptical smile. To demonstrate just how wrong he was, and just how strong she; watch this. The gun is loaded again now. You realize that, don't you, Swami? Here is death in my hand. I can take it or leave it; can't I? And see? I put the gun to my temple just as I did when your letter first came. See there? I can even press the trigger—a little. You and your fool prediction! How hard do you have to press the trigger of a gun to make it go off? Goodness! Quite hard. Quite a ways. She hadn't realized *that* before. . . . Great God, she was pulling too hard! She couldn't stop. . . .

Dear Mrs. O'Neill:

Your good and kind letter has arrived too late to serve its noble intention. Helen shot herself on the morning of December twelfth after reading of the death of Swami Yogadachi in New York City.

I am closing this house at once and sailing for England to visit my people. Her death

is a loss I can never hope to forget, never hope to avenge. Its author threw himself before a subway train in New York on the tenth of December for a reason only God knows.

I am too distracted to think clearly. I have never thought these predictions of fortune tellers could be so harmful. I can not imagine what source of information the man may have had. Surely it must have been a very compelling conviction of his own ability to read the future that made him cast himself before the train.

Please accept my most sincere thanks for your interest in Helen's welfare. Although I have never met you, I know from your letter that you are a strong, capable and noble woman. I commiserate you upon the death of your friend and I know how greatly you can sympathize with my feelings at losing the only feminine creature I have ever loved besides my mother.

Very sincerely yours,

*A. Ogden Frey*





## CHAPTER THREE

October 29.

Dearest, dearest Laura:

The round-robin and your lovely letter came a few days ago and I hasten to answer it while I may. We never know what is go-

ing to happen on this plane and our dearest friends may pass away without a word of it reaching us until months afterward. I hadn't heard from one of the girls in months and months. The last letter I had from any one in the old Delphian Society was a note from Helen Frey the last time she was in Europe.

Still, I wasn't so surprised to get the round-robin. I was prepared for it. About a month ago I got a letter from a very famous astrologer, a Swami in Camden, New Jersey, telling me the most astonishingly intimate things about myself, and predicting that I would hear from several old friends in the near future.

You see, I am a member of a Spiritualist Church here, and we find it very easy and often helpful to be *en rapport* with other psychics all over the world. It must have been through spiritual communion that this Hindu received this knowledge of me. I commissioned him to draw up my horoscope at once. It is the most perfect thing I have ever seen of the kind. He has my past down perfectly—and my temperament! He admits some difficulty in plotting my future. He says he can't see a full year

ahead for me, but he has carried it through January and will go on further at a later date.

I gather confidence in him because he does not predict *all* happiness and good fortune. He sees violence, great violence in the lives of some of my friends and I have wondered if George is always kind to you. You know you can trust me, Laura, dear. Has he ever struck you? I wouldn't ask if it were not for the Swami's mention of violence.

I am writing some of the other girls today. I think round-robins are splendid for renewing old acquaintances—don't you?

Please don't wait a long time to write again, and take no offense at my question about George. Are you at all interested in the strides psychic research has made in the last few years? What is your husband's faith? Is it true that one of the twins married? I never hear from them. I heard that June married a theatrical man and turned Catholic for him. Do you know if that is true?

Write soon, won't you? And if you want me to I'll have the Swami draw up *your* horoscope. You were always so level headed.

I think there is a big place for you in psychic work.

Your sincere old friend,

Ellen Kroos

P.S. How is the baby?

November 30.

Anne dearest; how are you?

I really shouldn't be writing you—I wrote last. But there is so much news! My control came at our last seance and told me you were having trouble with Tom again. You poor, poor child. What does your future hold for you with a man like that? I should think you'd take up some serious study, some church work or something and let him go his way. You have no children. I wouldn't sacrifice myself to his lust. Why don't you write to Swami Yogadachi? I mentioned him to you before. He has told me some wonderful things. Lots of the other girls are consulting him. He has warned Helen Frey that she will be tempted

to take her own life. Poor Helen. She wrote me such a pitiful letter. She is fighting against great odds. None of us can go against the Powers. I have tried to interest her in spiritualism but it's impossible to impress her with its true importance just now.

The Swami told me I would hear of several deaths among my friends. I wonder whose. He says there will be murders and suicides and that some will go insane, all within the space of a few months. "Sisters will kill sisters, and wives their husbands," he says.

Mary Thompson writes me that she had him draw up her horoscope and although she wouldn't reveal what he told her—she said it was very accurate and not very cheering for the future. I hope nothing terrible happens to her.

Do you hear from Laura Stanhope? I wrote to her a month ago but received no answer. Is she happy? You know, I often wonder if George is as good to her as she lets on. I know what you have to bear with Tom, but *that* is better than being *beaten* every few days by a brute of a man. I think I'm wiser, after all, to remain single. I may have to do without some of the luxuries

you girls have, but I have my church work and my control. I almost got his name the last time he came. He is an Indian chief of the Seminole tribe! Isn't it amazing? All of the other members of our church have Sioux or Black Feet or Crow guides but mine is a Seminole from Florida.

I have told the Swami about him and sent ten dollars for a *complete* reading of my future. The shorter ones I have are very good but they only go as far as Spring. Now I'll know—in a few days—what the Powers intend for me.

Why don't you write him, dear? It might clear up your trouble with Tom. It couldn't hurt to try. You don't suppose Laura would kill George, do you?

Tell me everything and write soon. If you write to Mary Nolan Thompson don't mention that I told you about her horoscope. For some strange reason she wants it kept secret. If you have the time you might write to Helen. She really needs friends.

Your old friend,

Ellen Thomas

December 1.

Dearest Laura:

What *are* we going to do about Helen? Laura—she will not listen to me. I tell her she must prepare herself, since the spirits of suicides are always earth-bound. Nothing does her any good. She laughs at the prediction and insists that she is not afraid. I can't hold out any hope to her. The Swami is truly illustrious. He knows everything. And if it is written in the stars that she is to go that way—nothing can stop her. It is too bad, I suppose, that she has to know about it and worry about it. On the other hand, I should be glad to know how and when I shall pass through the veil so that I may put my house in order.

What do you suppose is the matter with Mary Nolan Thompson? Something is preying on her mind too. Do you suppose Thompson is mean to her? But there is something else. She hinted at some inherited taint. Did you know she had an aunt, her mother's sister, in an asylum? She told me about it once in school. Poor creature. She may have found *that* in her horoscope. I hope not. That would be dreadful.

I haven't heard from you in so long. You didn't take offense at my questions about

George, did you? I shouldn't have asked. I know it must be some one else who is referred to. By the way, does the baby enjoy perfect health most of the time? When is his birthday? Will he be four or five? Time goes so fast, doesn't it?

I have found the *twins'* address at last. It was on an old program—a piano recital we went to together just before commencement at old Mount Albans. I found it through my control. He's awfully good at finding things. It's their home address, where their mother lives. Did you hear that they were on the stage and that they left that poor old lady all alone? I could hardly believe it. I'll know in a few days. I just finished writing them.

Well, I'll close now. I have to write several other letters. I think I have just enough stamps. If you hear from Mary or Anne, please let me know. It won't do any good, but I think we should all try to cheer Helen up. If she must go, she might as well go happily.

Your sincere friend,

Ellen Knous



December 14.

Dear Old Pal:

Good night! You could have knocked us both over with a *feather*. One feather for the two of us. June brought your letter to the dressing room—she was late as usual—and stood it up against the mirror. *Guess*—she says—*guess* who it's from. She hadn't opened it. So we both guessed a while. We had forgotten your husband's name. It's a dumb name anyway, June says.

We couldn't get anywhere, so we *opened* it. Imagine our surprise and *picture* our amazement! You—you old . . . well!

But isn't it terrible about Helen Haenkel-tenckle? Remember—how we used to kid her about her name. She was just a peach, but dumb, of course. We didn't know anything about it until a few days ago we got a letter from Koons. She's goofier than ever. What a mol! Remember the time she saw a man in her own tea-cup and damn near fainted?

Well, she tells us about this Swami—

honest to God, I always thought Swami was a low comedy name for all shush-dinge. Meanin' nuthin' pussinil about any of the Delphic Choricles—of course! What ever became of Ursula anyway? But it *ain't!* Swami *means* something. Koons is our authority. Good old Koons. If you hadn't protected her from the rest of us we'd have done for her the day after she first came to school. What do you think of my English accent? I'm stringing the snappiest straight man—a legit from dear ol' Lunnon. Of course, June saw him *late* as usual and is now trying to sign him up with a blanket contract, if - you - know - what - I - *mean!* Dearie! a *blanket* contract. No chance, May has her hooks on that baby.

But—Koons tells us Helen is brooding about killing herself—and along come the papers where she's done it—Marie, that's terrible! It just doesn't seem possible that such a thing could happen in this day and age. I'll bet anything it's that damn fortune teller's fault. What did he want to go and get her all upset like that for? Do you know what he told *us*? He says we're going to have a big fight. He calls that *news!* My God! If a man bites a dog! Say. It'd be news if we

*didn't*. He's no fortune teller. I'm going to write him and get my money back.

Well, we were all of a heap when we read it. It didn't seem real. It don't yet. June was just saying, it don't seem possible.

Who started that round-Robert? When June saw Laura Stanhope—like you always write it, she says (the cat) she says—Always the President! No offense. I don't know, though, maybe she *meant* it. Here, ask her. Hold the wire . . .

Hello, Laura:

Don't pay any attention to my big slob of a sister. She just blows and blows and nothing ever comes out. She wishes something *would* just now—something she didn't swallow. Well, I warned her. Acrobats are deadly that way. What a sister! If she had a nickel for all the words she uses that don't mean anything—we could both retire—if she'd give me half—which I doubt.

It's terrible about Helen. I cried like a baby. What is Koons'trying to tell us about Mary Nolan? Nobody can make heads or tails of her letters. She says your husband beats you and your kid's going to die. Is it?

We're playing the Palace next week—

barring an act of God—we'll send you a program.

Your two fat sisters,

*May and June*  
*"Lakke and Earnestine"*

### 3

December 26.

Dear Mrs. O'Neill:

After your nasty letter, I had resolved never to write to you again, but the enclosed newspaper clippings bear me out so thoroughly that I can not refrain. Mary Nolan Thompson is a thief. She has been arrested and is now in the psychopathic ward of the County Hospital for observation. There has been insanity in her family as I told you. All of this was predicted by Swami Yogadachi before his tragic death of which you must have read. The world has lost a great seer in Swami Yogadachi. He

knew everything. He not only predicted his own death, almost to the minute, but he told Helen Frey when she would commit suicide, poor thing, and he told Mary Thompson she was a kleptomaniac and would end her days in an insane asylum. Furthermore, only four days before his death he told me that I would live to *hear of the death of a five year old boy* and of other deaths, before I died—next summer.

I am not afraid. The Swami was *en rapport* with a plane above this materialistic world and he could see things denied to ordinary mortal eyes. I will meet the Prince of the Morning gladly, with my house all in order. I will go bravely to the spirit realm, to that happy land beyond the veil.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Koos

P.S. For the sake of old times, I take the trouble to tell you that I called upon Mr. Thompson when I heard of Mary's arrest. His story was pitiful, indeed. He is a heart-broken man.

He says that he began missing money from his pockets about the first of December, but thought nothing of it, believing that Mary planned to use the money for a Christmas gift for him—not wanting to ask for a large sum outright. It never seems like a real present if you use the person's money you are going to surprise. But when Swami Yogadachi's death was announced in the newspapers, Mary took to brooding, sitting for two days, staring out of the window, neglecting her house and even her own person. Then Helen's suicide reached her and they had to call a doctor. She tore her hair and scratched her own face. Strong men could not hold her and she was in bed for five days.

When she finally got up she seemed perfectly well, although very weak, and Mr. Thompson told her not to try to leave the house. She did, however, go shopping. Two detectives caught her trying to steal silk scarfs in Lord and Taylors. From her wild actions and incoherence under questioning, they deduced that she was unbalanced, and from cards in her purse they got his name and called him. The police were not involved that time. Mr. Thompson placated the store managers. She was obviously out

of her mind. He hired a nurse to stay with her and a specialist to attend her. The expense, he says, was terrible. You know he is only a clerk in a bank and they had nothing but his salary.

On the twenty-third, practically Christmas Eve, she got away from her nurse and tried to steal a fur coat in a crowded store, leaving her own in its place. She got a block from the store before they caught her and she almost started a riot by beating onlookers over the head with her umbrella. They took her away in a patrol or ambulance and got in touch with him at his office.

It is very sad, of course, but it only goes to show that *none of us* can escape our fate.

Ellen Woods

## 4

“Hello, Derick.”

Thompson kissed her—almost as briefly as one does a corpse—and they sat on a visitor’s

bench like two wet sparrows. Mary smoothed the calico skirt of her uniform and brushed his hand. He could take it then, if he wanted to. She wouldn't make him feel that he had to be tender, to a *crazy* wife.

"How's everything?" he asked, hollowly, as if his head were in a wooden bucket as he spoke.

"All right." She smiled. "I haven't—felt badly—all week."

"That's fine." He looked at her, then, his solemn eyes hopeful, his thin lips smiling faintly. "What do they say?"

"They think I'm getting along fine. Of course, none of the real doctors have seen me since Monday, only the young ones. They're so busy."

"Jesus; not since Monday."

"No, Derick, but they can't help it—and the young ones are good."

"No authority, though. They couldn't get you out of here. So damn' much red tape."

"Not so loud, dear," she squeezed his hand and looked furtively around. "They take offense—you can't *say* anything."

Thompson squinted suspiciously. "Then what? What do they do to you?"

"Not so loud, Derick! If you love me, don't talk so loud. . . . They haven't done anything to *me*—but I've seen some awful sights. I can't



tell you now. I'm afraid. When I come home, some time, I'll tell you."

"This place is kept up with the tax-payers' money——"

Mary clutched his arm. "Derick, darling, do you want to make me suffer? Lots of things go on that we can't stop; but if I'm quiet and good and do just as I'm told they treat me splendidly. Don't worry about it."

"What kind of lookin' guys are these young doctors?"

Mary's heart leaped suddenly in her breast. He was *jealous!* Mad as she was; a thief and a mad-woman—yet he maintained enough interest to be jealous. Derick misinterpreted her smile. "What are you grinning at? Do you think it's pleasant for me to know you're here at the mercy of these bastards? Christ, I can't even express my mind above a whisper without you shakin'. Suppose some punk of a doctor takes a notion to jazz you. Where do I get off? What chance have you got? You have to be good. You don't dare talk back. . . . That's the kind of thing I've been livin' with—ever since you been here."

"Derick, darling, nothing like that ever happens. Please believe me. These fellows are all wrapped up in their work. We're just sick women to them. The other never enters their heads."

Thompson hid his face in his hands. "All right; I believe you." They huddled there a moment more in miserable silence. Mary licked her pale lips and stroked his hair. "Did I have any mail?"

"Yes!" He looked up, glaring. "A letter from that God damn' Koons woman. . . . I tore it up."

"Don't *talk* so loud." Mary's chin quivered and tears ran from her eyes. "I'm sorry to upset you, dear. I'll ask her not to write again. But, please don't yell at me."

She was in his arms then. He hadn't meant to yell. Faintly their hearts sought each the other's rhythm as their slim breasts were bruised in desperate contact. "Mary," he sobbed. "Oh, Mary, darling."

"There, sweet; there, there. Don't be impatient. I'm on the chart for Dr. Zinn next Wednesday. Maybe he'll say I can go."

He kissed her, longer; her cheeks, her eyes. "I'm a lousy husband. Jesus. Come here to cheer you up—and make you baby me. I wish to Christ I'd been the motorman o' that God damn' train; I'd 'a run it back an' forth over the son of a bitch a hundred times."

One of Mary's brows crawled higher than the other—as we have seen it in the Mount Albans annual. "We've got to stop it from going any

further, Derick. We've got to have faith in Laura."

"Yeah. We got to get you *out* o' here."

"It won't be long. . . . There's the matron. I guess you better go."

"Oh, Jesus, I just *came*."

"Derick——"

"All right." They stood, hands clasped.

"Your time is up," old hard-face said.

If Mary's nails had not bitten his palm, he would have retorted.

"'Bye, Mary."

"Good-bye."

He kissed her once more, fleetingly, and squeezed her hand, hard. "Good-bye."

## 5

May 21.

Dear Laura:

How is Bobby? Are you watching him carefully? Anne writes that all this horrible series of disasters will terminate through his living on—past his birthday—and growing up. I hope so. God, Laura, how I hope so. I've been through all this before. I know what it is. I've been through so much. When

I first read that horoscope telling me I *couldn't* fight my fate, that I was a born thief and a maniac—I fought. How I fought! Then the other things began coming true and I began slipping. I can't go over all that again. My days are numbered if Bobby dies. Save him, Laura! Take him away with you. Never leave him alone. Do *something!* Anne is sentenced. That's hard enough to bear. If Bobby goes I won't wait to die. I'll dash my brains out. I'll jump from the Chrysler Building. Oh, God, Laura, do *something*.

Mary

May 19.

Dear Mrs. O'Neill:

Love your boy in the flesh as long as you may. His days are numbered now. Accept my sincere condolences and grieve not too much lest you bind his little spirit to earth.

Ellen Woods

# PART TWO





## CHAPTER FOUR

October 14.

Dear Laura:

I've meant to write so often, but mother has been here, and there seemed so *much* to do. How are you, kiddo? She's gone back to

N. Y. C. now. She still takes care of Bill as if he were a baby. I wish I could have gone with her to see a good show and Broadway again.

Laura, darling, the strangest thing has happened. I got a letter from *Jo Turner*, can you imagine that? Jo—who has been so snooty for the last few years you couldn't touch her with a ten foot pole. Actually wrote to me and sent a round-robin that's been circulating some time. I sent it to old lady Kersten because I was afraid if I didn't no one else would ever think to. I told her to send it back to you. I don't know who started it, but Hazel Cousins was on it—and Helen, you may be sure.

*But* the strangest thing is that about a week before the letter and robin came from Jo, I got a letter from a star reading fellow in Camden, New Jersey, telling me I was going to hear from an old friend I had almost forgotten.

Well, of course, nobody *could* forget Jo, but I hadn't thought of her in such a long time. It was like a voice from the dead. And funnier still—*she* had just the same sort of letter I had, and from the same man. It must be somebody we both know, trying to play a joke on us. But I'm writing to him



anyway. Why don't you write too? He tells the past, present and future—by the stars. I haven't been to a fortune teller since Tom flirted with a palmist I took him to, more than a year ago. He's a good boy—but he's *impressionable*, if you *know what I mean!* I'll bet you do.

How is the baby—and George? Don't wait so long to write just because *I* don't answer. I love to get letters but I hate to write them. You know. I've always been like that. I'll send some snaps as soon as I have them printed. How about a picture of Bobby? I'll *bet* he's big.

Your own,



P.S. The man's address is Swami Yoga-dachi, 1402 Chestnut Street, Camden, N. J.



October 18.

Dear Anne:

You may be sure your "star-reading fellow" is someone we all know, because I've had a letter from him too, and so have all the other girls. Save your money, honey, it's a fake.

What did Jo have to say? I don't know what got into her. The moment we were out of school she seemed to forget all of us. I don't suppose I've been such a perfect correspondent, but I've written her at least a dozen times off and on. All I ever hear from her is "Merry Christmas" every year. She doesn't forget that. But wouldn't you think—we were room-mates, you know—she'd say hello in *July* some time? What's still funnier, she was out here a little while ago—in California, I mean. I know she was. And didn't look me up. It's her business, of course. I think I know why she acts that way, maybe you do too, but she should know me better than to think *I'd* be the one to criticise. I guess I'm as broad-minded as the next one. But she was always an independent soul. Maybe she was thinking of Bobby or was afraid George wouldn't be so cordial. Anyway, I'm glad she's come to life

again. If she writes you again let me know and I'll try my luck once more.

It must have been dandy, seeing your mother. Did she have Bill with her in Akron? How old is he now and what is he studying? George has big plans for Bob—but I tell him he'll probably turn out to be a barber. We are having some good pictures made of him and I'll send you the proofs so you can pick out the one you want.

I wish Akron weren't so far away. I certainly do get fed up on scientific baby food, my own spinach and butter-milk diet—and *bridge*. Sometimes I think I'll scream if I ever see another deck of cards. George has subscribed to the Literary Guild and I read a lot in the daytime, but he likes to have people around in the evening and there isn't a thing to *do* but play bridge.

Miss Kersten returned the round-robin and I sent it on to Koons. She and your Swami will probably get married. Now, that's what *I* call fortune telling.

Don't worry about Tom, Anne. When I remember how he used to *look* at you, I know he's true blue and you couldn't get rid of him if you tried. But—listen, Anny! You're going to have to hurry to catch up

to me with a family. I'm almost sure I'm that way again—and I might as well go through with it. It will be good for Bob to have someone to play with and it will be a perfectly grand excuse for not playing bridge for a while. Can you think of a better reason for having babies? George wants a girl of course. Little Laura aims to please.

Did I say "little"!

You'll have to answer or I won't write. Lopsided correspondence can be carried too far.

Always the same,

Laura Stanhope

October 29.

Dear Laura:

*You!* Of course, *you* wouldn't have anything to do with fortune tellers. You always were too sensible. But *I* have my horoscope—and Tom's too—and they both tell the straightest truth. Mine says I'm always losing my temper but don't mean it and a lot of good things. (You know I am.) And Tom's says he's loving, but *fickle*—and you

know he *is*. But I'm not going to tell *you* all they say—just so you can laugh at me. You're as bad as Jo. Even after the demonstration of the round-robin she wouldn't have hers told. Hazel Cousins did, though, and she wrote to Jo, telling her how good *her* horoscope was. It was Hazel sent the round-robin to Jo. She doesn't write to me. I don't know why. I never did anything to her. Do you know the twins' address? Somebody ought to see that they get it. They were nice kids.

Will you ever forget the time Melchisedeck ran away with them and Ursula and Helen caught him? The twins couldn't have patched out one whole dress between them. Those were the happy days.

Both my notes from that Turner woman were half a page long. One said: "Here's a round-robin one of the Delph's sent me. Hazel. If you don't send it on to another one God'll send locusts to Akron. A Swami told me so." And the other one said: "Child—I move so fast that anything the stars would tell your horoscoper would be out of date before he reached the first stop. Hazel had him tell her a lot of bunk, but I don't *want* to know what's coming. It's too much fun watching to see. Tell Laura Stanhope

I'm too damned ashamed of myself to write her after waiting so long."

So that's that. I don't get you about her—not entirely. You mean her men? I always did suspect that "guardian" of hers. Who ever heard of a guardian with wavy chestnut hair! But what else? Come on, sphynxy, don't keep *all* the good things to yourself.

And you pregnant again! Well, you're lucky, that's all I've got to say. If I skipped a month the ceiling would fall in. But don't I wish I could—for Tom, you know.

I'm alone a lot lately. He is working so hard. Some days I only see him about twenty minutes. His office is trying to cut expenses like everyone else and they've given him two other men's jobs to do.

Here are some snaps. The pretty girl is Nellie Stone, and the boy is Phil McKenzie, they're both from Tom's office. We four run around a lot together. Don't you think they make a sweet couple? Just the right size for each other. Do you like my new hat? It's a copy of a Paris model—but I suppose you see later things than we used to in New York, there where all the stars are.

Say! I've been going to mention this for a year. I saw Dolores del Rio in "Evangel-

ine" a long time ago. It was a grand picture, but I've always thought Evangeline was a blonde—didn't you? Will you take that up with Mr. Lasky, please? I've been thinking of dyeing my hair. What do you think? You always have such good taste.

Now, write soon. Love.

As ever,



December 5.

Laura, dear:

I heard from Ellen Koons yesterday for the first time in a month. She is all excited about Helen Frey, who is threatening to kill herself. Did you ever hear of such a thing? I thought she was so happy. I guess if the truth were known Tom's not the only one with a failing for the ladies. All men are alike and if all of you have been pitying me for what I've suffered—well, not *you*, but some of them—they had better "mend

their own fences” as my grandfather used to say.

I can't stand pity, Laura; you know that, and I was a goose—if not something crazier—to tell my troubles to a lot of catty women. Please don't take any of this to yourself. You have always been splendid and any one who calls *you* a cat has me to answer to. But you know some of the other Delphians *were* born with claws and I was silly enough to let them know about Tom and that little snip of a secretary I made him get rid of.

Oh, Laura, I thought that was all over. Honestly I did. I prayed it was. Tom was so kind and thoughtful. We had some of the grandest times this summer. Motored to Sandusky where his people live. Out to camp. But—damn it!—yes, *damn* it. He's gone off again. We have had some terrible scenes. I trusted him implicitly until I got that Swami's letter, naturally that made me more watchful. Once or twice I looked for letters in his coat and he saw me. Laura, he went wild. He accused me of driving him to other women with my jealousy; said that he might as well go out and enjoy himself since he was guilty of it in my eyes whether



he did it or not—well, just *everything*. Of course, I wasn't exactly silent, and he finally grabbed his hat and went out and didn't come back until three o'clock in the morning. That was nearly three weeks ago.

Since then things have been getting worse and worse. I've tried *not* to be jealous, but what can I do? I know he can't keep his head if a girl smiles at him and he's such a handsome dog that they're always smiling. There are dozens of them in his office. It doesn't do any good to get his secretaries discharged. The place is full of little snips with baby-doll faces and corn-colored hair. Since business has been so bad he's been working late almost every night and once or twice I've walked down to meet him; I had nothing else to do. I *hate* going to the movies alone, don't you?

But he was working, all right. At *first* he was. Then last Wednesday I got a complete reading from Swami Yogadachi, telling me that I was being duped, that Tom Jessup could not be honest or true if he tried, that he was lying to me and that there was only one cure for a man of his disposition and temperament.

I don't know what that means unless—

but I can divorce him. The Swami says that won't do any good. It will just allow him to do his philandering legally; it won't help me to bear it. It won't keep my heart from aching. I don't know what to do. He never stays home any more. He says I've driven him out. That isn't true, Laura. I trusted him all summer. I was sure he had turned over a new leaf. Then these horoscopes came and it all started over again.

Now Ellen writes that the Swami told her she would hear of a murder among her friends. I enclose the letter. Read it and tell me what you think. It might refer to the twins, of course, it says "a sister"—and then Helen Frey's "suicide." Isn't that terrible? I'm sure I don't know where this Yogadachi gets his information, but he hits the nail on the head every time. I'd feel a lot safer if Tom were more like George. But *you* always did get the best of everything, the top cream, the maple centers, the best looking boys and now the truest husband. How do you do it? Just born lucky.

Well, I've got to run. Have some shopping to do. I usually get down town around lunch time just to see if Tom eats alone. If I catch him eating with any of these flaxen-

curled cuties I'll scratch *both* their eyes out.

Love,

Anne

P.S. How's the baby? Where's my picture of him? You're a fine one!

A. J.

## 2

The door bell rang. *Now* who? "You'll have to get down, lazy." Anne eased the cat off her lap and tried to memorize the page number of her place in *Cimarron*. "One-eighty-two, one-eighty-two, one-eighty-two," she repeated as she walked to the front door. "Hello, Phil. . . . Well—where's Nellie?"

"I don't know."

"Oh—oh! The love-birds have their feathers raised."

The boy looked at her steadily as he tossed his hat on the hall table and took her hand. "Yeah," he said drily. "Tom out?" They walked toward the living room, their fingers twined.

"He's working. You get off easy."

"Yeah."

"Well, you do. He's had to work every night but Tuesday this week."

"That's tough."

"You'd think it was."

"Mm-hm."

"He *is* working; isn't he, Phil?"

The young man's oval face confronted her squarely. "If Tom says he's working, he's working; as far as I know."

"But you'd know. Tell me the truth."

