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SECOND HONEYMOON

By the author of:

ME ----- Century Company

MARION ----- Harpers International

DIARY OF DELIA Sat. Eve Post.

(All anonymous)

Also several other novels published by Harpers and MacMillan.

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SECOND HONEYMOON

1.

"And so they were divorced, and lived happily ever afterwards!"

I laughed as I said this. One doesn't take a divorce seriously in these days. I suppose I should have been impressed by the solemn letter from your Reno lawyers. So much trouble just to divorce a woman!

Very nice of you to charge me merely with Desertion! Three years Desertion. Well, time flies like a hare. Time we are assured heals all our wounds. Of course, I had no wounds to heal! I lit a cigarette nonchalantly.

"The thing to do" said I, "is to 'Laugh Fool Laugh'".

I tossed the letter across the room. It landed in a cock-eyed heap on the top of a jardiniere crammed with roses that someone had sent me. It looked funny, topping my roses, and I began to laugh. I couldn't help laughing, for it was such a grand joke---a joke on me! There was nothing else for me to do---but laugh.

I was to be divorced. You were a resident of Nevada. Of all places--Reno! I couldn't visualize you in that setting; but then I knew why you had gone to Reno. You were in a great hurry now. You could get a divorce swiftly; and so you had made the five days journey to the divorce city in order to get rid of me quickly--so that you might marry the other woman!

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II.

The day was sultry and humid, and I was tired and fagged after a monotonous day at the studio where I worked as a reader. As I was crossing the lobby, the Manager of the Apartment House called to me:

"Oh, Mrs. Dutton, your husband is waiting for you in your apartment".

For a moment I could neither move nor speak. A numbing sense of paralysis seemed to be creeping over me, though my heart was beating wildly. I had not expected this. I must have looked queer, because the Manager followed me, and she said:

"Shall I take you up, Mrs. Dutton?"

"No thank you".

I had command of myself now. Going up in the automatic elevator the strangest of thought floated hazily across my mind:

"Is my nose shiny? Has he changed. What does it matter. He is nothing to you. He is nothing to you. He belongs to Her---to her! He has only come to make the final arrangements---financial arrangements he wrote. Ha, ha! I've gone past my floor! I hope

my hair look all right. What in the world am I trembling for? Look here---you've got to go through with this like a sport---"

I twisted the key in the lock and pushed the door roughly open. You were standing in the center of my living room. A sense of panic, of craven fear besieged me. I was afraid of you---you, in whose arms I had once lain. I forgot everything else---all that the lawyers had told me I must do and say. I wanted only to grovel at your feet, and over me there swept like a swarm of haunting shadows the things that lay between us---the things that I had done and said---the things that had parted us---and the years and the years and the years that were lost forever.

All the time you were looking at me, saying not a word---just studying, appraising---ah! judging me! I tried to smile. Crazy thoughts ran through my mind.

"Where's my lipstick---my compact? Have I changed terribly? Do I look old. He used to love me so! He used to love me so! He used to be crazy about me----but now---now---she---so beautiful---so----"

My voice broke harshly the spell of silence.

"I know why you're here. You are divorcing me, because you want to marry Mrs. Morse. Well that's quite all right by me".

I thought I had done this well---with real finesse. My voice sounded quite light and casual, and I took out my compact, and with an unseeing eye I powdered my face.

After a long moment, you said:

"It's not all right by me, Biddy".

Biddy: That was a slip of course.

You'd hardly call me by the old, whimsical pet name now, when you were going to marry Her. I felt ravaged by a surge of passionate resentment. You had gone to Reno in her behalf. You wished to cast off my yoke.

"Then what ~~are~~ you here for?" I demanded, glaring at you. You hesitated. You always used to choose your words so carefully--pausing before speaking, as though weighing what you had to say.

"It's about----a Trust deed. I want to provide-----"

"I won't take a cent from you. Not a cent. I have'nt for three years. Don't forget that".

"But-----"

"Don't worry about me. I'm all right. I'm fine. I've got a great job".

"What do you do, Biddy?"

"I'm a Reader" I answered proudly----"A Reader in a Moving Picture studio----Universal. I read stories--do you see----and---"

"Is there any future in that work".

"Oh yes----a grand future. If you stand in with one of the directors or executives, maybe you'll graduate into continuity writing and---"

"What do you mean by standing in' ?"

Now I could really laugh. I felt lighthearted. It was good to know I still had the power to upset you. Your voice was always rough and curt, when I did or said anything that moved you. You spoke abruptly:

"My car is outside. Shall we ride somewhere--- anywhere you say. We can discuss the matter better perhaps outside".

"I don't mind" said I, still feeling warm and comforted.

It occurred to me that you hadn't smiled once. But then you were a quite serious person, and this was no laughing matter. No sir. Besides you had a slow, reluctant way of smiling. Then your grave face would light up. Dangerous thoughts! I was in the car, sitting beside you. I stole a glance at your face. You were looking dead ahead, unsmiling.

### III.

Till you ever forget that long ride to San Pedro. Side by side, almost touching and yet so far apart, the ghost of the other woman between us--your face set, hard and cold as steel. And so for what seemed like hours, till at last I found the courage to put the question that I had been burning to ask all of the way:

"Well, Jerry, and so you're in love with Mrs. Morse?"

You did not answer. You continued to look straight ahead.

"Well, why don't you admit it. Are you in love with Mrs. Morse?"

You always paused before speaking, as if carefully choosing your words:

"I think a whole lot of her" you said.

"That's begging the question. I asked you if you were in love with her".

"Well, what is love?" you demanded roughly.

"It's what you felt for me" I flashed back, "when we were married".

"You forgot, that you left me for three years".

"On her account. I suspected even then that you cared for her".

"Your suspicions were absolutely unwarranted. I told you so at the time".

"And I didn't believe you. I knew you were seeing her---"

"She was a client---"

"Of course---just a client. Is that why you're marrying her now?"

There was a long silence, I sitting tensely beside you; you with that troubled frown looking ahead.

"Well, why don't you answer me?"

After a moment, speaking slowly, reluctantly:

"You did us both a wrong Biddy. After you left me----we were drawn together---mutual loneliness.----tastes in common---sympathy----lets not go into it".

"I understand. I can just see how comfortably and homely she made things for you. I don't blame you! You fell for an atmosphere. She always was a good actress".

Ket a word now from you. The car speeding.  
After a very long interval I said passionately:

"Anyway, she can't have this hour!"

Your voice is deep. It is weighted with a profound sadness and tenderness. Are you thinking of her I ask myself wildly.

"What do you mean by that Biddy?"

I moved nearer to you. Now I press against your side.

"You belong to me just now. I'm with you -- not she!"

I knew you were looking at me now, but I dared not return your burning glance. My heart began to sing within me. Old power stirred into life and excitement. I wanted to laugh---to cry. I slipped my hand under your arm. The car swerved off to the side of the road. For a moment you shrank from me, tried to shake off my arm, and then fiercely, hungrily, your arm went about me and I was drawn up closely, closely--the car still moving and guided by your other hand.

