THOUGHTAUDIO

MAIN STREET

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MAIN STREET

This is America—a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves.

The town is, in our tale, called "Gopher Prairie, Minnesota." But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina hills.

Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters. What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever Ezra does not know and sanction, that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider.

Our railway station is the final aspiration of architecture. Sam Clark's annual hardware turnover is the envy of the four counties which constitute God's Country. In the sensitive art of the Rosebud Movie Palace there is a Message, and humor strictly moral.

Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith. Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?

CHAPTER I

I

ON a hill by the Mississippi where Chippewas camped two generations ago, a girl stood in relief against the cornflower blue of Northern sky. She saw no Indians now; she saw flour-mills and the blinking windows of skyscrapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Nor was she thinking of squaws and portages, and the Yankee fur-traders whose shadows were all about her. She was meditating upon walnut fudge, the plays of Brieux, the reasons why heels run over, and the fact that the chemistry instructor had stared at the new coiffure which concealed her ears.

A breeze which had crossed a thousand miles of wheat-lands bellied her taffeta skirt in a line so graceful, so full of animation and moving beauty, that the heart of a chance watcher on the lower road tightened to wistfulness over her quality of suspended freedom. She lifted her arms, she leaned back against the wind, her skirt dipped and flared, a lock blew wild. A girl on a hilltop; credulous, plastic, young; drinking the air as she longed to drink life. The eternal aching comedy of expectant youth.

It is Carol Milford, fleeing for an hour from Blodgett College.

The days of pioneering, of lassies in sunbonnets, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings, are deader now than Camelot; and a rebellious girl is the spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest.

II

Blodgett College is on the edge of Minneapolis. It is a bulwark of sound religion. It is still combating the recent heresies of Voltaire, Darwin, and Robert Ingersoll. Pious families in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, the Dakotas send their children thither, and

Blodgett protects them from the wickedness of the universities. But it secretes friendly girls, young men who sing, and one lady instructress who really likes Milton and Carlyle. So the four years which Carol spent at Blodgett were not altogether wasted. The smallness of the school, the fewness of rivals, permitted her to experiment with her perilous versatility. She played tennis, gave chafing-dish parties, took a graduate seminar in the drama, went "twosing," and joined half a dozen societies for the practise of the arts or the tense stalking of a thing called General Culture.

In her class there were two or three prettier girls, but none more eager. She was noticeable equally in the classroom grind and at dances, though out of the three hundred students of Blodgett, scores recited more accurately and dozens Bostoned more smoothly. Every cell of her body was alive—thin wrists, quince-blossom skin, ingenue eyes, black hair.

The other girls in her dormitory marveled at the slightness of her body when they saw her in sheer negligee, or darting out wet from a shower-bath. She seemed then but half as large as they had supposed; a fragile child who must be cloaked with understanding kindness. "Psychic," the girls whispered, and "spiritual."

Yet so radioactive were her nerves, so adventurous her trust in rather vaguely conceived sweetness and light, that she was more energetic than any of the hulking young women who, with calves bulging in heavy-ribbed woolen stockings beneath decorous blue serge bloomers, thuddingly galloped across the floor of the "gym" in practise for the Blodgett Ladies' Basket-Ball Team.

Even when she was tired her dark eyes were observant. She did not yet know the immense ability of the world to be casually cruel and proudly dull, but if she should ever learn those dismaying powers, her eyes would never become sullen or heavy or rheumily amorous.

For all her enthusiasms, for all the fondness and the "crushes" which she inspired, Carol's acquaintances were shy of her. When she was most ardently singing hymns or planning deviltry she yet seemed gently aloof and critical. She was credulous, perhaps; a born hero-worshipper; yet she did question and examine unceasingly. Whatever she might become she would never be static.

Her versatility ensnared her. By turns she hoped to discover that she had an unusual voice, a talent for the piano, the ability to act, to write, to manage organizations. Always she was disappointed, but always she effervesced anew—over the Student Volunteers, who intended to become missionaries, over painting scenery for the dramatic club, over soliciting advertisements for the college magazine.

She was on the peak that Sunday afternoon when she played in chapel. Out of the dusk her violin took up the organ theme, and the candle-light revealed her in a straight golden frock, her arm arched to the bow, her lips serious. Every man fell in love then with religion and Carol.

Throughout Senior year she anxiously related all her experiments and partial successes to a career. Daily, on the library steps or in the hall of the Main Building, the co-eds talked of "What shall we do when we finish college?" Even the girls who knew that they were going to be married pretended to be considering important business positions; even they who knew that they would have to work hinted about fabulous suitors. As for Carol, she was an orphan; her only near relative was a vanilla-flavored sister married to an optician in St. Paul. She had used most of the money from her father's estate. She was not in love—that is, not often, nor ever long at a time. She would earn her living.

But how she was to earn it, how she was to conquer the world—almost entirely for the world's own good—she did not see. Most of the girls who were not betrothed meant to be teachers. Of these there were two sorts: careless young women who admitted that they

intended to leave the "beastly classroom and grubby children" the minute they had a chance to marry; and studious, sometimes bulbous-browed and pop-eyed maidens who at class prayer-meetings requested God to "guide their feet along the paths of greatest usefulness." Neither sort tempted Carol. The former seemed insincere (a favorite word of hers at this era). The earnest virgins were, she fancied, as likely to do harm as to do good by their faith in the value of parsing Caesar.

At various times during Senior year Carol finally decided upon studying law, writing motion-picture scenarios, professional nursing, and marrying an unidentified hero.

Then she found a hobby in sociology.

The sociology instructor was new. He was married, and therefore taboo, but he had come from Boston, he had lived among poets and socialists and Jews and millionaire uplifters at the University Settlement in New York, and he had a beautiful white strong neck. He led a giggling class through the prisons, the charity bureaus, the employment agencies of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Trailing at the end of the line Carol was indignant at the prodding curiosity of the others, their manner of staring at the poor as at a Zoo. She felt herself a great liberator. She put her hand to her mouth, her forefinger and thumb quite painfully pinching her lower lip, and frowned, and enjoyed being aloof.

A classmate named Stewart Snyder, a competent bulky young man in a gray flannel shirt, a rusty black bow tie, and the green-and-purple class cap, grumbled to her as they walked behind the others in the muck of the South St. Paul stockyards, "These college chumps make me tired. They're so top-lofty. They ought to of worked on the farm, the way I have. These workmen put it all over them."

"I just love common workmen," glowed Carol.

"Only you don't want to forget that common workmen don't think they're common!"

"You're right! I apologize!" Carol's brows lifted in the astonishment of emotion, in a glory of abasement. Her eyes mothered the world. Stewart Snyder peered at her. He rammed his large red fists into his pockets, he jerked them out, he resolutely got rid of them by clenching his hands behind him, and he stammered:

"I know. You get people. Most of these darn co-eds——Say, Carol, you could do a lot for people."

"Oh—oh well—you know—sympathy and everything—if you were—say you were a lawyer's wife. You'd understand his clients. I'm going to be a lawyer. I admit I fall down in sympathy sometimes. I get so dog-gone impatient with people that can't stand the gaff. You'd be good for a fellow that was too serious. Make him more—more—YOU know—sympathetic!"

His slightly pouting lips, his mastiff eyes, were begging her to beg him to go on. She fled from the steam-roller of his sentiment. She cried, "Oh, see those poor sheep—millions and millions of them." She darted on.

Stewart was not interesting. He hadn't a shapely white neck, and he had never lived among celebrated reformers. She wanted, just now, to have a cell in a settlement-house, like a nun without the bother of a black robe, and be kind, and read Bernard Shaw, and enormously improve a horde of grateful poor.

The supplementary reading in sociology led her to a book on village-improvement—tree-planting, town pageants, girls' clubs. It had pictures of greens and garden-walls in France, New England, Pennsylvania.

She had picked it up carelessly, with a slight yawn which she patted down with her finger-tips as delicately as a cat.

She dipped into the book, lounging on her window-seat, with her slim, lisle-stockinged legs crossed, and her knees up under her chin. She stroked a satin pillow while she read. About her was the clothy exuberance of a Blodgett College room: cretonne-covered window-seat, photographs of girls, a carbon print of the Coliseum, a chafing-dish, and a dozen pillows embroidered or beaded or pyrographed. Shockingly out of place was a miniature of the Dancing Bacchante. It was the only trace of Carol in the room. She had inherited the rest from generations of girl students.

It was as a part of all this commonplaceness that she regarded the treatise on village-improvement. But she suddenly stopped fidgeting. She strode into the book. She had fled half-way through it before the three o'clock bell called her to the class in English history.

She sighed, "That's what I'll do after college! I'll get my hands on one of these prairie towns and make it beautiful. Be an inspiration. I suppose I'd better become a teacher then, but—I won't be that kind of a teacher. I won't drone. Why should they have all the garden suburbs on Long Island? Nobody has done anything with the ugly towns here in the Northwest except hold revivals and build libraries to contain the Elsie books. I'll make 'em put in a village green, and darling cottages, and a quaint Main Street!"

Thus she triumphed through the class, which was a typical Blodgett contest between a dreary teacher and unwilling children of twenty, won by the teacher because his opponents had to answer his questions, while their treacherous queries he could counter by demanding, "Have you looked that up in the library? Well then, suppose you do!"

The history instructor was a retired minister. He was sarcastic today. He begged of sporting young Mr. Charley Holmberg, "Now Charles, would it interrupt your undoubtedly fascinating pursuit of that malevolent fly if I were to ask you to tell us that you do not know anything about King John?" He spent three delightful minutes in assuring himself of the fact that no one exactly remembered the date of Magna Charta.

Carol did not hear him. She was completing the roof of a half-timbered town hall. She had found one man in the prairie village who did not appreciate her picture of winding streets and arcades, but she had assembled the town council and dramatically defeated him.

III

Though she was Minnesota-born Carol was not an intimate of the prairie villages. Her father, the smiling and shabby, the learned and teasingly kind, had come from Massachusetts, and through all her childhood he had been a judge in Mankato, which is not a prairie town, but in its garden-sheltered streets and aisles of elms is white and green New England reborn. Mankato lies between cliffs and the Minnesota River, hard by Traverse des Sioux, where the first settlers made treaties with the Indians, and the cattle-rustlers once came galloping before hell-for-leather posses.

As she climbed along the banks of the dark river Carol listened to its fables about the wide land of yellow waters and bleached buffalo bones to the West; the Southern levees and singing darkies and palm trees toward which it was forever mysteriously gliding; and she heard again the startled bells and thick puffing of high-stacked river steamers wrecked on sand-reefs sixty years ago. Along the decks she saw missionaries, gamblers in tall pot hats, and Dakota chiefs with scarlet blankets. . . . Far off whistles at night, round the river bend, plunking paddles reechoed by the pines, and a glow on black sliding waters.

