

Annie
Chapter 2: Caldwell (1880 - 1953) (24A)

I believe the early experience clouded grandma's entire life, and through her, her children's lives. Her young mother moved into a house in Manchester with her three year old daughter and fourteen month old son. I have the impression that her mother was widowed by the first Boer war, although that is unclear.

A few days after the family moved in, the young mother fell down the basement stairs, and probably fractured her skull. Grandma said that she dragged a blanket down to the basement and covered her mother, and waited for her to wake up. She also brought a blanket for the baby and whatever food she could reach - milk for the baby and bisquets. The children crouched beside their mother's body for three days, until the neighbor's attention was attracted by the sound of the little boy's crying. The police were called.

There were some well-read, tear-stained letters in the house, but nothing to identify the children. The mother's eyes were dark brown as were the little girl's, although the boy's eyes were blue. Brilliant deduction by the neighbors and the police brought them to the conclusion that the children were Jewish, and a Jewish orphanage was contacted. That was a good thing for the children. The orphanage would not separate the frightened girl and boy. One or the other of the children would probably have been accepted into private homes, but not together.

Some years passed before relatives traced the children. They were Jewish, but my grandmother never forgot those years. She insisted that the only people who had ever cared about her and her brother were Jews, and therefore she and her brother were Jews.

But the memory and uncertainty of ~~the~~ and fears of those years never left her, and she imparted them to her children.

Grandpa certainly did nothing to alleviate the fears. His cautious Scots ancestry was instilled in him. The threats of poverty and possible loss of his ~~the~~ job always loomed. Consequently the dole and poor house hovered in every shadow.

There was no excuse for that. As a top lithographer he earned an excellent salary, but every penny was carefully saved. They always lived on the fringe of a proper middle-class neighborhood - on the slightly deteriorating fringe, it is true; rent and expenses were low, but there was still the aura of respectability. If they ever renewed any parts of their wardrobes, it was with great reluctance.

Grandpa refused to take vacations, because someone might steal his job in his absence. When Niagara Lithograph insisted that he take a vacation - on full salary - he would don an old sweater and go from door to door, pleading for odd jobs, because he was out of work, and his family was starving.

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Mother attended School #18 and Hutchinson Central High School, and Chown's Business School. By the age of seventeen she had mastered some degree of expertise in typing and shorthand. She had no interest in learning book-keeping and filing.

By 1917 Europe was already deeply involved in the Second World War, and the United States was in the process of ~~starting~~ recruiting young men. Young women were also being solicited to join the services as stenographers and office personnel. With parental consent, they would be accepted as early as seventeen years of age.

Mother nagged and nagged her mother, and in her own words, "Practically dragged ma by her hair downtown to sign the papers for me." Grandpa refused to have anything to do with the entire matter. Mother became a Midshipman in the United States Navy. She was stationed in Washington D.C., where she met my father. The West Virginia farm-raised boy also wanted to see the world. He was almost a year older than my mother. My mother was eighteen and a half, and my father nearly twenty, when they were married in Washington.

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I remember my occasional young childhood visits to grandma and grandpa's rear Congress Street ~~ma~~ cottage. Uncle Arthur was still living at home. Grandma and grandpa called Arthur "Sonny".

The visits always began smoothly enough, but there would soon be a screaming battle. I never ^{knew} exactly what sparked those battles. It seemed to me that it always began with some differently recalled incident from their past. The cottage would reverberate with shouts and screams from the four adults.

The visits always ended the same way - with my mother slamming out of the cottage. ~~Sometimes~~ Sometimes grandma would have the last, "Don't you ever come back here again!" And sometimes it was Mother who managed

the final, "I'm never coming back here again!"

"All she cares about is 'Sonny'! my mother would rage bitterly, aloud.

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I once asked Mother if she and grandma had always quarreled so violently.

"Oh, no!" she answered. "Before that damn Art came along everything was wonderful! We used to dance around the rooms and play games and visit parks together, and she used to tell me the most marvelous stories. But after he was born, everything changed - all she talked about was 'Sonny'! She didn't have time for me any more. I would have killed him when he was a baby, but she never let him out of her sight. - That damn kid even slept in her bed!" The way she said that made it sound as though the sleeping arrangement had been baby Arthur's choice. To me it sounded as though grandma had been well aware of her young daughter's hostility, and had taken no chances. In my mother's mind, Arthur had entered this world with foresight and pure malice, directed solely toward her.

Years later, when I talked to Patty (Uncle Arthur's only child) she told me about how she had dreaded her childhood Sundays, when grandma came to dinner.

"All you ever cared about was Janet!" her father would shout. "Everything was always 'Janet - Janet - Janet!'"

"And then they would be off again," Patty said. "Every Sunday they would have the same fight all over again."

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But in spite of the noisy finales and ^{exits,} ~~exits,~~ the visits would eventually resume, and so did the battles. Blood ties among the Caldwell were too strong to ^{let a} little thing like mutual antipathy and ^{jealousy} ~~antipathy~~ interfere.

My mother casually told me, one early afternoon, that my father might be coming to visit for ~~a little while~~ ^{an hour or so.} I knew it irritated her when I showed any excitement or pleasure, so I tried to control myself, and went to change to the one dress that almost fit me. I did want to look grown-up. Maybe he would take me away with him if I looked older, and capable of taking ~~care~~ ^{care} of myself. I had half-formed visions of him coming home every night and I would be waiting for him with dinner all prepared. "Aunt" Mary had let me watch her cook, and I knew how to make egg-salad and tuna fish salad, and I would get a book and learn more. I also knew how to iron ~~handkerchiefs~~ ^{handkerchiefs.} I just needed some practice and I would be able to iron shirts.

I paced back and forth from one end of the block to the other - to my mother's irritation. She was wearing her madonna with child look and I was disturbing the impression. She had brought two chairs from the apartment, and they were set up on the front lawn, next Judy's carriage. Judy was carefully gowned to complete the image.

Finally I recognized my father's slim figure in the distance.

"Don't ~~run!~~ ^{run!}" my mother called crossly, as she carefully arranged the baby in her arms.

I did run, and then I stopped. He had a uniform on. I didn't like uniforms, and had been happy when the moths had eaten mine to shreds in the Wurtzman basement, where "Aunt" Mary had stored them. My mother had been shrilly angry when "Aunt" Mary had telephoned to tell her that I needed clothes for school.

My father and I inspected each other and then he put his arms around me.

"You're a big girl now," he said.

"Why are you in the navy again?" My dreams of us having a home together were shattered. I knew he had been in the navy during The War, and I knew that sailors lived on their ships. They rarely had homes on land. I was smarter about some things than about others.

"I'm in the Coast Guard, not the navy."

"But you live on a boat." I knew a lot about the Coast Guard.

Stella Niagara was on the lower Niagara River, and the Canadian shore was conveniently handy for rum-runners during those prohibition years. ^{Small boat} ^{congested} ~~The~~ traffic was very ~~heavy~~ from one isolated shore to the other. The nuns were always calling the Coast Guard, and they were familiar visitors to the convent.

"Yes, I live on the boat - and I have to leave in an hour, so let's not waste time."

"Will!!" My mother called for attention.

He put his arm around my shoulders and we walked to the tableau of madonna and child.

"Peggy, here's a dime. Why don't you take a walk up to Grant Street and get yourself some candy - I want to talk to your father alone."

I was known for my insatiable sweet tooth, but if she thought that I was going to leave my father's side—— she was dreaming. I sat on the arm of his chair, and clutched his ^{hand} ~~arm~~ while she tried to talk over my understanding. I didn't really listen to the conversation, I just waited impatiently for her to finish — but even my unsophisticated mind did catch some of the nuances. She always did believe in keeping at least one bird handy in the bush, and she was flirting with coquettish sweet reserve.