What a beautiful sunset we were riding into!

The sky was a gleaming field of Mother of Pearl.

Could you see it, or were your eyes like mine almost drowned in tears. I was conscious of the beauty about us; I saw it as through a golden haze; but I was listening to your voice:

"I've always loved you only! I've thought of you night and day. I tried to forget you--to hate you---tried to love another, and thought I had succeeded, but the moment I saw you, I wanted to take you into my arms, and I knew that I had loved you all the time---that I was dead in love with you all over again!"

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III.

"You will have to tell her."

"Yes".

"You look so glum".

"I'm sorry dear. How's that?"

"Whew! You don't call that a smile. You look like an undertaker, trying to be cheerful. After all, it's not our funeral darling".

"Suppose we don't talk about this".

"Why not? Are you afraid to?"

"It's not a case of fear--but decency".

"Oh ye-eh? Are you thinking how decent she was? I can see that you are thinking about her. "

"Are you comfortable dear? Doesn't that ocean look great. This is some drive. What say we go on to Long Beach".

"I don't care where we go---so long as we're together. Jerry----"

"Yes dear".

"Just what are you going to tell her?"

"I don't know exactly--er----"

"Well, you'll have to tell her that you don't care

anything about her. You don't--do you?"

"Here---let me tuck that rug about you. Thats a pretty stiff breeze from the Pacific. Are you quite sure you're warm enough? Suppose we have dinner at---"

"Jerry, you are deliberately evading my question. I asked you whether or not you cared anything still about that woman?"

"Lets not spoil our perfect day, darling. Lets talk about ourselves---shall we, dear?"

"How can the day be perfect when all the time I'm thinking that my husband still cares---"

"Now Biddy--isn't it enough that I love you--and you only?"

"But you have your reserves. You don't confide in me. Your keeping something from me".

"Won't you trust me. I've a hard problem ahead of me. I must solve it as a man should".

"Well, what is your hard problem then".

"I must return to Chanceryville and break---"

"No---you don't have to return there just on her account. You can write to her. You can write her a letter. Tell her that you love me--your wife. By writing you'll avoid scenes--hysteria--reproaches---appeals. Oh I can imagine just how she'd carry on. So write to her, Jerry . Break with her that way".

"It would be a cad's way, Biddy. She is entitled to an explanation".

"Why is she? She knew you were married all the time. She took her chance. If you go to her now, she'll drag the thing on---try to lure you back. Oh I know her kind!"

"You don't know her, or you wouldn't say that".

"I don't pretend to know her as well as you do!"

"Was that a nice thing to say?"

"Oh Jerry---don't see her---don't go back".

"I must. Its the square and sporting way. After all, I can't forget that --er---she has been my companion for the past two years".

"You mean --your paramour?"

"Thats not fair! We can't continue like this".

"I can see that you're crazy about her---that she must have been everything to you".

"Biddy, don't you understand---you were gone three years. I'm only human---only a man---- and she was kind to me--made things pleasant--made a home for me!"

"Oh, then you lived at her home did you?"

"No. I lived at the hotel; but I had a home to go to".

"Take away your arm. I hate you. I know you're in love with her.

"I'm in love with you, desreat".

"But you did care for her. You have to admit that

"Not in the way you mean. Not in the way I love

you".

"In what way then?"

You choose your words carefully, thoughtfully.

"I feel a natural sentiment and responsibility--- I have a high respect and---Please, Biddy lets drop this subject. We get nowhere".

"We get at the truth. A man and woman can't be perfectly happy when there is a lack of confidence between them".

"But don't you see dear, that this isn't my affair only. I don't discuss the matter----I must consider her".

"I see----- She's prettier, prettier than I---- quite a beauty---- She has a nice social position in that town---- all the conventional trappings of position and fashion---- I suppose that impressed you, eh. There Theres a bit of the snob in every man----"

"Look here, Biddy----"

"----and I've been a sort of a gypsy all my life. My people were artists and players. I've had to work for my living always----She has everything---I nothing".

"Darling, you have my love. Is that not something

"It thrills me when you say that. When you hold me like----Tell me----did you hold her in your arms like this, as you 're holding me now. Did you? Did you drive along in your car, with your arm about----"

"What good does it do to ask such question.

"Well why don't you answer me?"

"If I did, I might hurt you".

"That's an admission".

"You were gone a long time. A man cannot starve for affection".

"I can see that you grew fat on it! How many times has she ridden in this car beside you?"

"I can't say".

"She did ride in it--didn't she".

"Yes".

"And did you call her 'darling' too?"

"Sometimes".

"Let me go".

"No".

"All right then. Make a clean breast of everything about her. I want to know every detail".

"We're not going to talk about this any longer".

"Oh yes we are. What's the matter with you? Is she so sacred that she can't be discussed? All right don't answer then, but I want you to know that she doesn't deserve to be considered or pitied---no woman does, who takes another woman's husband from her".

"Biddy--I can only repeat---you were gone three years".

"Just the same she knew you were not free."

"I promised her I would be".

Wildly:

"You had no right to promise her that!"

Doggedly:

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"I had every right!"

"You were my husband--not hers!"

"Darling--I beg you to let us talk about something else."

"You can't cure a dangerous growth by scraping the surface. A surgeon probes to the root. There--- I've made an axiom. Wasn't I clever".

"Cleverest girl in the world. Just look at that sky!"

"What do I care for a sky when I can look at you. Oh Jerry--I do love you so----"

"----and I love you!"

"----but you are going back----to her!"

"I must go, dear. Lets not talk about it any longer."

"When are you going?"

"As soon as you say dear".

"Well, you've finished your six week's residence in Reno, have'nt you".

"I was four weeks in Nevada"?

"I see. Then you've two weeks more to serve, have'nt you".

"How'd you like to make a trip there with me---- not to Reno, but a nice camp at Lake Tahoe."

"The Nevada side?"

"Why yes----that's---er---where I stayed".

"Ho---ho! So you may finish your residence, eh?"

"So I may show you the beauty that I have been seeing these last four weeks. I'll take you all over the Tahoe country".

"For two weeks eh? And then, you or I can begin the action".

Patiently:

"Biddy, don't you understand that by taking you back with me, I would be condign any charges of desertion I have made against you".

"That's true".

My head rests on your shoulder. For a moment I am happy. I eject her from my mind. I mustn't let her lodge there too firmly. She is becoming an obsession. I sigh sleepily.

"Happy, darling?"

"Perfectly. The sky is lovely!"

This time it is you who reply, almost roughly:

"What do I care for skies! Will you go with me to Tahoe?"

"I'll go with you anywhere-----even unto the ends of the world!"

I feel my eyes drooping. I think I fall asleep. Oblivion is bliss.

IV.

