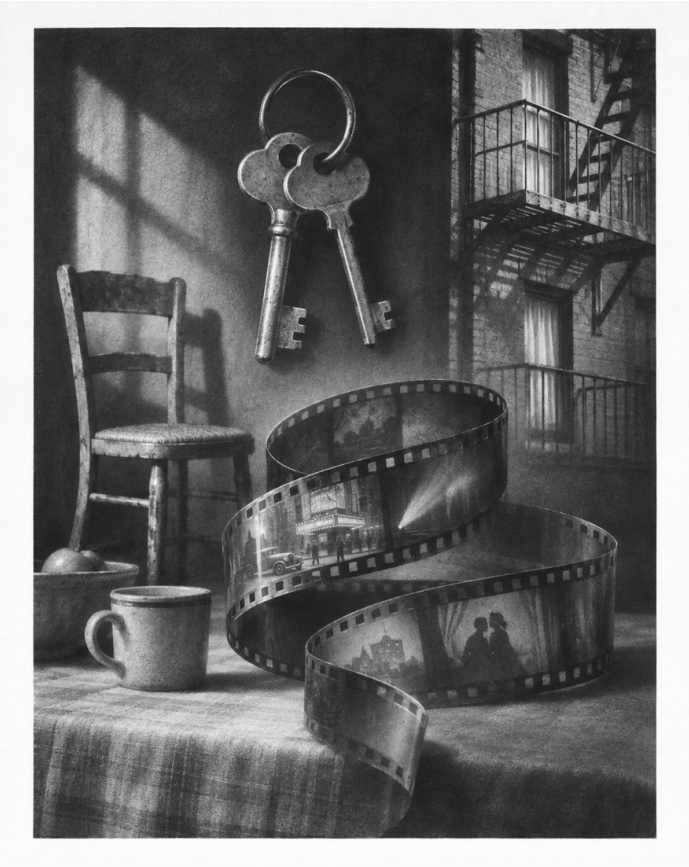
PIPCUB EDITIONS

Bad Girl

Viña Delmar

THE AUTHOR



Viña Delmar

1903 – 1990

Author vignette inspired by the published work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Viña Delmar

Viña Delmar was an American novelist and screenwriter. Bad Girl brought her early recognition for its close view of a working couple in New York. Conversations about money, marriage and daily expectations reveal pressures that neither partner finds easy to explain.

Delmar also wrote for the screen, including the screenplay for The Awful Truth. Across these forms, an ear for what people mean but fail to say helped give her scenes their distinctive rhythm.

BAD GIRL

BY

VIÑA DELMAR



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To

GENE

WHO WAITED DOWNSTAIRS

BAD GIRL

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

"Sailing, sailing, over the bounding main,
Many a stormy wind shall blow
Ere Jack comes home again."

Some one had brought a ukulele. Some one who hit the strings with a gay discordancy, a gleeful insolence that seemed to say, "Sure, it's out of tune. Who cares?"

The last agonizing chord rode out on the Hudson, and a voice falsely keyed and tuneless followed with a startlingly lengthy "agai-ain." A burst of high feminine laughter completed the grotesque performance.

The famous and beloved excursion steamer *Burma* glided on through the shining night. One fancied that she tossed her head disdainfully at the private boats that fluttered by like small, graceful birds. They were snobs who offered the silver river and the gleaming sweet-smelling night to a small, select company. The *Burma* was the real aristocrat of the Hudson. Her gentility was not so easily blasted that she feared the touch of the rabble. She could afford to open her doors to the sweltering hordes and give them music, dancing, refreshments as the advertisements reported. She gave them the magic of a river moon and romance, too, and all for a dollar twenty-five.

The passengers of the *Burma* danced and sang snatches of current songs that were born to live for one rollicking hour like the vows that were whispered in darkened recesses of the boat. Sizzling sodas, red and gold, leaped up through yellow straws to the moist and smiling lips of bobbed-haired damsels. Cigarettes gleamed in the darkness, and here and there an adventurous maiden bared white knees to the cool air. The flat-dwellers of New York were forgetting factory and office in the tolerant laws of the gold and white *Burma*.

Eddie Collins stood at the rail of the boat with his back to the water. Both hands were in his pockets, and across one arm a woman's cape, a frail black wisp of silk, trailed dejectedly.

He scanned the faces of the laughing couples who drifted past him, and on his own face was a confession of anger that simmered darkly within him.

"Sailing, sailing, over the bounding main"—the unmusical voice had resumed its chant, and Collins turned toward the rail and looked down into the glimmering river. He was very young. His hair was a sandy, disorderly crown, for he scoffed at the pomades that brought hard and shiny tidiness to the hair of the other youths. Collins' eyes were blue. They were sharply questioning eyes that proclaimed a keen intelligence that still groped blackly and unsatisfied within itself. The line of his chin was strong and firm. It was a chin that had taken blows and had proudly thrust itself upward at knowing the man who could give them. His mouth was large. There was a suggestion of obstinacy in his lips.

Somewhere a girl screamed with laughter. Eddie Collins clenched his jaws, and his eyes became hard blue chinks. The laughing girl's voice was raised now in mocking supplication. "Oh, Billy, ple-ease. I just combed my hair."

More laughter. Other voices mingled with the girl's. Eddie Collins spat contemptuously. "God-damn fools," he said.

An adventurous breeze sprang up from the river and in passing touched lightly the black wisp that lay on Eddie's arm. The wrap stirred languidly, a trifle impatiently, and slipped from Eddie's disinterested hold. It lay on the deck of the *Burma*, an aromatic heap of silk. A wrap with a Lanvin green lining that was splotchy and torn but still defiantly Lanvin green.

He left it there for a moment; then, regretting the childishness of the deed, flung it carelessly over his arm again.

"Many a stormy wind shall blow...."

And now the player of the untuned ukulele was drawing nearer, and Eddie listened to her song with a lazy interest.

"Ere Jack comes home again."

She rounded the corner of the boat and stood not three feet from Eddie Collins. Her voice was young and husky, her mouth wide and red.

"Sailing, sailing—"

The ukulele dropped to her side. She reached into the pocket of her flame-colored sweater and brought forth a chocolate almond.

An older girl, tall, thin, indifferently blonde, with her hair decorously imprisoned beneath a net, came from around the corner as though she had been following gay, fleet steps at a distance and had just caught up.

The two stood together wagering on the endurance of a candy-box cover that leaped the waves happily unconscious of the fate that would soon overtake it. Then the girl with the ukulele saw Eddie, and her breeziness suffered a momentary squelching under his sullen scrutiny. She was resentful of that moment, and her eyes beneath piquantly narrowed brows questioned his right to quench her buoyancy. Then she smiled. At herself, perhaps, for the moment she had stood with her laughter paralyzed on her lips and the angry gaze of the sandy-haired boy upon her.

The green of the cape lining caught her attention, and with a gleeful impudence she struck a chord on her ukulele and sang:

> "Sweetie went away and she didn't say where,
> She didn't say why, oh, I hope that I die!"

Eddie concentrated his whole attention on a cigarette. He would be damned if she'd drive him away.

Far down the deck a voice suggestive of soiled Lanvin green was once more begging "Bill-ly" not to muss her hair, and the ukulele continued: "Sweetie went away."

Eddie's cigarette described a fiery arc on its way to the river. He lit another, and the girl made a funny little clicking noise with her tongue and told her companion in disconcertingly loud tones that she just loved nervous men. The older girl was still watching the river. She was completely unaware of Eddie's existence, and

therefore the remark seemed pointless. She did not answer, and apropos of her friend's silence the incorrigible ukulele player turned to Eddie and sang:

"You know I'm lonesome,
You're lonesome, too."

Eddie shrugged his shoulders noticeably and took a step toward the girl. There was a fatalistic acceptance of her advances in his mien. She wanted to know him, and, after all, the atmosphere discouraged solitude.

"What makes you think I'm lonesome?" he asked. His question was not put in a softly inquiring manner, but truculently, after the manner of Harlem swains.

She was practiced. Her determination to establish social relations did not shrivel at his tone. She laughed at him. Her wide red mouth and the eyes that were dark and glowing gave themselves up to a great hearty laugh at Eddie Collins.

"I knew I'd get you to talk to me," she said.

"Oh, that was it?"

"Sure. You didn't think I wanted the pleasure of your company, did you?"

"Gee, you're fresh, aren't you?"

"Just fresh enough," she responded.

Her teeth flashed whitely behind the generously proportioned scarlet lips. Her eyes frankly revealed the idea that lay so close to them. She wanted to be kissed. Not at that moment, of course, but Eddie knew the routine. At first they would toss mildly insulting wisecracks back and forth; then gradually the artless phrasing of their speeches would take on a slightly yellowish tinge. Significant smiles and glances would accompany the degeneration of their chatter. It would become quite the thing to place smutty interpretations on every word passed between them. Then she would move with him into a darkened corner and permit him to kiss her, to paw her unrestrainedly. The limit? No, she would not go the

limit. She would lie against his shoulder, moist-lipped, panting, but ever alert lest the purely physical barrier that guaranteed her self-respect be taken from her.

Oh, yes, Eddie knew, but he was not conscious of having so gloomily detailed how far one could presume on the somewhat vulgar virginity of the lower middle-class girl.

"Who's with you?" he asked.

She motioned carelessly toward her companion. "Edna, my brother's lady friend," she replied.

The older girl, hearing her name, turned curious eyes upon the two. Flushed with self-consciousness at the importance of her social obligation, the girl with the ukulele made the one-sided introduction. "This is Mrs. Edna Driggs."

Eddie touched his hat and said, "I'm pleased to meet you."

Edna did not move from her position at the rail. She smiled at Eddie, exhibiting teeth that had gone to the dentist too late. The mutual friend suffered great embarrassment at Edna's silence but overcame it by assuring herself that she had done the proper thing. So reasoning, she turned her back on Mrs. Edna Driggs and said to Eddie, "Who's with you?"

She was looking at the cape, and Eddie frowned. "A bimbo," he told her. "Picked her up on Seventh Avenue. She wanted to go for a sail so I took her. She met somebody she knew on the boat and canned me." He smiled ruefully. "Didn't even know her name," he added. "What's yours?"

"Dot."

"That's not a name," he said. "That's punctuation."

She laughed and gave him a playful little push suggestive of long familiarity. He didn't mind. The hard blue chinks had widened into palely pleasant eyes. On a Sunday excursion one slim round-breasted girl is as desirable as another slim round-breasted girl, for they are all misers.

"Of course, my name's Dorothy. Dorothy Haley. What's yours?"

"Joe," he replied. Mysterious and unexplainable is the urge in extremely young men to conceal their real identities. He was not thinking that he had lied, so mechanically and absently had the

name leaped to his lips.

"Joe," she repeated. She was standing close to him now, and her eyes, dark and thoughtful, were considering the glittering river. "Aren't you going to tell me your last name?"

"Sure. It's Williams."

"Joe Williams. I use to know another guy named Joe. He had a dandy job at the Chevrolet service station."

Without reasonable excuse or preamble, Eddie suddenly pulled her close to him and kissed her. She was not surprised or angry, and he had known that she would not be. He liked her. The routine leading up to the kiss had been different with her. She had not insisted on a conversation replete with double entendres. It was not delicacy in Eddie that made him welcome the change, just that he was tired of the other.

There was no embarrassment between them now. Nothing in their words, facial expressions, or actions suggested that they had kissed.

Edna, the lady friend of Dorothy's brother, left off staring at the river and shifted her gaze to them. It was frankly inquisitive, but not unkind.

"Think she saw us?" Eddie whispered.

"Don't care if she did," Dot responded blithely. "She won't tell my brother. She says you can't watch a girl hard enough to keep her good, if she don't want to be."

Eddie nodded gravely. That sounded like brilliant summing up of a situation to him. He surveyed Edna interestedly. "She looks kind of young," he decided at last.

"Oh, no," Dot said, smiling faintly at the blindness of man. "Edna's twenty-eight. She's got a kid four years old. His name's Floyd. Her husband was killed on the railroad two months before the kid was born. She got ten thousand dollars for his death."

"That's fine for your brother," Eddie remarked.

Dot laughed shortly to show her appreciation of his sally and hurried on. "Oh, my brother isn't after her money. He gets seventy-five dollars a week himself. He won't let me put a penny in the house. Some brother I got."

"I'll say," Eddie agreed. "Where do you work?"

"On Twenty-third Street."

"Stenographer?"

"No, just a typist." Her lashes, soft and silky, fluttered as she raised an anxious gaze to his face. Her eyes were pleading, her tone apologetic, as she said, "I could 'a' learned shorthand. My brother wanted to send me to school, but I was crazy. You know how it is, I wanted to get to work."

He nodded understandingly.

"What do you do?" she asked him.

"Radio," he replied laconically.

"Gee," she said. There was admiration and awe mingled in her exclamation. "Hard work, ain't it?"

"Naw," swiftly and emphatically.

"We got a set. My brother built it."

"Everybody's got a set," Eddie said crushingly.

"Yeh, I guess that's so."

Conversation languished, and they stood looking at each other. After a moment Eddie asked, "Say," pointing to the ukulele, "do you really play that thing?"

"Sure. I play it swell sometimes."

"What do you mean, sometimes?"

"Well, it's according to what I'm playing."

"What can you play good?"

"Do you know 'It Ain't Gonna Rain No More'?"

Eddie nodded. Who in the year of our Lord 1923 didn't know "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More"? "Go ahead, play it," he ordered.

Dot sat down on a camp stool and began:

> "It ain't gonna rain no more, no more,
> It ain't gonna rain no more.
> How in the world can the old folks tell
> That it ain't gonna rain no more?"

There was something pathetically sweet about her. She was so eager to please. So anxious to be obliging. Even the untrained ear of Eddie Collins cringed at the horrible chords that came forth so brazenly from the ukulele. She was like a good child dancing for company. No ability, but plenty of willingness. Her brows were knit with earnestness. Her eyes never left the fingers which she placed with such painful accuracy in the wrong places. Eddie smiled.

"It ain't gonna rain no more, no more...."

And she was darn pretty, too. Gee, what soft-looking skin.

"That it ain't gonna rain no more." ...

The ukulele was quiet. The earnest eyes looked up at Eddie from their task.

"Yeh," he said by way of approbation. "Let's talk."

A thin-faced, sleek-haired youth wearing white trousers came suddenly from around the corner of the boat.

"Miss Higgins wants her cape," he said to Eddie.

Eddie's hands dug deeper into his pockets. His shoulders became a shade more rounded. He said, "Tell Miss Higgins to come for it herself."

The thin-faced youth smiled. "One doesn't say those things to a lady," he told Eddie, loftily.

"No? Well, you tell what's-her-name to come get this coat herself."

"Perhaps she doesn't care to speak to you," suggested the other.

"She didn't mind early this evening," said Eddie. His eyes narrowed again. His mouth was a crooked line when he spoke.

"Just what do you mean?" The boy with the sleek hair was quick to leap at Eddie's insinuation.

Dot's teeth tore nervously at her nails. She had once seen a pale-faced fellow with greased hair reduce an automobile mechanic to a meek and bloody pulp.

"Look here, Buddie," Eddie's tone was not unpleasant now, but his eyes still squinted, and his lips were thin and jagged. "I have no pick with you."

"But I have with you," replied the other.

Eddie's hands flew out of his pockets, and Dot uttered a tiny cry as the pale-faced youth came toward them.

The woman, Edna, left her place at the rail. She did not appear to hurry, but suddenly she was between Eddie and the other youth.

"One moment," she said.

Eddie glared at her. His eyes were hot and red with fury. In that mad, whirling eternity just before the first blow is struck, every man is wildly, gloriously primitive. In the blackness of club and nail, of tooth and claw, woman's business was to stand aside till the cry of the victor split the silence. Woman and foe never appeared simultaneously upon the horizon of the primitive warrior, and so, harking back to the Stone Age, the brain of the fighting man is unprepared for the active presence of a woman on the battle-ground.

Edna, tall and smiling, stood between the two young men. The black silk cape lay over her arm now. It had fallen to the deck with Eddie's first decisive movement.

"You get the hell out of this." Eddie spoke quietly between his teeth.

The woman laughed and flung the cape across the arm of the sleek-haired boy. "Here's Miss Higgins' cape," she said. "Tell her that Carbona is great stuff."

She laughed again, and forcing her arm through his, walked him back toward his crowd. He was an easier subject than Eddie would have been. The youth had not really wanted to fight. His fear of Eddie's contempt had made him aggressive. He welcomed the peace-making efforts of Edna Driggs.

Eddie Collins didn't. "Your friend is pretty God-damn interfering," he said to Dot.

"Don't be sore," she begged. "I'm glad he didn't hit you."

"What! That little monkey-faced fool?"

"Oh, I know you could have licked him, but I'm glad you didn't fight."

A couple passed them, carrying cigarettes that glowed brightly in the night. Beneath was the lustrous, splashing river, and above, a tranquil ceiling of stars.

"Funny," Dot said, and her voice was low. "We see each other here tonight and then never again." She waved toward the place where Edna had disappeared with the sleek-haired boy. "Why did you meet that Higgins girl, I wonder? It wasn't for anything. You just meet and talk and fight and forget. I wonder why."

"Say, what are you talking about?"

She smiled a little, and her eyes were wide and childish in the moonlight. "I feel mopey now," she said. "It's 'cause they're playing sad music, I guess."

She leaned against the rail and listened. Some one who could coax forth all the native pathos and grief there is in the melody was playing "Aloha Oe" on a steel guitar.

"Ain't that sad?" Dot asked. "Gee, it makes me feel so soft." She reached for his hand, and these two children stood together, silent and solemn, on the deck of the noisy *Burma*. "Gee, I could cry," she said. "Honest to God, Joe, I could cry."

Her dark, full lips quivered, and his grasp on her thin, nail-bitten fingers tightened ever so slightly.

"My name's not Joe. It's Eddie. Eddie Collins," he said, and his tone was harsh and angry.

CHAPTER II

The apartment house had a foyer. It was tiled in grimy white and brown squares. The walls were rough and dark. Dot had always thought of oak bark, or rather she thought of trees; she didn't know the name of any particular one.

Two chairs stared lonesomely at each other across a wide empty gap. They were pensioners. You could picture them in years gone by, important and useful in a high-ceilinged room where a fire burned brightly and whisky and soda stood on a tray near by. You didn't know why you thought of whisky and soda, but you did, and you looked again at the chairs. Pensioners. Fit for further service, but not concordant with the demands of the day. You fancied some one saying, "But you can't destroy them—" and so they stood miserable and embarrassed in their uselessness. Foyer chairs.

There was a telephone booth, too, for the convenience of the tenants, and a rug with its edges frayed and its jolly colors dimming with cruel gradualness. You knew that in time it would be a strange nondescript shade.

The stairs stood beside the telephone booth. They were marble and gave an air of elegance to the foyer, Dot thought. It never occurred to her that there should be an elevator.

Dot was standing on the third marble step looking down at Eddie. They were truly alone now. Edna Driggs had left them together.

"I suppose you're so popular that I'll never see you again," Eddie said. There was irony in his tone. He didn't doubt Dot's popularity, but he was following a standardized line of attack. In Eddie's circle, men said those things in that manner and were successful. Dot's orbit was the same.

"You don't think I'd make a date with you, do you?" she asked. "You were all right on the boat when I was lonesome—" She broke off in a laugh.

"Suits me," he came back. "I was just sorry for you. It sure looks like you can't get a fellow to take you out."

"Well, I'm particular." She said this with her little tip-tilted nose in the air and the brown, wavy bob swinging low and silky on her neck. The ukulele was under her arm, mute and forgotten. It had no place in the grimy foyer with its barnlike walls and embarrassed chairs. In a few minutes it would be thrown carelessly in the spare closet, the limbo of winter coats, hoarded magazines, and useless radio parts.

"What about it?" Eddie prompted. "Want to see me again?"

"I should say not, but accidents do happen."

Eddie smiled a little. He liked girls to say things like that. No fun kidding a dame who couldn't think up a quick answer. This Dot Haley was all right. She was a little stuck on herself, but she was a good-looker, though he'd never tell her that she was.

This noble resolution to refrain from adding to Dot's conceit was pure swagger on Eddie's part. It would have been impossible for him to sing praises to Dot's charms had he desired passionately to do so. He knew that other fellows, when they chose, could toss compliments about with enviable ease. Pretty expressions flowed liquidly as they willed. They could even extol the beauty of an unattractive girl without experiencing any difficulties. Eddie was different. Flattery froze on his lips. He had tried it once. He had failed, or perhaps he had succeeded. The lying words wouldn't come. Honest admiration was almost as hard to express. He fumbled for words, suffered terror, helplessness, humiliation, and fury before crawling back in his shell, defeated. Hard words and silences came more easily.

"Want to go to a chop suey place?" Dot asked him. "I know a dandy one. You can dance there, too."

"Where is it?"

"Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street near Seventh."

Eddie knew the place. He signified approval by nodding.

"Thursday night be all right?"

Again Eddie nodded.

"Well, then that's settled," Dot said briskly. She moved up another step and delayed going farther. Her hands drifted lingeringly over the balustrade, and one foot made strange little

jerky motions expressive of indecision.

"I got to go up now," she said.

"Thursday then," Eddie reminded her.

"Yes, Thursday. I'll meet you in front of the place at eight o'clock. I won't eat no dinner. Gee, I love chow mein, don't you?"

Eddie said it was good stuff.

Dot sat down on the fourth step. "I should go upstairs," she said. "I'll get Hail Columbia if my brother's in."

"He your boss?"

"Sure, but he ain't strict. He don't care much what I do, but once in a while if something goes wrong down at work, he's funny. You know how it is."

Eddie appeared to know how it was. Out of deference to the funniness of Dot's brother, he waited in silence for her to speak again.

Somewhere aloft a door banged open with a loud, brassy jangle. Footsteps sounded on the marble stairs, and a voice pursued them hollowly.

"Bring ten cents' worth of potato salad, too, Ben."

A man with a proud, businesslike purposefulness appeared on the landing. His brow was puckered importantly. He was skinning the inside of his lip by a system of nervous, rapid snatches. His impressive mien was designed to conceal the smallness of his errand.

Dot slid over on the steps and the man walked past her, down the hall, and out of the door.

"I hope he remembers the liverwurst," Eddie said.

Dot smiled, but not at Eddie's remark. It was a thoughtful, wondering smile.

"That woman who hollered don't care no more about living," she said.

"Do you know her?"

"No, but when a woman hollers down a stairs like that, it's 'cause she don't care what the neighbors think, and she gets like that when nothing counts any more."

"You're crazy," Eddie said. "My mother use to holler down the stairs when she wanted something."

"Is she dead?" Dot asked.

"Yeh, so's the old man. He died from pneumonia. He sold his coat for a drink and caught cold." The corners of Eddie's mouth twisted into a travestied smile. "He sold all the parlor furniture one day and stayed drunk for a week. My old lady was good though, she.... But say, I got off the track, she use to holler downstairs."

Dot said nothing. Her head was resting against the balustrade bars, and her pleated skirt lay in soft folds on the bottom step. The front door slammed, and a woman of thirty or thereabouts with keen brown eyes and a fine figure came into the foyer.

She smiled at Dot as she passed and said something kittenish about love's young dream. Eddie blushed and the woman ran blithely up the stairs laughing.

"She works in a Wall Street office," Dot said when the door one flight above them had closed with a quiet dignity. "She gets fifty dollars a week."

Eddie looked up the marble flight. There was respect in his gaze and a tinge of resentment. Fifty dollars! Could a woman be worth that much to a business firm? He doubted it. The respect vanished from his gaze; for a second the tinge of resentment lingered; then it too died. No, a woman couldn't earn fifty dollars. Some one had lied to Dot, or perhaps—he shot a quick, suspicious glance at her, but she was looking up the stairs at the door that concealed the woman, and her expression was reverential. He wouldn't tell Dot that she had been fooled. Eddie considered it a harmless deception.

"Guess I'll go," he said. "I got to get up early tomorrow morning."

Dot stood up. "I should have gone half an hour ago. I'll get killed."

Neither of them made a decisive move. The man with the pitiable air returned carrying a large paper bag. The bottom of it was wet, and small wrapped packages protruded from the top. He passed through the hall swiftly, but the odor of spiced meats and vinegar followed with slow and languid ease.

"Thursday night at eight then?"

"Yep, in front of the Chinee place." Dot turned her back and climbed two steps. "Good night, Eddie."

"Say, Dot."

She wheeled around with her dark brows raised in question. He had not moved an inch.

"Why don't you say good night in the proper way?"

"Oh." She laughed a little and flew down the stairs, a sudden swirl of white silken pleats and shining hair that danced in a mad little flare about her face.

He caught her in his arms and held her fast. Her cheek was against his. It was soft and smelled faintly of the powder she used. He kissed her lips, and she responded. It was in such situations that Eddie felt the need of honeyed phrases. At such times, other fellows whispered pet names and extravagant compliments. He could only press her against himself and kiss her.

"I like you an awful lot, Eddie."

"Do you?"

"Don't you like me?"

"Sure."

"You didn't say so."

"Didn't I?"

"You know you didn't."

He kissed her again to silence her. Her body was sweetly, fragrantly warm. It was a perennial warmth independent of climate. It would be there when August had gone, when the *Burma* lay asleep and dreaming of starry silver nights on the river. When the whistling, humming herd was no longer whistling and humming "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More."

She drew herself away from Eddie and faced the stairs again. Kisses were different here with the fading rug and the unhappy chairs looking on in silent, shocked amazement. It wasn't like the boat. Dot arduously examined a tiny nick in one of the ukulele strings. She hated to look at Eddie. No, it wasn't at all like the boat.

"I got to go," she said. Her words trampled on each other; some survived, others were lost. "I'll get murdered. See you Thursday night at eight. Good night."

She scrambled hastily up the marble steps, pausing on the second landing to hear the door slam. He was going home. Where was that? A little panicky feeling leaped within her. She didn't know where he lived. Suppose he should disappoint her Thursday night; she might never see him again. The pert little bob tossed indifferently. Suppose she never did see him again? There were other men. Lots of other men. Dot shrugged her shoulders with jaunty carelessness. One's line is one's line even if one happens to be alone.

On the third floor she fumbled for her key and opened the door at the head of the stairs.

"Is that you, Dottie?" Her father's querulous voice came waveringly down the hall to meet her.

"Yeh, Pa, it's me." The question and answer had been spoken simultaneously. Dot had had a key for five years now, and Frank Haley always greeted his children thus. He knew Jim's heavy, decided steps and the light, dance-like shuffle that meant Dot. He would look up from his magazine or evening paper and a puzzled expression would appear in his pale blue eyes as the key turned in the lock. He would grow apprehensive and demand in his peevish tone, "Is that you, Dottie?" Then, having been assured that it was, he would nod contentedly and return to his reading. He had known all along that it was Dottie, but it was part of the game that she should say so. Sometimes when Jim was cross he would reply to the question with a careless "Who did you think it was?"

That would grieve Frank Haley exceedingly. It was unkind and disrespectful. A boy had no right to speak to his father in that manner. It was too bad that he was sick and old, or he wouldn't be depending another day on the bounty of his son. God knows that he had tried to raise Jim and Dottie decently after the death of their dear mother. He cooked for them, he cleaned for them. In his old age he couldn't help it if he was sickly. Just to think his son begrudged him a civil word! Well, if he was a nuisance there was a remedy for that—

But the next night Frank Haley would be peacefully reading again when the heavy, decided step came up the stairs.

"Is that you, Jim?" he would ask.

"Yep, that's me." And Frank Haley would nod contentedly and return to his reading.

Dot came into the room. She had laid aside her white pleated skirt and the brilliant-colored sweater. She was wearing a soiled and faded dress from which the sleeves had been torn. Threads hung from the jagged gashes and trailed dejectedly across the white firmness of Dot's arms.

"Did you have a good time, my dear?"

"Yes, Edna went with me, you know. We sailed up the Hudson on the *Burma*."

"That sounds very nice," said Dot's father.

"It was."

Mr. Haley's blue eyes waited politely to see if Dot wished to continue the conversation. After fifteen seconds of silence they supposed not and returned eagerly to the story.

Dot unfolded the rotogravure section of a newspaper and scanned without interest the pictures of some society folks, the funeral of a prominent politician, and the latest additions to the Bronx Zoo.

It was very quiet in the room. Dot pushed the paper from her and yawned widely. She considered going to bed, but Edna had given her a message for Jim. It was unsafe to trust it with her father, for he would twist and alter it beyond recognition. To leave a note for Jim would injure the feelings of the old man.

Dot waited, kicking impatiently against the thick golden-oak post that supported the table.

Her father looked up from his magazine. "You are scratching the table, Dottie," he said, reprovingly.

"One more scratch won't hurt," she replied.

Mr. Haley continued his reading. Dottie was perfectly correct. One more scratch wouldn't be noticed in that jungle of criss-cross marks, but the children must be rebuked occasionally. Dot pushed her chair back from the table. The chair was golden oak, too. Her

mother had believed in golden oak for dining-rooms. There were two other chairs like the one Dot sat on. One had arms and was Papa's chair. There was a long, massive buffet at the south wall. It wore an ecru scarf, and a red glass bowl sat on it with vindictive satisfaction. The bowl was an uncertain, distorted haze of red when reflected on the door of the china closet which stood directly across the room. Dot accepted that room. It never occurred to her that the red bowl could be set on the top of the china closet and the blue vase substituted in its place. Things were where they had been in the house on Lexington Avenue, and no one had thought of changing them.

Mamma had died in that other house. Dot didn't remember her. She had a tintype of a black-haired girl with a large mouth and an elaborate pompadour. That was Mamma. The tintype had been taken at Coney Island. A dashing, derbyed youth stood proudly at her side. That wasn't Papa. Papa had been the photographer. Romance here perhaps, but Dot didn't see it, and probably Papa didn't either any more.

Dot wondered vaguely how Mamma would have liked their Bronx apartment. Rents had risen since Mamma's day. Fifty-five dollars the Haleys paid with Jim and Papa rooming together and no parlor for company. Not that they had much company, but there were friends of Dot's and a man now and then from Papa's lodge. Edna was the only one who came to see Jim, and nobody cared with Edna that there was no parlor.

Dot's second yawn was halted by Papa, who suddenly turned his head expectantly toward the hall. The door opened noisily, and Papa called out, "Is that you, Jim?"

"Yep, that's me."

An expression of tranquillity settled on Mr. Haley's face. The children were safe at home.

Jim strode into view. His coat and vest were already off, and he was yanking at his tie as he passed through on his way to the room that he shared with his father. He was tall and muscular. His features were rough and uneven. When he smiled Dot liked him, but

most times he was grimly sober, and she pictured him in the machine shop being foreman to tousled-haired, sweaty-faced men, and she pictured them hating him.

"Hello, Kid." He pulled Dot's hair as he passed, and she followed to his room.

"I waited up for you," she said. "Edna wants me to tell you that she is having her cousin Will at her house tomorrow night. She says don't come if you ain't prepared to be nice to him."

Jim threw his coat over a chair. It fell to the floor, and neither of them picked it up.

"All right," Jim said.

"Are you going, anyway?"

Dot felt it her privilege in the office of messenger to make inquiries.

"What's that to you?"

"Nothing, I guess."

"You guessed right." Jim was eleven years older than Dot, and he could be as rude as he pleased. "Get the deuce out of here. Going to get undressed."

Dot went hurriedly. She was free to go to bed now. Her mission was accomplished. She stood uncertainly in the dining-room for a second, then walked toward the radio-set. It was the only thing in the room that was not golden oak. It was mahogany stain and had three important-looking dials.

Dot lifted the lid quietly and looked inside. She wanted to see how it was made.

CHAPTER III

The Lotus Garden with its bright hanging lanterns and spicy native odors suggested a Chinese festival gay with curious, high-pitched music. One thought of red-lipped, sloe-eyed girls munching golden limes, queer eastern games of chance, and yellow youths with black silk hair. The delicately-molded Orientalism of the Lotus Garden was enhanced by the decorative presence of its owner. Herbert Yet Sim Nom, complacent blend of Mott Street and Times Square, moved quietly through the restaurant, diffusing his suave diplomacy among the makers, servers, and consumers of Chinese and American dishes all hours of the day and night.

Yet Sim Nom knew full well the languorous allure that dripped from every lantern, curtain, and incense-breathing idol in the place. He had planned it all, and his greatest pleasure was in watching the senses of the Americans reel dizzily under the triple assault of Chinese music, lights, and cookery. He knew that the young men and women who drifted in and out of the Lotus Garden pictured China as a dazzling expanse of golden dragons and fascinating symbols designed by Herbert Yet Sim Nom.

He enjoyed watching the diners. Those with mingled expressions of bewilderment and admiration did not please him. They were yokels. Those whose faces were grim, disapproving masks brought a faint glimmer of amusement into Yet Sim Nom's brown eyes. His delight was appreciative patrons whose easy familiarity with the menu card proclaimed them veterans of many Chinese cafés. He disliked most the person who ate, drank, and smoked, all without realizing that the Lotus Garden was as beautiful as the visions of a dreaming China maid.

Such a blind one was Eddie Collins. He had come to the Lotus Garden solely to eat chow mein, and he went about his business with a steady, systematic motion. Frequently he raised his tea-cup and when he did his eyes dwelt for one disinterested moment on the surroundings. His gaze would lower again with the cup, and Eddie Collins would once more apply himself vigorously to the bowl before him.

His companion was different. Her eyes sparkled as she watched other couples swing by in the rhythm of the dance. There was an anxious vividness about her. She wanted to be part of the swaying, squirming mass. Herbert Yet Sim Nom could see that the atmosphere had claimed her. Great splashes of color glowed on her cheeks, and she smoked her cigarette in a manner that marked her as a girl who only smoked on special occasions.

Yet Sim Nom strolled past them. They had been served by a new waiter, and the practiced eye of the owner quickly took in the table. The only impression that he carried away with him was that the stupid, sandy-haired youth had scorned the ash tray and was arranging a wet gray semicircle of cigarette stubs on his saucer.

The music stopped, and the dancers hurried back to the chow mein, growing cold and pasty in the course of many encores. A girl with lazy eyelids and dewy vermilion lips floated past the table where Dot Haley sat with Eddie. A vagrant cloud of perfume surrounded her. It seemed to spiral from her fluffy black bob to the heels of her slippers. They were red slippers.

“I know her,” said Dot. “Her name is Maude McLaughlin. She went to school with me, and we used to go out together after we started to go to work, but she got going with a fellow steady, and she didn’t have no more time for girl friends.”

“Is that the fellow?” Eddie asked, looking curiously at a slim, dapper youth who wore a dark suit with a light gray vest smiling through.

“Yeh, that’s him. His name is Ted Monroe. He bets on horses and he always wins, Maude told me.”

Eddie laughed a little. “He’s in a class by himself,” he remarked.

“Well, I guess he’s a clever fellow, Eddie. Maude’s going to marry him. She told me she would have married him the first week she met him, only he didn’t have enough money.”

“No horses running that week?”

“I don’t know. Maybe—Oh, Maude sees me. She’s coming over.”

Eddie kept his seat. If a coach of social etiquette had been there and said, “Eddie, why don’t you arise?” he would have promptly replied, “Why? I ain’t goin’ no place.”

Maude greeted Dot effusively and turned a careful appraising smile upon Eddie.

"How do you do," she said.

Eddie didn't know whether to shout "How do *you* do" right back at her challengingly or to say "I'm feeling well"; so he said nothing, which was quite all right, as Miss McLaughlin's interest in him had already flagged.

She was very different from Dot. Eddie felt the difference. She wore a large yellowish diamond and a dress with heavy sophisticated folds of satin.

"Why, Honey, I haven't seen you in ages. You should have come over to the house, you dear kid. You knew I'd always be glad to see you."

Her flood of affability embarrassed Dot. She floundered. "I—I supposed that you were always busy."

Maude smiled importantly. "Of course there's always a crowd around, but they're just a lot of hangers-on that don't mean much. You should have come over, Dot. Ted was just saying one night about a month ago that he wondered what had ever become of that nice little Haley girl."

Eddie didn't like Maude. He didn't like the way she acted toward Dot. There was probably a word for it, but he couldn't think what it was. She was acting as though she was giving Dot something. Eddie wished he could think of that word so he could tell Dot later.

"I'll get Ted to come over here and we will have a foursome. How would you like that, Mr. Collins?"

"Try anything once," Eddie responded gloomily.

Ted came over. It was obvious at once that he had never asked anything at all about that nice little Haley girl. He didn't remember having met her before and two minutes after his second introduction had forgotten her name.

"This is a rotten place," Maude said. "I'm glad I have the car downstairs so I can get away from it quick."

"Is it your car?" Dot asked in awe.

"Yes, of course. That is, practically. It's mother's car really."

If Maude had gone a little further she might have reached the truth. The car, a three-year-old Buick, really belonged to a friend of Maude's mother. A most intimate friend of Maude's mother. A friend, in fact, whose intimacy with Maude's mother good people could only deplore.

The orchestra was at work again, but neither of the couples noticed it. Eddie was smoking a cigarette and listening to Maude McLaughlin. He wished he could think of that word. Ted was drinking tea with a certain masculine grace that showed off his soft, well-kept hands. Dot fashioned narrow golden skirts of pineapple with the side of her spoon and thought of Maude at the age of seven sitting on the steps of the teachers' entrance, holding forth on the subject of where babies come from.

She wasn't telling "secrets" now, though there would always be a certain aura of naughtiness surrounding Maude's words. It was because her eyes carried forever with them the look of an easy and unrepented surrender.

"And you, dear, what have you been doing?" Maude had finished discoursing on what she termed a perfectly ghastly summer, and she was ready to listen now in case anybody else had anything to say.

"Oh, I've been working," Dot responded. "That's about all I ever do."

"You poor thing. I simply couldn't stand an office routine. I nearly went mad rushing downtown every day. If I hadn't quit I'd have had a nervous breakdown, I feel sure."

Eddie moved uneasily and lit another cigarette.

"Hold the light," Maude said. She lifted a cork-tipped cigarette to her lips and put cool white fingers on Eddie's hand to steady it. A faint, light breath crossed Eddie's cheek, and the match was out.

He withdrew his hand. "That's my last match," he said, and he turned to blow smoke out at the dance floor.

The waiter brought the checks. Ted Monroe covered them with one hand and endeavored to look unconcerned under Eddie's steady gaze. He was ready to begin the popular good-humored argument when Eddie said quietly, "Let me have my check, Monroe."

Ted passed it over, smiling as he did so. This Collins was a strange guy, obviously low-class. Ted looked at his own check and asked Maude for three dollars and eighty cents.

Eddie got up noisily. His chair hesitated for a brief moment on its two back legs, then settled down to normal with a bang. The three at the table eyed him disapprovingly. Dot looking up from her powder compact to do so.

"Come on," he said to her. "Quit fussing. You'll look just as bad when you're finished."

Dot closed her vanity with a hasty little snap and jumped to her feet. Maude was still seated, and Eddie was starting away.

"I'm going, Maude. See you again," Dot said, stopping for a moment at Maude's side.

Maude laughed. "Your rough Romeo has you trained," she said. "Do you jump through hoops for him? I was going to have you both come home with me for a while. Wouldn't you like that?"

"Oh, sure, that would be swell." Dot's ready smile disappeared as a doubting look overspread her face. "But maybe Eddie wouldn't come. Wait, I'll ask him."

He was leaning up against the door at the top of the restaurant stairs. His hat was on his head, and his cigarette burned close to his fingers.

"Ready to go now?" he asked.

"Eddie, Maude wants—" Dot gulped; he was looking at her coldly —"wants me to go over to her house."

"Well?"

"I thought you'd like to go, too."

"You thought cockeyed," he returned, opening the door. "What'll I do with that jane and her sweet boy? You go."

He was over the threshold. Dot caught his hand, and the door closed behind them. They were at the head of the stairs, looking down at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

"Eddie, I came out with you and I'm going to stick with you. I ain't like that Higgins girl."

His sulky eyes blinked, but he never faced her. He was watching the light on his cigarette creep closer to his hand.

"Please come, Eddie. Maude and Ted want you and I want to go so badly."

"Well, go," he said, flinging what was left of his cigarette to the little tile foyer below. "They're your friends and I suppose it means something to you to go calling on them. It means nothing to me."

Dot's teeth wandered from one finger to another in vain search for a scrap of nail to bite. She turned her head away from Eddie and looked at the wall, an uninteresting but safe view.

"It means nothing to me either," she said finally, "unless you go, too."

He did not answer. There was silence on the landing for a second; then a strange, smothered sound reached Eddie's ears.

"Say, are you crying?" he demanded. "You make me sick, crying 'cause you want to go to some dame's house and won't."

"Oh, it isn't that, Eddie."

He could see her face now. Her eyes were unbecomingly red. The lips that were warm and full were misbehaving. She could hardly make him hear, so low did she speak to keep her voice from ending in a silly little sob.

"It's because you're so mean, Eddie. You speak so cross to me. I guess you don't like me, Eddie."

"Aw, for Christ's sake!" he said, drawing the words out slowly so as to get the maximum amount of contempt in each. "If you want to go to that dizzy broad's house that bad, come on."

"Oh, you're a darling," Dot said, brightening up and making a dive for her compact.

Eddie said nothing. He fumbled for another cigarette and was scratching a match on Herbert Yet Sim Nom's frosted glass panel when Maude and Ted joined them.

"Has Mr. Collins decided to favor us?" asked Maude. Her eyes sparkled with amusement, and she broke into a little light laugh when Dot answered:

"Yes, he says he'll go over for a while, Maude."

Ted was already in the car. There was a small pucker of discontent between his dark brows as he watched Maude come downstairs with Eddie and Dot. Why did Maude do such things? he wondered. What amusement could she derive from entertaining that little dumb-bell? And if the girl wasn't bad enough, there was this Collins with the manners of a ditch-digger.

"Your friend can sit with Ted," said Maude as they reached the car. "I have so much to tell you, Dottie."

Wordlessly, Eddie climbed into the seat beside the wheel. Ted sat expressionless and silent, waiting for the girls to get seated in the rear.

"Wanna go right home?" he asked Maude.

"I have to," she answered. "I may get a long-distance call from mother. She's in Atlantic City," Maude explained to Dot. "Then Sue Cudahy is going to drop in for a minute. You know Sue, don't you, Dottie?"

"Oh, sure. She's the girl who couldn't graduate, ain't she? She had to get her working papers."

"Yes," Maude answered, sudden compassion oozing into her voice. "Poor Sue. I give her all my cast-off clothes. She's coming in for some I promised her tonight. Don't let on you know about it. She's sensitive."

"Oh, I wouldn't," Dot promised.

The car started, and for a moment no word passed between the occupants. Motoring was a rare treat for Dot. She loved the motion of the machine, the wind in her face, the feeling of luxurious privacy. She felt sure that if ever she owned a car she would ride throughout the night. Not alone, of course. Somebody would have to be with her; so she would take Eddie. Maybe sometime they would ride all the way to California. Dot had heard of people doing that.

"She's a telephone operator now," said Maude.

"Oh, yes—Sue." Dot got in step with Maude again.

"She's got a sweetheart who is simply impossible." The dewy vermilion lips came together in a long, thin disapproving line. "He's a drug clerk, so they say, but I think he's just a plain soda jerker.

Poor Sue, she'll probably marry him and have six children and wear my clothes for the rest of her life."

"Yes," Dot said rather stupidly. She was thinking of Sue Cudahy as she remembered her. Big, blonde Sue who had once whispered a wickedly fascinating tale having to do with Maude McLaughlin and a boy in the Junior High. So wickedly fascinating was the tale that it spread like a plague throughout the school. There was no one in the building that did not hear, and Maude went about her business with her dark eyes leveled at scholars and teachers alike and a brazen inquiry in the depths of them. That was six years ago. Now Maude was Sue's best friend. But was she? It certainly was kind of her to give Sue charity. Not so kind, though, to talk with careless freedom of Sue's circumstances. That could be avoided. Still the fact remained that Maude said nothing ill of Sue and had acted generously toward her. Dot was puzzled. People were hard to understand. It was like a riddle: "When is a friend not a friend?"

"How do you think I look?" Maude asked suddenly. She had lighted a cigarette and was leaning back, idly blowing smoke.

"Gee, fine," said Dot. "Swell diamond you got."

Maude smiled contentedly. She liked other girls to notice her ring. "Isn't it lovely?" she said. "I didn't want Ted to go over a thousand dollars, but he is such a silly."

Dot gasped. Over a thousand dollars! Maude was trying to look very casual after having delivered that piece of information. Girls didn't usually take it like Dottie. They generally made an effort to match Maude's casualness. One had said, "Well, he'd have to go over a thousand, Maude. A girl wouldn't wear what a fellow could get for a thousand." But Dot was so frankly dazzled that for a second Maude was afraid that she had made it a little too strong. She grew easier as she saw Dot getting back to normal but decided not to tell Dot that her winter coat was costing thirty-five hundred dollars. Eighteen hundred would do nicely in this particular case.

"When are you going to get married?" Dot asked.

Maude threw her cigarette away and drew closer to Dot. Her voice sank to little more than a whisper as she said, "I have another offer. There's a man forty-two years old, a banker, who's simply wild

about me. He has a hundred-thousand-dollar home and four Rolls Royces. He's divorcing his wife simply in the hope that I'll take him."

"Oh, Maude, you wouldn't marry an old man?" Dot asked, horrified.

Maude adopted the woman-to-woman attitude. "I don't know, Dot," she said. "To be perfectly frank with you, I'm not sure I wouldn't. What have I if I marry Ted, although I do adore him? Suppose he does have an income of, say, three or four hundred dollars a week. What's that, after all? It's nothing compared to what Mr. Shaw could give me."

"Shaw is his name?" Dot asked.

"Yes, George Bernard Shaw," said Maude. "Isn't that distinguished?" For a second she hung in dizzy suspense. The name had a too familiar ring. Suppose it was the name of a movie actor? But presently Maude breathed regularly again. There was no inkling of suspicion in Dot's expression. Maude smiled to herself. What if George Bernard Shaw was a movie actor? Dot was so darn dumb it wouldn't make any difference.

CHAPTER IV

The car stopped before a brownstone house on Alexander Avenue. The street was very quiet. The atmosphere of the Bronx had never invaded this small street. Here one would find no steps full of gossiping uncorseted Jewesses, no squalling, dirty-faced babies. The quietness of Alexander Avenue demanded quiet, and noisy, ill-bred families who came "looking for rooms" were always repelled by the aloofness of the old brown houses. Here and there a couple stood in a doorway. One did not think this significant on Alexander Avenue, such an air of respectability hung over everything. One felt that the rooming-houses were refined and proper. Perhaps the air of propriety emanated from the shingles of aged doctors whose last patient had died years before.