"Peggy loves living here, and having a real home - don't you, Peggy?" She raised her voice sharply.

I ignored the question. The hour was going by too fast.

"When am I going to see you again, Daddy?"

"My cutter will make a stop in the harbor in October. We won't be in port long, but I want you to come down and see it. Your mother will bring you down - won't you, Janet?" He raised his voice.

"Maybe." She shrugged and put the baby back in the carriage. The arranged scene had not worked to her satisfaction, and the audience was

over, but she had a last thought.

"Peggy, why don't you take Judy for a ride in her carriage, while I say goodbye to your father?" She had never let me touch either carriage or baby before.

"I have to leave now," my father said, "and I want Peggy to walk a little way with me."

"Only to the end of the block. She can't cross any streets." She turned her head away - we were dismissed. She never worried about me crossing streets when she wanted something from a distant store, and Grant Street was a thirty-five minute walk in each direction. If she wanted cigarettes (Reback objected to cigarette smoking, and wouldn't buy them) or she wanted ~~the~~ the stuff that maintained that strange color of her hair, she didn't ~~hesitate~~ hesitate to send me for them, no matter how great the distance or number of streets to be crossed.

We didn't say anything to each other until we reached the end of the block.

"Come on, Peggy - smile! I'll see you in October." I nodded and watched as he walked quickly away.

Of course, Reback didn't know about my father's visit, and I was told that if I wanted to see my father in October, I had better not mention it. Why would I mention anything to him? The wall between Reback and me had already been securely bricked in by my mother. She told him that I called him names while he was at work. The words she said I used were not familiar to me, and if he had thought, he would have realized that it was highly unlikely that a convent raised girl, and a particularly naive one, as I obviously was, would know them. At first he would look hurt, and then an angry flush would show. The threat of not seeing my father in October prevented me from defending myself.

August

She had an old standard L.C. Smith typewriter, and in ~~September~~ ^{August} she started to write again. I say "again" because in my mind the clacking of the typewriter was always associated with her. It was ~~just~~ better for me when she wrote. It kept her mind occupied.

It was time for me to enter school. She didn't like that, but there were laws about it.

She gave me a fat envelope to take to the new school. I was instructed to take it directly to the principal. I followed the instructions and seated myself in the offered chair, while the principal read the lengthy ~~letter~~ missive.

The principal looked perturbed.

"I don't know what to do," she said to her assistant. "according to this, she shouldn't be here. — Who brought you to school?" she asked me. "Can you speak?"

"Yes." I was surprised at the question.

"From what your mother says, you never ^{really attended classes} ~~went to school~~ before and you cannot be taught. Can you read?"

"Of course I can read!" I was ^{indignant.} ~~indignant~~

"Can you read some of these words?" She gave me my mother's letter. "Read ^{it} aloud, please."

I read the first page and a half aloud and then burst into tears. Thankfully, my memory has blotted some of the horror from my mind, and my tears prevented me from finishing the letter. I always knew she didn't like me, but I didn't know how much she hated me. My summer spent at the public library hadn't been wasted. I understood what she said. The principal gave me a large handkerchief, and sat down beside me.

"You read very well," she patted my shoulder. "Now tell me, where did you go to school?"

Between wretched hiccups I told her about Mount Saint Joseph's — but that didn't really count because I was too young to attend classes. And then I told her about Stella Niagara and about School #21, which

I had attended for the year I was at the Wurtzman's. I didn't tell her about skipping grades - that wasn't important. I had only been in the second, fourth, sixth and eighth grades.

The principal called Mrs. Norton at School #21, and had a long conversation with her, and then returned to sit beside me. We talked while I tried to erase my mother's ugly words from my mind.

"According to Mrs. Norton, you should be in high school. Your records were sent to Lafayette High School." I didn't even know that I had graduated. I remembered taking the easy examinations, but I hadn't paid any attention after that. ~~There were more interesting things to do~~

"Peggy, there are a lot of people like your mother. I know it's hard ~~for~~ to understand that, and you are very immature for a twelve year old girl. Do you know what 'immature' means?"

"Yes," I said sadly. "It means that I don't understand all the things that other girls my age know." I had a feeling that I never would understand them. The few times I had tried to join Roslyn had not been successful.

"That's right. You also know a lot of things they don't know - things that are learned from books. Mrs. Norton told me that you were far in advance ~~academically~~ ^{scholastically}, but I think you should repeat eighth grade and this time concentrate on trying to make friends and learning about children your own age. - But that's up to you. What do you think you should do?"

Nobody had ever asked me to make a decision regarding my future before.

"I know that repeating the school work will be dull, but Mrs. Norton told me how much you like to read. I have books here and you can come in every afternoon and read by yourself, if you would like that."

That was the clincher, and I agreed.

"Fine," she smiled. "Now that's enough for one day. You come back tomorrow and we will start."

I hadn't been away from home very long, and I returned before noon.

"Good!" my mother said with satisfaction. "You came back just in time to make my bed and clean up the kitchen. I could have told you that they wouldn't accept you in school!"

"I don't start until tomorrow!" I went to the kitchen.

"You didn't deliver my letter," she screamed.

"Yes. - I did," ~~she~~

"I'll find out - you filthy little ~~liar~~ ^{liar!}" I heard her on the telephone

— as I turned on the water for the dishes. -Actually I don't think she said much, although she was on the telephone for a while. Her face was sullen and angry for the next few days.

I enjoyed the next month ~~that~~ I was in that school, but then we moved back to Lafayette Avenue, and I had to transfer to a different grammar school. My mother gave me another envelope to take to the new school, but this one I threw in the garbage pail—in front of her.

"Aren't you curious about what's in it?" she asked me with bright eyes.

I didn't answer. Maybe I was beginning to grow up.

"I'll mail it to the school!" she threatened. I knew she wouldn't. She was too lazy to even bother changing from her night gown unless she was going out for the evening.

I did see my father in October, but the weather was bad, and we were only permitted on the deck of the cutter. His look-out friend warned him that the chief was coming and we had to leave.

"I'll write to you," he promised. And he did, and he sent me a snap-shot of him on the cutter. I still have that, but I don't know what happened to the letter. Ah, well, it was a "how are you - I am fine - be a good girl and take care of your mother" letter. It is the only

of him that picture I have. I do have a checker-chess board that he made. My mother asked me if I wanted it ~~when she was~~ when she was ~~is~~ going to throw it in the garbage, about three years ago. My husband had it restored for me. It is a beautiful chess board.

There was no public library worthy of the name in the Lafayette Avenue area, and I had to walk all the way downtown to the Main Branch at Niagara Square. It was a very long walk, but there was a magnificent selection of books. I went a little wild and my greed led me astray. I read Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. Rider Haggard and Zane Grey. Oh, I read Dickens and Oscar Wilde and de Maupassant and Fielding and many other classics too - but it was the ~~escapism~~ escapism that captured my attention. I knew better, and I knew I was wasting my time, I should have been studying and paying attention to ^{the} practical details of learning how I was to take care of myself.

My mother had a passion for books and didn't care what I read. It was the only common meeting ground we had. She told me she would give me a quarter a week for doing the housework, but I rarely saw the quarters - it was always coming next week, and soon I would have a great accumulation of quarters, or so she assured me. I am still waiting.

Now that Judy wasn't considered so breakable, her daytime feeding and care was turned over to me, along with diaper washing and changing and bedmaking, dishwashing, dusting, preparing vegetables, shopping, and washing floors. Reback did the vacuuming every Saturday, since the vacuum was too ancient and heavy for me to push. I wouldn't have minded the chores, if she had ever been pleased with my efforts, but she took everything for granted. She slept most of the day, and wrote most of the night. She did the final completion of the evening meal and greeted ~~Reback~~ Reback lovingly when he came home. He was given a detailed account of her exhausting day, and how she had to contend ^{with} me and the care of the baby. By now I knew that there would never be anything I could do that would please her.