Carol's family were self-sufficient in their inventive life, with Christmas a rite full of surprises and tenderness, and "dressing-up parties" spontaneous and joyously absurd. The beasts in the Milford hearth-mythology were not the obscene Night Animals who jump out of closets and eat little girls, but beneficent and bright-eyed creatures—the tam htab, who is woolly and blue and lives in the bathroom, and runs rapidly to warm small feet;

the ferruginous oil stove, who purrs and knows stories; and the skitamarigg, who will play with children before breakfast if they spring out of bed and close the window at the very first line of the song about puellas which father sings while shaving. xox

Judge Milford's pedagogical scheme was to let the children read whatever they pleased, and in his brown library Carol absorbed Balzac and Rabelais and Thoreau and Max Muller. He gravely taught them the letters on the backs of the encyclopedias, and when polite visitors asked about the mental progress of the "little ones," they were horrified to hear the children earnestly repeating A-And, And-Aus, Aus-Bis, Bis-Cal, Cal-Cha.

Carol's mother died when she was nine. Her father retired from the judiciary when she was eleven, and took the family to Minneapolis. There he died, two years after. Her sister, a busy proper advisory soul, older than herself, had become a stranger to her even when they lived in the same house.

From those early brown and silver days and from her independence of relatives Carol retained a willingness to be different from brisk efficient book-ignoring people; an instinct to observe and wonder at their bustle even when she was taking part in it. But, she felt approvingly, as she discovered her career of town-planning, she was now roused to being brisk and efficient herself.

IV

In a month Carol's ambition had clouded. Her hesitancy about becoming a teacher had returned. She was not, she worried, strong enough to endure the routine, and she could not picture herself standing before grinning children and pretending to be wise and decisive. But the desire for the creation of a beautiful town remained. When she encountered an item about small-town women's clubs or a photograph of a straggling Main Street, she was homesick for it, she felt robbed of her work.

It was the advice of the professor of English which led her to study professional library-work in a Chicago school. Her imagination carved and colored the new plan. She saw herself persuading children to read charming fairy tales, helping young men to find books on mechanics, being ever so courteous to old men who were hunting for newspapers

—the light of the library, an authority on books, invited to dinners with poets and explorers, reading a paper to an association of distinguished scholars.

V

The last faculty reception before commencement. In five days they would be in the cyclone of final examinations.

The house of the president had been massed with palms suggestive of polite undertaking parlors, and in the library, a ten-foot room with a globe and the portraits of Whittier and Martha Washington, the student orchestra was playing "Carmen" and "Madame Butterfly." Carol was dizzy with music and the emotions of parting. She saw the palms as a jungle, the pink-shaded electric globes as an opaline haze, and the eye-glassed faculty as Olympians. She was melancholy at sight of the mousey girls with whom she had "always intended to get acquainted," and the half dozen young men who were ready to fall in love with her.

But it was Stewart Snyder whom she encouraged. He was so much manlier than the others; he was an even warm brown, like his new ready-made suit with its padded shoulders. She sat with him, and with two cups of coffee and a chicken patty, upon a pile of presidential overshoes in the coat-closet under the stairs, and as the thin music seeped in, Stewart whispered:

"I can't stand it, this breaking up after four years! The happiest years of life."

She believed it. "Oh, I know! To think that in just a few days we'll be parting, and we'll never see some of the bunch again!"

"Carol, you got to listen to me! You always duck when I try to talk seriously to you, but you got to listen to me. I'm going to be a big lawyer, maybe a judge, and I need you, and I'd protect you——"

His arm slid behind her shoulders. The insinuating music drained her independence. She said mournfully, "Would you take care of me?" She touched his hand. It was warm, solid.

"You bet I would! We'd have, Lord, we'd have bully times in Yankton, where I'm going to settle——"

"But I want to do something with life."

"What's better than making a comfy home and bringing up some cute kids and knowing nice homey people?"

It was the immemorial male reply to the restless woman. Thus to the young Sappho spake the melon-venders; thus the captains to Zenobia; and in the damp cave over gnawed bones the hairy suitor thus protested to the woman advocate of matriarchy. In the dialect of Blodgett College but with the voice of Sappho was Carol's answer:

"Of course. I know. I suppose that's so. Honestly, I do love children. But there's lots of women that can do housework, but I—well, if you HAVE got a college education, you ought to use it for the world."

"I know, but you can use it just as well in the home. And gee, Carol, just think of a bunch of us going out on an auto picnic, some nice spring evening."

"Yes."

"And sleigh-riding in winter, and going fishing——"

Blarrrrrrr! The orchestra had crashed into the "Soldiers' Chorus"; and she was protesting, "No! No! You're a dear, but I want to do things. I don't understand myself but I want—everything in the world! Maybe I can't sing or write, but I know I can be an influence in library work. Just suppose I encouraged some boy and he became a great artist! I will! I will do it! Stewart dear, I can't settle down to nothing but dish-washing!"

Two minutes later—two hectic minutes—they were disturbed by an embarrassed couple also seeking the idyllic seclusion of the overshoe-closet.

After graduation she never saw Stewart Snyder again. She wrote to him once a week—for one month.

VI

A year Carol spent in Chicago. Her study of library-cataloguing, recording, books of reference, was easy and not too somniferous. She reveled in the Art Institute, in symphonies and violin recitals and chamber music, in the theater and classic dancing. She almost gave up library work to become one of the young women who dance in cheese-cloth in the moonlight. She was taken to a certified Studio Party, with beer, cigarettes, bobbed hair, and a Russian Jewess who sang the Internationale. It cannot be reported that Carol had anything significant to say to the Bohemians. She was awkward with them, and felt ignorant, and she was shocked by the free manners which she had for years desired. But she heard and remembered discussions of Freud, Romain Rolland, syndicalism, the Confederation Generale du Travail, feminism vs. haremism, Chinese lyrics, nationalization of mines, Christian Science, and fishing in Ontario.

She went home, and that was the beginning and end of her Bohemian life.

The second cousin of Carol's sister's husband lived in Winnetka, and once invited her out to Sunday dinner. She walked back through Wilmette and Evanston, discovered new

forms of suburban architecture, and remembered her desire to recreate villages. She decided that she would give up library work and, by a miracle whose nature was not very clearly revealed to her, turn a prairie town into Georgian houses and Japanese bungalows.

The next day in library class she had to read a theme on the use of the Cumulative Index, and she was taken so seriously in the discussion that she put off her career of town-planning—and in the autumn she was in the public library of St. Paul.

VII

Carol was not unhappy and she was not exhilarated, in the St. Paul Library. She slowly confessed that she was not visibly affecting lives. She did, at first, put into her contact with the patrons a willingness which should have moved worlds. But so few of these stolid worlds wanted to be moved. When she was in charge of the magazine room the readers did not ask for suggestions about elevated essays. They grunted, "Wanta find the Leather Goods Gazette for last February." When she was giving out books the principal query was, "Can you tell me of a good, light, exciting love story to read? My husband's going away for a week."

She was fond of the other librarians; proud of their aspirations. And by the chance of propinquity she read scores of books unnatural to her gay white littleness: volumes of anthropology with ditches of foot-notes filled with heaps of small dusty type, Parisian imagistes, Hindu recipes for curry, voyages to the Solomon Isles, theosophy with modern American improvements, treatises upon success in the real-estate business. She took walks, and was sensible about shoes and diet. And never did she feel that she was living.

She went to dances and suppers at the houses of college acquaintances. Sometimes she one-stepped demurely; sometimes, in dread of life's slipping past, she turned into a bacchanal, her tender eyes excited, her throat tense, as she slid down the room.

During her three years of library work several men showed diligent interest in her—the treasurer of a fur-manufacturing firm, a teacher, a newspaper reporter, and a petty railroad official. None of them made her more than pause in thought. For months no male emerged from the mass. Then, at the Marburys', she met Dr. Will Kennicott.

CHAPTER II

IT was a frail and blue and lonely Carol who trotted to the flat of the Johnson Marburys for Sunday evening supper. Mrs. Marbury was a neighbor and friend of Carol's sister; Mr. Marbury a traveling representative of an insurance company. They made a specialty of sandwich-salad-coffee lap suppers, and they regarded Carol as their literary and artistic representative. She was the one who could be depended upon to appreciate the Caruso phonograph record, and the Chinese lantern which Mr. Marbury had brought back as his present from San Francisco. Carol found the Marburys admiring and therefore admirable.

This September Sunday evening she wore a net frock with a pale pink lining. A nap had soothed away the faint lines of tiredness beside her eyes. She was young, naive, stimulated by the coolness. She flung her coat at the chair in the hall of the flat, and exploded into the green-plush living-room. The familiar group were trying to be conversational. She saw Mr. Marbury, a woman teacher of gymnastics in a high school, a chief clerk from the Great Northern Railway offices, a young lawyer. But there was also a stranger, a thick tall man of thirty-six or -seven, with stolid brown hair, lips used to giving orders, eyes which followed everything good-naturedly, and clothes which you could never quite remember.

Mr. Marbury boomed, "Carol, come over here and meet Doc Kennicott—Dr. Will Kennicott of Gopher Prairie. He does all our insurance-examining up in that neck of the woods, and they do say he's some doctor!"

As she edged toward the stranger and murmured nothing in particular, Carol remembered that Gopher Prairie was a Minnesota wheat-prairie town of something over three thousand people.

"Pleased to meet you," stated Dr. Kennicott. His hand was strong; the palm soft, but the back weathered, showing golden hairs against firm red skin.

He looked at her as though she was an agreeable discovery. She tugged her hand free and fluttered, "I must go out to the kitchen and help Mrs. Marbury." She did not speak to him again till, after she had heated the rolls and passed the paper napkins, Mr. Marbury captured her with a loud, "Oh, quit fussing now. Come over here and sit down and tell us how's tricks." He herded her to a sofa with Dr. Kennicott, who was rather vague about the eyes, rather drooping of bulky shoulder, as though he was wondering what he was expected to do next. As their host left them, Kennicott awoke:

"Marbury tells me you're a high mogul in the public library. I was surprised. Didn't hardly think you were old enough I thought you were a girl, still in college maybe."

"Oh, I'm dreadfully old. I expect to take to a lip-stick, and to find a gray hair any morning now."

"Huh! You must be frightfully old—prob'ly too old to be my granddaughter, I guess!"

Thus in the Vale of Arcady nymph and satyr beguiled the hours; precisely thus, and not in honeyed pentameters, discoursed Elaine and the worn Sir Launcelot in the pleached alley.