"Why don't you call up?"

"The switch-board's cut off at five-thirty."

Phil smiled. "He's working. Forget it."

"Truly?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I don't believe you, but I don't know what I can do about it tonight. What's the trouble between you and Nellie?"

"Same old thing."

"Sit down."

"Reading this?"

"Yes—it's great. You read it?"

"I saw the picture."

"Oh, of course, we all went together."

"I don't care anything about a book after I've seen the picture."

.....  
"What about you and Nellie?"

"Oh, it's the same old story. She's runnin' around with another guy."

"No! Who?"

"You don't know him."

"Not that Steve?"

"No, another fellow. You don't know him."

"You mean she's actually that way about somebody? I thought you two were engaged."

Phil rose and started toward her chair, an unmistakable mien of serious purpose frowned from him and impressed Anne. He leaned over her and kissed her astonished mouth.

"Well," she laughed, "is that a prize I get for knowing the golden text?"

"No," he said without moving, holding his weight with stiff arms on the arms of her chair, "you get that for nothing. This is sample day."

Anne was disturbed, but she knew Phil so well. This was a strange new note in their friendship, but the thing to do was take it lightly and kid him out of any wild ideas he might have

cooked up. Probably he'd had a few too many drinks.

"How much? by the dozen?"

"Wholesale only."

"A gross, then?"

"Have you got a new penny?"

"I just bought some two-cent stamps . . ."

"No—we don't take stamps."

"Go back and sit down, Phil. What if Tom should walk in? I think it's awfully funny for you to act like this just because Nellie is giving trouble. . . . After all, I'm not in the habit of comforting quarreling sweethearts with my kisses."

"My God! you're dumb, Anne. You are dumb."

"Thanks;—but go sit down. . . . I didn't want you so close in the first place and if we're going to call names I'm not sure you hadn't better go." She was not smiling. She meant it. "Do you want me to call Nellie up and reason with her? I don't know who she's running around with, but he'll have to go some to be as sweet as you." She regretted that phrasing too late to hold the words. "In your hat!" she said to reclaim the moment.

Phil held her slim shoulders and tried to kiss her again, hitting her cheek as she twisted away.

"You're drunk, Phil."

"No, I'm not. I haven't had a drink since last night."

"Well, you should be if you expect to get away with this heavy love stuff." She rose, avoiding him, and he clutched at her waist, drawing her body toward him.

"Phil McKenzie, let me go!"

"Don't be such a prude, Anne."

"I'm not a prude. I just don't like you that way, that's all. That's clear; isn't it?"

"Perfectly." He dropped his arms.

Anne twitched and fretted, adjusting herself, patting her hair and straightening her dress.

"I like you, Anne."

"I like *you*, Phil."

"But you don't want to play with me."

"No."

"Good."

"Good?"

He nodded. "I think you're pretty square, Anne."

"I hope so."

"You're too square to be taking it like you are."

"*Taking* it?"

"You've been taking it for months. I'm losing my job to tell you about it."

"Something about Tom?"

"*All* about Tom."

"Let me have it. Is he out with Nellie?"

"Yes."

"I see."

"I'm only scenery, Anne. I've just been doing an old friend a favor. I'm not engaged to her. I haven't quarreled with her. I never loved her. They wanted to be together, that's all, so they made it up that I should tail along to keep you from being suspicious. The girl's nothing to me."

Anne stood rigid, listening. Her dark eyes more than half closed; her lips drawn tightly against her teeth.

"But I couldn't keep it up—damn it. You're too good a scout. Maybe I fell for you—I don't know. But I'm through being a monkey for them, so they can make a—to fool you.

"I'm going now, Anne. I'm leaving town. Tom'll fire me if he don't do anything else. I don't want any trouble. . . . So long."

"So long, Phil." Another effigy of a man. No guts, no underpinning. If he had "fallen for her" he'd stay and take her hand and fight for her. Instead, he was running.

"Will you—kiss me good-bye?"

Anne smiled, tiredly. Kiss him good-bye. She shook her head.

"So long, then."

She raised one hand in a vaguely fatalistic gesture of acknowledgment that she heard him.



The door closed and she stood without moving until the cat scratched to be let out.

### 3

She pretended to be asleep when Tom came in—and again when he left next morning. She had nothing to say to him. What good was talk?

He called her on the telephone about one o'clock. "I've got to go to Youngstown on business, Anne. I'll be back tomorrow or next day. I'm sending the boy out with fifty dollars. That'll do you; won't it?"

"Sure."

"Well—be good."

"Why should I?"

"What do you mean, why should you? What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Are you going to start *that* again?"

"No. Go ahead. Have a good time."

"How can I have a good time? I'll be working every minute."

"Like you were last night."

"Why? What about last night? I suppose you came up here."

"No, I didn't. I didn't have to."

"I can't talk about this in the office. Hang up and I'll call you from outside."

"Don't bother. What time are you going to Youngstown?"

"Why? What difference does it make?"

"Oh, I thought I might come down and have dinner with you and put you on the train. We used to do that."

That was true. They had. At first they wouldn't have missed eating a meal together for all the tea in China.

"Oh—I don't know. I thought I'd leave before dinner—eat on the train and get in a good night's sleep."

"That's right. Take care of your health. . . . Well, so long, Tom."

"Anne!"

"Yes."

"I thought you had hung up."

"No."

"I thought you had."

"What was it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Your voice sounds so dead."

"Is it any wonder?"

"Who'd you see last night? Who's been talking to you?"

"I thought you couldn't talk about it in the office."

"Oh, to hell with 'em. Listen, Anne; I don't want you to believe things people tell you. If you want the truth about anything I do—you ask me. . . . I know what's the matter with you. Some busybody's told you they saw me with a woman last night. Well, they did. Do you know who it was? It was *Nellie*. We worked late and when we left we were both hungry. We went out to the Dutchman's and had fried chicken. I knew you'd be asleep or I'd have called you so we could all go. Phil knew about it."

"Yes?"

"Sure. So you see, there's nothing to it. And if you'll trace half the rumors you hear they all come down to some explanation just as simple as that. Good Lord, you're not going to start being jealous of *Nellie* too, are you?"

"I'm not jealous of anyone, Tom. I'm past that. Was Phil in the office today?"

"Uh? No. No, he wasn't. Touch of grippe, I guess."

"No—he's gone away."

"What do you mean gone away?"

"I don't know. He told me he was going away."

"When? When did you see him?"

"Last night."

Tom made a face at the telephone. Suddenly

he was excited. Phil had run wild. Talked. Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh. Now, what?

"What did he have to say?"

"Do I have to *tell* you?"

"Oh, so that's it. He's gone nuts too. Got sore because I bought Nellie a fried chicken. Well, I think it's pretty damn small of both of you. That's what I think."

"I don't want to talk any more. So long, Tom."

"Anne!"

"Oh, *what?* We can't wrangle like this over the phone. Your operator's listening in. Go on to Youngstown. Come home when you get ready. It's nothing to me."

"Don't feel that way about it. This is a business trip, honey. Honest it is."

"Yeah?"

"It *is*. But look, Anne. I'll go ask the old man if somebody else can't go. What do you say? Shall I? Will you come down and have dinner with me and go to a show if I can get out of the trip?"

What perverse imp was running away with his tongue? Why did he feel impelled to convince Anne that his fabrication was the truth? At the outset, the objective had been to get away without trouble for a free evening or two with Nellie. Now, as the obstacles to a clean get-away

increased, the objective changed. Now, the time with Nellie was not important. Anne *must* be convinced that he had not been lying, if he had to sacrifice the assignation to give his story a semblance of verity. . . . Why?

"I'll do whatever you say."

Of course, if he could get her to believe the yarn without calling off his party—or—though Tom was not conscious of this—if he could get her only to *profess* to believe him although both of them knew the story was false, and both knew that the other knew, still he could go ahead with his original plans. If, in much talk, almost by accident, through exasperation or from any cause, he could wring from her words which could be stretched into a semblance of faith—something he could throw up to her later—something he could use as a basis for an assumption of innocence after the event—even then there would be no excuse for abandoning his fun, for cancelling his *liaison*.

"That's what I'll do, honey," he forced the most spurious tone of enthusiasm into his voice. "You sit right there and wait for me to call back. I'll bust a button to get out of it. Would you like that?"

"I guess so."

"Well, Christ, talk like it, then. If I turn the office upside down to keep you from suspecting

I'm cheating on you, I'm at least entitled to a little cordiality."

He sounded sincere. She wanted to believe him. Phil could have been lying, for selfish reasons. After all, Tom was her husband; she should take his word before she did that of anyone else. And if he *had* been planning to take another woman to Youngstown, keeping him home with her was a victory of a sort, no matter how it was done, no matter how little his heart was in it. And if she could win this once, perhaps she could prevail upon him to renounce Nellie—or whoever it was—in spite of his fickle nature, in spite of Yogadachi. "I'd *love* it, Tom. You know that. It would be like old times again."

"Well, I'll try. Don't set your heart on it. I may not be able to sell the old man, but I'll do my damndest. Now, you just sit tight. Hear me?"

"Yes, Tom."

"So long."

He hung up and swung in his swivel chair to face the window. "Oh—*nuts*," he said to an unoffending sky. "Damn these women." He gathered two or three letters in one hand and went to Nellie in the outer office. She had seen him coming and had put her legs to the left of her desk so she could press his as he bent over to talk to her.

She did not raise her auburn marcel as he leaned over. "I could *feel* you coming clear across the room," she said throatily without looking up. "Every time you open your door a wave of you comes out here and gets me. I can't work until you've gone back again. My fingers are stiff—and that little friend of yours—speaks right up in meeting. God, I love you, worthless!"

Tom grinned at her and looked down the neck of her loose blouse which she caused to gape with an obliging generosity. Without moving her shoulders she squinted up at him sidewise. "What are you looking at?" she whispered hoarsely. "You're in the office! . . . Like 'em?"

Tom buttoned his coat.

He put the letters on her desk and cleared his throat.

"You didn't have anything to say to me," she went on in that burring undertone which carried no further than his ears. "You just came out here for a little peek." She pressed her full calf against his shin and so moved her knee that Tom straightened and looked around the room full of typists.

"Be careful," he said.

"Never! Not with you, you madman. Oh, how I hate you. Always so sure of yourself."

Tom expanded.

"Touch me! Touch me somewhere. Any-where. Quickly, Tom," she demanded.

He leaned over the letters and allowed his arm to lie across her breast a second only.

"Oh, God," she breathed. "I can't wait. Let's get out of here now. Think of some excuse, Tom. Can't you?"

She covered her eyes with one hand and her throat was palpitant.

"Bring these letters back to me in a minute. I've got to talk to you."

Nellie knew exactly what that meant. It was a slight set-back. He'd been talking to Anne. "Yes, Mr. Jessup."

"When you have time," he said in his natural voice.

Well, it seems the old man had no one else who *could* go to Youngstown on this particular mission. Anne would have to postpone that party that was to be like old times until he got back. Not more than two days—for sure.

## 4

So what did gullible Anne do but go to Youngstown looking for them? She lacked only the shawl over her head to be a character from



an old temperance cartoon, hieing her body from hotel to hotel, scrutinizing the registers for Tom's familiar handwriting. She had no idea what name he might be using. In the eight most presentable hostelries, there was no entry she thought he could have written although she did read one *Mr. L. A. Smith and Wife*—written back-hand.

Meanwhile, the cavorting was taking place in Akron. And—for all it was illicit, the performance had in it certain noble elements; a somewhat Oriental grandeur entered the second-rate hotel bed-room and tinted the dim electric light, softened the coarse linen and enriched the hangings. A sonorous, rumbling, impressive tone, a processional heavy with brass and deep-bellied drums heralded the consummation of a desire as primal as volcanic bowels, as pristine and elemental as thunder. What Tom lacked of physique to make the union wholly symbolic was equalized by the extra fervor brought to the fray by Nellie. Just as a movie audience is pleased to ignore skinny legs in a male star if the heroine appears to be daffy enough about him, so were the gods appeased and the cosmic audience at these festivities given their money's worth. Tom's arms were frightful and his nude chest rather like a pigeon's, but because Nellie experienced, or seemed to experience, an holy

rapture at their contact with her own more than adequate complements, the wind bated its breath and the stars blinked blissfully as climax after climax was reached time after time.

What I mean to say is that all through the night, while Anne ransacked the Youngstown hotels with a second-hand revolver in her purse, Tom was giving his entire time and all his swiftly ebbing energy to that man-killing occupation which Nature has made exhilarating to conceal its basic insidiousness.

Nellie had the time of her life. "Why, Tom," she gave him the needle, "you're absolutely tireless, dear." And Tom responded as if it were mid-afternoon instead of four in the morning.

They had breakfast brought in at noon and by nine that evening Nellie herself was ready to sit quietly in a movie. But two hours was breathing spell enough—for her—and an idyllic episode in the picture caused her to take one of Tom's thin arms and lead him back to their untrellised bower. But the novelty had abated in ferocity for Tom and before midnight he was ready to sleep. He dropped off as Nellie tried to lead what conversation there was to the subject of Anne. Having completed rather too thoroughly her domination of the fellow's physical being, she attacked the moral fibre, the spiritual body and other such-like figments popularly said to lie

within the human breast, pigeon or normal. Likely her rapacity would have been gratified if the other job had been done less well; as it was, Tom was too sleepy to remain awake long enough to surrender. Too sleepy to talk about Anne or anything else.

Anne got home while they were still sleeping in the morning. She looked at his untouched bed and telephoned his office. Mr. Jessup would be in later in the day. She was ashamed to leave a message. How would that sound? *Please have him call his wife when he gets in!* She wouldn't have those weak-minded little cats laughing at her.

The girl at the board pulled the plug out and called to another, two desks away. "You owe me fifty cents, Sadie. He hasn't been home;—she just called."

Anne made some toast and drank tea and went next door to retrieve the cat. The neighbor congratulated her on her husband. "I think it's wonderful, him taking you with him on business trips like that"—and watched Anne's face narrowly for the pain.

"He's very thoughtful that way," Anne said, scratching the cat's head, her face as expressionless as she could adjust it. "Thank you for taking care of Chita."

Tom called her early in the afternoon.

"Hello, Anne. I'm back."

The very sound of the bell had carried the conversation further than that.

"Yes."

"I'll be home early for dinner."

Why did he pretend to be gay; pretend dinner with her would be pleasant? He didn't want to come home to dinner. Why wasn't he man enough to say so?

"All right."

"Jesus, God! You sound glad to hear from me. I don't know why I break my neck to get back to hear you talk like—like a wet—potato. I'll be damned if I do."

"What shall I get for dinner? Lamp chops?"

"What's the matter with you, Anne? Yes—sure, lamp chops are all right."

"All right."

"Anne!"

"Yes?"

"Aren't you glad I'm home? Don't you want to see me? I've been gone two days and all I get for a welcome is a wet blanket."

"Don't let's talk about it, Tom. You come on home and—I'll—we can—talk then."

"Why, what is there to talk about? Are you ill?"

"Not very."

"But you *are* ill?"

"No, I'm not."

"I'll come home right away."

"No, don't do that. Just come for dinner. I'm all right."

"All right," he made his voice light and cheerful again. "I'll be seeing you."

He made a conscientious effort to work. He really should make up for all the time he had lost. His desk was cluttered with business needing attention. But concentration was beyond him. When he realized that he had been staring at one sheet of paper for twenty minutes while imaginary conversations with Anne and fragments of memory from the past forty-eight hours alternated in his mind, he rose in exasperation, took his hat and made for the street.

Nellie's cruelest, most scornful smile followed him out the door and got in the car with him. "Piker," it taunted, from a spot six inches from his left ear. "Tied to her apron strings! Run to her, *baby*. After last night and the night before—you run to her when she crooks her finger. Slave. Conformist! Where are all your fine declarations of freedom? Back to the hutch and your lettuce leaves! But don't expect me to believe you're a lion the next time you feel like a prowl. Go on back to *her*. Here's a kiss for you!"—as he drove toward his home. Tom, you see, was impressionable, and Nellie's smile con-

veyed to him only as much as she meant it to convey and not one iota more.

Anne heard the car stop. He had come home early in spite of what she had said. All right, grimly, it didn't matter much *when* it was done. She took the revolver from her purse, looked for a place to put it—a place easy to reach—then hastily stuffed it back in the bag as the back door-bell rang. The groceries! She carried the purse with her.

"G'day, Miz Jessup. Have a nice trip?"

If she should shoot *him*, the blood would be brilliantly red, running down that white apron. When she shot Tom his blood would just soak into his brown suit, and look black.

"Very pleasant, thank you."

"I got a cousint in Youngst'n."

"Ye-es?"

The front door closed.

"Hello, Tom," she called cheerily. There must be nothing amiss before the tradesmen. "Are those the seventeen-cent peas?"

"Yes, ma'am. . . . Hello, Mr. Jessup. Glad t'see y'."

"How are you, Jo?"

"Pretty good. You're gettin' thin."

"Oh, I don't think so." Tom embraced his wife perfunctorily, kissing her in brief salute.

"I wisht I could knock off an' go home in th'

middle o' the day," Jo winked at Tom. "You eggzecutives get all the breaks."

The three people laughed. "I put in some scraps for the cat, Miz Jessup. I thought you might want 'em."

"Thank you, Jo." She closed the door and turned to Tom.

"Give me a real kiss, honey," he said, and she watched him approach her, held motionless, with her back against the door, by a resolution akin to that one feels when necessity forces the handling of something filthy; a beskite dog, the vomit of a loved one. She was taut in anticipation of contact with his flesh, spared violent nausea only by reflection that soap and water would cleanse her of even the most loathesome mucidity.

She let him kiss her—and the touch of his lips dispelled her paralyzing horror. Oh, God! make it that she was wrong. Make it all an unfounded suspicion! Purge her head of these nasty thoughts and make these arms mean what they were pretending. Fix it up like that; won't you, God? Ah, it was too late. Too late for even God to do anything about it. His kiss had been unnatural, twisting in a new way; something he'd picked up in Youngstown. Over his shoulder she saw her bulging hand-bag on the kitchen cabinet.

"Dja get lamb chops?"

"Yes. . . . Lamb chops."

He released her and she busied herself storing the cans and packages. What for? In two hours neither of them would care *where* the groceries were.

"You didn't get that brown suit pressed. You must have been busy."

"I was," he yawned, leaving her to her chores. "I put over something pretty decent for the house."

That sounded natural enough. That was the way he talked. That's what he *would* say.

"See the Vincent's?" She had to raise her voice to make him hear.

"No-o-o. No time."

He was running the tub. "I'm gonna take a bath," he forestalled further conversation.

"Towels there?"

"Yep. . . . Thanks."

Washing the odor of another woman from his body. Oh, why wait? Why wait? In the tub he'd be helpless. He probably wouldn't lock the door. His blood would mix with the water in the tub. If he did turn the key she could shoot the lock open—like they did in the movies. She should do it while he smelled of *her*, while the guilt was all over him. Anne's hands ran over her chin, her neck and into her hair. Her teeth cut her lower lip. No. While a vestige of doubt remained she



would wait. But that meant catching him. Actually finding him *with* someone. All right. Suppose it did. It was better to wait for that than to kill an innocent man. To kill Tom. . . . Was she actually going to—to *kill* Tom? It didn't seem possible.

She pushed her bag way in the corner of the cabinet and dropped an empty paper sack in crude but effective camouflage before it. When Tom returned in a dressing gown, the chops were sizzling. Anne was cutting bread with a long sharp knife. He came up behind her and pressed his scantily clothed body against her. She could not suppress the shudder that ran through her, and wrenched away, turning, the long knife still in her hand. Her eyes blazed with hatred. For a moment you could have bought Tom's chance to live for two Confederate pennies. He swallowed hard. "I—I didn't mean to startle you," he said, and backed out of the room.

## 5

February 26.

Dear Laura:

You are the only one in the world I can come to with my troubles. Please hear me

out and do not condemn me too quickly. I do not care what the rest of the world thinks, I want your good opinion to follow me to jail, to death if need be. This may be the last letter you ever receive from me. I fully intend to kill myself—yes, even as poor Helen did—after I shoot Tom. If my courage fails and I do not go through with it, think kindly of me. I will go to jail and take my punishment. It will be worth it.

My life is a living hell. I have not slept more than an hour at a time as far back as I can remember. It must have been over a month. I am losing my mind, I know, although this all seems rational enough; doesn't it? I talk about killing and suicide and madness,—calmly. That is because I am talking (writing, of course, it seems like talking) to you. I have been thinking about all this so long. Tom watches me. He knows I am going crazy. He knows I distrust him and that I am only waiting for an opportunity to strike. He does not know I have a gun. I bought it in a pawn shop in Youngstown.

He took a woman there. But I couldn't find them. I thought I could kill him when he came back—but the grocery man was in

the kitchen when he came in. I couldn't do it then.

We have had separate bed rooms since Christmas. I think he locks his door at night for fear I'll stab him in his sleep. But I won't do that. I want him to know I'm doing it when I do. He'll come into the kitchen when I'm cooking and if I start to slice bread—he runs. I must look dangerous with a butcher knife in my hand.

This must sound silly to you. Anne—looking dangerous! But I'm serious, dear. It has to stop. The Swami was right again. There is only one way to stop it. I have to kill him—kill the only man I have ever known or loved—*because* I love him.

Now, please don't do anything foolish like telegraphing the police here. That would only delay matters. Since I have done nothing but *tell* you about it, they would have to let me out some time—and I would do it as soon as I got away. I have concluded Ellen Koons is right. We can't any of us escape our Karma or Fate or Destiny. The whole plan of our lives is a pattern. Yogadachi or Danbury or whatever his right name was, was only part of the pattern. He didn't wish any of these things to happen. He had no reason to wish for his own death.

He had nothing to gain by killing any one else. Ellen is right, I think, he was in touch—*en rapport*, as she says—with a sphere we don't even know. He saw ahead and told us about it and died. Ellen and I have been corresponding ever since Mary was sent to the asylum. Wasn't that just too pitiful? Proud, sensitive, little Mary Nolan—in an asylum. That's what I dread most about what I'm going to do. If I have to go to jail—all of the others—yes, and even you—will say: "Poor Anne. In a cell!" It's your pity I hate and not the cell. But I will avoid it if I can. God knows I have to get away from it sooner or later. The *neighbors* pity me. My *family* pities me. You girls pity me. I've reached the end of my rope. I'd much rather be dead.

But it's not only that. I'm caught up in this pattern. I have to do what I'm doing to complete this endless chain that started with that round-robin. I guess that's where it started. Certainly it was about that time that all the trouble began. And it's just going the rounds from one to another of us. Each one is a link. The Swami, Helen, Mary, me. I don't know who is next. I may never know. But, Laura, a husband has to be killed and Tom is the logical one. I think I've been

planning to kill him for years; ever since I saw him kiss my niece on our wedding day. It was all in fun. You know. The men of the family kissed the bride as they always do. The women pretended to make a fuss about favoritism—he was so handsome, damn him—and they all kissed the groom. Dot was only fifteen—but she had a positive yen for men, Tom in particular. It was probably her fault as much as his, but there was no kidding in their kiss and I saw red. Oh, I controlled myself. I was home. But—there you are. The Swami said a husband would be murdered. Well, the only ones left are Mary's, yours and mine—that I know anything about. I'm very, very sure you aren't going to kill George. Not if *I* can help it, with a worthless, cheating devil like Tom walking around begging for it. You have a different part to play in making this pattern anyway. Laura, I hate to have you think I've gone as batty as Ellen, but everything has come out so accurately so far; if there is *anything* you can do to save Bobby's life, for God's sake do it. He's almost five. In one of my letters from the Swami he says I'll hear of a little boy's death *while I am in prison*. It's things like that that make me think I won't be able to kill myself after

I've shot Tom, but God knows I mean to try.

There, now. I've put it all down on paper and you'll cry over it or telephone for the police or—I don't know what. But it won't do any good. I'm going to do it before this reaches you. Pray for me.

Anne

## 6

Laura read the letter the second time as she waited for "long distance" to tell her there was no answer at the Jessup residence in Akron. Then, as quickly as she could, she packed a bag and took the first train East. George followed her only a few hours later, on the next train.

There was no answer because the house was empty, save for Chita, who slept calmly in the middle of Tom's bed while Anne stood in his office door and emptied the contents of her revolver into her husband's body. He had changed suits. That was like Tom. This one was grey.

The sound of the gun, the sight of Tom dying before her, the blood pounding in her own ears, hypnotized Anne Jessup. She lost count of the explosions, lost all ability to count, and so saved no cartridge for herself. She lost all sense of time and place, and when witnesses came trepidatiously toward her, she continued to pull the trigger, over and over again, the revolver clicking, clicking, clicking, on empty shells.

When the men saw her helpless they fell upon her, baying, "Get her gun! . . . Take it away from her!" And when she relinquished it without hesitation, they puffed and jerked their heads and straightened their coats as if the battle had been strenuous. But don't laugh at them. They were under a strain. Adjusted for strife, keyed to it, her easy surrender surprised them and they had no time to change costume and make-up. Resolved to die, if need be, they could not forget their heroics instantaneously when the emptiness of the gun turned them into lackeys. So they strutted in memory of their earlier, grander images of themselves, blood-spattered, at grips with death, and they glared their resentment at Anne. Like the neighbor-boy who switches games on his fellows—say from cowboys to pirates, all in his own head—she was suspect. It was a lousy trick. If she was going to play killer she should stay in character until the curtain

touched the floor. Switching in the middle of the scene made the rest of the cast feel like damn' fools. And for making him feel an ass, man will never forgive you. For this they glared at Anne, for this they hated her—and not because she had killed Tom. They were rather well satisfied that she had done that. Every male in the office desired Tom's heart's blood for taking Nellie Stone from beneath their noses. Too craven to take her themselves, still they wanted her left where they could sniff her, like poodles.

One of them thought of this as they formed a ring around Anne. One of them looked over the heads of the others and into the gathering group of chattering stenos and clerks, looking for Nell.

She wasn't there. As the second shot of the fusillade had sounded, prefacing the screams and hub-bub by only the smallest portion of a second, Nellie had risen from her desk with the rest, but her interest had lain in another direction. The center of interest to the other girls had been this cogent drama being enacted before their dull eyes. Nellie's was the homely door of the freight elevator and the company of the old operator.

A bitter wind parted her auburn marcel and she regretted losing that hat. It was only a week old, the only one like it in Akron. She shouldn't be seen running from the building like this, hatless, coatless. It was a confession of guilt. There



would be a trial. She would be named. The world's finger would point at her in scorn. The husband-stealer. The wicked woman. But what could they prove? A lot, perhaps, if she attracted attention by running. If she stayed—she was more than Anne's match. If she stayed and *helped* Anne, professed innocence and contributed to her defense— A talk with the lawyers— A plea of temporary insanity instead of "the unwritten law"——

Nellie returned slowly to the freight entrance. What was her alibi for running? Why had she come this far? Cigarettes. She had left just *before* the shooting. That bunch would be too excited to remember whether she had or not. Or, another version,—knowing of Anne's jealousy, however unfounded, she had run to save her neck—and returned the moment she thought it was safe. That would hold water. But she bought cigarettes before ascending—by way of extra precaution.

The police had not yet arrived. Why hadn't she thought? She could have brought the nearest traffic cop back with her—or a doctor would have been even better. What a fool! She always thought of everything twenty minutes late.

"She won't talk."

"She won't say a word," they told Nellie as she added her presence to the fringe of the in-

quisitors. Lots of them were smoking. This was like "after hours". No one would think of criticising their cigarettes at a time like this. Nellie opened her new pack of Luckies ostentatiously and offered them on either side. "They're fresh," she thought to add, creating evidence.

"Isn't it terrible?"

"Is he dead?" Nellie asked.

"Oh, yes; I think so. God, isn't it awful?"