The two couples left the car, Ted and Eddie without having exchanged a single word. Maude rummaged in her gold mesh bag for a key and rushed up the stoop, her white knees flashing in the darkness as she ran.

"Don't mind the house," she said as she threw the doors open. "Bella hasn't been here to clean since mother went away. You pay a nigger twenty-five dollars a week and you can't get service anyhow."

The others had reached the vestibule now. Maude drew them in and switched on the lights. Cheaply stained stairs rose at the foyer's side in a straight, simple line. Ahead was the living-room—huge, but cluttered even so. Dust lay thick over the piano and chairs. The trays on the smoking-tables had been filled beyond endurance with cigarette stubs, and the carpet around had graciously catered to the overflow. In the corners the pattern of the parquet floor was well concealed, and two glasses redly sticky suggested that Ted and Maude might have had a drink some days before. Clothes, obviously Maude's clothes, lay over chairs and divan. A dressing-gown of masculine cut was draped across the piano like a scarf.

"It's filthy," said Maude somewhat unnecessarily.

Dot and Eddie found seats. Maude flung her hat on the floor and herself on the divan.

"Be a cherub, Ted, and mix a cocktail," she said.

"What's the matter with you?" he returned. "Crippled?"

"You cute thing," Maude gurgled, "I could eat you up when you try to be gruff wif oos own ikkle Maudie."

Maude mixed the cocktail.

Eddie refused his glass. "Never use it," he explained.

"Mr. Collins suspects your private stock, Ted," said Maude.

Dot sipped experimentally at her drink. It was a golden shade and served in a thin-stemmed glass that shimmered with a dozen colors. Dot was disappointed at the bitter taste of the cocktail. It seemed sad that such a beautiful thing should taste so awful.

She looked at Maude. Her cocktail was gone, and Ted's was fast disappearing.

"Very good," he said to Maude.

Dot sighed regretfully as she relinquished the glass to the tray. She'd never be like Maude.

"What's the matter, honey?" Maude asked.

Dot was embarrassed. "I don't like it," she faltered.

Maude and Ted laughed. "Oh, go on," Maude said, "you'll get to like 'em." She took the glass and started toward Dot with it. "Here, drink this and you'll love the next one."

"I'm afraid I can't," Dot said.

"Oh, sure you can."

Dot was glad that the front doorbell rang. She had visions of Maude holding her while Ted spilled the lovely, horrible drink down her throat. Eddie was sitting near the piano smiling at her confusion. She felt that he could be relied on, but there was no comfort in that. She didn't want Ted and Eddie pummeling each other all over the room. The cocktail was forgotten, however, when Maude returned with Sue Cudahy and Pat Macy in tow.

Sue was big and blonde, as Dot remembered her, with small blue eyes under thin, undeveloped brows. Her nose was well shaped, but her mouth was large, and her teeth, when she smiled, looked like three sides of a square.

Pat, who was suspected of being a soda jerker, had extremely red hair and a small nervous face. It was impossible to guess at the color of his eyes because he kept blinking them continually.

He sat down near Eddie. They felt kindly toward each other, but neither knew why, nor were they conscious of a bond.

Cocktails were not mentioned to the newcomers. Sue watched Maude drink the one Dot had refused, and there was a slight shadow of amusement in her eyes.

Ted leaned back in his chair and surveyed Maude's friends wonderingly. What did she want of them? What did they give her?

His glance shifted to Maude. She was talking to Sue.

"Oh, Sue, I found some of the loveliest hats and dresses for that friend of yours who needs them." Maude looked at Sue meaningly as she spoke. Her gaze was as sharp and significant as an elbow thrust. She wanted there to be no question in Sue's mind of the kindness of her old school chum.

"That so?" Sue said, carelessly.

"There's one hat in particular, I think will be very becoming—" Maude went on.

"That so?" Sue said again and turned to ask Dot if her brother was still single.

Over near the piano, conversation turned to radio.

"I wish I was brilliant enough to know something about that marvelously interesting subject," said Maude. She was piqued—these two stupid couples ignoring her!

"I'm gonna tell a smutty story," she announced. "I'm not interested in radio or Dot's brother."

It was milder than Dot had expected. She laughed a little and looked at Eddie. He was not amused.

"Mr. Collins didn't like my story," Maude giggled wickedly.

"Oh, yes, I did," Eddie returned, "the first time I heard it."

His reply drew a bigger laugh from Sue and Pat than Maude's story.

"Here's one you never heard," said Maude.

Throughout the second story, Dot focused her gaze on the rug. She lived a hundred years waiting for Maude to finish. When Maude finally did, Dot knew it only by the laugh of Pat Macy. Dot couldn't find a bit of sense in the line that had brought Pat's laugh. Again she looked at Eddie. He wasn't laughing either, but she could see that he had found sense in Maude's joke. Eddie was staring curiously at Ted. There was a middle-class oath forming in his brain. "He'd be God damned if a woman of his would ever tell a filthy story."

Dot knew he was displeased. She whispered to Maude that they had to go. But Maude was just beginning to enjoy herself. She insisted that they stay, and Dot's misgivings were routed by her hostess's purring arguments. Maude told another story. This one carried a faint whiff of stale beer and free lunch. What the girl in the Pullman said to the man who had shared her berth struck Dot like a slap across the mouth. She couldn't have believed it of Maude. Dot sat silent while Ted chipped in with a yarn about the woman who didn't want any more children.

Her glance met Eddie's, and there was a blush on Dot's face that made her turn from him. Were these people her friends? She had wanted to come there. She couldn't let Eddie see that she hated them, hated being in this dusty, smoke-filled room with the vulgar and shameless Maude. And so they stayed while Maude fed a score of cigarettes to her amber holder. Sue waited with honest boredom for the bundles which were for her "friend."

It was Pat Macy who at length yawned sleepily. "It's twelve o'clock," he said. "Time to go, Sue."

"Yes," she agreed, walking toward the table where she had laid her hat. "Where are those boxes, Maude? Can I get them?"

She could. Maude directed her upstairs and turned her attention to Dot.

"Are you going, too?" she asked, noting that Dot had risen from her chair.

"I must. I should have gone an hour ago." There was a frightened look in Dot's eyes. Her brows were drawn together nervously.

"What are you scared of? The dark?" Maude laughed. "I'm sure Mr. Collins could be persuaded to take you home."

Sue reappeared with a hat box and four flat oblong boxes tied together. She handed them to Pat and wasted no time saying good night to her benefactress. A brief "So long," and Sue was walking down the steps to Alexander Avenue.

The others followed.

"Thank God that's over," Sue said. "I hate that house worse than poison."

"It's like all the other houses in the row," said Dot.

"Oh, I mean I hate Maude and Ted and their actions."

Dot said nothing. Her eyes roamed undirected to the boxes which Pat carried piled up in front of his face like a moving-picture comedian.

"Sure she gives me clothes, but say, how she enjoys it! I owe her nothing," Sue declared. "You could tell her what I've said and she'd still continue to pass on her cast-offs to me. I could kill her sometimes, she's so damn patronizing."

"Patronizing!" Eddie suddenly exclaimed. "That's the word."

Nobody noticed him. Dot was absorbed in what Sue was saying. Open dislike of any one who had been kind was entirely new to Dot.

It occupied her mind till Pat and Sue turned off toward the subway and Eddie and she were alone. There was no word spoken between them. They walked on, their heels sounding hollow and sad on the deserted pavements. They passed a bakery and the odor of fresh loaves rose up, seeking to lure them into the shop where a blatant white light spread itself over marble-topped tables and raisin-studded coffee rings.

"Want some coffee?" Eddie asked.

"No, thank you," Dot returned firmly.

They walked on, their steps growing slower as they neared Dot's door.

"Well?" Eddie prompted as they stopped.

"What well?"

"Gonna see me again?"

"That's up to you."

"No, it ain't."

"Sure it is."

"I ain't gonna argue at this hour. I got to get some sleep. You call me up tomorrow. I gave you the number in the Chinee joint, didn't I?"

"Yes, I have it."

"Well, use it. I'll be waiting tomorrow for you."

He caught hold of her hands and pulled her to him. She kissed him without question or coquetry.

"Good night, Kid, I'll expect your call."

He started away from her and was arrested by her hand on his sleeve. He turned and found her eyes brimming with tears.

"What the hell—"

"Oh, Eddie, don't think I'm crazy. If you get mad at me I'll have to walk around all night alone. I won't go home, Eddie, I can't. I'm scared to go upstairs."

He took her hand and led her into the brown-and-white foyer. She was crying carelessly now and clinging to him.

"I wasn't gonna tell you, but I had to—"

"What's the matter?"

"I can't go upstairs. It's half past twelve and my brother will kill me." The last few words were accompanied by an agonized sob.

"Don't be crazy," said Eddie, his face suddenly hardening. "Your brother won't kill you. Tell him you were at a friend's house. Don't he know Maude? He won't holler."

"Oh, he will, he will, Eddie. He hit me once something awful just because I went to Coney Island and didn't get home till twelve."

Eddie's eyes narrowed and his hands slipped into his pockets. "I'll go up with you," he said. "Come on."

"Oh, that would be twice as bad. He'd think I was no good being with a fellow till this hour."

"I hope he says so," Eddie spoke out of the side of his mouth. "Come on."

"Oh, no, Eddie. You'd hit Jim and he'd put me out."

"Then you'd go with me."

"With you? Where?"

"Where I go, Stupid. Come on, every minute makes you later." Eddie started up the marble stairs. He was impatient to see the end of this. Dot clutched his hand and pulled him back.

"I don't want to be bad friends with Jim. He likes me in his own way. You'll hit him, and whether he clouts the devil out of you or you lick him, he'll throw me out anyway."

"Well, I said that you can come with me." Eddie's eyes looked out of the narrow space he allowed them and found Dot's. For a moment he held her gaze; then she looked away.

"There's my father, too," she murmured incoherently.

"All right. I won't fight with your darling brother. I'll explain like a movie hero that we were dee-tained and I hope he will forgive me for keeping you so late and all that bull."

"Oh, no, Eddie, if he sees you he'll kill me—"

"What do you take me for? Do you think I'd let anybody in the world hurt you or any other dame I happened to be with? I'll start nice, and if he goes to hit I'll—Jesus Christ, I'll tear him apart."

"Then he'll put me out."

She leaned against the wall and gave herself up to a series of dry, racking sobs.

"Well, what are you going to do?" Eddie asked, brusquely. "Stay down here and cry all night or face the music? Come on, don't be a fool."

"No, Eddie, I can't go up with you and I can't go up alone."

"What else is there to do?"

"Will you walk over to Edna Driggs' with me? I'll wake her up and she'll come over."

"What good would she be? If your brother was to hit you she couldn't help."

"But he won't hit if Edna's there. He does what she says."

Eddie made an exclamation of disgust. He walked back and forth in the grimy foyer, giving Dot a look of complete bafflement now and again. He wanted to climb the stairs. He wanted to see Dot's brother, and he wanted Dot's brother to say that Dot was no good.

Instead he followed her out into the street and walked in disapproving silence to the house of Edna Driggs. It was a squat gray stone building that tenanted eight families. Edna lived on the first floor and answered the bell at once. She was fully clothed and did not register the nth degree of alarm which Eddie expected of her. She simply said, “Hello, Kids, where’s the trouble?”

Dot had ceased crying. Eddie knew it was the confidence that she had in Edna that had quieted her. Dot was able to state the situation briefly; so he contributed not one word to the story.

“Sure,” said Edna in answer to Dot’s request. She got her cape and walked back to Dot’s with them.

“You’ve been with me since nine-thirty, Dot,” Edna schemed as they walked. “I was taken with pains like ptomaine and you didn’t dare leave me, but I feel fine now. Thank God, we have no phones,” she added.

No one spoke again till they reached their destination.

“You better run along, Eddie,” Edna advised. “Jim will take me back home again. Everything is going to be all right now with Dot.”

“Oh, yes, Eddie,” Dot assured him. “I’ll be all right now.”

Eddie grunted his good night. Dot and her champion passed through the big glass doors and he remained on the sidewalk watching as they climbed the first flight of steps. Dot was game now to face her angry brother. She hadn’t trusted him to go with her. She had to have Edna Driggs. He spat the name mentally. Edna would buy Dot’s safety with lies and smiles. Eddie would have assured it differently. His hands closed into white, bloodless fists. Angrily, he turned toward Willis Avenue.

Damn Edna Driggs for being alive. The trolley had passed over the bridge and was going west when Eddie suddenly remembered that he should have slammed Haley anyhow for the other time—the time Dot had gone to Coney Island.

CHAPTER V

Harlem lay black and shining in the rain of an October night. The trolleys groaned along One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and the lights of Proctor's and the Harlem Grand Motion Picture Theater lay in dank and yellow reflection in the puddles. Harlemites, their faces covered by umbrellas, hurried along the street. They prodded and bumped into each other, scowled, and rushed on to the movies.

Dot stood outside of Loft's candy store waiting for Eddie. An old felt hat was pulled low over her eyes and the collar of her coat pinned tight around her neck. Her slippers were heavy with wetness and the sleazy silk stockings clung to her insteps. Dot's umbrella was closed. It was useless. The rain was coming from the direction in which Dot wanted to watch. Why was Eddie late? She glanced into the candy store. Even with its tiled floor tracked with countless pairs of dripping rubbers it seemed inviting. She went in and asked for a pineapple sundae. Certainly by the time she had consumed it Eddie would be there. She stood at the counter with the little mound of ice cream and pineapple shreds. From the tables she couldn't see the street, and she wanted to see the street. Perhaps Eddie would come, and not finding her, would go away again. Gee, that would be fierce.

The pineapple sundae disappeared and Dot took up her post again beneath the red electric specimen of Mr. Loft's handwriting. She might have stayed in the store, but a person gets so restless waiting. There's a painful sort of solace in watching each new figure that appears, and in trusting and believing until the perfect stranger draws close enough to rout all hopes. The disappointments and the courage that flares anew with each blighted expectation.

One dark outline a block away, slim and slight as Eddie, caused Dot's heart to pound delightedly. She framed her words; she knew just how she would greet him. "You're not late by any chance?" she would say. But it wasn't Eddie. A sickening chill passed over Dot as the outline materialized into a well-dressed unknown. He said "Hello, Cutie" to Dot as he passed.

The sickening chill persisted. There was a heavy conviction bothering her now, a conviction that Eddie would not come. Half an hour late! He had never done this before. At least thirty times they had met at this corner, and Eddie had always been prompt. It had been raining, too, on other occasions. It wasn't the weather that delayed him. Dot bit her lower lip till it was sore and bleeding. Oh, where was Eddie? There was positive agony in the glance that she directed unwaveringly eastward. Another figure. This one might be Eddie, she assured herself. As the man, one she had never before seen, walked under a bright light, Dot suffered no disappointment. She was conscious of the fact that she had really known from the start it was not Eddie. Stupid, to try to fool herself.

Well, she would wait no longer. He wasn't coming. She knew what she had to do. She had to go to his house and find out what had kept him. She couldn't go home and sleep without knowing. Perhaps he was sick—Dot hastily snipped her thoughts off there. She was going to give him a piece of her mind, that's what she was going to do. How did a guy get that way? Letting her stand out in the rain like a sap. She wouldn't do that for the Pope. Where did he get that stuff, anyhow?

She knew his house though she had never before been in it. Madison Avenue. The inevitable brown stone that needed no "Vacancy" sign in the window to identify it. On either side, similar houses flaunted similar announcements.

A girl in a bright blue slicker ran up the stairs whistling, took a key from her pocket, and opened the door. Dot thanked her as she too passed into the house. The bright blue slicker disappeared into the gloom at the top of the green-carpeted steps. Dot stared around at the hatrack where a deserted-looking shawl drooped drearily, at the dusty rolling doors that undoubtedly concealed the inevitable business couple in the inevitable "front parlor." From behind a door at the end of the passage Dot heard voices. One voice, a woman's, was shrill and grating. Dot recoiled from the idea of looking that voice straight in the eye and asking for Mr. Collins. Still she had to know why he hadn't come. Perhaps she could find the girl who whistled and wore a bright blue slicker. Dot climbed the stairs and looked around. Five doors. All closed. No sound from anywhere. Dot

tried one flight higher. This floor had six closed doors to make the situation more baffling. She leaned against the banister rail trying to decide what to do. Then all at once there was music. An orchestra abruptly burst into music, oddly enough choosing the last six bars of a popular song to begin with. Dot was momentarily amazed. Then she smiled. A radio set. Probably Eddie's set, too. She was trying to place the room from which the music came when it was discontinued as suddenly as it had started. A second later it began again, loud but not clear as before. There was a shocking distortion to it now. Silence again. Then after a time, the music once more, loud and with perfect clarity, but only for a moment or two; then in the quiet that followed, Dot heard some one walking about. The door farthest away from her opened, and Eddie rushed out like a cyclone. He was halfway downstairs before she could call him.

"Eddie."

"Oh, gee, Dot," he said and came up the stairs again.

"I was worried about you," she said. "I thought maybe—But say, you got a deuce of a nerve letting me stand in the rain while you play your set."

"They stuck me with it, Dot; at the last minute the boss wanted me to fix it. I brought it home. I can work better here. I thought you'd know I'd get there. I figured you'd sit in Loft's till I come."

"Well, I couldn't. How'd I know you'd come?"

"Well, Gosh, I never gave you a stand-up, did I? You seen just now how I was breaking my neck to get to you, didn't you?"

"Yeh," admitted Dot slowly.

"Gee, that set was a pipe to fix"—Eddie smiled reminiscently as he spoke—"once I found out what was wrong." He was silent for a time, thinking in terms of condensers and grid leaks. Dot watched him sulkily. He had enjoyed working on the set. He hadn't cared at all that that half hour could have been spent with her. "Want to see it?" he asked, brightly.

Dot followed him into his room. She knew it wasn't considered "nice" to go into a man's room, but with Eddie so enthusiastic over his mechanical skill she thought it would be placing a high value on

her charm to object. She could fancy him saying, “Don’t worry, Kid, I’m so interested in that set you don’t look like anything to me!”

He closed the door and turned on the lights. Dot looked about and gathered an impression of a tiny room, a narrow white bed, a chiffonier, and radio parts that trailed their disks, coils, and plates over every visible flat surface. The window sill, the top of the chiffonier, the single chair, the floor, and the table that stood at the window each bore a burden of radio equipment. Only the bed was saved, and Dot guessed that that was because Eddie hated to subject his treasures to constant rearrangement.

The set which he had repaired stood on the table in a space which had been hurriedly cleared for it. The floor whereon lay an overturned ash tray and many strange drawings with weird symbols testified to the swift, deft motion with which Eddie had provided a landing-place for the set.

“Ain’t she a beaut?” asked Eddie.

“Sure is,” Dot agreed, dully.

“Super het,” Eddie announced.

“Is that so?”

“Bring in anything from KGO to 2LO.”

“No kidding?”

“Sure. Wanna see inside?”

Dot looked obligingly inside. A lot of bulbs gleamed up at her and an unintelligible mass of metal and wire sat snugly, confident of admiration.

“Neat, eh?”

“Sure is.” Dot yawned.

“See what I did on it?” asked Eddie.

Dot lost her patience then. “How the hell should I know what you did to it?” she asked. “For God’s sake, I’m not Marconi or Edison or whoever discovered radio. I stand like a sap out in the rain waiting for you while you’re getting everything from KGO to 2LO; then you have the crust to make me look at the damn thing.”

Eddie walked away from the set and found a cigarette.

"All right, Dot, my mistake. It's my job, you see. I thought you'd be interested."

"I am interested, Eddie, but I can't know these things just natural. They got to be explained. Let's go to the movies, Eddie. Gee, I don't want you to be sore at me."

"I'm not sore at you. You're right. I'm a coo-coo."

He walked to the window and stared vacantly for a second before saying "Look," in a low, disgusted tone. Dot looked. The rain was beating in slim gray sheets against the window, hitting the pane and spattering into thin, colorless wavy lines, trailing drearily for a second before joining other colorless wavy lines only to wiggle wetly into oblivion. Dot watched the drama silently.

"It's raining like hell," said Eddie. "Can't you wait till it lets up?"

"We'll wait downstairs, huh, Eddie? I feel funny here. Suppose your landlady should find me? She'd think I was a bum or something."

"She won't find you," said Eddie. "They don't expect nothing raw here. This ain't a twelve-dollar-a-day hotel."

Dot laughed a little nervously. She didn't want to splash through the streets again. She hated the thought of a movie with the smelly dampness of a thousand drenched coats. But it was dangerous, being here alone with Eddie. She knew it was dangerous. Often as they stood in her vestibule with their bodies pressed tightly against each other, she had been glad of the people who at intervals passed through the hall and forced them to spring guiltily apart. Here there would be no saving interruptions. Here there would be only Eddie and herself—only Eddie and herself. A happy tingle came over her as she realized their aloneness. Conclusive proof of the danger.

"Let's wait downstairs, Eddie."

"Go on. You crazy? It might rain for an hour yet. Who's gonna sit on the steps in that dirty hall when they can stay here where there's ash trays and things?" asked Eddie, stamping his cigarette into the rug with a practiced heel.

"Ah, come on, Eddie."

"No, you're crazy. Take off your things and wait here."

"Gee, Eddie, you're mean."

Dot walked to the chiffonier and gazed sulkily into Eddie's shaving mirror. Not a trace of powder remained to suggest the careful toilet she had made before going to Loft's corner. Solemnly she found her compact and daubed at her nose and chin. Her lipstick next, then a little vindictive yank at a wave that had slunk into obscurity beneath the soaked felt hat.

"Coming downstairs?" she asked, coldly.

"No, what's the use of that?"

"Then I'm going home," said Dot.

Eddie took a step toward her and surveyed her questioningly. He was sincerely puzzled at the tremendous point Dot made of getting downstairs. A dangerous situation to Eddie was a bulging hip pocket or a length of lead pipe. Anything else was a dame's excuse to pick a fight. Eddie didn't feel like quarreling now.

"Aw, stay a while, Dot. Look," he said with sudden inspiration, "wait here fifteen minutes, and if it ain't stopped raining I'll do whatever you want, or if it has stopped we'll go dance or something. What do you say?"

Dot hesitated and he followed up quickly: "Get your coat and hat off and smoke a cigarette with me. It'll do you good."

"Well, only fifteen minutes," Dot gave in.

She took off her coat and laid it over the iron foot of the bed. Her hat she perched on Eddie's clothes-tree, and he smiled at seeing it there. It looked funny as hell, he said to her. Dot's dress, blue satin with yards and yards of shining braid, was new, but he didn't notice it. Dot didn't expect him to. She would have told you that men never notice clothes.

"Sue Cudahy called me up at the office today," she said. "Pat's got a new job. He's up at a store on Washington Heights. They want us to go to the Poppyland Dance Hall with them Saturday night. She said it would be better than last time. They got a new band there now. I told her I'd ask you about it."

"It's all right with me," Eddie said.

He sat down on the bed, and Dot moved restlessly about the room, pausing at the mirror and the window to pass disparaging comments on her reflection and the weather at each stop.

"Come here," said Eddie, suddenly.

"What for?"

"Come here."

Dot went to him, successful in her attempt to look wholly unaware of what he might possibly want. He pulled her down on his knee and kissed her. Dot laughed and scrambled to her feet.

"Oh, that's what you wanted! Gee, I thought you had something important to say or something. If I had known I wouldn't have come."

"Wouldn't you?"

"I should say not." But she was still laughing.

"It was a hell of a kiss with you busy trying to get away, and the first one tonight, too," he complained. "Let's try it again."

Dot shook her head.

"Well, sit down anyway," Eddie said. "You got me crazy, walking around like a wild animal."

She came over and sat beside him, knowing full well that he would kiss her again. Far better than Eddie did she know that tonight he would be difficult to manage. There were no sinister plans or expectations in his mind. There had been none when he had urged her to stay.

His arm went around her, and for a minute of silence they stayed so, leaning against each other. Eddie looked blankly at the wall. Dot busily pleated the braid on her dress. Neither of them knew how the next kiss happened. Perhaps Dot suddenly raised her lips, or maybe Eddie stooped to them. It was a long kiss. It ended with both his arms around her and Dot's weight heavy against him.

"Getting hot in here," he remarked as they separated.

Dot giggled. Eddie always said that after the first lingering kiss, and Dot always giggled.

"Where's that cigarette you so rashly offered me?" she asked.

"Oh, I forgot." Eddie produced a package of Lucky Strikes and Dot took a cigarette. Eddie watched her as she lighted it.

"You'll choke to death," he said.

She was painfully conscious that he continued to watch her as she made a brave effort to inhale the smoke. Gee, let's see now, how did Maude do it?

"Here, quit torturing that cigarette." Eddie was grinding the sparks into the carpet, and Dot's objections counted for little.

"You don't know how to smoke, and there ain't no sense in learning, but there are some things come natural." He smiled at her and kissed her lips.

Dot's arms, so young and so pitiably anxious, despite her inner knowledge of what that night might mean, curled eagerly about his neck. His mouth was warm against hers. His face could be no closer to her; yet she had the sensation that he was drawing nearer, nearer. It was only when the kiss was over that she found he had gently forced her head down on the pillow. She knew that she ought to sit up and pull the new blue dress with all its yards of braid down over her bare knees. She knew she ought to. She knew she ought to.

Another kiss, hot and heedless, made her breath come faster. She saw Eddie's eyes blue and narrow close to her, a vein in his temple throbbing spasmodically. He closed his eyes. To shut out the sight of her? Was he trying to get himself under control? The thought perished when Eddie stretched himself beside her.

"Eddie, we must get up."

"Why?"

Yes, why? Well, because things happen, had happened to other girls. She tried to sit up, but he held her with one surprisingly strong arm.

"Eddie, I can't stay here. Maybe you don't know or don't believe that I'm a good girl."

"Who said you weren't?"

"You ain't acting as though you thought I was. You're making me lay here."

He withdrew his arm swiftly. "All right, Kid," he said. "I'm sorry. I thought you knew that with me you'd always be as safe as you wanted to be."

"Oh, Eddie, I didn't think you'd—you'd make me do anything."

He continued to look injured; so she kissed him, bending over him and running one hand through his hair. Again and again she kissed him till his arms were once more around her and she was lying with her breasts crushed against him and swelling just a little above the square-cut neck in the satin dress.

"Eddie, I love you so."

It was hardly more than a breath, but he heard her, and his embrace tightened. He knew what she wanted him to say. He ought to say it, but, damn it, he couldn't. Once said, the words would belie their sincerity, sound hollow and false and theatric. They embarrassed Eddie with their inadequateness. She waited, and he said nothing.

"Oh, I do love you." Dot fell back on the pillow and turned her face away.

Eddie lay with his eyes closed, one hand palm outward against his forehead.

In the moment of silence the long, wet fingers of the rain tapped with dismal insistency at the window. Neither of them heard. Dot turned and looked at Eddie. Her hand wandered to his and crawled under his cuff, snuggling warmly against his pulse.

"I have to touch you if you're going to lie there," she said.

He smiled and pulled her to him. Their mouths melted together. Dot felt his hand on her knee. It was indecent. She could not discourage it without shaking off his kiss, and the kiss was very sweet. She wondered: if her stockings were not rolled, would it be so awful? She did not try to stop him and discovered almost immediately that that was a mistake. At this stage of the game, silence was obviously encouragement.

"Eddie, don't. You mustn't."

She felt that there was no ring of conviction in her voice. Certainly there didn't appear to be.

"Dot!"

"What? What's the matter, Eddie?"

"Nothing. Just—Gee, don't this get you at all?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you feel that we—that there should be more?"

"Eddie!"

"Oh, I know I oughtn't to have said that, but, God! Dot, I'm a wreck. You see, I ain't used to stopping. Do you get what I mean?"

"Yes, I get it."

"Well, it looks like a kiss or so is all you want out of this thing. You're not upset if we stop after hot loving."

"Is that so?" asked Dot, unexpectedly.

"Are you? Do you feel that there should be more?"

He sat up suddenly on the edge of the bed and looked down at her with hope and incredulity mingled in his expression. She said nothing. She was thinking of what it would be like to be a bad girl. People would know about it perhaps. Eddie might tell. Then she'd have to go away to a place where nobody knew her.

"Dot, answer me."

She said what was on her mind. "I'd be a bad girl."

"No, you wouldn't. A bad girl is something different. You'd never let anybody else touch you, would you?"

"I don't know," she said after a minute's hesitancy. "I never thought I would let you go the whole way with me."

It took time for the full meaning of her words to penetrate. When it did he looked at her face and found that her eyes had been waiting to meet his. "Do you mean that you are going to let me?"

"I guess so, Eddie." Pause. "Yes, I'm going to let you."

"Now?"

"If you want to."

"If I want to? Gee, Kid, you say crazy things."

The girl in the bright blue slicker was the first one in the house to discover that the rain had stopped. She charged down the stairs, feverishly anxious to be out of the small, dusty room that was her home.

“It isn’t raining any more,” she shouted to her friend who had the first floor front.

“It will be teeming again in a minute,” was the gloomy response.

“Don’t be silly,” said the girl in the bright blue slicker. She swung down the hall singing cheerfully. “It ain’t gonna rain no more, no more. It ain’t gonna rain no more. How in the world can—”

The front door closed with a firm and solid sound, cutting off any further repetition of Wendall Hall’s weather forecast.

Upstairs, Eddie and Dot looked at each other with timid little smiles hovering about their mouths.

“Do you remember—” began Dot.

“Yes,” said Eddie.

CHAPTER VI

In the brown-and-white foyer she clung to him, and he knew that she was crying.

"Gee, Dot, don't do that. What's the matter? You make me feel like a dirty dog. It's my fault. I oughtn't to have talked you into it. Come on, you gotta go upstairs, Kid. Cut it out and powder your nose."

He hugged her silently. At the moment she needed a worldly lover who would tell her not to notice the herd save to pity them. She needed assurance, enlightenment. Eddie could not speak, for now in the sane, cold light of afterwards he, too, saw Dot as a poor misled creature whose reckless surrender must darken every hour of her future.

"I wish everybody didn't think it was wrong," said Dot, very low.

"I guess other people have wished that." He sighed heavily.

"Don't you suppose," Dot asked, "that somewhere there are nice people who would think it was all right?"

"Maybe in France," Eddie replied, doubtfully. "Even the high-toned people over there are kind of loose, I've heard."

"Gee, Eddie, I'll feel awful down at work. I bet the girls will be able to tell right off that I've gone bad."

"You gone bad? Gosh, Dot, don't say such things."

Dot fumbled for her compact. Tears had left slim, wavering traces in her rouge, and moisture had gathered her lashes into four dark points above each eye. Eddie surveyed her anxiously. Her brother was sure to know that she had been crying. He watched silently as Dot spread the tiny cerise puff over her cheeks and touched her mouth uninterestedly with the lipstick. The powder failed her in her moment of need. Tears were apparently a poor powder base.

"Do I look all right?" she asked.

Had he risen to the occasion with a cheerful affirmative she might not have broken down again and cried, but he couldn't send her upstairs to that brother of hers with pitiful pink circles beneath her

eyes.

"Oh, Eddie, Eddie, I can't bear it. He'll see it on me. He'll know what I've done and he'll kill me."

"The hell you say. Come on, Kid, this is the time I'm taking you all the way home."

"No." She shook her head miserably. "We went through all this once before, Eddie, and besides if you were there and he accused me of being no good, what answer have we got?"

Eddie kicked at the leg of one of the pensioner chairs.

"We could say we were going to be married," he replied.

"What good would that be? He'd find out we weren't going to be when we didn't do it."

Eddie shot a look at her under the brim of his hat. "I mean we would get married. Don't you want me, Dot? Wouldn't you marry me?"

"Oh, yes, Eddie, I'd love to. You'd never be sorry nor nothing. But I didn't think you meant that we'd really be married. I didn't think that you'd want me."

"I wanted you an hour ago, didn't I?"

She answered quickly. "That's something different. You've wanted other girls like that."

"Yeh, you're right, Kid. I got no argument and I can't explain. I'm too dumb. But this is different."

"But it's all right to tell them I'm going to be married?"

"Sure. Want me to go with you?"

"No. I'm not afraid now." There was a new note in her voice. She was almost the girl who had played the ukulele aboard the *Burma*. "I'll go up right away. Gee, Eddie, nothing matters now. When will we be married?"

"In the morning. We'll go down to City Hall and do it. I'll take the day off. Gosh, Dot, I'm happy, too. I never thought you'd—"

The rest of the sentence was lost as she flung her arms around him and kissed him. She ran up the stairs quickly and laughed down at him from the first landing. She had forgotten that she was a bad girl. Eddie had made everything all right.

"Good night, Kid."

"Good night, Eddie—darling."

Dot found Edna Driggs in the apartment. She was hanging curtains, or at least that is what she would have said she was doing. Really she was standing six feet away from the curtains telling Jim to pull up a little on the left side. Mr. Haley was reading the third installment of a thrilling serial.

"Hello, daughter," said he. "Are your feet wet? Better change your clothes at once."

"Oh, I'm all right." Dot brushed his solicitude lightly aside. She waved to Edna as she passed through the front room to lay her hat and coat away. Jim and she exchanged no greeting.

Dot lingered a while in her room, eyeing herself curiously in the mirror. Her eyes gleamed with unusual brightness, and Dot admitted to herself that any one who looked at her would know that she was carrying a secret which had suddenly become a very gladsome secret. She combed her hair vigorously. She felt terribly alive. She wanted to take a long walk or become otherwise energetically engaged. She was anxious to hear what Jim would say.

With her hair dancing in a gleeful little bush about her face, she returned to the parlor. Jim had stepped down from the chair and was regarding the curtains speculatively.

"Why the hell ain't you around once in a while to give a hand?" he asked Dot.

"She's more handicap than help," Edna returned swiftly. Dot smiled at her. Good old Edna.

"I got some news for you," Dot said to Jim.

"Spring it," he said.

"For you, too, Dad," Dot said. "Put your book down."

Mr. Haley set aside his magazine resignedly. Children were a trial at times. Edna waited and did a little guessing. She anticipated Dot's announcement.

"I'm going to get married."

Jim eyed her coldly. “Is that the way you let us know about it?” he asked. “I thought girls always brought their fellows around and showed them off first to their families.”

Dot had backing now. It wasn’t hard to answer Jim sharply. “I guess girls do,” she said, “in families where they ain’t treated like prisoners by their brothers.”

Jim walked over to her. “See here,” he said, “maybe you don’t know it, but I’ve been a God damn good brother to you.”

“In some ways,” said Dot.

“In all ways. I’ve stood for murder from you. Many a fellow who was practically supporting his sister would have thrown her out if she came home at twelve o’clock from Coney Island after bumming around with God knows who. I guess you’ve forgotten that little happening.”

“No,” said Dot. “I haven’t forgotten it.” She touched her cheek gently, reminiscently.

“Yeh, I know I hit you,” said Jim. “For your own good.”

“Thanks,” said Dot.

“I’ve supported this house, and I’ve been father and mother to you because Ma is dead and the old man ain’t well. You got a hell of a nerve to tell me I’ve been a good brother in some ways and to calmly say you’re going to be married.”

“Why do you object?” asked Dot. “You don’t even know the fellow.”

“That’s just why. He’s some mug that you’ve picked up on a street corner, I suppose.”

Dot flushed. Her eyes wandered to Edna for help, but Edna had strangely become the audience. For once she seemed no part of the Haley scene.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Jim. “Bring your boy friend up here. Let him meet your family like a decent fellow would want to do. After six months or so, when I’ve gotten to know him, if I think he’s all right you can marry him.”

“After six months!” gasped Dot.

"Yeh, after six months. What's your hurry?" Jim bent suspicious eyes upon her. "In a rush, eh? I thought so."

"What do you mean?" Dot's eyes were brighter now, and her cheeks red and hot.

"You know what I mean. I bet you gotta marry this guy. You probably should have been married to him months ago, you little bum."

"Jim, please." Dot studied the carpet, and in the silence that followed she added, "You don't know that I've done anything wrong."

"Don't I? Say, I wasn't born yesterday. You ain't the strong, determined kind of girl. You wouldn't fight me. You'd give in and wait six months sooner than quarrel if you weren't forced to marry fast. Six months is no time to a girl who ain't expecting trouble."

"Jim, you're rotten."

"Yeh. Well, you can prove that you're not. Have the fellow call around and keep company for a while. If I like him you can marry him. If you say you won't do it that way I'll know it's because you have to marry him, that you've fallen for him."

Mr. Haley ceased looking agonized long enough to look disapproving. "Jim," he admonished.

Jim didn't hear his father. He plunged on, talking down into Dot's small, feverish face. "And if you make me believe that you went to this guy without being married to him, then, God damn it, I don't want you in this house!"

Dot flinched. "You're hard, Jim," she said. "It may be that I love him too much to wait."

"I know all those stalls, too. Well, are you going to have him call here and give me time to look him over?"

Dot shook her head.

"Then it's just like I thought," said Jim. "You'll do me a great favor if you get the hell out of here."

"Jim, where'll I go?"

"Go to your sweetheart. His bed will probably hold two."

Dot didn't move. She couldn't believe that Jim was ordering her from the house.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked.

She turned resolutely to her room. One could pack and pray that during the interval thus consumed Edna would speak.

"Where are you going?" Jim roared.

"To pack," Dot said weakly.

"To pack, eh? You touch nothing that's in that room, hear me? I paid for every damn rag you own. What you earn wouldn't 'a' kept you in bread and butter if I hadn't treated you a damn sight better than you deserved. You'll touch none of those clothes. You'll clear out of here as you are, and if you haven't any money you can probably get some before morning."

Dot stifled a sob. She turned to her father and searched his eyes appealingly.

"You heard your brother," said Mr. Haley. "If you have sinned, Dorothy, you must take your punishment."

"Sure she must take her punishment," Edna said. "And she'll get it, too. I'm surprised at her. Such a nice girl, too. Now that she's cut herself away from her brother she'll probably end up in the streets. Wasn't that what you were thinking, Jim?"

"Yes," answered Jim, "just about. And I'll not be sorry for her if she does."

"One wouldn't expect you to be, Jim," Edna went on. "But don't let her have it on you that you were cheap. Let her have her clothes."

"I paid for them," Jim objected.

"Yes, but don't be cheap. Let her find out that there'll never be another man who'll treat her as white as her brother did. Let her have her clothes."

Jim turned his attention to the curtains. "Get your clothes and hurry up about it," he spat at Dot. "Be out of here in twenty minutes and don't ever let me lay eyes on you again."

Dot packed. The two shabby, paper-thin valises that she used on her vacations were routed out from under the bed and dusted. Dresses, step-ins, stockings, hats, costume slips, sweaters.

Everything was crushed into the bags. Dot wondered where she was going. She had just a dollar. To think that her life with her father and Jim was to end this way. And Edna! Thoughts failed her on the subject of Edna.

She was ready now. Ready to walk through the parlor without a word to any of them. Ready to rove the streets till morning. She couldn't go to Eddie like this. The felt hat, still coldly damp, pressed against her temples. The coat, wet and heavy, depressed her.

In the parlor she paused for a speeding second. Mr. Haley was reading again with self-conscious absorption. Jim was yanking spitefully at the curtains, and Edna, bent over a sofa pillow, was plucking interestedly at the embroidery.

Dot walked slowly through the hall. Her valises were heavy. So was her heart. Suppose Eddie failed her now? Then there was only the poorly paid job and the fact that she was a "little bum."

The door closed upon her with a sad, muffled little sound. The trio in the front room changed their attitudes as her footsteps died away on the marble stairs. Mr. Haley looked up from his thrilling serial story and stared ahead of him with a blank, fixed look. Jim mumbled a curse and slumped into a chair. Edna grabbed up her coat and hat.

"Where are you going?" asked Jim.

"After the kid, of course, you hypocritical louse. You called her a bum, didn't you? And just because you merely suspect that she gave herself to a man. Well, you *know* that I did; so I just got an idea what you really feel about me. I'm sticking by Dorothy, see?"

And the door closed again, this time with a hard, firm slam that obviously carried the courage of its convictions.

CHAPTER VII

At the corner Edna found Dot. She was standing in front of a shoe store that had been a saloon a few years before. The empty streets were drying gradually, sulkily, and a moldy-looking moon moved sluggishly between gray stripes of sky.

Dot said nothing. She watched Edna's approach curiously over the rumpled handkerchief that fluttered between her eyes and mouth with unnecessary, important little jerks.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Edna.

"Car."

"Where do you think you're going?"

No answer.

"Come on home with me, Kid."

Dot neither moved nor answered, and Edna laughed a low, reassuring laugh.

"Don't be foolish now, Dottie. You'll be better off at my house for the night than sitting around Penn Station."

"Aw, Jim'll be over to your place yelling some more."

"No," said Edna. "Jim won't be over." She put a hand on Dot's arm and pushed her into action.

"Look here, Edna. I ain't ashamed of nothing, see? Get that straight. I'd 'a' told Jim how it was if my father hadn't been there. Don't do me any favors thinking I'm the goat of Jim's peeve. He's right. I—I did fall for Eddie Collins."

"Oh, don't I know it, Kid? Come on, forget it."

"How do you know it?"

"I knew it the night you came over and got me to square things with Jim."

"It hadn't happened then, Edna."

"No, but I knew it was going to. It happened tonight."

"Yes, it happened tonight. And," said Dot, finding Edna's eyes in the glare of an arc light, "I'm glad."

"Who you arguing with, Dottie? Who you trying to convince? I don't care a row of pins that you signed over all you have to Eddie Collins. All I'm asking is, will you sleep at my house tonight?"

Dot picked up her valise, and together they walked down Willis Avenue. Silently they marched past the dairies and lingerie shops, past butchers and milliners, grocers and hardware. At the crosstown tracks they paused for a moment to let a weary trolley take itself westward. It passed them, uttering a strange, weird noise peculiar to trolleys on damp nights.

Across the street the lights of Beck's bakery blinked affably.

"Let's get coffee and peach pie," said Edna.

Dot wordlessly followed her into the shop.

"Good evening, Mrs. Driggs," said the baker. "How's the little fellow?"

"Oh, he's fine," said Edna, "fresh as ever."

"Well, just like the rain tonight, you gotta take the bad with the good." Curious indeed is the hankering of the uptown tradesman to strew the path of his customer with gems of philosophical wisdom.

Dot was already seated in the back at one of the tables. She had unbuttoned her coat and was gnawing thoughtfully at a thumb nail.

"Say," she asked when Edna had joined her. "Why did you seem to be on Jim's side up in the house?"

"Gee, you Haleys are dumb. I wanted you to get your clothes."

Dot smiled apologetically. "I thought sure you'd left me flat, Edna. I might have known that you wouldn't. Gosh, what'll Jim say to you when he finds out that you and me are still friends?" Dot was too young and too interested in the string of events that had suddenly unwound themselves in her placid existence to notice Edna's expression or to give her a chance to reply. "I never thought I'd get married so soon," she said.

"Well," said Edna, "'marry in haste and repent at leisure,' or 'he who hesitates is lost.' Take your pick, Dot."

Dot smiled over at Edna. She felt cheerful and thrilled. Tomorrow she would be married to Eddie. Tonight she would sleep at Edna's house. Edna was her friend. Yes, tonight was all mapped out and

tomorrow was her wedding day. The day after? Well, that would be passed in a sort of dreamy and very delightful stupor. She would be Eddie's wife. Nothing annoying was ever going to happen again. Nothing annoying—

"The first week I was married," said Edna suddenly, "I damn near starved to death."

"But I'll bet you didn't mind," said Dot.

"What do you mean, didn't mind? I could 'a' killed Marty. He lost his job right before the wedding, and I didn't want to postpone it. By the way, did you and Eddie get around to talking about anything besides how sweet you were?"

"He never says I'm sweet, Edna. He's a funny fellow. Funny that I should be so crazy about him. It ain't as though he was handsome either. But gee, Edna, he's so nice."

"Down to earth, Kid. Has he got any money saved?"

Dot blushed uncomfortably. This wasn't at all nice of Edna.

"Gosh, I don't know. He didn't tell me nothing about that, and how can you ask a fellow such a thing?"

"I'll ask him," said Edna.

"Oh, Edna, don't you dare. He'd be wild. He'd think that you were awfully nosey."

"No doubt," said Edna. "He's not crazy about me now; so I guess I'd better wait till you start to get slim before asking you over to dinner."

"It won't be that bad," said Dot, seriously. "I'll keep my job, and Eddie gets a nice salary. I'll bet it'll be grand."

"Well, if it ain't," said Edna, "it won't be because you looked on the dark side."

The coffee and pie arrived. Coffee in heavy mugs. Pie, a generous chunk with the crust lying loosely above the thickened mess of peaches. Edna picked up her fork with a brisk, businesslike gesture. Dot was less interested. After all, this was the eve of her wedding.

The pie disappeared. The coffee lingered.

"Edna," said Dot, "was the night you got married the first time Marty ever touched you? You know what I mean."

"Yes, and we'd kept company for three years."

"You were good, weren't you? Better than me."

"But I'm sorry now. Look how short a time I had him."

"Tough, Edna! Gee, it must be awful. I couldn't stand it if anything happened to Eddie."

Edna looked over at Dot's very young, very solemn face.

"You'd stand it, Kid. You'd be surprised what these old beans of ours will stand. But you probably won't lose him unless a blonde comes along."

The cue was given. It was time for the conversation to jump back to pointless pleasantries, but Dot still had another momentous comment which had to be made.

"I'd kill him if there ever was another woman," she said. "I might even kill them both."

Edna was happily absorbed in watching her empty plate. "Some more pie, Dot?" she suggested.

"No, I got enough pie. Sure, I'd kill the both of them."

Edna got up from the table. "Come on, Dot," she said. "You won't get any sleep tomorrow night; so you'd better come along now."

Dot's quick blush rushed into action, and Edna laughed. She paid Mr. Beck his forty cents, remarking as she did so, "Miss Haley is getting married tomorrow."

"Fine. Good wishes," said the baker amiably. "Did you get a good man?"

"The best in the world," said Dot.

Mr. Beck's fat stomach shook delightedly, and his blond mustache quivered in sympathy.

"That's what they think, eh, Mrs. Driggs? A year from now she'll be saying—Ah, well."

A sudden sigh caused the happy stomach to rise and then fall dejectedly into still dignity. "Young love is beautiful, but like the flowers and sunshine, it passes quick."

"You old crêpe-hanger," said Dot.

"Ach, your love will be different. It will last for ever." The twinkle in his eye was of the variety which fears it will be overlooked.

In silence, Dot and Edna continued their walk. Dot still felt thrilled. She looked up at the skies. It seemed the thing to do with all this exultation. The sky was not a promising sight, but nothing could have quenched her buoyant spirits so long as she knew that shortly she would be Eddie's wife.