Judy was fretful, and a picky eater. My mother had become bored with her madonna role, and Judy was on a formula. Getting a few ounces of formula down Judy was not rewarding, since she immediately vomited it up just as the last drop went down. She would give an angelic smile and everything would gush out all over both of us, to both our consternation. I would be screamed at and accused of abusing her.

When Reback came home, he was given a blow by blow recount of my transgressions of the day, and Judy was lovingly handed to papa for the feeding. Happily, Judy had no discrimination, and papa would receive the regurgitated formula all over his suit. It was the highlight of my day until Reback finally refused to feed her anymore, and the chore came back to me.

Poor Reback. ^{I suppose he'd somewhat} ~~He had~~ been a happy bachelor until this marriage. At forty-seven he was not competent to handle a household composed of a new baby, a strange adolescent girl, and an irrational thirty-three year old changeling shrew. And she was all of that. One moment she would appear to be a logical adult, and the next moment she would be a raging foul-mouthed witch, spewing out senseless curses and accusations. I think I had ~~some~~ some empathy for Reback at the time, but then the strappings started.

Repeating eighth grade was boring and the children in this school seemed backward to me. My mother was pleased with my boredom, and encouraged me to stay home, until the truant officer started to show up with increasing regularity. I handled that problem pretty well by myself. I alternated between coughing delicately and ~~saying~~ explaining that I had a cold, and telling him that my mother was too ill for me to leave her. I held scrawny Judy in my arms when I answered the door. I know we presented a pathetic picture. The truant officer was most understanding until one morning when the doorbell disturbed my mother and she came charging out in her disheveled nightgown.

"God damn it, you bitch! What are you doing at the door? Has that

bastard of a truant officer been here again?"

The truant officer took one look and backed down the stairs.

The next day she received a summons.

When Reback came home that night she told him that I had been skipping school without her knowledge, and was probably running around with some boys. I must be taught a lesson, she said. And the only way to teach me was to beat me. She never struck me herself, but she told Reback to use his belt. At first he was reluctant, but with shrill cries and clapping hands, my mother goaded him into action. After a while he got into the swing of things, and needed no further instruction.

"Kill her - kill the bitch!" my mother screamed. When he exhausted himself and turned purple and stopped to gasp for breath, she sobbed and held him to her breast.

"Look what you're doing to my poor husband," she cried. "He's going to have a heart attack, and it will be all your fault if he dies!" She took him to bed, murmuring soothing words to him. For a few days everything would be comparatively peaceful.

At the age of thirteen I had no place to go.

Grandma only lived a few blocks away, but I stayed away from her. She reminded me too much of my mother, although I must say that she was always kind and stopped to talk to me and ask me how I was. She would thrust some coins at me. I didn't want to take them, but I had putting them in my pocket, or dropping them on the sidewalk. a choice of ~~putting them in my pocket, or dropping them on the sidewalk, or putting them in my pocket~~ While I admit that I was stupid - I was not that stupid.

Grandma and my mother had not spoken to each other since 1931. told grandpa
Grandma and grandpa had had a battle, and grandma ~~XXXXXX~~ to remove himself from the cottage. Just to make certain that he ~~XXXXXX~~ received the message clearly, she waited until he left and dumped all his clothes outside and bolted and locked the door. It was still fairly warm outside and grandpa got himself a small cot, and slept in the garbage shed. Buffalo is not known for it's ~~XXXXXX~~ benign winters, and when it became

impossible for him to sleep in the shed, he abandoned it and showed up at my mother's door - with something resembling ~~pneumonia~~ ^{pneumonia}. If my grandfather had been well, she would have turned him away, I am sure, but ill-health in any creature brought out compassion in her. She nursed him back to ~~health~~ comparative health, but he had a bad heart and before my mother could urge him on his way, he had a heart attack and died.

Then the recriminations and screams started. My mother expected to be reimbursed for the nursing and care of her father, and my grandmother refused. That ~~feud~~ ^{feud} lasted until 1945. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ My grandmother ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ was already ill at that time.

I had a standing invitation for dinner, with Aunt Pollie and Uncle Willie every Thursday. I was warned by my mother that if I said anything derogatory to them about her that I would never ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{go to their house} again. I wouldn't have said anything anyway. I was too ashamed of my own inadequacy.

High school was no better than grammar school, and now I was ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ leaving the house and genuinely skipping classes. I spent ~~all~~ all my time in the library, and my taste was deteriorating.

I enjoyed my little half-sister, although it seemed that she would never learn to use the toilet. I told her that she could come and live with me, when I had a home of my own - and I would always take care of her.

Reback was becoming more sour about my mother's all night typing. He said he couldn't sleep, though there were three rooms between their room and the room she typed in - so she moved closer to my room. Now I couldn't sleep, and she slept all day.

And the strappings continued.

One time, in desperation, I tried to hang myself.

The apartment house was old and the gas pipes that had been used for illumination still jutted from the walls. They were capped, but still connected to the main gas line. I tried to hang myself on the one in my bedroom, but the piping started to ~~seem~~ give way, and I was afraid I would flood the apartment house with gas, or start a fire. I did not want to be responsible for anyone else's death, so I tried a high hook in my clothes closet. I wasn't successful there either. The hook pulled from the wall. I never could do anything right.

My mother saw the bruise on my throat the next day, and she laughed

"The next time you want to try that, let me show you how. I'll show you how to do it properly."

I managed to leave the room with some dignity, and went into the bathroom to vomit.

I sat on the edge of the bathtub and thought. No, I would not try that again. That might give her pleasure - and I didn't want to do that

The rental for the apartments was very reasonable, even for those devastating times. It ranged from twenty-five dollars a month - for the darkest inside apartments, to fifty, for the corner for the apartments with outside windows. That included heat, a ~~refrigerator~~ ^{refrigerator}, and a gas stove. Gas was also included in the rent. There was no ~~extra~~ ^{additional} charge for the mice and cockroaches.

After some experimenting, I concocted a paste of borax, boric acid, and liquid bleach and spread it around the free-loaders haunts. I don't know if it killed them, or if they just moved to a more friendly neighborhood, but after a short time they were no longer present in the Reback apartment.

Unattached maiden ladies of any age could not rent an apartment. Their morals were suspect. Families that included often drunk, wife-beating husbands were welcome, as long as the rent was paid on time and

the neighbors did not complain too often.

The L-shaped building and attached apartments were rail-road flats. They were large, in that they had a double living room, a dining room, kitchen, bath, two bedrooms and a third room with no outside window. I called that ~~room~~ room the dark room, and would not go into it. There were three stories of apartments - almost thirty, I believe - I never counted them. The largest apartment was occupied by the landlord, his wife, and their three daughters. The entire building occupied almost one block, facing Lafayette Avenue and continued around the corner on Barton Street. A wooden porch led from the kitchen door and ran the full "L" length of the upper two stories of the apartment house. The inside apartments had windows in the rear, facing the porch - one window in the kitchen, and one in the adjoining largest bedroom - the Reback family bedroom. There were three ~~the~~ abutting windows in the ~~double parl~~ ^{double parl} with an adjoining tiny front bedroom. - That room was mine. ~~room, and one in the ~~the~~ adjoining front bedroom mine.~~ There was a window in the dining room and another in the bathroom - they were at right angles to each other, across an inaccessible square courtyard. The neighboring apartment's windows completed the square.