The lake is of the very blue of Velasquez.  
Streamers of celestial gold, pale violet, blood and fire  
colors are splashed riotously and yet with supreme art  
over a sky of ever deepening blue.

You are sound asleep, your head turned from me.  
It is five o'clock in the morning; but I have slipped  
out of bed and am sitting on the step of our cabin watch-  
ing the miracle of the sunrise. We are in a motor camp  
at Lake Tahoe--the Nevada side.

. I sit at the door and look out at the Lake and the  
sky in a sort of blissful dream. An immense happiness runs  
runs like an ecstasy through all my being.

We are on our honeymoon- our "second honeymoon",  
you have called it. The trip has been a perfect one.  
We have passed through scenes of unmatched beauty--a country  
of illimitable horizings; the penetrating mystery and sultry  
warmth and incredible fascination of the Mojave Desert and  
into the Sierras. You said you wished me to see the beau-  
ty all along the way that you had travelled alone.

In a charmed silence, we have ridden for hundreds of miles and gazed as in a dream at the unfolding panorama of sheer beauty. At times we would simultaneously look at each other, hold our breaths a moment, and then you would bend down and kiss me upon my lips. And the car would go on and on. Sometimes I hoped that it might never stop. If we could but go on like this forever!

This place is on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe. It is in a clearing on the edge of a deep wood, right on the shore of the Lake. The cabins are rustic, quite attractive and with modern conveniences. Everyone in the motor camp seems to know each other. They are all "residents". Here it was that you lived during your weeks in Nevada, though you established legal residence in Reno. You were going to divorce me! The camp is thrilled and all agog because you have brought back with you the wife you were going to divorce.

I did not mention her name all of yesterday. What a miracle! I am proud of myself.

Now I can see you stirring---you are reaching out your arm, feeling for me. I slip on tiptoe to the bed and kneel down beside it. You say drowsily:

"Where are you, darling. I miss you-----"

And you call me by her name!

I start up, screaming. You sit up.

"What's the matter?"

"Don't you ever dare call me by her name

again!"

You blink. You are sheepish and remorseful. Then you try to laugh it off.

"Oh come on back to bed sweetheart".

"No".

"Come now! Or must I make you!"

"No I say".

"All right. We'll see about that".

You get out of bed deliberately. You are smiling, and I can see that you are still only half awake. I am not over my indignation and anger. You grab me. We struggle. You kiss and kiss me. You call me funny names into my ear. I have to laugh in spite of myself, and you keep on dragging me to the bed.

I am held tightly in your arms, my head on your breast.

"Now go to sleep" you adjure, and proceed to fall soundly asleep yourself.

I don't sleep. I lie there, in your arms, bitter thoughts possessing me.

I think:

"He's always calling me Sylvia."

"She must have been terribly near to him".

"He must have loved her".

"She must have slept with him or why did he-----  
Oh God! I can't pursue that line of thought".

I try to get from under your arm, but although

you are asleep, you have a strange hold on me.

You always hold me tightly when we are in bed. You told me once, it was because you had missed me so--- over those years when I was gone. That many a time, you would reach out for me, and I was not there! It was characteristic of me at that moment to let the devil slip into my tongue and I said:

"But she was!"

Now as I lie beside you, my mind is a storehouse of hate and resentment. I think of all the things she has done. I try to visualize her----a pretty woman, tall, dark, the appealing soft spoken kind. The very antithesis in type to me! I see her in her home--the kind Interior Decorators would approve of. Soft lights and shades and silken pretty things and gleaming mahogany and big squishy couch in front of the fireplace, and this and that antique bit about the room, and, of course, brass candlesticks in the right places. Oh yes, a lovely sort of a home! A nice place to entertain. A restful place for you to come. Oh, Oh! How am I going to bear all this. I'm not a homemaker. Poor you! You have given up much for me.

You are drawing me closer. You turn my face around, so that we can look into each others eyes.

"Sleep, dear?"

"No. How could I?"

"Why not?"

"Thinking of her."

"You should'nt do that".

"No? And you calling me by her name?"

"Wheres your sense of humor?"

"Thats not funny".

"Force of habit".

"What? What did you say?"

Reluctantly:

"Well, I said it was force of habit. Now don't get excited Biddy. Look at the thing fairly. After all, I've not deceived you about her. I used to call her by your name at first".

"That is a detestable--a vile thing to say to me".

I managed to extricate myself from your grasp and get out of bed. My mood is hellish.

I take my shower and come back into the little main room. You are clumsily setting the table. The coffee is on the stove. You put a flower in a glass at my plate. We eat breakfast silently. You look across at me appealingly; but my mood has not changed. I think all the time of the day when you will be going back to Chancellorville and I to Hollywood. I want you to take me with you. I would not go if you asked me, but I want you to want it and to ask me. You keep on looking at me pleadingly. Presently:

"What today, dear?"

"I don't care what we do or where we go".

I am still sulky, petulant, though I am beginning

to melt deep deep inside me.

"All right. Tell you what we'll do. We'll move  
over to Tahoe Tavern. Its on the California side of the Lake.  
With the Tavern as our headquarters we can motor to all the  
points of beauty about this country. I want you to see  
Emerald Bay--the Lake of Fallen Leaves---"

I say craftily:

"If we go to the California side, won't that be breaking  
your residence in Nevada?"

You look at me reprovingly a moment and then you  
laugh:

"To heck with my residence. Come here!"

I get thoroly, efficiently and ardently  
kissed. I'm feeling myself again. Its a honeymoon  
after all.

"Jerry, how about Reno?"

"Hot and hectic. Streets crowded. Everything  
wide open".

"Must be fun. I'd like to see it".

"Look here, young woman, I'm enough scenery for  
you to look at for the present".

I am kissed again. We laugh and chatter and  
plan. I am sitting on your knee. I tell you solemnly and  
truthfully that you are the first man who has kissedme in three  
years. You pretend that you don't believe me. The wound  
inside me stirs again. I say:

"You wouldn't I You were too well consoled  
yourself".

"Boo-boos" You make a fierce face, and  
try to deflect me.

"Jerry--tell me the truth, once and for all.  
Do you love her?"

"I love you. That's the millionth time I've told  
you. Want to hear me say it again?"

"Yes, but do you love her too?"

"How can I? I've got my hands full loving  
one woman, have'nt I?"

"But isn't it a fact that a man can love two  
women at once".

"I don't know about other fellows."

"Well have you any sentiment---any feeling  
whatsoever for her?"

"Shall I go get the mail at the Post Office?"

"After you answer my question".

"Well what am I to answer this time?"

"Have you any feeling, sentiment---for her".

After a moment, your brows knotted you say:

"I have a sense of responsibility----"

"Why should you be responsible for her----"

"Darling, don't lets go over this all again".

"Oh I feel as if you still cared ~~something~~  
about her, and I can't bear it."

You don't answer that. I suppose you are at  
a loss what to say. I go on bitterly:

"Isn't it a fact that all men are by nature constitutionally bigamous".