"How do you like your work?" asked the doctor.

"It's pleasant, but sometimes I feel shut off from things—the steel stacks, and the everlasting cards smeared all over with red rubber stamps."

"Don't you get sick of the city?"

"St. Paul? Why, don't you like it? I don't know of any lovelier view than when you stand on Summit Avenue and look across Lower Town to the Mississippi cliffs and the upland farms beyond."

"I know but——Of course I've spent nine years around the Twin Cities—took my B.A. and M.D. over at the U., and had my internship in a hospital in Minneapolis, but still, oh well, you don't get to know folks here, way you do up home. I feel I've got something to say about running Gopher Prairie, but you take it in a big city of two-three hundred thousand, and I'm just one flea on the dog's back. And then I like country driving, and the hunting in the fall. Do you know Gopher Prairie at all?"

"No, but I hear it's a very nice town."

"Nice? Say honestly——Of course I may be prejudiced, but I've seen an awful lot of towns—one time I went to Atlantic City for the American Medical Association meeting, and I spent practically a week in New York! But I never saw a town that had such up-and-coming people as Gopher Prairie. Bresnahan—you know—the famous auto manufacturer—he comes from Gopher Prairie. Born and brought up there! And it's a darn pretty town. Lots of fine maples and box-elders, and there's two of the dandiest lakes you ever saw, right near town! And we've got seven miles of cement walks already, and building more every day! Course a lot of these towns still put up with plank walks, but not for us, you bet!"

"Really?"

(Why was she thinking of Stewart Snyder?)

"Gopher Prairie is going to have a great future. Some of the best dairy and wheat land in the state right near there—some of it selling right now at one-fifty an acre, and I bet it will go up to two and a quarter in ten years!"

"Is——Do you like your profession?"

"Nothing like it. Keeps you out, and yet you have a chance to loaf in the office for a change."

"I don't mean that way. I mean—it's such an opportunity for sympathy."

Dr. Kennicott launched into a heavy, "Oh, these Dutch farmers don't want sympathy. All they need is a bath and a good dose of salts."

Carol must have flinched, for instantly he was urging, "What I mean is—I don't want you to think I'm one of these old salts-and-quinine peddlers, but I mean: so many of my patients are husky farmers that I suppose I get kind of case-hardened."

"It seems to me that a doctor could transform a whole community, if he wanted to—if he saw it. He's usually the only man in the neighborhood who has any scientific training, isn't he?"

"Yes, that's so, but I guess most of us get rusty. We land in a rut of obstetrics and typhoid and busted legs. What we need is women like you to jump on us. It'd be you that would transform the town."

"No, I couldn't. Too flighty. I did used to think about doing just that, curiously enough, but I seem to have drifted away from the idea. Oh, I'm a fine one to be lecturing you!"

"No! You're just the one. You have ideas without having lost feminine charm. Say! Don't you think there's a lot of these women that go out for all these movements and so on that sacrifice——"

After his remarks upon suffrage he abruptly questioned her about herself. His kindliness and the firmness of his personality enveloped her and she accepted him as one who had a right to know what she thought and wore and ate and read. He was positive. He had grown from a sketched-in stranger to a friend, whose gossip was important news. She noticed the healthy solidity of his chest. His nose, which had seemed irregular and large, was suddenly virile.

She was jarred out of this serious sweetness when Marbury bounced over to them and with horrible publicity yammered, "Say, what do you two think you're doing? Telling fortunes or making love? Let me warn you that the doc is a frisky bacheldore, Carol. Come on now, folks, shake a leg. Let's have some stunts or a dance or something."

She did not have another word with Dr. Kennicott until their parting:

"Been a great pleasure to meet you, Miss Milford. May I see you some time when I come down again? I'm here quite often—taking patients to hospitals for majors, and so on."

"Why——"

"What's your address?"

"You can ask Mr. Marbury next time you come down—if you really want to know!"

"Want to know? Say, you wait!"

II

Of the love-making of Carol and Will Kennicott there is nothing to be told which may not be heard on every summer evening, on every shadowy block.

They were biology and mystery; their speech was slang phrases and flares of poetry; their silences were contentment, or shaky crises when his arm took her shoulder. All the beauty of youth, first discovered when it is passing—and all the commonplaceness of a

well-to-do unmarried man encountering a pretty girl at the time when she is slightly weary of her employment and sees no glory ahead nor any man she is glad to serve.

They liked each other honestly—they were both honest. She was disappointed by his devotion to making money, but she was sure that he did not lie to patients, and that he did keep up with the medical magazines. What aroused her to something more than liking was his boyishness when they went tramping.

They walked from St. Paul down the river to Mendota, Kennicott more elastic-seeming in a cap and a soft crepe shirt, Carol youthful in a tam-o'-shanter of mole velvet, a blue serge suit with an absurdly and agreeably broad turn-down linen collar, and frivolous ankles above athletic shoes. The High Bridge crosses the Mississippi, mounting from low banks to a palisade of cliffs. Far down beneath it on the St. Paul side, upon mud flats, is a wild settlement of chicken-infested gardens and shanties patched together from discarded sign-boards, sheets of corrugated iron, and planks fished out of the river. Carol leaned over the rail of the bridge to look down at this Yang-tse village; in delicious imaginary fear she shrieked that she was dizzy with the height; and it was an extremely human satisfaction to have a strong male snatch her back to safety, instead of having a logical woman teacher or librarian sniff, "Well, if you're scared, why don't you get away from the rail, then?"

From the cliffs across the river Carol and Kennicott looked back at St. Paul on its hills; an imperial sweep from the dome of the cathedral to the dome of the state capitol.

The river road led past rocky field slopes, deep glens, woods flamboyant now with September, to Mendota, white walls and a spire among trees beneath a hill, old-world in its placid ease. And for this fresh land, the place is ancient. Here is the bold stone house which General Sibley, the king of fur-traders, built in 1835, with plaster of river mud, and ropes of twisted grass for laths. It has an air of centuries. In its solid rooms Carol and

Kennicott found prints from other days which the house had seen—tail-coats of robin's-egg blue, clumsy Red River carts laden with luxurious furs, whiskered Union soldiers in slant forage caps and rattling sabers.

It suggested to them a common American past, and it was memorable because they had discovered it together. They talked more trustingly, more personally, as they trudged on. They crossed the Minnesota River in a rowboat ferry. They climbed the hill to the round stone tower of Fort Snelling. They saw the junction of the Mississippi and the Minnesota, and recalled the men who had come here eighty years ago—Maine lumbermen, York traders, soldiers from the Maryland hills.

"It's a good country, and I'm proud of it. Let's make it all that those old boys dreamed about," the unsentimental Kennicott was moved to vow.

"Let's!"

"Come on. Come to Gopher Prairie. Show us. Make the town—well—make it artistic. It's mighty pretty, but I'll admit we aren't any too darn artistic. Probably the lumber-yard isn't as scrumptious as all these Greek temples. But go to it! Make us change!"

"I would like to. Some day!"

"Now! You'd love Gopher Prairie. We've been doing a lot with lawns and gardening the past few years, and it's so homey—the big trees and——And the best people on earth. And keen. I bet Luke Dawson——"

Carol but half listened to the names. She could not fancy their ever becoming important to her.

"I bet Luke Dawson has got more money than most of the swells on Summit Avenue; and Miss Sherwin in the high school is a regular wonder—reads Latin like I do English; and Sam Clark, the hardware man, he's a corker—not a better man in the state to go hunting

with; and if you want culture, besides Vida Sherwin there's Reverend Warren, the Congregational preacher, and Professor Mott, the superintendent of schools, and Guy Pollock, the lawyer—they say he writes regular poetry and—and Raymie Wutherspoon, he's not such an awful boob when you get to KNOW him, and he sings swell. And——And there's plenty of others. Lym Cass. Only of course none of them have your finesse, you might call it. But they don't make 'em any more appreciative and so on. Come on! We're ready for you to boss us!"

They sat on the bank below the parapet of the old fort, hidden from observation. He circled her shoulder with his arm. Relaxed after the walk, a chill nipping her throat, conscious of his warmth and power, she leaned gratefully against him.

"You know I'm in love with you, Carol!"

She did not answer, but she touched the back of his hand with an exploring finger.

"You say I'm so darn materialistic. How can I help it, unless I have you to stir me up?"

She did not answer. She could not think.

"You say a doctor could cure a town the way he does a person. Well, you cure the town of whatever ails it, if anything does, and I'll be your surgical kit."

She did not follow his words, only the burring resoluteness of them.

She was shocked, thrilled, as he kissed her cheek and cried, "There's no use saying things and saying things and saying things. Don't my arms talk to you—now?"

"Oh, please, please!" She wondered if she ought to be angry, but it was a drifting thought, and she discovered that she was crying.

Then they were sitting six inches apart, pretending that they had never been nearer, while she tried to be impersonal:

"I would like to—would like to see Gopher Prairie."

"Trust me! Here she is! Brought some snapshots down to show you."

Her cheek near his sleeve, she studied a dozen village pictures. They were streaky; she saw only trees, shrubbery, a porch indistinct in leafy shadows. But she exclaimed over the lakes: dark water reflecting wooded bluffs, a flight of ducks, a fisherman in shirt sleeves and a wide straw hat, holding up a string of croppies. One winter picture of the edge of Plover Lake had the air of an etching: lustrous slide of ice, snow in the crevices of a boggy bank, the mound of a muskrat house, reeds in thin black lines, arches of frosty grasses. It was an impression of cool clear vigor.

"How'd it be to skate there for a couple of hours, or go zinging along on a fast ice-boat, and skip back home for coffee and some hot wienies?" he demanded.

"It might be—fun."

"But here's the picture. Here's where you come in."

A photograph of a forest clearing: pathetic new furrows straggling among stumps, a clumsy log cabin chinked with mud and roofed with hay. In front of it a sagging woman with tight-drawn hair, and a baby bedraggled, smeary, glorious-eyed.

"Those are the kind of folks I practise among, good share of the time. Nels Erdstrom, fine clean young Svenska. He'll have a corking farm in ten years, but now——I operated his wife on a kitchen table, with my driver giving the anesthetic. Look at that scared baby! Needs some woman with hands like yours. Waiting for you! Just look at that baby's eyes, look how he's begging——"

"Don't! They hurt me. Oh, it would be sweet to help him—so sweet."

As his arms moved toward her she answered all her doubts with "Sweet, so sweet."

CHAPTER III

UNDER the rolling clouds of the prairie a moving mass of steel. An irritable clank and rattle beneath a prolonged roar. The sharp scent of oranges cutting the soggy smell of unbathed people and ancient baggage.