Edna's house. She had a hall, too. A long hall through which one had to tiptoe because the baby was asleep in the back room. Edna called him the baby, but of course he wasn't, although one did have to tiptoe. At the end of the hall there was an abrupt turn; once around the turn, everything was all right. Visitors could make all the noise they wanted to. They could play the Victrola or scream conversation at some one who might be right in front of the baby's door. Once around the turn, everything was all right.

The room found there was cut glass, or at least that was a first impression of it. There was an astonishingly large cut-glass lamp on the table, that had no proportionable relation to the rest of the room. The sideboard fairly sagged beneath the weight of nappies, ice tubs, and fruit bowls. The china closet flashed a glimmering, glassy smile, and on the window sill a vase with the fashionable "daisy cut" posed haughtily like a white and dazzling mannequin.

There were portières made of green plush ropes and a couch with a red, green, and yellow cover. The red predominated, and the couch opened—two items which had brought the couch and its cover to be part of the household effects of Mrs. Edna Driggs.

The wall paper was blue. The landlord had permitted Edna her own choice with the renewal of her lease two years before.

"The wall paper goes with my rug," she often pointed out to friends on their first visit.

Sue Cudahy had said, "It didn't go with your rug to the cleaners," and Edna had sort of lost pride in her wall paper since then.

Dot threw her hat and coat on the couch and sat down beside them.

"Hey, get up," said Edna. "What do you think we're going to do? Sit around all night and talk about what you would do if you caught Eddie with another girl? Get up. I'm going to make the bed."

"Aw, let's talk a little while, Edna, I ain't sleepy."

"That's tough, because I am. You can sleep next to the window where you can talk it over with the breezes."

Edna's words came from the closet, where she was tidily leaving her coat upon a hanger. Dot watched her as she rushed about, pushing the chairs this way and that to make room for the ever-ceremonious opening of the couch. When the chairs had been grouped about in a perfectly suitable manner, Edna gathered her sheets and pillows together so that all would be in readiness.

"Look out," she said to Dot. Then, presto, the couch was a bed large enough for two. Edna could ill conceal the pleasure she felt at having played so important a part in this startling exhibition of modern magic.

"I wouldn't be without one of these sliding couches," she said, trying to make her voice sound casual.

"I could stand you being without one tonight," said Dot. "I bet I don't close my eyes."

"Well, if you insist on talking once I've said good night, I'll close them for you," Edna warned her. "Now hop out of your clothes and sleep your last time away from Eddie."

Dot undressed leisurely. Edna watched her from the bed and kept up a rapid flow of disgusted comments.

"Say, are you dying? Come on. You don't have to sew that ribbon now. Turn out the light, will you? I'm sleepy. Listen, Dot, tomorrow you'll be dying for another hour's sleep, and once my kid is up, your morning's rest is just naturally finished. Come on, will you?"

"I'll turn out the light, Edna, but I don't think I'll get in for a while."

"What are you going to do? Sit by the window and commune with yourself? Come on."

And in the end Dot climbed into bed and was asleep an hour before Edna.

The new day began with Floyd Driggs yanking impishly at Dot's hair. He was a solemn-eyed child, strangely unsmiling and incongruously mischievous. There was something vaguely Japanese in the small, wise face.

"Wake up, Dottie, wake up. You gotta be married. Who you gonna marry?"

Dot sat up briskly. No sudden realization of this day's significance dawned upon her. She had been conscious even in her sleep that this day was to be different from all others.

"Is Eddie here?" she asked.

The little boy shook his head gravely. "No one's here but me and Mamma and you."

Dot smiled. Of course Eddie wasn't here. He didn't know that she had spent the night at Edna's.

"Where's your mother?"

"Mamma's gone to the drug store to telephone. She says she's gonna tell your boss that you're very sick. Are you very sick, Dottie? Mamma says no use in you losing your job just because you lost your head. Did you lose your head, Dottie? Don't look like you did."

"Hush, darling," said Dot. "You talk too much."

"So do you and Mamma," said Floyd, in the tone of one who remarks on an interesting coincidence. "Why do we all talk too much?"

Dot lay down again. No use asking Floyd to go away while she dressed. She would have to wait for Edna to return and call off her child. Meanwhile it was pleasant just to lie there and think of Eddie.

The door at the end of the hall banged, and Floyd ran to meet his mother as though she had just returned from a tour of the Far East.

Dot jumped from the bed and slipped into a kimono which she found on a chair beside her. The storks flying across the crinkly material with gay disregard of what is expected in a stork's flight were supposed to conjure up visions of sparkling-eyed geishas and the flowery kingdom, but Hans Andersen was still too fresh in Dot's memory. It was Hans Andersen of whom Dot thought while Edna repeated her conversation with Dot's boss.

"I said to him, 'Miss Haley has a terrible toothache and she hasn't slept a wink all night and she's just drowsed off now and I hate to wake her.' 'Well, don't wake her,' he says. 'Let her sleep and tell her not to come in until she feels perfectly all right again.' That was nice of him, wasn't it?"

"Oh, he's a nice old duck," said Dot. "Shall I tell him tomorrow when I go in that I got married?"

"I would," said Edna. "He'll probably think it's a good joke about your friend pretending you had a toothache."

Dot sat down and began to pull on her stockings. If you rush downtown every morning at eight o'clock, you haven't the daily bath habit. You put on your stockings and then your pumps. You keep your nightgown on while you slide your chemise up under it. Then you take off the gown and go to the bathroom. You wash your face, neck, and ears and brush your teeth. Then you wash your hands and arms. Sometimes if there is a comb near the basin you experiment with different parts in your hair before the medicine-chest mirror. But whatever you do at that mirror doesn't count. Back in the bedroom, the actual hair-dressing is done. But before that you powder, your forehead first, working downward to your neck; then rouge on your cheeks, and next your lipstick is applied. *Then* you do your hair, and last you get into your dress, slipping it over your feet so as not to disarrange the hair. Now you're dressed.

"Edna, I think I'll go out and phone Eddie."

"Have your breakfast first."

"No, I'll be right back. It'll only take a minute. I think I'll phone the rooming-house. I don't think he went to work today and he's probably waiting for a call."

Dot went then, singing as she walked down the hall:

"Stella, be a regular fellar,
Oh, Stella, I love you so—"

At the drug store she changed her dollar into silver and picked out a phone booth. She knew Eddie's number. In a minute the shrill annoyed tones of the landlady came over the wire.

"Could I speak to Mr. Collins, please?"

"Who?"

"Mr. Collins."

"Mr. Carlton?"

"No, Mr. Collins. Eddie Collins."

"Oh, no. He isn't here any more. He moved."

Silence.

Then Dot heard her own voice asking, "Are you sure? He lived there last night."

"Yes, I know. He moved early this morning."

"Oh," said Dot.

The landlady was back in her kitchen feeding her family of cats before Dot remembered to hang up the receiver.

Steady. No panic now. One more place to get him. He must be there. He must be. Dot waited, listening intently. Every click on the wire made her brows draw together nervously. She stared into the blackness of the mouthpiece, waiting—waiting.

"Hello," said a curt businesslike voice.

"Hello," said Dot. "Is this the Uptown Radio Shop?"

"Yes."

"Is Eddie Collins there?"

"Who?" The voice had grown surly and less businesslike. This female obviously was not going to buy a radio set nor even have her battery charged.

"Eddie Collins."

"No."

"Do you know where I could get him?"

"Nope."

"Does he—does he still work there?"

"Who wants to know?"

"I do. I'm the girl he's engaged to."

"Oh, no. He won't work here no more. I fired him this morning for robbing the cash register."

Here was humor. Dot recognized but did not welcome it.

"Did he leave?" she inquired.

"No, I'm telling you I fired him."

Dot hung up the receiver after having said thank you. One would never discover from this feeble wit whether Eddie had quit his job or was still there. This was the sort of man who is convulsed at the

mention of twins and who slips castor oil into his friends' coffee cups.

Dot went back to Edna's. She had left the door unlatched, and quietly she walked down the hall to the living-room. In the kitchen, Edna was chastising her son.

"And if you ever do it again I'll give you another slap. The idea! A whole pound of butter! Do you think butter grows on trees? I told you to put a piece of butter in the frying-pan."

"Well, that was a piece, Ma."

"And no back talk either. The idea!"

In fact it seemed that the idea was the thing which irritated Edna more than anything else, the principle of the thing, as it were.

In pursuit of a tablecloth, she came into the living-room. Dot was sitting at the window staring out at the clothes lines heavy with frolicsome white shapes.

"Can you beat that?" demanded Edna. "A whole pound of butter the kid throws into the frying-pan."

Dot had gathered as much. She turned and offered a horrified shake of her head in comment.

"The whole pound. I wasn't watching him, and before I knew it, it's all melted. Did you get Eddie?"

"No."

"No? Where is he?"

"I don't know and I guess he don't want me to know either."

"What's this?" The tragic fate of a whole pound of butter suddenly seemed very unimportant.

"He's moved from his house without leaving a message for me, and they wouldn't tell me nothing at the radio shop."

"Hm." Edna sat down. Her face wore an expression of deep reflection. She was recalling her glimpses of Eddie, what he had said, how he had acted. In the end she patted Dot's hand comfortingly.

"He'll be here. There's a mistake somewhere."

"Yeh," said Dot bitterly. "Last night."

"Oh, you're one of those trusting girls, eh? When you can see everything you believe it, but if the light goes out for a second you begin to doubt."

"No, but oh, Edna, don't it look funny? He's moved away, and if he wanted to find me, how could he? He don't know I've left home."

"Don't be a mug, Dot. What's more natural than that he should come here?"

Dot got up from her chair and walked to the couch. "It's more natural," she said, "that he wouldn't want to marry me at all. He's like all the rest of the men."

Edna laughed. "Listen to Experienced Agnes," she said to the daisy-cut vase.

"Well, gee, Edna, you don't have to have gone with a million men to know that they don't want to marry you after you've fallen for them."

"Movies, Kid, movies. This is real life, and Eddie's a real fellow. If he didn't want to marry you, he'd never have told you he would."

Dot's lids drooped over her eyes. "You're just trying to cheer me up," she said sulkily. "You don't like Eddie and it ain't natural you'd be praising him so if you were saying what you really think."

Edna's lips curled with exasperation. "Right," said she. "I'm just being Pollyanna. Eddie's a filthy skunk. He never intended to marry you, and by now I'll bet he's halfway to Australia. What should he marry you for? He done his dirty work and is probably laughing a whole string of ha-ha's. You might as well become a streetwalker now. That's all that's left for you. As for myself, I'm going to the kitchen to save that piece of salt pork from Floyd. All men are up to destruction."

So saying, Edna disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. Dot considered the room uninterestedly. What was it all for? Something that Sue Cudahy often said came back to her: You're born, you kick around here for a while, and then you die. Sue Cudahy indeed! That she should complain! It wouldn't have been Sue to let one rainy night ruin the rest of her life. And if, by any chance, Sue had been frail, it would have been like her to spend the night in her lover's bed in order to get him down to City Hall early.

Edna called from the kitchen, “Come on, Dot, have some eggs and coffee.”

“No, I don’t think I want any, thanks. I’m going out for a while.”

Edna appeared on the threshold. Her eyes were no party to the expression of disgust with which her lips were twisted.

“What do you mean, out? Where will you go?”

“Oh, for a walk.”

“Don’t be a fool. Have some coffee.”

Suddenly Dot was crying. Great, splashing tears fell unhampered to the gay little pink ruffle that trimmed her dress.

“Oh, Edna, I’m so miserable.”

“I know it, Kid, but Eddie will come. I know he will.”

“He won’t. He won’t. Why should he?”

“Because he’s wild about you.”

“He couldn’t be wild about anybody, Edna, he isn’t that kind.”

Dot’s head fell to her arm, and she surrendered with a perverse delight to being as miserable as the situation called for. Floyd came from the kitchen to watch. He was interested but rather hoped that Eddie wouldn’t come. If Dot got married she’d never be able to stay over night at his house any more. Floyd knew.

Dot’s sobs continued. Edna smoothed the silky brown bob and murmured encouraging words, to no avail.

“Snap out of it, Kid,” said Edna. “I’ll have the neighbors in asking what’s the matter if you don’t shut up.”

For answer Dot’s weeping increased.

“You never do things by halves, do you?” Edna asked.

Dot raised a tragic face from her sleeve.

“No, I wish I did, and I wish I hadn’t given in to him.”

Edna envied Dot. She herself was past the age where there was compensation in dramatizing a bitter disappointment.

“Get this straight, Kid,” she said, catching Dot’s tear-filled eyes. “Whether you go through life with Eddie or without him, remember that you didn’t give in to Eddie. You gave in to yourself.”

“Yes, but he ought to come. I want him so.”

"He'll come."

"Never—never—never."

The doorbell rang. Dot jumped and made a frantic daub at her eyes. "Probably a peddler," she said, but not very successfully. Floyd ran to the door, Edna followed more leisurely, and Dot stood in the doorway, looking down the long hall.

It was Eddie. Edna had been right. She wasn't, however, the sort of person to turn to Dot and announce triumphantly, "I told you so." What she said was to Eddie, and it was very low. Dot at the end of the hall thought it sounded like "You're a fine bozo."

"Eddie's here, Eddie's here," shrieked Floyd.

Eddie followed Edna into the apartment. He clutched Dot's hand as he passed her, and they walked into the living-room.

"I was up to your house," said Eddie. "The old man was there. When I told him I was gonna marry you today he looked kind of like he didn't believe it. He said you'd moved; so I come on here. Anything wrong? You been crying."

Eddie planted a foot on one of Edna's chairs and rested contentedly.

"Well, it looked funny," Dot explained. "Your landlady said you'd left there, and the radio man wouldn't tell me anything. Gee, I didn't know what to think."

Eddie laughed easily. "Gosh, women are fools." He looked at Edna as though expecting her to agree. "You didn't think I was going to take you to live in a room the size of a closet, did you? With a single bed and one chair." If the mention of the single bed was out of order, nobody noticed it, and Eddie continued. "My landlady didn't have a double room; so I moved across the street. She was mad, that's why she didn't tell you. I'd 'a' got here earlier only the boss had a couple of jobs he wanted me to look at and I thought it would be just as well if I didn't lose my job today."

Edna and Dot exchanged glances.

"Now, Dorothea, do you suppose you could stand the sight of some coffee?" asked Edna, witheringly.

Dot smiled from Edna to Eddie and back again. They met her smile indifferently. It wasn't a very encouraging bridal party. Edna looked as though she had had just about enough nonsense, and Eddie, having taken his foot off Edna's chair, wandered about uneasily.

"Come on, Dot," he said. "Never mind coffee. We'll get it somewhere outside."

"Her master's voice," remarked Edna.

"Edna has coffee waiting for me," said Dot, unhappily.

"Oh, don't bother about that," Edna hastily answered. "Run along, I'll be glad to see you on your way."

"Aren't you coming with us?" Dot paused in the act of planting her cloche firmly on her head and stared at Edna.

"With you? I should say not. What, me go all the way to City Hall with what I got to do today?"

"Please, Edna, to see me married."

"No. Just bring back the certificate and I'll believe it."

Dot's eyes wandered to Eddie. He was sitting on the window sill, tapping the floor with his foot. She telegraphed him a message of distress to which he responded feebly.

"Sure, come on with us, Edna."

Edna shook her head. "No, you'll manage fine without me."

Eddie bore her refusal heroically. He shrugged his shoulders, and his eyes remarked that you couldn't force a person into accompanying you to your wedding. Dot picked up her suitcase, and Eddie took it from her.

At the door she flung her arms around Edna's neck and kissed her. "'By, Edna, darling, thanks a lot for everything and I'll be up to see you tomorrow night."

"Good-by, dear. Good-by, Eddie."

"'By," said Eddie.

Floyd's impromptu nine thousand, four hundred and eighty-two followed them out to the street.

"Dottie's gonna be married,
Married, married.
Dottie's gonna be married.
Tra la la la—la la."

"So," said Eddie when they reached the corner, "you and Edna thought I ditched you, eh?"

"Edna didn't," said Dot, shortly. "She said you'd come."

"Hm." Eddie spoke into the cup of his hand where he was lighting a cigarette. "She probably thought I wouldn't have the courage to fade out."

Dot laughed. "Gee, Edna can't win in your figuring, can she? What's wrong with Edna?"

"Aw, she makes me sick," said Eddie. "She thinks she's so God damned important."

"Well, she was pretty important last night. What would I have done without her? My brother kicked me out. I wouldn't have known what to do without Edna."

"You wouldn't have known what to do without Edna, eh?"

"No. What could I have done?"

Eddie smiled without being amused at anything at all. "Jesus, Kid, you and I will get along great," he said somewhat irrelevantly.

CHAPTER VIII

Mrs. Eddie Collins née Haley gazed about her home on a late October day. Her housework was all done. Mrs. Harris, slim to the point of emaciation, had arrived a half hour before with a mop and broom and had done Mrs. Collins' housework. Mrs. Harris was Mrs. Collins' landlady. She had made the bed, mopped around the floor, and let the broom rest lightly for a moment in the middle of the rug. Then she had taken herself to other parts, murmuring vaguely about some one called Margaret who needed a real good lesson.

Mrs. Collins, left behind, surveyed her home. It was twelve by ten and had two windows. The bed hogged most of the space, but a few chairs, a table, a wardrobe, and a bureau did manage to squeeze in. There was a picture of a very nice young man necking a white horse, and another picture showed a bevy of cheerful Russians on the verge of sleigh-riding right into the middle of Eddie's new six-tube set.

A very nice home, no doubt. Mrs. Collins was well pleased with it. And her housework was done! The rest of the day belonged entirely to her to do with as she pleased. Strangely enough the thought gave Mrs. Collins a heavy feeling in the region of her heart. What did one do with unoccupied days that stretched along with tedious consistency? Business? No, Eddie had said that no wife of his was going to work while he had his health. Noble of him. Very.

He arose at eight every morning, and Dot went with him to the little dairy lunch room next to the bank. Breakfast. Then Dot walked with Eddie to the shop. Sometimes Mrs. Williams, the boss's wife, would be there, and she and Dot would hold the same conversation on each occasion. The weather was fine for the time of year. Yes, a little chill in the air. Indeed a heavy coat did feel good in the evening. The shops were showing the sweetest hats. Mrs. Williams preferred hats above everything else. Dot suspected that her generalization included Mr. Williams. Mrs. Williams was always on her way to do a little shopping if only Bill would give her that money and let her go. Bill would give her that money and away she would go with a last sweet, condescending smile at Dot and a low word to her husband accompanied by a sour expression.

Dot would leave the shop then, too. She would wait till Mrs. Williams was well out of sight, however. It would be terrible if she were to think that Dot was trying to attach herself.

It was very nice to walk slowly along the uptown thoroughfare admiring a dress here, a hat there; a particularly beautiful shade of stockings in a third place. Interesting to note the expressions carried by the women who allowed themselves no glances into the shops where clothing was not sold on credit. Very nice, indeed. That is, very nice while it lasted. But once Dot came to Bim's West End Theater and walked back on the other side as far as the Drusilla Dress Shop, she had seen everything. Then perhaps her breakfast had digested enough to allow a chocolate malted. She drank a chocolate malted and then wondered what the devil she'd do with herself.

Of course Edna could be visited at any hour of the morning, afternoon, or night, but to keep visiting Edna might suggest that marriage seemed a little bit empty. Sue Cudahy worked. Maude McLaughlin couldn't be seen before 2 P.M. and then only by appointment. There simply wasn't anything to do. Mrs. Harris solved the housework problem; consequently lucky little Mrs. Collins had the whole day to herself.

Eddie had been so frighteningly emphatic on the subject of Dot's returning to work.

"No, God damn it. What the hell do you think I am that I can't support my wife? Go to the movies, visit your friends, do what you please, but you'll not go to work."

Dot didn't know that his loud and angry protest had been born in the brain of a five-year-old, scantily-clothed urchin who had trotted stolidly at his mother's side as she scrubbed floors in office buildings, stopping to rest only when that awful pain was giving her a "turn."

Dot never mentioned work again, but she envied Eddie who returned at night after a full and busy day. He didn't have to wonder what he'd do with himself. He ate his dinner ravenously and was ready to enjoy a movie. To Dot, the movies were becoming a deadly bore. The theaters were places where she had to go to keep from dying of loneliness.

Miss Howell, the school teacher who had a room on the same floor with Dot, asked her why she didn't read. Dot thanked her for the suggestion, but somehow the *True Story Magazine* didn't give a married woman the same kick it might have given a virgin. So after all Miss Howell's kindly suggestion was worthless. Dot couldn't read.

Twice Sue had stolen a day off and had spent it with Dot. It was on one of these days that Dot suffered a shock.

It seemed that Sue was out of favor with her mother. She chewed her gum with passionate intensity and still managed to say, "I told her I was out all night on a party at a friend who lives in Brooklyn's house, but she insists I was with Pat and she called me a terrible name."

Dot registered sympathy. "Why don't you get her to call up the friend and ask her and prove you're right?"

Sue looked surprised and contemptuous all at once. "There ain't no friend in Brooklyn," she said. "I was with Pat. His sister's away and he's alone in the apartment."

"Sue!" Dot was startled. "You don't mean that you slept in the same place alone with Pat!"

"Why not?"

"But didn't anything happen? Didn't he try to go pretty far with you?"

"Well, you damn little fool," said Sue. "Where have you been? Of course he tried to go pretty far with me and succeeded. He's succeeded every time he's tried since a year ago last March."

The room whirled before Dot's dizzy gaze. So Sue had let Pat go the limit, and no one had known it. Pat hadn't told any one. Maybe Eddie wouldn't have, either. Sue wasn't considered a bad girl. She hadn't a frightened, persecuted expression.

"Didn't you give in to Eddie before you married him?" asked Sue.

"Yes," said Dot, hesitantly. She had almost forgotten that she had. Two weeks of marriage does make one feel so settled and solvent.

"Well, what are you so shocked for?"

"I ain't shocked, only I didn't think you would."

"That's no compliment," said Sue, gravely. "A girl is a damn fool who holds back."

"Why do you think that?"

"Gee, Dot, you know yourself how you get loving. There's damn little a fellow don't know about you before you say yes. You'll let him get so far that it ain't decent anyhow, and then you stop him. And what for? So that you can tell your girl friends how scared you was on your wedding night."

"No, that ain't the reason," said Dot. "Look at the chance you take. Suppose he didn't marry you?"

"Then I'd marry somebody else and be spared the shame of having to admit that I fooled around with a fellow for two years and didn't have the guts to go further."

"Gee, I never talked to you, Sue, without hearing something I'd never have thought of."

Sue reached for her lipstick with a nonchalant gesture. "When you start cheating on Eddie," she said, "let me know. I'll be able to give you an argument in both directions."

Dot smiled. "I'm not going to cheat on Eddie," she said.

"Well, maybe not." Sue's brow wrinkled thoughtfully. "I remember reading of a case in the newspaper once where a woman was true to her husband for all their married life, but they lived on a farm and there wasn't any one else around."

"Sue! You're terrible."

"Well, maybe," said Sue, "but you know, Dot, I've watched people. You don't. You listen to them. Do you remember Mrs. Barns up on Cypress Avenue? She was getting a tooth filled for damn near a year. You believed her when she complained every day about having to go to the dentist's. Bunk! Doctor Walters was her sweetie. That's why you'd always find her in his office."

"But she said—" began Dot.

"There you are, 'she said.' Hell's bells, Dot, I'm a virgin. I was just kidding you about me and Pat. Believe that and I'll call the ambulance for you. I gotta run along now."

She ran along, and Dot, left alone in her room, wondered if after all Sue wouldn't be happier if she and Pat were respectably married. Later she decided that Sue would not be happier. Not if she had to spend her days wandering about Harlem looking for something to do.

Once Dot took a 'bus ride downtown, but she didn't like it very much. The mashers couldn't be handled like the ambitious youth of One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. Up there a girl could always say, "Run along," or "Who are you talking to?" or something like that. In the days when she had gone to work, she had encountered practically no flirtatious gentlemen because there had not been the aimless, time-free air which had accompanied her on her one sally into the Fifth Avenue shopping district.

A man had spoken to her right outside of Russek's. A particularly gorgeous wrap was on display, and Dot had been picturing herself inside it when the man spoke.

"It is beautiful enough," he remarked, "for a bootlegger's mistress."

Dot turned her most crushing gaze upon him.

Undaunted, he continued, "You're not by any chance a bootlegger's mistress, are you?"

"No," replied Dot, "I'm not." And she moved down the street.

The man followed her. "Don't be angry," he pled, "some of our best people are."

"Are what?"

"Bootlegger's mistresses, of course."

"Run along," said Dot, using a bit of magic which she had brought from Harlem.

It failed. He did not vanish.

"I shall run along presently," he said. "I shall run home and write ten thousand words."

That, Dot considered, was a strange remark. That had to be investigated. "Ten thousand words about what?" she asked.

"Bootleggers' mistresses."

"You're crazy," said Dot.

North of Central Park it is permissible to deliver such ultimatums after having done hardly any research work on the subject.

Dot's self-elected companion seemed interested in her diagnosis.

"You're the second person who has told me that," he said. "The first one was a brain specialist. A great uncouth chap with a mustache."

"Say, are you trying to pick me up?" asked Dot.

"Not today," he responded. "I'm just after a little light conversation, but if you'll come around Thursday—"

"Don't flatter yourself," said Dot and walked swiftly southward with the gentleman at her elbow.

He kept to her stride and talked into her ear as they traveled. "If you're not a bootlegger's mistress," he said, "would you mind telling me whose mistress you are?"

Dot stopped short and faced him. There was no anger in her glance now. She put her question as though they had been conversing under the most pleasant circumstances for hours. "What does mistress mean?" she asked.

The man looked back at her without raillery in his eyes. He was tall and gray-eyed, and his amused grin died abashed.

"Why, mistress is the word for a woman who has illicit sex relations with a man," he said. "For instance, Du Barry was King Louis' mistress. Do you see?"

Dot nodded. When she looked around again, her masher was hopping in a cab. Dot resolved never to go window shopping downtown again. These guys were too hard to handle.

Well, all right, stay in Harlem. Walk from Bim's West End Theater to the Drusilla Dress Shop. Many a girl would give her right arm for a husband like Eddie. Walk, drink chocolate malteds, visit friends, go to the movies, and when these things can be borne no longer, cry for loneliness and boredom.

Edna Driggs, walking unceremoniously into the room occupied by Dot and Eddie, found Dot face downward on the bed crying for her loneliness and boredom.

"What's the matter? Have a fight?" asked Edna.

"No." Dot sat up and sniffled.

"Gee, you cry easy," said Edna. "What is it, a gift? Who's dead?"

"No one," Dot answered as miserably as though she were sorry to say that such was the case. "I'm glad to see you, Edna."

A sob.

"I'm glad you told me," said Edna. "I'd never have guessed it."

Dot smiled crookedly. She walked to the bureau and powdered her nose with unnecessary carefulness. Edna watched attentively as the lipstick moved across Dot's lips with deft little strokes. Edna watched more attentively but said nothing when Dot lighted a cigarette and began to puff heroically.

"I'm trying to get so that I like to smoke," Dot explained. "They say it's company when you're alone a lot."

Tears rushed readily to Dot's eyes.

"My, my," said Edna, "don't we just feel awfully sorry for ourself?"

"Well, it's no fun," Dot said hotly. "I'm all alone all day without a thing to do, I almost go crazy."

"I'm alone too," said Edna, "and nobody comes home to me at six o'clock."

Dot wasn't to be shamed out of her misery. "You got Floyd to fuss over, and you got your apartment."

"How would you like to have an apartment?"

"I'd love it, but Eddie's got queer ideas. He'd rather save five dollars a week for two years and pay cash for furniture than get it on time."

"That would be Eddie," said Edna. "But listen, I came to tell you about this today, though I didn't intend to spring it before I was half inside the door. I got a lot of furniture, you know. When Marty was alive his younger brother and his mother lived with us; so we had more rooms. It's down the cellar in my house, and it wouldn't cost you a cent. There's beds and chairs and bureaus and tables and everything. I can even fix you on sheets and other household stuff."

Dot's eyes shone. A home of her own. A real home to settle and to re-settle, to clean and mind and in which to put up cretonne curtains.

"Oh, Edna, you darling!"

Dot made an impetuous rush, but Edna held her off with a cautioning hand. "Hold on, Kid, don't holler yet. Remember you got Eddie to convince."

"Oh, he'll do it. He must do it when I tell him how unhappy I've been."

Edna considered Dot's chances. "Well, he might," she said, "but don't die if he says no."

"Three rooms would be plenty," said Dot. "A bedroom, living-room, and kitchen. I couldn't go over fifty a month though. Where would you look if you were me? I don't want to get anywheres near Jim and my father."

Edna said not a word. She knew it wasn't important to Dot whether or not she was answered. She saw that Dot was already laying the linoleum in the most perfectly white kitchen that had ever existed outside of a *Saturday Evening Post* advertisement. But she was wrong. Dot was only down to the shelving—it would be white and shiny with pictures of little blue coffee grinders on it. Edna was far more troubled than Dot about Eddie's reaction to the idea. He would say no unless his humor was better than Edna had ever seen it.

"How much are electric bills a month?" Dot asked.

"About two dollars too much," said Edna.

"No kidding, I want to know." Dot's tone suggested that she was working on a problem of which Edna could have no possible inkling.

"About two dollars," said Edna.

"And gas?"

"Oh, anywhere from a dollar up."

"Gee, that's cheap enough," said Dot. "I could do my own wash—"

"Hold the fire, Kid. Did you ever wring out a blanket?"

"No. Did you?"

"Yep."

"Then so could I, and look at the money I'd save if I did my own laundry."

"And look at how you'd get to hate housework."

Dot smiled loftily. Poor Edna, she didn't know that no one would ever tire of working in the prettiest, coziest little apartment that ever was.

Edna sat for another ten minutes, then made signs of moving on. "I want to buy a hat," she said. "If you're not too tired from hanging the pictures and unpacking the barrels, maybe you'd like to come along."

Dot closed the door on her little be-cretonned love nest and vigorously tried it; then she got her hat and coat and walked out of the furnished room.

"I bet I'd learn to cook right away," she said as she followed Edna to the street.

"Sure you would," Edna agreed. "All any bride needs is a can opener."

"Oh, I mean really cook, pot roasts and things."

There was something very touching in the way she said pot roasts and things. Edna patted her tenderly on the shoulder as they walked down Madison Avenue.

"Ask Eddie," she said, "and if he says you can take the furniture I'll show you how to cook pot roasts and soups and puddings and everything."

"Gee, Edna, do you think we could get a place for fifty dollars?"

"Any amount of them," Edna assured her. "Nice ones, too."

Edna was troubled. She wished with all her heart that she had approached Eddie on the subject. The thought of Dot's disappointment if Eddie displayed his middle-class independence made Edna choose a green hat when she had come out with the sole idea of getting a tan one.

Dot found shop windows that she had never before noticed. Windows with chinaware and ice boxes, windows with garbage pails and mops.

Edna watched her pityingly. Some might think that envy would have been a more appropriate expression for a woman whose young enthusiasms were buried with a rollicking, mad Scotsman. Edna was acutely aware that if Dot had been able to think of anything but house furnishings, she, the poor old widow, would have received a

bounteous share of pity. Edna chuckled silently. Nothing could hurt her. A man with a sulky face, sulkily telling her that he would have none of her friend's furniture in his sulky home, would have left her howling with mirth. Poor Dot. Eddie could hurt her dreadfully. Nothing could hurt Edna. Not even Jim Haley—oh, well, nothing could hurt her much.

"Look, Edna, you stick close to me when I approach Eddie on the subject."

"Yeh, sure, I'll be only a short car ride away."

"No, I mean it."

"So do I mean it. If I'm there how can Eddie call me an interfering, God damn pest?"

"Edna!"

"Yes, Edna! You tell him, Kid, all by yourself. If he isn't eager to take the stuff, my being there isn't going to throw him into an ecstasy of delight."

So Dot told him about it without Edna to back her up. It was after dinner in the Perfect Snack Lunch Room and Restaurant. Eddie was smoking thoughtfully. He was wondering why the hell the boss had put eight volts of grid bias in that neutrodyne. Grid bias was the works, all right, but why the hell eight—

"Eddie, wouldn't you just love a home of your own with home-cooked meals and all?"

Eddie's expression was one of supreme indifference. "Less trouble in a restaurant," he answered discouragingly.

"Yes, but you don't get the proper stuff in a place like this."

He forgot grid bias and brought his eyes to rest on Dot's face. "Sorry I can't afford the Astor," he said.

"Oh, I didn't mean that, Eddie. I mean you don't order right. You don't balance your diet. You don't eat spinach, for instance. Now in a home of your own you'd get spinach, for instance. Nice, well-cooked spinach with a hard-boiled egg on it."

"I hate spinach, for instance," said Eddie, hardly.

"Oh, well, not just spinach. In a home of your own—"

Eddie stuck the light of his cigarette in the coffee. There was no hint of indulgence in his invitation. He sounded like Eddie in still, white anger confronting an enemy. “Got something on your mind? Out with it.”

Dot was frightened. Oh, he was going to be mad! If it was only Sue who had offered them furniture, or even Maude McLaughlin; but Edna—The first fight was coming. Maybe the last fight. Perhaps Eddie would leave her when he found that she was not satisfied with the home that he had been able to give her. She wanted to say, “No, honest, Eddie, I was only thinking,” but she wanted those three little fifty-dollar rooms so badly, and maybe he would say yes. He was waiting for her to speak. He was ready to oppose anything she suggested. She read that on his face. Oh, well, she couldn’t sit there looking at him.

“Edna has some furniture that she has no use for. She thought it would be cheaper and more comfortable for us if we took it and got an apartment somewhere. I’d like to do it.”

Eddie tipped his chair back a little from the table and surveyed Dot with a stern eye.

“She’s sorry for you, eh? Too bad. We can’t take charity, Dot. We’ll have a home when I can afford it, see? Marriages that go right have one mess of brains running them, not three nor even two. I’ll tell you when we’re ready for an apartment. Did you get that?”

Eddie’s severe glance showed nothing of what he was thinking. The cutting blue of his eyes did not carry to Dot the thoughts that were running in his mind.

First fight now. This’ll be good. I can still hear the old lady yelling, “You make me sick.” Husband and wife fights. Dot’ll say she’s sorry she married me and that I begrudge her a little happiness and that I’m a God damn fool.

“So I’ll tell Edna no?” Her voice was very low and small.

“Use your own judgment. I said we couldn’t take the stuff, didn’t I?”

Dot arose from the table. Her nose was a little pink, and her eyes were not accessible.

“You know best, Eddie,” she said, tremulously.

Jesus Christ! Nothing but "You know best, Eddie." Just like that.

His hand reached out for hers. He didn't see the diners, only Dot with her little pink nose and her loyal eyelids protecting her tears from staring strangers.

"Are you mad, Dot?"

"No, only I'm—so—disappointed."

She broke away from him and bolted for the door.

He followed and caught her by the arm. Jesus! She wasn't mad.

"Dottie, I was thinking of something else, and you made me sore. Go ahead, get the furniture if you want it. I—I'm crazy. Trying to show who's boss—"

"Oh, Eddie—"

CHAPTER IX

Eight subway stations from Harlem and up four flights of stairs, Dot found her ideal apartment. Not right away, of course. First there had been a week of terrible discouragement and unbelievable weariness. But that was forgotten now. She and Eddie were firmly ensconced in their home.

Dot had liked the house at first sight. She had admired the big orange lights which hung outside and the way the building was divided into two parts. There was space for fifty families in the building, twenty-five on each side. The janitress was a terrible woman and easily nettled, but one couldn't have everything—and the apartment was so adorable.

There were five apartments on each floor. The Collinses had the middle one, and it lay behind a lovely reddish-brown door. Of course it was on the top floor, but then neither Dot nor Eddie minded the stairs. Dyckman Street was just around the corner and Two Hundred and Seventh Street a few blocks away.

What Dot liked best about the apartment was that it had no hall. She hated apartments with halls. Nobody would be mean enough to count the place which could be crossed with one large step a hall.

And the living-room was right there, in front of the one large step. Dot thought it a very large living-room, considering that her apartment was only three rooms. The room was thirteen feet by eleven and had one nice, large window which looked on the street. It annoyed her a little that she couldn't see much of the street because the gray wings of the house jutted out on either side, but she consoled herself with the thought that she could see who was passing her door.

Dot had "done" her living-room in delft blue. There were blue voile curtains at the window. Delft-blue voile. Dot had made them herself, and she was well pleased with the window.

It irritated her that the rug wasn't delft blue, but still it was awfully nice in its reddish-greenish-tannish way. Dot had never before seen such plump roses, and they were tan roses, too, but the

rug had been Edna's, thus erasing all doubt of their authenticity.

Dot was doubtful about the golden-oak table. Ought it be square? Oh, well, it was square, and she didn't know anything that could be done about it except to keep an ecru cover on it and in the center a little fern that almost looked real.

One of the chairs was golden oak, too, and it beamed with a sickly yellowish smile upon its partner who was only mission wood.

There was a Morris chair. The cushions on it were not delft blue. They were bottle green and a little worn, but Dot didn't mind that. She thought Eddie wouldn't be nearly so comfortable in a stiff new chair.

Catty-cornered in the southwest corner was a table. Edna's mother-in-law had got it from her mother-in-law as a wedding present. Dot liked it least of all the things in the room. It was so terribly heavy and old-fashioned. She had Eddie's radio set on it, so people wouldn't notice that the table was a hundred and fifty years old.

Of course there was a sofa. It was cherry-wood and not upholstered in delft blue. It had a pale gray background and was brocaded with tiny pink buttercups. It was a very comfortable sofa. The first day in the new apartment, Dot had made Eddie lie on it and had asked if he could honestly say that he had ever encountered a more comfortable one. There was a bridge lamp beside the sofa. It had a black iron base and a charming shade upon which was the silhouette of a geisha being obligingly carted about town in the silhouette of a jinrickshaw.

Against the opposite wall was a chest of drawers where Dot kept the dining-room and kitchen linen. It was chestnut and had knobs which, as though they themselves were not adequate for their jobs, provided little metal pulls on their neat rounded ends.

The wall paper was unfortunately not delft blue. The landlord had of course given Dot her choice of several samples, but inasmuch as there was not a delft blue in the collection, she had chosen sand color.

Edna said that sand color was a good background for pictures; so Dot had to have pictures. She dumped a photograph of her brother Jim out of a gilt oval frame and replaced it with a shiny green likeness of Pola Negri cut from a movie magazine. Then there was the picture that Edna had had taken of herself and Floyd while Floyd was still young enough to be manageable. Whistler's "Magnolia Tree" was Sue Cudahy's contribution to the living-room. A plaster-of-paris plaque of a Gibson girl in linen duster, veil, and goggles gave a hint of the esthetic pursuits of Edna's youth.

Dot's heart had been set on candlesticks. There's something dressy about mahogany-stained candlesticks with tall, imposing candles. On the day that she made these purchases, the Woolworth had been out of delft blue candles; so she had taken pale green ones.

The pictures and the candles were indeed big factors in the success of the living-room, but Dot felt that not enough credit was given the chandelier. It belonged to the house, of course, and Dot tried not to think that she might some day move away from it. It was a white bowl supported by a thick brass chain and nicely finished off with a row of white glass lace. It hung a little low, Dot thought; two links shorter, and Eddie might have saved himself that nasty crack on the forehead.

All in all, the living-room was very satisfactory, in fact, quite lovely. Thinking it over from an unprejudiced angle, Dot decided that she hadn't made a mistake in "doing" it in delft blue.

The kitchen was of course much smaller than the living-room. Dot liked a small kitchen. It saves a great many steps, and this one had the advantage of opening right out from the living-room. There was a swinging door between. Dot hoped Eddie hadn't seen her swinging the door back and forth and back and forth again for the sole purpose of watching it work.

There was a big white sink, and Eddie had bought a fixture which, when attached to the faucets, made it possible to warm the cold water or cool the hot water. It was just an ordinary black gas stove the Collinses had, but it roasted beautifully. The ice box had been relined when they moved in. It would have cost ten dollars to cover the floor with linoleum; so Dot had decided on oil cloth. They had saved four and a half dollars that way, and Eddie had varnished the

entire surface, which was bound to make it last even longer than linoleum. It was a pretty pattern, blue and white squares. The kitchen window looked out on the rear. It had a little white curtain with a checkered gingham edge. There was a shelf above the tub, and four dazzling white canisters sat thereon. The largest was labeled “Flour” and the smallest “Tea.” The two between were the sugar canister, which could accommodate four pounds without discomfort, and the coffee canister, which could accommodate two pounds with terrible discomfort. There was the salt box there, too, the pepper box, and many other boxes, jars, and cans.

Behind the cupboard doors Dot kept her set of dishes, of course. There was a bowl of fruit on the little white table that stood so self-consciously between its two white chairs. It knew it shouldn’t be there with its chairs telling the wicked secret that Dot and Eddie frequently took their meals in the kitchen. Dot often gave the table an admiring glance so that it shouldn’t feel too bad. The bread box on the built-in sideboard matched the canisters. Oh, triumph of domestic art! It was white, and upon it in blue letters ran the legend “Bread and Cake.” Woe be unto the infidel who tried to push past the smart sliding door an unwanted pie.

Beneath the bread box were two drawers. In one lay the good cutlery in pomp and splendor upon a yard of green velveteen. In the other were the kitchen knives and forks, the coffee-strainer, egg-beater, pancake-turner, potato knife, wooden spoon, and mixed in with these little industrious utensils, bewildered and dazed, were a mess of grid leaks, discarded dials, odds and ends of wire, a burnt-out “C” battery, an insulator, and a tube that had once been a darn good detector. Underneath, in the closet where the shining aluminum pots, pans, percolator, and electric iron made their home, Eddie had hidden all the parts of dismantled radio sets that were too big to fit in the drawer.

To feast her eyes on her bedroom Dot had to return through the living-room. She had to walk out into that little place that could hardly be called a hall and then walk right past the door that led to the outside and turn quickly around a little angle, and there she was in the bedroom. It had two windows. These looked right smack

across twenty-five feet into somebody else's bedroom, but Dot didn't look, except straight down with her head to the left side, and then she could see the street again just as she did from the living-room.

There were pink voile curtains at these windows, but Dot hadn't made them. Bedroom curtains are nicer when they're all frilly and ruffly. It was the ruffliness that had scared Dot out of making them. She had bought them from the department store at Two Hundred and Seventh and Broadway. Two and a quarter a pair.

Coming at one from the center of the north wall was the bed. A full-size, bird's-eye maple bed with carved scroll-work in two places. It had three pillows; Dot liked two and Eddie liked one. The spread was just plain white. To Dot there was something touching about that white spread. It seemed so wistfully envious of the beautiful pink curtains, so sure that no one could ever admire it while the breezes insisted upon making lovely, delicate sails out of the pink voile curtains. Dot always patted the spread lovingly.

The rug was leaf green with, Dot thought, pineapples in it. She decided to refer to them as "figures." If she called them pineapples Edna might think she didn't like them. When Dot sat down on a maple-wood chair she was able to see under the bed where there was a worn spot in the rug, but—comforting thought—few people sat on the maple-wood chair. Another chair was upholstered in yellow brocade and absolutely smirked with self-satisfaction.

Dot admired Eddie's chiffonier terribly. It was chestnut, because chestnut was the only wood that Martin Driggs knew by name and he had been badgered into choosing his own chiffonier. A matting-covered chest stood in one corner of the room. It held some of the bedroom linens and towels. The overflow was accommodated in Eddie's chiffonier. Eddie, statistics proved, could do nicely with two drawers and a laundry bag.

Dot frequently opened the door of her closet. It had a large wooden arm, stretched between its walls, which held her dresses in neat array. Her hats and shoes stood on the shelf above. There was no sign of Eddie there except a pair of discarded shoes which he hadn't yet accustomed himself to the idea of throwing out. A cretonne-covered box on the floor was where Dot kept her more intimate garments. She had no bureau, chiffonier, or chest of

drawers. Instead she had what Mrs. Williams had suggested Eddie should give her in honor of their first home, a vanity table, a frail, mahogany-stained, tri-mirrored vanity table with two shallow little drawers and knots of forget-me-nots painted helter-skelter with fine disregard of balance. It was Dot's pride and joy.

Sometimes when her work was all done, she'd go whisking about the apartment, patting the white spread, smiling at the kitchen table, and admiring her blue voile curtains. Even the bathroom with its sparkling white tub and perfectly workmanlike shower bath came in for its share of praise.

Dot would stand on the little blue bath mat and study the gleaming white tiles surrounding it. And sometimes she would suddenly burst into song, and other times she felt as though she'd just like to cry.

CHAPTER X

It was kind of hard to tell Eddie because it was all such a new idea. They had never discussed the possibility, or rather the certainty, of Dot's becoming pregnant. He didn't know that it had finally happened, and she hated to tell him. He got mad so easy.

His ignorance of the result of their young and irresponsible carelessness was not due to the fact that they lived like a moving-picture couple, who one would imagine consummated their amours through an ambassador, but rather because Eddie was only vaguely conscious that the dates on the calendar had anything to do with Dot's physical condition.

She wondered if she couldn't get Edna to tell him. No, Sue Cudahy would be a more acceptable message-bearer, or even Maude McLaughlin. Dot knew that she was only playing with the thought to relieve her feelings. She knew she would have to tell him herself.

Gee, this was worse than asking him if they might take Edna's furniture. Babies were cunning things, sort of gay and friendly. They didn't cost much either, and it would sleep in a crib beside their bed. There's something sort of valuable about them. She couldn't afford a nurse; so she'd have to stay home and mind it. No leaving them alone. Some people did, of course, but occasionally a baby pulled the blanket up and smothered, or the house caught fire. No, she'd have to cut out parties and stay home and probably sit close to the crib and watch the baby while it slept. Tied down. No dances, no movies, no window-shopping of an evening. Tied down. But the baby would be in his crib, and it would be an ivory-colored crib with perhaps a picture of a pussy-cat at the head and foot.

"Eddie." One had to tell Eddie, and it seemed proper that one should be careless and hard in the telling. "I think I'm pregnant."

Eddie looked at her without speaking. He was leaning against the built-in sideboard in the kitchen while Dot fried the chops for supper.

"It's the twenty-eighth now," she went on. "Yep, I guess I'm pregnant."

"You don't seem much worried," he said.

"Of course, I'm not worried," she began gayly and stopped short. There was something in his face that stopped her. She ought to be worried. He was worried. The familiar eyes had narrowed in their equally familiar way.

