safe subject. "We'll have been married a year. My, it doesn't seem that long!"

"It seems much longer," she said tonelessly.

She was looking off again, and he felt in sudden uneasiness that the subject was not safe at all; he wished she would not look as if she were seeing the whole course of that year and of their marriage. . . . not to get scared, but to learn—she thought—the thing to do is not to get scared, but to learn . . . The words came from a sentence she had repeated to herself so often that it felt like a pillar polished smooth by the helpless weight of her body, the pillar that had supported her through the past year. She tried to repeat it, but she felt as if her hands were slipping on the polish, as if the sentence would not stave off terror any longer—because she was beginning to understand.

If you don't know, the thing to do is not to get scared, but to learn. . . . It was in the bewildered loneliness of the first weeks of her marriage that she said it to herself for the first time. She could not understand Jim's behavior, or his sullen anger, which looked like weakness, or his evasive, incomprehensible answers to her questions, which sounded like cowardice; such traits were not possible in the James Taggart whom she had married. She told herself that she could not condemn without understanding, that she knew nothing about his world, that the extent of her ignorance was the extent to which she misinterpreted his actions. She took the blame, she took the beating of self-reproach—against some bleakly stubborn certainty which told her that something was wrong and that the thing she felt was fear.

"I must learn everything that Mrs. James Taggart is expected to know and to be," was the way she explained her purpose to a teacher of etiquette. She set out to learn with the devotion, the discipline, the drive of a military cadet or a religious novice. It was the only way, she thought, of earning the height which her husband had granted her on trust, of living up to his vision of her, which it was now her duty to achieve. And, not wishing to confess it to herself, she felt also that at the end of the long task she would recapture her vision of him, that knowledge would bring back to her the man she had seen on the night of his railroad's triumph.

She could not understand Jim's attitude when she told him about her lessons. He burst out laughing; she was unable to believe that the laughter had a sound of malicious contempt. "Why, Jim? Why? What are you laughing at?" He would not explain—almost as if the fact of his contempt were sufficient and required no reasons.

She could not suspect him of malice: he was too patiently generous about her mistakes. He seemed eager to display her in the best drawing rooms of the city, and he never uttered a word of reproach for her ignorance, for her awkwardness, for those terrible moments when a silent exchange of glances among the guests and a burst of blood to her cheekbones told her that she had said the wrong thing again. He showed no embarrassment, he merely watched her with a faint smile. When they came home, after one of those evenings, his

mood seemed affectionately cheerful. He was trying to make it easier for her, she thought—and gratitude drove her to study the harder.

She expected her reward on the evening when, by some imperceptible transition, she found herself enjoying a party for the first time. She felt free to act, not by rules, but at her own pleasure, with sudden confidence that the rules had fused into a natural habit—she knew that she was attracting attention, but now, for the first time, it was not the attention of ridicule, but of admiration—she was sought after, on her own merit, she was Mrs. Taggart, she had ceased being an object of charity weighing Jim down, painfully tolerated for his sake—she was laughing gaily and seeing the smiles of response, of appreciation on the faces around her—and she kept glancing at him across the room, radiantly, like a child handing him a report card with a perfect score, begging him to be proud of her. Jim sat alone in a corner, watching her with an undecipherable glance.

He would not speak to her on their way home. "I don't know why I keep dragging myself to those parties," he snapped suddenly, tearing off his dress tie in the middle of their living room. "I've never sat through such a vulgar, boring waste of time!" "Why, Jim," she said, stunned, "I thought it was wonderful." "You would! You seemed to be quite at home—quite as if it were Coney Island. I wish you'd learn to keep your place and not to embarrass me in public." "I embarrassed you? *Tonight*?" "You did!" "How?" "If you don't understand it, I can't explain," he said in the tone of a mystic who implies that a lack of understanding is the confession of a shameful inferiority. "I don't understand it," she said firmly. He walked out of the room, slamming the door.

She felt that the inexplicable was not a mere blank, this time: it had a tinge of evil. From that night on, a small, hard point of fear remained within her, like the spot of a distant headlight advancing upon her down an invisible track.

Knowledge did not seem to bring her a clearer vision of Jim's world, but to make the mystery greater. She could not believe that she was supposed to feel respect for the dreary senselessness of the art shows which his friends attended, of the novels they read, of the political magazines they discussed—the art shows, where she saw the kind of drawings she had seen chalked on any pavement of her childhood's slums—the novels, that purported to prove the futility of science, industry, civilization and love, using language that her father would not have used in his drunkenest moments—the magazines, that propounded cowardly generalities, less clear and more stale than the sermons for which she had condemned the preacher of the slum mission as a mealy-mouthed old fraud. She could not believe that these things were the culture she had so reverently looked up to and so eagerly waited to discover. She felt as if she had climbed a mountain toward a jagged shape that had looked like a castle and had found it to be the crumbling ruin of a gutted warehouse.

"Jim," she said once, after an evening spent among the men who were called the intellectual leaders of the country, "Dr. Simon Pritchett is a phony—a mean, scared old phony." "Now, really," he