Towns as planless as a scattering of pasteboard boxes on an attic floor. The stretch of faded gold stubble broken only by clumps of willows encircling white houses and red barns.

No. 7, the way train, grumbling through Minnesota, imperceptibly climbing the giant tableland that slopes in a thousand-mile rise from hot Mississippi bottoms to the Rockies.

It is September, hot, very dusty.

There is no smug Pullman attached to the train, and the day coaches of the East are replaced by free chair cars, with each seat cut into two adjustable plush chairs, the head-rests covered with doubtful linen towels. Halfway down the car is a semi-partition of carved oak columns, but the aisle is of bare, splintery, grease-blackened wood. There is no porter, no pillows, no provision for beds, but all today and all tonight they will ride in this long steel box-farmers with perpetually tired wives and children who seem all to be of the same age; workmen going to new jobs; traveling salesmen with derbies and freshly shined shoes.

They are parched and cramped, the lines of their hands filled with grime; they go to sleep curled in distorted attitudes, heads against the window-panes or propped on rolled coats on seat-arms, and legs thrust into the aisle. They do not read; apparently they do not think. They wait. An early-wrinkled, young-old mother, moving as though her joints were dry, opens a suit-case in which are seen creased blouses, a pair of slippers worn through at the toes, a bottle of patent medicine, a tin cup, a paper-covered book about dreams

which the news-butcher has coaxed her into buying. She brings out a graham cracker which she feeds to a baby lying flat on a seat and wailing hopelessly. Most of the crumbs drop on the red plush of the seat, and the woman sighs and tries to brush them away, but they leap up impishly and fall back on the plush.

A soiled man and woman munch sandwiches and throw the crusts on the floor. A large brick-colored Norwegian takes off his shoes, grunts in relief, and props his feet in their thick gray socks against the seat in front of him.

An old woman whose toothless mouth shuts like a mud-turtle's, and whose hair is not so much white as yellow like moldy linen, with bands of pink skull apparent between the tresses, anxiously lifts her bag, opens it, peers in, closes it, puts it under the seat, and hastily picks it up and opens it and hides it all over again. The bag is full of treasures and of memories: a leather buckle, an ancient band-concert program, scraps of ribbon, lace, satin. In the aisle beside her is an extremely indignant parrakeet in a cage.

Two facing seats, overflowing with a Slovene iron-miner's family, are littered with shoes, dolls, whisky bottles, bundles wrapped in newspapers, a sewing bag. The oldest boy takes a mouth-organ out of his coat pocket, wipes the tobacco crumbs off, and plays "Marching through Georgia" till every head in the car begins to ache.

The news-butcher comes through selling chocolate bars and lemon drops. A girl-child ceaselessly trots down to the water-cooler and back to her seat. The stiff paper envelope which she uses for cup drips in the aisle as she goes, and on each trip she stumbles over the feet of a carpenter, who grunts, "Ouch! Look out!"

The dust-caked doors are open, and from the smoking-car drifts back a visible blue line of stinging tobacco smoke, and with it a crackle of laughter over the story which the young man in the bright blue suit and lavender tie and light yellow shoes has just told to the squat man in garage overalls.

The smell grows constantly thicker, more stale.

II

To each of the passengers his seat was his temporary home, and most of the passengers were slatternly housekeepers. But one seat looked clean and deceptively cool. In it were an obviously prosperous man and a black-haired, fine-skinned girl whose pumps rested on an immaculate horsehide bag.

They were Dr. Will Kennicott and his bride, Carol.

They had been married at the end of a year of conversational courtship, and they were on their way to Gopher Prairie after a wedding journey in the Colorado mountains.

The hordes of the way-train were not altogether new to Carol. She had seen them on trips from St. Paul to Chicago. But now that they had become her own people, to bathe and encourage and adorn, she had an acute and uncomfortable interest in them. They distressed her. They were so stolid. She had always maintained that there is no American peasantry, and she sought now to defend her faith by seeing imagination and enterprise in the young Swedish farmers, and in a traveling man working over his order-blanks. But the older people, Yankees as well as Norwegians, Germans, Finns, Canucks, had settled into submission to poverty. They were peasants, she groaned.

"Isn't there any way of waking them up? What would happen if they understood scientific agriculture?" she begged of Kennicott, her hand groping for his.

It had been a transforming honeymoon. She had been frightened to discover how tumultuous a feeling could be roused in her. Will had been lordly—stalwart, jolly, impressively competent in making camp, tender and understanding through the hours when they had lain side by side in a tent pitched among pines high up on a lonely mountain spur.

His hand swallowed hers as he started from thoughts of the practise to which he was returning. "These people? Wake 'em up? What for? They're happy."

"But they're so provincial. No, that isn't what I mean. They're—oh, so sunk in the mud."

"Look here, Carrie. You want to get over your city idea that because a man's pants aren't pressed, he's a fool. These farmers are mighty keen and up-and-coming."

"I know! That's what hurts. Life seems so hard for them—these lonely farms and this gritty train."

"Oh, they don't mind it. Besides, things are changing. The auto, the telephone, rural free delivery; they're bringing the farmers in closer touch with the town. Takes time, you know, to change a wilderness like this was fifty years ago. But already, why, they can hop into the Ford or the Overland and get in to the movies on Saturday evening quicker than you could get down to 'em by trolley in St. Paul."

"But if it's these towns we've been passing that the farmers run to for relief from their bleakness Can't you understand? Just LOOK at them!"

Kennicott was amazed. Ever since childhood he had seen these towns from trains on this same line. He grumbled, "Why, what's the matter with 'em? Good hustling burgs. It would astonish you to know how much wheat and rye and corn and potatoes they ship in a year."

"But they're so ugly."

"I'll admit they aren't comfy like Gopher Prairie. But give 'em time."

"What's the use of giving them time unless some one has desire and training enough to plan them? Hundreds of factories trying to make attractive motor cars, but these towns—

left to chance. No! That can't be true. It must have taken genius to make them so scrawny!"

"Oh, they're not so bad," was all he answered. He pretended that his hand was the cat and hers the mouse. For the first time she tolerated him rather than encouraged him. She was staring out at Schoenstrom, a hamlet of perhaps a hundred and fifty inhabitants, at which the train was stopping.

A bearded German and his pucker-mouthed wife tugged their enormous imitation-leather satchel from under a seat and waddled out. The station agent hoisted a dead calf aboard the baggage-car. There were no other visible activities in Schoenstrom. In the quiet of the halt, Carol could hear a horse kicking his stall, a carpenter shingling a roof.

The business-center of Schoenstrom took up one side of one block, facing the railroad. It was a row of one-story shops covered with galvanized iron, or with clapboards painted red and bilious yellow. The buildings were as ill-assorted, as temporary-looking, as a mining-camp street in the motion-pictures. The railroad station was a one-room frame box, a mirey cattle-pen on one side and a crimson wheat-elevator on the other. The elevator, with its cupola on the ridge of a shingled roof, resembled a broad-shouldered man with a small, vicious, pointed head. The only habitable structures to be seen were the florid red-brick Catholic church and rectory at the end of Main Street.

Carol picked at Kennicott's sleeve. "You wouldn't call this a not-so-bad town, would you?"

"These Dutch burgs ARE kind of slow. Still, at that——See that fellow coming out of the general store there, getting into the big car? I met him once. He owns about half the town, besides the store. Rauskukle, his name is. He owns a lot of mortgages, and he gambles in farm-lands. Good nut on him, that fellow. Why, they say he's worth three or four hundred thousand dollars!

Got a dandy great big yellow brick house with tiled walks and a garden and everything, other end of town—can't see it from here—I've gone past it when I've driven through here. Yes sir!"

"Then, if he has all that, there's no excuse whatever for this place! If his three hundred thousand went back into the town, where it belongs, they could burn up these shacks, and build a dream-village, a jewel! Why do the farmers and the town-people let the Baron keep it?"

"I must say I don't quite get you sometimes, Carrie. Let him? They can't help themselves! He's a dumm old Dutchman, and probably the priest can twist him around his finger, but when it comes to picking good farming land, he's a regular wiz!"

"I see. He's their symbol of beauty. The town erects him, instead of erecting buildings."

"Honestly, don't know what you're driving at. You're kind of played out, after this long trip. You'll feel better when you get home and have a good bath, and put on the blue negligee. That's some vampire costume, you witch!"

He squeezed her arm, looked at her knowingly.

They moved on from the desert stillness of the Schoenstrom station. The train creaked, banged, swayed. The air was nauseatingly thick. Kennicott turned her face from the window, rested her head on his shoulder. She was coaxed from her unhappy mood. But she came out of it unwillingly, and when Kennicott was satisfied that he had corrected all her worries and had opened a magazine of saffron detective stories, she sat upright.

Here—she meditated—is the newest empire of the world; the Northern Middlewest; a land of dairy herds and exquisite lakes, of new automobiles and tar-paper shanties and silos likes red towers, of clumsy speech and a hope that is boundless. An empire which feeds a quarter of the world—yet its work is merely begun. They are pioneers, these

sweaty wayfarers, for all their telephones and bank-accounts and automatic pianos and co-operative leagues. And for all its fat richness, theirs is a pioneer land. What is its future? she wondered. A future of cities and factory smut where now are loping empty fields? Homes universal and secure? Or placid chateaux ringed with sullen huts? Youth free to find knowledge and laughter? Willingness to sift the sanctified lies? Or creamy-skinned fat women, smeared with grease and chalk, gorgeous in the skins of beasts and the bloody feathers of slain birds, playing bridge with puffy pink-nailed jeweled fingers, women who after much expenditure of labor and bad temper still grotesquely resemble their own flatulent lap-dogs? The ancient stale inequalities, or something different in history, unlike the tedious maturity of other empires? What future and what hope?

Carol's head ached with the riddle.

She saw the prairie, flat in giant patches or rolling in long hummocks. The width and bigness of it, which had expanded her spirit an hour ago, began to frighten her. It spread out so; it went on so uncontrollably; she could never know it. Kennicott was closeted in his detective story. With the loneliness which comes most depressingly in the midst of many people she tried to forget problems, to look at the prairie objectively.

The grass beside the railroad had been burnt over; it was a smudge prickly with charred stalks of weeds. Beyond the undeviating barbed-wire fences were clumps of golden rod. Only this thin hedge shut them off from the plains-shorn wheat-lands of autumn, a hundred acres to a field, prickly and gray near-by but in the blurred distance like tawny velvet stretched over dipping hillocks. The long rows of wheat-shocks marched like soldiers in worn yellow tabards. The newly plowed fields were black banners fallen on the distant slope. It was a martial immensity, vigorous, a little harsh, unsoftened by kindly gardens.