Worried! God, a baby! They were all right, of course. Some fellows were simply coo-coo about their kids, and the little devils got so after a while that they would say Daddy. But Dot standing there at the stove, young, smiling—pretty green, Dot. What did she know about pain? And it was pain. Eddie could imagine pain. He could see it coming unexpectedly upon Dot, catching her in the dead of night, catching her while she smiled in her sleep. Even his arm about her wouldn't help, and how could she know what it would be like? Young, smiling, frying chops, and telling him that she was pregnant, in the tone she used to the iceman when she ordered a twenty-cent piece of ice. But maybe—Even Dot was a woman. Maybe she wanted a baby. Cute damn things. Once a baby in a bakery had got so that she knew Eddie and had quite unexpectedly made him a present of her rattle. It had been a pink rabbit with little pebbles inside. Of course, he'd given it back to her; but it was the idea of the thing.

"Do you want a baby?" he asked.

There was his face. Narrow eyes, set jaw. There was his voice. Cold, steely. There was his question. Do you want a baby? He threw his cigarette on the lovely oilcloth and crushed it to nothingness. Eddie had never abused their home before. Do you want a baby? He was looking at her now. What did he want her to say? No, of course. Would he look so worried, so hard, if he wanted the other answer?

Dot turned a chop over, disclosing a hitherto unsuspected lovely brown side. She threw the pancake-turner on the tub. It made a nasty clatter from which even the tub seemed to shrink.

"What do I want a baby for?" she asked. "Who wants to be tied down for months before and years after? Not me."

Eddie sighed. That was a sigh of relief, of course, but his expression never relaxed all evening.

On the thirtieth Dot looked at Eddie questioningly. "It's the thirtieth," she said. "Where do we go from here?"

"You're sure now, eh?"

"Positive."

"Well," said Eddie. It was different when it was a fellow's wife. A fellow didn't go in a pool room and get hold of a guy he knew, tell his story, and see if the guy could suggest a drug or a doctor. It was different when it was a fellow's wife. "Well," said Eddie. "Well—"

Dot went to see Sue Cudahy. Sue had quit work. She was going to marry Pat in another month, and she was letting him get accustomed to supporting her.

Dot found her sitting on the sofa in the Cudahy parlor, re-stringing her yellow beads. She looked a little bored with life and had none of the shining mysticism of a girl in her last month of single blessedness. She chuckled when Dot told her news.

"Good for you," she cried.

"Good!" Dot looked grieved at her friend's perversity. "It's hell."

"Why, what's the matter? You're married, ain't you?"

"Sure, but Eddie—I don't want a kid. Say, Sue, what do you do to get out of a mess like this?"

Sue, in turn, looked a trifle grieved. It was cruel and tactless of Dot to come to a girl on the brink of marriage and ask such a question.

"I really don't know anything about it," said Sue, a bit coldly.

Dot didn't "get" Sue's position at all.

"Gee, there must be something," she said. "Look, Sue, Pat's in a drug store. He can get me something, can't he?"

"Why, that's against the law, Dot. Pat would lose his job." Sue looked properly shocked at her friend's request.

"Well," said Dot, "all right. I'm sorry I asked."

Silence for a moment; then Dot spoke of the gorgeous winter coats in Koch's window.

It was just before she left to go home and fix Eddie's supper that Sue relented.

"Pat did get something once for the wife of a friend of his," she said. "I'll call him up, and you can send Eddie over to the store tonight and he'll let him have it."

Dot was grateful and said so. She went home feeling lighter of heart than she had felt for days. Everything was going to be right again.

Only Pat's wonderful remedy didn't help. Religiously Dot took it and each night when Eddie came home she sadly admitted that success had not crowned her efforts.

"All that rotten-tasting stuff," she thought, "just to keep a little crib out of the bedroom."

"She's afraid of being tied down," thought Eddie.

After a week, Dot stopped taking the stuff. She would almost have let things drift. She was tired of medicine and of baths so hot that they burned her skin. She was almost ready to say, "Well, what's to be will be."

Only Eddie said, "What are you going to do now?"

She thought of Maude McLaughlin the next day. Maude had always been wise. She would know something. Time was growing very important now. In fear of being put off, Dot went without preparing Maude for her visit. What are you going to do now? Eddie had asked. Even hours seemed precious. What are you going to do now?

Maude was at home, a Maude in kimono and mules, a Maude with tousled hair.

"I didn't think I'd find you home," said Dot. "But I took a chance."

She followed Maude down the hall into the dining-room. From abovestairs a voice floated down.

"Who is it, Maudie?"

"For me," said Maude, curtly.

That had been Mrs. McLaughlin, Dot knew. She wished that she could speak to her. She would probably be able to help.

"I'm spending the day in," said Maude. "We have visitors. A niece of mine is visiting us. You didn't know my sister, did you?"

"Didn't know you had one."

That seemed to vex Maude. "Of course I have a sister," she said. "She is married and lives up-state. She's sick and has sent her kid down here for us to mind. I was playing with her when you came

in."

"Funny to think of you playing with a kid."

"Oh, I'm good at it," said Maude.

A tall negress in a stiff white dress came to close the door that divided the dining-room from a room beyond. Dot caught a flash of a blond-haired tot of two or thereabouts. The door closed, and the child's voice, raised in instant disapproval, rent the air. Between her violent shrieks, Dot could hear her saying, "Mommie, Mommie. I want my Mommie."

"She's homesick," explained Maude.

"Poor kid," Dot commented.

The negress opened the door. "Sorry, Miss McLaughlin," she said; "she'll be quiet if you let her stay in here."

The child scampered past her nurse and climbed up on Maude's lap. She brushed a little smooth cheek against Maude's face and curled up contentedly. "Mommie," she whispered.

Dot took a deep breath and said, "You know, I'm pregnant."

She half expected Maude to burst out in hearty congratulations, and Maude's horror-stricken expression comforted her.

"Oh, Lord, Dot," she said. "For God's sake, don't have a baby. Oh, the agony of it."

"I wouldn't mind that," said Dot, "if only—"

"You wouldn't mind it, eh?" Maude's eyes rested on the curly blond head against her breast. "Fancy that passing through you," she said.

Dot gasped. She'd never thought of childbirth except vaguely. Both Dot and Maude lost sight of the fact that it was not an infant's head they were regarding.

"I've taken some medicine," said Dot, "but it's no good."

"None of it's any good," said Maude. "There's no medicine in the world that will do the trick. You have to have an operation."

"Well, gee, don't that hurt terribly?"

"It does," said Maude, "the first time, because most girls are crazy enough to try it without ether. If you have ether you don't feel a damn thing, where in actually having the baby, they can't very well

give you ether until the worst of it's nearly over."

Dot was overawed at the easy, almost doctorlike way that Maude gave out her information. She sat with her legs crossed carelessly, the child in her arms, a cigarette in her mouth. Once she removed the cigarette for the express purpose of kissing the baby. Dot was enchanted with Maude's worldliness.

"Gee, you know a lot," she murmured, devoutly. "Did the doctor tell you or did you read it in a book?"

Maude laughed a little. "Dot, you're wonderful," she said. "I don't know whether to kiss you or to kill you. You might go to hell, Kid, but it won't be from lack of faith."

"What do you mean, Maude?"

Maude sighed. "You must be kidding me," she said. "Nobody could be so thick, but anyhow I'll write you an address where you can go and get fixed up. Don't let them charge you over fifty dollars."

Dot gasped. "Fifty dollars!"

Maude looked at her in surprise.

"Holy God, Kid," she said, "you didn't expect to beat that price, did you? I know a girl who pays three hundred for every one she has."

"Three hundred!"

Maude shrugged. "It's a bootleg operation, Kid. If it was legal it wouldn't be worth more than ten dollars, but the country says 'No abortions'; so dumb doctors who couldn't cure a split lip get rich on doing them."

Maude's words didn't reach Dot's consciousness. She was thinking of the price. Fifty dollars! Could Eddie raise fifty dollars?

Maude followed her train of thought.

"You can have a baby for nothing," she said. "The hospitals are wide open to the woman who wants to have a baby, but to the woman who doesn't want one—that's a different thing. High prices, fresh doctors. It's a man's world, Dot. To the woman who knows her place they will give their charity, but the woman who wants to keep her body from pain and her mind from worry is an object of

contempt. Hm, Dot, did you get that? I'm getting pretty smart. Guess I'll get a soap box and talk birth control to the down-trodden masses."

Dot said nothing for a moment. Then she asked, "Maude, do you suppose it is really terrible pain for a woman to have a child?"

"Dot, it's unbelievable agony. If you ever have one, remember while you're in the delivery room that I told you not to do it. Dig up fifty dollars for an operation even if you have to sell your furniture."

"But, look, Maude, there's an awful lot that must be nice about a baby. People have 'em all the time and they seem happy about it."

Maude thoughtfully extinguished her cigarette. "Honey," she said, "you're an awful nice kid, but you're a moron. No offense meant. It's just a condition over which you have no control. A lot of people are morons, and ideals are meant for them. There'd be no law and order if everybody thought like I do, and I ought not tell you this, but I'm going to anyhow. Ted told me, and it's pretty near true. Did you ever notice that when there's something unpleasant to do it's always covered up with a lot of glamour commonly known as bologna? It's good for the world that the women should have babies; so they keep the fiction moving about dear little baby hands, beautiful motherhood, a woman's true mark of distinction, and so forth. It's good for the world that our men should go and be butchered and starved and diseased in their God damn armies; so we hear about glory and bravery and patriotism and that bunk. Any time you hear a lot of piping about any grand honor you're getting, take a look under it and you'll see it's the bunk."

"Gee, Maude, you take the joy out of life."

"Ain't no joy in it, Kid. It's eating, drinking, working, loving, suffering, and dying. Go see that doctor, Kid, and cheat the world of a baby that would damn near kill you in getting here."

Dot nodded amiably. At last Maude had said something intelligible. She wanted Dot to go to the doctor's. Well, of course, Dot would go; but the rest of her friend's tirade sounded pretty dizzy. It was unpleasant stuff, Dot could gather that much. All about

not letting her child grow up and join the army. Well, if he wanted to join, Dot couldn't see how she was going to stop him; but she wouldn't argue that point with Maude right now.

She felt that she ought to go. A sudden detachment had claimed Maude. She gazed at her watch and gazed in the direction of the door behind which the negress lurked. The child had grown restless and fretful.

"Well, thanks a lot, Maude. I think I'll run along now."

Maude nodded as though that was also her feeling on the subject. Dot wormed her way into her coat and said good-by.

"I'll let you know how I make out," she said.

Maude did not follow her to the door. It seemed there was a law about moving the child from her lap. As Dot passed through the hall she encountered the negress, who was bearing a tray in the direction of her charge. There was a big bowl of carrots and potatoes, a glass of milk, a slice of bread and butter, a pat of Jello molded into an enticing little form, and three Nabiscos.

Just before she closed the door, Dot heard Maude's voice raised in a dulcet eulogy.

"Oh, Mommie's lamb, see the lovely carrots and the nice 'taters and afterwards if you eat everything there's Jello and crackers—"

Dot closed the door. She felt a little cold and wistful. Jello in a heart-shaped mold. Carrots could be shaped that way, too. There were cribs with pussy-cats on them made in apartment-house sizes that would just fit into that corner beside the bed. She had recently seen a high chair with the back shaped like a rabbit's head. Did you put bootees on little tiny babies or those infinitesimal glove-soft shoes that one saw in windows? Oh, well, hell! Might as well go see this doctor and get it over with. Who wants a baby to tie you down when he's small and go join the army when he gets big?

Dot consulted the address which Maude had given her. It was Dr. Griegman, and he lived two blocks from the Theresa Hotel. She knew that nothing important could happen that day, for she had not the fifty dollars, and Maude had told her that for illegal operations the doctor collected before he put the patient on the table. Still, it would be just as well to see him and find out if he would do it at all.

The doctor's house was a brownstone front similar to the one in which she and Eddie had lived. It was perhaps Dot's fevered thoughts that cloaked it in a sinister haze. There seemed something dread and ominous in the many drawn shades, something weird and murderous about the cat who innocently took the sun upon the front steps.

Dot rang the bell. A middle-aged woman whose forte was not English opened the door. She ushered Dot into a huge reception room, and Dot sat down. There were several chairs, a divan, a long, low table. The room was empty save for herself. There was something offensive in the barrenness of the doctor's table. One could fancy the doctor saying, "What! Magazines for the dames who come in here? They don't need them. Their minds are well occupied."

The rug needed sweeping, Dot noted after a time. Another few minutes passed before she observed the huddled wisps of dust clinging together beneath the divan. Then she saw other things. Dirty windows, a smeared mirror. She shuddered. There was a damp chilliness about the room.

Suddenly the rolling doors sixteen feet in front of her parted, and the doctor gestured for her to enter. As she crossed the threshold and the doors snapped behind her, she had a comforting thought that after all Maude knew where she was going. Maude could put the police on the right track if Eddie became alarmed at the prolonged absence of his wife.

The room on the other side of the door was not the hideous room with the "table" as Dot had expected. There was a door, however, in the west wall, which was certainly concealing the chamber of horrors. Dot tried not to look at it, but there was nothing much more attractive in the room they were in. A very old desk with papers in a crazy swirl across it stood beneath a double window. The telephone was on it, and a paper weight in the actual size of a human skull made Dot wonder gloomily if it represented a former patient. A couch with the stuffing bursting forth ran along one wall. There were two chairs, a table, a bookcase, and a great deal of dust. The doctor's diploma hung on the wall, but it was too far above her head for Dot to read, had she so desired.

The doctor sat on the desk, and Dot timidly settled herself on a chair that promptly tilted back six sudden inches and made her gasp.

The doctor laughed but sobered quickly at the blank, frightened query on Dot's face. "That's the desk chair," he said. "Sit there." He gestured to another chair which Dot accepted gingerly.

"Now, what seems to be the trouble?" he asked.

Dot didn't feel much like telling him. He seemed so very young. She wanted an old doctor with a full white beard which, though unsanitary, would certainly be reassuring. Dr. Griegman was thirty or thereabouts, and everybody knows that a doctor of thirty suggests to the feminine mind rompers or an affair, depending on her type. To Dot he suggested rompers. A doctor of thirty was to her like a plumber of ten.

But she told him that she thought she was pregnant. Dr. Griegman looked properly interested, as though he ever had patients in a different condition.

"What makes you think that?"

Dot explained.

"Hm," said Dr. Griegman. His dark, not bad-looking face seemed worried. "Are you married?" he asked.

Dot blushed hotly.

"Of course I am," she said.

"Of course you are," Griegman mocked. "I've never had a patient yet who wasn't."

He jumped from the desk. "All right," he said, "let's look you over."

He motioned to the west door. "Go on in. Take off your dress and brassiere or whatever you wear and climb up on the table. Let me know when you're ready."

Dot went slowly into the other room, closing the door behind her. There was the operating table standing white and quiet as a casket, only not quite so white. Griegman's last patient had evidently had her shoes shined before the examination. There was a basin in the corner where water dripped with maddening monotony. Dot took

off her hat and coat and hesitatingly began to unhook her dress. Eddie might be sore when he heard that another man had seen her like that. But still, a doctor! Surely a doctor saw so many women that it was kind of flattering oneself to think he'd be fresh.

Dr. Griegman came into the room without being called just as Dot was stepping out of her dress. She did not meet his gaze, but he stood watching her as she walked to a chair and laid her dress upon it. Her little chemise just covered her nudity and it was with a note of desperation in her voice that Dot asked: "Must I take this off, too?"

"If you don't mind," said the doctor with mock deference; then added: "Less time would be wasted if women did at once what they were told to do."

Dot slipped her chemise down over her feet and the doctor slapped the center of the table meaningly.

Dot, frightened and confused, climbed upon it and lay down. He bent over and touched her breasts. Dot turned her face away from him and lay dumb and miserable while he pursued his examination.

At length he said: "Seems no doubt about it. You are certainly pregnant."

He went back to the head of the table again and bent over her. His face was very close to her now.

"Sure you're married?" he asked.

Dot nodded. There was a lump of anger and fright in her throat.

"I like to help little girls out," he said. "Little single girls."

His hands were adventurous and heavy. Dot stiffened beneath their touch.

"I'm married," she said, dully.

"Too bad," he said. "Fifty dollars is a lot of money."

Dot jumped to a sitting posture preparatory to getting down from the table. The doctor put an arm around her for assistance and captured a breast in one of his hands as he did so.

"This is a good time to be indiscreet," he suggested.

Dot reached for her chemise and dress, and the doctor instantly became professional.

"You want to attend to that soon," he said. "It's in its second month. Give me a ring and make an appointment if you decide to have an operation. Bring your husband or a friend with you."

He retreated into the other room, and Dot hurried into her hat and coat. As she passed him on the way out he said: "That will be five dollars for the examination."

Dot only had two dollars and a quarter with her; so he took that.

CHAPTER XI

Dot lay on the sofa with a blanket drawn up to her ears. Funny how chilly and sick a woman could feel, once she knew she had a good excuse. Eddie sat over near the window turning the pages of a radio magazine with no great eagerness. There was an air of determined depression about the apartment and its two occupants.

Once Eddie spoke. “Want me to get you something?”

Dot shook her head. What could he get her? She didn’t want anything. She was too miserable. Downstairs a Victrola began to play “Burning Sands” by the Whiteman Orchestra. People were probably feeling in good spirits down there. The woman who kept the apartment probably hadn’t been to see Dr. Griegman. Dot cast a glance at Eddie. Suppose she told him. She smiled a little. What good would it do her to have Dr. Griegman’s nose broken? Eddie hadn’t cared about her having to undress. He seemed to know that she would have to, but if she had told him the rest—Well, she couldn’t, because he certainly would make an attempt to clean up the dirty office, using the doctor for a mop. Then he would be arrested. Men made things so difficult. Because he would do this and be arrested, Dot couldn’t tell him of the doctor’s unpleasant habits; consequently she couldn’t give him a good reason for not wanting to go to Griegman again.

At first she had hoped to gain time by mentioning the price of the operation. Eddie had looked worried but not baffled. He said he felt sure his boss would advance him fifty dollars and that he could repay him five dollars a week.

Dot closed her eyes wearily. One had one’s choice between going to that dirty office and being mercilessly pawed or submitting to the unbearable pain of childbirth. The second way seemed by far the more desirable, perhaps because it was a delayed punishment while the other was directly upon her. Whether that was the reason or not, Dot preferred the natural course; but then there would be Eddie looking gloomy and blue. This time next week it would be over, and they would be able to talk to each other again and go to the movies

and laugh. There is no law that can stop a woman from having a baby once Nature has given her the opportunity, but Dot doubted that any woman had ever had one without her husband's sanction. It would indeed be over in a week from now, for Eddie would continue to look dismal until the possibility of his being a father had passed. She would go as soon as Eddie got the fifty dollars. Too bad he didn't want a baby. She would be able to face the unbelievable agony of which Maude had spoken if he were only *with* her. But he wasn't. They weren't allies in the crisis. He was far off somewhere thinking his own thoughts, probably calling her a fool for having got into this mess. She would go back to Dr. Griegman, and he, for the small sum of fifty dollars, would put Eddie back in a good humor again. She turned wearily on the couch, and Eddie looked up at her.

Poor kid! Trying to make up her mind. Well, she'd have to come to a decision by herself. A man would have a hell of a nerve to tell her to go ahead and have the baby. It was her job to bear the pain, her job to tend the little thing for years to come. What right had a man to say what she should do?

Advice in the opposite direction was an impossibility. It was murder as Eddie saw it, murder to snuff out the little germ of life that flickered so uncertainly, that little germ that grew to be a kid in overalls with a dirty face who asked for pennies and was proud of his Daddy. Still, some women died bringing the little fellows here. Oh, God, why was it so hard? Why did a guy have to see the picture of Dottie cold and white beside a vision of a kid who'd be called Junior? Oh, it was her battle. He couldn't help, and she was so little and scared-looking. She seemed to think that he was sore about something. He wished that he could explain what he felt. If he could only tell her just why he kept quiet. Words. He needed words again. And well-chosen, capable words are scarce, north of Central Park.

The bell rang. Eddie got up and went to the door. Dot raised herself to a sitting position and endeavored to look less sick-hearted.

Eddie opened the door. Edna Driggs stood outside.

"Oh," said Eddie, and leaving the door open, walked back to his chair.

Edna closed the door behind her and came into the living-room.

"Hello," she said, and seeing Dot swathed in a blanket, added quickly: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Just lying down."

Edna sat down on the couch beside Dot. "I was worried about you," she said. "It's nearly two weeks since I heard from you."

Dot smiled a smile, sadly lacking in gayety. "Oh, you'd have heard from me," she said, "only I didn't think you'd be much help."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Well, what do you want help for?"

Eddie had recovered his magazine and had apparently discovered an intensely interesting article. His head was bent low over the book, and he seemed utterly oblivious of the conversation between the two women.

"I don't want to have a baby," said Dot. "What do you do in a case like that?"

"You have it anyway," said Edna. "And when you see it you're ready to kill the person who says you didn't want it."

Edna got up and removed her hat and coat. There was in her air the manner of one who sees that she is needed.

"Lots of women don't have them," said Dot.

"Slackers," Edna returned. "Dames who'd shoot their fingers off to evade going to war if they were men." Edna reseated herself on the couch and waited for Dot to speak.

Dot said nothing. She was not anxious to debate the pro and con of birth control. She perceived instantly that the kind of help that she wanted would not be forthcoming from this quarter, and she was ready to let the matter drop.

"How do you feel?" Edna asked after a time.

"Fair. I'm worried, of course."

"What are you worried about? Why don't you want to have a baby?"

Eddie looked up from his intensely interesting article. He looked as though he wanted to say something, but the impression passed, and he returned to his reading.

"Well," said Dot, "for one thing—"

For one thing what? She looked pleadingly up into Edna's waiting eyes. What were some of the reasons for abortion? You simply couldn't say, "Eddie doesn't want a baby." Edna would probably hate him if she knew that. To say that she herself didn't want one was absurd. Edna would make short work of that objection.

"We'd like a little more money before we have one," said Dot timidly.

She cast a frightened glance at Eddie. Would he be angry at this attack on his earning capacity? If so, Edna's reply must surely have restored his good humor.

"Crazy Kid," Edna laughed, easily. "You have plenty. You go to shows and dances and you dress yourself up snappy for your evenings out, don't you? Well, there'll be no shows and dances with a wee one to mind, and the money'll go on him. So there you are. What are you going to name it?"

Dot shook her head slowly. Wee one. What a cute expression. How descriptive of a gurgling elfin little thing that clings warmly to you and searches for bright objects to fix a wavering, unsure glance upon. Wee one. Dot continued to shake her head. It was not so much a gesture of negation now as it was the action of a person whose mind is occupied with melancholy thoughts.

"It will never be born," she said.

A smile had appeared on Edna's face, such as a salesman wears when he has at length overridden a customer's prejudice against his article. Now at Dot's words the smile vanished. It was as though Edna realized for the first time, that Dot was deadly serious.

"But, Honey, what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I guess I'll have to have an operation."

Edna looked at Eddie. She was trying to figure how the land lay. Who was the birth-control advocate, Eddie or Dot? If it were Dot, all was well, but in the event of its being Eddie....

"Operations of that kind cost a lot of money," said Edna.

"Eddie can raise it," Dot replied. She was beginning to see that she also was having a tussle. There was not one good argument that she could find against having a baby. Edna would fight her into a

corner. Her sole reason was Eddie's doleful air. And that reason she could not give. What would Edna think of a man who didn't want a child?

"Look, Dot, I'm not a gushy sort of person, but you haven't any women in your life that think as much of you as I do. Sue and Maude and those girls are just companions. I'm a friend. Do you see the difference? Can't you tell me the real reason why you don't want a baby?"

Obviously, Edna had no self-consciousness about the silent blue-suited figure in the corner. She was talking to Dot, and she was desperately in earnest. Dot saw the earnestness shining through her eyes. It made Edna suddenly beautiful. Dot had a feeling that perhaps her mother would have talked so. She knew that Sue Cudahy in this position would have asked Edna just what business it was of hers. But curiously, at that moment, it seemed Edna's business. But for that silent blue-suited figure whom Dot had not forgotten, she might have told Edna that Eddie—But it was not to be thought of, and Edna had to have an answer.

"I don't—I don't want the pain of it," she said. Her eyes turned away from Edna and fixed themselves on space.

"Oh, Dot, you little fool."

Eddie laid his magazine down with surprising quietness. "Why is she a little fool?" he asked.

Edna was momentarily taken aback, so completely had she forgotten his existence.

"Oh, Eddie, she didn't mean anything by that." Dot was large-eyed and worried. An argument? Now? Just when she felt that she couldn't bear one more vexation.

"I meant that Dot was a little fool to consider the pain so seriously," Edna explained. "But every girl does that at first."

"Well, then, don't blame Dot for it," said Eddie.

"No, but you see," Edna went on, "that one night when the baby comes might be pretty bad, but it is gone in a few hours and you have your baby."

Nobody said anything for a minute. Dot was considering Edna's "pretty bad" against Maude's "unbearable agony."

"Let her do what she wants about it," said Eddie. "It's her business."

Edna got up and walked toward him. "Look here, Eddie," she said, "you're a married man and you have a job and you can vote, but I'll be damned if I think you're responsible. Do you mean to say that you'd have her considering an illegal operation and not try to talk her out of it or at least let somebody who cares about her try?"

"It's her business," said Eddie.

"It's the business of somebody who's had a baby to tell her what it's really like. Nine-tenths of the girls and the young married women in America haven't the faintest notion what it's like. How can they have? If they'd let somebody tell them they wouldn't be so scared."

Dot's interest in the whole affair made her forget her worry regarding Eddie and Edna.

"I saw Maude McLaughlin today," she said. "I—I think she's had a baby. She said it was unbelievable agony."

Edna smiled coldly. "I've heard people say that about tonsil operations," she said. "I had a baby and I am ready to go through it again if I remarry."

"Dot's not built like a war-horse," remarked Eddie.

"Disregarding the personal side of your remark," said Edna, "I would advise you to learn something before trying to discuss obstetrics. You don't know anything about Dot bearing a child."

"And I don't want to know," Eddie growled.

"Oh, you don't want a baby?"

Dot jumped ahead of the retort she saw Eddie framing. "He's worried for me," she said.

"He is like hell," Edna cried. "If he was, he wouldn't let you have that operation. There are only five or six doctors in New York who do it without ever having a comeback from the patient, and those men charge from a hundred and fifty up."

"What do you mean, comeback?" asked Dot.

"Blood poison for one thing, and there's a lot of other things that happen, too."

Eddie struck a match and lit his cigarette.

Great tears streamed down Dot's face. "Oh, God," she said. "What can I do?"

Edna turned to Eddie. "See here, Kid, don't be too smart. Just because you don't like me isn't a reason for not using my knowledge. If you're worried about Dot, remember this: there's pain and danger in either direction. One way you're dealing with a good doctor, and nature is on your side. The other way you've got a guy that couldn't make a living the way other doctors do, and you've got nature fighting you. Besides, the last way you have no baby, you're out fifty or seventy-five dollars, and in case you have a religion, you've sinned against it."

"Aw, tell it to Dot," said Eddie.

"Aren't you interested?" asked Edna.

Then Eddie called Edna a name which makes up in venomous intent what it lacks in accuracy. It is guaranteed to leave a wife and her well-meaning friend in consternation. Eddie picked up his hat and walked out of the apartment.

Dot's tears fell faster. "What else can happen?" she sobbed. "I'll bet he doesn't come back all night."

"Don't cry. I'll stay till he comes back."

"Oh, Edna, you mean well, but it's all wrong. I can't have a baby, and please leave me alone about it."

"No, Dot, I can't. I must convince you that an illegal operation isn't as easy as it sounds. Maude's a coward, Dot. Honest to God she is. It's not a pleasure, but it isn't so bad as some women make out. Listen, Dot, I went with a girl to have one of those operations, and I'm sure I didn't have as much pain with Floyd as she had with—"

"Oh, she didn't have ether?"

"No."

"Well, it's easy with ether."

"Yes, very easy. You're deathly sick at your stomach, and sometimes the retching strains you, and you have a nice time with your insides."

Dot dried her eyes. She knew it was a futile gesture.

A half hour passed without a word being said. Occasionally Dot patted her eyes with her handkerchief. As nearly as she could make out, she was much worse off than she had been earlier that day. Then she had not considered Dr. Griegman's talent dangerous. She had merely been revolted by the man. Now she had discovered that blood poison, death, and a score of unknown dangers awaited her in that grimy office. Still, she had to go. Eddie did not want a baby. Surely that much could be seen by anybody. If he only wanted one! How gamely she could face the months of waiting and the terrible climax if he were beside her choosing bootees, picking out a name, counting days.

Before conversation was resumed between Dot and Edna, Eddie returned. He walked into the room with a sullen air of defiance.

"Well," he asked, turning to Edna, "have you decided on the baby's godfather?"

"Please don't be sore, Eddie," Edna begged. "Between us we have Dot a nervous wreck."

"Between us," Eddie barked. "For the love of God, you fixed things so she hasn't any chance. It's enough to get anybody nervous. You got her dying no matter what she does."

"No, Eddie," Edna said, "I haven't. I merely want to take some of the bloom off your idea that operations like that are a cinch. Do you still want her to be operated on after what I told you about bum doctors and all?"

"It's up to her."

Suddenly a climax had been reached in the scene. Two pairs of eyes turned upon Dot. The two people in the world who cared for her were awaiting her answer. She was startled by the abruptness of the move. The decision which she had reached again and again now seemed foolish. After all, it was her body that was to be the battlefield. She had been wrong. It was her place to do what she pleased, not to stand by and wait for Eddie to pass judgment. Deciding in favor of Griegman when every impulse cried against it had been absurd. She felt terribly happy and peaceful as she said, "I'll have the baby."

And then she looked at Eddie's face. It was a mask of gloom and despair. She had chosen wrong, perhaps, but she would stand or fall by that decision.

She had no way of knowing that Eddie had just seen himself arguing with a conductor that Junior was only three years old, and that then Junior, conductor, and car had faded into space as a vision of Dot, cold and stiff on a hospital bed, had come into his mind.

He smiled sourly. "Satisfied, Edna?" he asked. "These women who want to be Jesus Christ sure do beat me."

CHAPTER XII

It wasn't possible to face nine months cooped up in a three-room apartment with a person so depressingly silent as Eddie. She knew what his silence meant. He was sore clean through. He didn't want a baby. She would often look up at him and find his eyes fixed upon her, and the expression in them was one of terror. He dreaded the thought of a baby who would cry in the night, who would take nine-tenths of her time, who would consume the money they had used in dance halls and chop suey restaurants. That's what his terrified expression meant. What else could it mean?

She couldn't face months of this. She had to talk to him, try and straighten things out. They had to face the future together.

She was lying on the bed. Fifteen minutes before, she had been violently ill. Her stomach had become a petulant, complaining beast that had not retained more than a slice of toast in three weeks. The odor of coffee would bring on a sudden weakness. Lamb chops acted the same way. Dot tried to laugh at herself, but it was not easy with Eddie pacing the floor, cursing under his breath. Of course it wasn't pleasant for him, but still, Dot reflected, it was her stomach that reeled with nausea. She could tell him that, but her desire was to bring them closer together again, not to begin arguments that could end only in further distance between them. That had become her aim—to see Eddie in a good humor again.

"Eddie," she said, "I don't want a baby, you know."

She saw him look up from his paper. He was stretched crosswise on the bed with his chin resting on his hand. The paper lay spread before him. Once Dot had kept newspapers off the bed because of the print rubbing against her immaculate spread. It didn't seem to matter so much any more.

"Don't you?" he asked. "I'll be glad when you get to a decision."

"Oh, I'm going to have it," she said, hastily, "but I just wanted you to know that I feel just as you feel. I don't want it either."

Eddie scowled but said nothing.

"You see," Dot plunged on, "it's like this, you have to use common sense. Edna talks too much, but she knows more than we do."

Eddie looked back at the newspaper. Dot could not see his face. She wished she could; maybe he was glad to know that she didn't want the kid either. Surely this ought to be a bond between them to renew their old companionship.

It seemed to be working. Eddie's hand reached out and found hers. He squeezed it tightly.

"Of course, I'll be kind to the kid," Dot added. "But, Eddie, I'll never care as much about it as I care for you."

Eddie turned a page noisily. "You'll be a damn funny mother if you don't care a hell of a sight more for it," he remarked.

"But I won't. I doubt that I'll care for it much at all."

"Aw, shut up," said Eddie, pulling his hand away. "What do you have to talk about the kid for anyway? It'll get here soon enough."

"Well, I gotta talk about it," said Dot, "because I need a doctor."

"Yeah, next July," said Eddie.

"No, now."

Eddie sat up on the bed. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing, only it's done nowadays. Edna said so, and Maude said so. If you get what they call prenatal care, you fix it so that you run hardly any chance at all of an accident. See, the doctor looks at you often all through the months, and he can see how you're getting along. He tells you just what to do and all. He puts you on a good diet and everything, see. And he can hear the baby's heart beat, and he can tell how the baby's getting along, too. If we spend a lot of money on this thing we don't want a dead baby, do we?" Dot giggled a little. Those were awful words. Dead baby. You had to laugh a little to help say them.

"What the hell are you always laughing at?" asked Eddie.

Funny he hadn't thought of that before. Some babies didn't live. They came here without the necessary spark that would make them into little fellows that would get into fights in the back lot. How did

a person stand it if, after months of hoping and imagining things about him, the little thing just arrived and disappeared without ever having let you hear him say "Daddy."

"I ain't always laughing," said Dot. "I ain't got so much to laugh about. What do you think about getting a doctor?"

"Sure, get one. If everybody else has them, I suppose you ought to."

"It's awful expensive," said Dot.

"How much?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"Are you kidding?"

"No."

Eddie got up and went over to the chiffonier for a cigarette. "Jeeze, that's a lot of money," he said.

"Yes," Dot agreed, "it is. Some doctors do it a lot cheaper, but I am thinking of a certain doctor."

"Who?"

"His name is Dr. Stewart. He delivered Floyd. Two hundred dollars is the cheapest he'll do it. He usually gets five hundred, but Edna says she thinks he'd do it for two hundred for people like us."

"Kind-hearted, ain't he?" Eddie remarked sourly. "Two hundred dollars. What makes him such an expensive guy?"

"Oh, Edna says he's wonderful. He's so smart and so nice. He tells you what to eat and keeps the baby's weight down so the pain won't be so awful."

"That sounds good," said Eddie.

"And he gives you such good care and all that there's very little chance of anything going wrong."

Dot's cheeks had become very pink with her eagerness. She leaned toward Eddie, and her voice took on a coaxing note. "Look, Eddie, you make forty dollars a week, and we've got a lot of time for saving up. You don't have to pay the doctor a cent until after the baby is here. I've figured it all out, how we can manage. It's worth it to have me and the kid safe, ain't it?"

"You don't have to nag me to let you have decent care," Eddie said. "Get this highway robber if you want him, but I'm glad you got it figured out how we can manage, because I don't see it at all."

Dot said no more about it. She could have talked all night, only she thought it best to leave well enough alone; for Eddie, despite a sudden restlessness that had seized him, looked more contented and friendly than he had in weeks. Dot congratulated herself on good generalship. She had convinced him that the kid was just as much of a nuisance to her as to him, and that had made him feel more kindly toward her.

Dr. Stewart made his first call on Dot three days later. He was a medium-sized, brown-haired man with an inclination toward obesity. He was still under forty, but he was not the type of man who makes a woman yearn for a more elderly doctor. He was pleasant, not formidably professional, and very conscientious. He had a little boy of his own. Dot found that out at once.

Dr. Stewart did not seem willing to base his diagnosis on Dot's symptoms alone. He asked for a sheet. Wonderingly Dot brought him one that was fresh from the laundry. Dr. Stewart told her the position he wished her to take, lying crosswise on the bed. An examination followed, in which the sheet was used solely for the psychological effect it would have on Dot. One couldn't feel exposed with yards of sheet billowing about one. She thought of Dr. Griegman's crude professional manner.

At length Dr. Stewart stood up straight and said: "Well, you're going to have a baby."

It didn't seem the same as when Griegman had verified her suspicions. In Dr. Stewart's words lay congratulations, respect, and a hint of forthcoming glory. A sudden mist of terrifying, heart-bursting happiness descended on Dot. A baby. It suddenly seemed new and very, very wonderful. She wished she could run to Eddie and say: "What do you think, darling, we're going to have a baby!"

Dr. Stewart had returned to the living-room and was awaiting her there. He was sitting in Eddie's chair, smoking comfortably.

Dot came and sat on the couch. She wanted to ask him a great many questions, but she didn't know where to start. Presently he began to speak. He told her about conception, of which she had only the vaguest idea. He described what the child was like now, how it would be a month later. He traced the little life through the months till it would lie, lobster-red and squinty-eyed—but beautiful to its mother—in an ivory-white bassinet.

"I hope you're not thinking of an abortion," he said. "A nasty, corrupt practice which has a bad effect on the woman who uses it."

"Oh, no," said Dot. "I want my baby."

"That's fine." Dr. Stewart smiled pleasantly. "You'll have it probably around the middle of July."

"Yes, it takes nine months, doesn't it?" said Dot, wishing to show that she was not an idiot about obstetrics.

Dr. Stewart nodded, but with reserve. "We figure it ten lunar months," he said.

"Oh, ten months?"

"Ten *lunar* months."

"Then it isn't nine months after all?"

"Well, it's ten lunar months."

"Oh, I see," said Dot, brightly, but she didn't. She was quiet for a few seconds; then: "I'd like to have you for the confinement," she said shyly.

Dr. Stewart seemed absorbed in his cigarette. "Yes, Mrs. Driggs spoke of that when she phoned me," he said. "I understood that she had spoken about the price and so forth to you."

"Yes—she said that you could—that you would—two hundred dollars."

Dr. Stewart nodded. "That means," he said, "that I will be here once every two weeks, deliver the baby, and see you every day for two weeks after."

Dot thought that would be very nice.

"I will be here again two weeks from today," Dr. Stewart said. He got up and put on his coat. He reached for his hat and bag.

"Sorry you're so sick at your stomach," he said. "But that condition will clear up soon. Try gelatine. You might be able to hold on to that for a while."

He smiled again and began the descent of the stairs. Dot held her door open until she heard the big downstairs door close with a rushing thud. Then she went back to the bedroom and lay down to think it all out.

She was going to have her baby despite Eddie's grouches and everything else. She was going to have her baby. She felt that the whole undertaking had been moved to another plane. There was somebody looking after her child's well-being now. A good doctor was going to listen to her baby's heartbeats. Again and again her mind went over what Dr. Stewart had told her. "Your baby," he had said. Her baby. Oh, dear God, if there was only some one who could share her delight, some one who cared enough for that feeble little glow of life to picture it a year, two years from now, when it would be a little boy who could say "Mommie." Too bad Eddie didn't want it.

She had to cool her enthusiasm against his return. He had just begun to accept her again, and excitement over the kid that was coming to break up his night's rest would surely alienate him. She dressed and went around the corner to Dyckman Street. Eddie's supper had to be ready for him. Not that he had ever said anything about it, but Dot thought that a man's supper ought to really be ready for him.

She bought a pound of round steak and a can of corn. She had potatoes and butter and coffee and sugar and milk. Oh, bread. A small loaf of bread. How about breakfast? Were there eggs?

She forgot about the eggs, for suddenly a dreadful wave of dizziness swept over her. She dropped into a chair and watched the world go black before her eyes. The voice of the grocery clerk sounded very far away.

"Let me get you a drink."

She got home somehow or other. She remembered climbing the four flights of stairs. It seemed that never would she have her bundles safe on the kitchen table and her body limp on the sofa.

Somehow she managed. And Eddie's supper was ready when he got home. Dot ate two Uneeda biscuits and talked about Dr. Stewart.

Eddie listened without comment. Twice she almost gave herself away. It's hard to be depressed and gloomy sometimes, even to please one's husband.

Eddie ate his dinner with scarcely a word to Dot. He was thinking of an utterly stupid error he had made that day in repairing a radio set. He wondered how he had come to do that. Oh, well, a fellow's mind was apt to wander sometimes. Mr. Williams had ridden him hard about it. He'd have to see that it didn't happen again. Not that it wasn't excusable once in a blue moon, and not that Williams wasn't fully aware that Eddie did know radio; but still Eddie couldn't help but think that this would be a hell of a time to lose his job.

The incident made Eddie marvel a little at the trustfulness of a woman. Gosh, Dot didn't know that he was a crackajack radio repair man who could always get a job. She was figuring on him to see her through her confinement with the best of care. She depended on forty dollars a week. Suppose he wasn't so good at the job, suppose he was a guy Williams could can without missing, suppose he couldn't connect with another job fast. She'd have to have the kid brought by charity doctors. She wasn't even imagining that. She was trusting him, depending on him. Women were funny.

Since Dot's stomach had become so sensitive, Eddie had taken her place as official dishwasher. It had been his own suggestion, and he was so proud of having summoned the words that had brought about the arrangement that he sulked each night when Dot picked up a towel to do the drying. He wanted to do it all, and if she couldn't see for herself that he was willing, then she was too dumb to worry about; so Eddie sprinkled soap flakes in the dishpan and scowled.

After dinner they went back to the living-room. Eddie sat down in his chair, and Dot took the sofa. He was smoking again.

"When did the doctor think the baby would be here?" he asked.

"Around the middle of July."

"Hm," said Eddie, and added: "Well, it's almost Christmas."

"Yeh, in ten or twelve days Christmas will be here. Say, you know, Eddie, it takes ten months for a baby."

"Go on. It's nine months."

"No, the doctor said ten months."

"He must be a horse-doctor."

"He said it took ten lunar months."

"Well, that's something different again. It means something about the moon."

"What's the moon got to do with me having a baby?"

Eddie smiled thinly. "They don't say nine months," he said, "because if they did you could understand it. They say ten lunar months to make it harder and to give you something to dope out. It's just like charging two hundred dollars. That's something to dope out, too. The whole damn thing is a puzzle. Why is having a baby so expensive? Why does it hurt so? Why is the only other way out so rotten? Ten lunar months explains it great. If they said nine months the poor saps who were going to have the kid would understand it."

"Well, look, Eddie, at all the calls the doctor's got to make on you, and he's got to deliver the baby and all. If you think it's too expensive I'll get another doctor."

Eddie leaped from his chair with an oath. "There you go," he said. "Always trying to start a fight."

"Didn't you say—"

"Yes, I said, but I'm not blaming your wonderful doctor. He's got to charge that much for what he's got to do, I suppose. But why the hell isn't the whole thing different? You don't ask for a kid; it just gets wished on you, and then you have a whole hell of a lot of trouble. What I'm kicking about is that it is necessary for so much to be done about it. Why can't babies come like—like flowers?"

Dot giggled. Eddie gave her a look of disgust mingled with contempt.

"I mean it," he said. "God's supposed to be at the head of the whole system. Why the hell doesn't he think up a way for babies to come without driving people damn near crazy?"

"I don't know, Eddie," said Dot, gravely. "Perhaps if there was no trouble there'd be too many babies."

"That can't be the reason," said Eddie. "God doesn't seem to think that there can be too many kids."

"That's true, too," said Dot as though she had just recalled her last conversation with God and was remembering what he had said on the subject.

Eddie turned on the radio set. The voice of a soprano filled the room. Neither of the Collinses thought it extraordinary for the set to be put in use during a discussion. Half the dramatic scenes enacted uptown are done to the accompaniment of Victrolas or radio sets.

"Gee," said Dot, "I wonder what my father would say if he knew I was going to have a baby."

"What could he say?" asked Eddie with far more seriousness than Dot's idle remark deserved.

"Oh, I don't know. I bet he'd be surprised."

"Why should he be surprised? You're married, and there's nothing wrong with either of us."

"I think I'll write him a letter and tell him."

"What for?"

"Don't you want me to?"

"I don't care what you do about it. He's your father."

"Well, it's not because he's my father that I want to write. It's because I haven't anybody else to write to and I'd like to write to somebody."

"I didn't know you were so crazy about writing letters."

"I just feel like it."

Eddie shrugged his shoulders. He didn't want to say that he'd probably have to bust her brother in the nose some day if she went and stirred up sleeping dogs. No use in telling her that.

Dot got out her stationery. It was pink stationery, and so far only two envelopes had been used and none of the sheets. The envelopes had gone with money orders to the gas and electric companies. The ink was in the kitchen cupboard. There was a little difficulty in connecting with a pen, but finally Dot sat down to write.

Eddie found a man who was singing the much-derided, much-sung "Yes, We Have No Bananas."

"Crazy thing," he muttered.

"What?" asked Dot.

"That song. Say, haven't you started to write yet?"

"No."

"How come?"

"Well, I decided not to write to my father. I'm trying to think of somebody to write to."

"Must you write?"

"I feel like it."

"What have you got to say?"

Dot looked at Eddie uncertainly. What had she to say? Was he kidding? There was no confirmation of her suspicion on his face. He meant it.

"Well, I just thought I'd try to think up some girl I used to know and tell her I was married and about my apartment and all."

"Oh," said Eddie, "I see. You feel like smearing a little bunk about the gorgeous home you got."

Dot didn't think of any one who might be glad to hear from her. After an hour of deep thought, she replaced the pen and ink and slid her stationery back in its hallowed place between her lavender combination and her pink one. She returned to the living-room to listen to Don Roberts singing "Marcheta" for the four-thousandth time from Station WHN.

"I gotta get my hair cut," she remarked, "as soon as I think I can sit long enough in a barber's chair without getting sick."

"Why don't you wait till the day before Christmas Eve?" said Eddie. "Then you'll look good for Sue's party."

"I don't think I can go to Sue's party," said Dot. "Suppose I got sick?"

"Well, suppose you did?" asked Eddie. "I'd take you home. Say, you can't close yourself up in the house for nine months."

"Listen, Eddie, you go. I'll be all right here with a movie magazine —"

"Trying to make me out selfish, ain't you? I said that *you* couldn't close yourself up. You're always misunderstanding things."

"Well, it's no wonder—"

"You said it. No wonder you don't understand when you don't try to. I meant you ought to go for the kick you'd get out of it. I don't give a damn for Sue or for her party."

"Don't go then."

"I'll be damned if I will."

"All right. We'll both stay home unless you have some other place in mind you'd like to go."

"Yes, I'll go to the Ritz-Carlton for the evening."

"Well, don't be nasty."

"Who the hell is nasty?"

"You are."

"*I* am! I haven't said a word."

"Oh, no. You never say anything."

"I'll be afraid to hereafter. One word and you're down my throat."

"Oh, Eddie, don't let's fight."

"Who's fighting? I only said—"

"Let's drop it."