You look at me with mock gravity. Then you burst out laughing. This is too much for you. I say sulkily: "Well its true anyway. Most men would like to be Mormons or Turks".

You go out chuckling. Anyway, I am glad I have not made you angry. How patient you are with me! I suppose some men would take me by the shoulders and give me a good shaking. Thats what I need. At all events a good mental shaking. I wish I could forget her!

V.

From the cabin door, I watch you as you go stridin down between the long lane of pepper and eucalyptus trees to the main Inn, where is the Post office. My heart wells with pride in you. To think you belong to me---are all my own---my husband! To me, it seems as if you were the most wonderful man on earth. Thats how much in love with you I am. I know you are not the story-type of hero. You have'nt an Arrow collar or kodak profile. Yours is a rugged, a strong face, and you're so big and nicely built. I think of what Mrs. Disraeli said about her husband! It applies to mine.

As for me, I wish that I were pretty. I'm not. (She is a beauty!) My eyes are not large, with long curling lashes. Mine are just lashes, and my hair is plain brown--a windblown bob. I've nice enough teeth, a nose and mouth and eyes like any one else's. No one would turn to take a second look at me. I'm just ordinary looking. Of course, you would, dear!

I go back into the cabin and begin to straighten up things a bit. Then I pick up a paper. Its a Chan-

colorville paper. I glance through it contemptuously. I used to like that little city. It was a game place and I had many friends there. But now I think of it with aversion. She lives there! It is there she is awaiting your return!

Absent-mindedly I turn to the Women's page, and glance down the Society column. Suddenly I see something that startles me. I read:

"Scarlet curtains and scarlet candles in silver holders formed an attractive decoration at the charming luncheon given by Mrs. Sylvia Nurse, in honor of her engagement to Mr. Jeremiah Dutton. Covers were set for eight....."

The paper is dated two months ago. Overmastering rage and indignation consumes me! The silly fool! Announcing her engagement to another woman's husband! I jump up. We'll see about this! I'll show her!

How I do something that I have never done before--though terribly tempted. I go to your brief case. I dig into it. I find and take out ~~her~~ letters!

I tear off the rubber band about them.

I begin to read. I read on and on, amazement and unholy joy consuming me! So this is my rival--this foolish, shallow, prouing woman. One letter begins: "At break of dawn, I hear the robin's lay! Sing all ye birds--oh sing!"

"Where did she take that from?" I ask myself hysterically, and I begin to laugh. I have to laugh. Her letters are such a curious mixture--pages of stuff

apparently culled from books; then lapses into the patter of the town; tidbits of gossip. She is a female Babbitt! Ah! but here, I come across something more sinister:

"Whatever you do" she writes, "do not see her alone I'm so afraid for you, dear! She might poison you!"

I call her a name. How dare she discuss me with my husband. I read on:

"Get rid of her--get rid of her---at any price and in any way!"

References to my finances. Words of sympathy. She is watching the calendar. His time will soon be up. She prays that God will be with him in the trial before him. She is waiting for him. Soon he will be free! But not for long---ah! not for long! Soon they will be man and wife!

My husband stands in the doorway. His face is dark, stern!

"What are you doing?" he asks.

I am sitting on the floor--her letters all around me.

"I am reading her letters!" I say fiercely.

"You should not do that".

"Why shouldn't I?"

"They were not written to you".

"They were written to my husband".

"It's not right. You had no right to read those letters, Biddy".

"Do you mean that I'm not to see what she writes  
you---that you're to have a secret from me and----"

"But these are old letters. We've got to wipe  
out the past. You can't possibly get any good from  
reading those letters. Certainly there's nothing to  
entertain---"

"Sarcastic, eh?" I croak. "Well let me  
tell you her letters are entertaining--they are screamingly  
funny! Listen to this: 'Sing--Oh ye birds--Oh sing!'  
I burst out laughing.

Your head droops; your shoulders droop.  
You look intensely wosry. Without speaking you sit down  
in one of the big rustic chairs, and suddenly you cover  
your face with your hands. I leap up, the letters  
scattering. I kneel beside you.

"I'm sorry--I'm sorry! I'm a mean little  
beast---forgive me--- please--please---".

You take my face in your hands, and look at me  
so gravely, so tenderly.

"How long are you going to keep this up?"

"Until you get rid of her, as she wrote you  
to get rid of me!"

"But we can't go on like this, dear. There must  
be trust and harmony between us".

"How can there be harmony when that woman---"

"Isn't it enough that I love you?"

"You loved her too".

"No. I was lonely. I needed--love. I was starving for it; but all the time---all of these years, my darling, I loved you!"

I sob, my face against your knee.

"Oh God! If only I could believe it".

"You can, dear!"

You lift me right into your arms. We cling awhile. Then I push back, my hands on your shoulders.

"Her letters are so intimate---just as if you'd been everything to each other. Were you---were you?"

"No---not everything".

"Did you know she gave a luncheon announcing her engagement".

"I heard about it after I left".

"Wasn't that the silly thing to do?"

"It was---not wise".

"Premature, eh? Counting her chickens before they were hatched. Only a silly woman would have done such a thing".

Your face is sad. You speak almost defensively, and I cannot bear your tone.

"She considered me practically free. Everyone in Chanceryville in fact looked upon me as her fiancee".

"Well its just too bad about them!"

Dully:

"You were gone three years, dear!"

"I suppose I'll never hear the end about these three years. Look dear---you don't have to go back, do you  
"Yes, I must, Biddy".

"Well but, it would be so much easier, and simpler if you wrote her a letter---a kind letter even----"

"We've gone all over that dear".

"Well--when are you going?"

"A week or so---whenever you say dear. The sooner I get it over with the sooner we will be together again".

"Oh, so we're to be together again, are we?"

"For all the rest of our lives" you declare solemnly.

"Where will we live?"

"Wherever you say dear".

"Not Chancellerville anyway".

"My business interests are all there".

"You don't expect me to live in the same town as that woman, do you?"

You are silent, a monument of gloom now.

You get up, and make a few restless strides across the room. Then you turn and look at me queerly.

"You are right Biddy. It would be humiliating----"

Your voice is cold, infinitely weary.

"Humiliating? Not for me! I've done nothing".

"It would be humiliating for her" you say.

"She doesn't deserve it".

"You are thinking of her---not me".

"I am thinking of you both. All right then!"

Your tone becomes suddenly brittle: "Chancelerville is out I must go back there--close up my affairs. Then we'll have a month's vacation in the mountains and decide after that what we will do".

"Sounds wonderful!" I say.

You bend down and kiss me, but it seems to me your kiss is chill. I hold on to you tightly. After awhile you go out to fix up the car, preparatory to our moving along.

I feel fine. Chancelerville is out, as you say! I win! I won't have to live in that little city--won't have to face the old crowd; be the subject of gossip and conjecture and perhaps condemnation. I won't have to live where ~~she~~ does! The town is not large enough to hold us both.