None of them had *ever* had so much fun.

Nellie elbowed her way through the private office door, and when the others saw who was pushing they held their bodies aside as if she, certainly, was entitled to a floor table—and *sans couvert*.

Though they babbled a little, mostly in whispers, at the outer edge of the pack, here, close to Anne and Tom a tense silence was observed. The woman's eyes had not lifted from the contorted face of the corpse—not even once. She scarcely blinked.

Nellie studied her a moment, looked once at her dead lover, then slipped her arms around Anne and pulled her head down on her breast, stroking her cheek. It was a bold move, a daring move, but Nellie was not without courage. She risked a lot, but she won. *Tears*, then. Tears in abundance. Anne clung to her, sobbing and sobbing.

A great elation swelled Nellie's heart. This could never be undone! These tears, this embrace, this evidence of sisterly affection before more than two dozen witnesses could *never* be erased from the record. It was a *coup*! If Anne had taken the other tack, reviling and denouncing her, it could have been called hysteria, madness. But *this* was gentle and kind. It was Anne's funeral. Anne's suicide. But what would you? Who's responsible for anything? You've read Yogadachi's letters yourself. It's the stars.

March 3.

My dear Mrs. O'Neill:

Need I call your attention to this further fulfillment of prophecy? You may scoff as much as you like. You may heap anathema on my head, but *nothing* can stand before *Prophecy*! Resign yourself to your fate.

Ellen Woods





## CHAPTER FIVE

**W**HEN men avoid a woman as beautiful as Hazel Cousins, they confess a large conceit. In effect, they say: "If I don't pursue her, I can always alibi out of not getting her. I can say to myself and any curious

enough to listen, 'She's a chilly proposition. Prick her and she'd bleed ice-water.' I can say: 'God deliver me from a perfect *lady*.' And: 'When they look like that they demand too much.' Or: 'I'd hate to have a wife that pretty. Every man in town would be chasing her.' Thus convincing myself and other men as well as many women, that I do not want her, that I am an extremely clever analyst, the master of my Fate, and a connoisseur of femininity. These are lies, of course. The truth is that I would crawl a mile on my hands and knees to stick my middle finger in her coffee. But—I had rather lord it as I do over my own good wife who bears not the slightest resemblance to Lillian Russell, Harriet Hoctor or Lenore Ulric than make a fool of myself shooting at the moon. I had much rather knock them dead by the dozen—or even by twos and threes—just as they come, run o' the mill, than make a play for something so damned select that I'd be laughed at or ignored. The plainer ones don't expect you to look like a Greek god in your B.V.D.'s and they don't insist that you salaam three times, put ashes on your head and kiss their feet every night before retiring. Not that I wouldn't be glad to go through practically any ritual to possess her, but she wouldn't have me, so I'll let her alone."

Hazel didn't understand that. She thought

there was something wrong with her. She knew she was pretty, but rigid home instruction kept her fooled into believing that modesty and maidenly quiet were the attributes which attracted the most desirable men. Conversely, the parental instruction made certain that lesson would be borne out by observable facts when Hazel should be old enough to study case histories, by identifying "desirable" men as those who *were* attracted by the practice of these same virtues. Hazel was only half-way through Mount Albans when it became monotonously apparent that, for some reason she could not fathom, the system had broken down. The only men or boys attracted by her meekness and her retiring ways were grey-beards, priests or sissies. But the faculty insisted that mother and father were right, and the boys the other girls had for friends did seem a little clumsy, loud or precipitate. She brooded about it, wondered, but took no experimental steps. They were not an experimenting family, the Cousins. They thought Ben Lindsay had hoofs and Clarence Darrow a spiked tail which he had to keep strapped to his left leg so it wouldn't lash. And once, during spring house-cleaning, Hazel had suggested that the living room furniture be rearranged as it settled into place. Her mother patted her cheek kindly and shook her head, lips puckered as if she had been

biting a quince: "No, no, Hazel"—it sounded more like "noo-noo"—"papa wouldn't like it. We got along pretty well the way it was for six years. I don't think we'd better try anything new. . . . Don't you like the front room?"

"Oh, it isn't that. I just thought it would be nice for a change—with the Davenport over——"

"We won't discuss it, Hazel."

"Yes, ma'am."

And that evening Hazel's mother had one of her headaches—from worry. The meal was eaten in silence and when it was over, each of the diners leaving a few morsels on his plate to establish that he was not a pig, Cousins was summoned to a conference while Hazel stood at the front window and worried about her dereliction.

Did Cousins think their child had a restless streak? Where had a desire for novelty come from? What did it mean in her character? Were any of the Cousins like that? Certainly none of *her* family were. So her father talked to Hazel for about an hour that evening—about changing furniture and things.

Mount Albans, for all its strict rules, was lax to Hazel. Her room-mate was from Texas and she insisted on changing the furniture in their room every Saturday afternoon, until Hazel came to look upon this weekly upheaval as one



of Rome's ways and because it was habitual it assumed an order in her mind and she thought that if you started out by changing your furniture around every Saturday without fail, it was no longer sinful. It would be sinful *not* to move it, if that was the way you started out. When she got married she was going to move everything about once a week from the very beginning.

Dresden and platinum and rose, and her mother dressed her well. Every week or two a box arrived holding some dainty addition to her wardrobe. These dresses and caps and capes and hats she donned a little sadly. She couldn't keep the other girls away when she tried them on. They were all far more excited about each new arrival than she. Yet their exclamations and comments hurt her, the praise more than the feline innuendo. And she was forever letting them wear her things; all one had to do was ask—or, if one was timid, just stand and look with the proper countenance.

Commencement would have wrung your heart, if you were observing and sensitive. She looked like nothing earthly in those billows of airy white foam. She looked like a bride from some unwritten fairy tale and they all said so. At least, they said she looked like a bride. Hazel would be the first to marry and she'd get the richest and handsomest husband. She answered

nothing to all this praise. Hazel was not quick at thinking up answers. "Oh, I don't know," she said, and her lips relaxed quickly, drooping ever so slightly at the corners. What's sad about that? Well, you'd have to see her. It is folly to tell you her eyes were sad. No one ever looked long enough into her eyes to glean sufficient data to describe them. They embarrassed you. After a glance you knew your jaw had dropped and that you looked an utter imbecile to her. So you turned away. She got nothing but adulation on every hand. You'd show her she had no such stunning effect on you. You *could* look elsewhere when she was in the room! But that vainglory cost you dear—because, confronted by Saint Peter, Up There, and asked: "In all your life, what thing do you most regret, my son?"—you would have to answer truthfully: "To wound a lady's pride and to teach her she was not desirable in my eyes, I turned from the contemplation of the most perfect face and figure the Lord God ever made. I never saw her again—but I have dreamed of her thousands of times. I regret that I did not look longer while I might." And for your frankness, likely, They'll let you polish halos.

Back in her home, Hazel resumed her search for something through those familiar windows. Or, was she searching? As far back as she could remember she had stood looking out at whatever strip of the world chance placed before her casement. But regardless of the familiarity or strangeness of the passers-by, she asked nothing of them. They neither stimulated nor amused her. They were just other people. And the guests in her home were no more. The youngsters she knew had grown gayer and gayer. They drank and necked and smoked and made whoopee. There wasn't a single whoop in Hazel. Gin burned her mouth and made her head ache. The few youths callow enough to paw or attempt to kiss her went about their designs in such ludicrous fashion that she brushed them off with a single wave of her lids. And Papa and Mama Cousins still held the reins. Eleven o'clock was bed-time.

The old man decided to take his wife and daughter to Europe before Hazel's debut. She spent most of her time in Paris, Berlin, London and Venice, looking out of her windows. But not even Hazel could look out of a window for hours without thinking about something. What she

thought about most of the time was an island where she had been cast by the sea with a gentleman. His name was Raoul, Raoul Wellington, the polo star. Although his clothing was torn, his shirt gaping at the neck for want of buttons and his beard rather too long for evening, he remained punctilious. He bowed to her slightly, smilingly, when they woke in the morning on their separate beds of leaves. He asked her at every meal if she would have the saddle of the rabbit or an haunch. He courted her there alone as he would have in New York City, if he had ever turned up in New York City, fanning her with a banana—no, a palm—and allowing his fingers to run deliciously about the roots of her hair and lightly over her temples—until, one day, he kissed her—gently, his beard biting her chin slightly, pleasantly, provocatively, despite his tenderness.

On the homing vessel, she stood at the rail and one hand touched her chin in fond reminiscence.

“Dreaming, Hazel?” her father asked.

She took his hand and squeezed it. He gave hers an answering pressure. They weren’t very communicative, the Cousins.

It was called a coming-out party, and everything that could be done to bring her out was done, according to Post. But Hazel couldn’t emerge. She danced and took her share of her

father's wicked, wicked punch—but nothing happened. Four of the boys asked to call and did so, later, formally; escorting her here and there and finally proposing, one at a time, with a uniform hang-dog, tail-between-the-legs manner of novice salesmen: "You don't want any of this truck I've got to sell; do you? No! I didn't think so." They were rebuffed before they opened their mouths; they were half-way down the steps with their hats on before Hazel could answer.

I think this was because sex was unimportant to Hazel. She was normal, no more, no less, and if her mother was opposed to change, she was not so backward as to frown on personal hygiene before marriage. Hazel was allowed to keep herself scrupulously clean, minimizing desire. There was not even a suggestion of rut. Who thinks of fornication before a madonna? Well, of course; but Hazel never met men like that.

A nasty little cough attacked her and after X-rays and examinations, Hazel and her mother went to Denver for a while. It wasn't serious; it wasn't dangerous, but—since they could afford it and nothing held them to New York—why not clear it up quickly?

Martha Viborg saw them in the hotel lobby the day after they arrived. Just a drop in the bucket from the well of loneliness, was Martha, and she had more money than Blaisdell has pen-

cils. She saw Hazel first from the back and that made her catch her breath. When the girl turned, her full effulgence almost blinded the Lesbian and she began scrutinizing all the men in Hazel's vicinity to identify the vision's husband. God could be relied upon to supply a little extra-special manna now and then, it was true, but not such a pasty as this without *some* complications. The elderly woman was obviously her mother, but mothers were not complications to Martha. Mothers had no imagination whatever.

### 3

Viborg was one of the most popular lung men in Denver. He had a private hospital of his own. It filled his life so full that he was never conscious of Martha's strangeness. He had married her expressly to get a start, to get money enough to put up his first sanitarium. She had married him to give herself an air of respectability before the world. A married woman had so much more liberty than a single one. She was seldom suspected of being queer. Without an husband, however, and cursed with a rich baritone voice, anyone from the city was likely to raise you if you were seen only in the company of women.

And being whoopsed in Denver was no joke. Chicago and New York, Los Angeles, were big enough to shield such a girl from harm, but you couldn't let a thing like that get out in a village! The cats would shred you. They'd sit, so help me, on the same sofa with a damned, rheumy-eyed poodle, and tear the reputation of a respectable dyke to ribbons. And Martha insisted that she was respectable. Her affairs were always of the heart and never vulgar, hurried gratifications with chance acquaintances. She was not to blame for the divergence from the norm of her tendencies. These desires were none of her choosing. But she was independent enough and proud enough to tell the rest of the world to mind its own business. She'd keep her shades down. What was Viborg but an opaque screen between her activities and the neighborly eye? If they peered around the screen they were worse than she, had fewer or lower morals.

Strong, within, and ready to defend her mode of life against all critics, Martha was also sensible. She did not parade her condition in slouch fedoras, four-in-hand ties, tailored tweeds and low-heeled brogues. It certainly did *not* pay to advertise—not in Denver. But her feminine attire was less a matter of expediency than of taste and refinement. Martha's family was, on the whole, rather fine, and none of her relatives

ever dreamed what was wrong with her. She was strange, they admitted, but that was her business, she seemed happy enough.

So, outside of a very close shingle and the deep voice she could not change, Martha appeared to be a woman. And a pretty woman. Very presentable, indeed. Her hair was a shade or two lighter than ground black pepper, that extraordinary, arresting mixture of something and grey that startles when worn by a person under thirty. Her features were well assembled, a little sharp, perhaps, until you reached her lips, which were full and shapely.

There was nothing wrong with Martha outwardly. She did not stride nor boom nor grip your hand with malicious strength. She did not smoke cigars nor carry a cane. In fact, no more than ten or a dozen people in Denver knew she was queer and those few weren't talking about it.

What made her so? Who am I? Not Kraft-Ebing nor Havelock Ellis, certainly. 'I don't know, frankly. I know Martha—well. There are no secrets between us. But she doesn't know where she came from and your guess is as good as mine. She blames herself partly for Hazel's death, but I doubt that she is responsible. Hazel, except for her great value as ornamentation, might as well have died long before.

To demonstrate Martha's careful methods,



instead of asking the desk clerk at the hotel who the angel was, she drove to the Viborg Sanitarium and invited her busy husband to dine with her.

"But I can't, my dear. There are nine new and very wealthy patients whom I must interview some time before midnight."

"Any of them interesting?"

"Nothing extraordinary, I think. Simple T.B. generally."

"No handsome men?"

"None half so good looking as I."

"And no women more beautiful than I?"

"None."

"You're a dear. All right. Eat your sandwich here in all these germs. But don't say I am not a very, very thoughtful wife."

"You are, Martha dear; I assure you you are."

"'Bye——"

"Drive carefully."

"Don't worry."

So!

Perhaps the girl wasn't ill. Hmm-mmmhmlala-de dum deey. Hunm-mhm-hmhmmm-m. Le de dum dum dum deey.

Martha dined alone at Hazel's hotel, dressing, of course, stunningly.

June 28.

Dear Laura:

I'm so close to you out here in comparison to home that I feel as if I could call to you over the back fence. How are you, dear? Do you ever get this far east or do I have to come on out to California to see you? Mother is with me. It's my throat. But the doctors don't expect me to die for a long time.

The wife of a big doctor here is a California girl, her name was Bailey and her family used to live on Westlake Boulevard. Did you ever know them? She has been a life-saver to me since I arrived, taking me everywhere and having tea and bridge for me. Mother is very fond of her too, and you know how few people please Mother. Of all the Delphians you were the only one who passed—and I think your grade was only about 76%. She flunks *me* on every count.

Martha, the doctor's wife, knows everyone here. Perhaps I shall take a wild and wooly mountaineer back east with me. Do you recommend them? We're going mountain climbing tomorrow. Martha has a cabin

several thousand feet up one of these hills and she's going to teach me "a new art" she calls it. We'll have to take skis and snowshoes and I'll probably break my neck. I love this country. Perhaps I'll make Dad move out here. The people are so congenial and charming. Martha, for instance, is just a trump. I've never met anyone quite like her before—and we met entirely by accident.

We'll be here some time. Write me one of your longest letters and tell me every smart thing that baby says. Didn't you steal a march on all of us—I'll bet the others just boil when they think of you having the only baby in the club. Of course, *I* don't. Not much. Poor me; I haven't even snared a loose man yet. Why is it, Laura, that all the real nice ones are married? Mercy. I know any number of husbands I could care for, but they're all in love with their wives. Now isn't that my luck?

Don't ever accuse me of writing sad letters again. This one is so cheerful the paper is laughing. Is that a good sign? I *feel* that way, somehow, and it is a grand and glorious feeling. I guess it's the mountain air. I'm getting light-headed. But I am happy here.

Happier than I have ever been before in my life.

I'll close now, before you think I've gone dippy. Kiss the baby for me.

Hazel

"Isn't it invigorating?" Martha asked, drawing the gauntlets of her wool gloves up to her wrists. They were leaving the cabin to descend the mountain.

"I've never been so happy before. I've never cared much whether I lived or died—but here!" They stood looking over a serried expanse of snow-capped peaks.

"It's sustaining," Martha went on, taking up her pike. "Like the strong arm of a man you love, tight around you, here, at your back." She touched Hazel's spine just above the pelvis. "Come on. We want to get down to the car before dark."

They tramped in silence. Hazel was puzzling a new idea. "Sustaining,—like a man's arm" *there*. That was strange to her. . . . New. Yes. It would feel that way. She arched her back, experimentally. It would feel like a good dancing

partner, plus love, plus the joy of stretching. She turned to Martha, smiling that breath-taking smile. "That must be pleasant," she said surprisingly.

Martha relished the smile a moment. "What?" she asked, truly puzzled. Her own remark had been sent forth provocatively. When it failed to bring a pertinent or any other sort of response, she had forgotten it.

"A man's arm there."

Ah! "Well, isn't it?"

"I—I don't know. I don't think a man has ever—held me exactly that way."

Martha pursed her lips. "Then you haven't had good luck with lovers. An accomplished male would have done it."

"It—it seems such a little thing. Doesn't it?"

"It's the detail that makes an accomplished lover; don't you think?"

"I—don't think I've ever thought much about it."

Martha laughed gaily, "No. Oh—oh—oh—no! Of course not. A girl as beautiful as you are never, never thinks about love."

"Stop laughing. . . . Honestly. Oh, I've thought about love; but never about 'detail', as you call it."

Martha squinted at her quizzically. These revelations were confirming many of the older

woman's suspicions. "Do you mean that you've never compared the—the technique of your suitors? Their kisses, their pressures, their embraces? You've never said to yourself: 'If Tom could kiss like Jerry and had Frank's or Charley's hands—' you've never said that? Never thought about it?"

"No. . . . I—I never have."

"Well, child. What's wrong with you? Are you partly dead?"

"No—I don't think so." For the first time in her life, Hazel felt like concealing her celibacy and virginity. To Laura and Josephine she wailed about both, only half in jest, but, at least, frankly. To Martha she felt impelled to pretend more experience.

"You don't care much about the men; do you, Hazel?"

"Not much."

"The great Mr. *Right* your parents told you about when you were a child hasn't come along?"

"Not yet."

"What's been wrong with them?"

"What do you mean?"

"How have your best boy-friends failed? Clumsy?"

"Some of them."

"And you've never met one who knew exactly where to put his hands—and when. That's important too; isn't it? *When*."

"Indeed it is."

"Most boys don't know when."

"No."

"Some do."

"I suppose so."

"Hazel; have you *ever* been mad about a man?"

. . . "No."

"I thought not."

"Why did you think not?"

"You're too sensible to lose your head. I don't think you'll ever really be crazy over a man."

"I wish I could be." That had escaped her.

"Why?"

"Well, isn't that what life's for? Aren't we meant to love and marry—and carry on the race?"

"High school notions."

"Well, to love; anyway. I've always wanted to love something, somebody. Not like I love my father and mother; that other way. I feel that I have something to give, something worth while. And I'm not ugly."

"*Indeed* you're not."

"I've always felt incomplete, since I've grown up. But I don't mean to throw myself away."

"Don't."

"I'm not going to. . . Oh, I'll meet him. You've introduced me to so many nice people."

"Who interests you?"

"We—I—I, not—n—none of them, that way."

"Thank God for that."

"Why?"

"None of them are half good enough for you."

"Well, I don't know. Perhaps they're too good. It isn't that. But I—I just don't seem to excite them—nor do they excite me."

"Have you ever had a very close girl friend, Hazel? A *real* friend? One you loved a great deal?"

"Well, in school."

"Your room-mate?"

"No. Laura Stanhope. The one who lives in Los Angeles. The one with the baby."

"She has a baby, has she?"

"Yes. She seems to have found the right man, George O'Neill. They're just too disgustingly happy. . . . I'm glad, of course."

"Do you know him?"

"No. I've seen his picture."

"Does he appeal to you?"

"Oh, goodness, no!"

"I thought not."

"You say the strangest things, Martha. What are you driving at?"

"Nothing. I've just been wondering about you. I love you, you see, and I'm very much interested in your happiness."



“Thank you, Martha, dear. I—I don’t believe anyone has ever spoken to me—so—so kindly before. . . . So understandingly.” Why was she choking? What were those tears doing in her eyes?

“You told me the other day that I was a life-saver to you out here. Well, *you’ve* been a life-saver to me. It isn’t all one sided. I was very lonely until you came.”

“But, darling; you’re married. You can’t suffer as I do. You have love and a home.”

“I have a home.”

“Oh, you love the doctor too.”

“Precious child. . . . Love the doctor! All right. If you like to think I love the doctor, I shan’t contradict you. But he doesn’t fill my life. You see—I’ve wanted babies too.”

“I guess there’s always something,” Hazel sympathized. “When we’re little we want to be big and when we’re big we want husbands—then babies—then what?”

“A different husband—perhaps.”

“Oh—I should be very well satisfied with *one*, if he were the right sort.”

Martha laughed again. “Yes—the right sort. But that’s what keeps so many of us changing. We keep looking for the right sort and damned seldom find him. . . . After the babies, you see, Hazel, even the man who managed his hands and

lips pretty well through the courtship, loses interest. Loses interest in *that* at least. Even the right sort. It isn't their fault, poor dears, some of them stay loyal as watchdogs all their lives, but their heart's not in it."

"Oooh, Martha; how cynical!"

"Cynical? No. I'm a doctor's wife, my dear. That isn't cynicism; it's physics."

"Physics?"

Martha nodded. "Two pieces of magnetized metal, floated, attract at their opposite poles. Leave them together a few days and then separate them and see how much attraction they have for each other."

"None?"

"None."

"Just being together wears it out?"

"Quite."

"Well, it's better to have had it and worn it out than never to have had it at all."

"You sweet baby! What are you doing tonight?"

"The movies with Mother."

"After that?"

"Bed. Sleep is supposed to be part of my diet."

"You haven't coughed since you've been here."

"I know. . . . I'm afraid I'll have to take cold purposely or we'll have to go back to New York."

"And you don't want to go."

"Indeed not. . . . Unless I could take you and all the mountains too."

"Freight rates are very high on mountains. Even a little one—from here to New York—tchtchtch! Quite staggering!"

"Why did you ask about this evening? The picture will probably be dull as New York."

"Couldn't we arrange for a charming escort to take Mama, and couldn't you come to my house—and talk? I never get enough of you."

"I'd love it."

"Talk about men—the beasts!"

"The brutes!"

"The—the *bums!*"

Hazel laughed, a rippling, restorative peal. "Let's! Let's call them all the nasty things we can think of."

Martha pointed. "There's the car. It's too late now. Jimmy'd hear us—and he's *all* man."

"Oh, I don't care." Hazel was drunk. Drunk on comradeship, the altitude, the exchange of ideas with an understanding mind. "I don't care if he does hear me." She was giggling now. "Oh, the tramps! The—the rats. The *rats*. There's one for you to beat. Rats!"

"Hush, Hazel, you'll drive me bug-house too."

As they drove the rest of the way back to Denver, they planned sending Mrs. Cousins to

the cinema on another's arm. But the old lady broke it up, and it was not until two days later that Martha finally had Hazel alone with her in the big house.

## 5

It is a delight to watch Martha work. Detail! The girl is past-mistress of detail and nuance. It is a fortunate thing for the few of us men left in the metropolitan area that all dykes are not as gifted and intelligent as was Mrs. Viborg. She had a different appeal for every different type of woman she sought and she knew exactly when the laying-on-of-hands was permissible. She never wasted a motion. . . . Nor a moment. She could have opened a school for husbands to the immeasurable enrichment of the world and the despair of divorce lawyers. But, of course, it would have been illegal. Anything so reprehensible as teaching men and women how to enjoy life must be heavily punished. It isn't decent to be anything but clumsy and crude and gross.

But they aren't all as clever as Martha. Most lady-lovers are as uncouth as the males they imitate.

Hazel and Martha kissed at greeting. That's nothing. Perfectly straight women do it, non-

sensical as that is. It is an advantage the Lesbian has over the Sisterhood. Can you imagine the scrimmage on Broadway if all the fairies kissed their trade when they met? The bodies would be ten deep around the *Times* Building and it would take a week to clear a path into the Palace.

Where were we? Hazel and Martha kissing.

"Oh, darling, it's refreshing just to look at you."

"Mother's beside herself with curiosity. She insists I'm meeting a man here, and although she's more sporting about it than you'd think, she's bursting to know which one it is. . . . Poor Mama. She'd so love to marry me off."

"Do you think she might—eh—*drop in*, to see?"

"Oh, no. That wouldn't be cricket. No. She wouldn't do that."

"She might have your virtue in mind."

"It would be a relief to have it on somebody-else's mind for a change. Somebody's-else. . . . It's been on mine till I'm sick of it."

"What a mood you're in. . . . Give me that."

They sat on opposite ends of an old, bottomless divan, sinking in it for *feet* before coming to rest.

"Who's getting cynical now?" Martha asked, extending cigarettes. "You sound like the bitterest of bitter virgins. Like Katisha."

Hazel sighed heavily. "Don't make fun of me, Martha. I have a right to be bitter. If I were a Katisha I'd never say a word. . . . But I'm not; am I?"

Martha rose and stood smoothing her friend's hair, allowing her cool, dry fingers to run about at the roots at the nape of Hazel's neck. "You are quite the most gorgeous creature in the whole world. You are so delicious I could eat you. Your ears are the daintiest— Only see them. Your mirror doesn't do them justice."

Hazel smiled up at her happily. "I love that— what you're doing. I could sit still and let you play with my hair for hours. Does that mean that I'm part cat?"

"You're *all* cat, dear, or I'll disown you."

"Disown me?"

"You don't mind, do you, if I pretend that you're my baby. You appeal to me that way. I've wanted to cuddle you ever since the first time I ever saw you."

"But me for your baby makes you so old. And you're not."

"No. But let's say you are much younger than you are."

"It's all right—in play. But I shouldn't care to be any younger than I am."

"Poor darling."

"Martha."

"Yes, love."

"I'm going to tell you something I've never told anyone before in my life. Promise?"

"On my honor."

"I've always dreamed—please, now, if you twit me about this later I'll be as angry as anything."

"Never a twit."

"Well,—I've always dreamed about being shipwrecked on an island; a tropical island. And the man—one of those brutes, you know?—always does that to my hair."

Martha leaned over the edge of the divan.  
"Like this?"

"*Just* like that."

"And does he do this?"

"Yes. Oh, that's nice."

"And does he kiss your ear—like this?"

• • • • •  
"And this!"

• • • • •  
Hazel could scarcely articulate, but she finally managed, very weakly: "No—o. He—he's never done exactly that."

And before they parted Martha thought of any number of things Raoul Wellington had never done, for all he was an accomplished gentleman alone with Hazel on an island of their own.

When Hazel, star-eyed, returned to the hotel, the old lady smirked at her. "Hazel! You're falling in love. I can see it in your eyes." And when that made her daughter burst suddenly into a screaming shower of tears and fling herself out of the room, Mrs. Cousins couldn't understand it. She toddled after Hazel ready to apologize, placate, make-up, anything. She hadn't meant to upset the child. But Hazel had kept right on going—out—although she had just come in.

Nor did the young lady return to take her to the pictures. Mother Cousins called the Viborg home. After ascertaining the identity of the caller, a servant said that Martha was not at home. She was, however, lying sleepless across her bed, holding a little lock of hair to her lips.

Hazel had walked until bodily weariness forced her to find a place to sit. She entered the Public Library and found an empty chair at a long table where students worked under green-shaded lamps. After an eddy of interest at Hazel's arrival, the heads returned to their books and no one looked at her. She opened a discarded volume and leaned over it, covering her eyes with her hands.

She must get calm, relax. She must control





Hazel thought it was very beautiful . . .



herself. Right now her mother was searching for her, calling telephone numbers, worrying. Mother must not be made to worry. After all, nothing had really happened. That wasn't anything; was it? in the last analysis? It left no scar. It did not injure. It wasn't like breaking your leg or taking dope.

Hazel thought it was very beautiful. She had been happy until her mother's smug, old-fashioned face had leered at her and mouthed the name of love. She had wanted to strike her, then, but had cried out and run instead. But why had she wanted to strike her mother? For all those years of waiting? For the torment of waiting for a man? No, it was more than that. Or less. But did she need a reason? Was there a reason for everything? Wasn't it possible just to want to do something without knowing why?