The expanse was relieved by clumps of oaks with patches of short wild grass; and every mile or two was a chain of cobalt slews, with the flicker of blackbirds' wings across them.

All this working land was turned into exuberance by the light. The sunshine was dizzy on open stubble; shadows from immense cumulus clouds were forever sliding across low mounds; and the sky was wider and loftier and more resolutely blue than the sky of cities . . . she declared.

"It's a glorious country; a land to be big in," she crooned.

Then Kennicott startled her by chuckling, "D' you realize the town after the next is Gopher Prairie? Home!"

III

That one word—home—it terrified her. Had she really bound herself to live, inescapably, in this town called Gopher Prairie? And this thick man beside her, who dared to define her future, he was a stranger! She turned in her seat, stared at him. Who was he? Why was he sitting with her?

He wasn't of her kind! His neck was heavy; his speech was heavy; he was twelve or thirteen years older than she; and about him was none of the magic of shared adventures and eagerness. She could not believe that she had ever slept in his arms. That was one of the dreams which you had but did not officially admit.

She told herself how good he was, how dependable and understanding. She touched his ear, smoothed the plane of his solid jaw, and, turning away again, concentrated upon liking his town. It wouldn't be like these barren settlements. It couldn't be! Why, it had three thousand population. That was a great many people. There would be six hundred houses or more. And——The lakes near it would be so lovely. She'd seen them in the photographs. They had looked charming . . . hadn't they?

As the train left Wahkeenyan she began nervously to watch for the lakes—the entrance to all her future life. But when she discovered them, to the left of the track, her only impression of them was that they resembled the photographs.

A mile from Gopher Prairie the track mounts a curving low ridge, and she could see the town as a whole. With a passionate jerk she pushed up the window, looked out, the arched fingers of her left hand trembling on the sill, her right hand at her breast.

And she saw that Gopher Prairie was merely an enlargement of all the hamlets which they had been passing. Only to the eyes of a Kennicott was it exceptional. The huddled low wooden houses broke the plains scarcely more than would a hazel thicket. The fields swept up to it, past it.

It was unprotected and unprotecting; there was no dignity in it nor any hope of greatness. Only the tall red grain-elevator and a few tinny church-steeples rose from the mass. It was a frontier camp. It was not a place to live in, not possibly, not conceivably.

The people—they'd be as drab as their houses, as flat as their fields. She couldn't stay here. She would have to wrench loose from this man, and flee.

She peeped at him. She was at once helpless before his mature fixity, and touched by his excitement as he sent his magazine skittering along the aisle, stooped for their bags, came up with flushed face, and gloated, "Here we are!"

She smiled loyally, and looked away. The train was entering town. The houses on the outskirts were dusky old red mansions with wooden frills, or gaunt frame shelters like grocery boxes, or new bungalows with concrete foundations imitating stone.

Now the train was passing the elevator, the grim storage-tanks for oil, a creamery, a lumber-yard, a stock-yard muddy and trampled and stinking. Now they were stopping at a squat red frame station, the platform crowded with unshaven farmers and with loafers—

unadventurous people with dead eyes. She was here. She could not go on. It was the end—the end of the world. She sat with closed eyes, longing to push past Kennicott, hide somewhere in the train, flee on toward the Pacific.

Something large arose in her soul and commanded, "Stop it! Stop being a whining baby!" She stood up quickly; she said, "Isn't it wonderful to be here at last!"

He trusted her so. She would make herself like the place. And she was going to do tremendous things——

She followed Kennicott and the bobbing ends of the two bags which he carried. They were held back by the slow line of disembarking passengers. She reminded herself that she was actually at the dramatic moment of the bride's home-coming. She ought to feel exalted. She felt nothing at all except irritation at their slow progress toward the door.

Kennicott stooped to peer through the windows. He shyly exulted:

"Look! Look! There's a bunch come down to welcome us! Sam Clark and the missus and Dave Dyer and Jack Elder, and, yes sir, Harry Haydock and Juanita, and a whole crowd! I guess they see us now. Yuh, yuh sure, they see us! See 'em waving!"

She obediently bent her head to look out at them. She had hold of herself. She was ready to love them. But she was embarrassed by the heartiness of the cheering group. From the vestibule she waved to them, but she clung a second to the sleeve of the brakeman who helped her down before she had the courage to dive into the cataract of hand-shaking people, people whom she could not tell apart. She had the impression that all the men had coarse voices, large damp hands, tooth-brush mustaches, bald spots, and Masonic watch-charms.

She knew that they were welcoming her. Their hands, their smiles, their shouts, their affectionate eyes overcame her. She stammered, "Thank you, oh, thank you!"

One of the men was clamoring at Kennicott, "I brought my machine down to take you home, doc."

"Fine business, Sam!" cried Kennicott; and, to Carol, "Let's jump in. That big Paige over there. Some boat, too, believe me! Sam can show speed to any of these Marmons from Minneapolis!"

Only when she was in the motor car did she distinguish the three people who were to accompany them. The owner, now at the wheel, was the essence of decent self-satisfaction; a baldish, largish, level-eyed man, rugged of neck but sleek and round of face—face like the back of a spoon bowl. He was chuckling at her, "Have you got us all straight yet?"

"Course she has! Trust Carrie to get things straight and get 'em darn quick! I bet she could tell you every date in history!" boasted her husband.

But the man looked at her reassuringly and with a certainty that he was a person whom she could trust she confessed, "As a matter of fact I haven't got anybody straight."

"Course you haven't, child. Well, I'm Sam Clark, dealer in hardware, sporting goods, cream separators, and almost any kind of heavy junk you can think of. You can call me Sam—anyway, I'm going to call you Carrie, seein' 's you've been and gone and married this poor fish of a bum medic that we keep round here." Carol smiled lavishly, and wished that she called people by their given names more easily. "The fat cranky lady back there beside you, who is pretending that she can't hear me giving her away, is Mrs. Sam'l Clark; and this hungry-looking squirt up here beside me is Dave Dyer, who keeps his drug store running by not filling your hubby's prescriptions right—fact you might say he's the guy that put the 'shun' in 'prescription.' So! Well, leave us take the bonny bride home. Say, doc, I'll sell you the Candersen place for three thousand plunks.

Better be thinking about building a new home for Carrie. Prettiest Frau in G. P., if you asks me!"

Contentedly Sam Clark drove off, in the heavy traffic of three Fords and the Mirmiemashie House Free 'Bus.

"I shall like Mr. Clark . . . I CAN'T call him 'Sam'! They're all so friendly." She glanced at the houses; tried not to see what she saw; gave way in: "Why do these stories lie so? They always make the bride's home-coming a bower of roses. Complete trust in noble spouse. Lies about marriage. I'm NOT changed. And this town—O my God! I can't go through with it. This junk-heap!"

Her husband bent over her. "You look like you were in a brown study. Scared? I don't expect you to think Gopher Prairie is a paradise, after St. Paul. I don't expect you to be crazy about it, at first. But you'll come to like it so much—life's so free here and best people on earth."

She whispered to him (while Mrs. Clark considerately turned away), "I love you for understanding. I'm just—I'm beastly over-sensitive. Too many books. It's my lack of shoulder-muscles and sense. Give me time, dear."

"You bet! All the time you want!"

She laid the back of his hand against her cheek, snuggled near him. She was ready for her new home.

Kennicott had told her that, with his widowed mother as housekeeper, he had occupied an old house, "but nice and roomy, and well-heated, best furnace I could find on the market." His mother had left Carol her love, and gone back to Lac-qui-Meurt.

It would be wonderful, she exulted, not to have to live in Other People's Houses, but to make her own shrine. She held his hand tightly and stared ahead as the car swung round a corner and stopped in the street before a prosaic frame house in a small parched lawn.

IV

A concrete sidewalk with a "parking" of grass and mud. A square smug brown house, rather damp. A narrow concrete walk up to it. Sickly yellow leaves in a windrow with dried wings of box-elder seeds and snags of wool from the cotton-woods. A screened porch with pillars of thin painted pine surmounted by scrolls and brackets and bumps of jigsawed wood. No shrubbery to shut off the public gaze. A lugubrious bay-window to the right of the porch. Window curtains of starched cheap lace revealing a pink marble table with a conch shell and a Family Bible.

"You'll find it old-fashioned—what do you call it?—Mid-Victorian. I left it as is, so you could make any changes you felt were necessary." Kennicott sounded doubtful for the first time since he had come back to his own.

"It's a real home!" She was moved by his humility. She gaily motioned good-by to the Clarks. He unlocked the door—he was leaving the choice of a maid to her, and there was no one in the house. She jiggled while he turned the key, and scampered in. . . . It was next day before either of them remembered that in their honeymoon camp they had planned that he should carry her over the sill.

In hallway and front parlor she was conscious of dinginess and lugubriousness and airlessness, but she insisted, "I'll make it all jolly." As she followed Kennicott and the bags up to their bedroom she quavered to herself the song of the fat little-gods of the hearth:

I have my own home,
To do what I please with,
To do what I please with,
My den for me and my mate and my cubs,
My own!

She was close in her husband's arms; she clung to him; whatever of strangeness and slowness and insularity she might find in him, none of that mattered so long as she could slip her hands beneath his coat, run her fingers over the warm smoothness of the satin back of his waistcoat, seem almost to creep into his body, find in him strength, find in the courage and kindness of her man a shelter from the perplexing world.

"Sweet, so sweet," she whispered.

CHAPTER IV

I

"THE Clarks have invited some folks to their house to meet us, tonight," said Kennicott, as he unpacked his suit-case.

"Oh, that is nice of them!"

"You bet. I told you you'd like 'em. Squarest people on earth. Uh, Carrie——Would you mind if I sneaked down to the office for an hour, just to see how things are?"

"Why, no. Of course not. I know you're keen to get back to work."

"Sure you don't mind?"

"Not a bit. Out of my way. Let me unpack."

But the advocate of freedom in marriage was as much disappointed as a drooping bride at the alacrity with which he took that freedom and escaped to the world of men's affairs. She gazed about their bedroom, and its full dismalness crawled over her: the awkward knuckly L-shape of it; the black walnut bed with apples and spotty pears carved on the headboard; the imitation maple bureau, with pink-daubed scent-bottles and a petticoated pin-cushion on a marble slab uncomfortably like a gravestone; the plain pine washstand and the garlanded water-pitcher and bowl. The scent was of horsehair and plush and Florida Water.