Eddie walked into the bedroom without answering her. Dot turned off the radio set and the light and followed him. They undressed in silence. Eddie's trousers were laid with no especial care on the smirking yellow chair. His shirt was carefully hung over the back of it. His underclothes were thrown from across the room, and he painstakingly avoided the sight of them missing their mark, which had been a somewhat difficult one; namely, the knob of the closet door. His shoes and socks were placed beneath the bed so they would be handy in the morning. He reached down and picked up his tie, which had been neglected in the excitement of placing the shirt correctly. He tossed it in the general direction of the chiffonier. Then Eddie was ready for bed. One wonders who buys the pajamas that are sold uptown.

Dot's disrobing was done in a more leisurely fashion, and it bore a slight tint of elegance. She cold-creamed her face before retiring. She wore a nightgown. There were bedroom slippers at her side of the bed. She turned out the light and climbed in beside him.

He moved close to her and put his arm around her. She kissed him.

They both knew that this in no way meant that hostilities had ceased, nor did it signify that they would be on speaking terms in the morning.

PART TWO
CHAPTER XIII

By the twentieth of December, Dot's perfidious stomach had settled down to a condition resembling normal. If she took no more than chicken broth, crackers, an occasional poached egg, gelatine, and food of that type, she had no difficulty at all. This new-found ability to eat though pregnant drove all interest in the approaching Yuletide right out of Dot's mind. She bought two pairs of black silk stockings for Edna. A tie with collegiate stripes of red and blue seemed just the thing for Eddie, and it was only a dollar. She worried for a whole day about Maude and Sue. Money was not too plentiful, what with the approaching confinement; besides, she didn't feel like shopping; but suppose they gave her something. Wouldn't that be terrible, if they gave her a present and she didn't have one to give them? She grew quite alarmed over the situation. A girl like Maude you'd have to give something kind of expensive to, and money had to be watched closely. Still, how would Dot feel if Maude gave her something? At length she decided that Maude and Sue would have no Christmas so far as she was concerned. If either of them gave her anything she would frankly tell them that they had to excuse her as she was saving money for her baby.

The stockings and the tie had been bought in the little department store whence Dot's pink curtains had come. She wouldn't have faced the downtown crowds this year for anything in the world. On a sudden impulse she added a carton of cigarettes to Eddie's tie. It was their first Christmas together. Too bad it couldn't have been more festive.

It would be the first year that Dot had ever passed without a Christmas tree. Well, they'd have one next year, and then there'd be somebody to enjoy it. Let's see, the baby would be five months old next Christmas. Sure, plenty old enough to enjoy a tree. He'd probably be able to eat one of those candy canes, too, but she

wouldn't give it to him without asking Dr. Stewart. She made up her mind that she'd never give the baby anything without asking Dr. Stewart if he could have it.

The return of her stomach's self-possession led Dot and Eddie to accept the invitation to Sue's party. Neither of them remembered that an agreement had been reached by which Sue was to lose the Collinses as guests. In talking it over, Dot had reminded Eddie that Pat and Sue were to be married on the twenty-seventh of December. This was really Sue's last good party. Yes, Dot must make an effort to be present. So they went.

Sue lived on the top floor of a five-flight walk-up. The house was on Brook Avenue. The Cudahys had six rooms. It was very nice to give a party there, because the hall was very long and the kitchen was almost a block's walk from the parlor. This permitted Sue's mother to damn all the trouble to which the guests were putting her without the possibility of the guests hearing her. Also, there was a sort of alcove which opened out from the parlor. When renting the apartment, the agent had called it a music room, but he knew and the prospective tenant knew that it would be used for a bedroom. Tonight the bed in the so-called music room was used for wraps, and the first to arrive would perforce be the last to depart.

Off the hall were two other bedrooms and the bath. Mrs. Cudahy was all for putting lights in the bedrooms. She was a broad-minded woman, and she knew there was no harm in these petting parties, but she was also a methodical woman. Everything in its place was her motto. A bedroom was no place for a petting party, and she darkly suspected that there were couples in there. With the couples who were leaning against the walls in the hall she had no argument. But it wasn't nice to go hide where nobody could see you at your deviltry. She took the matter up with Sue. Nothing came of it, however, except another quite unexpected marriage on the same day as Sue's.

There had been no attempt made to decorate the parlor. A piano and a framed photograph of Bill Cudahy, who was a traffic cop, was enough decoration for any room in the world, at least in Bill Cudahy's estimation. But the dining-room had been decorated. There was a huge red-and-green bell dangling from the chandelier.

It was one of those bells that are only a flat half bell at the time of purchase but can be opened with a quick, deft gesture and transformed into a thing of beauty and frequently a joy forever to its owners. It is a splendid buy. There is no holiday for which a bell doesn't make a nice decoration.

Holly was scattered promiscuously about the room. Each picture had a clump of holly peeping out from behind it. There was mistletoe over the doorway. Mrs. Cudahy had misjudged her guests.

The table was resplendent with a paper table cover. Mrs. Cudahy had only at the last minute decided to be high-toned. By that time the stationery man had been out of covers bearing Santa Claus and his reindeers. There hadn't been anything appropriate for a wedding either. So Mrs. Cudahy took what he had. It was a crinkly white cover with the Father of his Country done in gold and white on two corners and red, white, and blue rosettes on the others.

In the center of the table was a large cake with oceans of glossy white frosting. At an earlier hour there had been some writing on it in raised frosted letters, but Sue had a small brother. Mrs. Cudahy hadn't wanted the nuisance of serving a lot of people; so she arranged for them to help themselves when prompted by their own desires. There was a ham on the table with a sharp knife beside it. One supposed that she had no aversion to one's using the same knife on the boiled tongue. There were crackers, bread, pickles, and a bowl of innocuous punch that was made from adding water to fruit juices which were already half water. Some bananas and apples lay unconcernedly in a glass bowl on the sewing-machine. They were no part of the party. They had arrived long before the party and expected to witness Sue's wedding. Dot knew they were no part of the party because there was no lace doily under their bowl.

The noise in the parlor was something terrible. A great many girls have sharp voices. The trip down the hall blunted them somewhat; so Pat Macy stood in the dining-room eating a great many crackers. Mrs. Cudahy thought him a hog and said as much. Pat merely said, "All right, pardon me," and returned to the parlor. No hard feeling between him and Mrs. Cudahy.

In the parlor the party was in hysterics at the antics of the party clown. He was giving his own impression of a husky-voiced fellow trying to sell cough drops. He was awfully funny. And so willing. He recited ever and ever so many comic poems and sang a song. The song proved a foolish move on his part, for it reminded six or seven other guests of their own accomplishments. One, a chap named Bernstein, with a remarkable Jewish accent, thought of his customary contribution to things of this sort before anybody else did.

"Say, Brownie," he shouted across the room, "reminds you of my 'Fireman' song, don't it?"

The room promptly seethed with requests for Mr. Bernstein to sing his "Fireman" song. It seemed that Mr. Bernstein didn't want to. It seemed that he couldn't be coaxed or bribed to sing his "Fireman" song. It seemed that after all he would sing it.

Mr. Bernstein sang his "Fireman" song. Miss Eiden sang "The Sunshine of Your Smile." Mr. McDonald recited an Edgar Guest poem. Mr. Mont played Rachmaninoff's Prelude in G Minor.

Mr. Collins and Mr. Macy went up on the roof and talked about the coming baseball season as compared to the last.

The little variety program had not been completed when Maude McLaughlin dropped in for a minute or two. Ted was at her side and he caused a sensation with his tuxedo, derby and white scarf which showed just the correct amount of itself above the collar of his black overcoat. Maude was far less smart-looking than her escort. The gold net dress under her velvet wrap would have been several stains better for a cleaning, but this fact didn't make the girls in their plain, informal frocks feel any better.

She was quite cordial, however, despite her dressy clothes. She had a smile for everybody to whom Sue introduced her, and to some she even said a few words. Sue sent her most dependable messenger to the kitchen with an order for drinks.

"Maude McLaughlin just came in with her fellow," the messenger panted to Mrs. Cudahy. "Sue wants drinks right away."

"To hell with Maude McLaughlin and her fellow," said Mrs. Cudahy.

But the drinks arrived. Maude drank hers with a slow, unenthusiastic air. It seemed that she and Ted couldn't stay a minute. They were going on somewhere else. They just wanted to wish Sue a Merry Christmas and congratulate Pat on the approaching wedding.

After five minutes of staring at Maude, Sue's guests picked up the party again and continued it. Under cover of the noise and crowd, Maude sought out Dot, whom she found on a camp stool close to the piano.

"Hello, Kid," she whispered. "How are you?"

Dot's eyes had seen the ham with its fat and sugary coat and had telegraphed a vivid description of it to Dot's stomach. Dot was miserably undecided about the matter. One ought to go home if one was going to be ill, but it was a terribly long ride, and subways and street cars are awful places to be ill in. Still, a party is no place for such things.

She looked up at Maude—Maude with her air of being superior to her surroundings, Maude who wore gold net and asked after a person's health. As though she really cared.

"I'm fine," she said and smiled whitely.

Maude leaned over her. "Did you see Griegman?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"Would he do it for you?"

"He'd do it for anybody, wouldn't he?" Dot asked. "I wouldn't let him, though. I've knocked all that craziness out of my head. I'm going to have my baby."

"Somebody told you about a woman's true mark of distinction and forgot to mention the pain." Maude was smiling humoringly down at Dot.

Dot looked across the room. It was hard for her to meet a person's gaze when she was going to say something nasty, and Dot had made up her mind to be nasty.

"Some women aren't yellow, Maude," she said.

"They're all brave six months before it starts to hurt," remarked Maude.

"And some are brave straight through. Take that soap box of yours somewhere else, Maude." Dot's young shoulders squared themselves under her pink silk scarf. "I'm not afraid of any pain that millions of other women have stood."

"I'll see you in the hospital," said Maude and walked away. She was vexed with Dot Collins. If Dot had behaved herself and let Maude tell her what to do, Maude might even have given her that red dress that Ted hated so. But there wasn't any sense in doing things for people whose lives you couldn't run. And Dot would be in a fine fix with a baby. Fancy not being able to afford a fur coat and being sap enough to have a kid.

She went over and spoke to Ted. They said good-by to Sue and scattered a smile around the room. Yes, it was too bad that Sue hadn't been able to find Pat, but she could give him their message. Sue took them to the door.

"I hear that Dot is going to have a baby," said Maude.

"Yes," said Sue.

"Isn't she a fool?" Maude demanded of Sue.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Sue said. "People know their own business best."

Sue had already received a wedding present from Maude.

"Well," said Maude, "good-by."

Sue walked back to the noisy room and looked for Dot. But the camp stool was empty. Dot's moment of indecision was over. She was standing in the Cudahy's bathroom thanking God that nobody had noticed her sudden departure.

The door opened. There isn't a bathroom in the Bronx with a lock that really works. Mrs. Cudahy stood there looking at Dot wonderingly.

"Did you drink too much?"

Dot shook her head. "I haven't had anything," she gasped.

Mrs. Cudahy's mouth expressed her suspicions. Her eyes traveled over Dot's figure.

"You're the married one, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm going to have a baby."

"Poor child."

Dot's eyes, momentarily red and watery, turned on her. "Why 'poor child'?" she asked.

"Oh, you're so young and tiny. Come, lie down for a while."

Dot permitted herself to be led into one of the bedrooms. Mrs. Cudahy put a cover over her and sat down beside her.

"When's the baby coming?"

"Not till July."

"Oh, well, don't mind being sick. It'll be over soon, and then you'll be fine. You'll eat like an ox and get to be a big strapping girl."

"My doctor is going to put me on a diet."

It was too dark to see Mrs. Cudahy's expression when she said: "That's a lot of tomfoolery. I ate everything I wanted and had a regular baby to show for it. Sue weighed twelve pounds and was the envy of every woman on the street."

Dot shuddered. "Didn't it hurt terribly to have a baby that big?"

Mrs. Cudahy appeared to be thinking it over. "Well," she said after a time, "did you ever have a bad cramp?"

"Yes."

"It's like that."

"Sounds easy," said Dot.

"Well, it ain't like having your nails manicured, but I hope Sue will have one; so you see it can't be so bad, or I wouldn't be wishing it on her."

"Some women who have had babies," said Dot, "tell their friends not to have them."

"Sure," said Mrs. Cudahy. "My own sister didn't want me to have Sue, but I went ahead and had her, and I got to go get her friends a drink now. You stay here."

Mrs. Cudahy disappeared in the darkness of the hall. There was a faint light in the room which came from the bedroom of the neighbor across the court. Dot could make out the bulk of a bureau and the back of a chair. She lay there thinking. Maude and Mrs. Cudahy and Edna and herself. What advice would she have to pass on to other women? Would she be able to tell some one she liked

that having a baby wasn't so bad? Why did Maude make it hard to remember that one night of pain was after all only one night? Of course some women were in pain much longer, but that wasn't frequent. Mrs. Cudahy seemed to think that a big baby was an accomplishment. Dot smiled. Dr. Stewart and she could have a beautiful argument. Mrs. Cudahy probably thought it was silly to bother a lot about doctors. Dot couldn't see where it was silly. If anything went wrong you didn't have to reproach yourself for stinting on expenses. No, she was right, right in having her baby and right in having engaged Dr. Stewart.

The noise in the other room had quieted down some. Mr. McDonald was reciting again. Something about bells this time. Lots of bells. Edgar Allan Poe had written it, Dot heard Mr. McDonald announce. Dot knew about Edgar Allan Poe. He had lived in a little white house in Fordham with a black bird painted on the door. Dot had often wondered if his wife had had many children. If so, the park around the house must have certainly been a convenience to her.

Hm. Nice and quiet now. Wonder where Eddie is? Presently Dot fell asleep. When she awakened, Mr. McDonald and his unusual talent had departed. The house was very still. She jumped up, cold with a sudden unreasoning terror. What had happened? She staggered, stupid with sleep, down the hall to the front room. Every one had gone home save Eddie and Pat Macy. Mr. Cudahy was there now, huge and pleasant-faced, with a wallet full of Christmas greetings from his pet motorists. Mrs. Cudahy was telling about the house they use to live in, and Sue in a low voice was trying to wheedle a ten-dollar bill out of her father.

They all looked up as Dot appeared in the doorway.

"There she is," cried Mrs. Cudahy. "I wouldn't let Eddie wake you up, dear."

Dot smiled with sleepy embarrassment. Funny how people treat you after you've been asleep for a while. A sort of combination of indulgence and harmless contempt.

"It's after two o'clock," said Eddie.

"It's Christmas," said Pat.

Then everybody said Merry Christmas to everybody else, and Sue kissed everybody but Eddie.

"I've been trying to convince your husband that you ought to stay all night," said Mr. Cudahy. "We have an extra bed, and a pair of my pajamas would fit the pair of you."

"No," said Eddie. "We can't stay. Thanks."

He got up and walked over to Dot. "Get your things, Kid, we have to go."

"You're very foolish," said Mrs. Cudahy. "We have that bed—"

Dot walked to the window. It didn't look at all like the Christmas of holiday cards. There was no fleecy white snow sparkling like blue-white diamonds. There was no jolly silver moon beaming on the world. The windows of the surrounding houses were dark, hollow squares. No golden shafts of light came from them, warming the cheerless morning. The streets were deserted. A cold wind came singing a harsh song from around the corner.

This was Brook Avenue. She and Eddie would have to walk one block to Willis Avenue and then wait for a car. They ran irregularly at best, and this was two o'clock in the morning. When one came, they'd ride to the subway entrance at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and Broadway. It was elevated there. They would wait again for a train which would take them to Dyckman Street. All this time Dot would be sleepy and very cold. Her coat had a fur collar, of course, but it was really a thin coat.

Mr. Cudahy had begun to unlace his shoes. "You ought to stay," he said.

"It's a shame to drag her out tonight," said Mrs. Cudahy.

"Gee, nobody cares about poor me," said Pat.

Mrs. Cudahy laughed. "Are you going to have a baby?" she asked.

Mr. Cudahy jumped from his chair and looked at Dot. "What!" he cried. "Have you been holding such news back from me? Never will you two kids get out of this house now. What! On Christmas morning I shouldn't have a bed for you, and you should go out in the cold with your poor little body uncomfortable and all? On Christmas morning of all times. By God, Mother, give them my bed."

His explosion, half mockery, half something else, brought a sudden silly moisture to Dot's eyes. There were people who respected the rights of the little fellow yet to be.

She looked at Eddie. He was smiling at Mr. Cudahy, but his smile was that of one who still must refuse to accept a favor.

"Oh, Eddie, please let's stay," Dot cried. "I don't know whether Mr. Cudahy's joking or not, and I don't care, but I'm terribly uncomfortable."

"Up to you," said Eddie.

"What about me?" asked Pat. "I'm damned if I'll brave the cold. Put me out, and I won't let Sue come in my house."

Mrs. Cudahy's brow registered deep thought. "Papa and I will sleep in the music room," she said, "and Dot and Sue can sleep in the big bedroom, and Eddie and Pat can have the small one, and I'll get Jimmie up, and he can sleep on the cot in the music room with us."

Everybody seemed satisfied except Eddie. He looked very much disturbed. Mrs. Cudahy suggested coffee for all before retiring, and as they moved toward the kitchen, Eddie got close to Dot and whispered, "I have something to tell you."

After Dot had nibbled a Uneeda biscuit and gone to bed and while Sue was saying good night to Pat in the dining-room, Eddie came in to see Dot.

"Listen," he said, "I was talking to Pat. He knows a fellow in the furniture business, and he can get a crib wholesale. As long as we're going to have this kid, it's gotta have a place to sleep, don't it? Good night."

He kissed her and sped down the hall to the other room. Dot cuddled further into Sue's nightgown and sighed contentedly.

"Oh, yes, and Merry Christmas," she called in answer to Mr. Cudahy's good night.

Maude McLaughlin seemed an awful damn fool.

CHAPTER XIV

Round steak	.40
Wet wash	1.25
Soap	.08
Daily News	.02
Tomatoes	.14
	——
	$1.89

Well, that wasn't bad for a day's expenses. Dot added the little column of figures again to make sure it wasn't a dollar ninety. Every penny counted now. Two hundred dollars for Dr. Stewart had seemed an Herculean undertaking, but now upon that task hardly well begun had fallen another.

Dot had pictured herself lying pale but happy on the bird's-eye maple bed with her baby joyously partaking of his first breakfast.

Dr. Stewart had looked doubtful when she had revealed this vision. "You see, Mrs. Collins," he said, "practically everybody goes to a sanitarium nowadays. Women have learned that it's best that way. You'd have to have a nurse, and while an ordinary maternity nurse is sufficient for your purpose, that would be fifty dollars for the two weeks you need her. You'd have to have a laundress in, and there's a great deal of drugs and sick-room things you'd need, and that would run into money. You're foolish not to go to a sanitarium."

Dot had thought of Edna dropping in to fix broth, of Eddie giving her a sponge bath. Nurses, laundresses, drugs! The bottom dropped out of her simple calculations.

"But where could I go? Wouldn't it cost a lot?"

Dr. Stewart shook his head. "Lots of places do charge a lot," he said. "But there's one place on One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street that's reasonable. The food is good, and the care is all that you need. You can get a small room there for a hundred and twenty-five dollars."

"For how long?"

"Two weeks. We'll get you home after that."

Dot's face betrayed her dismay. A hundred and twenty-five dollars for the sanitarium and two hundred for the doctor. Could they manage? She and Eddie with their food and gas and electricity and rent, and clothes for the baby.

"It's very nice," said Dr. Stewart. "A lot of my patients have been there. I'll have them send you some pamphlets if you like, and you can go down and take a look at the place."

Dot told Eddie when he came home that night. He took the news coolly.

"Well," he said, "I hope that you didn't think that you could lie in bed here all day with a new baby and nobody to do anything for either of you."

"No. I thought that Edna could help."

"Gee, you're a dumb-bell," said Eddie. "Honest to God, I wonder why they don't lock you up."

"I don't see how we can manage, Eddie."

"Well, I didn't see how we were going to pull two hundred fish out for Doc. If you can do that you're smart enough to manage the rest."

"But, Eddie, three hundred and twenty-five dollars! Almost enough to buy a Ford car."

"Sooner have the Ford, heh?"

"No, I didn't mean that exactly, but it's so much money. Golly!"

They hadn't talked about the money since but Dot was keeping a budget, walking to Two Hundred and Seventh Street to get things cheaper, reading newspapers instead of magazines, and trying to cut her own hair.

It was February now. The days of sleet and cold, icy winds were separated by vagrant, sweet-smelling hours that came mysteriously and fled back to Never-Never Land. When they were gone you didn't believe that they had happened, but then again there was the strange breath of dewy violets and woodlands, and you felt somehow happier even if you had been fooled.

Dot was doing a lot of sewing. She had heard somewhere that it was bad luck to prepare very lavishly for a baby. She worried a little but could not resist the temptation of buying unbelievably narrow lace and phantom-fragile muslin despite the extravagance.

Eddie watched her sew. What was she doing that for? She didn't want the kid. He was curious. "What are you doing that for?" he asked.

She looked up at him in amazement. "What am I doing it for? The kid can't go naked, can he? You can't bring him home from the hospital naked. And so long as he's got to have clothes, this is the cheapest way to do it. It don't cost me over a dollar apiece to make the dresses myself."

The next time he had a few minutes to himself, Eddie looked in an infants' furnishing store. He saw dresses for forty-nine cents which certainly must be good enough for some people's babies or they wouldn't be selling them. Guess Dot didn't know that kid's dresses could be bought so cheap. Eddie chuckled. He wouldn't tell her. Why the devil shouldn't Dot make his clothes? Wasn't he, Eddie, going to make the kid a high chair all by hand? A good joke on Dot, that. He wouldn't tell her.

Funny how many things he was keeping to himself. He couldn't tell her this and he couldn't tell her that, because she didn't want the poor kid, and it seemed heartless of him to be happy over it. Sometimes he would get an idea that she was warming up to the little fellow, but then she'd say something and he'd know she didn't want it.

The vision of Dot dying to give life to the baby had receded to the back of Eddie's mind. He never thought of it any more. He was thinking now how hard he would try to make her love the baby once it was here. But probably that wouldn't be much of a job. Kids are so damn cute. Only it would tie them down. Dot liked to dance and go to parties. Maybe she'd want to leave the kid alone and go running around with Sue and Pat. Then maybe, if he ever caught her doing it, he'd have to wallop her. You can't leave kids alone. They pull the blankets up over their faces sometimes and smother.

Eddie looked in the window of the infants' furnishing shop a little while longer. Then he went in. When he came out again he had a bundle.

Well, a fellow couldn't act excited over a kid's arriving when his wife was pulling a long face over the idea. Besides, what kind of crazy thoughts were these? When the hell was he the kind of fellow to ever get excited over anything?

His dinner was on the table when he reached home. Dot was flushed and tired. The wet wash had come that day, and she had been ironing. She always ironed sheets, though Edna told her that she was crazy. You ought to just see that they're well dried, fold them up nice, and put them away. When you take 'em out they look ironed. The same with the towels and pillow cases. Tablecloths you had to iron. Dot ironed everything. If she hadn't, she would have felt that she was being unfaithful to the little apartment.

Dot kissed him when he came in. He handed her the bundle.

"What's this?" she asked.

"I don't know what you call it," he said carelessly.

She opened it. A tiny crocheted sacque lay within carefully wrapped in tissue paper. A large blue bow of very stiff, aggressive ribbon was at the neck of it. Dot smiled. The ribbon was so ridiculous. The sacque was so pleadingly tiny.

"Did you buy this?" she asked.

"Me? Can you picture me buying stuff like that?"

"No," said Dot, honestly. "But where—"

"Mrs. Williams sent it."

"Mrs. Williams! Did you tell them I'm going to have a baby?"

Eddie sat down at the table and reached for a piece of bread. "No, I didn't," he said. "I go down there to fix radio sets every day, not to gab. Besides, I'm not any more excited about this whole business than you are. I don't run up to people in the street and tell them about it. Mrs. Williams looked you over that day last week, and she hasn't got bad eyes."

Dot walked to the mirror in the bedroom. She stood before it for almost five minutes examining the proportions of her figure from every angle. She was convinced that Eddie was lying.

"I don't show," she said to him as she pulled out her chair and sat down.

"I'll bet every woman thinks that," said Eddie.

Her convictions melted away. Perhaps he was right. Maybe this was one of those things that other people knew and you didn't. The thought depressed her. She had so wanted to watch her body changing gradually to accommodate its little occupant.

"Do I look bad, Eddie?" she asked.

"No, you look great."

"I mean my figure."

"No, that's all right, only it shows that you're going to have a baby."

"Well, I guess I'd better stop going to dance halls and places then. People are probably making fun of me."

Eddie hadn't bargained for this. He swallowed a very hot piece of potato hastily.

"Don't be crazy," he said. "You're all right. I guess Mrs. Williams has been watching for it, and that's why she saw it. If a person didn't know—"

But Dot didn't answer. She was thinking of something else now. Something that she'd have to ask Dr. Stewart about. She'd been dancing quite a lot. So far there had been no sign of life in her baby. Were the two facts connected? Icy fingers of terror clutched at her heart. Why hadn't she told the doctor sooner about the many excursions to the Poppyland Dance Hall? Had she thought to put something over on him? Funny how all of a sudden a fear can come at you out of the darkness and shake you till you're cold and limp. She hadn't thought of it before, and now she was panicky and ill with the awfulness of it.

Darkness came over the room. The arc light in the street streamed wanly through the window. Voices of neighbors calling to each other. A baby crying. Somebody's dishes being hastily despatched with many protesting rattles and clinks. In the purple-gray twilight

the little sacque with its absurd blue bow was a narrow white streak, a shooting star. Was anybody ever going to have that silly little bow under his chin? In that minute, Dot knew that she couldn't bear it if her baby ... if anything went wrong.

Eddie got up and lit the light. He looked at her carelessly. She was crying, but he preferred to say nothing about it. She cried a lot recently. It was because she didn't like what was going to happen, he thought. Yeh, it was best not to notice her. Maybe he'd get mad sometime and tell her what he thought of her for not wanting a kid. But he knew that he couldn't. After all, it was her pain. No wonder she cried and didn't want the baby.

Dot looked up at him as he carried the butter to the ice box. Suppose she had danced her baby to death. Could she ever forgive Eddie for not taking the news as hard as she would? He wouldn't mind. He'd be able to say that everything happens for the best.

She dried her eyes and rushed to help clear the table.

"Sit down," he said.

"No, I'll help."

"Go on. Sit down."

She went and sat down. He was good to her. He loved her. If only he would love the baby. Oh, well, a person can't have everything, and maybe after it was here and he saw it, he would get to care about it. She wondered if he knew that there'd be no more dancing and parties then. Better not tell him for a while.

Dr. Stewart came two days later. His coat was not yet off when Dot asked her question timidly, quaveringly. "I have danced an awful lot recently. Do you think that it will hurt—hurt the baby? I haven't felt any life yet."

He looked at her seriously. He was one to laugh only at what he knew a patient knew in her heart to be foolish. When she had a deadly fear, he read it in her eyes, in her voice, and he respected her fear.

"I don't think so," he replied. "We'll have a look. Just what do you call an awful lot of dancing?"

The sheet was produced, the examination made.

"You're quite all right," he said. "But I wouldn't overdo anything if I were you. On the whole I think a daily walk would be much better exercise than dancing. And don't hang curtains. I've found a lot of women who hang curtains at the wrong time."

"But you think it's all right?"

"Yes, I should say so. You'll feel life soon now, I think."

"How soon?"

Dr. Stewart smiled. "Couldn't say exactly, but don't be surprised if your baby gives you a kick all of a sudden."

Dot looked rapt and ecstatic. Fancy her baby giving her a kick!

"Dancing in poorly-aired, crowded rooms isn't going to do you any real harm for another few weeks," he went on, "but it won't help any. Get your walk, and you'll feel much better."

It was that very night that Sue and Pat dropped in. Sue and Pat were now known as the Macys. They had been living with Sue's mother since the marriage but were busily searching for an apartment that would meet their needs. Nobody was quite certain what their needs were, but Dot suspected that it was an apartment close enough to Sue's maiden home for the Macys to eat there.

There was quite a smug, satisfied air about Sue lately. You felt that she would never again make jokes about women being unfaithful to their husbands. Marriage was something very sacred now. One felt that she would, without a moment's hesitation, cast the first stone. Dot wasn't quite certain that she liked her any more.

Sue wore a large straw hat with a rhinestone dagger stuck through it with careless grace. Her coat had a huge imitation fur collar. The coat fitted closely at the waist and flared generously at the bottom. There was more fur at the bottom and fur at the cuffs. Her slippers were black satin with large, bright tin buckles. The stockings above were very sheer. Dot fancied that she might photograph very well in her finery but when seen right smack up close in the hard, white light of a seventy-five-watt bulb—well, after all, the fur was imitation, the buckles were tin, and the stockings weren't four-dollar sheer, they were seventy-nine-cent sheer.

Pat was quiet and unobtrusive. There was about him, since his marriage, the air of a menial who has delivered an important message and is undecided whether or not to wait.

He engaged Eddie in conversation. He wanted to buy a radio set for his father-in-law. What would Eddie advise?

Dot took Sue's things, and they sat down together on the sofa.

"We were looking around this section for an apartment," Sue said. "We didn't see anything we liked, though. I got hungry and we stopped in at that what-do-you-call-it place where they roast chickens."

Sue settled the folds of her champagne-colored dress importantly. Dot had seen that dress on Maude and had heard what Maude had said about passing it on. Silly, the way Sue was trying to show off the embroidery on it. Dot felt a little sorry for her.

"You didn't like any of the apartments around here?"

"No, we'll be having a lot of parties most likely, and the rooms are so small."

"This is quite a big room," said Dot.

"Well, you two don't have much company," said Sue.

Dot thought this was a bit pointed. "I'm pregnant," she said, "and I wouldn't have a party now for Gloria Swanson. It's too much trouble."

"You're quite right," said Sue. "That one I gave Christmas Eve was certainly a bother, and you have no idea what it cost."

Dot had a fairly good idea what it had cost. Christmas morning Mrs. Cudahy had told Eddie how the liquor which had been consumed had been given to Mr. Cudahy bottle by bottle from people who had expected tickets and hadn't got them.

Funny the way a girl will put on airs after her marriage, particularly if she has been the pursuer and has finally felled her prey.

Both conversations perished. Eddie had told Pat all that the layman could understand about neutrodynes. Dot was sulking quietly at Sue's attitude.

Presently Sue said: “It’s about as lively as a funeral here. What’s the matter with you two?”

“Nothing,” said Dot.

“What do you say we all go to Poppyland?” Sue jumped to her feet and looked at Eddie.

“No,” said Dot.

Eddie was ready to follow her lead, but her emphatic refusal stirred his curiosity. “Why not?” he asked.

Dot hadn’t considered that there would be questions. “Oh,” she said, “I don’t know.”

“Come on.” Sue was now impatient of delay.

“What’s the matter, Kid?” Eddie’s conscience was troubling him. He felt that he knew what had caused her refusal. Had he dished the poor kid out of her fun?

“I don’t want to go, Eddie. If you want to go, go ahead. Sue will dance with you.”

“Is it because I said that the other night about how you look?”

Dot might have consoled him, but Sue spoke before she had the chance. “Oh, come on, Dot. Nobody would know you were pregnant. You look fine. Come on.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake, let me alone, the two of you,” cried Dot. “I’m pregnant, and I’m nervous, and I’m cranky, and it costs money to dance, and I’m saving for my baby, and shut up!”

“Well,” said Sue, sweetly, “don’t you mind, honey, this is Pat’s treat. It won’t cost you a nickel. Come on.”

Dot got quickly from her chair and ran to the bedroom. She carried with her the memory of the expression on Pat Macy’s face. He had been looking at Sue, and there had been embarrassment and shock in his gaze. She threw herself on the bed and cried. Nobody cared about her baby. Eddie had wanted to go. Had she told him that it was bad for the baby, he would probably still have wanted to go. Nobody cared. It don’t pay to go against what your husband wants. He didn’t want the baby.

Dot cried until she heard the door close behind Sue and Pat. Then she dried her eyes and returned to the living-room. Eddie had turned on the radio set.

"Gee, you were nasty to them," he said.

"I don't care. She makes me sick."

"Well," said Eddie, "I don't care either. Only soon you won't have any friends."

"I'll have my baby," said Dot.

Eddie turned abruptly from the radio set. "Will he take the place of your friends and the Poppyland?" he asked.

Hm, here he was worrying about the damn old dance hall. No use fighting with him. Give him the answer he wants, and have peace in the family.

"I only meant," she replied, "that he'll sop up so darn much of my time that I won't have many nights for people anyhow."

"Oh," said Eddie.

Nothing more was said about the Macys, nor of the time when Dot would be held captive in the little three-room home. The days passed uneventfully. Dot sewed—dresses, diapers, petticoats, bellybands. Eddie worked. The weeks slipped by.

One day she went down to see the sanitarium of which the doctor had spoken. She took twenty-five dollars with her for a deposit. Dr. Stewart had told her that this was the correct mode of procedure.

It was April now, and to Dot's young, slim figure there had come a change, a sudden impressive maturity, a simple, sweet promise that soon she too would be ready to give. A tree in blossom. A bush in bloom.

She wore a cape drawn tightly about her. If there's a fur collar lying around, all one has to do is get two yards of material and sew it at the neck, line it with some bright shade of silk, put the fur collar on, and there's a cape.

The sanitarium was on One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street, as Dr. Stewart had said. It was in a row of brick houses. Two of them had been used in the creating of the sanitarium. Ivy covered the

front of the house, and a nurse in stiff white linen sat on the stoop, anxiously assuring herself that it was spring.

Behind, in front, and to one side was New York's Congo. The rows of houses with their signs "For Colored Tenants" drew Dot's attention. She was pregnant. She was going to buy a bed upon which she might lie for the duration of her pain.

"Gee," thought Dot. "Niggers. But I guess you don't care who your neighbors are once the pain starts."

Inside the sanitarium it was hard to remember the ivy which climbed so green and inviting outside. There was a strong odor of ether and disinfectant. Dot felt small and frightened, defenseless. But what could she do? She had to have a place to have her baby. She felt that she would die with her pain in the strange, unfriendly, chemical atmosphere.

The nurse who had sat so idly on the stoop became a brisk, swift-footed messenger. In the time that it took Dot to be waved into a small, rather dingy office and to find a chair, the nurse had summoned the proprietor.

He was not a doctor. He was merely a man who for some strange unknown reason had decided on a sanitarium for his career. Had he not decided on a sanitarium, he might have been a bond salesman or a confidence man. He was over six feet tall and of great bulk. He had a red, jolly face and a quick, convincing smile. He put Dot at her ease. He wore his personality as a woman wears an orchid. He told amusing stories of women who had been his guests. He made Dot feel that of course her confinement would be a bit more important than any he had ever housed before. She had an idea that he would be running in and out of her room to admire her baby, to raise her spirits, to ask if there were anything else he might do. He stated his prices in a careless, offhand manner, as though if she didn't have the money it wouldn't make a particle of difference.

Dot liked him at once. She felt now that she had a friend in the place, some one who'd sort of look after her. Of course, she couldn't possibly know that never again after receiving her receipt for twenty-five dollars (balance to be paid upon admission of patient) would she see the jolly, big-brotherly sanitarium barker.

A nurse showed her over the place. It was an old house. There was no elevator. Women were brought from the delivery room on stretchers by nurse-power. One flight up was the delivery room. Too bad Mrs. Collins couldn't take a look at it, but there was a patient on the table just now. Yes, they had another delivery room, but the men were cleaning it. Now here was a nice front room Mrs. Collins could have. Two hundred and twenty-five dollars. Well, it was a very large room. They had others. For instance, behind this door was a lovely, comfortable room for only a hundred and seventy-five. Unfortunately there was a patient in it at the present time, and Mrs. Collins wouldn't be able to see it. Over here was a room that got the sun all day long. Only a hundred and fifty.

"Have you got anything for a hundred and twenty-five?" asked Dot, timidly.

"Yes, we have a couple," said the nurse. "But they're very small, and you have to remember that you're going to be here in the middle of summer. For twenty-five dollars more you might as well be comfortable."

"May I see the ones that are a hundred and twenty-five?" asked Dot.

"Certainly."

They walked up another flight of steps. On the way they passed a pretty, brown-eyed nurse carrying a tray. She looked at Dot and smiled faintly. Dot smiled back at her.

"Has Mrs. King gone yet?" asked Dot's guide.

"No," said the brown-eyed nurse. "Her doctor's making her stay another day."

Dot's guide shook her head as though Mrs. King's doctor were a person of inexplicable actions.

"We can only see one of the rooms," she said. "We only have two at that price, and one of them is taken."

Dot saw the room. It was Number Nine. It was as wide as Dot's bathroom and but a trifle longer. A snow-white bed, a less snow-white bureau, and a little stiff-backed chair had been squeezed in somehow. A table stood by the bed, a small table. There was a telephone on the shelf above the bed.

"This is a hundred and twenty-five," the nurse announced in the tone of one who says: "That's what you get for being cheap."

"Oh," said Dot. "It's so tiny."

The nurse read in her voice the hopelessness of one who cannot spend another cent, and a feeling of pity prompted her to make a suggestion.

"You could go in the ward," she said, brightly.

"The ward," echoed Dot.

"Yes. Of course, it isn't the kind of ward that perhaps you're thinking of. There's only four beds in it—and it's only a hundred dollars."

As she spoke she led the way next door. A large room jumped at Dot out of the dim hallway. It was the largest room Dot had ever seen. Two beds stood at the east wall and two at the west. The southern end of the room was all windows. Air and light were here in abundance. Two of the beds were vacant at the moment. The other two held women that were nursing their infants and were not at all concerned with the sightseer. Dot realized that it was because these women had paid the sanitarium's lowest price that intrusion upon them was permissible.

A hundred dollars and the same care that you got for more money, the nurse assured her. Of course, you didn't have the privacy, but some people preferred the ward because you never got lonely. There was one other difference. The blankets in the private rooms were blue-striped and pink-striped, while the ward blankets were all gray. Dot felt that she could bear up under this.

She decided in favor of the ward. Then she was shown the nursery and the bathroom and was permitted to depart.

"We'll mail you a list of the things you'll need while you're here," promised the nurse.

Dot went home. She was not in a remarkably pleasant frame of mind, but she was pleased that she had cheated the tiny room and that she had gained twenty-five dollars by so doing. She consulted the card from her Postal Savings account which told how close she

was to her goal. She had done well. She had managed to save thirty-five dollars a month. She had a hundred and fifty now that the twenty-five had been paid to the sanitarium.

The twenty-five saved on the room was not a bit of casual luck but actually a godsend, she realized in looking over her account. For, though he had said nothing about it, Dot had observed that the suit which Eddie wore for "good" was rapidly going from bad to worse. He would probably visit her every evening at the sanitarium, and she would feel so bad for him if he didn't look as decent as the other women's husbands. Yes, he could get a suit with that twenty-five.

Dot stretched herself out on the bed. She was tired. She had walked a great deal. Her idea of reaching the sanitarium had been wrong. She had had to walk all over the City College grounds to find the place. Hills, steps. Why wasn't a city perfectly flat? Why wasn't—

Suddenly Dot sat bolt upright on the bed and her expression suggested that she was listening to something. One of her hands moved tenderly and rested on her abdomen. She closed her eyes, and two tears, hot and glistening, appeared on her lashes. Grateful tears.

The baby had moved.

CHAPTER XV

May now. May in Inwood. Trees green and laughing, shaking their branches with queer little rustling noises. Fort George Hill, Riverside Drive, the Mohawk Trail, Isham Park all green and inviting. Sometimes Dot looked up Fort George Hill, and a desire to climb would almost overpower her. Adventure seemed to lurk behind the bushes, to loll on the wild, green grass. She knew it was a delusion. On top was merely the matter-of-fact, workaday world. Washington Heights was there. There was no adventure, and besides in two months' time she would have her baby, and she couldn't climb very well. The Drive was better. She could walk along, dreaming down at the sun-speckled water. It was hot in the sunshine. She could not go without her cape, and she felt the heat so intensely this year. There were benches on the Drive. She could sit down and slip out of her cape for a few minutes. While she was sitting down it wasn't so noticeable that she was pregnant. The Mohawk Trail was hilly. She couldn't go there any more. Isham Park was pleasant and cool, but it was quite a long walk.

She liked to walk to the end of Dyckman Street. It was fun sitting on the dock, watching the ferryboats cross the river. Sometimes fish were caught, and sometimes motor launches passed with gay-looking girls in them. She was interested in gay-looking girls this year. It seemed funny that such a short time before she was one of them. Only last summer she had worried what style of bob to get, what shade of lipstick, what color sweater. She had worn flip little shoes, too, with frightfully high heels on them and perky little bows. She had had a hat that pulled down tight on her head over her eyes and nose and showed only a very red, very provocative mouth to the boys on the street corners. There were still boys on the street corners, but they didn't notice her now. They didn't dream that a few short months before they would have shouted "Hello, girlie" to her as she passed. Yes, she with her feet in flat-heeled, broad-toed shoes, her cape wrapped protectingly around the precious lump, her slow, labored walk. She didn't use any rouge now; she just powdered. Rouge was foolish under the circumstances.

But she watched the other girls. She saw them in bright spring hats and boyish suits making for the subway. She saw them hopping in and out of cars, trailing an extra wrap carelessly upon their arms. She saw them in dazzling white, strolling beside smiling men carrying tennis rackets. She had never played tennis, but she felt now that she would like to. There were other girls. Millions of girls. The girl she always saw at the movies who was so terribly pretty. The girl next door who wore tight-fitting dresses and whose figure was so delightfully slim.

She noticed everybody now. She knew that she was a mess to look at. She couldn't sew well enough to make dresses that would artfully conceal her condition. She doubted that any one could. But what difference did it make after all? She was going to have her baby, only now that the appointed time was near, she was impatient. So painfully impatient.

Edna brought Dot a letter one night. It had come to Dot in care of "Mrs. Driggs." Inside there had been another sealed envelope addressed to "Dorothy." There had been no message for Edna. The letter was in the handwriting of Jim Haley.

"Guess he wants to make up with you," Edna remarked as she handed the letter to Dot. "Perhaps somebody told him about the baby."

Eddie, sitting on the floor feeding water to his "A" batteries, grunted.

Dot opened the letter.

"Your father died this morning," she read. "I thought I ought to let you know. Don't come over as I will not let you in. Jim Haley."

"Oh, my father's dead," said Dot.

"No kidding?" said Edna.

Eddie came away from the batteries and took the letter out of Dot's limp hand. He read it slowly and let it fall back on the table. He glanced at Dot's white face.

"Dirty louse," he said. It was thoroughly understood that he was referring to Jim Haley. "Do you want to go over and take a look at your old man?"

"Jim wouldn't let me in," said Dot, dully.

"Like hell he wouldn't." Eddie reached for his coat. "You want to see your father?"

Dot smiled affectionately up at Eddie. He was ready to do battle so that she might pay her last respects to the meek old man who would never again call: "Is that you, Dottie?" She sighed regretfully. That part of her life had been finished months before. What was the use of mourning or fighting over it now?

She shook her head. "No, Eddie, honest. I don't want to go."

Once again he was being cheated out of the chance to baste Jim Haley. He looked at Dot, searching her face for a sign that she was concealing her real desire.

"He'll let you in," he assured her. "You might have two relatives to cry over by the time you get inside, but you'd see your old man. Want to go?"

"No, Eddie. It isn't worth it. The old man was all right. He couldn't have done no different than he did at the end. Jim was his bread and butter, and he didn't dare go against him. The old man was all right, but I guess I'll remember him like he was the night I got back from that ride on the *Burma*."

All this while Eddie had been holding his coat. Now he put it back on the chair reluctantly.

"Are you going, Edna?" asked Dot.

Edna smiled. "What! With that polite invitation you got? Not me. After all, you got some right there, and you wouldn't be let in, he says. Imagine me going up. I always did like the old man, though."

Once again Eddie grabbed his coat hopefully. "Let's go, Edna," he said.

"Thanks a lot, Eddie, but I don't think I will. You see, I haven't any real right there."

"You were a friend of the old man's," Eddie reminded her, as though this fact had been well known for some time.

"No, thanks, Eddie. I was kidding. I wouldn't really go. Jim and I had a difference of opinion."

Eddie shook his head at the utter vacancy of women.

Dot got up slowly and made for the bedroom. “You know, I don’t feel very good,” she said as she passed Eddie.

She lay down on the bed and pulled the blankets, that always lay in virginal, undisturbed pinkness at the foot of the bed, up over her shoulders. Eddie and Edna came in and stood near her looking sympathetic and puzzled.

“I feel as cold as ice,” said Dot. “I’ve got to work to keep my teeth from chattering.”

“Hm,” said Edna.

“Think I ought to call the doctor?” asked Eddie.

Dot shook her head. Her hair, dark and wavy, made a fascinating design on the white austerity of the pillow.

“I’ll get a hot-water bottle,” said Edna. “She’ll be all right soon. It is just the shock of that letter that upset her.”

Quite unconsciously Edna addressed Eddie. He seemed to be the one that needed reassurance.

Edna fetched the hot-water bottle, and Dot took it under the covers with her. She lay very quietly for an hour while the others sat and talked to her. Gradually the chill passed. Dot felt quite all right again. She got up and began to hem diapers. The baby moved about with swift little flail-like motions of what Dr. Stewart had assured her was his arms and legs.

Everything was all right again, but there had been a pain that had come with the chill, a strange pain that had felt to Dot as though the baby were breaking away from her. She knew now that it had probably been half imagination and half plain, ordinary cramp. It had been a terrible moment.

And now as the days passed there came talk of vacations, Eddie’s vacation that filled her with joy, and Dr. Stewart’s that filled her with horror. Eddie was to have his the last week in June and the first in July. Dr. Stewart’s happened to be at the same time, only his extended another week into July. It seemed that he hadn’t had a rest in three years and was now able to take one. He had been arranging his cases for six months in a manner that would make the trip possible. Dot wouldn’t need him before the end of July, he felt sure. He was going to Denver to see his mother. Dot mustn’t worry. She

was going to be fine. In the meanwhile, she was to go twice to see Dr. Simons, a colleague of Dr. Stewart's. Dr. Simons would examine her and telegraph to Denver in case there were unexpected developments. Dot took Dr. Simons' address and telephone number. She realized that Dr. Simons was doing a favor for her doctor and that was why she had to go to his office. Dr. Simons had to be saved the tiresome trip uptown.