I begin to hum. Life's not so bad after all, and I think: "If he had cared a pinch about her, he would have taken those letters from me" I give them a contemptuous push with my foot. Then I begin to gather them up; but I do not put them back in your brief case. Suddenly I notice the mail you have laid on the little sideboard. I cross over and pick up her last letter. It is lying on top of the pile of letters.

## VI.

I can hear you whistling outside our cabin.  
Yours is a recuperative nature--cheerful, happy. You are packing travelling paraphernalia into the car, and as you pack you whistle or sing.

Inside the cabin I am tearing up her letters. I take them one by one and tear them across three times. Then I drop the pieces into a newspaper, roll it up tight and thrust the package into the large tin rubbish can. I dust my hands. That is that!

There is one letter left--the one you brought from the Post office. It is still unsealed. I hold it in my hand. I turn it over, and I think:

"What a fool you are to write to another woman's husband! You are putting dynamite in her hands!"

Her writing is large and conventional. A balanced hand. Mine is a scrawl! She has had the advantage of a finishing school! I've been out in a man's world of work the major part of my life. I have a professional woman's contempt for the weak clinging

vine parasitic type of my sex. She, I think with scorn, is poison ivy. I won't read her letters! Why should I? What does it matter what she writes to my husband? After all, it is I whom he loves! So I start to tear the letter across. It is almost in half! Then something queer happens. I am assailed with a psychic urge, an unendurable curiosity to read that last letter. I cast a look around me, like a thief; then slip my thumb under the flap of the envelope. I am reading her letter:

"My dearest:

Your six weeks in Nevada will be up by the time you receive this letter. Do not delay a moment after that. We cannot afford to wait. There's a reason why you must hurry back---why we should be married at once---I am going to have a baby! ...."

There's a little mirror on the wall of our cabin. It is directly in front of me. I see a face in it. I do not recognize it as my own. My eyes are not large; but the eyes in that face are terribly, tragically large, and they are staring out into space, like those of a haunted person. And my cheeks are always flushed with color---but that face is pale---pale as death!

I don't know what I am doing----something mechanical. I know. I am twisting a paper in my hands. I cannot think. I cannot move.

Your voice:

"Heh, Eddy! Come on out!"

A shiver runs all over me, just as if an icy draught were blowing through the room. I cannot answer

you. I am like a dumb person. You call again. Now I am assailed by fright. Suppose you should see that letter! Suppose you take it from me ---read it ---read it---and know and know and know --that she is going to have a baby! God Almighty!

Panically, frantically I thrust the odious letter back into its envelope and conceal it in my pocketbook. You are calling again.

"Huh---you in there! What are you doing?"

Now I can answer. Now I am no longer dumb. I have hidden that letter. You will not see it. You will never know! My voice is gay-----Is it my voice?

"I'm packing!"

I make a rush upon a grip and begin thrusting this and that article into it.

"To heck with your packing! You come on out here when I tell you to".

I don't answer. I feverishly fold a pair of pajamas --they are yours---and I stow them into my night bag. You come to the door. Your fists are planted on your hips--your arms akimbo. You frown at me portentously.

"Woman! What did I order you to do".

I do not answer. I don't look at you.

"If the Mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the Mountain. Come here, Mountain!"

I am kneeling by a suitcase, muttering monotonously:

"She shan't have him! She shan't have him!

He's mine--mine!"

"What's that you say?"

I turn back a laughing----or is it contorted?---  
face.

"Attend to your own knitting Mahomet. The moun-  
tain 's on her own job".

"Is that so? We'll see about that".

You stride over to me, haul me up by the neck.  
You pretend to take a grip in my hair and to drag me along,  
kissing me all along the way to the door. We are on the  
little porch. You throw a soft pillow on the step, and  
firmly set me upon it. I get another kiss. You return  
now to your job. You polish the car with a big chamois  
rag. You sing as you work. Your voice is nothing but  
a creak. You sing:

"She'll be coming down the mountain, when she  
comes--when she comes--"

You get the words all wrong---but no matter!  
Our car is large and beautiful. The sunlight is all about  
us. From one of the cabins the music from a radio  
floats out. A crooner is singing, and you stop to  
listen:

"Lover, come back to me-----"

My lip curls. Sickening, sentimental slush!  
Kind of stuff she would gurgle over. Well her lover is  
not going back to her. Not if I know it.

You are standing back, surveying with pride  
your handiwork. The car shines.

"How that for a ~~slipshape~~ workmanlike professional job?"

"It's swell!" I say.

How efficient you are about everything! Your large, strong hands are capable of so much! You are always doing something--making something. You are wearing old khaki trousers and a most disreputable shirt. You are over six feet tall, athletic, all man. Your smile is the nicest thing on earth---something to make a woman's heart leap, or to bring the mothering tears to her eyes; for curiously enough there's something singularly boyish and wistful about your smile, withal your thirty five years---a lonely, appealing quality. Ah! Those three long lonely years!

Now you are running water from a hose over your hands. You glance at me slyly, and then with a twist of your hand you turn the hose on my feet. I scream. You look at me puzzled, startled, and then you drop the hose and spring to my side and gather me into your arms.

I am crying! Softly, hopelessly, endlessly! I cannot stop.

"Why dearest, dearest---I was only teasing you. What's the matter, baby?"

I go on crying--crying, my face pressed against your breast.

You take your big soiled handkerchief and daub

my eyes.

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"What's the matter, baby?"

"Don't leave me! Oh, don't leave me!"

"I don't intend to".

"But you're going back---you're going back...."

"I'll take you with me".

Ah! He has said it at last! He will take me back with him. You go on planning.

"We'll have a month in the mountains, and then we'll go on to Council City. From there its only an hours ride to Chancellorville. It won't take me more than half a day....."

"You mean you won't take me back to Chancellorville with you."

Soothingly:

"You wouldn't want to be there."

"You can't see her alone! I must be with you".

"Don't make it too hard for me dear. I want to handle this thing as a man should".

"You can't see her alone I say".

"That's nonsense. You have nothing to fear...."

"I tell you you can't see her alone!"

"Now what harm in the world ...."

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

"She might poison you---kill you, if you told her you were giving her up!"

"Rot!"

"Did you think it was rot when she wrote that about me?"

"Now listen dear. All I want to do is the honorable thing. I am going to her and tell her the truth. She is entitled to know".

I repeat monotonously:

"You can't see her alone---you can't see her alone!"

"You're unreasonable, Hddy".

"No---no---only woman would say it. You can't see that woman alone. She'll take you from me".

"She can't. I love you only!"

"I know women better than you do. When they're in love, they aren't normal. They have no principle---They do anything---anything ---to hold---to keep the man they love!"