The thought of returning to the hotel and so much as seeing her mother made Hazel sick. A wave of loathing made her shudder. Yet, she must not only *see* her before she slept. She must talk to her, explain the strange outburst and lie to her. Why?

Why need she go back at all? She had found love; a love so great that it humbled and pros-  
trated both Martha and her. A love full of tenderness and thoughtfulness and ecstasy. A love

which begged man's protestations. A thing of sublimity——

Fingers slipped once more over her body in a surge of exquisite memory. Martha's pretty eyes, blazing with passion, looked up at her again and Hazel quivered involuntarily. Why on earth had she left Martha's house? Why left her arms? That was where she belonged. Why put distance between herself and her love, now that she knew where it was and what it was? Would it be silly to go back? Would the doctor be home? What would Martha think of her for acting that way? Wasn't it piggish, like eating every vestige of food on your plate?

She rose and stumbled out to a telephone. The bed-room extension rang and Martha took the instrument quickly. "Hello," she said very low.

"Martha!"

"Darling."

"Martha, I want to come back. I can't stay away from you. May I?"

"I'll send a car! Where are you?"

"I'm—I don't know. I've been walking and I'm lost. I'll come in a cab. . . . Are you sure it's all right?"

"All right? My loved one, it's heavenly."

"I'm flying."

But she waited long enough to call her mother before taking off.

"Hello, Mama. This is Hazel."

"Oh, Hazel, Hazel, where have you been? You've *worried* me so. Where are you?"

"Mama, I'm staying—I'm staying with Mrs. Viborg tonight. We're going up the mountain at daybreak and I'm staying there to get an early start."

"Hazel! You mustn't do that. You come home here to me. I want to talk to you."

"I can't, Mama, I've promised."

"Hazel, your first duty is to your parents. I *must* talk to you. Mrs. Viborg is not at home at all. Where are you, Hazel?"

"I'm—I'm in the Public Library."

"Hazel, don't fool with me! The Public Library, indeed."

"But I'm not staying here, dear. I'm leaving at once for Mrs. Viborg's. Good-night."

Mrs. Cousins was still expostulating as Hazel replaced the receiver gently on the hook. You shouldn't hang up on your mother, of course. You shouldn't hang up on anybody. But if you couldn't stand it any longer and you knew where love—real love—was waiting, nothing mattered. And every minute you spent out of sight, and of touch, out of the presence of that love was a minute wasted from your life. She told the cab driver to hurry.

October 2.

Dear Laura:

Just a note to let you know I won't be coming out there this trip—much as I'd like to. We're going back to New York and Martha is going with me. Oh, Laura, how you would love her if you knew her! She is so fine. I have just heaps to tell you, but I haven't time. We're shopping and packing every minute.

One of the girls started a round-robin. You'll get it soon. I sent it to Jo.

I'll write you a long letter on the train. The saddest thing has happened—and Mother and I don't even speak. I'll tell you all about it later.

*Hazel*

But Hazel found no time to write on the train. Between the details of her feud with her mother, and worrying because the estrangement

existed; scheming to be alone—if only for a moment—with Martha, without letting Martha see that she planned each encounter, lest the woman tire of the association; watching her lover's every move, jealously, to see that she did not talk long to other women; defending herself against Martha's charges of mental unfaithfulness because Ronald Larrimore was on the train and seemed to have taken a great liking to Hazel; between all these activities, mostly cerebral, there was no time for letter writing.

Larrimore, as all the world knew, was not the ordinary, empty-headed movie-star. He was a gentleman, an actor of the first rank before pictures were anything, a book-collector and all sorts of things. His wife was a society girl, a poet. He had purposely contrived to sit at their table, apologizing humbly. Annoyed at first, Hazel had withdrawn all objections when she recognized him. Martha had retired into a shell.

"You were scarcely civil to Mr. Larrimore," Hazel said to Martha later. "Don't you like him?"

"Precious—we must be very careful, in public. People like Ronald Larrimore sense attachments like ours and laugh at them."

"Why, Martha, how could he?"

"Have you ever read any of his wife's verse?"

"No."

"I'll get you some."

"I don't understand."

"It isn't necessary. Only remember this. Ronald Larrimore has a reputation for being a great humorist, in his way. He'll do or say anything for a laugh. I wouldn't be surprised if he came to sit with us—to laugh at me."

"Martha, darling! You're too sensitive. No one—no one *can* know about us."

"The closer we get to New York, my dear, the more people will know about us, or suspect about us, at a glance. People from Hollywood, my dear, are not like your mother nor the doctor, nor our neighbors in Denver."

But Hazel would not believe it. And Martha could not bring herself to confess the prevalence of her kind in the picture colonies, on Park Avenue and at Newport. While Hazel was innocent enough to believe that only they knew of this soul-stirring delight, that only they practiced these inventions, Martha wished her to remain so. It was this perverted soul's constant dread that Hazel would learn that there was little unique in their relationship. She was certain to learn it sooner or later as they all did. In Hazel's case, the results might be serious.

Mother Cousins tried always to eat when "the girls" did, but Hazel consistently thwarted her. The old lady cornered Martha. "Mrs. Viborg,



are you helping me? Have you told Hazel how sorry I am?"

"Yes, Mrs. Cousins. She'll be all right in a day or two. It was just the shock—you know?"

"Oh, I *didn't* really distrust her. I was just worried about her. I had to know the truth. You understand. . . . What could I have said to her father—if—if anything *bad* happened?"

"I understand—perfectly. But I *do* think you could have trusted your own daughter—both of us for that matter. Surely you couldn't have thought I would have lent my house——"

"Oh, certainly *not*. I was just a silly old lady. I was wrong. I am sorry. You forgive me; don't you? Tell Hazel."

"I'll try again, Mrs. Cousins."

"Thank you, my dear. Thank you so much. Ask her if we can't dine together tonight."

While Martha fidgeted, anxious to get away because Larrimore had passed and was probably sitting with Hazel at that very moment.

He was. "Oh, oh," he said only half audibly as Martha approached. "Here comes Bill."

"I beg your pardon?" Hazel said.

"Nothing, nothing. How-do-you-do, Miss Viborg. Do I have your chair?"

"Thank you. . . . Mrs. Viborg."

"Forgive me," Ronald made his voice an affected basso. Martha glared at him. He lowered

one brow very low, raised the other very high and nodded his head in little, quick jerks—as you have seen him do so often in characters.

“Mr. Larrimore has been telling me the most amusing stories,” Hazel said gaily.

“Perfectly clean ones,” the actor hastened, raising one hand in a defensive gesture, “Weren’t they, Miss Cousins?”

“Oh, perfectly proper.”

“Of course, I *know* all kinds.”

“So I’ve heard,” Martha said coolly, taking the seat he had vacated.

“Ah! You’ve been reading my mail.”

They made Hazel uncomfortable with their banter. It seemed to veil a threat, something dangerously cutting just under the surface of their words. “I think I’ll step outside a moment,” she said. “Is it cold?”

“It will be cold in here when you leave.”

“Isn’t he sweet?”

“If I go out there with her, will you throw me overboard?”

“Probably.”

“You’re quite charming yourself.”

“Thank you.”

“I wish you didn’t dislike me so profoundly. I’m not going to harm her.”

"Were you thinking of offering her a career—opposite you?"

"Has she ever done anything?"

"Theatrically? No."

"I'd be afraid of her voice—the talkies are exacting, you know."

"I've heard——"

"She would have been splendid in silent pictures. . . . My!"

"I scarcely think she'd be interested, Mr. Larrimore. Girls of her calibre are not so easily movie struck."

"What Cousins is that? The watch man?"

"Yes."

Larrimore grimaced. "Well, perhaps not. But that was *your* suggestion, anyway."

"Most of you motion picture people start out that way. That was my only reason for mentioning it."

"You're a forthright sort of person; aren't you?" Martha's courage and entire freedom from awe before his illustriousness nettled him.

"I was born in Los Angeles," she explained. "I grew up with pictures."

"Oh,—I see. Well, that almost makes us brothers, under the skin."

"I never thought I'd live to have the opportunity to tell Ronald Larrimore to mind his own business."

"Yet, you have."

Martha nodded.

"Was it as much fun as you expected?"

She tossed her head impatiently.

"Well, if you can possibly excuse me, now——"

"*Must* you go?"

"I'm afraid so. I really should be trying on wigs."

"Cat!"

"Don't mention it." He bowed, smiling victoriously, and started away with his laurels.

"Give my love to your husband," Martha said just loud enough for him to hear. He stopped short and turned angrily, but the famous Larri-more sense of humor saved him. "Thank you, Bill. She'll remember you, I'm sure."

## 8

No reconciliation was effected between the ladies of the Cousins family, and Martha took an apartment with Hazel. They were unwrapping new furniture, happy, chirping like birds to each other, when Papa Cousins called. Say what you would, he had a figure for afternoon trousers. He was delighted to meet Mrs. Viborg. Hazel and he

talked alone, a towel tied Mammy-wise around her platinum curls.

"Why haven't you come home, Hazel?" He didn't know, he couldn't know, that the day when his poor sternness had power was past.

"Mother must have told you. She hurt me cruelly."

"She told you she was sorry for that, Hazel. It is not your place to censure your mother, no matter what she does."

"I couldn't be spied upon, Dad. I couldn't bear to be suspected—of—of wrong doing. . . . She—she *sneaked* after me. Actually sneaked."

He tried kindness, then, later, threats. Each was alike futile, and he left them to their nesting.

One day just before Christmas, Hazel saw the twins advertised at the 81st Street Theatre. By that time they were spending many evenings out of the house and they attended the performance together. Hazel laughed heartily at the fat sisters and applauded their harmony singing and burlesque toe-dancing. She hurried Martha around to the stage door before the Raskobs could get dressed and away.

"I won't go in with you, dear. I'll wait in the car," Martha said.

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I went to school with those clowns. Come *on!*"

But Martha held back. "I don't want to go in,

Hazel. Truly I don't. . . . You run ahead. The car's nice and warm. I shan't mind waiting a bit."

"Oh—but I—I thought we might take them home with us. They're *loads* of fun. You'll like them."

Martha gave in, as usual, and they found the twins' dressing room.

"Jesus-God!" screamed May.

"Hazel!!" June yelled. And I defy any man to report the dialogue of the next three minutes accurately.

Then they threw costumes and shoes off the chairs so their guests could sit down, and jabbered. Wasn't it awful about Helen Frey and did she know they'd just closed at the Palace?

"What about Helen?"

"Hadn't you heard?"

"She's dead!"

"Killed herself."

"No!"

"Honor bright."

"In the head with a gun. Sure, you knew that."

"I didn't." Hazel felt the color receding from her face, leaving it strained and chalky.

June babbled on: "I bet you didn't even know about May's operation."

"No! When?"

"Day before yesterday. Tell her about it, May."

"Damn her," said May, grinning. "She has no shame—for me."

"But—you're fooling. What was it?"

"A young top-mounter," June laughed "—only you can't book hand-stand acts, so they let 'im go."

These were English words, Hazel thought, but a foreign language nevertheless. "Fools!" she said.

"My God, don't you get it? . . . She got *caught*—and the Doc found out who she was and charged a thousand dollars."

"*That's* what hurts," said May.

"But it's better than layin' off," June assured them all.

"Ain't somethin' awful gonna happen to *you*? It is to everybody else. Didn't you get no letter from that Swami?"

"Oh—that——"

"Yeah, *that!* He's the bird. What a swell job! I wish heda told me to look out for acrobats."

"I'll bet Hazel didn't even know *he* was dead."

Hazel was too stunned to speak. She just looked at their fat, cold-cream-smearred faces with horror back of her eyes.

"Didn't you, Hazel?"

"He isn't; is he?" she asked dully.

"Sure he is. They scraped him off the subway tracks."

"Two weeks ago."

"Not—not really."

"Look!" May screamed. "She *has* got a bad horoscope. Look at her."

June turned. Martha stood beside the pale girl. "What is it, Hazel? . . . What's the matter? Shall I get you a glass of water?"

"Don't get scared, kid," June said, spacing her words as she studied Hazel intently. "No matter what he's told you,—there's nothing in it."

"I wish you would, Martha."

"It's at the foot o' the stairs. Here's a cup."

"Thank you."

. . . . .

"Oh, I'm all right."

"Sure. Don't take that bunk seriously. . . . Say,—who's the boy-friend?"

"What?"

June nodded toward the door. "The lady-Elk. . . . Who is she?"

"Martha? . . . She's a girl I met in Denver."

"A *girl* you met in Denver!"

"Why, June; she's—she doesn't look old."

"No—but if they hadn't changed their mind at the last minute she would certainly have a swell mustache by this time."

"You mean she's masculine?"



June rolled her eyes and May laughed aloud. "You wouldn't keep anything from your old sisters, would you, Hazel?"

"Why,—what do you mean?" She was angry—unaccountably, she thought. Her neck and ears were flushing redly. She felt a little sick, a little fighty.

"Heads up!" June warned, and Martha returned with a cup of water.

"How do you feel, dear?"

"I'm all right now." She drank. "Thank you." Then she wanted to be away from them. The twins had grown common since school. She was ill at ease with them. They'd want to talk about her horoscope—and she didn't want to talk about or think about it. But June's strange allusions to her "boy-friend" reminded Hazel of Martha's warning on the train—especially about theatrical people. This was the reason Martha had wanted to wait in the car.

The same basic morbidity which had made Helen Frey play with a gun at her temple, that holds women within sight of a bloody accident until nausea overcomes them, held Hazel in her chair and made her say: "What are you girls doing tonight? Can't you come up to our house for a while?"

May was struggling into a dress, her voluminous Teddy only half concealing the great areas

of soft white meat. As Hazel regretted the invitation and caught the amazed eyes of June, she smiled at the sudden realization that it made no difference to her if Martha saw these fat and unappealing women only half clothed, although she had been nervous and irritable on the train if Martha paused for a moment beside the seat of a young and slender girl. Their relationship was, then, much the same as if they were of opposite sexes. She looked up at Martha, who appeared to be in deep thought.

"Sure we can," May said thickly through the yoke of her dress as it passed her lips. "Can't we, June?"

"Bet your life. I'd love it."

They went; but a more strained evening would be difficult to imagine.

June and Hazel shut themselves in the bath together for a time and May had nothing to say to Martha. And Martha was having kittens until that door should open again.

How shall I tell you what was said in that white-tiled room? Some scenes in this life are beyond a man's experience. No matter how dictaphonic my recital, you would know it was sheer imagination because, even if I had ever gained entry to such a room at such a time, that which I should have heard would have been, not two ladies talking there *alone*. I feel entirely ade-

quate to the invention—in my ear is their very intonation, their hesitancies and repetitions, but I drop it. I drop it for two reasons; the first, that it would be unbelievable no matter how exact; the second, that June was not given to a careful selection of polite words and I fear me that the questions she asked of Hazel, in the phrases she asked them, would not be printable. You see her dilemma. Here was Hazel Cousins, a virgin if there ever was one, living with a dyke. June could tell 'em a block away. *Living* with one, mind, and apparently unconscious of it. That's what got June. Hazel didn't seem to know what was wrong with Martha.

Well! If Hazel was being led astray, little Junie was not the Delphian to let her go uninformed. But, first, she had to learn just how much Hazel knew—back of that baby stare—and just how far the affair had gone. A delicate problem and one demanding the privacy they selected for its solution.

But every whisper was a knife in Martha's heart. She sat on the divan staring at a bowl of blue flowers in the Chinese rug. She was more anxious to hear what was being said in that privy than either you or I. She felt that her life was at stake. That her future happiness with Hazel was in grave jeopardy was too obvious to need thought. The situation was more serious than

that. This strain was ominous, deadly, like waiting for someone to draw his last breath. Martha thought it must be her own bier she stood beside. No other person in her life had been so important to her as Hazel. For all the violence of previous attachments, none had been so real and deep and profound as this. And now a cheap little Kike of a vaudeville dancer was ruining it! Smirching it! Making it ugly.

How could she get them out of there? Tap? Call? Oh, it was all so obvious! Why in the name of God had she let these creatures come here? In the fulness of her knowledge of the world, she had not had the courage and the strength to stop Hazel from running up the shades and inviting the public to see.

May could stand the silence no longer. "Haven't you got any gin in the house?" she asked.

"I can get some," Martha said. "We seldom drink anything but wine."

"You got some wine?"

"Yes."

"Gee, that's swell. . . . Port?"

"No—o. I'm afraid not. I—I'm sure there's Sauterne, perhaps—Burgundy; and Champagne, of course."

"*Champagne!*"

"Would you like that?"

Martha was extremely grateful to her corpulent companion for being thirsty. That was her alibi. She tapped on the door. "Hazel. . . . Would you and—June like a glass of wine?"

"Jesus!" May called. "You don't need to ask June if she wants *Champagne*. She's been wonderin' for twenty years what it tastes like."

The wine saved the situation—socially. Domestically, it could not be saved. Hazel would not look at Martha—until the third bottle had been drunk, then her eyes were bitter and her pretty lips drawn. May and June left hilariously after quart five.

Hazel was asleep by the time Martha returned from putting them in the elevator. She removed the small shoes reverently. Squeezed each foot and massaged it where the strap had pressed the flesh. She rolled the sheer hose down the white, white legs; loosened, unbuttoned and untied, then staggered with the inert girl to the great bed and covered her gently, lovingly, for the last time.

Besides a travelling costume and a few toilet articles, Martha packed a bottle of wine. "I'll need that in the morning," she said aloud. . . . "Good-bye, my love." She kissed the sleeping lips, the lids, the ears—and went to an hotel.

March 8.

Hello, Laura, dear:

You did me so much good. Who else in the whole world would have come so far just to pat my hand? Mother, of course, but I mean among my friends. Just seeing you and saying the little we did helped me more than I can ever tell you. Why doesn't God start over, make a new world, and fill it with people just like you? I don't suppose any one would appreciate you in such a world. There wouldn't be anybody like me for contrast. It wasn't necessary for you to come. (That made your visit twice as pleasant.) I am getting on well enough. Every one is very kind without showing the least slobbery pity. I like these matrons. They are capable, gentle, firm. You'd make a good one. —Oh, I'm laughing. But I can't help it. The picture of *you* as a police matron in a prison is just too much.

And that George of yours, coming too. Wasn't that splendid? There *are* real people in the world, aren't there? Gosh, you're lucky.

Apparently no one has found out about all this yet, none of the girls, I mean. I haven't received any flowers, anyway. That would be a welcome change. Suppose they all turned against me now. It would be like some of them. I did get one letter, but it was brought over from the house. It was from Hazel Cousins, written before—before the Chicago fire! I suppose it's meant to be friendly, but she was always a strange girl. Do you remember how sad she was over the Irish janitor of Main Hall? She used to take him fudge from our parties because she said he'd had a great sorrow in his life. She talks a lot about the sad case of Mary Nolan. She's been corresponding with both Mary and Ellen. I'm answering, telling her to let Ellen *alone*, but there's no stopping them, Laura. I know. You tried to snap me out of it. Now, look what I've done.

But I'm not sorry. I can actually sleep on my cot here and that's more than I could do on a good bed at home. I may be hurting my case with the court—I know I'm not making any headway in Heaven—but I'm glad I did it. Glad clear to my toes. It's such a relief to *know* definitely and surely that Tom is not—out with another woman. Oh,

Laura, you're lucky. You were born lucky. You haven't a jealous drop of blood in your body. And no reason for doubt. If George were faithless to you—you would square your shoulders, pick up that precious boy and walk out of the house *easily*. You'd never return. And I mean—you'd *never* return. It would be easy for you. You have absolute control—you can make your heart do just what you know is best—and you get such marvelous breaks that you never have to tell it to do anything that hurts you. I hope for your sake and George's that this crazy farce is over now. Whatever it is that has been demanding blood from the Delphians should certainly be satisfied. But it isn't. Oh, I wish I could *know*. Ellen is so happy in her utterly blind faith. You are so happy in your disbelief. But here I am—between the two. One minute *believing* to the point of murder; the next minute doubting—doubting even my own senses.

Have *you* heard from any one? They open all my mail, of course, so I'm not sure who has written me. Maybe dozens have and they've thrown the letters away. I wonder what's become of Jo Turner. She wrote to me when that round-robin was going



around last fall—and I answered. I haven't had a word since.

Oh! Damn! I rattle on and on just to keep my mind off of things. My fool attorney is out trying to get *proof* that Tom was untrue. My God! As if I didn't know! But he says he has to convince a jury, and *if I'd only taken some photographs!* Can you imagine? He thinks I should have gone around to little hotels with a Kodak, chasing evidence. Maybe that would have saved my life. He seems to think it might. Well, I've given him a list of dates, but he won't be able to find anything now. Tom was too clever for us. He always eluded me when he was doing it. The poor lawyer hasn't a chance now. But he says our whole case rests on proving beyond a reasonable doubt that Tom was a rake and a roué. And if possible that he was cruel to me. That's out, of course; he never raised his hand over his shoulder when I was in the room. But there is more than one kind of cruelty. The trick is to prove it.

I've decided absolutely that there was nothing between Nellie Stone and Tom. It must have been somebody else, maybe many others. But it wasn't Nellie, I'm sure. She's here every day to see me—and I told you

how she put her arms around me that day. No, Phil was lying. God knows why. If he wasn't lying why doesn't he come back for the trial? If he has any testimony now is certainly the time to give it.

Hazel was bitten by the Swami too. She is supposed to die very suddenly, after a short but terrible illness, early this Spring. She didn't give me the details, but she asks *me* not to do anything rash so *she* won't die. It seems there's some connection. The longer I think of it the more convinced I am that there is some underlying connection between every one of these events. Yet—they have all happened so naturally. I suppose I'm off my noodle again. I just wonder if there wasn't something phoney about that round-robin? What do you think? Did you ever find out who started it? Helen Frey? Heavens! That's just the way. Every time you start to look into it something like that comes up. Helen's dead and Frey's gone back to Europe.

Well, I give up. Write me often. I think they'll let your letters through. I'm quite a novelty here. No one understands why I don't keep a scrap book. I've been assured a hundred times that I'll be a celebrity when

I get out and that Broadway will pay me  
big money. Ghastly!

Nellie is mailing this for me.

Anne

March 23.

Dearest Laura:

I have been trying for months to arouse enough resolution to start and finish a letter to you. This is the *tenth* start. The rest never got beyond half a page. This time I *will* finish it.

What is it all about, Laura? Do *you* know? Life, I mean. I've done nothing but read all winter and I don't know any more now than I did a year ago. I've been looking for something to cling to. I've got to find it. I've got to occupy my mind and fill my time. Even Mother has her clubs. You have a baby. Everyone has something but me. The junk I've read! Emerson, Robert W. Service, Bertrand Russell, Cowper Powys, H. L. Mencken, William James, Science and Health. I've read *everything*

and they're all nutty. None of them know about me. None of them have anything to offer *me*.

The doctor says I've got to find some interest in life. The little pig. He intimates that *he* would make a splendid interest for me. I tried dancing and singing and now I'm taking piano lessons! At my age. But I don't practice. There's no art in me. This must be awfully dull to you.

Of course there's nothing in these crazy horoscopes. I've read hundreds of them and they all say things in such a general way that they might apply to any one. But I have never seen any so specific as Swami Yogadachi's. He actually named places, events and people. It's just *that* which bothers me.

I get very much ashamed of myself when I think of Helen Frey and Mary—in an asylum—think of it! And *I* complain! And now poor Anne.

Laura, he told me that while a very dear friend was fighting *in court* for her life—I would be stricken with a short, violent and eventually fatal illness. And he put both Helen's suicide and Mary's trouble *before* Anne's trial. It is his exactness which bothers me—and I haven't been well.

I used to run into Jo Turner now and then at the theatre, each time on the arm of a different man, always distinguished, of course—imagine Jo with any but a distinguished man. But now she's gone to Washington. I'll bet she's after the President. Don't I wish I knew her secret? What does she *see* in them? What does she get out of it? I mean, aside from diamonds and cars and grand things. She must get something else. Jo is *not* common. I mean—we both know her, Laura. This isn't catty. She has morals of her own. I don't understand them but I know she *has*. They aren't the world's code, but they keep her up. Well, that's what I need, something to keep *me* up. I'm not scrupulous. I could do what Jo does if it *interested* me. It doesn't. Probably having plenty all my life makes a difference. But that's not right either because I never *wanted* an emerald bracelet in my whole life. Nor anything else—very much.

You probably don't remember me mentioning a girl in Denver I was so fond of? Martha Viborg? The doctor's wife? I don't suppose so. She came East with me, you know, and stayed for a while. I was happy then. She's gone back to her husband.

She used to make me eat regularly and

get lots of sleep—but I hate eating alone. It seems such a waste of time. I come home from shopping or a matinee to this empty apartment, bathe, dress, fully intending to go to dinner and perhaps a movie, or to call on the folks—but I sit down to read a while first and it's ten or eleven before I know it. I never feel hungry like normal people—and the sight of food disgusts me. Isn't that funny? I *know* I have to eat. Don't scold. Everyone scolds so. Once in a while an old beau takes me to dinner but most of them are *so* stupid. And they all look like such pigs, stuffing food away with both hands.

I'm boring you.

Well, there's no news. It must be dreadful on Anne, not knowing what's going to happen now. I really glory in her spunk—doing what she did. Of course, it isn't *right*; but Heavens—was *he* doing right? I don't think she ever had a happy month with that man from the day she met him.

How is California? Don't worry about me. I'll be all right. Tell me about the stars you see. Is Ronald Larrimore out there now?

Kiss that Bobby for me and tell him that even if he never sees her—his Aunty Hazel loves him just the same. I've been intending

to get down town to a toy shop where they have the cleverest things—but that's me all over. I just don't do it. I will though. Promise Bobby that I'm going to send him some of the cutest monkey-men he ever saw. They *are* cute, Laura; I could play with them myself.

I saw the twins—months and months ago. June had just been aborted. It didn't even dampen her spirits. That's part of life too, I guess. What does it take that I haven't got, Laura? Courage? Energy? I give up. God—I almost envy her. There's blood in her, at least. She's human.

I'm crazy too, I guess. But say! That old horoscope is going to be fooled. St. Peter too. When it comes my time to die—I'll change my mind—or put it off. I'll be too busy reading or something. Now *laugh*.

Always



April 2.

Dear Old Thing:

There's little enough to write about. The trial starts on the sixth. I've no idea how I'll

stand that—sitting there with hundreds looking holes through me. The only time I was ever up in front of people in my life I forgot what I was supposed to say—yes, *you* remember. And how cut-up old lady Blake was. She wanted the show to be such a success. I couldn't help it. Probably I'll do the same thing again. I hope I don't embarrass the judge.

You're sweet. You say just the right thing and just enough of it. No! I have not a friendly dove who eats crumbs from my cell window—not even a damn' sparrow. You'd be surprised how good the food is. To be sure, the *company* might be a bit more select. But it couldn't be more amusing. I have a good, working understanding with my "neighbors" now, but it was dreadful at first. I felt out of place, of course, and I was too much the de-crowned queen or de-frocked empress—or what you will. That got me nowhere, you may imagine, but everything is "jake" now. And what a vocabulary! *Jake* is harmless compared to hundreds of other new words—and old ones with new meanings. I'm becoming quite the "four-minute moll"—but not indelibly, I hope.

But—what difference does it make? If



I'm going to spend the rest of my life among these people I might just as well learn their language; even adopt it. It will be better for me. Easier.

At first I bought a lot of special privileges. Had my meals sent in—but no more. The others razzed the life out of me.