Dr. Stewart would be in to see her once more before his departure. There was nothing more to do now till the actual delivery. She had been dieting for ages. She had been walking. She was in perfect condition, and it looked very much as though she were going to have an easy time. Dr. Stewart was very cheerful and congratulatory, but Dot's heart was in her boots. A new doctor at this stage of the game! He would probably have to deliver the baby, too. If her child showed signs of getting ready to arrive, Dot didn't believe that a telegram to Denver was going to persuade him to postpone activities until Dr. Stewart's return.

Thoughts of Eddie's vacation, however, made her happy. What would it be like to have him around every day? He had tried to make it later in the month, in hopes of being off while Dot was in the sanitarium, but he had been unable to arrange it that way.

Of course, there wasn't anything they could do for amusement during these precious two weeks. Money was scarce, and Dot's condition prevented excursions of even the mildest nature. There would only be the movies and the radio set. But just having him around for two blessed weeks would be enough.

A new happiness came over her. She cleaned vigorously but with caution. She wanted everything to be perfect for his vacation. She got Eddie to take the curtains down. She washed them carefully, and Eddie rehung them.

She had received from the sanitarium a list of things she would need there. She borrowed a Boston bag from Pat Macy and packed it so that it should be ready in case of a hasty journey to the sanitarium. Six nightgowns were the smallest possible number with which you could do, it seemed, and that only in the event of being able to send them home, having them laundered and returned. Well, Dot had four voile nighties and a silk one which Edna had given her

for Christmas. She could buy another voile nightie, and that would make six; only there was no one at home to launder them for her. She couldn't possibly buy enough to do her for the entire stay, and obviously they expected you to have a clean nightie at least once a day. She worried over that. What could she do? To send them to a regular laundry was impossible. They wouldn't be ready in time. Eddie would wash them, she knew, but he wouldn't be able to iron them. The other items included a kimono, bedroom slippers, brush, soap, washcloth, toothbrush, tooth paste, talcum powder, and two towels.

She decided to ask Edna's advice in the matter of the nightgowns.

"Honey," said Edna, "people don't take voile nighties to a sanitarium. Sorry to tell you so, but it's true. You'd think you was looking at Ziegfeld's chorus in bed to take a look at the things the women wear."

Dot's worry pucker appeared suddenly on her brow. It was always like this. Even at the movies, she was the worst dressed girl in the place. God, she couldn't go to bear a child without being conscious of the inferior grade of her nightgowns.

Edna saw that Dot was going to cry. She spoke rapidly, keeping an eye on the worry pucker. "You know, Dot, I was going to marry Jim. I thought about it a long time. Even a person as old and decrepit as I am loves to have nice things; so I bought a lot of underwear and things for the honeymoon that I'll never have. I have two dozen crêpe-de-Chine nighties and God knows how many chemises and step-ins and things like that. Let me give you six of the nighties, and Eddie can bring them back to me as they get soiled, and I'll do 'em up and return them to you. All right?"

"Oh, Edna, I couldn't."

But in the end Dot took five of them—not six, because of the one Edna had given her for Christmas.

So her bag stood ready with all the beautiful nighties within. A manicuring set, a bottle of Ed Pinaud's Lilac, and a box of Three Flowers face powder were added to the list of necessities. Irrelevant is mention of the fact that the lilac spilled in the bag, and Dot, who had looked forward to enjoying its cool fragrance through long, hot

days in the sanitarium, was unable to replace it. She cried a little over the tragic end of the lilac. It was so easy to cry nowadays. Everything made her feel like crying. It would have been nice to have toilet water. Probably everybody else would have it. But the first bottle had been an extravagance; so the second was an impossibility.

The days grew hotter. Dr. Stewart came on the last call he would pay her before his trip. Dot felt that it was the last visit he would ever pay her. Surely it would be the unknown Dr. Simons who would share that strange, burning session of pain with her. She almost wept as she said good-by to Dr. Stewart. He had been so kind, so understanding.

The last diaper was hemmed, the last bellyband stitched, the last tiny dress edged with delicate lace. Sue Macy had presented Dot with a white wicker wardrobe that had four layers upon which to lay the baby's clothes. On top there had been a large satin bow of pink ribbon. Dot had ripped it off with a hot anger that was all out of proportion to the affront. Didn't Sue know that Dot's child was going to be a boy? Tenderly Dot replaced the offensive pink bow with the blue ribbon that had been on the sacque which Eddie had brought. A bow under the child's chin would annoy him anyhow, and it looked pretty on the basket.

So all the baby's clothes reposed whitely in their proper places. There were bootees from Mrs. Cudahy and bootees from Miss Eiden who had sung "The Sunshine of Your Smile" on that far-distant Christmas Eve. There was a billowing, luxuriant carriage cover of blue silk from Maude McLaughlin. There were a dozen tiny, efficient-looking shirties from Edna. The rest of the wicker was full to overflowing with Dot's contributions to her son's wardrobe. There was a rattle hidden away down in the bottom under his nightgowns. Dot knew that it had been a silly purchase, but it had been such a cunning rattle. And after all it wasn't half so silly as the duck who was made of Turkish toweling and squeaked.

A deposit had been paid on the crib. The balance would be due upon delivery. It was ivory-white as Dot had always imagined it, and Pat Macy's friend had wanted to give them a carriage at wholesale price, too. Dot hadn't been able to manage the carriage. She would

have to get that on the installment plan. Much as Eddie loathed the great American habit, it would have to be acquired for the sake of the baby carriage. Dot wanted a gray wicker carriage.

There was nothing to do now but wait, and waiting was hard. Not only was she impatient and nervous, but her body had become a strange, unfamiliar mass of discomfort. The baby moved restlessly with almost continuous kicking and rocking about. Sitting could be merely tolerated; walking was a labor. One could not lie on one's bed continually and dream of brisk autumn days when one would light-footedly tread the Drive, pushing one's sleeping baby in his carriage.

"Eddie," asked Dot, "what was your father's first name?"

Eddie looked up from his evening paper. "Why?" he asked.

"The kid's gotta have a name," Dot pointed out.

"Well," said Eddie, "don't name him after that bum."

Dot didn't answer. She was thinking of the five dollars Ted Monroe had sent for her to buy a gift for the baby. She was wondering what she ought to get.

New York was feverishly playing Mah Jong. Chicago was aghast at the crime of Loeb and Leopold. The East, South, North, and West were sending their delegates to the Democratic Convention. The bobbed-haired bandit had been caught. There was talk of Dempsey fighting Gibbons. A man named Wilson had died. But to Dot there was only one thing that had ever happened—she had become pregnant.

"You know," said Eddie, "there's something good going to be on the radio the first week of my vacation."

"What?"

"The Democratic Convention. They're going to broadcast it."

"What is it?"

"Oh, a lot of Democrats get together and pick out a fellow that they want to run against Coolidge."

"That don't sound good," said Dot.

"Well, I think it ought to be. Graham McNamee is gonna report it from WEAF and Major Andrew White from WJZ."

"It may be good then," Dot admitted at length.

"New York is gonna try to put Al Smith over," said Eddie, "but they won't do it, because he's a Catholic."

"I thought this was politics," said Dot.

Eddie looked doubtful. "Don't know much about it," he said, "but that's what the boss said. We'll listen though."

The Democratic Convention came with a waving of flags and a beating of drums. It came with its men and women from Texas, Maine, and the Dakotas. It came with its orators, charlatans, and idiots. It came with its planks, platforms, and balloting, William Jennings Bryan, Senator Walsh, and Izetta Jewel Brown. Alabama casts twenty-four votes for Underwood.... Missouri will be polled.... Alaska votes under the unit rule.... Speeches about Salisbury, Glass, McAdoo, and Underwood. Jonathan Davis, John W. Davis, Governor Silzer of New Jersey, Governor Smith of New York. The Ku Klux Klan. We will adjourn for the evening out of respect to President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, whose son died this morning.... "East Side, West Side." Governor Al Smith. Good old Al. Mad, insane demonstration. Noise. Singing. Screams. "California, Here I Come." William Gibbs McAdoo. We want McAdoo. Mac'll do. Another demonstration. More noise. Bryan speaks. Texas provokes a raucous, scornful query: "Is that Sam Houston's state?" Will Rogers gets a vote. Kansas decides to caucus.

It came to Dot through Graham McNamee. His smooth, clear voice brought Madison Square Garden into her living-room. She saw the states hurrying with their banners to join the latest demonstration. She saw Alabama, proud and pompous, casting her inevitable twenty-four votes for the inevitable Mr. Underwood.

The Democratic Convention proved to be the only thing that could make Dot forget her unhappy body, the suit that Eddie must buy, the carriage that had to be managed. Even the pangs of indigestion, her latest burden, could be lulled by listening to Senator Walsh taking the ballots.

It wasn't all quite clear to Dot. The people down at the Convention seemed so terribly excited over the whole thing, and Eddie had it direct from Mr. Williams that Coolidge was going to do

another term. What did it matter, then, who they decided on? Ritchie was a nice name. Why didn't they take Ritchie? If Coolidge was going to continue to be President, why did they bother so much about who was going to be defeated? It was quite inexplicable, but there was an odd fascination in listening to the states changing their opinions, in hearing the sudden noise of a spontaneous, unexplainable stampede. Then, too, there was a glamour about the people who came from far places. Fancy hearing the voice of a man who was actually an inhabitant of Arizona.

Dot and Eddie sat before the loud speaker listening spellbound to the never-ending balloting.

Once Al Smith had so many votes that Dot grew quite excited. "I thought you said they wouldn't put him over?"

"Well, you see, Dot," Eddie explained, "even if he gets the most votes here, it don't mean that he will be President."

"Why not?"

"Because he's got the Republican candidate to run against," said Eddie.

"Then I don't see what the use of the whole thing is," Dot replied.

But she liked it and she listened.

By the third day she and Eddie were quite alarmed. They had thought that a day and a night would probably complete the convention. The continuing of it meant that they would have to miss a session, for on the next day Dot had to see Dr. Simons. It had been agreed that Eddie must accompany her on the long trip.

"You can get your suit while you're downtown," said Dot. "Don't you think it would be nice to buy a suit downtown?"

"What am I gonna do with you? I can't drag you all over downtown."

"I'll wait in the doctor's office."

"It's best not to make arrangements like that. You don't know how you'll feel after the trip or nothing. I'll get my suit where I've always got my things. In Benny's. We'll go to the doctor's and come straight home."

"All right," said Dot. "Say, Eddie, I hope I don't have the baby before the convention is over, don't you?"

Eddie's pale blue eyes rolled slowly. They fixed themselves on Dot's face with a cold, accusing look. "Don't be saying things like that," he said hardly. "You take that kid when you can get it." He made a movement that was something between a shrug and a shudder. "What the hell, do you think I want you hanging around pregnant till next Christmas?"

CHAPTER XVI

Dr. Simons lived in an apartment house on Madison Avenue, a very different Madison Avenue from the one which spread itself above the park. The Collinses went down to Columbus Circle in the subway, then took the Fifty-ninth Street car crosstown to Madison Avenue, then the Madison Avenue car to Sixty-eighth Street. Dot was very tired when she got to Dr. Simons' house, almost too tired to be impressed by the beautiful apartment building.

A very blond, very stagey-looking nurse took Dot's name. Oh, yes, Dr. Stewart had spoken of Mrs. Collins. She and Eddie were admitted to the waiting-room. They sat very quietly and looked the place over. There was no sign of the doctor, but they could hear an occasional movement behind the closed door which betrayed the doctor's presence.

There was a thick, soft rug on the floor, and a few Japanese prints hung on the wall. The furniture was French gray wicker, and the window had been draped by a professional draper. A very charming waiting-room, and a most disgusting wait.

The thing that baffled Dot completely was the stairs which rose out of the little foyer. Stairs! This was just an apartment, wasn't it? What were the stairs for and to what did they lead? She had decided that they were just make-believe stairs when a child came down carrying a doll. She placed the doll in a chair and solemnly climbed the stairs again. When she returned she had a picture book. So! There was actually something upstairs. Well, doctors were funny people.

The wait continued. The blond nurse smiled encouragingly now and again. It grew warm in the pretty room. Dot took off her hat and later threw back her cape. Eddie sighed heavily and shifted his position. No other patients came into the room, but that was scant comfort, as a dozen people might well have been examined while Dot waited.

Dot leaned over and whispered to Eddie: "I wonder how Al Smith's doing?"

Eddie smiled. “It’ll probably be Election Day before we get home,” he said.

A woman came down the stairs, a dark, brainy-looking woman with a pleasant face. The doctor’s wife. Dot had never before seen a doctor’s wife. She stared at Mrs. Simons, wondering what it must feel like to be the wife of a clever doctor. Gee, Mrs. Simons must be proud. It wasn’t long after that Dot learned that Dr. Simons was very proud of his wife. Dr. Stewart hadn’t told Dot that Mrs. Simons was better known as Dr. Martin and that under that name she was recognized as an obstetrician of note.

Dot gazed at her interestedly and back at the child who was busily tearing pages out of her book. Having a child couldn’t be bad, or all the doctors wouldn’t be letting their wives have them, she thought.

Mrs. Simons exchanged a few words with the nurse and looked at Dot. She smiled and Dot smiled back at her. Did doctors deliver their wives’ babies? she wondered. She would have liked to ask Mrs. Simons that and what was upstairs.

Suddenly the door to the doctor’s office flew open. Nobody came out. The doctor had apparently been lost in his own thoughts for an hour and a quarter or had perhaps been deep in a mystery novel.

“You may go in, Mrs. Collins,” said the nurse.

Dot turned and whispered to Eddie: “I guess you’ll have to stay out here.”

Dr. Simons was apparently a person who couldn’t stand waiting. Mrs. Collins’ delay was too much for him. He appeared on the threshold and gestured impatiently to both of them. They arose and followed him.

The inner office basked in a cool golden glow. The sun streamed unrebuked in all the four windows and busy little electric fans whirred gleefully and dared it to make a nuisance of itself. Everything was terribly modern-looking and terribly oiled, polished, and clean.

In the center of the room stood Dr. Simons, waiting with a peevish expression on his face for Dot to take a seat. He was a tall, dark Jew, still under forty. He was slender, sharp-eyed, and rather

brilliant-looking. His fingers were long and slim and nervous. He was good-looking. The sort of Jew who, one expects, will speak with an Oxford accent and who will say blisteringly sarcastic things.

Dot took a seat. So did Dr. Simons. So did Eddie. Dr. Simons asked Dot if her name was Kenny. She said it wasn't, and Dr. Simons seemed greatly upset over the turn affairs had taken. He pulled out a file-drawer and began whispering "Collins" over and over to himself. Finally he slammed the drawer and shouted: "Miss Henderson."

The nurse appeared.

"Find this woman's card," he said. "It's with the batch Dr. Stewart brought over. Her name is Kenny."

Dot's mouth opened, but she could see by the smile on Miss Henderson's face that the doctor's mistake had been noticed.

Miss Henderson found the card. The doctor regarded it critically. "Oh, you're the woman who is to come to term in a few weeks, aren't you?"

"I hope not before Dr. Stewart comes back," said Dot timidly.

Dr. Simons favored her with a quick, sharp glance. In the end he decided she was merely stupid. "So do I," he said.

He read the card over six or seven times. When he finally laid it down, Dot had the impression that he still had not absorbed a single idea in connection with it. Miss Henderson could have told her something about that strange, restless, clever mind that never knew a peaceful moment. Could have told her something about this peevish young doctor who crucified and tortured himself for his patients, who respected but disliked him.

"We'll look at her, Miss Henderson," said Dr. Simons.

Miss Henderson led Dot through a narrow white door into a narrow white room. She helped Dot off with her dress and assisted her to the table.

"She's ready, Doctor," said Miss Henderson, opening the door.

The doctor's voice startled Dot. He was of course speaking to Eddie, but who would have guessed that he could speak like a human being and on such short acquaintance? "I listen to Roxy," he was saying, "when I have the time."

"Mrs. Collins is waiting," said Miss Henderson.

The doctor came in. He examined Dot thoroughly. He was as conscientious and as purely professional as Dr. Stewart, but there the similarity stopped. Dr. Stewart's manner was that of a saviour ministering to the needs of some one he pitied and cared for. Dr. Simons' attitude was one of extreme annoyance. "That there should be women!" said his cold eyes. "And that they should get pregnant!"

The examination finished, he left Dot abruptly, presumably to continue his conversation with Eddie. It was only by Miss Henderson's cool hand extended to her that Dot knew that it was time to get off the table.

She dressed and joined Eddie and the doctor. Eddie was chatting easily with Dr. Simons. Dr. Simons looked at Dot as she came in. His eyes were still cold, but they held something else, a look of apprehension, of worry.

"She's fine, isn't she, Doctor?" asked Miss Henderson.

You felt that her words were not at all meant to reassure the patient, but rather to soothe and compose the doctor.

"Yes, ah, yes," he said absently. "Quite all right. When are you to come again, Mrs. Collins?"

"The week after next," said Dot.

"You'd better make it next week," said Dr. Simons. "A week from today."

They left him then. Dot went, feeling that she had put a blight on that cool and sunny room. The doctor was worrying his hair with his long, slim fingers and staring thoughtfully after her. Miss Henderson was tiptoeing about as though not to disturb his reflections, unpleasant though they might be.

Outside, Dot found that Mrs. Simons and the child had disappeared. Together she and Eddie left the strange apartment that had stairs.

"I hate that man," said Dot passionately.

"Oh, he's all right," said Eddie. "Nervous, that's all. Clever fellows are always two steps away from the bug-house."

"Dr. Stewart isn't like that."

"This fellow's a Jew," Eddie reminded her. "When they ain't the common, money-grabbing kind, they're kind of erratic."

"You know why I hate him?" asked Dot.

"No. Why?"

"He scared me. He looked at me funny. He thinks something's wrong with me."

"How do you mean?"

"With my insides, I guess. He thinks I'm gonna kick off, having this baby."

"You're crazy."

"You didn't see the way he looked at me. Maybe he's right," she said, gloomily.

"Ain't you got faith no more in Stewart?"

"Yes, but he ain't seen me lately. Maybe something has happened."

"Oh, go on," said Eddie. "Nothing just happens. You'd 'a' felt it, I'll bet, if anything bad had happened."

There was no car in sight; so they walked slowly down Madison Avenue. Dot was preoccupied and dreary. She gazed without interest into the windows of the shops that lined the street. Crazy shops. Many of them had nothing but books in the windows. Others were full of junk, funny-looking vases and plates and things. One shop had nothing at all on display except a great big cabinet with Chinese designs. "Give me Two Hundred and Seventh Street any time," thought Dot. "Or Willis Avenue."

She undressed and lay down when she got home. It had been a horrible trip. She was dead tired and depressed. Her body was a smoldering expanse of quivering flesh. That doctor! Did he know something that kindly, good-natured Dr. Stewart didn't know? Had she seen her future truthfully foretold in the panicked gaze that he had cast upon her?

Some women did die in childbirth. Everybody knew that. The rate was low nowadays. But still, some women did die. Would she be one of them?

Funny she hadn't thought about dying before. And funny that somehow she didn't care for herself. But to leave a tiny, defenseless baby all alone in the big world! There was Eddie, of course, but he would be bewildered, frightened, helpless as the baby. What would he do? He had no relatives. He would not give the baby to Edna even if she would take it. What would he do? He would probably put it in a "home."

She tore her mind to pieces with conjectures. She tossed her head about in an agony of worry. She saw her baby's identity forgotten, Eddie far from New York, herself cold and useless in her grave. Sleep released her at last, but she cried in her sleep, and Eddie, standing quietly by, wondered what she was dreaming.

When she awakened, he had dinner all ready. The corn had boiled too long, and the steak was too rare; but she appreciated his effort. Not that she was hungry. It was hard to eat when visions of the baby —whose mother had made him a dozen web-fine dresses all by hand —growing up in an institution were so close.

"Ain't supper all right?" asked Eddie.

"Sure. It's fine."

She wasn't eating even as well as her diet permitted. Eddie wondered what that meant. Was something wrong with her, after all? Suppose something happened to her?

Now, for the first time in months, he pictured her lying white and dead. He couldn't bear the thought of it. He moved restlessly and uttered an oath.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Honest, Eddie, dinner is fine. Don't be sore that I ain't eating. It's only because that trip kinda tired me out."

"I ain't sore."

"Then what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"There is, too, something the matter. Do you get the blues when you think how close we are to having a kid?"

"Yes," said Eddie.

The pall with which Dr. Simons had enshrouded Dot did not lift. The days of Eddie's vacation rode each other into eternity, hot, dry days above which the sun hung with a tawdry brassiness. Its sumptuous golden radiance seemed to have deserted it. It was merely a huge and ugly gilt bauble suspended in space. At night when it fell behind the Palisades with the crass obviousness of an electrical effect, it left behind a stifling, black night.

The Democratic Convention continued. The inability of the Democrats to reach an agreement had become a joke around town. Dot still listened. She had come to respect steadfast Alabama and to enjoy, if not to share, California's excitement over William Gibbs McAdoo. She was a New Yorker. She wanted to see Al Smith get the nomination. Of course Coolidge was going to be President again, but since these people set so much store by picking a loser, she felt that Al Smith certainly ought to be the guy. Listening to the arguments and discussions, even, dispelled the gloom which Dr. Simons had provoked. But after the delegates, the alternates, the visitors, and everybody else had gone for the night to their hotels, rooming-houses, and homes, there were still Dr. Simons' worried eyes staring at her from the darkness. He thought she was going to die. She had seen it in his face.

She had stayed in the house during the terrible heat wave. Eddie had shopped for the meat and groceries. Nobody had come to see them. Edna had taken Floyd to Asbury Park. Sue and Pat were vacationing at Far Rockaway. She had had a card from Maude McLaughlin. Maude was in Atlantic City. Her card had said: "We are having a wonderful time. Wish you were here."

"We" are having a wonderful time. That didn't mean Maude and her mother, for they never went any place together. Did it mean Maude and the golden-haired child? Dot earnestly doubted it. It probably meant Maude and Ted. She would be having a wonderful time at an expensive seaside resort despite any irregularities of conduct. When it was Maude, the gods laughed and accepted her sins as youthful pranks. Dot felt a little bitter. It was very hot on Post Avenue, and the gods didn't seem to care a hoot that Dot was perpetuating the race in a perfectly respectable way. Maude was

probably wearing snowy-white sport clothes and soft, perfumed dance frocks. She was bathing, riding in wheel chairs, dancing, and in every way enjoying the summer.

She had dropped Dot a card and had sent the baby a gift; so apparently she bore Dot no ill will even though Dot had seen fit to do as she pleased in the little matter of her pregnancy. Dot was still a trifle angry at Maude. She had longed to return the carriage robe, but an insane lust to own many things for her baby had defeated her longing.

The night of July Fourth came down upon New York with a dark, throbbing heat. There was nothing of new interest being reported from Madison Square Garden. Dot and Eddie sat drinking cream soda, each gloomily thinking his own gloomy thoughts.

Dot got to her feet ponderously. "Eddie," she said, "I got to go up on the roof for a while. I'm getting crazy from just looking at this room."

Eddie turned off the radio. "I'll go with you," he said.

They ascended the one short flight of stairs to the roof in silence. Dot walked in front. Gee, from the back you'd never know she was pregnant! She wore a short dotted-swiss dress without sleeves and without belt or sash. It had only taken an hour to make and had cost but forty-nine cents. Her hair still held its noble, aloof wave which could be touched neither by pain nor by adversity, but it was ragged on her neck and far too long to fill any of the accepted offices of the bob. Eddie looked at her ankles. They were slim and girlish. Perfectly normal. Some women acquired swollen ankles during pregnancy, Eddie knew. He remembered Dr. Stewart's concern lest her hands and feet swell. Oh, she was probably all right. He was just full of imagination.

The roof was dark and deserted. There were no stars, and a cloud, glumly silver, betrayed the moon's hiding-place. There was going to be rain in a few hours, and the air, heavy and sulky, resented the approaching storm.

Dot walked to the edge of the roof and peered over the low wall. The street lay alone suffering the heat. No one was strolling tonight toward the movies or the pool room. This was a holiday. People

were at the beaches or at lavishly decorated dances. The older folks were probably listening to the Convention or permitting the threat of rain to keep them to their living-rooms.

The voice of Senator Walsh reached Dot and Eddie from a dozen loud speakers. Everybody in Inwood who owned a radio set listened to the Convention.

Some one didn't have a radio set. A girl with a frail, thrilling voice who had the apartment right under the front part of the roof was playing a piano and singing the wistful, haunting melody that had struck New York so short a time before.

"What'll I do, when you
Are far away?
What'll I do? What'll I do?
What'll I do?"

A sudden chill hit Dot. Far away. Somebody was wondering what they would do when they were left alone. Far away. What did that mean? California? Hawaiian Territory? Perhaps farther. Perhaps a place from which there was no return.

"What'll I do, when you
Go 'way from me?"

The voice of the singer was not a good voice, but there was a faint tragic sweetness tinting it that hurt Dot. It tore. It cut. Perhaps she was going far away and was going to leave Eddie wondering what to do.

She crept closer to him over the dead, black roof. His face was a blur of white in the darkness. She touched him, and his arms went around her with a gentle firmness that seemed for the moment as though they could keep her safe from Death itself.

They stood so for an age, it seemed. They were alone in the world, he and she standing alone in the hot, black dampness. There was a lump in Dot's throat. She wanted to cry, wanted to shriek that it wasn't fair. Why were you tortured with fear and grief when you were doing what, according to religion and science, was the right

thing? Why was your body ill, your mind troubled, when you were saving and stinting just to bring another little life into the world? Oh, it wasn't fair. She hugged Eddie tightly. Perhaps very soon now his arms would be empty.

"What'll I do, when you
Go 'way from me?"

Over Interstate Park, a skyrocket cut through the fog and exploded, a torrent of hot red and dazzling green. The colors were dimmed slightly by the mist but you could guess that they were bright and very gay. To Dot, the thought of pleasure-seekers and excursionists at the Park did not occur. The skyrocket was just a mockingly cheerful salute from a world that was about to crumble and fall into the unknown.

"Oh, Eddie, I'm so blue."

He kissed her mouth gravely and held her close. He did not question. He was Eddie, her husband. Solid, strong, and so very dear to her.

"What'll I do? What'll I do?
What'll I do?"

The black hush deepened. The piano was quiet. The Democratic Convention had lost its followers. They had gone to bed. No further signal came from Interstate Park. The world was empty. There were only Eddie and Dot, forgotten and solitary, left alone on top of a deserted building.

"Eddie, I love you so."

He kissed her again. "How do you feel, Kid?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm all right. Why? Why did you ask?"

"I just wanted to know."

A little wind came up. Dot's hair blew in his eyes as he bent above her. The fragrance of her powder rose from her warm, white neck. He turned away from her, lost in thoughts of the night he had first

kissed her. She had been so gay, so fresh. Now, she was troubled, burdened, and about to face a crisis. He had done it. He had brought this on her.

"Eddie, I got to go see Simons again tomorrow."

"Yes, I know, Kid."

"I wouldn't go if it wasn't for Dr. Stewart. He'd probably be sore if I didn't, huh?"

"Yes, I guess he would. You'll have to go."

"Eddie, when are you going to get your suit?"

"Maybe tomorrow night if you feel well enough to be left alone. I don't want to drag you down there with me."

"What kind you gonna get?"

"Blue serge, I guess. It always looks nice."

"Yes, that's right."

They left the roof then, but Dot knew that the roof and what it brought to mind would never leave her. It would linger forever embalmed in all its terrifying serenity.

Reluctantly, the next day she started again for the office of Dr. Simons. Eddie had thought it best to accompany her again. For though she now knew exactly where the office was, he thought it advisable for her to have a companion on such a long trip.

Dot hated the people in the subway who looked at her. She was conscious of the shabbiness of her cape, which was of cheap material and had not stood the gaff. She was quite unable to feel glorified by her approaching motherhood, for across the way from her sat a woman with a tiny infant in her arms, and the woman wore a frock that had never been purchased for less than thirty dollars. Dot fell to wondering how the woman could have managed such an expensive dress so shortly after her confinement. The puzzle kept Dot occupied all the way to Columbus Circle.

Dr. Simons had not yet returned from his calls when they arrived at the office. Miss Henderson assured Dot that he was due any minute. There were other patients in the reception room today—a

white-faced girl with a bad cough, a small, natty man with no obvious disorder, and a woman who was going to have a baby around October.

Dot sighed and took a seat. This probably meant that the trip to Inwood would be made during the subway's rush hour. She discarded her hat and cape and picked up a magazine. It was the *Atlantic Monthly*. She didn't remember ever having seen a copy of the *Atlantic Monthly* before. It looked like a very nice magazine, but *Judge* had funny pictures. Eddie found *Judge* for her, and she settled down to wait.

Presently the main door of the hall slammed loudly. There was the sound of quick, important steps and the doctor's voice rapidly putting questions to the nurse. There followed a delay in which the patients in the reception room heard Dr. Simons holding forth to Miss Henderson on the delivery he had just accomplished uptown somewhere. Miss Henderson's voice was not in evidence now, but you knew she was looking surprised, sympathetic, and admiring at proper intervals.

The doctor rushed impressively through the reception room and into his office. He did not look at any of the people who were awaiting him, but you felt that this was just a little game he played and that really he had noted the number and identities of the patients.

Miss Henderson gave him time to rest for ten minutes or so; then she nodded brightly to the natty, little man. "You may go in, Mr. Clifford."

Mr. Clifford went in jauntily. Mr. Clifford came out properly squelched. The two women were attended to with neatness and dispatch. Dot's turn was next, but it appeared, from the hesitation on Miss Henderson's part, that she was a delicate subject with the doctor and could not be broached without preparation. Miss Henderson went in the office. When she came out she smiled at Dot but gave no signal. A few minutes later the signal came from the nurse. It was as though she had been instructed to count up to five hundred and then usher Dot into the presence of his Royal Nervousness.

Dot went in with slow and reluctant steps. Eddie remained in the reception room, pretending to read from one of the humorous weeklies.

Dot smiled at Dr. Simons when he looked at her. He returned her greeting with a somewhat absent cordiality.

"Well, how are you?" he asked.

"I'm feeling fine," she said, trying to keep a ring of defiance out of her voice. "Though I'm kind of worried."

Dr. Simons appeared interested. He looked up from a sheaf of papers which he held in his hand and asked, "What are you worried about?"

Dot's defiance fled. She met Dr. Simon's eyes timorously. "You kind 'a' gave me the idea," she said, "that things weren't so awful good with me."

Dr. Simons laughed a little. His laugh would have deceived no one. It was hollow, false. Dissipating fear was evidently no part of his bedside manner.

"You want your own doctor back, eh?" His attempt to jeer pleasantly fell flat. His expression was too anxious, too intent on her answer, for his words to pass as mere persiflage.

"I've had Dr. Stewart for months," Dot said, gravely, "and I feel as though I had had him for years. I'd let him cut my head off, and I wouldn't doubt but what he could get it back on again."

"That's very flattering trust," said Dr. Simons.

Dot felt a little sorry for him now. Perhaps her disclosure of how she felt toward Dr. Stewart had been unkind, and certainly unnecessary.

She laughed uncomfortably. "I'm used to him," she said. "That's it, I suppose. Have you heard from him lately?"

"Yes," said Dr. Simons. "I had a wire from him this morning."

Miss Henderson came and urged Dot into the other room, where she helped her prepare for the examination. Dr. Simons was, on this occasion, content with the most perfunctory of investigations.

"Well," he said, as Dot returned to the office, "I guess you'll have your doctor with you in three or four days."

"Oh, did he say so in the wire you got?"

Dr. Simons shook his head. "I'm going to send for him at once," he said. "He asked to be called if you showed any signs of action. I don't feel justified in handling your delivery in the face of his request."

"Oh," said Dot, "that's fine."

She left Dr. Simons, with his dubious smile, standing in the middle of his office looking after her. The nurse was humming a melody from the new Elizabeth Hines show.

Dot said nothing to Eddie until they were on the car; then she told him that Dr. Stewart was coming right back. In her voice was the peace and joy Robert Browning must have visioned when he wrote his famous poem of the world's tranquillity.

"Gee, that's great," said Eddie.

"Ain't it? Everything will be all right now. That Simons guy put a jinx on me. He made me feel rotten."

Eddie looked at her carefully. "How do you feel now?"

"All right. Tired, though. Gee, I'm glad Dr. Stewart is coming back."

She looked glad. For the first time in weeks there was a vividness about her, an air of having to face a job that would be unpleasant but inconsequential.

Eddie's spirits rose with each station that they passed on the Broadway express. At Dyckman Street, he bought half a banana cream pie in Hanscom's bakery, and Dot forgot her diet long enough to eat a slice of it.

She was cheerful, smiling, and brave through the following days. When Dr. Stewart's letter postmarked New York arrived, she felt almost as though the worst part of the confinement were over. The letter said that he was coming to see her on the following day.

Eddie had gone back to work. She had hated to part with him, but there was some consolation to be found in returning to a normal routine. She cleaned busily so that the house should be bright and shining when Dr. Stewart came. She expected him around one o'clock, but it was after three when he arrived.

He didn't tell her that he had been talking to Dr. Simons. If he had, he probably would have kept Dr. Simons' greeting to himself: "My God, Stewart, I'm glad you're back. That Collins woman! I don't want to deliver her. If her baby's over two pounds it'll be a battle. God, Stewart, I'm glad to see you."

Dr. Stewart had scoffed at his colleague's excitement, had laid him a little bet, had advised him quite seriously not to worry so much over the people he saw and to have some confidence in himself. Dr. Simons reminded his friend very much of an exposed nerve. Everything that came within his range of feeling hurt him, made him throb with pain and anxiety.

"Don't worry over Mrs. Collins," Dr. Stewart had laughed.

"I shan't," Dr. Simons returned, "now that you're here; but if you hadn't come, I'd have probably been buried the same day they bury her."

On the whole, Dr. Stewart didn't consider it prudent to repeat this conversation to Dot.

CHAPTER XVII

Dr. Stewart came every day. It was a wearisome, tiring wait. Dr. Simons had indeed anticipated trouble, for there was not the slightest sign of climax.

The hot spell held out with admirable strength. The little apartment, so close to the roof, discharged tiny points of heat. Eddie spoke of an electric fan, but Dot discouraged him. Though he could get a fan very cheap there was still the electric bill to consider.

These last days were raw torture—the heat, the tedium of waiting passively for something to happen, her body huge, uncomfortable, heavy.

She spent most of her time now on the bed. The sheet would grow burning hot beneath her. She would leave it and go to lie for a while in cool water. She would powder herself from head to foot with Mavis talcum and try the bed again.

Eddie brought in the dinner things, salads, usually, or sandwiches. Dr. Stewart had permitted Dot to forsake her diet. It was too late now for the baby to be influenced to any extent. She ate ravenously. Everything carried an aura of rarity about it. The tomatoes were lusciously scarlet; the crinkling, green leaves of lettuce seemed strange fairy fruit, perfect, desirable.

The evenings brought ice cream and Nabiscos. Dot allowed the ice cream to dissolve on her tongue. She counted the Nabiscos. A shortage made her glad that Eddie didn't like them. They went no more to the movies, nor did they walk in the evenings. There was nothing to do but wait. The ice cream made an exciting interlude, something to look forward to.

It was the end of July now. The baby was to have come in the middle of the month. A miscount. Well, how could a woman tell? What unfairness, not even to know positively when your baby was due. Mother Nature, indeed! A woman surely wouldn't have arranged things so. Nature was a man, a rather unpleasant old man who spat tobacco juice out of the corner of his mouth and said in a wheezy voice, "A little pain and worriment never hurt no woman."

No, there was nothing to do but wait. The money was all ready for distribution between the doctor and the sanitarium. It was lying in the Post Office waiting to be moved to the banks of Dr. Stewart and the sanitarium proprietor. It had been difficult to save so much, but it was well worth it. Dr. Stewart who came all the way from Long Island, who trudged up all those stairs, who gave his best efforts to her, was surely entitled to be paid in cash and not in small portions.

Eddie had his suit. It was blue serge and looked very nice on him. He hadn't worn it yet. He had tried it on for her, and it fitted so beautifully that she agreed with him that it was well worth walking up one flight to get a suit like that for twenty-four dollars and fifty cents. Surely none of the men who came to see their wives at the hospital would look any nicer than Eddie.

"Eddie"—Dot was lying on the bed holding Eddie's hand as he sat in a chair beside her—"there's a 'bus that runs about a quarter of a block from the sanitarium. It takes you to a Hundred and Eighty-first Street. Right to the subway entrance. You can get the subway there, and of course that takes you to Dyckman Street, and you know what a short walk it is to here from there. I want you to bring me home from the sanitarium like that. I'll be strong enough to stand it. Don't get a taxi. It'll cost too much. I'm telling you now because I don't know how soon I'll go."

Eddie squeezed her hand. "Got the saving habit, haven't you, Dot?" he asked.

"No kidding. I mean it."

"I'll walk you all the way home. How will that be?"

"I mean it, Eddie. I want to come home that way."

"How about the kid? Gonna stick him in a subway on a hot day?"

"Oh, he won't mind. He'll be asleep."

"Tell the truth, Dot, you forgot about the kid."

She hadn't. She had imagined him sleeping gamely through the uncomfortable ride which was the best his parents could afford. She had pictured him soft and pink in her arms, drawing astonished glances from the other passengers.

"You didn't forget about him," she challenged.

Eddie looked at her in amazement. Was she jealous that he had thought of the baby's discomfort and had treated hers lightly? Jealous of the baby? Good God! Well, this was no time to vex her.

"I can never forget about him," he said. "Never for a minute. How in hell can I?"

She sighed. If only Eddie wouldn't treat the baby like a dread something coming at them with slow certainty.

A dazzling bright shaft of moonlight fell across the shirtwaist box. Dot stared at it silently, admiring it. How pretty it was. Things like this could make her forget for the moment how great a trial this waiting was.

Edna came back from Asbury Park. Floyd had not been getting the proper food at their hotel. Soon afterward Sue and Pat returned from the beach. Pat had wearied of commuting from Far Rockaway to Washington Heights. Sue thought it very unkind of him and said so at every opportunity.

The Macys were amazed to find Dot still carrying her child. Their pleasant jeers at her delay angered her. She longed to throw them out of the apartment. They could joke about it. What did they know of the suspense, the worry, the discomfort, all borne through blinding hot days and nights of close, stifling darkness?

Eddie was no ally. He did not seem particularly anxious to have it over with. Probably because he didn't want the baby. Edna, who had been delivered of Floyd in the dead of winter, couldn't be expected to know what the summer meant to a woman whose body was hot and heavy. Only Dr. Stewart seemed to understand the torment of waiting.

"The baby is all ready to be born," he said. "It's just a stubborn little donkey sitting there waiting."

"Can you see him, Doctor?"

"No, but I can feel him."

"Is it a him, positively?"

Dr. Stewart laughed. He had nice teeth and a pleasant laugh. "The heartbeats suggest as much. But frankly, Mrs. Collins, they can't always be depended upon."

Well, maybe it was a silly question, but who wouldn't ask silly questions after days of waiting and the heat, the heat, the heat!

"I guess we'll have to do something about his stubbornness," said Dr. Stewart, thoughtfully.

"Do something?" echoed Dot.

"Yes, we're tired of waiting for him. We'll hurry him up a bit."

Dot grew alarmed. Something had gone wrong. The baby wasn't going to come in the natural way. She had heard of the dread Caesarean operation from Sue, but she had not the vaguest idea of its use. Was it going to happen to her?

She got a grip on herself and tried to speak as unconcernedly as Miss Henderson might speak if she were standing near the vanity table re-packing Dr. Stewart's bag.

"Something wrong, Doctor?"

"Oh, no. Everything is quite right, but you're tired of waiting, and so am I. We'll give you a thumping big dose of castor oil and see if that doesn't hasten action."

Dot smiled. Not a Caesarean operation, but castor oil. Maude McLaughlin would have said, "Exactly. Five million petty, sordid trials make up this period known as ten lunar months." But Maude was not there, and Dot saw the castor oil as a homely old friend who had arrived just in time to prevent disaster.

Dr. Stewart prescribed two ounces of castor oil to be taken at a single dose. Elixir of lacto pepsin mixed with it would make it more pleasant, he said. Dot meekly agreed to follow directions. The possible result would indeed be worth the effort.

She waited until Sunday to take it. Eddie would be home then, and in case success was in store for her she wanted him near.

At nine in the morning she took the cupful of thick, bloodlike fluid. Lacto pepsin was a familiar shade of red, and it created a horrible illusion. At twelve Dot was a trifle sick at her stomach. At two the baby twitched and rolled, fluttered and shivered. At three she got a bad pain. At four the baby was reasonably quiet and the pain had subsided. At five Dot was ravenously hungry, and the castor oil had been a failure.

The nerves of both Eddie and Dot were worn to a frazzle. They bickered and quarreled over nothing.

"I'm hungry," she said.

"Well, I'll go to the delicatessen store and get something. What do you want?"

"Anything."

"That's no answer. What do you feel like eating?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Eddie, can't you pick something out? I don't feel like thinking about it."

"Yes, and I'll bring back something you don't like."

"You know I like everything."

"The hell you do."

"Must you swear at me?"

"That's not swearing at you. Come on, what do you want?"

"Well, can't you wait a minute? What's the hurry?"

"I thought you were hungry."

"It's enough to take the appetite away from anybody to have you get sore over nothing."

"Who's sore?"

"You are."

"I am not. You're the one that's sore."

"I am not."

But they both looked very peevish, and they walked about the apartment with sulky expressions on their faces and avoided each other's eyes.

Eddie got his hat, and Dot prepared the percolator for coffee. She was wearing a very short red-and-white checkered dress. There was nothing underneath it, and her stockings were rolled down to her ankles. She looked very tired and worn. Eddie's heart gave a throb of pity for the little, solemn face with its babyish pink mouth and its weary, bewildered eyes. He wanted to take her in his arms and ask forgiveness for not being more pleasant, but he was clumsy at things like that. She might be going away to give herself up to the

inevitable at any moment now, and here he was fighting with her. He stuck his hat on his head with a sudden, abrupt gesture and ran down the stairs.

Dot looked in the ice box. The butter was very low. Did he know it? Would he think to get butter? She walked quickly to the door and opened it. She would call down the stairs and tell him not to forget the butter.

She opened her mouth to call, but his name would not come. She could not call. Too vividly upon her consciousness was blazed the memory of a woman who had called down the stairs and of a girl who had worn a white pleated skirt and had carried a ukulele. What the girl had said of the woman, Dot remembered well. She closed the door. She could spare Eddie that.

He came back from the store. He had remembered the butter. He had brought ham and cheese and pickles and coleslaw and a Ward's cake. They ate in silence. Still silent, they cleared up the few dishes. Eddie tuned in on WEAF, and the silence finally broke up in comments on the program.

Dot bathed and went to bed. Eddie lingered in the living-room tinkering with his set. He was not conscious of his reluctance to undress. The night so fraught with possibilities had made him restless, but he was not aware of it. Twice, after she had gone to sleep, he went quietly in to look at her. She was breathing deeply, and there was an expression on her face that asked a question. The blessed bulge beneath the sheet drew his attention. The baby. Surely three weeks from now he would be lying in his bassinet, crying perhaps, but still the baby he had dreamed of, despaired of, and longed for. Why didn't she want it? His own face wore a question as he looked at Dot's closed eyes. Why didn't she want it? Why did she speak so lightly of that little life that breathed and fed inside her? How could it live there and not win her love? She had sewed for the baby, had sewed tirelessly; but as she said herself, the baby couldn't go naked. She didn't want the baby. That much was evident in every word that she spoke on the subject. Well, he could love it secretly. No use in making her unhappy by going into ecstasies of delight over something that she didn't feel that way about.

He went back to the living-room and picked up a book he had borrowed from the boss. A book on radio. He lit a cigarette and began to read. Dot stirred in her sleep, and he ran to her side; but she had not awakened, and her questioning expression had given way to one of peace—as though the question had been answered.

It was after one o'clock when Eddie's subconscious mind remarked that there was no use waiting around, as nothing was going to happen.

Eddie took himself off to bed. He tried not to disturb Dot, but as he settled himself under the sheet, she moved and said, "Four dozen diapers." He held his breath, and she went back to sleep.

Dr. Stewart came the next day. It was the thirtieth of July.

"Well," said he, "no luck yesterday, eh?"

"I had a pain," said Dot, "but it went away and didn't come back again."

Dr. Stewart examined her. "Hm," he remarked, "that pain was part baby. Suppose you repeat that dose tomorrow morning."

Dot shuddered, but it never occurred to her that one might overlook Dr. Stewart's "suggestions."

She repeated the dose at breakfast time next morning. It proved impossible to retain. By noon she was feeling as she had grown accustomed to feeling—hot, heavy, and uncomfortable, but without sign of climax.

Eddie came home two hours earlier than usual. He expected to find almost anything, the home deserted, Dot writhing in agony with no one near, or perhaps Edna waiting to tell him that Dot was at the sanitarium.

Instead he found Dot sitting by the window drinking a glass of iced coffee.

"Hello, dear," she said. "Anything wrong?"

"No. Can't a fellow come home early without there being something wrong?"

She told him about her latest adventure with castor oil. He shook his head and tightened his lips disgustedly.

"Guess that kid's gonna be a Christmas present," he said.

"Anyhow he's lost his chance to be a July baby," Dot remarked.

"Hold your horses," Eddie said. "The day ain't over yet."

But Dot was right. The baby didn't take advantage of his last opportunity to be born in July.

August first, Dr. Stewart came into the little top-floor apartment looking like a man who has an ace in the hole and a bad poker face.

"We'll fool Mr. Baby this time," he said.

Dot watched interestedly as he unpacked his bag with unusual velocity. He drew out adhesive tape, a length of tubular rubber, a lubricant. He went swiftly to work.

"We'll fool Mr. Baby this time," he said again.

After he had gone, Dot sat for a long time in the yellow chair and waited for the baby to be born. Absurd, of course. If Dr. Stewart had expected immediate results he would have remained. Still, Dot sat very quiet and waited. Besides, it was nicer to stay quiet. What Dr. Stewart had done was probably the correct thing to do under the circumstances, but it certainly didn't add anything to her comfort.

The bell rang. Dot stood up and walked toward the door. Even that short walk was labor. Maude McLaughlin stood outside, Maude cool-looking, smiling, Maude dressed in pale orchid chiffon with a sheaf of roses in her arms, Maude with the perennial dewy eyelids and vermilion lips under a large, drooping hat. But primarily, Maude coming out of curiosity to see how things were going with Dot.

"Oh, come in," said Dot.

Maude came in. She took in the little apartment at a glance. "Oh, what a charming place you have."

"Yes, we like it," said Dot, sweetly.