"How could people ever live with things like this?" she shuddered. She saw the furniture as a circle of elderly judges, condemning her to death by smothering. The tottering brocade chair squeaked, "Choke her—choke her—smother her." The old linen smelled of the tomb. She was alone in this house, this strange still house, among the shadows of dead thoughts and haunting repressions. "I hate it! I hate it!" she panted. "Why did I ever——"

She remembered that Kennicott's mother had brought these family relics from the old home in Lac-qui-Meurt. "Stop it! They're perfectly comfortable things. They're—comfortable. Besides——Oh, they're horrible! We'll change them, right away."

Then, "But of course he HAS to see how things are at the office——"

She made a pretense of busying herself with unpacking. The chintz-lined, silver-fitted bag which had seemed so desirable a luxury in St. Paul was an extravagant vanity here. The daring black chemise of frail chiffon and lace was a hussy at which the deep-

bosomed bed stiffened in disgust, and she hurled it into a bureau drawer, hid it beneath a sensible linen blouse.

She gave up unpacking. She went to the window, with a purely literary thought of village charm—hollyhocks and lanes and apple-cheeked cottagers. What she saw was the side of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church—a plain clapboard wall of a sour liver color; the ash-pile back of the church; an unpainted stable; and an alley in which a Ford delivery-wagon had been stranded. This was the terraced garden below her boudoir; this was to be her scenery for——

"I mustn't! I mustn't! I'm nervous this afternoon. Am I sick? . . . Good Lord, I hope it isn't that! Not now! How people lie! How these stories lie! They say the bride is always so blushing and proud and happy when she finds that out, but—I'd hate it! I'd be scared to death! Some day but——Please, dear nebulous Lord, not now! Bearded sniffy old men sitting and demanding that we bear children. If THEY had to bear them——! I wish they did have to! Not now! Not till I've got hold of this job of liking the ash-pile out there! . . . I must shut up. I'm mildly insane. I'm going out for a walk. I'll see the town by myself. My first view of the empire I'm going to conquer!"

She fled from the house.

She stared with seriousness at every concrete crossing, every hitching-post, every rake for leaves; and to each house she devoted all her speculation. What would they come to mean? How would they look six months from now? In which of them would she be dining? Which of these people whom she passed, now mere arrangements of hair and clothes, would turn into intimates, loved or dreaded, different from all the other people in the world?

As she came into the small business-section she inspected a broad-beamed grocer in an alpaca coat who was bending over the apples and celery on a slanted platform in front of

his store. Would she ever talk to him? What would he say if she stopped and stated, "I am Mrs. Dr. Kennicott. Some day I hope to confide that a heap of extremely dubious pumpkins as a window-display doesn't exhilarate me much."

(The grocer was Mr. Frederick F. Ludelmeyer, whose market is at the corner of Main Street and Lincoln Avenue. In supposing that only she was observant Carol was ignorant, misled by the indifference of cities. She fancied that she was slipping through the streets invisible; but when she had passed, Mr. Ludelmeyer puffed into the store and coughed at his clerk, "I seen a young woman, she come along the side street.

I bet she is Doc Kennicott's new bride, good-looker, nice legs, but she wore a hell of a plain suit, no style, I wonder will she pay cash, I bet she goes to Howland & Gould's more as she does here, what you done with the poster for Fluffed Oats?")

II

When Carol had walked for thirty-two minutes she had completely covered the town, east and west, north and south; and she stood at the corner of Main Street and Washington Avenue and despaired.

Main Street with its two-story brick shops, its story-and-a-half wooden residences, its muddy expanse from concrete walk to walk, its huddle of Fords and lumber-wagons, was too small to absorb her. The broad, straight, unenticing gashes of the streets let in the grasping prairie on every side. She realized the vastness and the emptiness of the land. The skeleton iron windmill on the farm a few blocks away, at the north end of Main Street, was like the ribs of a dead cow. She thought of the coming of the Northern winter, when the unprotected houses would crouch together in terror of storms galloping out of that wild waste. They were so small and weak, the little brown houses. They were shelters for sparrows, not homes for warm laughing people.

She told herself that down the street the leaves were a splendor. The maples were orange; the oaks a solid tint of raspberry. And the lawns had been nursed with love. But the thought would not hold. At best the trees resembled a thinned woodlot. There was no park to rest the eyes. And since not Gopher Prairie but Wakamin was the county-seat, there was no court-house with its grounds.

She glanced through the fly-specked windows of the most pretentious building in sight, the one place which welcomed strangers and determined their opinion of the charm and luxury of Gopher Prairie—the Minniemashie House. It was a tall lean shabby structure, three stories of yellow-streaked wood, the corners covered with sanded pine slabs purporting to symbolize stone. In the hotel office she could see a stretch of bare unclean floor, a line of rickety chairs with brass cuspidors between, a writing-desk with advertisements in mother-of-pearl letters upon the glass-covered back. The dining-room beyond was a jungle of stained table-cloths and catsup bottles.

She looked no more at the Minniemashie House.

A man in cuffless shirt-sleeves with pink arm-garters, wearing a linen collar but no tie, yawned his way from Dyer's Drug Store across to the hotel. He leaned against the wall, scratched a while, sighed, and in a bored way gossiped with a man tilted back in a chair. A lumber-wagon, its long green box filled with large spools of barbed-wire fencing, creaked down the block. A Ford, in reverse, sounded as though it were shaking to pieces, then recovered and rattled away. In the Greek candy-store was the whine of a peanut-roaster, and the oily smell of nuts.

There was no other sound nor sign of life.

She wanted to run, fleeing from the encroaching prairie, demanding the security of a great city. Her dreams of creating a beautiful town were ludicrous. Oozing out from every drab wall, she felt a forbidding spirit which she could never conquer.

She trailed down the street on one side, back on the other, glancing into the cross streets. It was a private Seeing Main Street tour. She was within ten minutes beholding not only the heart of a place called Gopher Prairie, but ten thousand towns from Albany to San Diego:

Dyer's Drug Store, a corner building of regular and unreal blocks of artificial stone. Inside the store, a greasy marble soda-fountain with an electric lamp of red and green and curdled-yellow mosaic shade. Pawed-over heaps of tooth-brushes and combs and packages of shaving-soap. Shelves of soap-cartons teething-rings, garden-seeds, and patent medicines in yellow packages-nostrums for consumption, for "women's diseases"—notorious mixtures of opium and alcohol, in the very shop to which her husband sent patients for the filling of prescriptions.

From a second-story window the sign "W. P. Kennicott, Phys. & Surgeon," gilt on black sand.

A small wooden motion-picture theater called "The Rosebud Movie Palace." Lithographs announcing a film called "Fatty in Love."

Howland & Gould's Grocery. In the display window, black, overripe bananas and lettuce on which a cat was sleeping. Shelves lined with red crepe paper which was now faded and torn and concentrically spotted. Flat against the wall of the second story the signs of lodges—the Knights of Pythias, the Maccabees, the Woodmen, the Masons.

Dahl & Oleson's Meat Market—a reek of blood.

A jewelry shop with tinny-looking wrist-watches for women. In front of it, at the curb, a huge wooden clock which did not go.

A fly-buzzing saloon with a brilliant gold and enamel whisky sign across the front. Other saloons down the block. From them a stink of stale beer, and thick voices bellowing

pidgin German or trolling out dirty songs—vice gone feeble and unenterprising and dull—the delicacy of a mining-camp minus its vigor. In front of the saloons, farmwives sitting on the seats of wagons, waiting for their husbands to become drunk and ready to start home.

A tobacco shop called "The Smoke House," filled with young men shaking dice for cigarettes. Racks of magazines, and pictures of coy fat prostitutes in striped bathing-suits.

A clothing store with a display of "ox-blood-shade Oxfords with bull-dog toes." Suits which looked worn and glossless while they were still new, flabbily draped on dummies like corpses with painted cheeks.

The Bon Ton Store—Haydock & Simons'—the largest shop in town. The first-story front of clear glass, the plates cleverly bound at the edges with brass. The second story of pleasant tapestry brick. One window of excellent clothes for men, interspersed with collars of floral pique which showed mauve daisies on a saffron ground. Newness and an obvious notion of neatness and service. Haydock & Simons. Haydock. She had met a Haydock at the station; Harry Haydock; an active person of thirty-five. He seemed great to her, now, and very like a saint. His shop was clean!

Axel Egge's General Store, frequented by Scandinavian farmers. In the shallow dark window-space heaps of sleazy sateens, badly woven galateas, canvas shoes designed for women with bulging ankles, steel and red glass buttons upon cards with broken edges, a cottony blanket, a granite-ware frying-pan reposing on a sun-faded crepe blouse.

Sam Clark's Hardware Store. An air of frankly metallic enterprise. Guns and churns and barrels of nails and beautiful shiny butcher knives.

Chester Dashaway's House Furnishing Emporium. A vista of heavy oak rockers with leather seats, asleep in a dismal row.

Billy's Lunch. Thick handleless cups on the wet oilcloth-covered counter. An odor of onions and the smoke of hot lard. In the doorway a young man audibly sucking a toothpick.

The warehouse of the buyer of cream and potatoes. The sour smell of a dairy.

The Ford Garage and the Buick Garage, competent one-story brick and cement buildings opposite each other. Old and new cars on grease-blackened concrete floors. Tire advertisements. The roaring of a tested motor; a racket which beat at the nerves. Surly young men in khaki union-overalls. The most energetic and vital places in town.

A large warehouse for agricultural implements. An impressive barricade of green and gold wheels, of shafts and sulky seats, belonging to machinery of which Carol knew nothing—potato-planters, manure-spreaders, silage-cutters, disk-harrows, breaking-plows.

A feed store, its windows opaque with the dust of bran, a patent medicine advertisement painted on its roof.

Ye Art Shoppe, Prop. Mrs. Mary Ellen Wilks, Christian Science Library open daily free. A touching fumble at beauty. A one-room shanty of boards recently covered with rough stucco. A show-window delicately rich in error: vases starting out to imitate tree-trunks but running off into blobs of gilt—an aluminum ash-tray labeled "Greetings from Gopher Prairie"—a Christian Science magazine—a stamped sofa-cushion portraying a large ribbon tied to a small poppy, the correct skeins of embroidery-silk lying on the pillow. Inside the shop, a glimpse of bad carbon prints of bad and famous pictures, shelves of phonograph records and camera films, wooden toys, and in the midst an anxious small woman sitting in a padded rocking chair.

A barber shop and pool room. A man in shirt sleeves, presumably Del Snafflin the proprietor, shaving a man who had a large Adam's apple.

Nat Hicks's Tailor Shop, on a side street off Main. A one-story building. A fashion-plate showing human pitchforks in garments which looked as hard as steel plate.

On another side street a raw red-brick Catholic Church with a varnished yellow door.

The post-office—merely a partition of glass and brass shutting off the rear of a mildewed room which must once have been a shop. A tilted writing-shelf against a wall rubbed black and scattered with official notices and army recruiting-posters.