"Do you think I am so weak----"

I talk wildly, disjointedly:

"All men are weak in the hands of a scheming woman! She'll spring all sorts of things on you---she'll have hysteriol---cry----appeal to you---she'll cling to you---threaten---maybe try to kill you---and she'll lie, an lie and lie! She'll make up some fantastic story----about herself and----"

"No, no, no! You have her all wrong. She is not that kind. Lets be just to her. You don't know her as I----"

"Go on----No! I don't know her as you do!  
But I know my sex. I know what a woman at bay will do!  
Why even the Bible or Shakespeare or some other book  
says that Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, and  
you'll be scorning her ---throwing her over ---don't you  
see! ----and she'll fight to hold you---make up something-  
pretend ---well suppose she pretended----she was going to  
have---a baby!"

"Biddy! You foolish child!"

"But what would you do if she did---  
answer me that". Suppose she pretended that---"

"That's impossible. How don't lets  
go on with this discussion. Biddy, we could  
easily destroy our happiness if we went on in this  
way. Suppose, for the present anyway, we forget all  
this. Lets pack our stuff into the car and be off.  
What say? You give me a hand. Get busy! Wait'll  
you see what I'm going to show you. Tahoe is the  
largest and I'll say the most beautiful lake in the  
world. Now we're going over to the California side.  
The Savery is a swell place! Let me tell you some-  
thing. We're going to have a real honeymoon and  
don't you forget it!"

"Wait a bit Jerry!"

I hold you by your coat, and look up into  
your face.

"Well sweet heart? What now?"

"Promise me something".

"Anything. Want the Moon?"

"Do you really love me, Jerry?"

"Do I? Don't be funny".

"Say it then. Say that you love me.

I want to hear you say it again!"

"I love you and love you and love you and love you! How's that?"

"In spite of everything?"

"In spite of and because of everything, though its the unsentimental hour of ten A.M."

"But I've been hateful to you ---cantankerous--- hard to live with-----"

"I'm getting acclimated" you respond humorously, kissing my ear.

"And I left you for three years! A man can't live alone for three years!"

"That true". You still maintain your mock serious air.

"And since we've been back together---right on this honeymoon---I've thrown things up to you and nagged you--and said unkind things-----"

"Do you want me to spank you?"

"Look, Jerry. Some people believe if you think unkind things, then they come back to smite you like a boomerang. I've been thinking hideous things about her."

"Darling, don't condemn yourself! You're the dearest little girl in the world".

"No---I'm not---I'm not! I've been mean and small and petty. I ought to have been large--generous. The Victor should always be generous, should'nt he?"

"Anything you say, Victor".

"I used to flatter myself that I could'nt do anything small or mean. I might kill a person but I wouldn't pinch him!"

"Mein Gott! She is capable of killing".

"And even now----this is only a mood. How do you know what's back in my mind? Maybe I'm contemplating committing a ---a crime!"

You stare at me solemnly. Then you take me by the shoulders, give me a little shake and drawn me so close into your arms that I am nearly smothered.

I think I will never cry again!

VII.

We are fifteen thousand feet above sea level. We have been climbing steadily up what seems like an endless grade that circles the mountains.

I am almost breathless. I have not told my husband that I have a weak heart. I feel the altitude! You look at me, and your smile changes to one of concern.

"All right?"

"Sure".

"You're breathing rather rapidly".

"I'm---I'm a breathless sort of person you know".

You are so easy to deceive. No wonder she was able to "pull the wool over your eyes"!

"Shall we get out---take a look around us? We can climb up higher. There are some fine falls about a mile up. We have to go afoot. Come along!"

We are practically at the peak of the mountain now. We are seated on some rocks, overlooking the magnificent valley. You point off --with pride, for this is your own discovery, and you have been waitin to share the thrill with me.

"Now what do you think of Lake Tahoe?"

"It's--its---immense---grand!"

Words fail me. There are three definite colors predominating on the lake. There is a layer of pure blue, another of purple, another of jet black. The lake is surrounded by hills of inescapable beauty. The sheer grandeur of the scene lifts me out of my own petty human drama. I never will see anything so beautiful as Lake Tahoe, seen from this height. I look at you. Your face is glowing. It is almost as if you owned all this Beauty.

"You love Beauty, don't you?" I say softly.

"Who does'nt?"

"Some people go through life unaware of it even. I know why you feel and see it so perfectly".

"Well, old lady--why?"

"Because you are beautiful yourself" I say.

At that you laugh at me.

"Ho! Ho!"

"Yes----and your beautiful inside yourself too. I read somewhere that 'Unless we carry the beautiful with us, we will find it not'."

You are silent. Then, very gently, you take my hand and your eyes hold mine in a long, deep look.

"To comprehend perfect Beauty" you say, "one needs to be in love!"

I catch my breath.

"Oh Jerry" I say, "No matter what is before us---no matter where we may be---whatever may happen---we will never forget this hour, will we?"

"Never!" you say, and you kiss me so gently that my heart feels as if it were bursting within me.

VIII.

We are staing at Tahoe Tavern, on the California side of the Lake. Quite different from the auto camp! You say:

"Well, how's this, old lady".

"Swell I" I have to admit. But I can't help a little sigh. I rather miss the camp. We have wonderful rooms, overlooking the Lake. You call our rooms "the Bridal suite".

We are in the great dining room---candles on the table and lovely flowers, and people in evening clothes or sperts things all about us. You look so nice in your blue coat and white trousers, with your hair smooth and shining. I don't look so bad myself. My Hollywood gown is smart and chic. You smile across the menu card at me and tell me how pretty I look. We toss compliments back and forth to each other, while the waiter is filling our glasses and getting the table ready.

"What will you have dear?"

"Anything. You order, dear".

I'm really too absent minded and scatter brained to order a dinner. I don't care what they bring me. Everything tastes good, anyway, even if, as you insist, I merely taste my food. I reply that a person doesn't gorge when they are sitting opposite someone they're in love with.

"Don't they though!" you retort. "Now watch this animal".

You proceed to "pack down" as you call it a perfectly colossal meal.

I look about me. I see a number of familiar faces. Hollywood people. Up here after the cure?

After dinner, as we are crossing the lobby, and while you have paused at the desk to pick up mail, I am stopped by a Universal scenarist. She stares at me in amazement, almost unable to believe her eyes. I look back at her guiltily I knew a humble \$35. a week studio reader has no right to be staying at the same luxurious hotel where a \$500. a week scenarist is sojourning.

"What are you doing here?" she asks.

"Just what you are" I reply.

She stares hard. My husband is approaching and she glances from you to me. Her voice lowers:

"Who's your good looking male?"

"My husband".

"Oh ye-oh!" She twinkles her finger at

me.

"You don't have to fib to me. I'm too good a sport to tell on you" she avers. "Besides even you are entitled to your affinity I suppose".

That's pretty crass. Even I !

She is looking me up and down cynically and I fancy disparagingly. As I have said, I'm nothing much to look at. She's a rather dashing, handsome type.