She took the roses which Maude extended to her, and thanked her. She emptied the artificial cherry blossoms without ceremony into one of the chest's drawers and got water for the roses.

"Well, how are you feeling, Dot?"

"Fine."

"The baby is late in coming, isn't it? And it's so very warm this year."

"Oh, is it unusually warm? I haven't felt the heat at all this summer."

"But it does grow tiresome waiting, I'll bet."

Dot smiled. "No, I've been so busy, I haven't noticed the time at all." She sat down and continued to smile. "When did you get back from Atlantic City?"

"Yesterday. I saw Sue last night. Before I saw her I thought I'd be going to the sanitarium today to see you. What does your doctor think? Are you coming on all right?"

"Oh, fine. I have a very good doctor, you know. I wanted some one who was very good. My friend, Mrs. Driggs, lost her husband just before her baby was born, and she was so weak and ill from shock that she had to have a good doctor to see her through; so she got this Dr. Stewart, and I have him, too."

"That's nice," said Maude.

The muscles of Dot's face were beginning to ache from overwork, but she was afraid to let her face drop into repose. She knew that she looked tired, pained, and a good six years older than her right.

They talked for an hour. Dot prepared some lemonade for Maude. She showed her the other rooms of the apartment. She displayed the baby's wardrobe. She smiled.

Maude went, feeling that Dot was even dumber than she and Ted had ever dreamed. "A typical peasant," thought Maude. "Too damn simple to feel uncomfortable."

When Maude slammed the big door downstairs, Dot went to her room and with a tiny groan collapsed on the bed. If her baby hurt her, nobody should know about it. Not now when he was still unborn, or not later when he was a man who laughed at her advice. Nobody should ever know when her baby hurt her—least of all Maude. But it wasn't really the baby, it was the scheme to hasten his arrival which hurt. It hurt, and she had had to entertain Maude.

Isn't there anybody up there who looks after the comfort of pregnant women, God? Couldn't somebody give, say, an hour a day to mapping out a few hours of calm for them? They are so at the mercy of chance visitors, of climate, of financial conditions. Couldn't it be arranged, God, please?

Eddie came in carrying dinner. Ham, eggs, potato chips, baked beans, bread, and two cherry tarts. Dot felt too wretched to stand at the stove frying the ham and eggs. The sight of her warm, unhappy face and the dejection with which her eyes were filled, caused Eddie himself to doubt that he wanted dinner. But maybe she would eat something.

He prepared the dinner. He had never heard of parboiling; so the ham proved too salty to be enjoyed by the most ravenous of mortals. The yolk of each and every egg had scattered into a wide, jagged splotch of hot gold. The potato chips were soggy. The beans had scorched. Dot nibbled obligingly at everything. She consumed half a cherry tart and drank a glass of iced coffee.

A sudden flush of heat, not traceable to the temperature of the room, sent her to the sofa away from the meal that had been prepared with so much love and so little skill. She felt that she must die of the heat that had not been content to fire at her from the roof and the windows but had crept inside of her. The blood pounded at her temples, sang in her ears. She laid her hands on her forehead, but they were hot. Hot and damp.

"What's the matter, Dot?"

"Oh, I'm sick. I'm sick. This heat! Oh, it's terrible!"

Eddie leaped from his chair. "Ought I get the doctor?"

"No, I'm all right. I'm just warm. Just awful warm."

Eddie stood looking down at her. He felt stupid, useless. Would she know if it were time to get the doctor? Ought he just send for him and not bother whether it was time or not?

"Eddie, will you crack some ice for my head?"

He rushed to the kitchen and rummaged in the drawer for the ice pick. Too damn dumb to have thought of that himself. She had had to think of it. Poor kid, lying there sick, and she had to tell him when something was needed.

He returned with the ice wrapped in a towel and laid it on her head. She closed her eyes and lay very quiet and white for more than ten minutes. He thought she was asleep, but when he began to tiptoe away from her she opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Eddie, I'm afraid I'm an awful nuisance," she said.

Holy smoke, a nuisance! A strange sensation swept over Eddie. His eyes stung, and it suddenly became very hard to swallow. She had said it in such a small, wistful voice, had said it so honestly, so simply. She had not been fishing for extravagant reassurance. She had meant it. She was afraid she was an awful nuisance. And he, big clumsy fool, couldn't say a God-damned word of comfort. He could only walk quickly to the ice box, slam the butter in, and reply, "Yeh? That's too bad."

Dot didn't bathe at bedtime. She was afraid of disturbing Dr. Stewart's elaborate plan. She leaned weakly against the basin and sponged herself and got into bed.

Eddie read a story to her out of a magazine. But Dot preferred to read to herself. When Eddie read you couldn't tell whether the people in the story were saying things pleasantly or angrily. You could kind of judge for yourself if you were reading it.

Dr. Stewart's visit was made before noon next day. He passed no comment on any discovery he might have made, and Dot was afraid to question. He removed his work of the previous day and smiled at Dot pleasantly.

"Pretty warm today," he remarked.

"Don't speak of it," Dot said. "I'm nearly dead with it."

"Oh, Mrs. Collins, by the way," said Dr. Stewart as he was leaving, "how far does Mr. Collins have to go to get to a phone?"

"There's a drug store on the corner across the street," said Dot.

Dr. Stewart looked worried. "Suppose the store is closed?" he said. "Suppose it's three A.M.?"

Dot smiled comfortingly. "Eddie will wake every family in this house till he finds one that has a phone," she answered.

Dr. Stewart laughed and picked up his bag. "Well, good-by, Mrs. Collins. Don't worry. You'll get there."

Edna missed the doctor by five minutes. She ran up the stairs and rang the bell like a person who is sure she has come too late.

She looked at Dot unbelievingly. "Oh," she laughed a little in her relief, "I had the funniest dream last night."

"What did you dream?" asked Dot.

"Why—I dreamed that—that you weren't pregnant at all; so I had to get here early to reassure myself."

Dot said nothing. She knew that this was not what Edna had dreamed.

Edna stayed all day and signified her intention of remaining for dinner. She seemed loath to leave Dot alone, and Dot said nothing to discourage her staying. For Edna was not Maude, and it was nice to have company.

"I left Floyd with Mrs. Turner," said Edna. "She'll feed him and let him play with her kids."

Dot looked thoughtfully out the window. "You know," she said, "I'd like to go for a little walk."

Edna was dismayed. "Oh, Dot, in this heat?"

"But, Edna, I haven't looked in any store windows or nothing for ages, and I feel so good in comparison to what I felt yesterday."

They locked the little apartment, and Dot began the arduous descent of the stairs. She still wore her cape, and beneath it a black crêpe dress which Edna had given her. She felt happy at being out in the street again, although the pavements steamed and the sun shone with cruel persistence.

They walked the half block to Dyckman Street. "Let's walk straight up to Broadway, then around Two Hundred and Seventh, and then back home," Dot suggested.

"You don't want to overdo it," said Edna.

Dot had her walk. She shopped for dinner things and telephoned Eddie not to make his usual purchases at the grocer's.

"What are you doing out?" he asked.

"Edna's with me. I feel fine."

Edna elected to prepare dinner. There were lamb chops, mashed potatoes, corn on the cob, lettuce and tomato salad, jelly roll, and iced tea.

Dot ate a meal that would have satisfied two men. Edna had taken pains to have everything look dainty and appetizing. Eddie ate a meal that satisfied one man very thoroughly, and he thanked Edna for her trouble by not saying anything unpleasant to her.

Edna and Eddie cleared up the dishes. Dot sat on the sofa reading the newspaper and looking happier than she had in days.

It was a little before seven that Sue and Pat ran in for their well-known few minutes' stay.

"We just dropped in," said Sue, laughing heartily at her own humor, "to see if you and Eddie wanted to go to Poppyland with us tonight."

"No, we can't go," said Dot. "But you folks run along before the crowd gets in."

Pat and Sue sat down. It seemed that that was only one of the jokes they had in mind to spring on Dot apropos of her condition.

It was after nine o'clock when Edna arose purposefully from her chair. "Dot's got to go to bed," she said. "Come on, Macys, let the child get her sleep."

Edna got her hat and stood near Sue, waiting for her. Sue had no choice in the matter. She grabbed Pat's arm and said, "Come on."

The three visitors went to the door. "I'll be up in the morning," said Edna. "Good night, dear."

She kissed Dot and circumvented Sue's usual lengthy leave-taking by pulling at her sash. It was one of those sashes that couldn't bear pulling, and Edna knew that Sue would take this into consideration.

They all went down the stairs. Eddie and Dot watched them from the window as they left the building. They rounded the left corner of the house and disappeared from sight.

Dot took herself away from the window, and as she did so, she uttered a little scream, not of pain but of excitement.

"Eddie, Eddie, it's starting!"

He picked her up and carried her to the bed.

"I'll phone," he said. But she didn't hear him, he was already down one flight of stairs.

CHAPTER XVIII

Dot lay on her bed waiting for Eddie to return from the drug store. Why was it taking him so long? Surely the telephone booths all being in use would not have detained him. He would have no compunctions about jumping on somebody and hustling him out of the booth. Perhaps Dr. Stewart's line had been busy. Perhaps Eddie had forgotten the number he had so painfully memorized and had had to stop to search for it. Perhaps by some devilish chance Dr. Stewart's line had been out of order, and Eddie was trying to find a person close enough to the doctor's house to carry a message. Perhaps ... Dot looked at the Big Ben on the chair beside her. Eddie had been gone less than three minutes.

Well, now it had started. Soon it would be over. She would have her baby. She did not think of death now. She was too excited. She did not even think of the pain ahead of her. She thought of Edna's amazement when the bell should receive no answer in the morning. She thought of Eddie's frightened face. She would try to reassure him, try to make him understand that she felt fine and very gay. It was a little like having taken too much to drink. Only that way could this wild, careless sense of excitement be equaled, and then just artificially.

There was no pain yet. No pain yet. But the baby was coming. The membrane had ruptured.

Eddie came back from the drug store. He was very pale, and his sandy hair stood up straight on his head.

"He says he'll be right up," Eddie gasped. "But, God, all the way from Long Island! How do you feel, Kid?"

Dot laughed into his terrified face. She felt lightheaded, giddy. "I feel fine," she said.

Eddie moved aimlessly about the room. All the way from Long Island, and nothing to do but wait. If only he had caught Edna—but, hell, what did he want Edna for? He needed Dr. Stewart, that's who he needed.

Presently Dot began to sing. Eddie looked at her in astonishment. Delirious? The expression on her face comforted him. She was smiling at him bravely.

> "Hurrah, hurrah, we'll sing the jubilee,
> Hurrah, hurrah, the flag that sets you free,
> So we'll sing the chorus—

"I expect you think I'm crazy, Eddie."

He shook his head, but he looked at her perplexedly. She couldn't explain why she sang. Not wholly. Partly a desire to hearten him. Partly the excitement that demanded an outlet. Partly sheer bravado.

His gaze did not leave her face. She looked so incongruously pretty as she lay there with her ordeal almost upon her. Her cheeks were so glowingly pink, her mouth so red and young. There was a healthy sparkle in her eyes as though it were none of their affair what went on in the rest of Dot's body. Singing in the face of danger, laughing because he looked afraid.

> "Bring the good old bugle, boys—"

Dot marching to battle with her eyes a-sparkle and a song on her lips.

"Oh, Eddie, do you remember this?

> "It ain't gonna rain no more, no more,
> It ain't gonna rain no more—"

Yes, Eddie remembered it. He remembered the girl who had worn a flame-colored sweater and who had sung in a young and husky voice. He hated her to sing that song right now. It was a ghost come to haunt him, to torture him with questions. Does she still wear gay sweaters? Does she still worry over nothing but the pitch of her ukulele? Is she still happy? Does she—

Eddie went into the bathroom. He had to be alone for a minute. He walked over to the narrow frosted window and threw it open. He looked up at the warm, star-splashed sky. There were a lot of things he wanted to say, but there was nothing that could be worded. How could you say something without putting it into words? Eddie slammed the window shut. He looked up at the ceiling and said, "God, don't let her die." It was the best he could do. And it wasn't a real prayer, he told himself, not a real prayer.

Dot was lying just as he had left her.

"Want anything?" he asked.

She shook her head and smiled. No, there was nothing she wanted now. Soon the baby would be here. She did not notice whether he was lively or still. She wondered about the sanitarium. How would she get there and when?

Eddie wandered around looking for a match. He passed three packages of matches without noticing them and finally went to light his cigarette on the gas-stove pilot.

Dot felt a little pain. It was so slight that she would not have noticed it under ordinary circumstances. But now—well, there it was. A little pain. It would gather force and frequency. It would grow harder to bear, still harder, and finally when it could be borne no longer, the baby would rush forth and it would be all over. But now the pain had gone.

The time passed slowly. Dot had another pain. It, too, was slight. She worried for the slightness of it. Was it possible that after all she was not going to have her baby right away?

The bell rang. Dr. Stewart! He had hurried from Long Island to Inwood, breaking traffic rules without thought or care. To Eddie, it seemed the doctor had walked the distance, so endless had the wait been to him. Dot smiled at Dr. Stewart. Her mind was clearer than Eddie's, less worried. She knew how quickly the trip had been made.

Dr. Stewart took off his hat and coat and set his bag on a chair. He examined Dot briefly.

"Pain?"

"A little, very little."

"Got one now?"

"No. Just got rid of one."

Dr. Stewart pulled out his watch and seated himself in the yellow chair beside the bed.

"Tell me when you get another," he said.

Dot smiled and nodded. Eddie looked at Dr. Stewart, trying to learn something from his expression. He had met the doctor once before and had been impressed by his quiet, unexcited manner of going about things.

There was silence in the room for many minutes. Then Dot said, "I have a pain."

"Good," said Dr. Stewart, heartily. "Tell me when it goes away."

He kept his eyes fixed on his watch.

"It's gone," said Dot.

"Tell me when you get another."

An hour passed. Eddie calmed down. The doctor seemed to know his business. Dot had four pains, all of which Dr. Stewart timed.

"I have to get a new radio set," said Dr. Stewart. "Who's making the good ones now, Mr. Collins?"

Eddie looked at him uncertainly. Was he in earnest? Was this a time for shop talk?

"Well," he said at length, "there's the five-tube—"

"I have another pain," said Dot.

The doctor held a respectful silence until the pain had winged its inconsequential way out of the scene.

"Yes, I want five tubes," he said. "Which is the best buy?"

At eleven-thirty, Dr. Stewart put his watch away and got to his feet. "Well," he said, "I guess we'll all take a little ride down to the sanitarium."

Dot scrambled off the bed and ran to her closet. Her cape, her hat. There was her bag in the little alley between the vanity table and the wall. Eddie must take that. It was all packed. She was ready now. Dr. Stewart went downstairs ahead of Eddie and Dot. Eddie got his hat and took Dot's hand.

"Ready?" he asked.

Then all of a sudden she wasn't ready any more. A moment ago she had been, but now she was not ready to leave the little apartment where she had dreamed and suffered and worked. It was not easy now to walk, but she went to the little kitchen and looked at it as it lay in the dark with its little gas stove shining blackly, its canisters glimmering in the moonlight and the precious oilcloth which had been shellacked. She shut the swinging door that had so delighted her. It was hard to look at the little kitchen now. It was wholesome and sweet and innocent. It was not fair to burden it with the knowledge that there was pain and suffering in the world.

She stood for one sad, despairing minute in the living-room. There were the curtains she had made, the radio set that had brought her the Democratic Convention. These things knew her, and she had to leave them. She had to go away.

"Ready, Kid?"

Eddie came into the living-room and put his arm around her.

"Yes, I'm ready."

They walked down the stairs very slowly. Eddie's arm remained about her shoulders. He helped her into Dr. Stewart's car and took the seat beside her.

The ride began. It was not a silent ride. The mad impulse that had prompted Dot to sing now made her talkative, and Dr. Stewart was ready to keep conversation alive.

"Mrs. Driggs told me about the time you took her to the hospital, Doctor. She said she thought she was going to have a broken skull by the time she got there."

Dr. Stewart laughed. "There was certainly cause for rush that time," he remarked.

Dot had many comments to make on the car, the weather, the sanitarium, her pains, though the pains were still slight.

"How soon do you think the baby will be born?" she asked.

"Tonight when I went home for dinner," replied Dr. Stewart, "I met a friend of mine—a doctor who lives next door to me—who had been sitting with a woman nine hours waiting for the baby. That's the best answer I can give you."

"Oh," said Dot.

As the car passed into the Black Belt she remarked about the colored women who stood outside a store where a bargain sale was in progress.

Eddie looked at her curiously. Was this wonderful courage, or was she so uninterested in the baby that even his arrival didn't excite her? He failed to notice the sly glances she gave him, searching his face for a sign that her detachment was making him brave.

At the sanitarium, Dr. Stewart led the way. An aged gray-haired individual with a sad, drooping mustache sat at the switchboard.

"This is Mrs. Collins," said Dr. Stewart. "She has a reservation."

"Oh, yes, we expected her sooner," said the old man. "Her name has been coming up every night for weeks."

Dr. Stewart walked over to Dot. "Go right on upstairs," he said. "The nurse is there."

Dot turned to the stairs and then stopped. This would be different from her bedroom at home. She and Eddie and Dr. Stewart were not going to loll about and exchange pleasantries. She fled back to Eddie and threw her arms around him.

"I guess I won't see you again," she said.

She had meant not till after the ordeal was over, but her words struck a chilling note. Eddie held her tightly and kissed her. Dr. Stewart thoughtfully examined the band on his hat.

Eddie watched Dot climb the stairs, holding tightly to the rail. A nurse had come down to meet her. He saw her disappear with the nurse around the bend on the landing. She was gone now. When he saw her again she would have been delivered of the baby, she would be past her crisis, or she would be—

"There's a little room back there," said the old man, "where you can sit down if you're going to wait."

"Thanks," said Eddie. For the first time he noticed that Dr. Stewart was not with him any more, and he remembered that the doctor had followed Dot. He walked to the little room designated and began his wait downstairs.

Dr. Stewart followed Dot and the nurse into the large room with its four beds. Only two of them were occupied, and the women were soundly sleeping.

"Which bed do you want?" whispered the nurse. "The one near the window or the one near the door?"

"The one near the window," answered Dot.

The nurse took her cape and her hat. Dot recognized her now as the pretty, brown-eyed nurse who had smiled at her the day she had made her reservation. She began to help Dot out of her dress, and Dr. Stewart withdrew. Another nurse appeared with a basin of water and a glass jar holding a green liquid. The two nurses made the bed with rapid quietness. Dot's bag was unpacked. She was helped into a nightgown and kimono.

Dr. Stewart returned. In his hand he held a string of tiny blue beads that would have made a bracelet for Dot.

"This goes around the baby's neck," he explained. "It is clamped on, you see, and not unfastened until you reach home. It is so that the babies have no possible way of getting mixed."

For the first time Dot noticed that seven of the beads were white and that each bore in black print a letter of the name "Collins."

"That's very nice," she said, absently. The pains were beginning to make her thoughtful.

Dr. Stewart disappeared. The nurses loomed whitely out of the darkness. It reminded Dot rather of a moving-picture where a certain character fades out and another appears. Noiselessly they erected a little white screen around her bed. A little brass lamp was switched on. The light fell on the bed and did not spread beyond the screen.

"Will you lie down?" The brown-eyed nurse was Miss Harris. She had a soft, soothing voice.

There were apparently a great many things they had to do to her. They moved about busily, preparing her for the operating table. There was enmity between the two nurses, obvious even to Dot, who was not in a particularly observant mood. Miss Brown was a coarse, heavy-handed girl with a rough voice, whose manner, acquired in a charity ward, grated on Miss Harris. She could not even prepare an enema to satisfy Miss Harris, and Dot lay quietly waiting for them to reach a decision on how much water was necessary.

At last they had finished with her. She lay on the bed waiting for something else to happen. Nothing did.

Miss Harris removed the screen, and Dot asked, “Where’s my doctor?”

“He’s gone to bed,” replied Miss Harris.

“To bed!”

“Yes. He’s asleep in a room down the hall. We’ll call him when you need him. Shall I turn out your light?”

“Oh, no,” said Dot, fearfully.

“Have you any pain?”

“Yes—I have.”

“Is it very severe?”

“No, not terribly. It hurts though.”

Miss Harris unstrapped her watch and handed it to Dot. “Here,” she said, “you can time your pains. I’ll put the bell close to you, and you must ring for me when the pains get five minutes apart.”

Dot took the watch and thanked her. Miss Harris disappeared, and Dot sighed. It occurred to her that now again there was nothing to do but wait. She lifted herself on one elbow and looked out the window. The house directly behind the sanitarium was occupied by negroes. Festive negroes. There was a party in progress. A piano, a cornet, and drums were making the “St. Louis Blues” very blue indeed. The shades of their windows were drawn. Dot could only see the silhouette of two figures melted into one as a couple, in beautiful rhythm to the music, wiggled by.

A pain caught Dot unawares. The worst pain she had had so far. She fell back on the pillow and waited for it to pass. The “St. Louis Blues” beat and throbbed upon her brain. The music stopped. The pain stopped. A sudden burst of applause made Dot laugh. It was as though an audience were approving her successful effort not to let an eager groan pass her lips.

She looked at the watch. There was probably lots of time before the next seizure. She raised herself again and looked across the yard to the house where the negroes laughed and danced and “took the cash and let the credit go.”

The orchestra had been plentifully encouraged. They took up their instruments again. They played "That Red-Haired Gal." It hadn't mattered so much with the blues that the cornet was out of tune. But it sounded terrible now. The flat, tinny notes jangled against the hot, breathless night and irritated Dot.

And there was another pain. Fifteen minutes apart. No excuse to call for Miss Harris, but she would have liked company.

Time passed with a strange, incredible swiftness. The pains grew stronger. It became impossible to lie still. Impossible to sit up. The figures on Miss Harris' watch were white, and the face was black. The figures misbehaved. They congregated in the center of the watch and danced around in wild abandon. She couldn't time her pains nor tell how late it was. She thought she was crying, she wasn't quite certain. A cramp, Mrs. Cudahy had said. A cramp! Had Mrs. Cudahy ever really borne a child? Perhaps Sue was adopted. Pain that made you writhe, made you run your fingers through your hair, made you drip with perspiration, and finally made you ring the bell for Miss Harris.

She came, cool and faithful. "What is it, dear?"

"Oh, I'm in such awful pain," Dot gasped.

Miss Harris pulled Dot's nightgown up and made a brief examination. She captured one of Dot's wildly waving hands and held it till Dot drew it away with a sudden frenzied tug.

"You've been a dear little girl," she said. "You haven't uttered a sound. Now, go on being brave, for it's going to be a long while yet."

Her eyes were soft and sympathetic, but Dot hated her that minute. Couldn't she do anything? Did she have to stand there being so professionally kind?

Miss Harris took herself back into the shadows. Dot heard her talking in a low voice outside the door.

"Oh, hello, Bill. Did they get you up?"

A young man's voice answered her. It was less considerate of the sleeping patients than Miss Harris'. "Yes," it boomed. "The operating-room needed a polishing, so I got woke. What's it gonna be, Miss Harris, boy or girl?"

Miss Harris' whispered laughter came through the darkness to Dot. "I don't think I'll bet with you this time, Bill. You're too lucky."

"Aw, go ahead."

"All right. Three dollars it's a girl."

"Fine. I'll say a boy. And what time will it be born?"

"Another two dollars that it doesn't come before dawn," said Miss Harris.

Dot looked at the sky. The stars and the moon seemed to be permanently fixed. There was not the slightest sign of their rushing away from the rosy streaks of morning. It was two o'clock, perhaps. Maybe only one. Dawn. Dawn. Oh, she couldn't wait. She rolled on her side and sank her teeth into her forearm. This was childbirth.

She rang the bell for Miss Harris. "I can't stand it," she cried. "I can't stand it."

Miss Harris smiled slowly. "You must, Mrs. Collins. You can't stand it, but you must."

"I can't." Dot rolled on her bed. There was not the slightest degree of comfort any way she might turn. The pain had slowly spread to her back. Indeed it was most intense there.

"I'll look at you again," said Miss Harris.

Dot could barely lie still long enough for the glance Miss Harris took.

Miss Harris departed and returned with Miss Brown. Together they examined Dot.

"I think you ought to wake her doctor," said Miss Brown.

"Well," said Miss Harris, "you know she's an awful lot more comfortable here than she'll be if she has to lie an hour on the delivery table."

"She won't lie an hour," said Miss Brown.

"I don't know," said Miss Harris. "The doctors get mad if you wake them too soon."

"They get mad if they haven't time to prepare properly, too," the other nurse reminded her.

In the end Miss Harris went to call Dr. Stewart, and Dot was glad. It seemed important to her that she get to the operating-table. Surely it would be over soon if they would take her to the delivery room.

Miss Brown got her out of bed. She put the bedroom slippers on Dot's feet and fastened a strong arm under her. The descent to the delivery room had to be made between pains. It was impossible to move in the middle of one. On the sixth step, Dot stuck the back of her hand in her mouth and bit till Miss Brown ordered her sharply to stop. She wanted to sit down, but the nurse wouldn't let her.

"You aren't noisy," said Miss Brown, "but you think of lots of other ways to be a nuisance." She was smiling when she said it and meant no harm, but it would have made no difference to Dot had she scowled and sworn.

In the operating-room, Dot's kimono, slippers, and nightgown were taken from her. She was bundled into a shroudlike garment of linen or canvas. Stockings of the same material were drawn over her legs, and she was hoisted to the table.

There was another nurse in the operating-room, a new one presumably, for the Misses Harris and Brown hustled her about ruthlessly.

A small brown-haired girl without a cap on her head abruptly rushed into the room. She was buttoning her uniform. "What is it?" she said to Miss Brown.

"Nothing. What are you doing here? Just a straight delivery. We don't need you."

"Heavens! The old man rang my phone and got me out of bed. I thought you were having two Caesarians and quadruplets up here."

"Might as well stay as long as you're here," remarked Miss Harris.

The girl with the brown hair walked over to Dot and smiled. "How are you?"

"In pain," Dot responded and managed to smile.

"A brave little girl, Miss Lambert," said Miss Harris. "There hasn't been a whimper out of her."

"Now you have something to live up to," Miss Lambert said.

Dr. Stewart came into the operating-room. His sleeves were rolled up past his elbows, and he wore a rubber apron. His face was white and pasty-looking. Perhaps he wasn't well, Dot thought, or maybe it was because he had been awakened in the middle of the night.

With his entrance, the nurses were galvanized into action. Miss Brown ran to the sterilizer with a handful of glittering instruments. Miss Harris fussed with a huge, hot light that threw a burning white glare on the table. The new nurse hurried in feverish dismay about the room, looking for something important to do. Miss Lambert talked to Dr. Stewart in low, swift tones. Dot caught the word "anesthetic." She hadn't wanted anesthetic, had vowed she wouldn't take it. Now she longed for it, prayed for it.

"How are your pains now?" asked Dr. Stewart, gazing gravely down at her. "Are you hardly getting rid of one when another comes?"

Dot nodded miserably. Miss Brown raised Dot's feet and placed them in little stirrups that hung above the table. The position was a torture. She could no longer roll about in her pains, she could only wriggle and squirm and slip off the padded place in the center of the table where she was supposed to lie.

Miss Lambert and Miss Harris took places on either side of her. Miss Lambert gave her hand to Dot. It was a small hand. A hand that had gone again and again into the bottomless pit of agony to offer comfort. Dot clutched it with insane strength. She dug her nails into it, scratched it, squeezed it, and tugged at it until it seemed that the little hand must leave its wrist. It was a fighting hand. It, too, tugged, and Dot drew solace from its strength. It was warm and sympathetic.

She looked at Miss Lambert's face. It was a young face, a face surrounded with a gay little flare of silky hair.

"Oh, you don't know—You don't know what I'm going through," Dot breathed.

Miss Lambert made no answer. Her eyes were soft and looked as though they could weep for Dot's pain.

"Yes, you know, I guess," said Dot. "But it's terrible—oh, it's terrible."

The great light beat down on her ceaselessly. A white laugh.

"Oh, the heat, the heat," Dot cried. She was weltering in perspiration. She tossed her head in her torture, clutched Miss Harris' white collar, and sought to tear it from its moorings.

"You must lie quiet," Miss Harris whispered.

"Oh, I can't—I can't." A pain sharp as a blade caught her in the back. It was like a sudden burst of flame that illuminates what it destroys. The room did not blur before Dot's vision. Instead there was a sharp clarity in her gaze. She noticed a stain on Miss Lambert's sleeve, the sunburn on Dr. Stewart's forehead. A cabinet with glass shelves upon which lay a chilling glitter of instruments was for the first time noticed. The cabinet seemed to cover the whole wall. A monster with sharp, silver teeth. The pain bore down upon her, pressed the breath out of her. Her body trembled with agony.

"Oh, Jesus Christ!"

She gazed timidly at Dr. Stewart and Miss Lambert. It had not been a prayer. It had been profanity.

"Pardon me," she said.

But still they did not notice.

"When you get another pain," said Dr. Stewart, "you must bear down upon it. Push."

Dot nodded. She had to do it, had to obey, but it doubled the pain, trebled it.

"I can't—I can't."

"You must, dear," Miss Lambert said. "You will have it over sooner if you do."

Dot bore down upon the pains. With tears and perspiration running down her cheeks, she pressed against the enemy. Knives which she must again and again hurl herself upon. The nurses were not with her any more. They had scattered to other parts of the room. They seemed now to be devils heightening her torture. They ran about fussing over instruments, nickel cauldrons, basins, and lights. Boiling, scraping, sharpening, burning, whispering between themselves.

Only Dr. Stewart was near, bending over her. Strong, silent, and patient. Once he smiled at her. A pain had closed in blackly upon her. She had to smile back at him. It would be failing him if she did not smile.

He knew she was in pain. He knew. He understood.

The nurses returned. The pains increased. Dot closed her eyes and prayed for ether or for a merciful, obliterating fainting spell. Dr. Stewart turned and rapped out an order for anesthetic. Miss Lambert leaped forward.

Dr. Stewart's eyes returned to Dot, and a loud cry escaped her lips. At the same moment Dr. Stewart said, "Here's your baby!"

She saw it arrive. Imagination perhaps. Fantastic certainly. The baby jumped into Dr. Stewart's hands, its little arms and legs crooked, its head erect and certain of direction. An easy jump. The jump of a frog. Light, fast, and accurate. A frog. The baby had jumped like a frog.

"What is it, Dr. Stewart?" This from Miss Harris, who had three dollars at stake.

"It's a little boy," said Dr. Stewart and he held it upside down as he handed it to the aimless young nurse who had at last something to do.

"Is it whole?" asked Dot. "Is my baby whole, Doctor?"

"He's a fine young man, Mrs. Collins. Now, get ready for another pain."

It came. The pain of afterbirth.

"She'll need two stitches, I guess."

"Here, drink this."

"He weighs six pounds."

"You were a brave one all right."

"You helped fine."

"Get Bill."

"I lost three dollars."

"A fine boy, Mrs. Collins."

Dot turned her face to Miss Lambert and whimpered weakly, "Do I have to *walk* upstairs?"

Miss Lambert smiled. “No, honey, the boy is getting the stretcher ready.”

Eddie walked into the room. The nurses stared at him.

“The man at the switchboard sent me up,” he explained, rapidly. “He asked me to carry his half of the stretcher. He says his rheumatism is too bad tonight.”

He rushed to Dot, but the nurses surrounded him, and he and Dot simply exchanged a smile.

It was cold now. Freezing cold. They bundled her in blankets. Her teeth chattered. Her head ached. It was cold, cold.

The darkness. Her bed. Eddie’s kiss.

“What time is it?” she said, weakly.

“A little after four. Good night, Dot.”

“Good night, sweetheart.”

Sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

At eight o'clock Dot was awake. She reached over to the table where her pocketbook lay. Powder, rouge, and lipstick in quick succession. You couldn't tell, she might get a visitor even at this hour. She ran the comb through her hair swiftly. Pretty good now. Let the world come!

The woman on the next bed stared at her. "Have a bad time?" she asked.

Dot's brows wrinkled thoughtfully. "Not bad," she said. "Of course it hurts, but it ain't what it's supposed to be. Gee, I thought it'd be hell. No, it ain't bad. It's kind of—kind of like a cramp!"

CHAPTER XX

It was very nice in the sanitarium. The day nurse was Miss Parsons. She had hair that was like straw, both in color and texture. She pretended to be greatly annoyed by requests and scolded with mock severity when extra trouble was made for her. She was really very obliging. Her father had a comfortable amount of money; so she did not need her position and often flouted rules to make a patient she fancied more comfortable.

It was Miss Parsons who came over to Dot's bed on that first morning and said, "How would you like to get your face washed?"

"I'd like to," said Dot. "I only put this make-up on in case my husband came."

"If he did," said Miss Parsons, "he'd cool his heels downstairs until you were properly fixed. How do you feel?"

"Fine," said Dot. Her head was splitting with a sickening ache that reached from her eyebrows to the back of her neck, but it was scarcely noticed in the excitement of being in a strange place and of having had a baby.

Miss Parsons brought a basin of water. She rummaged among Dot's effects and found the toilet articles. Dot wanted to wash her own face, but Miss Parsons was a strong-willed woman. Dot wondered how Miss Parsons could brush another person's teeth. She couldn't, it appeared. Dot was permitted to do that for herself. Miss Parsons attended to a few other matters of pressing import and turned to the patient in the next bed.

"That's only a once-over," she said to Dot. "You'll get your real cleaning later."

Bill came in with Dot's breakfast tray. A spoonful of Wheatena, a cup of weak coffee, and a slice of toast.

"Gee," said Dot, "what's the matter? Food scarce?"

"Wait till you see what the other ladies get," said Bill. "You're being treated mean just because you have the youngest baby."

Dot ate her breakfast, finding it difficult to manage in the reclining position upon which Miss Parsons insisted.

The two other patients had boards in back of them to bolster them up. But they had not been delivered of their children as recently as Dot.

The woman in the next bed was going to be allowed to sit in a chair that afternoon. The other woman had a baby six days old. Dot looked at the woman interestedly. The one to whom the privilege of sitting up was about to be given was a Jewess of nineteen or twenty. She had very black, very curly hair and shining brown eyes. Her nightgown sagged from the weight of lace upon it.

Across from her was the mother of the six-day-old son. She had a jagged mop of blazing, red-gold hair and very full red lips that curved in a pleasing smile. Dot did not know why, but the woman with the red-gold hair reminded her of the girl in the bright blue slicker who had admitted her to Eddie's rooming-house on that rainy night ten months before. Silly, of course, but the impression persisted.

The nurse came in with a baby in her arms. She walked to Dot's bed with it. "Isn't this a cute one?" she asked.

"Awfully cute," said Dot.

The Jewess smiled graciously at the applause and lifted her arms for the baby.

Miss Parsons left the baby with the mother and went out to fetch another.

"This one has dimples," said Miss Parsons, returning.

Dot admired it until it was claimed by the bright-haired woman.

"This one's a lamb." Miss Parsons had another baby now.

"Yes," said Dot, gazing at it obligingly.

"He has such tiny hands," said Miss Parsons.

She made no move to take the baby away, and it suddenly dawned upon Dot that this was her baby. She put up her hands to take him, but Miss Parsons waved them away and laid the baby gently at Dot's side.

Dot looked at him. Oh, such a red little face, such a tiny, tiny little mouth, such a perky little nose, and the golden down on his little pink scalp. His eyelids opened just the tiniest bit, and she saw how blue his eyes were. He had tiny hands indeed, and beautifully shaped little nails. Alas, she could see no more of him, for he was blanketed and pinned beyond hope of even the smallest glimpse. She was almost afraid to touch him; he seemed so fragile and breakable.

"Say," Miss Parsons' voice cut in on the exploration, "what are you going to do? Play with the baby all morning? Aren't you going to feed him?"

"Feed him!" echoed Dot.

"Certainly. Do you think he lives on air?"

Dot looked around. The other babies were placidly nursing at their mothers' breasts.

Dot quickly untied the ribbon on her nightgown. Miss Parsons hurried over and applied boric acid to the breast for the baby's safety. It was by this that Dot knew that Miss Parsons had been teasing her. She would have been made to wait for the boric acid had she attempted to feed her baby any sooner.

He wouldn't nurse. Blindly his little hands groped against her breast and pushed. His head wobbled and rocked with objections.

"He won't eat," said Dot.

"That's all right," said Miss Parsons. "You haven't anything to feed him. We're just trying to get you two used to each other."

The babies were collected again after twenty minutes. There was nothing to do now but lie blissfully still and think about the baby. It was cool in the room. Cool and very white and clean. No flies got through the careful screening, and the dark neighbors of the sanitarium were very quiet.

Dot cast an interested glance along the lines of her figure. Her stomach was flat! They had bound her tightly, and her hand roved lovingly over the place where had been the precious but uncomfortable lump. It didn't feel perfectly normal, of course; there was a little pain now and again, and her body protested if she tried to move, but that was nothing. Nothing. She had her baby.

She wondered what Eddie was doing. He would probably not be able to see her till evening. What would he think of the baby? It was so sweet, so pathetically tiny and defenseless. How could he help but love it? The best thing, however, was to go slow, see how he felt about it first before going into any ecstasies. If he still didn't like the baby, any enthusiasm she showed would probably alienate him still further.

No visitors came all morning. Dot and the other women held a desultory conversation. The topic was, of course, childbirth. The Jewess was the main speaker. The other woman preferred a book to conversation, but Dot regretted that she wasn't permitted more opportunity to air her experience.

The Jewess had a sister-in-law who had had eleven abortions. Dot was promised a glimpse of her; she was coming to visit that very evening. Dot would know her by the big diamond she wore. Her husband, the brother of Dot's informant, was very good to her. They had an apartment on Riverside Drive. How much was Dot's doctor charging? What was she going to name her baby? The Jewess, who had now revealed herself as Mrs. Lensky, was going to name her daughter Shirley out of respect to the departed mother-in-law whose name had been Sarah.

Around eleven o'clock the phone rang. There was a telephone outlet on either side of the room into which the instrument could be plugged.

Miss Parsons now attached it on Dot's side and handed her the phone.

It was Eddie.

"Hello, Kid, how are you?"

"Fine. Are you at work?"

"Yes. I was dead for sleep, Dot, and I got up late and had to rush right to the shop."

"That's all right. There's nothing to worry about. I'm fine."

"Listen, I'm going to get off an hour early and come right up."

"What about your supper?"

"Oh, I can get that any time. I'll be there as soon as I can make it. 'Bye."

Dot hung up the receiver. Not a word about the baby! Oh, but he'd have to care for it when he saw those blue eyes and tiny hands. Dot thought the baby looked like Eddie already.

The next time the phone rang it was for Dot again.

Edna this time.

"Hello, there. How are you?"

"Fine."

"Have you had the baby yet?"

"Sure. A little boy."

"That's wonderful. I just came from your house. I figured that since you weren't there, you must have made a trip to the sanitarium. What time did it happen?"

Dot gave Edna all the details. After twenty minutes of conversation, Edna announced her intention of coming up and straightway did so.

She came, bringing a little wicker cradle full of blue flowers. She kissed Dot and asked, "Well, how was it, Kid? Not bad, eh?"

"No," replied Dot, "not bad." And she believed it.

Luncheon arrived via Bill. There was soup for Dot and crackers.

The babies would be fed again at one o'clock. Edna simply had to wait to see the baby.

Edna waited. The babies were brought in.

"Oh, Dot, he's grand," Edna said. "He has a beautifully shaped head."

Dot hadn't thought of it that way before. Now she took to delighting in the shape of his head.

"Look at his hands, Edna. Aren't his hands too cute?"

Edna kissed his hands. "Just see his eyes, Dot. Blue as anything."

"Yes, aren't they blue? I love his little mouth best, I think."

"Wait till you see his feet, Dot. There's nothing in the world cuter than babies' toes."

"His fingers have such tiny nails."

"They look as though they'd been manicured."

The baby punched at Dot's breast for twenty minutes and was then whisked away nursery-ward by Miss Parsons.

Then Edna had to go. It was time for the patients to be sponged, powdered, and changed into clean nighties.

"I'll come tomorrow," she said.

It was pleasant to lie on the bed and be bathed with cool water, rubbed briskly with alcohol, and powdered with soft, scented talcum. The nightgown Miss Parsons picked was a pale orchid with filet lace. Edna's favorite. Now was a moment that fairly screamed for a few drops of Ed Pinaud's Lilac. Still, Dot was happy enough. She combed her hair and rouged and powdered her face.

Dr. Stewart found her cool and cheerful.

"Well, we had a lot of fun last night, didn't we?" he smiled. "What do you think of your baby?"

"I think he's wonderful. Do you know what? I saw him get born."

"Did you?" asked Dr. Stewart.

"I saw and heard everything that went on," Dot said.

Dr. Stewart's smile grew into a light laugh. "Everything?"

"Yep."

"Sure of that?"

"Well, I think so."

"Maybe we put over one or two things you didn't notice, Mrs. Collins. But don't worry about it. You have a fine boy."

The little white screen was called into service, and Miss Parsons assisted Dr. Stewart in his examination. He found everything in correct order.

"You're a perfect textbook case, Mrs. Collins," was Dr. Stewart's comment. He smiled at her and made Dot very glad that she was a perfect textbook case.

Dr. Stewart went to the nursery to have a look at the infant.

He came back to say good-by to Dot. "The boy is fine," he said. "Of course he's lost a few ounces, but they always do the first day. Don't think about him, he's all right. I'll see you tomorrow."

So her baby had lost a few ounces. If they always did, as the doctor had so confidently assured her, then there could be no harm in it, but still it would have been nice if her child had acted a little bit differently and had gained. Dot wished she could take a little nap. It would be another hour before the baby was brought in again. She closed her eyes and tried very hard to attract a little doze, but failed.

Mrs. Lensky was reading a newspaper which Bill had brought for her. She was sitting in a chair beside her bed, elaborately kimonoed and bored-looking. She was going home in a few days, and the sanitarium had become dreadfully tiresome.

The girl who was so puzzlingly reminiscent of a bright blue slicker was also reading. She had a feathered negligee thrown carelessly over her shoulders, and Dot thought her prettier than any real woman she had ever seen before. Her table had several books and magazines piled upon it, and Dot thought that perhaps she, too, could read if she had one.

"Could I borrow one of your books or something?" she asked timidly.

The girl looked up at her and smiled. "Certainly. What would you like?"

"What have you got?"

"Well." The girl looked at her books thoughtfully and passed on to the magazines; then her eyes returned to the books again. "Do you like poetry?" she asked.

"Yes," said Dot. She really had no opinion at all about poetry, but the other girl had given her the impression that she just couldn't stand it if Dot didn't like poetry.

"Well, here's something nice. A rather delightful anthology."

Dot held out her hands to catch it, but the owner of the book apparently wasn't in the habit of hurling it about.

"Ring for the nurse," she said to Dot.

Mrs. Lensky essayed the office of messenger, and Miss Parsons caught her in the act and scolded her.

"Who told you to walk around? Sit down and don't move till you're told."

Mrs. Lensky sat down and sulked. Miss Parsons had no right to talk to her that way. Mrs. Lensky guessed that Miss Parsons didn't know what the name Lensky meant in the cloak-and-suit world. Hm! She could have had the best private room in the house and a special nurse if she'd wanted it, but she had preferred the company of other mothers and had taken this instead. Mrs. Lensky guessed that there were a lot of things Miss Parsons didn't know.

Dot looked the anthology over. She looked it over twice. She decided she might just as well pick one poem out and begin. She picked "Portrait of a Lady" by T. S. Eliot.

When Miss Parsons brought Dot's baby in at four o'clock, she found the baby's mother deep in gentle sleep and thought it rather a shame that she had to awaken her.

Eddie walked in a few minutes after five. He had gone home first and had shaved and changed into his new blue suit. To Dot's anxious question he answered that he had had sandwiches and coffee.

"You look wonderful, Kid," he said in honest amazement.

Miss Parsons brought him a chair and got a vase for the bouquet of which Eddie had gratefully relieved himself upon first glance at Dot's table.

He sat down on the edge of the chair and tried to keep his eyes fixed on Dot. The two other women, so much at ease in their nightgowns, so unaffected by the presence of a male stranger, confused him. Surely he ought not to look at them, but he couldn't keep his back turned when Mrs. Lensky, who was once again in bed, thought it only courteous to inform him that he had a wonderful son. There had been no introductions made, but Mrs. Lensky was at heart a sociable woman.

Miss Parsons returned with the flowers properly arranged in the vase. They were roses.

"Oh, Eddie, they're beautiful."

"I wanted to bring you the first flowers," he said, "but I see somebody beat me to it."

"Edna."

"Oh. Who in hell wouldn't know that she'd get here first?"

Dot laughed. Her laugh wasn't quite under control. It was nervous, shaky. He hadn't asked about the baby yet.

"Did you get a nap today?" he asked.

"Yes. I was asleep a little while ago."

"Isn't it hard to sleep with the kids crying?"

"No. They don't cry much."

"Where do they keep them?"

"Right down the hall."

"Do they bring the kids in and wish 'em on you much?"

"No, they're only brought in at feeding time."

"When's that?"

"Every three hours. The last one was at four o'clock."

"Oh."

"Dr. Stewart says I'm fine."

"Gee, I'm glad."

Silence fell between them. Eddie wasn't permitted to smoke in the ward, and he tore at his nails nervously. Dot looked out the window. The house in back was just beginning to show signs of life. The negroes had slept the day away.

"Did you have a hard day?" asked Dot.

"Not very," said Eddie.

Silence again. A stifling restraint clamped down upon them.

Eddie hitched his chair close to Dot and spread his legs comfortably under the bed. He was glad of the silence. He wanted to figure out something. Could he ask about the baby now without making her think he was more interested in him than in her? He didn't want to arouse that little jealousy which on a former occasion she had certainly felt. Could he declare his intentions of remaining to see the baby? She might think he had only come to see the kid. She hadn't mentioned it at all. Was it well? How could she be so uninterested, so unexcited!

"Would you like me to get you something?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Some ice cream?"

"I don't think they'd let me have it."

"How about some fruit?"

"No, Eddie, honest."

"Well, listen, Dot, I think I'll go down in front of the door and get a smoke. All right?"

"Sure."

"I'll be right back," he promised.

He grabbed his hat and hurried from the room.

Dot heard his quick step descending the stairs. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She rolled over and buried her face in the pillow. She had not expected questions. Mrs. Lensky had fallen asleep. Dot was shocked by the voice of her other roommate.

"What's the matter, honey?"

Dot faced about and pecked at her eyes with a handkerchief. "My husband don't love the baby," she sobbed.

"Has he seen it?"