The damp, yellow-brick schoolbuilding in its cindery grounds.

The State Bank, stucco masking wood.

The Farmers' National Bank. An Ionic temple of marble. Pure, exquisite, solitary. A brass plate with "Ezra Stowbody, Pres't."

A score of similar shops and establishments.

Behind them and mixed with them, the houses, meek cottages or large, comfortable, soundly uninteresting symbols of prosperity.

In all the town not one building save the Ionic bank which gave pleasure to Carol's eyes; not a dozen buildings which suggested that, in the fifty years of Gopher Prairie's existence, the citizens had realized that it was either desirable or possible to make this, their common home, amusing or attractive.

It was not only the unsparing unapologetic ugliness and the rigid straightness which overwhelmed her. It was the planlessness, the flimsy temporariness of the buildings, their faded unpleasant colors. The street was cluttered with electric-light poles, telephone poles, gasoline pumps for motor cars, boxes of goods. Each man had built with the most

valiant disregard of all the others. Between a large new "block" of two-story brick shops on one side, and the fire-brick Overland garage on the other side, was a one-story cottage turned into a millinery shop. The white temple of the Farmers' Bank was elbowed back by a grocery of glaring yellow brick. One store-building had a patchy galvanized iron cornice; the building beside it was crowned with battlements and pyramids of brick capped with blocks of red sandstone.

She escaped from Main Street, fled home.

She wouldn't have cared, she insisted, if the people had been comely. She had noted a young man loafing before a shop, one unwashed hand holding the cord of an awning; a middle-aged man who had a way of staring at women as though he had been married too long and too prosaically; an old farmer, solid, wholesome, but not clean—his face like a potato fresh from the earth. None of them had shaved for three days.

"If they can't build shrines, out here on the prairie, surely there's nothing to prevent their buying safety-razors!" she raged.

She fought herself: "I must be wrong. People do live here. It CAN'T be as ugly as—as I know it is! I must be wrong. But I can't do it. I can't go through with it."

She came home too seriously worried for hysteria; and when she found Kennicott waiting for her, and exulting, "Have a walk? Well, like the town? Great lawns and trees, eh?" she was able to say, with a self-protective maturity new to her, "It's very interesting."

III

The train which brought Carol to Gopher Prairie also brought Miss Bea Sorenson.

Miss Bea was a stalwart, corn-colored, laughing young woman, and she was bored by farm-work. She desired the excitements of city-life, and the way to enjoy city-life was, she had decided, to "go get a yob as hired girl in Gopher Prairie." She contentedly lugged

her pasteboard telescope from the station to her cousin, Tina Malmquist, maid of all work in the residence of Mrs. Luke Dawson.

"Vell, so you come to town," said Tina.

"Ya. Ay get a yob," said Bea.

"Vell. . . . You got a fella now?"

"Ya. Yim Yacobson."

"Vell. I'm glat to see you. How much you vant a veek?"

"Sex dollar."

"There ain't nobody pay dat. Vait! Dr. Kennicott, I t'ink he marry a girl from de Cities. Maybe she pay dat. Vell. You go take a valk."

"Ya," said Bea.

So it chanced that Carol Kennicott and Bea Sorenson were viewing Main Street at the same time.

Bea had never before been in a town larger than Scandia Crossing, which has sixty-seven inhabitants.

As she marched up the street she was meditating that it didn't hardly seem like it was possible there could be so many folks all in one place at the same time. My! It would take years to get acquainted with them all. And swell people, too! A fine big gentleman in a new pink shirt with a diamond, and not no washed-out blue denim working-shirt. A lovely lady in a longery dress (but it must be an awful hard dress to wash). And the stores!

Not just three of them, like there were at Scandia Crossing, but more than four whole blocks!

The Bon Ton Store—big as four barns—my! it would simply scare a person to go in there, with seven or eight clerks all looking at you. And the men's suits, on figures just like human. And Axel Egge's, like home, lots of Swedes and Norskes in there, and a card of dandy buttons, like rubies.

A drug store with a soda fountain that was just huge, awful long, and all lovely marble; and on it there was a great big lamp with the biggest shade you ever saw—all different kinds colored glass stuck together; and the soda spouts, they were silver, and they came right out of the bottom of the lamp-stand! Behind the fountain there were glass shelves, and bottles of new kinds of soft drinks, that nobody ever heard of. Suppose a fella took you THERE!

A hotel, awful high, higher than Oscar Tollefson's new red barn; three stories, one right on top of another; you had to stick your head back to look clear up to the top. There was a swell traveling man in there—probably been to Chicago, lots of times.

Oh, the dandiest people to know here! There was a lady going by, you wouldn't hardly say she was any older than Bea herself; she wore a dandy new gray suit and black pumps. She almost looked like she was looking over the town, too. But you couldn't tell what she thought. Bea would like to be that way—kind of quiet, so nobody would get fresh. Kind of—oh, elegant.

A Lutheran Church. Here in the city there'd be lovely sermons, and church twice on Sunday, EVERY Sunday!

And a movie show!

A regular theater, just for movies. With the sign "Change of bill every evening." Pictures every evening!

There were movies in Scandia Crossing, but only once every two weeks, and it took the Sorensons an hour to drive in—papa was such a tightwad he wouldn't get a Ford. But here she could put on her hat any evening, and in three minutes' walk be to the movies, and see lovely fellows in dress-suits and Bill Hart and everything!

How could they have so many stores? Why! There was one just for tobacco alone, and one (a lovely one—the Art Shoppy it was) for pictures and vases and stuff, with oh, the dandiest vase made so it looked just like a tree trunk!

Bea stood on the corner of Main Street and Washington Avenue. The roar of the city began to frighten her. There were five automobiles on the street all at the same time—and one of 'em was a great big car that must of cost two thousand dollars—and the 'bus was starting for a train with five elegant-dressed fellows, and a man was pasting up red bills with lovely pictures of washing-machines on them, and the jeweler was laying out bracelets and wrist-watches and EVERYTHING on real velvet.

What did she care if she got six dollars a week? Or two! It was worth while working for nothing, to be allowed to stay here. And think how it would be in the evening, all lighted up—and not with no lamps, but with electrics! And maybe a gentleman friend taking you to the movies and buying you a strawberry ice cream soda!

Bea trudged back.

"Vell? You lak it?" said Tina.

"Ya. Ay lak it. Ay t'ink maybe Ay stay here," said Bea.

IV

The recently built house of Sam Clark, in which was given the party to welcome Carol, was one of the largest in Gopher Prairie. It had a clean sweep of clapboards, a solid squareness, a small tower, and a large screened porch. Inside, it was as shiny, as hard, and as cheerful as a new oak upright piano.

Carol looked imploringly at Sam Clark as he rolled to the door and shouted, "Welcome, little lady! The keys of the city are yourn!"

Beyond him, in the hallway and the living-room, sitting in a vast prim circle as though they were attending a funeral, she saw the guests. They were WAITING so! They were waiting for her! The determination to be all one pretty flowerlet of appreciation leaked away. She begged of Sam, "I don't dare face them! They expect so much. They'll swallow me in one mouthful—glump!—like that!"

"Why, sister, they're going to love you—same as I would if I didn't think the doc here would beat me up!"

"B-but——I don't dare! Faces to the right of me, faces in front of me, volley and wonder!"

She sounded hysterical to herself; she fancied that to Sam Clark she sounded insane. But he chuckled, "Now you just cuddle under Sam's wing, and if anybody rubbers at you too long, I'll shoo 'em off. Here we go! Watch my smoke—Sam'l, the ladies' delight and the bridegrooms' terror!"

His arm about her, he led her in and bawled, "Ladies and worser halves, the bride! We won't introduce her round yet, because she'll never get your bum names straight anyway. Now bust up this star-chamber!"

They tittered politely, but they did not move from the social security of their circle, and they did not cease staring.

Carol had given creative energy to dressing for the event. Her hair was demure, low on her forehead with a parting and a coiled braid. Now she wished that she had piled it high. Her frock was an ingenue slip of lawn, with a wide gold sash and a low square neck, which gave a suggestion of throat and molded shoulders. But as they looked her over she was certain that it was all wrong. She wished alternately that she had worn a spinsterish high-necked dress, and that she had dared to shock them with a violent brick-red scarf which she had bought in Chicago.

She was led about the circle. Her voice mechanically produced safe remarks:

"Oh, I'm sure I'm going to like it here ever so much," and "Yes, we did have the best time in Colorado—mountains," and "Yes, I lived in St. Paul several years. Euclid P. Tinker? No, I don't REMEMBER meeting him, but I'm pretty sure I've heard of him."

Kennicott took her aside and whispered, "Now I'll introduce you to them, one at a time."

"Tell me about them first."

"Well, the nice-looking couple over there are Harry Hay-dock and his wife, Juanita. Harry's dad owns most of the Bon Ton, but it's Harry who runs it and gives it the pep. He's a hustler. Next to him is Dave Dyer the druggist—you met him this afternoon—mighty good duck-shot.

The tall husk beyond him is Jack Elder—Jackson Elder—owns the planing-mill, and the Minniemashie House, and quite a share in the Farmers' National Bank. Him and his wife are good sports—him and Sam and I go hunting together a lot. The old cheese there is Luke Dawson, the richest man in town. Next to him is Nat Hicks, the tailor."

"Really? A tailor?"

"Sure. Why not? Maybe we're slow, but we are democratic. I go hunting with Nat same as I do with Jack Elder."

"I'm glad. I've never met a tailor socially. It must be charming to meet one and not have to think about what you owe him. And do you——Would you go hunting with your barber, too?"

"No but——No use running this democracy thing into the ground. Besides, I've known Nat for years, and besides, he's a mighty good shot and——That's the way it is, see? Next to Nat is Chet Dashaway. Great fellow for chinning. He'll talk your arm off, about religion or politics or books or anything."

Carol gazed with a polite approximation to interest at Mr. Dashaway, a tan person with a wide mouth. "Oh, I know! He's the furniture-store man!" She was much pleased with herself.

"Yump, and he's the undertaker. You'll like him. Come shake hands with him."

"Oh no, no! He doesn't—he doesn't do the embalming and all that—himself? I couldn't shake hands with an undertaker!"

"Why not? You'd be proud to shake hands with a great surgeon, just after he'd been carving up people's bellies."

She sought to regain her afternoon's calm of maturity. "Yes. You're right. I want—oh, my dear, do you know how much I want to like the people you like? I want to see people as they are."

"Well, don't forget to see people as other folks see them as they are! They have the stuff. Did you know that Percy Bresnahan came from here? Born and brought up here!"