Every night, after dinner, my mother ~~ad~~urned to the bathroom with the evening paper and her forbidden cigarettes, to spend an hour and a half to two hours enthroned on the toilet. Reback would fume and occasionally shout and pound on the bathroom door until he was finally rewarded by the sound of the flushing toilet. Then he would go ~~to~~ the dining room window to ~~gl~~ glare at the bathroom window. Soon the bathroom window would open and my mother would appear, frantically waving a bathtowel to clear the incriminating fumes and stench from the room. I don't know who she thought she was fooling. Everything in the bathro always reeked of stale cigarettes, and half of the time she didn't even notice that there were still unflushed cigarette butts in the toilet bowl.

My mother loved to read other people's mail. Unfortunately, only Reback's was available - at the time.

When I brought the mail up, she would study each envelope carefully, and then start the kettle going. She steamed the interesting envelope, or ~~one~~ envelopes open, and sat down to read the contents. Then she would return them to the envelopes and glue them closed again. She had to be careful, because once she accidentally put the wrong letter in wrong envelope. She was so inept and careless that even two year old Judy would have known that the envelope had been tampered with. If there was anything particularly noteworthy, she would put it away for a day or ~~for~~ two.

liked to consider would
 She ~~was~~ herself a prophetess, and ~~Reback~~ read tea leaves ~~and tell~~ and tell fortunes with cards. She would study the tea leaves and then pull out the cards ~~and~~ ^{to} gravely forecast a few ~~the~~ tidbits from Reback's still unread (by him) mail. The letters from Reback's elderly mother frustrated her, since Mrs. Reback could not speak, nor write, English.

Reback occasionally grumbled about the late arrival and condition of his mail, and a few times he threatened to have all the mail held at the central post office - where he would pick it up. My mother didn't care for that thought. She had had the Spanish flu~~g~~ when she was in the navy, and received Veteran's Compensation for a damaged heart. She didn't want Reback to get his hands on that check, or to know the amount she received.

I found a large, heavy 18 karat gold ring on the sidewalk, on my way home from school one afternoon. The school was accustomed to my erratic appearances, and no longer bothered to question me. The ring had been cut, evidently the wearer's finger had grown too large for it. I brought it to my mother, and she said we would watch the lost and found column for a few days. If no one advertized for it, it would be mine.

"Finders - keepers," she said.

Now what would I want with such a great large man's ring?

After about four or five days, my mother gave me four dollars! I had never possessed such a sum.

"I sold the ring," she said. "You can spend the money any way you want."

"Want!" There were so many things I wanted. But I went to my room to consider what four dollars would buy. I did feel a momentary guilt about the man who had lost the worn ring - but it was fleeting. The four dollars was a concrete amount of money, in my hand, and I pushed the ~~nebulous~~ ^{nebulous} ~~nebulous~~ figure of an old man, searching for his lost ring, aside.

I yearned for a pair of ice skates, but I knew that was ~~impractical~~ ^{impractical}. The vision of myself flying across smooth ~~ice~~ moonlit ice, in a beautiful skating outfit, flitted through my mind. Four dollars would never provide a reality for that dream. I settled for a pair of roller skates for two dollars and fifty skates. I used the other dollar and a half to buy my mother a hand blown glass deer, and two small amber etched ~~gaf~~ glasses.

After I ~~gained~~ ^{gained} some dexterity in their use, the roller skates were wonderful. Now I had faster transportation ~~to the downtown~~ to the downtown library.

Just before Christmas, in 1934, the front doorbell rang. Since I was preparing dinner, and feeding Judy - and mother was in her usual attitude dishevelled nightgown, Reback answered the door.

"It's for you," he said to me sourly.

For me? No one ever called on me. The few girls who had come to the back door to ask for me, had had the door slammed in their faces.

"Tell whoever it is that she's busy," my mother screamed.

"Chtt!" Reback sounded sharply.

I flew down the three flights of stairs.

It was my father! He had a large package in his arms, and he put it down on the stone steps.

"Merry Christmas," he said, and hugged me.

Oh Daddy! All I could see was that he was wearing a pea jacket and was still in uniform. It was terrible. The words poured out as I begged him to take me with him. - I could cook now, and I could keep house for him. I would make a home for us both.

"I can't, Peggy - I can't. I live on the ship. It just wouldn't work." He was distressed, or at least I believe he was.

"Come on, Bill!" I hadn't seen the other uniformed man in the shadows. ~~Then~~ "I told you you should have sent the package."

"You'll be all right, Peggy - you will. Go inside. It's cold out here." He picked up the heavy package and put it in my arms and walked away. I never saw, nor heard from him again.

I slowly walked upstairs to my room and put the package on my bed, and closed the door.

"Tell the bitch to come out and serve dinner," I heard my mother scream.

"Leave her alone, Janet," Reback's voice answered.

No strap or screamings would have persuaded me to leave my room that night.

It took a long time before I would open the bulky package. My room

held my single bed, and a highboy. With me in the room, it was crowded. The package occupied a great part of my bed, and I stared at it blankly. Everything had gone wrong. I tried to recall my exact words to my father. If only I had been prepared, I chastized myself. Maybe if I had been prepared, I would have ~~been~~ calmly persuaded him with my mature logic. But everything had burst out at once, and I had not been able to stop myself. Oh Daddy - if only you had waited and sat down to listen to me. I finally opened the package. There was a beautiful large dictionary on top, and a five pound box of chocolates on the bottom.

I cried over every chocolate as I ate each and every one of them. It took me two days to eat them all, and it took a week for my stomach to recover.

"You didn't even offer me a piece of candy," my mother ^{said} ~~said~~, when I finally parted with the empty box to put it in the garbage. I wouldn't even have shared a part of my still uneasy stomach with her.

"Greedy little pig," she was amused. "Well, he won't be back. I'll see to that."

From that time on, she picked up the mail. If he ever wrote to me, I never knew of it.

My mother discovered the dictionary.

"You tried to keep this from me? - ^{You} ~~you~~ Bitch! I knew he hadn't ^{forgotte} ~~forgotte~~ me at Christmas."

"That's mine!" It was rather large and heavy for me to clutch to my skinny frame, but I wasn't going to let go of it. "Look! - It says, 'To my daughter, Peggy - from her Dady - Will F. Combs*!'" Daddy didn't speak very well, I guess. Or perhaps he was in a hurry. All I cared about was that it identified the dictionary as a present from him to me.

"Well you don't have to be so selfish - you can let me use it too." She carted it away to occupy a chair beside her desk and typewriter. "I still think it was supposed to be for me!" she said.

It is not my intention to present either Reback or my mother as ogres. Reback simply didn't know any better, and my hagridden mother was an inferior instructor.

In her own way, my mother is a good-hearted woman. She is a sucker for any ^{stranger's} sad story. Her own personal spectors of poverty, ill-health, ~~and~~ death, and every possible calamity - ~~among others~~ - have haunted her all of her life, and still do. I know that she genuinely believes that she was always a kind, loving mother. A few years ago, she asked me if I loved her. I was unable to lie and tried to evade the question, but she repeated it insistently.

"You are my mother, and we have been tied together most of our lives." That was the best I could do.

"That's not what I mean, and you know it!"

"Mother, sometimes I think I could learn to like you."

"I suppose that will have to do," she sighed, and looked at me sadly.

One time she told me that she hates to go to sleep because she always has such dreadful nightmares. Somehow, she said, I was always a part of the nightmares. She couldn't understand why.

"I have always protected you and tried to take care of you - haven't I, Peggy?"

I told her that it was almost time for our cocktail party, and we must dress.

In 1939, one of the spectors stepped out of the shadows, and she could clearly see one of the enemies, face-to-face. Now that she could finally put a name and face to one, she attacked with all the weapons and ferocity at her command.

The enemy was the I.R.S.