One girl has been here for over a year. We had a long debate—Resolved: That there is no use renewing your Ladies Home Journal subscription in jail, because you can't cook any of those impossibly ethereal desserts in a cell. She won the debate and then renewed anyway because there was a grand *murder* mystery running serially and she didn't want to miss it. Oh, even this life has its moments.

Listen, Laura, will you write to Hazel? All this business has gone to *her* head now. She's just waiting for my trial to "jump off." Don't let her. Make Ellen quit writing to her. It's dreadful. *I* can't do anything. The trial can't be stopped. I'd stay here years and never whimper if it would do the others any good—but it won't. Get busy, will you, Laura? Tell that child that there's nothing to it. I've written, but I'm a great one to preach after falling so hard myself. Well, it's all in a life-time. But I'd like to

keep Hazel's chin up. She says she feels weak and drowsy all the time. No pep. She thinks she might be anemic. Heavens! We're *all* anemic. I told her to go to a good doctor and eat spinach five times a day and quit writing to Ellen. What more? I don't know.

Enclosed is a note I got from Mary. It seems they have her bad spells down to a science now. They can chart them and know about when she's due for an outbreak. Lord deliver *me!* Just read it. I guess I was lucky after all. I only had *one* spell. It was a long time coming and it raised a lot of hell while I was at it—but it isn't coming back. I don't have to go like a bad dog to my kennel every night at eight. Laura, that must be awful. Poor Mary. I hope and pray they cure her. See what *you* can do.

Yours forever,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anne".

Mary Nolan Thompson's note to Anne was enclosed:

March 18.

Anne—you poor kid:

How you must be suffering. I know. They keep me behind bars most of the time now. I stay in the asylum two weeks—and go home *one*. “Hospital” they call it. I’ll bet it’s a worse jail than the one you are in. But it’s necessary. I have to be held.

But I’m not supposed to dwell on these things. I’m supposed to think of flowers and babies. Ye gods! Flowers and babies. Well, I’ll do even that if it’s going to keep me out of that place. I got your two or three letters long, long ago. Just after my one bad spell. You were so upset about Tom when you wrote them—but before you actually did anything.

Oh, Anne, you shouldn’t have done that. No matter what happened to *me*. How could there be any connection? This was something I couldn’t help. The horoscope had nothing to do with this. There’s been mental trouble in my family before. I have always felt compelled to take little things that didn’t belong to me. This has been coming on me for years and years. It was just that he *saw* it coming.

I am getting better. They know almost exactly when my spells will be worst and I

am locked up only then. And—as I say—I can go home one week each month. Derick has been so sweet about it all. No man wants a thief for a wife—nor a crazy woman either. But he sticks through it all, although I've offered time and again to give him his freedom.

I'm going to make my own future—once I get out of the doctor's care for good. Laura has given me so much confidence. She never believed in any kind of fortune telling and she poo-poo's the idea of me dying this summer. I never felt better in my life—physically—if I can only get the best of these *fits*.

Cheerio, Anne, dear. Keep cheerful. I know you'll be out of there soon and I'll bet you find some one to care for who is actually worthy of your love.

Yours 'til Niagara falls,

Mary

P.S. They won't let me eat *candy*—and that almost kills me!

Mary

April 8.

Laura, dear:

They've "carried him off to die"—what's that from? I don't remember. This time, anyway, it's *bet*. Me, that is.

I can see the frown. Maybe even a few tears. I can hear you say: "Hazel too!" But it seems there's something wrong with my tummy. Not enough spinach, I guess. Don't feel badly. Ellen has me pretty well "sold" on the advantages of the "spirit realm." Life wasn't so darn' pleasant for me. Especially after Martha left.

I'm weak as a cat. Too tired to write more. The nurse says I have to sleep anyway. Sorry I didn't get around to the monkeys for Bob. Give my love to *everyone*.

Good-bye, dear.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hazel".

April 16.

Miss Ellen Koons:

Are you not satisfied yet? Unless you stop writing your dreadful letters to sick people,

urging them to die, I will use every means in my power to have you stopped by law. You are doing a sinful, wicked injury to people you call your friends. You are blackening your own soul. It is beyond human reason to understand why you persist in your course.

There must be an end to this at once. Do not tell me it is none of my business. You have attempted to poison my own mind in regard to my baby's life. I have already delayed too long in stopping you. I chide myself with Hazel's death. I might have prevented that if I had taken steps to halt your letter writing a month ago.

I will await your answer one week. If you do not promise me faithfully and on your honor as a Delphian and a lady that you will refrain from writing more letters of this nature—I will immediately suggest to the Brooklyn authorities that your sanity be investigated.

Yours,

*Laura Stanhope*  
*(Mrs George C. O'Sullivan)*

Mrs. O'Neill

Dear Madam:

Although I have every reason to resent the tone of your last letter, I have learned tolerance and forgiveness. I can only pity you for clinging so closely to this life. We are all so much happier on the Other Side.

I am sure *you* will never hear from me again, after the letters you have been sending around to the Delphians. The *idea* of you accusing me of contributing to Hazel's illness. It was none of my doing that she starved herself to death. I never saw her from one month's end to the next.

You see, I have my friends too. One of your high-and-mighty circular letters was sent on to me long ago. I ignored it, of course, as I would have ignored this last threat of yours if I did not know that you are capable of doing exactly what you say you will. Naturally, I do not want the authorities applying their materialistic tests to me nor trying to analyze my spirituality with their clumsy, coarse, *human* methods.

I will, hereafter, confine my correspon-

dence to people who do not write to you.  
That will relieve your conscience at least.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Woods

May 7.

Dearest Laura:

They have delayed this terrible ordeal so many times that now, when it must be more than half over, I can scarcely realize what has gone on.

Was that girl with the gun myself? Who was it? My life before I entered the jail seems like a long dream. That was another person, not me at all. I didn't go to school with you at Mount Albans. That was someone else—a sister of mine, perhaps. Oh, it's dreadful. The court attendants chew tobacco,—some of them *gum*. The jury is a funny bunch. They don't look as if there was a spark of sympathy in a carload of



them. Listen to me. *Me*—the girl who hates sympathy. Well, when it's years on or off the end of your life you aren't so particular. I'd just like to wrest one eensty-teensty tear from *one* of their eyes. Not a chance!

One of them doesn't understand English, I'm sure. He sleeps all through the testimony. I'm counting on him for a disagreement. My lawyer is very hopeful. He thinks they'll acquit me entirely. I don't—but we won't go into that. Yogadachi said I'd get twenty years. I just heard that from Ellen. He didn't tell *me* that.

So far the testimony has favored me in one respect. Every one has given me a lily white character, God bless them. And plenty of others have blackened poor Tom.

We have no positive proof of infidelity though, so I'm pretty sure they won't think much of Mr. Paterson's "unwritten law" plea. Lots of people think he should have stuck to "temporary insanity" as Nellie Stone suggested.

The place is full of curious women every day. God! How they stare! If I could only get away from their eyes I'd be all right, but their ogling unnerves me. They must be the

fools who write me such crazy letters. I have hundreds, now, from all over the country. In some of them I am a saint, in others a "fiend from Hell." One man wants to marry me if I'm not convicted. Two others write that they'll come to the jail and have the ceremony performed with bars between us. Too much movies. Goes to their heads.

The State will start Tom's office force across the stand tomorrow. The eye-witnesses. I wish I could avoid that. I don't ever want to remember that day again—and tomorrow I'll hear about it *twenty* times at least.

So Hazel went the way the rest of us have. I thought she might break the chain by living. Well, that puts it squarely up to you. Bobby's birthday is the last of this month, isn't it? Oh, I know *you'll* break it. If you do I'll have hopes for anything. I'll even pray for a parole or a commutation or whatever you call it. Acquittal is too much to ask. I'll never get that. But if you get Bobby through till the fifth of June—I'll know this has all been the bunk. I'll know I was a goose-headed dupe without brains or character—and I'll know how to

live out the balance of my life, in prison or out, making up for what I've done.

If you get Bobby through the fifth of June—or even the third—all the rest of the girls will have to admit that they are wrong. Mary Thompson will *not* die in the asylum nor Ellen—but you weren't supposed to know about that. I think you should, however, and here it is.

I'm supposed to hear of Bobby's death two or three weeks after I am sentenced. That is supposed to prostrate me and send me to the prison hospital. About two weeks after that, Mary is supposed to burst a blood vessel in an especially violent attack of her mania—and Ellen Koons is to die the next day, he didn't say just how.

Hazel's anemia brings the chain up to my sentence. That will throw the last responsibility on you. Oh! Laura! If I had less confidence in you I would prevent sentence being passed on me. I could, you know. But life is still sweet. And I know you will be strong enough to carry on. Mary writes that she trusts you too. You *have* to save Bobby, for her sake as well as your own. "No chain is stronger than its weakest link"—and in this heavy one we have all made for ourselves—you are the weakest link.

Don't worry about me and take care of  
yourself as well as of Bobby.

Your old pal,

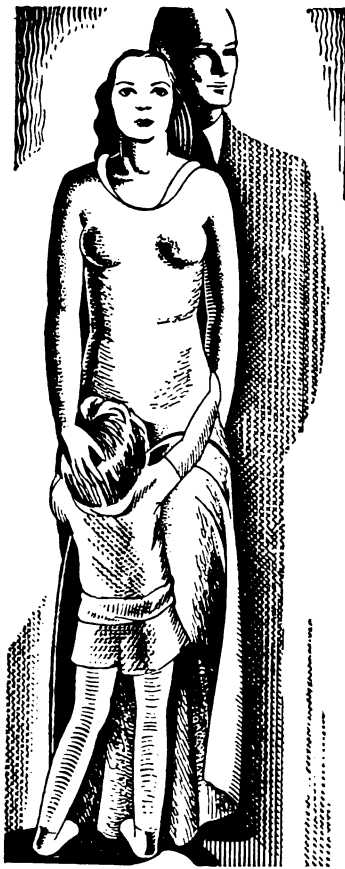
*Anne*

IO

Via Western Union:

TWENTY YEARS

ANNE



## CHAPTER SIX

**H**OW many is that? Mary, the maid who bruised so easily, is one. Bobby's mother is two. Ellen Koons is three. Helen Frey, four. Then—Mary *Nolan* Thompson, the twins and Anne Jessup, that's eight; Nellie, the vamp,

is nine; Hazel, ten and Martha, gone back to Denver, eleven. You have only two more coming but they're worth waiting for, Jo Turner and Ursula.

You get so you know them pretty well. You know 'em and like 'em, in spite of what goes on in their heads. Aw, damn! You feel sorry for them. *I* do. Take Martha, for instance. There she is, running around Denver in her car. All busted up. She's lost weight and she couldn't afford to. The Doctor doesn't know what's wrong with her. Even Jimmy can't understand it. She has him drive up the mountain as far as he can go and then she hikes up to the cabin alone. She touches the chairs Hazel sat in that first day and when she locks the door and starts down the hill, she remembers how she talked about men to get Hazel to express herself. And by the time she reaches the car again she looks forty.

We needn't worry about Hazel any more. All that fragile, tenuous beauty is buried, rigid, out of sight.

Nellie? Well, it's a funny thing about Nellie. She began drinking heavily after the trial; drinking and running around with just anybody. I suppose she was trying to forget that she should be in the penitentiary instead of Anne. A thing like that isn't easy to forget. It takes a lot of liquor and a lot of men. And the men were

highly unsatisfactory. In spite of Tom's pinched up chest, he was the only man who had ever really made Nellie want to sit quietly in the movies. She ratted around all over Ohio, the smaller cities, Toledo and Dayton and Columbus, but she always came back to Akron.

We'll hear more about Anne.

That big slob of a June Raskob hadn't meant any harm by talking to Hazel that night. She and May got the Interstate Time and at last accounts were knocking 'em off the seats in Texas, and steering clear of gymnasts and other show-openers.

Mary, we haven't forsaken. If Derick Thompson only had the jack he could get her out of that damned asylum. Ellen will always be with us. Even if somebody put some well-merited cyanide in that one's coffee, she'd linger on in spirit and probably haunt Laura. Helen, of course, moulders—and Frey still thinks of her occasionally.

No one feels sorry for Laura. The strength of her routs sympathy and her handsome head and firm hands make the average man feel silly trying to help her. See what I mean? Watch her turn that page and straighten the paper. No fussing or fiddling; and she's re-reading all those letters that caused so many tears.

Mary Kelly is worrying Bobby's dinner into him, in the kitchen—as George stalks into the

living room. George isn't quite tall enough to stalk very effectively, and his somewhat blobby features lack dignity in his home. At the office he gets away with murder, but in Laura's presence he doesn't stay masterful very long. He tries it now, putting the paper bag and his hat and gloves very deliberately on the table, frowning.

Laura watched him, the evening papers on her lap and on the floor at her side. "Good-evening, George."

He stood still in the center of the room, a new cigarette in his mouth, his fingers searching his vest for his lighter. "Good-evening, dear." He sat quickly beside her on the divan and put one arm around her waist. "Why didn't you tell me? What good am I if I don't help you?"

"I had no idea they'd make so much fuss about it, George. I didn't want it to get in the papers."

"They're full of it."

"Mr. Yeager said it was best to let them—to tell them everything, to keep them friendly."

"Yes, I suppose so. But, Laura, you shouldn't have tried to bear all this alone. You knew it when we went to Akron. You've had that powder since Christmas."

"Yes, dear."

"You aren't made of iron, Laura."

"No. But I was so afraid. I didn't want to



worry you. I was afraid if Bob took a cold or something we might both lose our heads.”

“Oh, he’s all right. Where is he now?”

“Eating. Mary will bring him in before she puts him to bed.”

George lit his cigarette. “I’m glad it’s come out. I’m glad you finally brought the whole thing into the open—it may save Jo and Ellen and the others.”

“It’s up to us.”

“Up to Bobby, eh?”

Laura nodded thoughtfully. “Just think; if he *should* have an accident tomorrow—how dreadful it would be.”

“We must not let him out of our sight a second.”

“No. I called his party off.”

“Good. . . . Did you tell the police about that telephone call?”

“Yes. They think it is somebody trying to alarm us, set our nerves on edge.”

“But who would it be? The way I read this, the man who plotted it all is dead.”

“So he is.”

“Then who could be trying to scare us?”

“I have my suspicions.”

“Who?”

“Ursula.”

“The dark girl?”

"Yes. I don't know how she *could* be connected with it, but somehow I'm sure she is. In the first place, she's the only Delphian who didn't have some disaster threatened for her—and she never writes to any of us."

"And she hated all of you for giving her the cold shoulder in school."

"That's just it. I think this is her revenge for the way we treated her."

"That's far-fetched, Laura."

"The whole thing is far-fetched if you want to say that. That's what Mr. Yeager said. Nobody *could* be so clever. Nobody could know for sure that all the girls would do what their horoscopes told them."

"No, not *know*; but a clever novelist like Danbury might have been fairly certain."

"It *is* uncanny the way he sees through you. I've read several of his books. He certainly knows women."

"Perhaps they planned it together."

"She could have been his secretary or something."

"His mistress, perhaps. I don't know anything about the man."

"I'll tell you what I think, George, frankly; or what I *did* think until I began to suspect Ursula. Danbury was a great psychologist. He knew to a turn of the hand and a bat of the eye just

how people would act under a given set of circumstances. His books prove it. Well, I think he got tired making imaginary characters do as he bade them and he started a chain of incidents in real life as a sort of testimonial to himself, a monument to his own great cunning."

"And then didn't wait to see if it worked? No;—no, Laura. I don't think so. Look. Any man so egotistical that he would plot such a thing could not kill himself until he had watched the results of his plan long enough to get his kick."

"But he was *sure* it would work. He didn't have to wait to see."

"But he would have to see it going on to get the thrill. Until the thing began to function it was only an idea."

"No, George. He found the secret of perpetual motion. You know? When the last piece of the machine is put in place, the wheels start going around; that's the theory, isn't it?"

"I guess so."

"Well, he built his machine. He had everything set. Then he threw himself into the spot reserved just for that—and the machine went on. Human minds were his cogwheels, pride and jealousy and passion were his belts and shafts and cams or whatever you call them. He has won—in a sense. I don't think his machine has broken down even now——"

“You mean you think Bobby will——”

“No! I don’t mean that. What I mean is that one of his wheels or weights or whatever you want to call us,—the links in his chain,—has developed a ‘flaw’. The ‘flaw’, in this case is our strength—yours and mine.”

“Yours.”

“And yours! Don’t you see? Our strength in refusing to function as cogs or links is going to break his machine, but if he had selected the metal a little more carefully—if he had put a different woman or a different family in this place instead of us—it would have run merrily on.”

“Wait!—there’s the secret! Wait. It’s getting away.” George shut his eyes and rubbed his forehead with one palm. “Carry that idea out, dear. See what I mean? We—that is, you—are the honey-combed casting. He put a honey-combed casting into his machine—*why?* He had no trouble finding perfect metals for the other sections. Helen, Hazel, Mary, and so on—Ellen—they have all served. *And he knew you were honey-combed!* He knew you were liable to fail him. *He admitted it by sending you poison through the mail!* That corrosive sublimate is a piece of string, a crude repair, chewing gum, used to patch his machine. And you think he applied the patch before he died? *Never!* No man with

that much cunning would destroy himself knowing that he had a cracked and patched 'casting' in a machine as delicate as the one he made. No, Laura. Danbury is not guilty."

"Why, George! You're a full grown detective. *Listen* to you."

They both laughed and their arms twined about each other.

Mary brought Bobby to them in his pajamas for a good-night kiss. "You can go and sit down," Mary said. "He's sleepy and I'll be right back."

## 2

"And I know more," said George between spoonfuls of soup. "I missed my calling. I'm going to ask this Kagell—Yagell——"

"Yeager."

"Yeager! I'm going to ask him for a job. See here. . . . No matter how guilty Danbury looks—the facts can be found proving him innocent. There's a close connection. He may have been a party to it, as you say, but I don't believe he did it alone. If he did—now, mind you—if he did, he had a peach of a reason for not switching 'castings'. From his point of view, I mean. If

he went ahead, took that one long shot, trusting his 'patch' to hold, he had a very good reason for wanting *you* and no one else but you in that particular place in his machine."

"Well," Laura exclaimed, following her husband's reasoning and quickly gaining some of his enthusiasm, "the reason's clear. Knowing people as he does, and knowing all us girls as he obviously did—he knew I would be fighting him every step of the way. He may have thought he needed that resistance up to a certain point; then it had to be wiped out. I would be silenced if Bobby died. I couldn't fight another minute if I succumbed to the same influence which had swayed the others."

"Yes. There's *that*," George mused, "and more. By winning over his greatest resistance he achieves another *coup* almost as great as predicting his own death. As you say, he needed your opposition to a certain point to give his machine balance. Then, the same weight had to be shifted—*because his machine was slowing down!* Do you see? He needed the weight of *your* conversion, the conversion of his greatest doubter—through Bobby's death—to give him impetus for another climb. If we could get a chart of his predictions we'd find—I'm positive—that he has dotted these *coups* at regular intervals all along the path his 'engine' is to run. Why, Laura,

if every 'casting' had been sound, if he hadn't picked one piece of bad metal, he could have depopulated the world! Suppose, instead of starting with the Delphians he had started with Congress. That's far-fetched, of course, but think of the panic it would cause. Wall Street aflame! The President goes mad!"

"Hush, George. You frighten me."

"Isn't it a magnificent plot? You can't help admiring his brains."

"But, George. Tomorrow isn't over yet. It isn't even here."

"You mean Bobby?"

"Yes!"

George looked up at Mary. "How was the baby when you left him, Mary? Seem all right to you?"

"Well—he *was* a little flushed."

"What's he been eating?"

"His *diet!* The Saints preserve us, it's as much as a body's life'd be worth to give him anything else."

"You haven't given him anything else; have you?"

"I have not."

"Suppose you run up and see if he's all right, Mary. If he's awake take his temperature."

Run upstairs! Mary could not keep her impatience with such foolishness from showing on

her face. She mumbled up them instead: "His tempichoor! Sure, the lad *has* no tempichoor! Where'd he get it, I'd like to know."

The telephone startled her. She answered the upstairs extension. "Hello?"

"Mrs. O'Neill, please."

"She's eating her dinner."

"Well, tell her it's Fanny; Mrs. Brennan."

"Hold the wire, please."

. . . . .  
"Hello, Fanny."

"Did I interrupt your dinner? I'm so sorry, dear, but I couldn't *wait*. Aren't you the one? Getting in all the papers!"

"I'm the one all right. It isn't very pleasant."

"N-o-o-o. My goodness! And you never told me anything about it. I didn't think you were that kind, Laura."

"I—well—I didn't feel much like talking about it."

"No? Why not? Gracious, that man is *good*; isn't he? Madame Bell *never* gets anything so accurate. What's his address again?"

"Whose address?"

"Why, this astrologer! Laura, I've been wanting to have my horoscope read by a really good one for ever so long."

"But, Fanny, he's dead."

"Dead?"



"Why, certainly. Didn't you read the paper?"

"Oh—ye-e-s. I read it. . . . But I didn't see that. Gee; I better read it again. Well! Isn't that amazing?"

"He—he was so good he predicted his own death."

"He *did*?!!"

"That's in the paper, Fanny. You go read it again."

"I guess I'll have to. . . . Gee, what'd he have to die for? It's all your fault, Laura O'Neill. If you'd told us about it before he died I could have had him read *my* horoscope, too."

"Fanny!"

"Well—I think it's mean."

"Fanny, you don't know what you're saying."

"Laura, you just aren't human. That's the trouble with you. You don't believe in anything. You're too sensible."

"Fanny—my dinner's getting cold. Do you mind?"

"Oh, go on back and finish your dinner. Mike and I are coming over after a while."

"Oh, not tonight, Fanny. Please? Understand; won't you? George and I have so many—the—the police are going to be here. It wouldn't be pleasant. . . . See? Do you see, dear? It just isn't the night."

"The *police*? The police at *your* house? . . .  
What *for*?"

"Why—eh—in—in connection with the case."

"Oh, that."

"You understand, don't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so. All right. Tomorrow then.  
I'll come over by myself in the morning. . . .  
Say, I've got a cook at last!"

"That's fine, Fanny. Excuse me now, won't  
you?"

"Go on and eat."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye; see you in the morning." Fanny  
turned from the telephone to her husband. "The  
*police* are going to be at Laura and George's,"  
she said. "Would you ever have believed it?"

. . . . .  
"Fanny Brennan," Laura told George. "She  
wants Yogadachi to read her horoscope."

"The damn' fool!"

"Did he know women?"

George wagged his head. "And *how*!"

Bob's temperature was normal. "The tele-  
phone woke him but he dropped right off with  
the thermoniter in his mouth," Mary reported  
acidly.

Laura finished her chocolate pudding. "How do we know he *hasn't* plotted that, George? How do we know Danbury wasn't plotting to have this endless chain spread all over the world? It would have been preposterous to *start* with Congress, but he has started with something within reach,—the Delphians. He starts with a girl's club, a group of susceptible women. George! . . . I just thought. Jo Turner is in Washington. I didn't give her letter to Mr. Lenz. It was too personal; too intimate. . . . You mustn't condemn her, George. She's—she's—being kept by a high official in the French legation."

"No!"

"Yes. . . . And I just thought she might be the link leading to something bigger. I'll *bet* the plot extends to Congress and beyond!"

"Mob hysteria!" George contributed. "You know? Once it got started nothing on earth could stop it. . . . Let's wire Jo and have her ask, in an offhand way, if her boy friend believes in astrology or if any of those fellows have had their horoscopes drawn up."

"Good! Georgie, you're a wizard."

"I? Why, *you* thought of all this. I didn't."

He kissed her tenderly on the forehead and they left the dishes to Mary. "What a woman! God's been good to me, Laura; giving me you."

"Hush. He was good to *me*, rather."

"Let's write a telegram to Jo."

"Let's."

"Where's her letter? The one you wouldn't let them print."

"You won't be angry when you read it?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, Jo's so . . . *modern*."

"I like her spunk."

May 6

Dear Laura:

What a lot of trouble you take for others! Thankless pack! What would any of them do for you? What have any of them ever done for you to make you champion them at so much pains to yourself? I know you'll say: "Jo's hard and bitter."—but I know what I'm talking about. I've *lived*, Laura. I know people. Why, just look at *me*. You write me this long epistle full of the noblest thoughts and best advice. What did I ever do to deserve it? I haven't written to you more than three times in five years! Let them die if they want to. There isn't one

good sound brain in the lot of them. It's sad. I *know* it's sad, but I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. I have my date with the grim reaper on July 4th, pinwheel day—and nigger-chasers.

But I don't think I'll keep it. And I'm not telling any one about it nor brooding over it. It's a laugh to me. I'm having too much fun. Lots of it is fun you wouldn't approve of, old dear, but it's still fun.

How do you do it? One husband, one boy-child, one home, one town. Yes—*one* town—even if it is Hollywood, or nearly. It would drive me crazy. Do you ever get east? Don't you ever come to a *city*?—to see the street cars? How we could fly around—you and I! Fly *high*, too, if you liked. And I know you *would* like. What a girl! You're wasted out there—utterly wasted. Don't you remember the good times we used to have—you and I? And how you were always afraid the boys would go too far! And I was afraid they wouldn't. You and I would have made a great team, Laura, if only you had a little more—just a little—the courage of your convictions. You *want* to live but you're afraid to.

You know why I haven't written. I live a life that would make your good old soul

shrivel. I love you too much to hurt you like that—and it's self defense too. You'd write me long, Billy Sunday, Camp-Fire-Girl letters trying to save what's left of *my* soul from whatever is left of *your* Hell. Or does it still blaze freely?

The present incumbent is an attaché of the French embassy. A little hairy—but how he knows his wines and cheeses. That makes up for the hair. Dining, as *he* knows how to dine, and loving as he knows how to love make up for almost anything. I tried depilatory on his chest but it pulled so he wouldn't let me finish the rest of his body. Honestly, Laura, hugging Simont is just like getting into your fur coat wrong-side-out, only more fun. Try it right after your bath—only don't go too far.

Do you hear from Hazel? I used to see her occasionally, but haven't heard in some time now. That damned star-reader hasn't got her too, has he? Well, what can you do? Forget it, is my advice, and let Ellen Koons hang herself. You know, I didn't write to this Camden sage until the bottom fell out of the market. Then all the comfort I got was that my money wouldn't do me any good after next fourth of July! Cheerful? Well, *I'm* laughing. And I got out of the

market with my clothes on, too. If I want to leave them in some Bear's apartment that's *my* business, but I'll be damned if I'm going to leave them in his *office*, hanging over his ticker for margin. Not Jo Turner!

Well, girl, that will be all. I haven't signed the name to so many words since I wrote the class prophecy. I'd hate to read *that* over now, after all that has happened. One thing I remember I said—Ellen Koons had bought a pair of second-hand wings from an Angel and was flying over your private day nursery where a thousand babies—all colors—played in the sand. Not bad—for me.

Adieu, ma chère, répondez tout de suite, s'il vous plaît.



"Well," said George, "I—I can see why you didn't give it to the papers. . . . She—she's a peculiar girl; isn't she?"

"Peculiar?"

“Yes.”

“Yes. She has her own ideas about life. She’s always been like that.”

“The Swami certainly didn’t make much impression there.”

“No. And yet—if Bobby died even Jo would be impressed. You see, that was written before she knew about Hazel.”

“Yes, I see it was. . . . Well, let’s ask her. Shall we?”

They sent Jo a telegram:

I HAVE TURNED SWAMI INFORMATION OVER TO POLICE HERE INVESTIGATION STARTED STOP WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF ANY INTIMATE FRIENDS OF YOURS BELIEVE IN ASTROLOGY STOP SEND COMPLETE DETAILS PLEASE

LAURA

## 4

“What does she mean, dear, where she says, ‘why do you take all this trouble?’ ”

“Oh, she got one of my circular letters. Last March I sent them to all the Delphians. They didn’t do any good. Here’s one of them.”