"Big elephant" I mutter under my breath, as I turn from her, scorning to disillusion her. She can believe whatever she chooses. I tell you about it as we cross to the elevator. At first you laugh, squeezing my hand under your arm. Then your laughter sounds angry as I say curtly:

"Go look -- set her right about it".

"Not I! Besides this is a clandestine affair isn't it?"

"Nothing of the sort! What are you talking about?!"

"Well, isn't it? We have to keep it secret-- you said so yourself. That you didn't want it known in Chancorville that we were reconciled --yet".

A dark flush goes over your face. You frown.

"That's different" you say stiffly. "I naturally prefer to wait till we get things straightened out".

I smile, holding my chin up. As we go across

the lobby, I bow mechanically to a few people. I don't really know whether I know them or not. In a hazy sort of way, their faces seem familiar. I'm like a person moving in a dream these days.

The elevator. Up we go. I feel your eyes on me. There's a knot between them. You are troubled.

Now we are in our room again.

"What do you want to do tonight darling? Take a ride around the lake---or how about a row? Want to dance?"

"Well---" Of course I smile ---I always smile these days! "What would you prefer?"

"Want to know?"

"Of course".

"An evening at home---reading".

"Fine! Lets. What you got?"

"Two corking books. Anatole France's 'Revolt of the Angels' and Will Durant's 'Transition'".

"I'll take 'Transition'".

We change into pajamas. You stretch out on the bed, chucking a couple of pillows under your head. You pay the bed beside you, but I curl up in a big overstuffed lounging chair.

A quiet evening at home! I try to read "Transition", but I do not comprehend a line I read. My mind goes stealing off, and I am thinking chaotically:

"How he can't divorce me! He has condoned the charges of desertion against me..... When he goes back to Chancelerville, he'll have to tell her.... He'll have to tell her he's not a free man....He's got a wife..... a wife! What a shock she'll get.... Well---it was coming to her..... I can just imagine how the town will talk..... It will be a bombshell in their midst.....when they learn you have become reconciled with your wife! .... Bridge and teatables and parties..... they'll talk about and exclaim over it! Its her own fault! She broadcasted and ballyhoed an engagement to another woman's husband! She will get just what she deserves. .....

"I wonder what she'll do. Once when I asked you what she would do when you told her, you answered gloomily: "I'm afraid she'll go to bed for a month".

She would! She's the kind to take to her bed----the clinging vine, poison ivy type! I know her kind so well---all women know it. They don't play fair with other women. They pet around a man and play the helpless, appealing act. They have to be babied, protected---Ahi all women know the kind and most men fall for it!

You burst out laughing. You have been chuckling off and on all evening.

"Listen to this" you say, and read me from "The Revolt of the Angels". I laugh with you,

though I don't comprehend one word you have read.

"What are you doing away over there. Come up here---"

You put the bed beside you.

"I'm all right here".

"How's 'Transition'.

"Fine".

"Dry?"

"No, I wouldn't say so".

"Put it down. You come over here. Let me read you from this. Its damned delicious--whimsical---here---come on!"

I put down Transition. I get on the bed beside you and under your arm snuggle up against you. I get a squeeze and a kiss and then you read. I am a silent, rapt audience. I laugh when you laugh, and keep quiet as a mouse while you read. You never dream that I am not hearing a word, but that again my mind is travelling along its own trail. I am thinking achingly:

"One more week----and you will be going back!"

We had finally decided on that. A week and then you are to return to Chancellorville, I to Hollywood. I am to resign my position, and join you as soon as possible. After that----its all on the knees of the gods! Huddled beside you, I am turning and returning it all over in my mind:

"One more week! Then you will be one  
the road----you are going back by motor----it will take  
six days. That makes nearly two weeks before---you  
will know! Anything might happen before then.  
I wonder if the roads are safe----mountain trails--  
cliffs---makes me dizzy just to think of them. The  
car must be checked and overhauled and the brakes  
need adjusting.....You will write me every day----  
wire me when you arrive there..... Ah! You sent  
her a wire the other day, I didn't see it. I asked  
you what was in it, and you replied:

"Its in answer to one she sent. She wanted  
to know when I would be back".

"Does she think you are divorced".

Your face had clouded over. You changed  
the subject quickly. I did not press it.

Now I am thinking:

"If she knows you are leaving on such and  
such a date----I daresay you will wire her when you  
are on the road----Oh how can you? How can you? ----  
she'll probably meet you. You told me that she came  
part of the way with you! Its pretty hard to meet  
a car however. She'll know the moment you arrive there-  
in Chancelorville. You'll be registered at the  
Chateau----she will call you there ---maybe she'll go  
to the hotel---to your room! Oh God! I cannot think  
of that!

How will she tell you? I know  
She'll stage a pretty little scene. I can just see  
her. She'll play her cards before you have time  
to tell her----about me! She'll say:

"Oh my dear! some beautiful has happened to  
us! I wrote you-----"

Then you'll say:

"Wrote me----about what?"

And she'll start to tell you. I know how  
she'll tell you. Not as I did----that time when I----  
I broke it to you jauntily--carelessly just as if it  
were a joke. We were going to have a baby! Wasn't  
that a joke on us. You thought it wonderful---  
sacred--extraordinary! The most marvelous thing on  
earth. What freak of fate brought her into our  
lives just at that time!

I was not normal! I was beside myself.  
I believed what now I know I imagined; but then, I wanted  
only to shake you out of your smug complacency ---to  
punish you--and her!

Even now I cannot bear to think of that all-  
say horseback ride----and of your face---your dear,  
tortured face!

Incidentally----there was to be no baby---  
for me! There never would be one!

Now you are reading "The Revolt of the Angels",  
and I am lying on the bed beside you, and thinking and  
thinking:

"Now sha is going to have your baby for you!"

Aloud I suddenly say harshly:

"I wish I were dead!"

"Biddy! For heaven's sakes. What's got into you now?"

"I said I wish I were dead, and I mean it".

You roll over, blink at me. The book drops over the side of the bed to the floor.

"Why do you say such awful things?"

"Because if I were to die it would solve our whole problem, don't you see, Jerry? You would always think of me lovingly. Its much better to die while you're young and pretty. You leave behind you then lovely memories----like--like faded bridal linen---do you see? Suppose you and I went on and on, by and by I'd be getting wrinkles all over my face, and maybe I'd get fat---who knows? And my disposition might get worse. I'm not a nice person----"

"I'm going to push that little face of yours in if you don't shut up. Never heard such damn nonsense in my life. Why you're healthy and husky as a little horse".

"Am I?" I say softly, and my hand goes stealing to my heart. Your brows are knotted with one of your puzzled frowns. You never can understand me. I am a Chinese puzzle where you are concerned, and the dear funny part is that in spite of that you go on loving and loving me

"You do love me, don't you?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"No", but Jerry-----you know I might'nt  
make you a good wife at all. I'm kind of freaky----  
I never was "brought up" properly. I just 'growed' like  
Topsy. My mother once told me my first bed was a  
drawer in a wardrobe trunk. She was playing one night  
stands! Oh dear-----you deserve one of these kind of  
women they write about in stories and the womans  
pages----you know the kind---home-makers and --and ---  
mothers!"