She pulled up her woolen panties, gave a bloodcurdling scream of outrage, and the battle was on.

A friend of my husband's, who was with the I.R.S. told us that every year, at Income Tax time, they would cut cards in the local office to see who would have to face her this time.

Judy was very slow about walking and totally oblivious to the concept of toilet training. At one point I rebelled against doing her diapers any longer, and Reback put on his brown sweater and cap and washed them for two days. Then he bought her some cotton panties. I think his logic was that she was depending too much on the security of the diapers. It was a reasonable assumption, but it didn't disturb Judy's natural functions for a moment. Now I had to mop up puddles and pick up other things as well. I put her back on diapers, it was less wo-

I would dress her up and curl her hair and take her downstairs and display her to her peers - and she would embarrass me. Not ^{one} of the other children her age wore diapers. The other children played and scrapped together. They would stop ~~what they were doing~~ to gather around Judy and examine her curiously. They were afraid to touch her, she still looked as though she might break. She was almost three, and the only thing she was adept at was sucking her thumb. She was a noisy thumb-sucker, and she imbedded pieces of dirt in the corner of one blue eye. She was attached to a small filthy blanket that had to be periodically pried from her clutch to be laundered. She did raise ^{shrinking} ~~loud~~ protests to that. She preferred her blanket to be ~~dirty~~ dirty, and would accept no temporary substitute for it.

One day I decided that I had had it with diapers, and threw them all down the incinerator.

"No panties either," I scolded her. "If you have to go to the bathroom - tell me!" To my surprise, it worked. Technically speaking, at the age of three, Judy could be said to be toilet trained. It was a milestone.

Feeding her was still an endless chore. She liked fresh peas, but each pea had to be ^{hand} peeled. That was only a nuisance, since she never ate more than fourteen peas. She loved milk, but it had to be warmed to an exact temperature. If it was a little too warm she wouldn't drink it because she said it had "robes" in it. I knew the ritual, but when my

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mother occasionally played loving ^{"mommy"} ~~mother~~ for Reback, and heated Judy's milk, it was summarily rejected.

At least Judy was beginning to talk. Anyway I could understand her. I had to do some interpreting for her parents, when they bothered to wonder what she was saying.

Things were changing.

Late in 1935 Reback was transferred from the local Immigration and Naturalization Service to New York city. The transfer was not to be considered permanent. It was on a per diem basis and he returned to the apartment once or twice a month on weekends, or my mother would visit him in New York.

Reback was somewhat of a ~~linguist~~ linguist. Beside his native Russian and adopted English, he also spoke some Italian and French.

My mother had completed a few novels and would take them with her to New York publishing firms, when she visited Reback in New York. The manuscripts were always returned, but she never showed discouragement. She read contemporary romantic, and historical novels, and would attack her typewriter with renewed energy. She was still learning her trade, and did not intend to give up.

With Reback's absence, she turned to me for some companionship and it was more pleasant and relaxed in the apartment.

Her twenty-seven year old cousin, Louis, stayed with us for a short time. He took my bedroom and I moved in with my mother and Judy. My mother enjoyed having a young man around the house, and I liked having an intermediary and consequently, a little more freedom.

Great grandmother had been brought from New York to stay - to Aunt Pollie's dismay - in a rented room under the same roof with ^(Aunt Pollie) ~~her~~ and Uncle Willie. Great grandmother was no longer competent to take care of herself or her property. The property and household possessions were sold off, except for some valuable silver, ~~and~~ china and Venetian glass.

Uncle Willie was disappointed in the result of the auction. I don't know the amount received, but it was far below his expectations, considering the location of the property, and the age and condition of the antiques.

I believe great grandmother was seventy-~~seven~~^{eight} or seventy-~~seven~~^{nine} at that time. I had heard so much about her escapades, and I was eager to meet her. Her intriguing title of "The Old Devil" was titilating. But I was sorely disappointed. I saw a tiny old woman with darting eyes. Every finger, including her thumbs ~~was~~^{was} covered with rings - ~~probably~~^{probably} very valuable rings, but they had no meaning to me. I was only interested in the woman, but there was no mind - there was only a frantic child in a withered body. She would escape from under the landlady's and Aunt Pollie's not always vigilant eyes and roam the streets, offering a ring to anyone who would give her the price of a movie. Aunt Pollie finally refused to be responsible for her and threatened to leave permanently for England.

Great grandmother was placed in the Forest Avenue ~~Sanitarium~~^{Sanitarium} where she died late in 1941. That was the year my first son, Michael was born. I would have liked to have had a photagraph taken of the five generations.

In ~~the~~^{late} spring of 1936, Reback became impatient with traveling back and forth and rented a summer cottage at Far Rockaway.

In June, I went ahead ~~by~~^{by} train to prepare the cottage for the Reback family, leaving my mother behind to put the furniture in storage, and bring Judy. I was put on the train, with my suitcase, by my mother, and picked up by Reback at Grand Central Station. I don't recall much about the trip except that I was mesmerized by the moving landscape. I am sure we must have stopped somewhere in the station to have dinner, before continuing on to Far Rockaway.

Krayer
~~Summer~~ Court, Far Rockaway.

It was dark when we arrived at the cottage, so I didn't see much that night, only enough to know that there were two small bedrooms, a kitchen, bath, and a living room. And everything was dusty and gritty.

In the morning Reback gave me ten dollars before he left for work in New York. He told me there were stores nearby. I found the stores and bought a fly-swatter and a ~~brush~~^{broom} first. Those essentials disposed of I settled to the purchase of less important items: a pail, cleanser, scrubbing brush, soap - and finally oranges, cereal, bread and butter, and salt and pepper, meat for beef stew and potatoes and vegetables and milk. The nice lady gave me some clean worn sheets to tear up for cleaning and dusting cloth. The cottage was furnished. There were towels and bedlinen, as well as pots and pans and dishes and cutlery in the kitchen cupboards.

I took the mattresses and pillows out on the small porch, and beat them with the fly swatter and left them to air ~~next to wall~~. Then I used the fly swatter on the flying inhabitants, before sweeping down the ceilings and walls and floors. I scrubbed all the floors and cleaned the cupboards and washed the pots and dishes and cutlery. Next I brought the mattresses and pillows inside and made the beds, after shaking the blankets outside. I put dinner on to cook while I scrubbed and disinfected the toilet fixtures and washed the windows on the inside. It was getting late when I finished and looked around the cottage. The outside of the windows would have to wait until tomorrow. I had time, my mother and Judy wouldn't ~~arrive~~ arrive until the day after. The beef stew was beginning to smell good ~~in the kitchen~~ and I set the ^{kitchen} table. I had forgotten to eat all day.

When Reback came in he looked at the living room and nodded his head. I had found some small flowering weeds and put them in a glass of water on a table after I finished dusting.

"Very nice," he said. "Let us go eat dinner now - there is a place down the street -"

"But dinner is ready," I showed him the set table and the beef stew. Reback and I never did have an easy relationship, and we sat down to eat our dinner in silence.

"Thank you," he said, and then walked into the bathroom and bedrooms and returned to the kitchen as I was cleaning up.

"You did a lot of work, the cottage is spotless, and the dinner was very good, ~~almost~~ almost as good as your mother's cooking." I never thought to ask him who he thought had been doing ^{most of} ~~the~~ the cooking and cleaning in the Lafayette apartment ~~for~~ these last few years, and I was slightly offended that he found my cooking less ^{appetizing} ~~appetizing~~ than it had been in Buffalo. Reback didn't smile easily, but he tried. "I don't suppose you have any change for me?" I believe he thought he was joking, but I did have change.

"There is a dollar and nine cents on the cabinet there." He ^{mumbled} ~~replied~~ something and picked the change before going to his bedroom.