"He just caught a glimpse of it last night, but it isn't that. He hates the idea of it and always has."

"Well, don't cry. Watch him fall for it when it grabs his hand and smiles at him."

Dot shook her head. "My husband isn't the soft kind," she said.

"Then just let him alone. If he doesn't love the baby, you'll get no interference in the raising of it, and that's something."

Dot returned to her crying. There wasn't any consolation in the red-haired girl's words. What kind of woman wants to raise her baby without her husband's comments and advice on the matter? What kind of woman can devote her life to two mortals who care nothing about each other? The book of poems which the girl had called an "anthology" floated before Dot's misty vision.

"That kind," Dot answered herself. "That kind."

Eddie came back. He had smoked and had mapped out his campaign. He wouldn't say a thing to Dot about the baby. He'd just stick around till feeding time and get a good look at the kid. Maybe he could tell by looking at it if it was well or not.

He found Dot lying idly on her pillow. She was freshly powdered and rouged, and she had combed her hair again. That was all the poor kid could do to pass the time. He'd go out again and get her a movie magazine. But no, if he did he might miss seeing the baby. He was pleased to observe that the talkative woman had fallen asleep, but the other one had given him a funny look as he passed her bed. What was that for?

"Did you have your smoke?" asked Dot.

"Yes."

"Say, Eddie, while you were waiting last night, did you hear the music coming from the niggers' house?"

"Yeh, wasn't it awful?"

"It nearly drove me nutty. Gee, it's bad enough to be in pain without having to listen to rotten music."

"Was the pain terrible, Dot?"

"Not so terrible, no. It was bad, but it was worth it."

"What do you mean, worth it?"

"Well, I mean to have it over. You know, the waiting and the worry and all."

"Oh."

"Was you terribly worried about me?"

"And then some."

"You poor darling. It must have been awful, waiting."

"It must have been awful having the pain."

The atmosphere was less strained now. They could look at each other. They could smile. So long as neither of them thought of the little one who lay sleeping in the nursery, all was well. Eddie asked many questions about the delivery. It was from his questions that Dot learned how much she had really missed, how blinded by pain she had been. No wonder Dr. Stewart laughed at her proud boast that she had seen and heard everything.

"It's a very nice delivery room," said Dot. "Of course I never saw any other, but I think this is a nice one. They have a cabinet full of instruments down there, and the cabinet is so big it covers one whole wall."

"Is that so?" said Eddie. "That's some cabinet."

Conversation perished. But it was a more pleasant silence that followed than on the occasion before Eddie had had his smoke.

A trio of black-haired women with heavily rouged mouths swooped down on Mrs. Lensky's bed. They all wore large diamonds. Dot could not find the one who had eleven abortions to her credit. They talked loud and laughed frequently. The red-haired girl scowled into her book.

"What time is it, Eddie?"

"It's six o'clock," said Eddie. And as he spoke, Bill came in with Dot's dinner tray. There was a poached egg, toast, tea, and some sliced peaches.

The other trays carried chops and vegetables and a very inviting dessert. In a few days she, too, would be getting a regular meal. The thought inspired her to do the best she could for the poached egg.

After the tray had been carried away, Dot began to grow restless. She wanted the baby. More visitors had arrived at Mrs. Lensky's bed. Her husband, a small young Jew already bald, was peeling an orange for her and bragging to the company about his Shirley.

The number of guests permitted in a ward at one time was restricted to twelve. But one bed was empty, only one visitor was with Dot, and the red-haired girl had none; so Mrs. Lensky was within the law.

Miss Parsons came into the room, and Mr. Lensky coaxed for Shirley to be brought in.

Miss Parsons looked at her watch. "Well," she said, "it's quarter to seven. I'll change her and bring her in a few minutes early."

Shirley came. So did the two other babies.

Dot grabbed hers with eager hands and laid it beside her. She exposed her breast, and Miss Parsons sponged it with boric, and together they pleaded with the baby to go after some dinner.

Dot had forgotten to watch Eddie's expression. She was busy with the baby. She didn't see him rise and bend over for a better look at the tiny red face and the squinty blue eyes. Gee whiz, that was his kid! Actually his kid. He wanted to hold it, wanted to look at its hands and feet, and wanted to talk to it. He wanted to hear it cry,

wanted to see its head turn. He wanted to feel the hair that lay so soft and silky on its head. He wanted to hold its hand. Gee, it was a little beauty, too.

"He won't eat," Dot said.

Miss Parsons said, "He will tomorrow. You'll have milk then."

"How does he get along without eating?" asked Eddie, but Miss Parsons had joined the group around Shirley.

"Well, that's the baby," said Dot.

"No kidding," Eddie smiled. "I thought it was a battleship."

"Red, ain't he?"

"Yeh, he's red."

"That fades, though."

"Does it?"

"Sure."

"That's good."

"It's time for him to go back," said Dot.

"Don't you want me to take him back?" Eddie's hands reached out for the baby.

"No, you might drop him," said Dot, "and then Miss Parsons would holler at you."

"I wouldn't drop him."

"Well, we'll wait for her to take him."

"All right."

Miss Parsons came and took the baby.

"That's what we saved all the money for, Eddie."

"Yeh, that's it."

Why the hell didn't she say something that a fellow could judge whether or not she liked the kid?

Why the devil didn't he say something that a woman could judge whether or not he liked the kid?

CHAPTER XXI

The days passed languidly in the clean, cool house of many births. Dot's trays came to her bedside generously laden and returned empty. Her visitors brought flowers and fruit. Maude came with Ted. Edna spent an hour a day with her. Sue and Pat came twice, and Eddie spent every possible minute with her.

The girl with the red-gold hair now sat in a chair and was permitted to walk about the room. She had had no visitors, and Dot wondered about her. Her name was Vernon. That much Dot had learned, and no more.

Mrs. Lensky had departed in a whirl of good wishes, Quelques Fleurs, and Jews. Another woman now had her bed, a woman who had trod the corridors wringing her hands in agony for seven hours. Dot's heart had bled for her. She had even prayed for the strange woman and had sighed with relief when the fearful cries from the delivery room were silenced and the baby had been born. She made Eddie speak very low so that the woman might sleep all evening.

Miss Harris tiptoed about. "She had a bad time," she remarked, nodding toward the sleeping woman.

"I know," Dot replied. "Did she have a boy or a girl?"

"She had a boy," said Miss Harris, "but he's dead."

The eyes of Eddie and Dot came together for one swift second and parted abruptly.

Pain and grief after months of hoping and dreaming! What was it for? Why did women suffer pain? Yes, to continue the race. All very well. But why this? God, why? For education? Did the poor soul, sleeping so gently after her battle with torture, have to know what it felt like to lose the life she had carried, had suffered for?

Dot looked at the woman in the other bed. She was perhaps twenty and had a sweet, patient face. There were gray shadows under her eyes, and her mouth drooped wistfully at the corners. Dot turned her face away, and burning tears gathered in her eyes. That

this woman had to awaken to hear that dreadful news! Dot wished that she might never awaken but might dream forever that she held her wee one close to her breast and fondled his little hands.

Dot's heart was heavy with her own troubles. Her baby was not thriving. He took scarcely enough sustenance to keep him alive. The nurses were very patient and gentle with him. They left him an hour with Dot, and every known method of forcing a baby to nurse was used. Dot's breasts ached with the milk that continued to gather within them. Her breasts were pumped, and the milk was offered to the baby from a bottle. He would not take it. He slept and lost weight and clung to Eddie's finger, and more than that he would not do.

Dr. Stewart was not perturbed at the baby's actions. "He'll take his food," he assured Dot.

But days passed, and the baby took no more than half an ounce of milk in twelve hours' time.

Dot would hand him back to the nurse and turn her face into the pillow and weep. Poor little baby! He didn't know that he would die if he went on being so stubborn. Poor, innocent little mite in a big, strange world with huge people towering above him begging him to nurse. He didn't know how to do it. He was frightened, perhaps. And he would die. Those tiny fingers with the tiny pink nails wouldn't clutch Eddie's finger any more. That little, well-shaped head with its cap of sunny hair wouldn't lie against her breast. She'd never again see the tiny pink mouth open in the tiniest, most absurd of yawns. In a frenzy of horror she would ring the nurse's bell wildly and demand her baby again. She must make him nurse. She would make him understand that he must nurse. But when once again the little warm bundle, that smelled so fragrantly of milk and talcum powder, lay against her breast, she knew that he would not nurse and that she could not make him understand his danger.

Sometimes a baby cried in the nursery. Dot's heart would constrict and the pulse in her throat would flutter fearfully. "Is that my baby?" she would call to the nurse.

"That's my baby," Mrs. Vernon would say, and the nurse would laugh at them both and tell them they had never seen the child who was crying.

The woman on the third bed would dream blankly up at the ceiling during these moments. She had no part in them. Sometimes at night her sobs were heard by the other women, and then Dot would cry too.

The day that Dr. Stewart took the data for the birth certificate, the baby had accepted no food for hours. Dot was in a morbid state. She thought of this formality as an unnecessary pain. Her baby was going to die. What difference did it make where his grandfather had been born? She gave the required information without looking at the doctor.

When Eddie came that night, she asked him if she had been right in assuming that his father had been born in New York.

"Yeh," he answered. "He was born on Ninth Avenue. What do you want to know for?"

"I gave Dr. Stewart the dope for the baby's birth certificate."

"Oh. What else did you have to tell him?"

"A lot of junk. Where our parents were born, our names and ages and what we named the kid and the address of our house and—"

"Say, Dot, what did you name the kid?"

"What did I name him? Eddie, of course. What did you think?"

"Eddie!"

"Well, Edward."

"Aw, Dot, you shouldn't have done that. That's an awful name. Say, Dot, I think I'll run down and get a smoke. Why didn't you name him something fancy like Theodore or Calvin?"

He rushed out of the room then. Mrs. Vernon, standing near the window, laughed a little.

"Heavens," she said. "Your husband certainly hates that baby. He drops a tear at even having it for a namesake." She laughed again.

"Huh?" said Dot.

Eddie did not return at once. Dot suspected that he had gone to get her a magazine. While he was away, some one came to see Mrs. Vernon—the first visitor she had had, so far as Dot knew.

He was a tall slim man with gray eyes that fixed themselves reproachfully on the red-haired girl. In the same baseless way that she reminded Dot of the girl in the bright blue slicker, so did her visitor call to Dot's mind the man who had gleaned so much satisfaction from mentioning bootleggers' mistresses. Much as all Martians would look alike to us till we grew accustomed to any strange physical features they might have, so did all members of the tribe who never appear self-conscious and who are careless about the impression they leave seemed to Dot to be cut from two standard models. One for males and one for females.

"I had a hard time finding you," said Mrs. Vernon's visitor.

She yawned. "Not so hard as I should have liked," she returned.

"How do you feel?"

"Bored at the moment."

"When was the baby born?"

"I didn't have a baby. I'm here for something else."

"Oh, stop being silly, Ora. How is the baby?"

Mrs. Vernon went and sat down on the edge of her bed. "The baby is fine," she said, seriously. "He weighed seven pounds at birth and is as healthy as could be desired. I'm well, too, but you shouldn't be here. I'm not supposed to have visitors today. My day isn't until Wednesday. Will you come Wednesday?"

"Oh, see here, Ora, couldn't I speak to the nurse and perhaps give her some money?"

"No, they're very strict. She might report you down at the desk, and you might be barred out entirely for having tried to bribe her into disobeying orders."

"I've never been in a maternity hospital before. I don't know about rules—"

"No, I know you don't. Be a good egg and go now. Come back Wednesday."

"You see, they let me by at the desk—"

"Yes, the account of visitors is kept up here. Do go."

"Very well, dear, but I'll be back Wednesday. So glad that you're feeling well and that the baby is healthy. Shall I see him Wednesday?"

"Yes, indeed. Good-by."

"Good-by."

The girl with the red-gold hair looked speculatively at Dot. Had she heard everything?

Dot did not keep her guessing long. "Why, he could have stayed," she said. "There's no rules about visitors on any certain days. But you want to dodge him, don't you? You told me you were leaving here Tuesday."

"Yes, I am. On Tuesday."

"Gee, he gets a tough break," said Dot.

Mrs. Vernon lit a cigarette and stood close to the window so that she could drop it if Miss Parsons' step should be heard in the hall. Dot was not the sort of girl whom one imagines cigarette smoke might annoy, and the other woman was asleep.

Mrs. Vernon took swift, nervous puffs of the cigarette. "Remember what I told you about raising your son without interference?" she asked. "That's what I'm dodging; interference."

"Oh," said Dot, "that was your husband? Holy heavens, you can't keep dodging a husband."

Mrs. Vernon said nothing.

"You can't keep dodging a husband," Dot repeated.

"No," said Mrs. Vernon, "you can't keep dodging a husband."

Eddie returned. Dot's suspicions had been well based. He had a *Motion Picture Magazine*, a copy of *Love Stories*, and a *Daily News*.

"Almost time for the kid to be brought?" he asked.

"I guess so," said Dot.

"Did he eat today?"

Dot shook her head. It was safer that way. She couldn't trust herself to speak of the baby. She couldn't tell Eddie, anyhow, of the hour she had spent whispering pleas and promises into those tiny

pink ears that might well have been the rose petals they resembled for all the good it did to implore.

"Gee," said Eddie, "what happens to them if they don't eat?"

"What do you think?" asked Dot, harshly.

Eddie laughed. Dot thought his laugh sounded funny. Maybe it was because it was out of place in a sanitarium.

"They don't die," he said. "Surely they can't die. Gee, the doctors know too much nowadays to let a baby die just because it won't eat, don't they, Dot? Can't they think up a way to feed him?"

"Nobody has yet," she answered.

She reached for her lipstick. If he didn't get off the subject of the baby's not nursing, she was going to bawl. Why did he keep harping on it, anyhow? He didn't care about the baby. He just wanted to have something to talk about, that was all.

"He doesn't like the bottle either, huh?" said Eddie.

"No, he doesn't like the bottle, and he won't nurse, and can't you talk about anything else?"

There! That would hold him for a while. What right had he to use for a handy conversational topic the baby's indifference toward life?

Eddie looked at her for a moment and then looked away. He was speechless. Again she had resented his interest in the little fellow. He'd have to be mighty careful how he spoke. Well, he'd try not to irritate her, but he'd be damned if he was going to slight the baby to please her. Once that kid got to be a regular person that wore socks and overalls, he was going to know that his daddy loved him—Dot or no Dot! And then Eddie remembered that perhaps the little fellow would never know anything. Perhaps—He looked at Dot. She was rouging her lips. God, rouging her lips.

She was making a splotchy job of it, too, but that Eddie didn't notice. Her hand trembled with nervousness and rage. That he dared to ask casual questions about the baby as though they were discussing the contents of the movie magazine or the merits of the band at the Poppyland Dance Hall. Hadn't he any feelings at all? Didn't he know that if anything happened to the baby she'd kill herself? What would be left in life without little Edward? Nothing but a man she loved but who had failed her child. A man who had

remained cold to the touch of his own kid's fingers upon his hand. But that kid was dependent upon Eddie for the necessities of life. If it gained young Edward anything to have Eddie think that he was the only love in Dot's heart, then she could be as cold as Eddie toward the baby. After all, she would have thousands of blessed hours with him while Eddie was at work.

Miss Parsons brought the baby. "Now eat, youngster," she said as she laid him beside Dot.

The eyes of both Eddie and Dot fixed themselves upon the child as he fastened his mouth to Dot's breast and made a feeble attempt to nurse.

"He's going to take his milk," said Miss Parsons.

But she had spoken too soon. The baby evidently had no desire but to assure his audience that he knew how to get his food should he ever wish for it.

An hour passed, forty minutes of which Miss Parsons spent trying to lure the baby to nurse. It was useless. At last she bundled him off to the nursery, leaving his parents on the verge of hysteria.

Eddie had to go then. He had promised to relieve the counter man at nine o'clock. It wasn't his job to sell radio parts to the public nor to answer their questions, but you had to do a fellow a favor once in a while.

He kissed Dot and left her. He felt that it was just as well that he had to leave early tonight. Perhaps they'd have quarreled, had he stayed.

Miss Parsons came in and leaned over Dot's bed. She whispered to her, "I'm going off duty now. This is Miss Harris' night off, and you'll have Miss Brown up here. She's kind of careless, and I want to tell you something. Your baby is running a little fever, and you want to see that she watches him and calls your doctor if he gets much worse. She sits in one of the empty rooms and reads all the time and forgets. Ring the bell and ask her once or twice if he's all right."

The baby was running a fever! Then she would never even bring him home. He would never lie in the ivory-white crib nor wear the cunning little nighties that could draw together with a string under his tiny pink feet. He'd never squeak the little duck that was made of

Turkish toweling. His tiny heart would flutter more slowly every hour, and finally it would flutter no more. Here he would die, here in the cold, hard hospital whiteness, and his little soul would fly through the terrible chemical odors and out into the starry summer night. Not even in her arms would he die, but alone, with no one near who loved him. Her baby. Her little lamb. And Miss Brown would calmly read while this was going on? Dot's lips shut in a firm, white line. She'd kill her if the baby died before Dr. Stewart had been summoned. She'd brain her.

Miss Brown came on duty. She looked in the ward and shouted a cheery "Hello."

Dot called her over. "My baby's pretty sick, isn't he?" she said.

"I was just looking on the chart," returned Miss Brown. "He's got a little fever, but that's natural from not eating. It's nothing to worry about."

"No?" asked Dot. "Well, we'll worry about it anyhow. That's being on the safe side."

"You'll spoil your milk, worrying."

"You haven't got any milk; so you worry," said Dot.

Miss Brown raised her eyebrows and walked away. She could see Parsons' hand in this.

Dot planned to get some sleep before ten o'clock so that she could lie awake through the night and question Miss Brown about the baby. She knew that at ten o'clock he would be brought to her. She wished that Dr. Stewart hadn't caused the one o'clock feeding to be stopped. He had meant well. He had meant to accustom the baby to sleeping through the night, but now she wished for the assurance that she might see him through the small, wee, dangerous hours.

Dot's plan to get in a nap was frustrated by guests arriving at the bed of the woman beside her. They were quiet people, but their oft-repeated condolences on their friend's misfortune annoyed Dot and kept her awake. Over and over they reminded the woman that she had dreamed for nine months of her baby, had suffered for him, and now she did not have him. And one of them was a man!

When they had gone Dot lay with clenched fists listening to the dry sobs that came from the other bed. She wanted to scream. She wanted to say words that God would hear.

Ten o'clock came and went. Dot's baby took no food. He fretted piteously. His little forehead was hot, and his lips were dust-dry. Once he opened his eyes, and she fancied he looked at her pleadingly.

After he had gone back to the nursery, Miss Brown made the women ready for sleep. The friendly dark closed in on Dot, and she sailed away on a ship of dreams to a beautiful land where the baby romped with healthy eagerness and Eddie rode him on his back and dumped him laughingly into a sand dune. She knew that any more such pleasant fancies would lull her to sleep. She brought her mind back to reality. She must stay awake. She must stay awake. She must....

Dot awakened with a start. The moonlight filled the room, making radiant the ugly enamel beds and the stiff white chairs. The two other women lay asleep like chill, marble statues. Dot shuddered. There was an eerie haze over everything. She wished that Mrs. Vernon might awaken. She listened for a sound in the nursery, but there was none to be heard. Miss Brown was probably reading or dozing.

Dot rang the bell. The silence continued for a few seconds more; then the shuffle of Miss Brown's sneakers could be heard in the corridor. She came into the room and looked hastily at Mrs. Vernon and then at the other woman. Dot sat up in bed, and Miss Brown came to her.

"What do you want?" she whispered.

"How's my baby?"

Miss Brown's face presented an expression of utter bewilderment. In the moonlight Dot could see her mouth drop open with amazement.

"Your baby is asleep. He's all right. I never heard of such a thing!"

"Did you take his temperature?"

"He's all right, I told you."

"Did you take his temperature?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe you."

Miss Brown smiled. "You're a very foolish girl, Mrs. Collins, exciting yourself over nothing."

"What was his temperature when you took it?"

"If I told you, it wouldn't mean anything to you."

"How do you know?"

Mrs. Vernon moved in her sleep, and Miss Brown exclaimed, "See! You're waking everybody up. Go to sleep."

"I want to see my baby."

"Well, I'll certainly not bring him in to you at three o'clock in the morning."

"Why not?"

"He'll cry and wake everybody up. Besides, it's against the rules to bring them out for anything but feedings."

"I want to see my baby."

"Well, you'll see him in a few hours. Not before."

Miss Brown started away and Dot grabbed her skirt.

"You don't know that my baby ain't dead, do you?"

"What?"

"I'll bet you haven't been near him in hours. Maybe he's dead."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Collins. He's all right. I'm glad every woman doesn't take on like you do. You ought to be made to have a special nurse."

"I don't act like this always. My baby's sick tonight."

"A little fever."

"Yes, a little fever." Dot's voice suddenly shot up to its normal pitch, and she sat bolt upright in bed. "A little fever, and you're too damn lazy to go take a look at him."

"Hush!"

"I'll not hush. I want to see my baby."

Miss Brown walked away.

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Vernon. She, too, sat up in bed, and pushed the hair back from her eyes.

"My baby's sick and that big overgrown horse is too damn lazy to look at him."

Miss Brown materialized out of the darkness and came into the room.

"I looked at him," she said. "He feels much cooler and he's sleeping nicely."

"Bring him in here."

"I will not."

"Just carry him in and let me look at him. You don't have to leave him a second," Dot begged.

"Why don't you do that, Miss Brown?" asked Mrs. Vernon.

"Because it's against the rules," said Miss Brown. "Now both of you go to sleep."

"He's dead," Dot cried. "I know it. I felt it the minute I woke up."

"Oh, honey, no," Mrs. Vernon soothed.

"You're a foolish woman, working yourself up over nothing. Your baby's well." Miss Brown was very angry.

"Listen, Miss Brown." Mrs. Vernon's voice was sharply authoritative. "You're the foolish woman. You only have to carry the baby in here for one second to make everything right for everybody concerned. Now, why don't you do it?"

"Because for tonight I'm bossing this ward," said Miss Brown. "I'll not give in to a silly woman who can't sleep and thinks it is a good time for some excitement."

"You've lost your professional poise," commented Mrs. Vernon.

"He's dead," Dot said again. "If he was alive she'd bring him in if only so that she could go back to her book in peace. My baby's dead."

"Your baby isn't dead, honey," Mrs. Vernon said. "He isn't dead."

"Oh, he is, he is."

"He is not," said Miss Brown.

"Then let me see him."

"No."

The sheet and blanket which covered Dot were suddenly flung aside as she leaped from the bed. She stood before Miss Brown, her breath coming in rapid gasps.

"I'm going to see my baby."

"You're going to get back in bed."

"After I've seen my baby."

Mrs. Vernon's voice came dimly to Dot's ears. "Honey, you'll kill yourself."

Miss Brown laid hold of Dot with two strong hands and sought to throw her back in bed.

"I'll scream," said Dot. "I'll wake everybody in the house." Dot's eyes were weird black and silver pools in the mystic light of the moon. She was stark insane in that moment. Miss Brown knew that Dot would murder her if she could. There was a maniacal strength in Dot's hands, an obsession in her brain. Miss Brown had had plenty. She was ready to resign from the sanitarium. She was ready to see Dot contract any internal disorder that might result from such folly. Quietly she got Dot's slippers and kimono and threw them to her. She stalked out of the room.

"Listen," said Mrs. Vernon, "let me go see your baby. I swear to tell you the truth about him. You mustn't go walking around."

Dot laughed. "I'm a little shaky, but I'm all right. They're going to let me sit up today anyhow."

She staggered weakly down the hall. She knew where the nursery was. She remembered from that long-ago day when she had come to reserve a room.

There was no sign of Miss Brown. Dot felt that she had been walking for eternities down a narrow, dimly-lit corridor with the angel of death beckoning her on. She remembered the day that the world had reeled and everything had gone black before her eyes. She must reach the nursery. She must see the baby.

The nursery at last! The chain that lit the lone bulb dangled against her forehead as she entered the darkness. She pulled it. Suppose the light did awaken the other babies? She was past caring for other people. Her baby was all that mattered in the world.

Quickly she looked around the room. It was a small room aired by a skylight. Two shelves were crowded with baskets wherein slept the babies. There were also two bassinets in the room. The baskets had little cards pasted on the front of them. Dot read the cards swiftly, "Baby Lefkowitz," "Baby O'Hara," "Baby Thompson," "Baby Cohn." She read on, down the shelf. She read all the cards. She knew that he was not there. She was consciously saving the bassinets for the last to keep alive a faint glow of hope. If he were not in one of the bassinets, then she had to find Miss Brown. Yes, then she'd have to find Miss Brown.

She turned away from the shelves. Her heart beat fiercely. Her cheeks burned, and her eyes stung. He had to be here. Oh, Lord, how could she stand it if he weren't?

The card on the first bassinet announced that Baby Vernon was asleep therein. Quickly Dot's eyes turned to the second card. It read, "Baby Collins." She plucked the baby from its bed and looked at him. Yes, it was her baby, but was he alive? Roughly, she ran her hand over his face. He was certainly cooler than he had been at ten o'clock. What did that mean? Was he going to be cold soon? Cold!

She pressed him to her breast in an agony of terror. She wanted to awaken him. She must see him move. She whispered to him, "Honey lamb, Mommie's baby." But the little pink eyelids remained closed. To pinch, ever so slightly, his little arm, might awaken him; but Dot grew sick at the thought of hurting him.

She sat down on the nurse's chair and rocked him back and forth, talking to him. "Baby, wake up. Mommie's alone and scared. Baby, baby, darling, wake up. They say you can't see or hear much at first, but you must hear me now. Baby, wake up."

The baby did not move. Silence surrounded and closed in on Dot. There was no one to help her, no one to care that she couldn't awaken her baby. Scalding tears ran down her cheeks and dropped on the baby's tiny hands. His little fingers moved resentfully.

Dot laughed. His fingers had moved. He was alive. His fingers couldn't move if he were dead. She laughed, and the tears poured down her face.

"Baby, baby!"

She squeezed him to her body and laughed hysterically, with her face buried in his blanket.

The baby's eyes opened. His mouth made itself ready for a series of strong arguments against getting crushed.

"No, no cry, sweetheart." Dot loosened her grip upon the infant. "What can Mommie give you to make you happy?"

It seemed important to give him something to reward him for keeping alive the little body that was so dear to her. Still laughing and crying, she offered him in turn the pink tassels on her kimono, her wedding ring, the rhinestone barrette from her hair. None of these things interested him.

Dot offered her breast. His little mouth groped for it and fastened itself. She felt the blessed suction of his little mouth. For more than fifteen minutes he suckled gleefully, making happy little crooning noises.

Dot uttered a glad cry when at length, satisfied and exhausted, the infant fell back upon her arm and slept.

She kissed him and giggled. She knew she was laughing. It seemed foolish, but she couldn't stop. She was crying, too. He was alive, and he had taken food. The warm bundle nestled in her arms, and she cried and laughed and talked aloud.

It was Mrs. Vernon who, after thirty minutes had passed, came to the nursery. She found Dot brilliant-eyed and feverish, telling her baby about the dresses she had made for him.

It was Mrs. Vernon who put the baby in his bassinet and who led Dot back to the ward and tucked her into bed.

It was Mrs. Vernon who late that afternoon wrote to a friend in Paris and said, "This morning I saw Mother Eve with her first-born. A Mother Eve in an embroidered kimono and with a gorgeous N'York accent. Still, nevertheless Mother Eve, thick-skulled, childish, and more than a little wild. Watch the poetry magazines for proof that I saw her...."

When Eddie came, he kissed Dot and asked, "How's the kid today?"

Dot shrugged. "All right, I guess. Haven't noticed anything unusual. Why?"

CHAPTER XXII

It was over now—the months of waiting, the pain, the fear that the baby would die, the two weeks at the sanitarium. It was all over, or practically so. This was Dot's last night away from home.

She had spent most of the day in the nursery receiving instructions from Miss Parsons on how to bathe, diaper, and dress the infant. It was all very simple. You just went ahead and did it, praying to God all the while that the baby wouldn't slip, drop, or cry.

Now she sat in a chair at the window, with the baby in her arms, looking at the house across the yard where tonight there was another party well under way.

It was very pleasant sitting there with Edna and Eddie beside her and young Edward lustily partaking of his supper. It was ten o'clock. Soon they must all desert her for the night, but they would leave a cozy contentment behind them. Dot's eyes wandered over Edna's familiar, homely face and on to Eddie. Lastly they rested on the baby. Her heart swelled till it seemed that it must leave her body and soar above the clouds. The two loves of her life, and her friend. Her eyes wandered to the bed where Mrs. Vernon had lain. She regretted the loss of the strange, red-haired woman. She wished that she were here now, even if she were only reading and scowling into her book in the manner that Dot had come to know. Dot had asked for her address, but she had laughed and said, "Dottie, you're a darling, but you're not one to keep a secret. I'll take your address instead." But she had gone without asking for it, and Dot had not pressed it upon her.

"What I'm trying to find out," said Edna, "is what the devil you want for supper tomorrow night."

"Oh, anything," said Dot. "Ham sandwiches will do. I'll be so glad to get home I won't care what I eat."

"In that case, I guess there's no use of me fussing for you. I like a good meal at six o'clock, and Eddie hasn't had anything but sandwiches for two weeks; so I guess the best thing we can do is to

leave two hunks of ham and a loaf of bread for you, and Eddie and I'll go to a restaurant to celebrate. How about it?"

Dot laughed. The idea of Edna and Eddie entertaining each other was good.

"No kidding, Dot." Eddie's voice was coaxing. "Edna says she don't mind cooking supper tomorrow night; so as long as she's game, why don't you pick out something you like and have a swell feed?"

Dot looked down at the baby's face and spoke with her eyes fixed hard on his little busy mouth. "What I want would cost about four dollars," she said.

"Well, speak up," Edna said.

"Sure," Eddie added, "Mr. Williams broke his heart and gave me a five-spot."

Dot looked up quickly. "And you'd buy supper things with it?" she asked. "That's for the baby. When people give you money, it's because they don't know what you need for him." She dropped her eyes again and added, "It's not fair to Mr. Williams, Eddie, not to spend the money on something for the kid."

"Is that so?" Eddie demanded, hotly. "You know what Williams told me to do with it? He told me to get some whiskey and get cockeyed drunk and recover from the wait I had downstairs. What do you think of that?"

"I think that's darn mean of Mr. Williams," said Dot. "Me with a new-born baby and you cockeyed drunk."

"Well, what are you mad about? I didn't get drunk, did I? What is it you want for supper tomorrow night?"

"I'd like an extra special steak. A real thick, tender one, you know. And mashed potatoes and corn on the cob and sliced tomatoes with plenty of mayonnaise, and rolls from the Hanscom Bakery, and bananas and cream."

"Order received and noted," said Edna. "Coffee or tea?"

"Coffee."

"Soft or hard rolls?"

"Soft."

"Will you take it at the table or in bed?"

"At the table."

"Fine. What time would you like it served, M'lady?"

Eddie turned to Edna and said, "I wanted to bring her home in the morning, but I can't get off till one o'clock, and it's so hot then that I thought we'd better wait till around five. I hate to drag her out of here when it's so hot. The nurse says she can wait."

"That's the best way," said Edna. "You leave here at five o'clock and come right home and sit down and eat your extra special steak."

"First I'll have to change the baby's diaper," said Dot.

Miss Harris came to get the baby, and Edna and Eddie got up to leave. Dot smiled again. It was funny and kind of sweet to think of them walking down the street together. What would they talk about?

They both kissed her. Edna bent over the baby and kissed his fingers and murmured silly, soft things in his ear.

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" she said suddenly. "Here I am hogging the baby and not giving Eddie a chance to kiss him good night."

The smile froze on Dot's face. Eddie had never kissed the baby. He didn't want to. What would he do now that Edna had practically forced him into it? Just as he and Edna were getting more friendly and he was becoming kind of used to the baby, she had to pull a bone like this. What would he do?

Eddie bent over the baby and kissed his cheek. He had a soft little cheek, and the smell of his healthy, clean young skin filled Eddie with happiness. His kid was like that. Sweet and normal and fresh like a young flower on its stem.

"Come on, Edna," he said. "It's after ten o'clock, and I got to take you home first."

"Why, that's silly, Eddie. I can perfectly well—"

"I'll take you home. Good night, Dot. Sleep well."

Dot heard them descending the stairs. Funny the stairs weren't carpeted. You'd think in a place like this where there were so many sick people that they'd have carpet.... Hm, Eddie took that pretty well after all. He'd made a good job of kissing the baby. Kissed him

just as though he'd always wanted to kiss him and as though something had held him back before. Nice of him to try so hard to be decent about it. Perhaps if he tried real hard to love the baby he might get so after a while that he wouldn't mind holding the kid in his arms. Gee, imagine what it would be like if Eddie ever got to care about the baby! How wonderful it would be to know he was there suffering with her when the baby was ill, laughing with her at the antics of the child Edward, and rejoicing with her when the child had become a man. No, that could never be. The best she could hope for was a placid toleration of the little fellow. Eddie wasn't the sort to be soft over a kid. Maybe because his own father had been so rough and hard. Dot sighed. No use dreaming about the way things ought to be; it only made what really was, much more awful to bear.

It was Dot's duty now to prepare herself for bed. The days of being waited on were over, too. She was a patient ready to be discharged. Dot wondered if ever in her life again she would be waited upon. Probably not. There would very likely be no serious illness which would send her to the hospital, and she would try not to have any more children. No, never again would a tray be brought to her bedside. Hospitals were the only places where that was done, and she never expected to enter another.

Dot went to the bathroom and washed her face and hands. She brushed her teeth and combed her hair. Tomorrow night she would be doing this in her own bathroom!

The ward was dark when she returned to her bed. Dot lay very still and tried to sleep. The party across the way was rapidly rising to a glorious peak. The husky, deep voice of a dusky woman reached Dot's ears.

"Pepper is pepper,
Salt is salt,
If I ain't gave you lovin',
It's your own darn fault."

Dot smiled. The woman who sang would be a creamy shade of tan with black bobbed hair and gold circlets in her ears. She would have flashing white teeth, and perhaps she'd wear a red dress. Once a girl

like that had come to the Poppyland Dance Hall. It was only by her escort's looks that the manager had been sure she was colored. They had been put out, of course. It had ruined Sue Cudahy's whole evening. Sue had felt sort of contaminated; so they had all gone over to Maude McLaughlin's to forget the unpleasant episode.

Dot fell asleep, but her thoughts continued unbroken. She fancied that the colored girl with the golden circlets was lying in the bed next to her. They talked about childbirth.

It was only by Miss Parsons' voice calling to her that Dot knew that the night was over. She was going home today. She and her baby were going home. It seemed wrong that everything in the ward was the same and that she should eat her breakfast with slow indifference. There should be bustle and rush, excitement. Heavens, she and her baby were going home!

She found her clothes in the closet, the clothes she had worn to the sanitarium, the dress which had enough material in it to make her two dresses now, the cape which she would have to wear to conceal the dress. She had wanted Eddie to bring some other things to her, but he would not know which dress she wanted, no matter how carefully she explained. After all, it didn't matter. There wouldn't be many people to see her. Eddie had seemed less dense on the subject of baby clothes. He had understood that he must bring a dress, two petticoats, a shirtie, a diaper, a bonnet, a sacque, a bellyband, a pair of bootees, two blankets, and stockings. Funny, how bewildered and frightened he would have looked had she asked him to get her pink dress off the hook and bring it along.

Dot got into her clothes. She made up her face very carefully. She wanted to look nice despite the terrible dress which hung so disgracefully upon her.

Miss Parsons came into the ward. She looked at Dot and laughed. "Hurry up," she said. "Get your hat. You're going home at five o'clock, and it's a quarter of ten already."

"Never mind. Don't razz me," said Dot. "Wait till some day you're in a hurry to get home."

Dot picked up a magazine and tried to read, but she couldn't get interested in the stories. A baby cried in the nursery. She went to see if it was young Edward, and it was. Gleefully, Dot lifted him from the bassinet and reached for a dry diaper. She was going to change her baby's diaper. She was going to make him all nice and comfy again.

But Miss Parsons was too fast for her. She came hurrying into the nursery just as Dot had opened the baby's blanket. "Get out of here," she said. "You are a fool if ever one breathed. Here's almost your last chance to get your kid diapered for you, and you want to do it. Many a time, in the months to come, you'll wish you had Parsons to change him."

Dot laughed. "I'll love doing it," she said.

"Yeh, you and the other inmates of the nut house."

Dot went back to her magazine. Despite the friendly tone of Miss Parsons' jeers, it was evident that Dot was not supposed to minister to her baby until she got him home. She wished they'd let her bathe him. The time was dragging so terribly.

Just before luncheon, Sue Cudahy came in. Dot did not expect any more visitors until she got home, but she was glad to see Sue.

Sue had something on her mind. She fairly glittered with the importance of it. The shiny, shellacked wings on her hat and the rhinestones on her slippers seemed to express her excitement as plainly as her gleaming eyes and her torrent of words.

"Oh, I couldn't wait till tonight when you were home to see you," she cried. "Besides, Edna will be there and all. This is a funny thing to tell you just as you're leaving the hospital, but I just went to the doctor's, and he says yes I am, and I just had to come here to tell you. What do you think? I'm going to have a baby!"

Dot's eyes grew large with surprise. She was sitting on the bed, facing the window, and Sue looked well at her for signs of the ordeal through which she had passed. She found no such signs, and with so concrete a reassurance before her, she squeezed Dot's hand and repeated, "I'm going to have a baby, Dot!"

"Are you actually going to have it, Sue?"

"Sure. When a woman intends to give birth she says, 'I'm going to have a baby,' and when she is not going through with it she says, 'I'm pregnant.' That's how you can tell, Dot."

"Not always," said Dot. "See, Sue, I'm getting smart. I never used to be able to argue with you. Now I know a lot more things than I used to know."

"I want to ask you about some of them. Tell me, honest to God, Dot, without trying to save me from being scared or without laying it on like one little louse, whose name I won't mention but who is a mutual friend, would do—tell me, does it pain terrible?"

Dot's gaze locked with Sue's. Sue's eyes were honest seekers after truth. You couldn't turn her question aside with a stall about cramps or with a light reply. A woman had a right to have her questions answered when she took the cheap cynicism which she loved so dearly and traded it in for a straight answer on what concerned her so terribly.

"Sue, listen, if all the women in the world were sitting right where you are and asked me that question I'd tell them this: yes, it pains like bloody hell. Nobody who hasn't been through it can know what it's like. No man doctor can have more than the smallest idea what it feels like. It pains like hell. Maybe a lot of women like Edna Driggs who would hear me say that would laugh at me and say that it was nothing bad at all. And that's the best part of it, Sue. When it's over, you forget. It depends on how good your forgetery is, how fast you get over it. And it's worth it. Oh, Sue, you don't know how well worth it it is to have a baby that's all your own. If you have good care, you're all right. That's what I'd tell all the women in the world if they came and asked me, Sue. It pains like hell, but it's over fast and you forget it."

"Have you forgotten?"

"Almost. If you'd have come tomorrow, I'd have probably told you that it wasn't as bad as a headache."

"How about our mutual friend? She hasn't forgotten."

"I don't know what to think about her, Sue. I'm kind of afraid that she's just a mean woman who feels important when she's scaring people. She's too mean to even say that the pain was worth it, and it

is, Sue, it is."

"My mother says it's nothing," Sue offered.

Dot's lips parted in a smile of reminiscence. "Your mother has done a good job of forgetting, Sue. And so will I, and so will you. You have a couple of hours of pain, and then it's all over forever and you have your baby. Why shouldn't it hurt? Gee, Sue, everything that's worth having hurts in some way or other."

"I guess you're right, Dot. It didn't hurt at all to get Pat."

Dot looked at Sue a moment more and then turned away. Why was it that other people were always finished with a serious subject long before she was? Other people were always quick to turn back to wisecracks. Maybe that was why she didn't have many friends. Too serious, perhaps. She'd have to snap out of it. Be more flip. She laughed a little at her thoughts. She'd start to be flip as soon as she had her son raised. A mere matter of eighteen or twenty years.

The luncheon tray came in, and Sue got up from her perch on the window sill. "I'll be going, Dot," she said. "I only dropped in to tell you my news. Should I come up to your house tonight?"

"If you want to. To tell the truth, Sue, I'll be going to bed very early."

"Well, I'll come in for fifteen or twenty minutes."

"All right, Sue." Dot knew that she could depend on Edna to see that Sue didn't make a night of it.

She had no appetite at all for lunch. She wanted to go home. She longed for the sight of her delft-blue living-room and for a cup of coffee such as came only from her own little percolator. She thought of the dinner which Edna would have ready for her and was horrified to find that it awakened not the slightest desire. Well, she'd have to make a bluff at enjoying it if her appetite was not aroused by the cheering sight of her own home.

Bill came and took the tray away. Dot rouged and powdered again. She started another story in the magazine and laid it aside without finishing it. She strolled past the nursery, trying to get a peep at her baby. She failed in her effort. She tried to hold a conversation with the woman whose child had died. This effort also failed. There was absolutely nothing she could do.

"Why don't you lie down and take a nap?" Miss Parsons suggested.

Dot thanked her and curled up on the bed. She lay there for forty minutes and then got up. It was useless. She could not sleep, but anyhow forty minutes had passed.

She was going home, and nobody seemed to realize the importance of it. Miss Parsons advised a nap, and Eddie seemed to think that he was going to keep her cooped up in the sanitarium till five o'clock. Even the baby thought this was the same as other days.

It was a quarter of three when Eddie came in. He had had to go home first and gather up the baby's clothes and get into his new blue suit. He had shaved and had washed his hands with Gresolvent. Dot untied the very neat bundle which Eddie had made of the baby's things and counted them over carefully. He hadn't forgotten anything. Everything was all right, except that he had brought Mrs. Cudahy's bootees instead of Miss Eiden's.

Miss Parsons gathered up the things and departed with them to the nursery.

"Oh, can I watch you dress him?" asked Dot.

"I'm not going to dress him yet," Miss Parsons said. "You're not going for another two hours."

Dot looked at Eddie pleadingly. "Please, can't we go right away?" she asked.

"It's awfully hot out, Kid."

"But look, Eddie, it'll be a half hour or so by the time the baby's ready, and it'll be another half hour by the time we get home, and I figured that maybe I'd feel better if I could lay down a while home before supper. Can't we tell her to fix the baby right away?"

"All right. It's up to you."

Dot ran to the nursery. "We're leaving right away, Miss Parsons," she cried. "Could you fix the baby now?"

"Sure."

Miss Parsons plucked the baby from his crib. She took off the sanitarium clothes and began to dress him in his own little things. Dot thrilled. The diaper she had hemmed, the petticoat she had

embroidered, were at last on the baby. Her eyes filled with tears of excitement when the little dress was buttoned on him. She laughed with delight when she saw the little bonnet on his head and the great white bow tied in a fascinating knot under his chin. He was wearing the sacque that Eddie had brought home. He looked kind of funny. Like a little pink monkey. Dot grabbed him away from Miss Parsons and kissed him again and again.

She waltzed with him into the room where Eddie was waiting so uneasily. He was pretending to read a magazine, but he couldn't concentrate on the words. He was bringing Dot and the kid home today. Home. Dot and the kid. Today.

He looked up at her as she came into the room. "Why don't you take it easy?" he asked. "What's the idea, capering around?"

"Oh, I'm so happy to be going home!"

"Well, take it easy."

He got up and reached for his hat. It was last year's straw. He put it on, and Dot felt a little sorry for it, it looked so wilted and weather-beaten in comparison with the new blue suit.

He walked toward the door, and Dot said, "Say, would you mind holding the kid a minute while I get my hat and cape?"

"Lay him on the bed," said Eddie.

"Maybe he'll roll off. Here, he won't bite you."

Dot put the baby in Eddie's arms and went to get her things. Eddie walked out of the room. He stood in the hall for a minute looking down at the baby. Then he kissed him. Could you squeeze them while they were so young? Well, maybe a little bit. Eddie squeezed him a little bit, and the baby fixed an inquisitive blue gaze upon him.

"That was squeezin', old fellow," Eddie whispered to the baby. "Should we do it again?"

Miss Parsons came out of a room, and Eddie handed her the baby and ran down the stairs. Dot found young Edward dozing in the nurse's arms. A wave of anger broke over Dot. He couldn't even hold the kid for a second. Who the hell did he think he was, that he was too good to hold his own kid? She grabbed the baby from Miss Parsons and started down the stairs.

"Need some help? Aren't you a bit wobbly?"

"No, thanks, Miss Parsons. I can make it. Good-by."

There was no sign of Eddie on the first floor. She sat down and waited. Where had he gone? She straightened the bow on the baby's cap and brushed a smear of powder off his neck. Eddie came into the sanitarium, banging the screen door behind him. "Come on, Dot," he said. "I got a taxi waiting."

Her anger dissolved. That's what he had gone away for. "Oh, Eddie, you shouldn't have done that. I could have gone home on the 'bus."

"Come on." He put his hand under her arm and piloted her down the stone steps to the street. He helped her into the cab and seated himself beside her. "Go slow, Buddie," he said to the driver.

The driver turned around and smiled at the little family. He'd been in Eddie's boots three times.

Eddie held out his hands for the baby. "Want me to take him?"

"Yes, if you don't mind, Eddie." It really was hot, and she did wish that she hadn't been on her feet so much all day. The baby felt like a ton of heat in her arms. It wouldn't hurt Eddie to hold him.

The transfer made, she stretched her legs joyfully and turned to look at St. Nicholas Avenue. The sky bending blue and dependable above the world made her very happy, the sun glowing goldenly, brilliantly, beautiful again now that her travail was over. The world was right. Some day, somehow, Eddie would come to love the little pink monkey who lay so trustingly, so unaware of antagonism, in his daddy's arms.

She turned again to feast her eyes upon the tiny mortal. He was so sweet, so adorable, so—Suddenly the blood in Dot's veins turned to ice water. A sharp prickling sensation ran up her back. The baby was dribbling. On the sleeve of Eddie's new blue suit the baby was dribbling. On the sleeve of Eddie's new blue suit! What would happen now? Would Eddie slap the baby? Would he perhaps make her slap the poor little thing?

He had to be told. Soon he might find out for himself, and then it would be worse.

"Eddie, let me take the baby. He's—he's dribbling on the sleeve of your new blue suit!"

Eddie looked at her with the narrowed gaze that she knew so well. "Dribbling, huh?" he said. "Do you think that's anything? Say, I'm wet clear through, and I ain't kicking, am I? Shut up!"

Colophon

Bad Girl
Viña Delmar

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