"Well whats the matter with you trying  
your hand at this mother thing?"

Your face glows--beams.

"Ah darling! Please kiss me!"

You do. Thoroughly--perfectly.

"Want to die now?" you ask.

"No----want to live forever!"

"Thats the way to talk. Tired? Want to go  
to sleep?"

"No. Go on with the Revolt of the Angels.  
Wish I was an angel".

"You are!"

"A hellish one!" say I.

IX.

I am walking on a plank--blindfolded.  
It is suspended above a bottomless abyss. I am  
moving on and on to the end of the plank. Soon  
I must plunge down--down---down. I cry out.  
I start up screaming. Your arms about me. I hear  
your voice, so full of concern and tenderness.  
"What is it darling?"  
"Nothing, nothing. Only a dream! Hold  
me closely!"  
If only life were but a dream!

X.

We are motoring from Lake Tahoe to Sacramento, where you will put me on the train. This is our last day together. You will go on your way---a five days motor journey --back to Chancellerville.

The day is heavy with an all encompassing heat. The sun blazes down relentlessly. You ask anxiously:

"Quite all right, dear?"

"Sure. Don't I look it?"

I give you a wide bright smile. You look uneasy none the less. These last few days have taken some of the sunshine out of your nature. I can see that you are concerned, troubled.

"Come up closer to me?"

"How can I? No human being could be closer!"

You drive with one hand. We do not look at the scenery now. When you are not watching the trail, you are looking at me.

"Listen to me dear. I don't want you to worry. I'll do the worrying for both of us from now on. Understand."

You are a man of few words; but you go on, and I listen to you dreamily. It is precious to know you planning for us.

"Now it won't be for long---at most a week or two. Then we will be together this time never to part again.....Without you, Biddy, life would mean nothing to me.....I'd be lost.....You are my little world.....my whole Cosmos! If I lost you.... If I thought I'd never see you agin---I'd drive this car off the cliff..... Thats how much I love you".

"Could'nt you say that all over again--- slowly, succinctly, so that I can swallow it all in agin!"

You say it all over again and more. I close my eyes, rest against your arm. We go on and on in silence. After a very long time I ask you in a small voice:

"Jerry, did you mean what you said?"

"About what?"

"About driving the car off the cliff---if you thought you would never see me again".

"Yes--I meant that".

"Do then" I urge dreamily.

You stare at me hard.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh---nothing. I was just 'calling you' as they say in poker".

"Biddy, you are an enigma. I don't understand you---but I adore you, darling!"

"Never mind about the understanding. Go on with the adoring".

My pocket book slips from my lap. I pick it up. Unconsciously my hand closes about the envelope inside. Suddenly I say harshly, savagely.

"I don't like babies---do you?"

You are startled.

"Why of course I do---and so do you. I never saw a woman who didn't".

"I don't tell you. Do you".

"So much---that I hope we have a dozen!"

"Suppose we have none---what then?"

"I'm not going to suppose anything so impossible and---tragic. We have demonstrated that we can--and we're going to---see?"

"But suppose we don't?"

"In that event I'll have to be satisfied with the one I've got".

You give me a big squeeze.

"Babies" I say, "are noisy, leaky little nuisances".

"That's why we like them".

"I don't!"

"Go on! You do. You wouldn't be a woman if you didn't, and if you weren't a woman I wouldn't love you".

"For heavens sakes, why do we have to talk about babies, of all things----babies---babies----is there nothing else you can think of?"

My voice rises fretfully.

"But dearest, don't be unreasonable. It was you who brought up the subject".

"Well I suppose I did---why pursue it?"

You give me a queer troubled searching look.

"Darling, are you sure you're quite all right?"

"No---I'm not----can't you see I'm in a ---in a ---pathological condition?"

"Patho----what do you mean?"

Your voice unconsciously rises in a joyful tone. I see what is in your mind, and an insufferable ache penetrates all through my being. I shake my head.

"No, no---I don't mean what you mean."

XI.

We are in the Sacramento Railway station. There are only a few people here. Travel is light this year. You have gone to arrange about my baggage, sleeper, ticket and the rest. I sit down and wait for you. I can't think at all. My mind is in a numbed state. All I know is --that you are going---back to her! This one idea presses down and down on me like a weight of lead.

I don't know when or how I began to realize that a woman sitting beside me is crying. I become hazily aware of the fact that she is gasping and sobbing and mopping her eyes with a handkerchief. I look at her. She's thin, ordinary looking little person. She sits there openly in the station tears running down her face. Now I am suffering from a million inner wounds; but I cannot cry at all. Long since I have lost the ability to cry. In spite of myself I stammer:

"Are you--are you in trouble?"

She looks up at me with the eyes of a wounded animal, and this is what she says between gasps and sobs:

"My baby! Oh my baby! My little, little baby! Oh my baby! My baby!"

It is as if she were sticking a knife into me and turning it around and around. I can't stop her. I can't even shake her off, for she has dropped her head upon my shoulder and is clinging to me, a stranger. I am panic-stricken, terrified by her confidences. I hold her, soothe her. But I don't know what to do---what to say.

"Oh don't cry! Please don't cry!"

She is telling me everything. She has been carrying a cup brimful---now it pours over---to me, of all persons in the world!

"I'm bringing my baby's body home---on---on the train....."

As she speaks, I am shivering. Why should she talk about babies? Why is the whole world in league against me? Why are everyone thinking and talking about babies---babies!

Hers was two years old.... such a pretty tot. It climbed on the top of a well----on a farm---the board broke----it fell in---was drowned---she is bringing its body ---home!"

On and on she goes---babbling. The baby was all the world to them---- her husband and her!

How will they live without her?      No home is a home  
without a baby----a child.....

I have dried her tears! I have said things  
I don't myself understand----things that came out of  
my lips. Soothing, loving, understanding things.  
It cannot be I who am speaking. Not I, the bitter,  
cynical woman who said she hated babies!

She says she feels better. She even tries  
to smile----a twisted, pathetic thing, that smile. She's  
a brave a little thing. I smile back at her, pat on  
her shoulder.

My husband comes up. He picks up my bag.  
We have only a few moments. The train is due.  
I kiss the woman, much to my husband's astonishment.  
We move down to the lower level, where the trains come in.  
I am smiling. I feel suddenly buoyed up by an immense  
courage.

You are not smiling; your dear face is overcast.  
Your eyes are red. Like the mother in the railway  
station you are unashamedly --crying.

We are at the steps of the Pullman. There is  
not time for you to come aboard. We stand a moment and  
look at each other. My hand sprages in my pocketbook.  
I smile up at you.

"Well, old thing, we've had a darned nice holi-  
day, have 'nt we".