March 21.

Dear old friend:

As former President of the Delphian Society I feel it is my duty to write every one of you and ask what you may know about an astrologer who called himself Swami Yogadachi. Have you ever met him? Had you ever heard of him before the middle of last September?

Doubtless you received a circular and a letter from him at that time. Most of the Delphians did. He predicted that you would soon hear from old friends—and in a few days or a week you received a round-robin.

Now—did you send him any money? Did he draw up your horoscope? Did he predict unpleasant events in your future? In several cases he did—and you probably know of the three catastrophes that have so far “come true.”

I am writing now in the fervent hope that you will rid your mind of this awful influence. Some thoughtless members have been so strongly affected by the circumstances that they are furthering the harm these “fortunes” have already wrought by ill considered correspondence. Won't you *please*, as loyal Delphians, not only forget that three of us have suffered horribly, for-

get that many more of us have had a malediction pronounced on our households, forget that you, yourself, have had some calamity predicted in your own life. It is absolutely necessary that we *all* do this. Let us not even *tell* each other what "the stars" are said "to hold for us." Let us stamp out this insidious mental cancer that has been nourished too long.

As you read this, please do not think I am reflecting upon your own strength of mind. You will, yourself, be able to throw off the dread and even the thought of this man's predictions for you. But all of us are not strong. I can name no one, of course, but we are all Delphians together; all old chums. Let us by all means uphold the ideals we swore to at Mount Albans—not so many years ago.

Please give this matter your most sincere support. I do not want to know what this Swami has told you will occur. I *do* want to know if you ever heard of him before September of last year. Had you ever met him under any of his numerous pen-names? Had you ever written to him—perhaps praising his books? Any information regarding his moral character or past life will be very much appreciated. Any informa-

tion regarding his possible association with any Delphian or possible access to old Mount Albans records will be very helpful.

I am your sincere and devoted friend,

*Laura Stanhope*  
(Mrs George C. O'Neill)

“That was the letter that upset Ellen so much. She knew it was aimed at her.”

“But you got no information?”

“Not a thing. And it didn’t even slow them up. They kept right on writing. But—as I told you, Ursula was the only Delphian who didn’t answer.”

The telephone rang every few minutes all evening, until Mary stuffed cardboard in the upstairs bell. All the O’Neills’ friends wanted to talk about their “case”.

Wasn’t it strange? and Did they really believe the man had plotted it all before he died? and How was Bobby? and Keep them posted! Until it was, surprisingly, one o’clock.

“It’s Bobby’s birthday, George.” By unspoken,

mutual consent, they rose and walked to the door, fingers twined. "What's in that package?"

"What package? . . . Oh, that. Why, Allen gave it to me; it's a ball for Bob."

They went upstairs and stood beside the sleeping boy, their arms around each other's waists.

"Just think, Laura. If our reasoning is right. If this plot is as thick as it seems, the whole future of America may be hanging on every breath that little fellow draws."

"I know. . . . Of course, we don't know yet," she said softly. *Why would Allen give Bobby a ball?*

"No, we don't know. Probably it isn't as far reaching as we imagine. But it isn't impossible. Just think—a plan to depopulate the earth, hanging on Bobby's life—for just a few days."

"It frightens me, George."

Bobby moved his little lips and frowned in his sleep. "The light bothers him," Laura said. "Let's go to bed."

As they reached the door and turned for one last look at the boy, he sat up suddenly in bed, his round little face distorted, his eyes still closed. They saw this pitiful sight, but George was already turning the switch. The room went utterly black and from the little bed came a piercing scream of terror.

"The light, George! Quick—the *light!*"

# PART THREE





## CHAPTER SEVEN

**S**IMONT, *mon cher*, do you believe in astrology?"

"Astrology? Simont?" He cocked his head; he pursed his lips; he shoved his fists deep in the pockets of his dressing gown and rolled

his eyes toward the ceiling. "Do I believe in astrology?"

Don't look at Jo just yet, she's still in bed.

"Well—*un peu, un peu*—Some—perhaps? Why do you care?"

"A friend of mine wants to know."

. . . "A *friend!*" The diplomat threw his arms in the air and stood in petrified Gallic astonishment, his fingers spread, his brows arched high, his feet wide apart. "*Your* friends would like to know if *I* believe in astrology!"

You can look now, she's pulled the spread around her. That yellow paper in her hand is Laura's telegram. . . . No, no, no. In her *band*.

Jo laughed at him. "Yes, my dear, they ask me." She held the telegram toward him and when he reached for it, pulled it away, proffering lips instead. That over, she let him read it.

"Goose! You gave me a start."

"You thought I'd been telling people about you?"

"I couldn't believe it."

"Of course not."

"It is nearly eleven, my darling, and I have an appointment at ten-thirty. That leaves me only two hours to bathe you."

"Have you been waiting for that, Simont? You might have been only *one* hour late if you had told me."



"One hour is not late. One hour after the appointed time is—for me—punctual. But, come; won't you?"

"Not this morning, pet. You run along."

"I run along? My beautiful! No bath?"

"Not this morning. Today I want to be clean!"

"I will scrrrub!"

"You wouldn't. And if you did, I shouldn't like it."

"But I've waited. I've kept three men sitting in my office!"

"Hurry to them now. . . . I mean it."

Only then was Simont convinced sufficiently to let his features fall. "*Mon Dieu*, what a woman! . . . Some day I will bite you. Josephine," he pronounced it as Napoleon did, "some day I shall bite you—so hard you cannot sit down for a week."

She sailed a pillow at him.

## 2

Before her mirror, Jo went into revery. The telegram from Laura prompted it. This face before her was the same one she had worn at Mount Albans. It hadn't changed much. Had

Laura's? What changes faces? Time? Life? Well, Time, maybe; and suffering. From a drawer she took a picture of her mother and looked back and forth from the photograph to the glass, comparing her own well-finished complexion with the tough, Polish hide of the older woman. Josephine's lines would be in the same places when they came. That much she could see. But would her eyes *die* like that? Her mouth sink in, toothlessly? Some of those lines were caused by an ill-fitting plate, and, bad as it was, acquired too late in life. Well, *those* Jo could avoid.

She gazed at her wide, brown eyes and tried to learn their secret. What did men see in them? In any eyes, for that matter. They were always talking about them. "Your eyes are this; your eyes are that." Once in a while they talked about lips or teeth or hair,—but mostly about eyes. "Those windows of the soul!" Jo made a face at herself and winked. *What* a window! Like the window of a toilet on a train. You couldn't see through them. Not *hers*.

"Poor thing," she said to her mother. "Poor, hard-working thing. Why haven't you got good sense?" For Jo's mother did not have good sense; that is, she would not take money from Jo, which is the same thing. People who will not take money which is offered without strings of any kind are out of their head. But Mrs. Walther was

one of those people who think some money is dirtier than some other money. She thought Jo's money couldn't be cleaned. She thought her own pay at the Polish bakery was as pure as the flour she sieved for bread. Maybe it was. I'm not going to argue with her. In the first place, I can't speak Polish. Jo could, and *she* didn't get anywhere in ten years of impassioned and temperamental raving.

The last penny the old lady took from Jo was her daughter's first week's pay when she went to work in the Astor barber shop. It wasn't more than a few dollars. Jo tried to make her take twenty more. This was before Mount Albans; Josephine was not yet eighteen, had—in fact—to lie about her age to get the job. She had to lie about her age but not about her looks. They lied for themselves.

"Where did you get all this money, Josephine?" Her mother had seen a twenty dollar bill only twice before in her life and not until she held this one a moment had she ever touched one.

"At work, of course."

"You got a raise?"

"No! *Tips*. The money's in the tips. That's why every manicurist in town wants to work at the Astor; the tips. You get more there than any other shop in the city."

“Tips? What’s tips?”

You see? That’s how it started. Mrs. Walther couldn’t believe those tips were expressions of gratitude for work well done. Once, when a wedding cake had turned out especially fine, for Alderman Schurz’s daughter, His Honor had come in to know who baked it—and had given her a *five* dollar bill. That was all right. But these tips . . . for filing nails?

She didn’t understand it; she knew Jo wasn’t bad; but she didn’t understand it. The secret lay in the proximity of male and pretty female, she was sure of that, but not until she had scrutinized the neighborhood cuticle softener at her work-bench did the light dawn. A knee was being vigorously rubbed as the old lady passed the door and looked in. . . . This, Josephine did, to millionaires!

Rather backwoodsey, that her gums should strive to meet about that. She took her plates from their tumbler the moment she got in the house. She couldn’t eat with them, but they were splendid for clenching. She clenched them at Jo when the girl came home. “Knee rubber!”

“What?” It was Jo’s Astor manner, a little lofty.

“Leg pusher!”

“What are you talking about?”

“Tips, you get.”

"Oh, mother, stop." The girl burst into smiles. "I'm going out with the best looking fellow I ever saw!"

"For pushing *knees* they pay you." She followed her daughter from room to room, as Jo undressed, bathed and dressed again.

"What you takin' a bath for?"

"Huh?"

"What you got to be so clean for?"

"My God, to—to be *clean*. I don't want to smell!"

"Who's gonna smell you?"

Josephine laughed and hugged her. "Don't you worry, mother. Your Jo knows her way around. *Nobody's* goin' to smell me. Nobody's goin' to touch me."

"You be a good girl, Jo."

"You bet your life I will. I'm givin' out nothin'. Smiles don't cost me a cent."

But it was not the tips alone which attracted the very cream of the profession to this particular shop. It was the catches. The management still has a hell of a time keeping girls because word's gone all over Iowa, Montana and parts of Oklahoma that you can *marry* the Astor manicurists with a pretty good chance of being right.

Breckenridge Madison was not, however, from the Open Spaces. The Breckenridge tells you

that. No, not Virginia either; Baltimore. But did he fall? No matter how long Jo Turner lives, she will never be able to forget the descent of Breck. It was her first major engagement and she had the whole Rebel Army in complete rout after the first skirmish.

That first evening she met him on the mezzanine. It wasn't permitted, but you could get away with it once. She couldn't let him call for her—not in that hole. But he did, finally, see her home, and he met her mother, and that was a test of sincerity. And Breck stood it. At lunch the day after he'd seen where she came from, he held *her* hand without looking at her nails and talked about his people.

Jo doesn't know yet, not even now, when July fourth is supposed to be her last day on earth, she isn't sure whether she ever loved Breck or not. It was glamorous, being wooed by a son of the Old South. It was glamorous just being wooed—plain. But it's doubtful if she felt any considerable fraction of the grand passion which had him so inflamed. Because, she didn't resent the tone nor the tenor of his conversation at luncheon that day and for the next three days as he informed her gently and gradually that he couldn't take her home as his wife under the circumstances. Praises be, however, the circumstances could be altered. Breck wouldn't have her ex-

cept as his wife, he was goofy that way, so it was up to them to make a wedding possible.

First off, she must quit her job. Quit holding other men's hands and running the *risk*, his word, of having them touch her—under the table—or otherwise insult her. Then, she must go to school; some decent academy for the finishing of young ladies where the varnishing would fix her up rather well. Then—ahem—then, if she could be—er—an orphan, say—of course he would always *provide* for her mother.

When Jo remembers all that, she's pretty sure the Descent of Breck was entirely one-sided. She hadn't loved him at all. But it's difficult for her to reconcile that finding with another event, the first of a series. For, if she did not love him, her code now says, she shouldn't have been "overcome by his nearness"?—will that do? Of course, having been "overcome" once, no apology is needed for the series. . . . But—that first time——

Let us say she suffered a temporary love as Anne's lawyer might have pleaded that she suffered temporary insanity. At any rate, that was the state of affairs through Jo Turner's Mount Albans period. Breck was the "guardian" mentioned heretofore, and Breck it was who taught the eyes of the Year-book photograph whatever it is they show they know. And up to that

time, he had been Jo's only instructor. Breck, let us say, taught her to weave paper baskets with little colored strips. She received her B.A. from Simont.

In between lies what Jo referred to in her letters to Laura. Between Breck and Simont lies life. L?

### 3

Jo didn't lose Breck as they do in the movies. She threw him away. More evidence that she hadn't loved him at all. When he had made a lady of her—as nearly, at least, as the raw material would permit, and for all practical purposes the product served admirably—she was through with him. A great one for being through with people, Jo turned out to be. She was through with Turner less than two years later. She buried him. He was dead, of course.

But that's the way it went. For one reason or another, some of them known only to the girl herself, Jo was through with man after man. Not vulgarly, if you'll take that on faith until I can explain. Not crudely. Jo was, in reality, that woman you hear so many ladies say they'd be if they ever put their minds to it. She used her head. Careful.



You've sat through that. Some broad-minded old hen says: "Well, I *can't* understand a prostitute's psychology. If I were going to do *that* I'd use some intelligence about it. I'd buy the most becoming clothes I could find and I'd be seen in only the smartest places. I'd get me a millionaire, an apartment on the Drive and do it right, but these common little chippies! They just have no brains." You've heard them; you've heard them. Well—here's Jo. She did just that, and with a manner.

Turner left her two good-sized insurance policies, a little business which the lawyers liquidated at a small profit to her and one of those life-long leases on a Drive apartment full of solid furniture. Only one car, but a Cadillac, and the garage paid for a full year in advance.

To Jo's inborn urge for self-improvement, Breck had added Mount Albans; to that, Turner added paintings and furniture. So that Havemeyer found in Jo a companion he could take anywhere. He did. It was in some such place that they met Broun, who added jewels and old fire-arms to Jo's collection. And in pursuit of his hobby they went abroad.

In Paris, Broun lost her to a French banker—who contributed heavily in cash. Meanwhile, Jo had been reading. So that long before the round-robin started, Jo was a fairly complete woman, if

self-made. Horse flesh, she knew, and precious stones; guns, furniture and paintings, we have seen; she fenced and danced and played any game, any game at all, for money, marbles or chalk.

She toyed with the notion of marrying the French Cræsus. She was ripe for a radical change. It was at this time, under the ægis of this Brumpere, that she met Simont. He didn't impress her at first. He was too young to be very wealthy or exciting. His inventiveness was not displayed in the drawing room. She left her mark inadvertently through thus abusing the man's ego.

One night a group of them wore Brumpere's dignity down with cup after cup from his own cellar and they ran the gauntlet of *rue Jaune* amid hoots and insults and some desiccated vegetables and half-dead rats, all hurled at them by an annoyed *habitante*. They ended up in the basement of the Bal Tabarin, safe enough, but very gay, if you like sailors and what sailors like for entertainment. And there, picking half tomatoes and other filth off her suit, Jo found Boy.

Boy had a name, William or Jack, it doesn't matter. Boy, she called him always. And a more worthless piece of tripe for Jo to waste time upon has not yet been discovered. Simont wasn't in that party. He had, in fact, already sailed for

the United States, for Washington. This kid was from a suburb of Detroit. He'd held a dozen jobs, performing none of their duties well, from leader of a jazz orchestra to running a labelling machine in a cough syrup factory. Now he was working at being an expatriate, and flopping as usual. Through the hilarity she saw his imitation of a bored and drunken American poet at his beer-stained café table in Paris. His fishy eyes never moved from a certain point on her skirt. She looked there herself but found nothing of interest. She tried to make him raise his eyes to hers. He did, finally, with affected languor and world-weariness. She smiled at him. He answered, tiredly—but not so tiredly. A little later she managed to pause long enough at his side to say: "Wait for me."—which doesn't take long.

When the party broke up, and she hastened it, putting Papa Brumpere to bed with a pat on the woolly noddle, she flew back. Boy, as I told you, was a flop. The evidence: that he was there, waiting. He hadn't even imagination enough to pretend to be asleep. Well, Jo took one last haul from the Papa and moved into the little louse-coop Boy had been living in.

Do you remember J. S. Fletcher's story, *The Beatific Vision*, about an idiot set out like a plant each day in the sun? and a circus parade goes by? It was written before he found out that you

could make money if you didn't write that way. I always remember that story when I think of Jo taking up with this Boy. She must have been just like a circus parade to that idiot. But it was not over nearly so soon. Connoisseur of gems and pistols, she had not yet mastered men. She could rule them, sway them, but she could not assay them beforehand. She took Boy for a genuine *Adam* (not Eve's husband) and he was only a tenth rate poseur.

She bought him clothes and she made him move. She taught him what a bed was for, but he never believed her. She left him one day, crying, two *mille francs* notes in his hand, as abruptly as she had come. Only one part of the episode is to Jo's credit, she withheld her right name. She told him she was Bellas Hess! And—oh, yes—she found out why he concentrated on that one spot on her skirt. It was the one smart trick he knew. Even the dumbest pooch can roll over. Some actor had told him, in Detroit, that no woman could stand to have anyone stare at her there. No matter how thoroughly she knew herself to be covered, if you looked long enough, stared vacantly, unseeing, she would first look down, then either move her purse or fold her hands in her lap or drop her handkerchief, or something. Not even this actor knew why it was.

Then Jo was bored, so she came back to the United States, on the theory, perhaps, that no megrim is so great that it will not seem comparative comfort after you pound your head with a hammer for a while. But she spared herself by stopping off at her apartment in New York City instead of entering her native land at once.

She did make that one trip to the coast, driving all the way herself, stopping over long enough in Indianapolis to get an hotel willed to her for services rendered but not billed. And—the Turner luck held. The man died while she was in California. It was hurrying back to settle his estate that kept her from looking up Laura.

That's Josephine. A fortunate lady of fortune. Loving parents had not sent her to boarding school to learn to paint china. Breck sent her there to learn to be his wife. Why to Mount Albans? Jo, herself, wondered. There was nothing like that in the school catalog. But somehow she had learned to be a wife, picked it up here and there.

We see her contemplating her unblemished face, her heart still whole, memory of Laura and

Mount Albans making her wistful and her mother's wrinkles making her sad.

Jo put the ugly picture back in the drawer and ran one bare foot up and down the spine of Romanov, a borzoi, at her feet. His eyes rolled up at her but his long head only clung closer to the rug in slothful content. "Hey, Your Highness, wake up. You glued there?" His tail beat twice on the floor and again relaxed. "You like it here? You think this is going on forever?" He blinked. Her maid entered, holding out a red bathing cap to Jo. "It isn't, Romey. I can see you're tired of it." That's right; blame it on the dog. The long, slender nose turned toward her, perhaps in astonishment. Tired of this? "It's our move, Romey. You better start packing."

## 5

Laura held her sobbing baby in her arms, rocking.

Petrified with fear, cold beads of perspiration dotting his brow, George stood rigidly against the wall. Then the sobs became softer and Bobby coughed, a little sleepy cough. Laura smiled over the rumpled head at her husband. "With so much depending on his little body—it's no won-

der he has bad dreams," she said. Mary was sent back to bed.

Bobby was first up next morning—as usual—his bad dream forgotten in the fun of a new day. His analyzed and tested breakfast was whisked from sight on the wings of the sturdiest of appetites.

His parents left him under the long-trusted eye of Mary, and went to keep an appointment with Yeager.

Information had been pouring in all night, all morning. There were telegrams from every quarter—and each promised further data by mail.

New York said:

KOONS HELD BROOKLYN TEMPORARILY GAVE NAMES ADDRESSES WOMEN DELPHIANS AFFECTED STOP ERRATIC RELIGIOUS FANATIC NOT REGARDED HARMFUL STOP GIVE US CHARGE OR MUST RELEASE STOP CAMDEN GIVES US BRONX ADDRESS DANBURY SECRETARY INVESTIGATING STOP COMPLETE NEWSPAPERS DANBURY DEATH AND INVESTIGATION TOGETHER WITH OFFICIAL REPORTS LEAVING AIR MAIL NOW STOP SHALL WE QUESTION KOONS NAMES IN VI-

CINITY WIRE FULL CASE AND  
SUSPECTS STOP HOLDING MARY  
THOMPSON HOSPITAL INCOMMUNICADO  
EXCEPT HUSBAND STOP  
MARY RATIONAL SAYS FREY  
MONTREAL IS LEAD STOP NEVER  
HAS BEEN SATISFACTORY EXPLA-  
NATION DANBURY CAR LEFT  
LOWER FIFTH AVENUE DAY OF HIS  
DEATH STOP HIS CHAUFFEUR MISS-  
ING SINCE THAT DAY STOP INTER-  
VIEWING PUBLISHERS TODAY

Montreal said:

FREY HOUSE OPENED YESTER-  
DAY BY SERVANTS STOP MR. FREY  
ARRIVES FROM LONDON TODAY  
GLAD TO OBLIGE

Si Lenz, the all-but-bald veteran of the *Examiner*, was exercising the special prerogatives and privileges of an old intimate of the Chief's. "I been over to the library," he said, "and I got in touch with the biggest astrologer in Point Loma by telephone."

Yeager waited. . . . "Well?"

"I don't think Danbury was Yogadachi."

"No?"





HER HEAD ROSE SLOWLY AND THEIR EYES MET . . .



"Nope."

"Why not? A.P. and U.P. both listed it among his pen-names."

"Um-hm; I know. . . . But Gustafson, that's the Point Loma big-shot, says that Swami Yogadachi was a woman."

"No!"

"I should waste breath on you! . . . An' at the library, in the papa of all reference books—there is no Swami Yogadachi listed as an author . . . United States Catalogue, they call it."

"That doesn't prove anything," Yeager objected. "What do you infer?"

"That Danbury was a *writer*! If he was also an astrologer, no matter what he called himself, he'd have published a book under that name. He never did."

"It's a good notion, but it's not conclusive."

"Every other name he had—six of them—all show *books*," Si stuck to his point.

"And Gustafson—at Point Loma—says Yogadachi was a woman? It's that brown Jane, Si. What else did he say?"

"He's trying to locate some letters from her. He's going to call me."

"It's that Ursula Whatsthis. She was Danbury's secretary."

"That ought to be easy to prove."

At this point George and Laura O'Neill were

announced and shown in. "My husband has a case all worked out for you, Mr. Yeager," Laura greeted the detective. "The only trouble with his theory is no one—not even Samuel Danbury—could have thought it all out beforehand."

When they had been introduced, George outlined his theory to Yeager. Si Lenz looked on and listened in admiration. True or false, the conception was stupendous. George elaborated, taking several sheets of paper from his pocket. "I have listed the members of the Delphian Society from my wife's old roster."

"Mr. Lenz has a theory—and it has some background—that Yogadachi was not Danbury, but a woman, perhaps Danbury's secretary," said Yeager.

"I agree! I agree!" said O'Neill. "That suits my ideas exactly. As I was saying to Laura—no man would commit suicide after fabricating so—so elaborate a plot. He would want to see it work out, if he was that much of a devil. You know? It wouldn't be complete unless he could have his laugh."

"Did any of the Delphians ever deal very much with the occult, Mrs. O'Neill? Any besides Miss Koons? Did this—Ursula ever claim to be a Hindu or anything like that?"

"Why, yes. That's what she was supposed to be, but I never knew of her telling fortunes."

"But she, at least, had a motive for hurting you other girls. That's more than Danbury had. Ursula could have wanted to revenge herself on the Delphians."

"Yes. She was bitter."

"I think we'd better arrest Ursula."

"And find out," said Si, taking a bulky envelope of clippings from his pocket, "if she was Danbury's secretary."

"Or something else," said George.

Si scrutinized some of his references. "Here's our stuff on Danbury's death. It wasn't on the level."

"What do you mean; 'it wasn't on the level'?" Yeager asked.

"Well, two witnesses say his eyes were closed when he fell."

"Meaning what?"

"That he couldn't be timing his jump. It wasn't suicide."

"Nobody has ever called it suicide until this thing came up. The story has always been—you can read it right there—vertigo, an accident. He *fell* in front of the train. He didn't jump."

"He left his chauffeur and his car standing in front of his publisher's office three blocks away—walked to a subway station and had a dizzy spell just in time to pitch in front of a subway express train? You call that on the level?"

"And the chauffeur," Yeager supplemented, "immediately disappears."

George O'Neill leaned excitedly forward. "You don't suppose it could have been the chauffeur who fell under the train, do you? Is that possible? Was the face—the body—mangled?"

"Pretty well cut up—but not beyond repair. It was identified. . . . No," Si said, "Danbury's dead, all right. The question in my mind is: 'Who murdered Danbury?'"

Yeager twisted his mustache and winked at Laura. "If we don't find a mystery in this case, Mrs. O'Neill, it won't be because we have no help. Both these gentlemen will be glad to *make* one. Your husband sees an international plot and now Si adds another murder to our troubles."

"Who identified Danbury's body?" George asked.

Si nodded. "I thought of that. My clips don't say."

"We'll know when the stuff gets here from New York," Yeager said. "It will be in the reports."

Everyone was silent for a moment. "Well, where are we?" asked Yeager. "We can't hold Ellen Koons. New York is after the members of Danbury's household. They'll tell us about his secretary. We can continue to trace Si's lead that

Yogadachi was a woman. We can send photos of Ursula to New York and Chicago. What else?"

No one had any suggestions. "One more thing I'll do," Yeager continued. "I'll check with local police on the whereabouts of all the Delphians at—whatever time it was—on December tenth. We know where Mrs. O'Neill was, of course."

Si had been re-reading some of his clippings for the twentieth time. "Eleven o'clock," he said without looking up. "He was killed at eleven o'clock in the morning."

Laura O'Neill straightened in her chair. "Eleven? Eleven in the morning?" She looked first at her husband, then at Yeager. Si regarded her quizzically. "Where—have you—Mr. Yeager! May I see the letter from Swami—the one I gave you? The poison letter?"

"Certainly,"—rising. "What have you thought of?"

"I remember the postmark. It was late in the day. Receiving so many letters from New York made me curious about how long it took mail to get here. I used to watch all the postmarks."

Yeager brought the letter from a small office safe, scrutinizing it. "Hello! Eight-thirty, P.M. . . . What do you know about that?"

Laura took the envelope. "Times Square Station, eight-thirty, P.M. That means that Samuel Danbury did *not* mail the letter. He had been

dead nine or ten hours! New York City mail service is the most rapid in the world. Those Manhattan boxes are emptied—goodness—every few minutes. It would be impossible to mail a letter before eleven in the morning—a letter which would be picked up by the Times Square branch—and then not have it postmarked until eight-thirty that evening!”

Si had been holding his breath. He released it all in one word: “Boy!”

“She’s right,” George agreed. “Mailed before eleven—I’d say *one* or perhaps two o’clock would be the very latest possible stamp.”

“In that case,” said Yeager, “we certainly need some one who is missing, say a chauffeur or a secretary——”

“Or both,” Si interposed.

An attendant brought several pieces of mail and a telegram to Yeager. One of them was from New York.

THREE DANBURY PUBLISHERS  
DENY ABSOLUTELY HE WAS YOGA-  
DACHI STOP THEY IGNORED NEWS-  
PAPER ERROR BECAUSE ATTACHED  
NO IMPORTANCE SEEMED HARM-  
LESS MISTAKE STOP NOW PRESSING  
SEARCH FOR MISSING SERVANTS



SECRETARY DESCRIBED AS HINDU  
MOVED BRONX ADDRESS CHICAGO.

“What stumps me,” Si said, “is how Ursula could have got Danbury dizzy at exactly the proper moment? He wasn’t poisoned.”

“Maybe she hypnotized him.”

They looked from one to another in absolute silence. Yeager began to nod his head. “If she could hypnotize half a dozen women with *letters*—a thousand miles away; maybe she did.”

6

Allen drove the O’Neills home. As he helped them from the car he asked: “Did the little fellow like the ball?”

George looked at Laura. “Did you give it to him?”

“No. I’m sorry. It’s still in the front room.”

“We’ve had quite a lot on our minds, Allen. This business has us all upset.”

“Yeah,—I read about it. . . . Well, I was just wondering.”

He seemed hurt that his gift had been taken so lightly.