Looking back, even in those times it seems impossible that I could have had any change, but it has happened to me more than once.

One time I asked my husband for some money to go shopping and he gave me ten dollars. I shopped and shopped until I could not carry any more packages. He had to open the door for me when I ^{came} ~~came~~ back.

"You must have a lot of money left," he smiled, as he unloaded my arms. I looked. - I had nine dollars and some change. I don't know where the error or errors started. I remembered that I had spent four dollars and something at the first shop and after that I just kept buying until I couldn't carry any more. I thought about retracing my steps but I had been to ~~some~~ many shops. From curiosity, my husband began to add up the sales slips, but gave up after he went over thirty-five dollars, and there were still more packages left.

Another time I went to the local bank to cash a check for fourteen dollars and seventy-four cents. The bank manager, who was also my hus-

bands after hours accountant, cashed the check for me. Even my weak addition told me that he had given me too much money, and I told him.

"Mrs. Fried," he said coldly, "I never make errors!"

"Everyone makes errors," I said, "and you just did."

"Mrs. Fried, I am very busy," he dismissed me.

"Well, you know where our shop is, and when you close your books to night and find yourself short, stop by." I gathered up the money and left. He never did claim the money, and was quite distant from then on, when we met. I always supposed that he had made up the difference himself, rather than admit to an error.

"I will take you out for dinner tonight," Reback ^{announced} ~~and~~ before leaving for work.

"But there is still plenty of stew left."

"Eat it for lunch." He left abruptly.

We had dinner in a small neighborhood delicatessen. I wasn't familiar with the food, and while it was interesting, I thought my beef stew was better. But Reback did try to be pleasant.

"Your mother and Judy will be at the Rockaway station at nine-thirty - meet them," Reback said, the next morning. The short honeymoon was over.

After he left, I looked around the cottage with a critical eye. I had never been in a summer cottage before. It wasn't beautiful, nor luxurious, but it was clean and bright. I changed the wilting weeds to a fresh bouquet, and made the beds and scrubbed the bathroom fixtures and kitchen sink, and put a bright red and white checked cloth on the kitchen table. I had washed and ironed the faded curtains throughout the house. I thought everything looked cheerful. It certainly looked better than it had two days before. I gave the small porch and steps a final sweeping and walked to the station.

I arrived at the station just as the train pulled in. It was only ~~a~~ eight or ten short blocks walk. My mother was carrying Judy and thrust her at me, with no greeting.

"Hello Slob Peggy," Judy said. Well, at least she was articulating better - but her words hurt. I knew it was foolish of me to be upset by a not very intelligent four year old child's parroted words, but I was. I kissed her cheek and put her on her feet.

"Pick her up and carry her," my mother screamed. "She caught your cold and she's still sick. She vomited all the way from Buffalo, and all over her father when he met us in New York." I hadn't had a cold, but Judy did look greener than usual.

"Where's the cab? Marcus said you would have a cab for us." I didn't know anything about a cab, and I'd never been in one. My mother had one ~~small~~ bag - Reback was to bring the other bags with him that night. There were no visible cabs in that little station. I carried Judy back to the cottage and my mother alternately dropped and carried the bag, using not very lady-like language all the way.

"What a hole! I'm going to bed, I'm exhausted." She went into the largest bedroom and closed the door.

I wanted to give Judy a bath. She was grimy and she smelled, but when I started the water in the tub, my mother screamed at the noise, so I sat Judy on the edge of the kitchen sink and washed her. Reback had told me that there was a weekly laundry service, and I added Judy's panties to the growing pile in the small closet in her room. The dress, socks and fine Canadian woolen undershirt would have to be hand laundered. My mother had left the small bag in the living room, and I found some clean panties and a cotton nighty for Judy, along with more soiled panties. Judy ate a little cereal and drank some warm milk. Her eyes were drooping and I put her to bed. She was asleep before I covered her up.

For the first time, I had a few minutes to explore the area. I knew that the ocean was to the left of Kramer Court, and down ~~XXXX~~ two blocks ^{and just} beyond the boardwalk. I didn't know what a boardwalk was, but I assumed it would be self-explanatory. The Atlantic Ocean - I had never seen an ocean before. The ground was stoney and full of broken shells. I could feel the sharp edges through my shoes, so I took them off. Now the burning sand also took it's toll on my tender feet. By the time I reached the beach, I could only sit on a dune and think of the sad fable of The Little Mermaid.

But the Atlantic was before ^{me.} It was still early in the season and the beach was deserted and clean. The ocean swept up to the shore and pulled a little further back each time. It was a receding tide. Lake Erie didn't have the restless breath and movement of the ocean. The sound was a vast sigh, and I felt it within me.

I looked at the grey Atlantic and thought. I was sixteen now. What was I going to do with myself. The ocean only pulled back and forth and had no answer for me. The German poem, None But the Lonely Heart, came to my mind-then I was impatient for my self-pitying weakness. I picked up my shoes and walked gingerly back to the cottage.

Everything was quiet in the cottage. I hadn't eaten any of the stew yesterday, and if I added the rest of the vegetables, it could be stretched for dinner. I shouldn't have given the change back to Reback. I should have bought flour and some fruit and eggs. Then I could have added dumplings to further stretch the stew, and I could have baked a pie. I would hear about my stupidity when my mother got up. Just because I hated eggs was no excuse for me to forget her love for them and bacon. I hadn't bought any bacon either! - nor coffee, nor cream. Oh well, I went out and sat on the porch steps and brooded.

The ice man came by. Reback had taken care of that. The ice man reminded me that the drip pan at the bottom of the ice box had to be

emptied once a day, and even more often when the weather became very hot, otherwise it would overflow and my mother would have a mess to clean up. Yes. It was something else for me to remember.

In a few days things settled ^{into} ~~up~~ a routine, and the other cottages began to fill up.

There were shrieking young voices from early morning until after dark - to my mother's irritation. But the neighbors were ^{and said nothi} polite about her typewriter disturbing ^{their} ~~her~~ sleep. There was nowhere for her to write but in the small living room, where I slept on the daybed. There was only the overhead light in there. I put the pillow over my ears and the blanket over my head. As the weather grew warmer, the children were on the beach most of the day, and my mother's daytime sleep was not so --- disturbed. By the Fourth of July, the beaches were crowded every weekend, as the city population rushed to escape from the heat. The cottage --- residents avoided the beach on the week ends, but their cottages over- ^{invited} ^{uninvited} flowed with guests and relatives, and the women were busy in the kitchens from Friday afternoon until late Sunday evening.

Reback had a passion for "soaking up the sun" and he spent every Saturday and Sunday in that absorbing ~~in~~ pursuit. He would turn purple and swell up, but no agony could persuade him that ~~the sun's burning rays~~ the sun's burning rays were not beneficial. He had a colossal ego and ^a firm belief in his own "God-given" superiority. Other people simply did not exist as more than one-dimensional annoying figures, and he enfolded himself in an impenetrable arrogant aura. When he and my mother would have one of their loud battles, he would remind my mother that he picked her out of the gutter, and would throw her back anytime he chose. He would include an aside in my direction, that if it wasn't for his benevolence and kindly nature, I would be starving in the streets.

I had a mental literal vision of my mother lying in the gutter in

her nightgown (since he had purchased every stitch on her back) and me sitting on the curb near her, with her typewriter on my lap. The typewriter was hers. It was only through his generosity and human compassion that we had food on the table and a roof over our heads, he would shout. Well, there was no television in those days, and their battles did make for exciting entertainment for the neighbors.

Sometime during a weekend absorption of the sun, some male neighbor's voice must have penetrated his mind-shield. One Sunday evening he asked my mother why I was never on the beach or in the water.