"We're very grateful, Allen," Laura said. "I'll see that he gets it right away."

"Oh, that's all right. Thank you, Mrs. O'Neill."

A letter from Anne was waiting for her.

May 22.

Dearest, dearest Laura:

My own troubles are slight now. They have been washed away by the waves of joy for what you are going to do and for Bobby's health. I *know* he's going to be all right. Of course he is; why shouldn't he? I'm *glad*, Laura. And the noble, self-sacrificing thing you will be doing—for all of us. To be sure, you might take out *some* of the things I said in my letters before you show them to the police, but use your own judgment. It's better than mine, that's sure. I know the trouble is over now. And there *is* a chance that a petition to Governor Dineen will make things easier for me some way or another. He's not likely to free me, my lawyer says, but he can do a great deal. He can shorten the sentence a lot. Oh, I *knew* you'd do something. If it only has the right effect on Mary and Ellen! I'll bet Ellen is sore at you. But you were perfectly right.

No matter how this thing started nor who is guilty—she certainly did more than her share to keep the kettle boiling.

She writes me all the time but I don't answer. Her Indian guide who is no common Indian, but a *Seminole*—I'll have you know—gives me a pain.

The pen isn't so bad—so far. I have a comfy little cell all my own. The women aren't crowded nearly as much as the men. The main criticism is the company. If they were tough in the Akron jail—you should see *these*. And the guards! I was introduced—initiated—into a secret society which has nothing to do with “dashes for liberty”—in the recreation room the other day. I can't *write* about it, but wait till I *see* you! You never heard of such a thing!

Now be a good girl and keep me posted on the results of your investigation. If Ursula Georgi *has* done this—and she is absolutely the only one who would—I'll bet you'll find her south of the Mason-Dixon line. Maybe she's a Swami to her mother, but I bet her mother is a *Maaamy!*

I never thought about her before. Somebody said they'd heard from her. Who was it? Frey? We did treat her terribly. She never would have been a Delphian if the

Dean hadn't threatened to make us disband. I heard, at one time, some years ago, that she had gone "back"—*back*—get that—to India. She was pretty bright, though. Did she ever try to hypnotize you? She did me once. I don't know how we happened to be alone together. I always tried to avoid her—but we were. And she said that her father could do "the rope trick." I said I'd always thought that was mass hypnotism and she said—well, maybe it was. One thing led to another and she showed me a trick of rubbing my arms and talking to me that actually made my arms very stiff. I don't know whether there was anything in it or not, but I couldn't move them. Maybe she hypnotized Danbury and got him to jump in front of the subway train. Look! Now *I've* turned detective! Oh, well, everybody's doing it. I can be fashionable—even here.

No, Laura. There's nothing I need. The girls I used to go around with at home are always sending something. Magazines, cake, candy, cigarettes. I'm all right. Don't worry about me. Of course, it's new now. In ten years—I may have another story to tell. Ten years. Well, we *won't* go into that. Maybe your petition to the Governor will

shorten it. You can't know how much I hope so.

Keep Bobby well, Laura. I know you will. And—say—why don't you copy Jo Turner's letter and let me *in* on it, like a good fellow. You aren't the one to deprive an old friend of all the choice news. Cat!

So long, now. I have to smuggle this letter out on account of the secret society of which I am a member. *That* will slay you.

As ever,



Bob followed his mother toward the telephone. "Where's my party, Mama? Don't I have a party, Mama?"

Turning to console him revealed the paper bag still on the table. With characteristic punctilio, Mary had dusted *under* it. "No party, Bob. Maybe we can have one next week. But here's a new ball Allen bought for you—and at luncheon Daddy is bringing you whole *worlds* of presents."

The big red ball was a poor substitute for a party, but if Mama said *no*,—she usually meant it. Laura called Yeager.

"I have some news—along the lines we discussed this morning. Listen. It's a letter from Anne Jessup. . . . Yes, the *murderess*, if you can't identify her any other way."

"No offense, Mrs. O'Neill."

"I'll read it."

. . . . .  
"Is *that* so? Is that so? Well it looks as if one arrest would finish this case, doesn't it? How's that boy? Taking his birthday all right?"

"He's never been better, Mr. Yeager. He's playing here right now. The chauffeur just gave him a new ball."

Something clicked in Yeager's mind. Besides hypnotism, chauffeurs had also been mentioned that morning. "Take it away from him at once, Mrs. O'Neill. I'll hold the wire. *Please*—at once; do as I say!"

More amused than alarmed, Laura took the bright red ball from Bobby and returned to the telephone. "Well, I have it. What's wrong with it?"

"Probably nothing. How long have you had that chauffeur?"

"About ten days. The old one was called suddenly away. His mother is very ill, somewhere in Oregon."

"I see. . . . Well, maybe I'm crazy, Mrs. O'Neill, but I wish you'd have that man drive

you down here. Right away. Can you? Bring the ball with you, but don't let the man know you have it."

"Why—Mr. Yeager, you talk just like a cheap moving picture. Surely—I'd be glad to, but—what do you suspect?"

"I don't know. Will you come at once?"

"Yes."

"Don't let your new chauffeur get suspicious. Be sure Bobby is in charge of some one who has been with you more than a year."

"Yes,—certainly." As she turned from the telephone Allen stood in the hall door. Involuntarily, Laura made a self-conscious movement with the new red ball. One corner of the man's thin lips moved a little. His eyes looked coolly down upon her with great assurance. "Doesn't the boy like the ball?" he asked.

His manner brought Laura's self-confidence back with a rush. He was almost insolent in attitude and bearing if there were no tangible disrespect in his words. Then she noticed that he was not wearing his uniform. "We don't allow him to accept gifts from comparative strangers, Allen. . . . Please bring the car around at once."

"Yes, ma'am. . . . I didn't know. I—I just *saw* it in a window."

"It's all right. The car, please. Why aren't you wearing your uniform?"

"I just came to ask if you'd be needing me. I have a—a personal errand I'd like to attend to."

"It will be impossible just now. I want you to take me down town at once."

"Yes, ma'am." Still he hesitated.

"You won't need to change. Perhaps you can attend to your errand while you wait for me."

"Yes, ma'am." He went rapidly through the house toward the rear door.

"George!" Laura called.

"Ye—es?"

"Where are you? Come here, please."

"What's a matter, Mama? Is it a bad ball?"

"What is it?" George asked, clattering down the steps.

"Allen!"

"Allen?"

"Yeager suspects him. He had changed his clothes. Perhaps this ball is poisoned or—or something."

"My God! Where is he?"

"Wait! He's getting the car. I don't know whether he knows we are suspicious or not."

"I'll get my hat."

"No. Listen. I'll go alone—so he won't know anything has happened. I'll tell him to drive me to Bullock's as if I wanted to do some shopping. When he's down in town where he can't get away, I'll change my mind."



"But it's dangerous, Laura. If he gets suspicious—anything might happen."

"It's the only way. Is that he? Is he coming?"

"Yes. He's backing out."

"Wrap this ball—put it in—in—oh, mercy. There's a shoe box in the hall closet. *Hurry!*"

As she entered the limousine, Laura scrutinized Allen's profile. Cruel, she thought, but it was impossible to judge more.

"Bullock's," she said. "Hurry."

If he was surprised at their destination he concealed it. He drove a little recklessly, she thought, but they were nearing the store before anything happened. Laura spoke through the tube: "Go to Detective Headquarters instead, Allen." She saw his lips curl scornfully, reflected in his small mirror. At a crowded corner he seemed wilfully to steer into a narrow space between a truck and a passing car. There was a crash, the splintering of wood and glass and the three autos were locked inextricably together. Allen climbed from his seat and opened the door beside Laura. The other drivers were angrily and vociferously studying the wreck. "I'll take that package, Mrs. O'Neill," he said evenly, snatching the shoe box from her grasp. "Give the police my compliments." He slammed the door and as the truck driver confronted him with a profane expostulation, he pushed him backward with a mighty shove, to

a seat amid the wreckage. A traffic officer saluted Mrs. O'Neill. "My man did it purposely, officer. There he goes now. Catch him. Mr. Yeager wants him at Headquarters." But the crowd was too thick. The policeman could not identify the fleeing chauffeur. Allen disappeared around a corner. "Catch him," Laura pleaded. "Catch my chauffeur. He's wanted for murder!" The traffic-cop gave chase. Her card and a ten dollar bill placated the truck driver. He agreed to call her garage for her. The other man had to be satisfied with only a card. She went on to Yeager's office in a cab.

A special detail of men were despatched to find "Allen", and the Chief told Laura what he and Si suspected.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

**S**I, of course, had the inside of the track; his story the evening of Bobby O'Neill's birthday put all the others in the shade. He had Laura's old Annual and he used the group picture of the Delphians on page one. Ursula,

marked by a white "x", was sought, Si's caption said, for questioning.

## BOBBY HAS HAIRBREADTH ESCAPE

"Mystic" Power from Grave  
Aided by Living Fiends

*Secretary and Chauffeur Sought*

By SI LENZ

Death stalked very near to little Bobby O'Neill today, his fifth birthday, when it was discovered that Allen Woodward, the O'Neill chauffeur, had given the boy a ball thought to be poisoned or filled with high explosives. What amounts to a moral confession of some culpability is the flight of Allen Woodward after he had learned he was suspected and had purposely wrecked the costly O'Neill limousine at the corner of Spring and Eighth Streets by running into a truck owned by the Hoover Pickle Factory in what is alleged to have been an attempt on the life of Mrs. George C. O'Neill, the boy's beautiful young mother.

Chief of Detectives Yeager has thrown a dragnet over the entire city and Hollywood. "The honor of the force is at stake," he said. "We must capture that man."

All through the night and since dawn this morning, the City's Finest aided by representatives of the *Examiner* have conducted a tireless investigation into the strangest case of attempted murder within the memory of man.

Spurred by the testimony of Mrs. O'Neill and the publicity attending the disclosures printed yesterday by the *Examiner*, the police today instituted an active drive against all fortune tellers in this city.

Mrs. O'Neill is one of the West End's most charming hostesses and her silent but active support of this paper's drive against the charlatans and quacks who prey upon the Los Angeles public with their clairvoyance and other wizardry has been more than appreciated by all who knew of these activities.

### *Bobby Now Thought Safe*

The aid of the Police Departments of New York City; Camden, New Jersey, and other cities has been sought by Mr. Yeager in his search for Ursula Georgi, now positively known to have been the secretary of the late Samuel Danbury, falsely identified at his death as Swami Yogadachi by this

woman who, it is charged, was, herself, the astrologer.

It is thought that with the apprehension of Ursula Georgi and the chauffeur, said to have been employed by Danbury and thought by local authorities to be an accomplice of the Georgi woman, Bobby O'Neill's life will be saved. To insure his safety, the O'Neill household has been placed under a rigid police guard and all foods are being thoroughly analyzed before the child eats them.

Mrs. O'Neill's desperate attempt to halt the glacier of melancholy psychology that had moved intrepidly through the Delphian ranks since early December, carrying one after another of these young ladies with it, breaking them, tearing them, grinding sanity from their minds and life from their bodies, is characterized by local educators and churchmen as one of the noblest actions in the history of womankind. Aided by the *Examiner*, Mrs. O'Neill is assembling all the letters Mrs. Anne Jessup received from members of the Delphian Society as well as those from Swami Yogadachi. These will be presented to Governor Dineen of Ohio with a petition for a parole for the unhappy woman.

Mrs. O'Neill calls certain of the letters printed exclusively in last night's *Examiner* "outbursts of a religious fanatic." "It was letters like that which urged these poor women on to their own destruction. If those letters to Anne could be found at this time I dare say the writer would be revealed almost as guilty of Tom Jessup's murder as his wife."

Mrs. O'Neill attempted to break the correspondence between Ellen Koons and Anne Jessup, in prison, and with Mary Thompson, in the insane asylum. It was known to everyone that Mary's fits of violence were of short duration and that at times she was entirely rational and repentant. Mrs. O'Neill saw the danger to this unbalanced girl of the wrong sort of letters received between her violent, raving seizures. Mrs. O'Neill has learned, however, that on April 15 a letter was delivered to Mrs. Thompson, and she has suggested to the police that this letter be obtained as material evidence of Miss Koons' culpability. She also suggests that a letter received by Hazel Cousins, as she lay in the Deaconess Hospital, New York City, on April 10 dying of pernicious anemia and a tubercular condition of the stomach—this letter also written by Ellen

Koons—be obtained from Miss Cousins' effects if possible.

"I have no desire to see Ellen Koons prosecuted for any part in the instigation of what I am forced to regard as a *plot*," Mrs. O'Neill said. "I think Ellen was as much misled and preyed upon by the activities of the Swami as were any of the other girls. Her extra-activity as a writer of depressing, provocative and prophetic letters certainly contributed to the sad fate of several of our friends, however, and if some measure of guilt could be laid at her door, it might serve to relieve other minds now laboring under false delusions of the inevitability of these dreadful predictions."

Bishop Clavering, interviewed by a representative of the *Examiner*, likened Mrs. O'Neill to Joan of Arc and said: "This brave lady has revealed the true strength of mind of all American womanhood. Her resolution to give the matter the publicity it deserved, to bring light and air into the subterranean channels of morbid thought which had been so long sapping and undermining the morale of a widening circle of women is closely akin to the achievement of the immortal Maid in raising the siege of Orleans. The anniversary of this event



which will be celebrated all over France on July fourteenth should be regarded as a celebration for Mrs. George C. O'Neill as well."

### *A Quiet Day at Home*

In sharp contrast to the festive gayety planned for Bobby's birthday today, a pall had descended on the O'Neill home. The family spent the day in the house save for several visits to the office of Chief of Detectives Yeager, who was assembling the facts necessary to fix the blame for these crimes on the proper shoulders.

It must be remembered that, although Mr. Danbury could be censured for suggesting the dreadful events, if he was the astrologer—many of which have come true—and in some States he might have been liable to prosecution, it remains that the only definite, first-hand attempt to take a life thus far attributed to him hinges upon his responsibility for enclosing corrosive sublimate in the paper intended for little Bobby O'Neill, and sent to his mother as a panacea for any ache or pain the child might develop on or near his birthday. Now, however, it is thought by the police that Danbury had no knowledge of the for-

tune telling activities of his secretary, Ursula Georgi.

Representatives of the Wurst newspapers in the East have interviewed neighbors, friends and publishers of Samuel Danbury and learned that his secretary answered perfectly the description of the Georgi woman. Tall, feline, dark, suggestive of a negro or a mulatto; a beautiful, quiet and efficient woman. She travelled with Danbury everywhere. She had been introduced as a high-caste Hindu. Several avowed their disbelief in this story of the woman's nativity. Several admitted they had suspected the relationship between Danbury and his secretary was more intimate than that of employer and employee. She had been in New York City on December tenth, but was not seen with him until after his fatal accident. She had then identified the body, reclaimed his automobile, attended his funeral and helped the executor of his estate for several days. Then she went away for her health. Her address has been changed several times since. Now she seems to have disappeared entirely, as has Danbury's chauffeur.

While the search for Allen Woodward occupies the local officials, the Brooklyn

police have been asked to hold Ellen Koons for further questioning and the New York authorities have returned Mary Thompson to the New York State Hospital to forestall any attempts at suicide.

The Camden, New Jersey, police are co-operating in an exhaustive investigation and will tomorrow morning enter the Danbury mansion, closed since last December. They will also take into custody for questioning as many of the author's former servants as can be located.

The New York City police will recall the witnesses to Samuel Danbury's death and will aid the Los Angeles authorities through interviews with his publishers and other business connections.

## 2

Yeager looked up at Si from the evening paper. "Hey! The fourteenth o' July ain't got nothin' t'do with John Dark, is it?"

"You tell me."

"It's sompn else."

"I should tell a Bishop?"

"He'll kill you when he reads this."

"Answer your phone."

"Montreal calling, sir."

"Hello!"

"Mr. Yeager—this is Inspector Peabody, of Montreal."

"How-do-you-do, Inspector. How are you?"

"Very well indeed. And how are *you*, sir?"

"Fine."

"How are all the little Inspectors?" Si murmured.

"Mr. A. Ogden Frey of London is in my office." The Canadian's voice carried well, so well Yeager had to hold the receiver an inch from his ear.

"Ask how *he* is," Si said to himself.

"Yes?"

"He has brought me some documents I think you should see."

"Thank you very much."

"I'm putting a messenger on the train with them. He'll bring them to you in person."

"Thank you, sir."

"You're entirely welcome. One is a letter from Ursula Georgi. A very important letter."

"That's great."

"I hope you catch her."

"We hope so too."

"Good-day, Mr. Yeager."

"Good-bye-day."

. . . . .

"'Good-bye-day'! . . . What's he sending you?"

"Letters Ursula wrote Mrs. Frey."

"Oh, yeah? The noose tightens. What did you hear from New Orleans?"

"She left there and left no forwarding address."

"Damned inconsiderate, I calls it."

"Where do you suppose she'd go? That telephone call came from a pay station in Chicago. They're working on that."

"I'll bet a cooky she's *here!*"

Yeager looked at the reporter a long time before he spoke. "That's exactly where she is." Then he whirled in his chair and yelled: "Buck! . . . Charlie! . . . C'mere. . . . If I only had a picture——"

"Show 'em the Annual. There's a big one in front, among the graduating class."

Buck and Charlie looked over their chief's shoulder. "A pippin!"—"Right off the lot!"

"Go find her. She's in town."

"Where's she stoppin'?"

"Huh! Where's she—why—she's living with the O'Neills—they're old friends, you poor half

wit. If I knew where she was stoppin' I'd call her up and have her in for tea."

Buck and Charlie studied the photograph. "Is this Ursula?"

"That's Ursula."

"What makes you think she's here, boss?"

"Just this. She's got a lot of brains. If she planned this thing—she's the smartest woman I ever heard of, bar none."

"You think it's smart to live in *this* town?"

Yeager ignored him. "I think it's smart to stick close to the gun, hiding under its barrel or sitting *back* of it if possible."

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh. The closer the better. Then maybe the O'Neill house ain't such a bad hunch. Maybe she *is* livin' there."

"Rats! Get out."

They went—but in the corridor they stopped. "Why ain't that good logic?" Buck demanded of Charlie Silver.

"The closter the better; am I right?"

"Let's ast next door."

From New York came a telegram:

MARY THOMPSON DIED HOSPITAL THIS MORNING FRACTURED SKULL IN FALL ATTEMPTING ESCAPE STOP FOLLOWED YOUR INSTRUCTIONS ON KOONS STOP

FOUND HER DEAD BY GAS IN  
KITCHEN STOP PAPER IN HER  
HAND ACCOUNT OF THOMPSON  
DEATH STOP LETTER ON TABLE  
FROM ANONYMOUS PARTY POST-  
MARKED SAN FRANCISCO STOP  
SUGGEST YOU GET PASSENGER  
LISTS STEAMERS SAILING FOR  
ORIENT STOP YOUR PARTY PROB-  
ABLY GOING ABROAD AFTER SEND-  
ING LETTER STOP LETTER NOW ON  
WAY TO YOU TELLS KOONS TO GO  
INTO TRANCE CONSULT INDIAN  
CONTROL

"I was right!" Yeager yelled. "She *was* here."

"*You* were right—" Si raised his brows.

"Well, *we* were right. She was here—now she's gone. Back to India. Maybe we can catch her on the ship!"

"Maybe—an' maybe she ain't on a ship."

"Sure she's on a ship. She's running now. She *was* here—the letter was postmarked——"

"San Francisco."

"Well, what's a few miles? She was on her way to the dock."

"She thought you'd figure that way."

"Oh, Si, you read too much Poe. Of course she's going to get away as far as possible now."

"No, Yeager, I don't agree. She's outthinking you. She says: 'They'll think of Los Angeles, then they'll see San Francisco, then they'll think India which means ships. But, instead of being a sap for them, I'll go to Los Angeles and'—what? 'Get in the movies.' "

"You're nuts."

"Bet you."

"How much?"

"Fifty."

"It's a go."

"I got to get out o' here anyway. We're takin' pictures of Bobby eatin' his lonely birthday dinner."

### 3

Laura introduced Si Lenz and his camera man to Fanny Brennan, who was leaving. "Ooooh, going to take Bobby's picture? Can I watch? I'll be still as a mouse."

Mary got in the picture too; "Trusted Servant Cares for Child." While the photographer fussed with his shutter, Si talked too much. It wasn't like him. But he couldn't possibly have seen the danger. Fanny looked perfectly harmless. The reporter told Laura that Mary Thompson and Ellen were gone.



"They didn't wait for Bob. They just skipped him," Laura murmured.

"Mary fell—trying to escape."

"And Ellen?"

"Turned on the gas when she heard about Mary."

Fanny went: "Tchtchtchtch!"

"Ursula is in Los Angeles, too. We just found that out."

"No!"

"Well, she was in San Francisco a few days ago. I think she's here now."

Fanny added: "Oh, my!"

"Frey's back—and the Montreal police are sending Yeager some letters from Ursula to Mrs. Frey. Funny bunch, those Canucks; they wouldn't trust the mails. Sending the letters by hand."

"Mary—too."

Suddenly Fanny remembered the time. "I *have* to run. 'Bye, Laura. See you later. Good-bye, Mr. Lenz. Good-bye, Bobby."

Bobby's "good-bye" ruined a plate.

Now, Fanny scarcely realized she had heard anything, and Si surely did not know he had spoken out of turn, but information had been transmitted unwisely. Because Fanny's new cook, who also served, even as Mary Kelly did, was Ursula. And when Fanny told Mike, at the table,

that the O'Neill's were about to capture the guilty woman and that a Canadian detective was bringing important evidence to Los Angeles for the lady's conviction, Ursula took the empty plates into the kitchen, slipped out of her apron and kept right on going.

## 4

Yeager's telephone rang. "This is Buck, boss."

"Yes."

"We found 'er."

"No!"

"Well, she works here, but she got wind we were coming."

"Honest?"

"Right back of O'Neills. She's the cook."

"No!"

"I'm telling you."

"Who tipped her off?"

"Don't know. She blew in the middle of dinner."

"She'll *never* be back. . . . Listen, Buck. Danbury's chauffeur is her boy-friend; see? He got away from us. He'll tip her and they'll try to run for it. You look in at the nearest rental

car agency out that way. We've got to catch those two . . . and, Buck——”

“Yeah.”

“If you see a red rubber ball. Painted red—ash can, gutter, anywhere; bring it in. It's evidence.”

“What the hell——”

“Do what I tell you, you——”





## CHAPTER NINE

**T**HE Canadian Pacific train bearing in one of its comfortable compartments the emissary of the Montreal police with his sealed packet of letters hidden close to his body, was due in Los Angeles at 12:10 midnight. The

Overland Limited from Chicago, which had taken Jo Turner from the Century at that point, was due but a few moments later.

Outgoing trains were being thoroughly watched. Incoming trains seemed of little importance to Yeager. But Si Lenz was there joshing with the girl at the cigar counter. The Canadian train was a little late.

"By gosh," said Si, "all these people must give *you* a laugh. All rushing around, going places, never getting anywhere, pretending to be something they're not."

"Oh, I don't know," she said.

"Like those things there—" he pointed to a novelty for sale; a cigarette case in the shape of an automatic pistol, "getting by on false pretenses."

"Oh, I don't know," she said. Her hair was yellow and curly, her eyes startled and blue.

"Yep. Everybody makin' out they're something they ain't."

A man with a weathered bag bearing seals from a number of Canadian hotels was accosted at Si's elbow. "Beg pardon, friend, are you from Montreal?"

Si turned a little, casually, and watched them. The Canadian studied his inquisitor, then nodded. "I'm from Headquarters," the fellow continued—and Si's eyes grew large.

"How much?" Si asked pointing to the toy pistols which so closely resembled the real thing.

"One fifty."

The voice over Si's shoulder was very low. "Yeager told me to meet you and bring you to his house."

"Oh, certainly. Have—have you—well; how am I to know?"

The impostor showed a badge. The Canadian nodded and smiled. "That's fine." They walked away together.

"There's an example," said Si, pocketing his change. "No. Don't wrap it. There's an example. That guy ain't from Headquarters at all."

"No? Gee,—I don't know." She was chewing gum. Call her *fourteen* if you like.

Si followed the two men to the curb. "My car's over here," the man with the thin lips said. "We can go this way." Si ambled leisurely in their wake. A big dark car was parked in one of the few unrestricted areas near the taxi stand. Cabs flowed in a continuous stream to the curb, stopped long enough to take or leave a passenger—and burred away. The two men entered the big car after some delay. There was, apparently, another person in the car, but Si could not be sure, the interior was very dark. As the engine was turned over, a lady in search of a cab, two heavy-laden red caps in tow, reached the curb.

Si looked once—then again. "Excuse me," he said. "Are you Josephine Turner?"

"I am." Her chin was high.

"We have mutual friends. I saw your picture in the Mount Albans annual—at Mrs. O'Neill's."

Jo melted at once. "Isn't that a scream of a picture? With the dahlias or whatever you call 'em, *here*," she spatted her own chest with a graceful, gloved hand. "How did Laura find out I was coming? I meant to surprise her."

"I don't think she knows. I'm not here to meet you."

"No! What are you here for?"

"Shsh," he said. "I'm watching two men in that car."

"Which one?"

"I dasn't point."

Jo's hand gripped Si's arm suddenly and she turned her back abruptly toward the car which was moving slowly, edging into the stream of traffic. "There's a woman in that car!" she said. "A woman I know. She just looked out the back window."

Si's tongue poked one cheek out from within. "Would her name, maybe, be—Ursula?"

"Yes!"

"Did she see you?"

"I don't think so."

"Boy—" Si whirled to the red caps, dragging



a crumpled wad of bills to light. "Here's two bucks. Check that stuff and one of you deliver the checks to Mr. Yeager at Detective Headquarters. Hear me!? Yeager—Chief of Detectives."

"Yas, suh."

"Are—are you a detective?" Jo demanded.

"Yes, madam; and so are you, just now. Come on." They stepped into a cab. "Get behind that big car, there," said Si. "And stay with it."

For some time their progress was slow. The traffic about the station approaches was very heavy. At length both cars extricated themselves and Si looked at his companion. "Maybe I shouldn't drag you into this," he said, impressed by her suave composure.

"I love it. . . . But I wish I knew more about it. I thought the police of ten continents were looking for Ursula. Did you know she was here? Was she on the train?"

"No; I'll tell you," said Si. "In that car are Ursula and her boy-friend who used to be Danbury's chauffeur—and a visitor from Montreal. The visitor has some letters which Ursula wants very much, and I think she means to get them."

"Letters?"

"From Mr. Frey, of Montreal."

"I know—Helen's husband!"

"That's right."

"To whom?"

"Well—I wouldn't know for sure, but I think they are intended for a man named Yeager. He's a cop. But I wouldn't be sure. Damned secretive these Canadian police."

The big car turned sharply and careened down an ill-lit residential street. Si's driver did likewise. "I hope they don't think we're following them," he muttered.

"They will," said Jo. "They can't help it."

"In that case," said Si, leaning toward the driver, "crowd that car into the curb, preferably near a cop."

"There's no cops out here," the driver growled. "What *is* this, anyway?"

"Crowd 'em in," Si repeated. "We want to stop 'em."

"Well, I'm not gonna crack up the hack for no fifty cent tip."

The "automatic" cigarette case came out of his pocket and Si placed its hard, cold, round end against the man's neck. "Crowd that car into the curb!"

The result was instantaneous. Like a streak the taxi passed the larger car and slowed at its left hand front fender, veering toward the walk. Si leaned out of the door, levelling his toy at the driver of the other car. Jo Turner sat in one corner of the cab as inconspicuously as it was

possible for Jo Turner to sit anywhere. Both drivers applied their brakes.

"Pile out," said Si. "And keep your hands *up*."

"What is this?" the tall chauffeur growled. "We haven't got any money."

"Get out o' that car. . . . *All of you.*"

Ursula followed the driver and they stood with hands upraised at the side of the road. "You too, Montreal. Come on." The tall man darted a swift glance at Ursula. The man who remained in the car did not move. With a sickening lump growing in his stomach, Si's confidence wavered. Had they killed him? Had this woman—for the man had been driving—had she killed the messenger as they rode through town?

Fearless, ruthless, bold, and cunning beyond imagination, these two were held at bay with a useless sham of a toy. Si wondered how long he could keep the upper hand. "Stand over here," he said in a voice made gruffer to bolster his own courage. "If you've killed that man it's your last murder. . . . *Move!*" They circled a little to allow him to see in the car. The man lay in a heap on the floor, blood soaking his clothes. His bag was emptied on the seat. Ursula's search for the papers had been interrupted—but too late to save another life. "My God," said Si. "*Another* horoscope." He walked backward to the side of the cab, keeping his "gun" at a threatening

angle. "Turn around, driver," he said. "Go back and get the nearest cop. Tell him to send the wagon—and you bring him back here with you. Yeah, for more than fifty cents."

"Well, I'm going to stay here," said Jo, suddenly starting from the cab. "I've never seen anything like this and I'm *not* walking out on a good show."

Ursula's black eyes dilated with hate. "Jo Turner," she whispered.

Jo looked over Si's shoulder as the cab turned swiftly around. "Ursula Georgi, you black-hearted wretch."

"Shut up," the girl snapped. "I'll get even for this."

"Never mind," her companion said. "Don't talk. This is a fluke. This fellow's not a cop."

"Oh, no?" Si swaggered. "I'm cop enough to put this over. Separate, you two. Stand further apart. . . . Now, Miss Turner, will you please go behind them and see if there are any guns or knives—or horoscopes—in their pockets. . . . Under his arms too. . . . Nothing? Look on the front seat. . . . Feel around the cushions."

Jo did as Si bade her. "Here's one." A heavy revolver had been wedged between the cushion and the side of the car. "I'll take it," said Si. "See if it's loaded."

"I don't know how——"

But the talk had been informative to "Allen"—he lowered his long arms. "Ain't yours?" he asked, grabbing at the gun the lady held. Jo pulled the trigger. Ursula came instantly to life, leaping on Si like a cat. Jo and the tall man fell together; Si fought with a virago. The real revolver slid under the auto, and as householders came running from doors, Ursula left the three struggling for possession of the weapon and walked slowly into the shadow of a large tree. As men in shirt sleeves and ladies in wrappers and negligees separated the three combatants, Ursula edged out of the crowd and across the dark lawn of a bungalow. One corner between her and that corpse meant temporary safety—perhaps freedom.

She ran. Behind her she heard the taxi return and stop. Other cars were stopping. She must leave the precious letters behind—but every inch she gained now was one more breath of life. They would be after her immediately. She drew her dresses higher and ran faster and faster. Three blocks from the stalled car, she walked. Where now? With her startling appearance, her unforgettable features, dark skin and haunting eyes—she could not melt into a city nor disappear in a crowd. Every means of egress from Los Angeles would be closely guarded. The newspaper pack as well as the police would be alert

to catch her. The chase had already been flaunted. Her picture had been in the papers. SOUGHT!—in connection with the investigation of——

And now the captions would read: WANTED!—for the murder of a Canadian detective! Ursula continued to walk. Where would they look for her? The ruse of mere *closeness* had been used. Remaining near this last crime would offer no protection. It was late. Registering at an hotel at this hour without baggage would put her under suspicion and surveillance at once. She could steal a car. Drive toward San Francisco, better still, toward the border, before the roads were being watched. That would only delay inevitable capture.

The plight of her companion, the erstwhile "Allen", crossed her mind but fleetingly. Her own need for a hiding place made his troubles of very minor importance. Her heels clicked out a monotonous rhythm as corner after corner was passed and she approached Pershing Square. A man looked meaningly in her face. Was that a possibility? It was! How simple! It had never occurred to her before. She looked back at the man who had practically accosted her.

With a clang and a siren hoot, a police patrol car approached and she changed her mind quickly and hurried on. The wagon whirred past

and nosed its way into the heavier traffic of Hill Street. Was *he* sitting in that car? Manacled? On his way to pay for her crimes? She resumed her walk. Every patrolman had her description in his pocket. The alarm would be given him by telephone—when he reported on the hour. Apprehension was only a matter of minutes unless she acted at once. She hailed a cab and sat in it. The driver wanted a street and number. *What* street and number? Where in all the world was an address she could give with impunity? She should have gone with the stranger. Of all the men and women she had ever met—who would welcome her now? What manner of person could overlook her guilt and shield her, help her? She gave the address of Laura O'Neill.

## 2

George was reading his evening paper in which the story of his troubles had now been relegated to an obscure rear page, when the bell rang. Laura was helping Mary make a cup of chocolate in the kitchen. "Hm-mm," George yawned. "Who could that be?"

*A woman* startled him. "How-do-you-do?"

"How-do-you-do? Is—has Mrs. O'Neill retired?"

"Eh? No—no, she—she's up. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you." She passed him.

"Who shall I say——?"

"An old friend."

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you."

Laura came in with a tray bearing two steaming cups. "There's a friend of yours——"

The two women looked at each other. Laura put the tray on the table. George looked from one to the other, puzzled. He was sleepy. The situation was preposterous under the circumstances. He could not identify the caller. "How are you, Ursula?" Laura asked. "Won't you sit down?"

The telephone broke the tension. George started to answer it. Both ladies spoke at once: "Wait!" He turned.

"That will be about me,—I think," Ursula said. "It will tell you to watch for me—probably. It may be Josephine Turner. At any rate, I beg you to give me an hour before you tell anyone I am here."

"Surely you aren't asking us to have pity for *you*," Laura said coldly.

"I *am* asking that, Laura. If there is one



human being in the world who will show me pity now—it is you.”

“If there is *one*.”

“Well—” George was undecided.

“Don’t mention that Ursula is here, George, if you please. I’d like to hear what she has to say.”

George left them alone and his voice could not be heard as he talked in the hall.

“Is Josephine Turner here?” Laura asked as the dark girl sat abruptly in a chair.

“Yes. I saw her—less than an hour ago. . . . She was beautifully dressed, as usual. Travelling costume. I think she must have arrived about midnight. She followed me from the Union Station.”

“Followed you? Out here?”

“No. . . . In another direction. We spoke.”

“She didn’t tell me she was coming.”

“I’ve probably spoiled her surprise. She is here to see you, I imagine.”

“I’d like to see her.”

“Yes . . . a lot more than you care to see me.”

“There’s nothing to say to that. You must know how I feel.”

“Of course.” Ursula studied Laura’s face.

“Have you come here to make one last attempt to kill my baby?”

Ursula closed her eyes and sighed heavily. "I'm not a baby killer."

"You tried to be. Surely, you aren't going to attempt to deny your part in this affair."

"That would be a little futile, now; wouldn't it? . . . No, I shan't deny it. The last bit of evidence they needed—must be in their hands now. . . . It's all over."

"Why have you come here, Ursula? What do you want from us?"

George re-entered the room.

"Do you recognize this lady, George? This is Ursula Georgi."

"Yes,—I know. How-do-you-do, Miss Georgi?" He bowed slightly, and sat uneasily, warily, between the two women.

"Did you tell them to come and get me?" Ursula asked, smiling at him.

"I—I—no, not exactly."

"But you told them I was here."

"I asked for a guard of police for my son. I told them he was again in danger and that I wanted police protection." He rose and took a step toward her. "I think that is a father's privilege when he entertains a murderess who has made repeated efforts to kill him."

"George——" Laura said quietly.

Ursula had not stopped smiling, a small, puz-

zling smile, as if its owner knew not what else to do with her face.

"My *dear*," O'Neill expostulated, "you asked too much. I did not tell them this woman was here, but I did ask for men."

"I understand, dear."

George sat down, angrily.

Ursula raised her delicately arched brows and bit her lip. "It doesn't matter. If I weren't here I don't know where I should be. Let them come."

The three were silent a moment. Laura spoke first. "I can't understand it, Ursula. I don't know why you should have hated me so; hated all of us so."

"I think you do," the woman answered wearily, laying her head against the back of her chair. "My caste in India is a very proud one. You girls might better have killed me than treat me as you did. Insults like those I suffered are unforgivable—and I never forgot them for a moment. I planned to be revenged from the very first sneer. It is a petty thing to sneer at color, Laura."

"I know—but your—your revenge has been out of all proportion to our—crime. We were cruel, perhaps, but you have taken—human life. . . . As—as I talk to you, look at you sitting there, it doesn't seem possible."

"I suppose not,—to you. You could never understand. You are so—well balanced."

"What I can't understand," said George, "is how you ever worked out the intricacies of that plot."

"No, Mr. O'Neill; what you mean is—you cannot understand how a half dozen apparently sane women could be led so easily by the nose. The plot—the attempt—was nothing. The willingness to be a party to the scheme was the most remarkable part."

"Not only that. I mean the cunning psychology. The idea of knowing *how* these women would think."

"It will not flatter your male vanity, Mr. O'Neill, but the plot was conceived by Samuel Danbury for a book and in his story the fools were all men. The book was never finished. . . . I could use his last chapter now—if I had let him live to finish writing it."

"And you applied his plot to life—turned his idea into a machine to obliterate the Delphians?"

"Yes. That's it. So I deserve no credit for its ingenuity. I'm trying very hard to finish the story to my own advantage now—but I'm not a writer. Danbury could have done it in half an hour. I can't do it at all. Here I sit—waiting for the police to come and get me. I'm not clever at all."

“Did you hypnotize Danbury, Ursula? Someone said you did, that you forced him to leave his car and go into the subway and fall.”

The dark girl smiled reminiscently. “Yes, I did that. He was a very good subject. . . . But why should I confess to you? I’ll have to sign all this tomorrow—for the police. . . . If they *catch* me.” With a new return of resolution, a new burst of courage, she jumped from her chair so suddenly that George could not interfere. She flew through the door and into the night, in one more desperate dash for freedom.

### 3

But they had the chauffeur. Let her scurry around a little if she wanted to. They’d make Allen talk. They did. While Ursula stayed out of sight by pretending to be a fancy woman, facts were elicited from Allen.

If you didn’t believe the Wickersham report on police methods, you wouldn’t believe me if I told you how they got Allen’s confession, how they pounded the story of Ursula out of his body. So I’ll just tell you what they got and not how they got it.

Ursula was really his wife. Danbury hadn’t

known that. Danbury hadn't known lots of things. Ursula's proficiency at wrapping turbans, a different way for each caste, and her command of several Hindustani dialects gave credence to her story that she was an Hindu. If she was, Hindus are born in squalor of Javanese mothers after white-sailor fathers have deserted them in huts on the coast of Java. That will be news to Gandhi and Krishnamurti.

Her mother nursed her the first day, forgot it the second—in her delirium—and when she remembered to do it again on the third day of Ursula's existence, it was almost too late. Almost. On the fourth day her mother died, on the floor of a deserted hut, in filth and rags and convulsions. And only her most unearthly howls on the fifth day were sufficient to bring two fishermen there to cut Ursula apart from the corpse and to carry her where weak gruel could be had.

It seems sometimes that our lives hinge on very little things. Only consider that Tom Jes-sup might still be paying surreptitious but vital tribute to Nellie Stone's great charm and Hazel Cousin's glorious breasts might still be warm and full and whole—if those damned Javanese fishermen hadn't, with Jovian lack of foresight, heeded Ursula's loud but unwarranted demands on the fifth day of her latest incarnation among

men. Well, the lowly shall be raised up! And she was.

She was raped, the first time, at ten. And not by a white-sailor either, but by a very black fellow, one the older women shunned.

A missionary found her not long after that and for two years she lived in his home, helping with the dishes and learning about her Saviour and sometimes sweeping. It was a Catholic mission and in this place she acquired her name. That was one advantage she had over Bobby; she knew all about the Man Who died on the cross. But, it was a strange thing about Ursula, they couldn't keep clothes on her. She hated garments of any kind and refused to wear them, and one day in her thirteenth year she ran away from the mission, attired exactly as she had been found at the age of five days. There was this difference, however, in her appearance. She was fatter.

And she hadn't learned to dance very well, when a Turkish merchantman steamed out of the bay, with Ursula—partly clothed—in the hold. How the sailors kept her a secret for twelve days is more than any of the ship's officers could ever divine, because when she waggled her body in the gyrations she thought were dances for *them*, after they discovered her, she screamed and laughed so loud that passing vessels heard her, when the wind was right.

These officers gave her, among other things, a new Saviour for her immortal soul. They performed a delightful ritual for the glory of Allah and then repeated it for his only prophet. Thus, by the time Ursula reached Port Said, not yet fourteen, she had too many Saviours and probably that was what spoiled the broth. With Christ, Mohammed and Buddha, all wrestling for that one soiled specimen of a soul, it's no wonder she was upset—often. In Port Said everyone upset you. You scarcely had time to dance or to eat, there were so many men, all waiting to upset you.

But Christ won. At least He got her; sometimes the winner loses. Another missionary reclaimed her, for the second time, and she was sent to America with a batch of other non-descripts to lecture in Sunday Schools on India and the Near East. She made a deacon out in Nebraska and he gave her a hundred dollars to leave town. The town was too small for Ursula anyway.

By the time she reached New York, she had the Church racket reduced to an exact science. The years had also taught her the value of an education. She got to an Episcopal rector one day and his church took her up. She played her native instruments for them, the *esraj*, *sitars*, *tabla* and *banya*, when they had them imported





THE SAILORS KEPT HER A SECRET . . .



for her, and demonstrated the folk dances of her people, slow-motion so no one would get excited. Raising her tuition for Mount Albans was a cinch for Ursula. *She wanted so to—how you say in your country?—have the knowledge; no?*

She quit talking like that as soon as the good ladies from the church had left her in the Bronx seminary. Two girls lived in each of the dormitory rooms. Ursula was planted, squarely, feet braced, in the middle of hers when Miss Elms, the Registrar, tapped and opened the door to show Anne and her mother—and younger brother—where they proposed to store Anne for the term.

“—and this is Ursula.”

There was no doubt of that. Well, it wouldn't do. The—eh—the *light* was bad. Mrs. Blackmere's imagination was anything but sprightly. The light? Why, my dear Mrs. Blackmere, this was a corner *room*; one window to the North and these two to the *East*, my dear Mrs. Blackmere.

My dear Mrs. Blackmere next attacked the color of the walls, the closet space and the rug, and when the critique got down to the door knobs, the proximity to the bath and the big tree outside the window, even Miss Elms began to suspect that there was *something* about the room Mrs. Blackmere did not like. It came to her in a

rush when Billy, the kid brother, piped—on their way out but before the door had been closed: “Pheeew, Anne. Are you gonna sleep with a nigger?”

Then Miss Elms understood. She took it up with the Dean a few hours later. “We’re going to have—er—*some* difficulty, I’m afraid, Miss Pringle, with that—er—that East Indian girl.”

“Difficulty?” Pringle thrived on difficulties.

“I can’t get her a room-mate. It’s one of the lightest and airiest rooms in Longfellow Hall, but everyone complains of the light the moment they see her.”

“Think she’s a negress, likely.”

“I shouldn’t wonder.”

“You leave it to me.”

It would have been a great break for Pringle if the next girl to be placed had been Helen Haenkel. The Dean would then have made the sale and cut Elms’ salary. But the next one in was Hazel Cousins—and not even Pringle would suggest that *she* sleep with Ursula. After Hazel, came Laura Stanhope—with her father, old Judge Stanhope, so there was no use trying that.

Ursula spent her boarding school days—and nights—alone, in one of the choicest rooms in Longfellow Hall.

Ursula was quick and clever. Inspection never revealed *her* candle. And she gathered and retained knowledge because it was equipment she knew she needed for a long journey she planned to make. The white-world was against her, but she would bring it low. She was going *up!* to heights others dreamed about. White men would kiss her hand, white women would curry her favor. It was all to be done with knowledge and sex and such extra powers as she had gleaned here and there in the East. And this vaulting ambition was not so much a desire for revenge against her persecutors and those who despised her as it was a determination to avoid sharing their opinion of her, herself. That wasn't as clear to Ursula as it is to you and me. Ambition was both aim and a reason for aiming to Ursula as it is to most aimers. Absence of analysis of this passion for attainment was tacitly condoned and her incuriosity regarding its true nature given what amounted to approval by the ding-dong-dinging of the need for ambition by all the teachers who also assumed that such a quality in a normal Miss was indeed an end in itself and needed neither reason nor explanation.

Ursula was going—*up!* In the last few months

at Mount Albans she scrutinized the terrain. She was through with churches and their revolting patronization. She would not go there to the people who had paid for her education. She would go immediately to work in some organization which towered high so she would have room and opportunity to climb. She started in the business office of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, advancing rapidly for a year, then suddenly halted. It seemed that knowledge, of the sort she had acquired at school, had done its utmost for her in this particular sphere. Sex or one of the Eastern arts must carry her out of the groove before it was worn too deep. Her work did not bring her into contact with any men with sufficient authority to get her a transfer to their private offices. Sex seemed useless here, but a great deal of cash was handled in a cage not far away, separated from Ursula by a clear-glass partition. It had been a long time since she had practiced—but perseverance, she knew, moved mountains. She applied herself to a little girl who had been with the company a long time.

It was two weeks before her efforts bore their bitter fruit and ten dollars was missing. Ursula let the child alone for a week, then began working again, involving her suggestions this time with detail for concealing the theft. Two days

later, our Javanese brat knew by the expression on the girl's face that an entry for which she could not account had been made on this ledger sheet or that. In so carefully policed an organization,—it would not be long. One more false entry. Then Ursula watched for the marked money. It came, and with it the opportunity.

Miss Georgi did not wait for the frisking, but went at once to the sacred precincts and demanded an audience.

"Yes, Miss Georgi."

Working for this mutt was going to be hard to take, but it was the next rung. "I know I must be brief." She bit her lower lip.

"Don't be embarrassed. What is it?"

"I don't *like* to be an informer."

The mutt raised a brow.

"I—I just saw a—a girl falsify—a—a cash slip. Oh, Mr. Heidt, I *hate* to make enemies—but that isn't honest."

"Now, really, Miss Georgi, you must be very, very sure before you make such an accusation."

"I'm *too* sure. I saw it."

"And—who was it?"

"Oh, Mr. Heidt, if—if I tell you can I—can I be moved, changed; put where I couldn't see anything else like that? I wouldn't want to go on day after day, *watching* the girls I'm working

with, afraid they'd take things from my own purse. Would that be possible?"

"Well, we—we could see what could be done. But, come, if there are dishonest people here and you know who they are, it is your duty to tell us."

So the little girl was fired and Ursula was moved a small step up, though a floor lower in the building, and Heidt's interest was aroused. Two years out of Mount Albans, Ursula was private secretary to a Chief Assistant in the engineering department, and the climb had been arduous. Other broken bodies had been left along the trail besides that of the girl in the cage. There was one broken home and three smashed hearts. An alpinist, Ursula resolved, should not start on Matterhorn. To keep her skirts clean for business reasons she had not loved, that is—she had not gone through the motions of love, outside of the bosses. She had read, instead, in the evening, and attended motion pictures alone.

She had read Danbury. One day she saw his picture on a book page—and burst out laughing, as most of us do when we see a photograph of our favorite author for the first time. But Ursula did not laugh because Samuel was funny looking; he wasn't. She laughed because in his face, in his eyes and mouth and the jib of his chin and the cut of his ears was an almost perfect *subject*.



A tyro at hypnotism could have his way with the owner of that head. Was he married?

Ursula learned all she could about the prolific scrivener and quit her job on the strength of her findings. She went to Camden and to his house and sat, presently, in his study. He came in, bustling. She did not immediately raise her head. He held a batch of unopened letters which he sorted between his fingers without system or point. Finally he decided to see her. He looked down, through *pince nez* attached to him with a single filament of gold chain—and saw only the top of her hat. Her head rose slowly, majestically, like the sun, pushed upward by her body coming out of the chair and gradually erect. He watched the movement, fascinated, and their eyes met.

*Finis! Finis pour Monsieur Danbury.* She held out her hand for the letters. "You—you've come at a very opportune time," he said with a puzzled frown. "I've just returned from a tour—" a "toowah", he pronounced it—"and I need a sektry very much."

"Yes," Ursula said, removing her hat, "shall we begin with these?"

"I'd—I'd best call the agency and tell them they needn't send any one,—if you'll excuse me."

"Certainly."

"Singular," he muttered to himself, "very singular indeed."

As she typed, later that day—Danbury had dropped off to sleep on a couch—Ursula felt an antagonistic presence behind her. The steps she had heard approach were not those of the house-keeper nor her new employer's man, but strange ones. Now, the new arrival had stopped just inside the door and was staring, from the feel of it, glaring, at her back. Whoever it was, it represented no weak opposition to her plans. It was a presence to cope with, a strength which challenged her own. She stopped typing but did not turn around at once, trying to think as she acted. Concentration revealed nothing. She turned and saw "Allen" for the first time.

"How-do-you-do," he said, one eye almost shut in his effort to see deeper than the surface of the self she was showing him.

"How-do-you-do."

"Are you the new secretary? . . . I'm the chauffeur."

"I see you are."

The man was frankly squinting now, with both eyes. "Haven't I met you somewhere before?"

Ursula did not answer beyond a smile.

"I know you," he went on. "My name's Goodman."

"Just now?"

"I don't understand."

"Never mind. Mine is Jahnsi—just now."

"Well, you're *calling* me—but I didn't know there was a game."

"You—wouldn't—fool—me, would you?"

"Let's talk about this another time," the chauffeur tried to wave the battle aside.

"You don't need to be afraid *he'll* wake up. He won't. He sleeps very soundly."

"You seem to have learned his habits in a hurry!"

"That kind of sleep's not a habit."

"I'd give fifty bucks to know where I've met you."

"You've never met me."

"I'll bet you I have."

"Not on this earth."

The man's eyes narrowed again. "I didn't limit myself to this earth."

"Now *you're* calling *me*."

"This is a new hand."

"I've got 'em!"

. . . "You certainly have. Who are you?"

"A mulatto—from appearances."

He shook his head. "Oh, no. Not you. . . . Where'd you get your training?"

"Isn't that a little personal?"

"I don't know. What are you doing here? Why butt in?"

"You saw him first?"

"I've been with him nearly a year"

"Make out pretty well?"

"Too well to have to cut it with a stranger."

"I don't stay strange long."

"That's more like it. . . . Come on, be gentle; where'd you get that eye?"

Ursula moved her head slowly from side to side. "Where did you get yours?"

"I've been with all the good ones, Hadeen, McMaster, Panchadasi, Hamilton. Houdini was a great friend of mine."

"I don't know them. I am from India."

"The Motherland," he mocked her. "Well, we should get on well together."

"I don't know why not." And heedless of the sleeping fount of words, they embraced in the middle of his study.

## 5

Well, there you have them, all thirteen; you paid your money and you may have your choice. Ursula's running, so you won't want her. Your wits are no match for hers anyway. She'd have

you riding broomsticks and washing your face in flour when you had something entirely different in mind. You wouldn't dare look at her suggestively for fear of counter suggestions. You couldn't talk to her either. She has comparative religions at her tongue's end, studied at first hand. There's no use you bothering with Ursula even if you could forgive her her trespasses.

Laura has Bobby and she's going to have Katherine, so that lets her out. Hazel and Helen, Mary and Ellen have all passed on. Martha is very careful about her companions, and Mary Kelly is too old. The twins? Zoftik! You like that? Anne will be out in twenty years and if you want to spend your time waiting with Nellie, she's in Akron. But don't forget Balzac's *Succubus*. Nellie is hell on tires and oil.

You can't have Josephine. Make up your mind to that. In the first place, I want her myself. Her *heart* is virgin. She has *never* loved. Boy was only a passing fancy, a mere infatuation. Nope, you can't have Josephine—and neither can I. Listen:

"It's too damned hot, Laura. They won't mind."

"I mind."

George sighed and patted her hand. "Very well, my dear. That settles it, of course. But—may I take it off before we go to the train? I want to have some fun."

Laura considered a space. "Well, if you insist on being a boor—yes; you can change before we go to the train."

It was the regular iron shirt argument. George was right, of course, it *was* too hot to wear a dress suit in Los Angeles that July third. He climbed the stairs wearily and passed Josephine's closed door only by exerting almost superhuman will power. Muffled voices came through the crack beneath, and through the keyhole, the voices of Si and Jo.

"I don't see what you want to marry me for," says Si.

"I don't either," says Jo.

"What do you say we don't do it?"

"Well——"

"It'd be a dirty trick to play on the O'Neills after all the fuss they've been to."

"Yeah! I guess we better go through with it."

"Just to show 'em we appreciate it."

"I couldn't disappoint Laura."

"No. . . . I wouldn't *ask* you to."

Then they both burst into screams and gales of laughter—and they pound each other and kiss as humans should, as if they meant it, as if there was no hurry and it was nobody's business if they never had done. And they hold each other at arm's length and Si looks at her—and looks and looks—so tears come to my eyes. And she

looks at that almost bald head and bulging brow and hawk-nose—and *likes* it. That's what I can't forgive her. She *likes* him. Maybe she loves him. Look at that. That far-away, bed-room look—for Si Lenz! a damned reporter who has had the morals of an adult guinea pig ever since his mother let him remain out of the house after ten o'clock. You can stay here and watch them if you want to—I can't bear it.

"But I *do* think you're a mess for mixing business with our honeymoon. . . . Why can't you send that boy on ahead on a different train?"

"He won't bother us! He's in car *six* in a lower. We're in car *two* in drawing room A—and he won't bother us!"

"Well, I *hope* not. Don't think I'm hateful. I want to help Anne just as much as you and Laura do, but it's *my* honeymoon!"

"Phil won't come in our *car*! I'll give him his orders."

"In a week you'll be giving *me* orders. Oh, you great big masterful man!"

Come *away*!

## 6

Mrs. Si Lenz, who had been Jo Turner, the toast of ambassadors and the darling and despair

of Simont, who never tired of bathing her, pouted world-weary lips at her intuitive spouse. "If I don't get this rice out of my back—I'm going crazy."

"My dear!" Si was abashed. "I *can't* help you here."

"Bother!" she said and walked to the end of the parlor car.

"Wait," he called, but she waved him down and entered the ladies' room. The uniformed maid had her back to the door as Jo entered. She was lighting a cigarette for a passenger and saying with a rich—a little too rich—southern accent: "Ah puffuhs Camels mahsef."

They faced each other. In Jo's mind was only one thought. Tomorrow was the fourth of July! She backed through the door and ran to Si. "Ursula," she panted "—the wash-room nigger. Quick!" He followed her. An aproned figure had just passed into the next coach. Si ran. She was fleet. Through the diner. Through another parlor car—to the observation platform—and Ursula leaped. Jo had pulled the emergency cord, but the train's impetus had not yet been checked. The black and white uniform lay motionless in a crumpled pile between the rails—nearly a mile behind the train when it was finally stopped.

Brakemen, the conductor, thirty passengers, tramped back to the corpse and surrounded it.



No one seemed to have the authority to touch the body, to straighten the cruelly backward-bent limbs. Everyone looked to the conductor for orders. Wasn't a conductor kind of like a captain of a ship at sea? Marry people—and all that? Why didn't he do something? He fussed with the wick of his lantern. A brakeman walked a short way off up the track and planted a red flare light which threw its unearthly glare over the silent crowd; casting long, grotesquely dancing shadows over Ursula's inert form. This red flare was to keep the engineer of the train's second section from running over Ursula or any of the witnesses.

**THE END**





