"I don't know," my mother shrugged and turned away, so he directed his question in my vicinity.

"I don't have a bathing suit." I served dinner. Dinner was served promptly at six, and he and my mother retired to their room shortly after. My mother would re-emerge about eight-thirty and scream through the door:

"Peg-gy! - It's time to go to bed." It was a great embarrassment.

This night, after dinner, Reback thrust two dollars in my hand.

"Buy yourself a bathing suit," he ordered, and went back into the bedroom, where my mother awaited him.

I had a nightly choice - I could put Judy to bed after I cleaned up the kitchen and washed the dishes, or keep her with me until my mother screamed for me. The young people of my age were not very stimulating conversationalists, but any company was better than none - so Judy went to bed early. I don't recall that it ever made any difference to Judy, at least she never raised an objection either way.

I had hoped that Judy would learn to play with the other young children, but she never showed any interest. I would take her to the beach and sit with her. My mother gave me some money to buy her a sand-pail and shovel, but she didn't like the feel of the sand. I tried to persuade her to wet her feet in a shallow pool, but she shrieked so piercingly, that I was afraid someone would think that I was ~~abusing~~ abusing

her. I would finally give up, and carry her back to the cottage. Some of the children had small beach balls and I would play gentle catch with them, and try to have Judy join in, but she would scream and fall down if the ball came near her.

I didn't like dogs. I still had a bad memory of the German shepherd guard dogs at Stella Niagara. They would only respond to German command and we were not permitted to touch or speak to them. When one occasionally broke loose, the nuns would shout for us to go into the convent. I was once cornered by one, and it snapped and snarled at me. It was only a half-grown animal, but ~~because~~ its unreasoning ferocity was frightening. I knew ~~that~~ that one should never show fear to a dog, but I would quietly remove myself to the other side of the street when I saw one coming. One afternoon when I was taking Judy shopping, a minute puppy attacked. Judy's athletic ability was non-existent, and she moved as quickly as a lethargic snail, but suddenly she was on my shoulders, and from there, she moved to the top of my head - shrieking all the way. The puppy was impressed with his first triumph, and paused before resuming his attack on ~~snapping at~~ my ankle as I tried vainly to pry Judy's fingers out of my eyes and loose from my hair.

I believe that was the first time I ever said, "Damn!"

A tiny child of no more than sixteen months toddled out to gather the puppy in her arms and ^{to} scold me for scaring her doggie.

The two dollars bought me a bathing suit.

I was a strong, slow, determined swimmer. I would seat Judy on the sand with a blanket beneath her and ^{another} one over her, having perfect confidence that she would be in exactly the same position whenever I returned. Then I would take to the ocean.

I didn't attempt to battle the rough surf, and would walk until the water reached my shoulders. I preferred to swim when the tide was coming in. I would begin my swim where the ^{land} shelf dropped off.

The shore would be far away after about twenty minutes, and then I would turn on my back to float. I felt as though I had the ocean all to myself - except for the sea creatures. I never asked them what species they were, but if they brushed their rough scales against me too harshly, I would push them away. After a while, I would swim back to shore. The young lifeguard stopped shouting at me about sharks, after a while. I don't know if my finny companions were sharks. Some of them were much larger than I, but I didn't find them nearly as offensive as some of the humans I knew.

My mother was unusually quiet for a while, and then one morning she went into New York with Reback. She returned that night, leaning on his arm, and looking pale. She spent the next two days in bed.

I heard some whispered words among the neighbor women, and caught the word "abortion." I didn't know what that meant, but when I next saw a dictionary, I would look it up. My father's dictionary was in storage in Buffalo, with the furniture. After a few days of invalidism and frankly, pleasant, sweet days, all the venom returned and she worked longer and harder at her typewriter. Well, I hadn't recognized her in that fragile genteel condition anyway.

Toward the end of August, the cottagers were giving farewell parties. I was invited to them, but my mother wouldn't let me go to "riff-raff" parties. She and Reback had only the barest nodding acquaintance with the neighbors to our left, and weren't invited.

Soon all the cottages were empty, except for us.

Reback was looking for an apartment in New York. On Saturdays, both he and my mother would be gone all day.

The first apartment~~was~~ was a disaster.

It didn't look bad - there were two bedrooms and a living room-kitchen-dinette.

Judy and I slept in a double bed in one bedroom. I spent the first night scratching and in the morning I was covered with welts. Judy looked like she had a deadly infectious disease. My mother screamed because I must have given Judy something and searched in the telephone book for a nearby doctor - who told her that we had bed-bug bites.

Reback shouted at the ~~land~~ landlady and demanded ^{the return of} the month's rent. The landlady refused and told him to keep his voice down. She said that her apartments were clean and that we must have gotten the bites somewhere else. She looked at me suspiciously. She left in a dignified ~~and~~ righteous huff.

Reback stripped the linen from our bed and pinned some number of bedbugs to the mattress. He went in search of the reluctant landlady and pushed her back into the room to examine the corpses. She returned some of the money, but it took ~~two~~ more days to find another apartment. I slept in a chair, and Judy slept ^{between} ~~with~~ the Rebacks ^{while they guarded} ~~guarding~~ her against further attack. Either they weren't considered tasty bedbug tidbits, or only the other bedroom was infested.

The second apartment, on 108th Street, was new and had never been occupied before. It was a very small two bedroom railroad apartment, furnished in what could ^{be} loosely described as depression borax. I don't believe it was intended to survive the stress of more than two sets of short term tenants. But it was clean and the rent included maid service. 'Maid service' meant a heavy woman with very large ~~slippers~~ feet shod in decre^pet bedroom slippers. She shuffled in twice a week to casually push a vacuum cleaner or carpet sweeper around and vaguely flick a soiled cloth~~ed~~ in the general direction of the furniture. She also changed the bed linen and towels once a week. I took over the cleaning and

scrubbing after watching her the first time. She found no objection - as long as the supervisor didn't find out. She would sigh and sit down to rest her feet and smoke cigarettes and tell me that she had once been young and strong and slim. She said she was thirty-eight years old.

"Conserve yo' strengt'," she advised.

Reback's ^{sullen} ~~face~~ face never showed contentment nor pleasure, but I think he was relieved not to be commuting any more.

I tried the nearest high school, Haaren, for a short time. It was a long walk - down Morningside park and ~~to~~ to Harlem, but the fall weather was beautiful, ~~the~~ and the principal was a wonderful woman.

New students were given a form to fill out and personal interviews.

The principal had started a school newspaper, and I was on the student staff. For six weeks it was fascinating. The classes were fairly small, no more than twenty-five students, and the teachers were interested dedicated women. But then she was transferred to Hunter and her special teaching staff went with her.

The student newspaper staff was dispersed and I found myself in a class room intended for twenty-five or thirty students, but over-flowing with sixty or more. Double desks had three medium sized girls or four small, and there were chairs around the walls.

I stopped going to school, but this time I did not stay home.

Judy was enrolled in a nursery school and was picked up every morning and returned early every afternoon. She was on her own, in the apartment until my mother got up, or I returned - whichever happened first.

New York was a magic ^{city} in 1936 and 1937, and I explored it with enchanted eyes. I received my lunch money every morning - seventeen cents. That was the price of lunch at the high school. The lunches had been pretty good there - much better than they had been in Buffalo. After

not too much thought, I settled for a daily slice of cheese cake - with whipped cream. That cost a dime. The other seven cents went in my pocket. It was delicious cheese cake. That was my first experience with it, and in my memory, it still lingers as the best. There was an Hungarian bakery on Broadway, near 110th Street, that had rum cake that was beyond description. I have tasted rum cakes and babas almost all over the world but never found a rum cake to compare with that. I am a fine baker, but I cannot duplicate it.

After much judicious investigation I found the places where I wanted to spend my weekday hours of freedom. I spent two morning hours exploring the art galleries and museums, and two afternoon hours in the library. There was so much to see and do.

I met a young man, in the library, who was a student at Columbia and a part time usher at the Metropolitan Opera House. When he was on duty at a matinee he would push an exit door open for me so that I could stand unobtrusively and watch the stage from an angle and hear the voice. I heard Lawrence Tibbett as Iago and Giovanni Martinelli as Otello, and Helen Jepson as Desdemona. After we were married, my husband and I saw Othello with Paul Robeson, Jose Ferrar, and Uta Hagen in the stage play at the Erlanger Theater in Buffalo. It was a beautiful production, but my mind heard the singing voices of the opera. My nice husband bought the Otello album for me. I still have that treasure.

The ladies at the library and museums and galleries were so kind and instructive. Oh, Ladies - I wish I could remember your names. I remember your patience with a gawky girl who wanted to learn everything at once, and your gentle chidings because I wasn't in school, and I remember your faces - but I don't remember your names anymore. Some of you were not very much older than I was - at the time. If I liked something, you never insinuated your opinions, you just asked why I found it interesting, and seemed to inspect it through my eyes and mind.

My mother made her once weekly tour of the publishing houses, and the pages of Dynasty of Death grew higher. Reback threatened to throw her typewriter out of the window.

Judy got the measles. The nursery school had told the Rebacks that she was too immature for nursery school, and had returned most of ~~Reback's~~ Reback's fee. But I don't think that had anything to do with Judy's measles.

I came home at three-thirty, as I always did, and made my mother a sandwich which she ate while re-reading last pages of her manuscript. I gave Judy a smaller sandwich and some milk. I started to prepare dinner as usual, and then I took Judy into our bedroom to have her point out words, and write them down and tell me their meaning. Then I would give her some new ^{similar} ~~similar~~ words, and have her sound them out. It was a daily ritual. Next I would read her a short story, and have her read it back. She knew the stories by heart now, but I would try to have her tell it in her own words. She would try for a few minutes, and then lose interest. It was discouraging, but I hoped she was making some progress - at least, I told myself and her that we were.

There was a sudden shocking scream from my mother.

Her face was pink and swollen with rage.

"You God damn lazy bitch! You never do anything but sit on your ass! Wait until Marcus comes home!"

Her typewriter ribbon had broken, and she had no replacement. I understood how important that was to her. I would go out to see if I could find an open stationary shop. Judy was still sitting on my lap and I put her on her feet and went to get my coat, just as Reback walked in.

"I could hear you all the way down the street," he shouted. "Now what is the matter?"

"This god damn bitch just said 'Marcus never does anything around

- the house. She needs a good beating!" She was repeating her own words and attributing them to me.
 - I hadn't said ~~anything~~ anything, and I had never addressed Reback by any name other than Mr. Reback.

"How dare you call me 'Marcus', bitch - I am always Mr. Reback to you, and always will be!" he started to pull off his belt.

"Use the buckle this time!" my mother screamed.

My coat was already in my hand, and I went out the still open door.

First I ran, and then I walked and walked and walked. I had foolishly bought a chocolate bar in the afternoon, and I had only three pennies in my pocket. If I had had a nickle, I would have taken the subway to the end of the line - in any direction, and then started to walk.

I passed a few Catholic churches. I could always go into one and sit and wait for someone to ask if I needed help. I knew about sanctuaries. But if I did go in, and ~~was~~ accepted their help, I would be under an obligation. I didn't want that.

I saw a clock near a police station. It was after eleven o'clock. I had been walking for over five and a half hours. ~~At that time~~, I suddenly realized that it was cold out, and I looked at the police station. I had never been in one, but it was my understanding that they were always open. Maybe I could just go in and sit down for a while - and think. I opened the door and went in.

There was a uniformed man sitting at a raised desk, otherwise the large room was deserted. There were long benches against the wall, and I sat down near the door to try to make my mind work. If it was daytime I could have gone to the library or the museum. Just talking to my nice friends would help. I would never tell them why I was disturbed. I wondered if the policeman would object if I sat on the bench all night? It was a long time before the library or museum would be open.

A tall, heavy man with dark hair came into the room, and stopped beside me.

"Come into my office," he said.

"I have ~~done~~ anything - I'm just sitting down!" I had sudden alarm-visions of being arrested.

"Yes, I see that. Come into my office, the chairs are more comfortable in there."

I had no reason to trust any man, but the policeman at the desk smiled at me and nodded encouragement, so I followed the dark haired man into his office.

"Take your coat off, it's warm in here. Would you like a sandwich? I didn't want a sandwich, and I had no intention of ~~parting with my coat~~ ~~parting with my coat~~ but I sat down opposite his desk, after he sat down.

He had a grim face, and in a little way, he reminded me of Reback, though he had no accent. To me, his was not a reassuring face.

He asked me my name and address, and I told him.

"How old are you?"

"I'll be seventeen in March."

"Do you live with your parents?"

"I live in an apartment with my mother, her husband, and my half-sister."

"You don't like living there," he stated.

"No - they hate me! I don't even know why I am living with them," it burst out, and so did tears.

He handed me a handkerchief, and waited while I mopped up the overflow.

"Now I want you to tell me everything - and don't lie to me!"

Indignation stopped the flowing tears. I had never told a lie in my life.

"Where do you go to school?"

I told him about my short experience at Haaren, and how I spent my days now. I gave him the names of my friends at the museum and library and the name of the former principal at Haaren. I told him briefly about

the convent, and about my father, and coming to live with the Rebacks.

"I will call these ladies," he said. "Now, give me the telephone number at the apartment." I didn't know it. There was a telephone out in the hall, and if there was a call for the apartment, a bell was supposed to ring. But no one had ever called.

He spoke to the operator, and then talked to Reback.

"Your step-father is coming," he said to me.

"He's not my step-father," I threw the hateful words away.

"Now don't start to cry again. I promise you that everything will be all right. When he comes, you will go out and sit on the bench again while I talk to him in here."

"I'm almost seventeen, I don't want to go back there. I can get a job, I can do ^{housework.} ~~housework.~~"

"You are still only sixteen, and you don't belong in a public home, and you are not the kind of girl to be working as a maid - and that is all you know how to do."

"But at least I would be paid!"

"You would not be paid very much, and you would only be a drudge in someone else's house. As bad as it seems now, living with your mother is better for you than that. You need more education."

I already knew that, and I had nothing further to convince him with. Reback came in, and I went out to sit on the bench.

It was a long conversation. The door finally opened and Reback and the dark haired man came out.

"Don't forget what I said," the dark haired man was saying, "just in case you should, I will remind you occasionally."

"Come on," Reback said to me.

"Please." The dark haired man said softly. - "Now young lady, remember what we were talking about. If you need someone to talk to, just call this number. If I'm not there, talk to my wife." He gave me a card.

Reback and I walked back to the apartment in silence. I must have

been walking in circles earlier, it really was not a long walk.

"You filthy bitch!" My mother was waiting at the door. "You've probably cost my husband his job - now you're really going to get a beating, and I'll help this time!"

"Go to bed," Reback said to her. "I have to be up in two hours." He pushed her before him into their room and closed the door.

The next day my mother asked me what had happened at the ~~pat~~ police station. I didn't say anything, and I honestly didn't know what had been said in that office, after I left it. I don't believe Reback ever told her either.

I never got beaten again. My mother didn't even scream at me - for a few days. I kept the dark haired man's card in my pocket, as a salesman, for a long time. James T. In-----? The rest of the name is gone. That was over forty years ago, but that is no excuse, I have remembered far less important things.