"Bresnahan?"

"Yes—you know—president of the Velvet Motor Company of Boston, Mass.—make the Velvet Twelve—biggest automobile factory in New England."

"I think I've heard of him."

"Sure you have. Why, he's a millionaire several times over! Well, Perce comes back here for the black-bass fishing almost every summer, and he says if he could get away from business, he'd rather live here than in Boston or New York or any of those places. HE doesn't mind Chet's undertaking."

"Please! I'll—I'll like everybody! I'll be the community sunbeam!"

He led her to the Dawsons.

Luke Dawson, lender of money on mortgages, owner of Northern cut-over land, was a hesitant man in unpressed soft gray clothes, with bulging eyes in a milky face. His wife had bleached cheeks, bleached hair, bleached voice, and a bleached manner. She wore her expensive green frock, with its passementeried bosom, bead tassels, and gaps between the buttons down the back, as though she had bought it second-hand and was afraid of meeting the former owner.

They were shy. It was "Professor" George Edwin Mott, superintendent of schools, a Chinese mandarin turned brown, who held Carol's hand and made her welcome.

When the Dawsons and Mr. Mott had stated that they were "pleased to meet her," there seemed to be nothing else to say, but the conversation went on automatically.

"Do you like Gopher Prairie?" whimpered Mrs. Dawson.

"Oh, I'm sure I'm going to be ever so happy."

"There's so many nice people." Mrs. Dawson looked to Mr. Mott for social and intellectual aid. He lectured:

"There's a fine class of people. I don't like some of these retired farmers who come here to spend their last days—especially the Germans. They hate to pay school-taxes. They

hate to spend a cent. But the rest are a fine class of people. Did you know that Percy Bresnahan came from here? Used to go to school right at the old building!"

"I heard he did."

"Yes. He's a prince. He and I went fishing together, last time he was here."

The Dawsons and Mr. Mott teetered upon weary feet, and smiled at Carol with crystallized expressions. She went on:

"Tell me, Mr. Mott: Have you ever tried any experiments with any of the new educational systems? The modern kindergarten methods or the Gary system?"

"Oh. Those. Most of these would-be reformers are simply notoriety-seekers. I believe in manual training, but Latin and mathematics always will be the backbone of sound Americanism, no matter what these faddists advocate—heaven knows what they do want—knitting, I suppose, and classes in wiggling the ears!"

The Dawsons smiled their appreciation of listening to a savant. Carol waited till Kennicott should rescue her. The rest of the party waited for the miracle of being amused.

Harry and Juanita Haydock, Rita Simons and Dr. Terry Gould—the young smart set of Gopher Prairie. She was led to them. Juanita Haydock flung at her in a high, cackling, friendly voice:

"Well, this is SO nice to have you here. We'll have some good parties—dances and everything. You'll have to join the Jolly Seventeen. We play bridge and we have a supper once a month. You play, of course?"

"N-no, I don't."

"Really? In St. Paul?"

"I've always been such a book-worm."

"We'll have to teach you. Bridge is half the fun of life." Juanita had become patronizing, and she glanced disrespectfully at Carol's golden sash, which she had previously admired.

Harry Haydock said politely, "How do you think you're going to like the old burg?"

"I'm sure I shall like it tremendously."

"Best people on earth here. Great hustlers, too. Course I've had lots of chances to go live in Minneapolis, but we like it here. Real he-town. Did you know that Percy Bresnahan came from here?"

Carol perceived that she had been weakened in the biological struggle by disclosing her lack of bridge. Roused to nervous desire to regain her position she turned on Dr. Terry Gould, the young and pool-playing competitor of her husband. Her eyes coquetted with him while she gushed:

"I'll learn bridge. But what I really love most is the outdoors. Can't we all get up a boating party, and fish, or whatever you do, and have a picnic supper afterwards?"

"Now you're talking!" Dr. Gould affirmed. He looked rather too obviously at the cream-smooth slope of her shoulder.

"Like fishing? Fishing is my middle name. I'll teach you bridge. Like cards at all?"

"I used to be rather good at bezique."

She knew that bezique was a game of cards—or a game of something else. Roulette, possibly. But her lie was a triumph. Juanita's handsome, high-colored, horsey face showed doubt. Harry stroked his nose and said humbly, "Bezique? Used to be great gambling game, wasn't it?"

While others drifted to her group, Carol snatched up the conversation. She laughed and was frivolous and rather brittle. She could not distinguish their eyes. They were a blurry theater-audience before which she self-consciously enacted the comedy of being the Clever Little Bride of Doc Kennicott:

"These-here celebrated Open Spaces, that's what I'm going out for. I'll never read anything but the sporting-page again. Will converted me on our Colorado trip. There were so many mousey tourists who were afraid to get out of the motor 'bus that I decided to be Annie Oakley, the Wild Western Wampire, and I bought oh! a vociferous skirt which revealed my perfectly nice ankles to the Presbyterian glare of all the Ioway schoolma'ams, and I leaped from peak to peak like the nimble chamoys, and——You may think that Herr Doctor Kennicott is a Nimrod, but you ought to have seen me daring him to strip to his B. V. D.'s and go swimming in an icy mountain brook."

She knew that they were thinking of becoming shocked, but Juanita Haydock was admiring, at least. She swaggered on:

"I'm sure I'm going to ruin Will as a respectable practitioner——Is he a good doctor, Dr. Gould?"

Kennicott's rival gasped at this insult to professional ethics, and he took an appreciable second before he recovered his social manner. "I'll tell you, Mrs. Kennicott." He smiled at Kennicott, to imply that whatever he might say in the stress of being witty was not to count against him in the commercio-medical warfare. "There's some people in town that say the doc is a fair to middlin' diagnostician and prescription-writer, but let me whisper this to you—but for heaven's sake don't tell him I said so—don't you ever go to him for anything more serious than a pendectomy of the left ear or a strabismus of the cardiograph."

No one save Kennicott knew exactly what this meant, but they laughed, and Sam Clark's party assumed a glittering lemon-yellow color of brocade panels and champagne and tulle and crystal chandeliers and sporting duchesses. Carol saw that George Edwin Mott and the blanched Mr. and Mrs. Dawson were not yet hypnotized. They looked as though they wondered whether they ought to look as though they disapproved. She concentrated on them:

"But I know whom I wouldn't have dared to go to Colorado with! Mr. Dawson there! I'm sure he's a regular heart-breaker. When we were introduced he held my hand and squeezed it frightfully."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" The entire company applauded. Mr. Dawson was beatified. He had been called many things—loan-shark, skinflint, tightwad, pussyfoot—but he had never before been called a flirt.

"He is wicked, isn't he, Mrs. Dawson? Don't you have to lock him up?"

"Oh no, but maybe I better," attempted Mrs. Dawson, a tint on her pallid face.

For fifteen minutes Carol kept it up. She asserted that she was going to stage a musical comedy, that she preferred cafe parfait to beefsteak, that she hoped Dr. Kennicott would never lose his ability to make love to charming women, and that she had a pair of gold stockings. They gaped for more. But she could not keep it up. She retired to a chair behind Sam Clark's bulk. The smile-wrinkles solemnly flattened out in the faces of all the other collaborators in having a party, and again they stood about hoping but not expecting to be amused.

Carol listened. She discovered that conversation did not exist in Gopher Prairie. Even at this affair, which brought out the young smart set, the hunting squire set, the respectable intellectual set, and the solid financial set, they sat up with gaiety as with a corpse.

Juanita Haydock talked a good deal in her rattling voice but it was invariably of personalities: the rumor that Raymie Wutherspoon was going to send for a pair of patent leather shoes with gray buttoned tops; the rheumatism of Champ Perry; the state of Guy Pollock's grippe; and the dementia of Jim Howland in painting his fence salmon-pink.

Sam Clark had been talking to Carol about motor cars, but he felt his duties as host. While he droned, his brows popped up and down. He interrupted himself, "Must stir 'em up." He worried at his wife, "Don't you think I better stir 'em up?" He shouldered into the center of the room, and cried:

"Let's have some stunts, folks."

"Yes, let's!" shrieked Juanita Haydock.

"Say, Dave, give us that stunt about the Norwegian catching a hen."

"You bet; that's a slick stunt; do that, Dave!" cheered Chet Dashaway.

Mr. Dave Dyer obliged.

All the guests moved their lips in anticipation of being called on for their own stunts.

"Ella, come on and recite 'Old Sweetheart of Mine,' for us," demanded Sam.

Miss Ella Stowbody, the spinster daughter of the Ionic bank, scratched her dry palms and blushed. "Oh, you don't want to hear that old thing again."

"Sure we do! You bet!" asserted Sam.

"My voice is in terrible shape tonight."

"Tut! Come on!"

Sam loudly explained to Carol, "Ella is our shark at elocuting. She's had professional training. She studied singing and oratory and dramatic art and shorthand for a year, in Milwaukee."

Miss Stowbody was reciting. As encore to "An Old Sweetheart of Mine," she gave a peculiarly optimistic poem regarding the value of smiles.

There were four other stunts: one Jewish, one Irish, one juvenile, and Nat Hicks's parody of Mark Antony's funeral oration.

During the winter Carol was to hear Dave Dyer's hen-catching impersonation seven times, "An Old Sweetheart of Mine" nine times, the Jewish story and the funeral oration twice; but now she was ardent and, because she did so want to be happy and simple-hearted, she was as disappointed as the others when the stunts were finished, and the party instantly sank back into coma.

They gave up trying to be festive; they began to talk naturally, as they did at their shops and homes.

The men and women divided, as they had been tending to do all evening. Carol was deserted by the men, left to a group of matrons who steadily pattered of children, sickness, and cooks—their own shop-talk. She was piqued. She re-membered visions of herself as a smart married woman in a drawing-room, fencing with clever men. Her dejection was relieved by speculation as to what the men were discussing, in the corner between the piano and the phonograph. Did they rise from these housewifely personalities to a larger world of abstractions and affairs?

She made her best curtsy to Mrs. Dawson; she twittered, "I won't have my husband leaving me so soon! I'm going over and pull the wretch's ears." She rose with a jeune fille bow. She was self-absorbed and self-approving because she had attained that quality of

sentimentality. She proudly dipped across the room and, to the interest and commendation of all beholders, sat on the arm of Kennicott's chair.

He was gossiping with Sam Clark, Luke Dawson, Jackson Elder of the planing-mill, Chet Dashaway, Dave Dyer, Harry Haydock, and Ezra Stowbody, president of the Ionic bank.

Ezra Stowbody was a troglodyte. He had come to Gopher Prairie in 1865. He was a distinguished bird of prey—swooping thin nose, turtle mouth, thick brows, port-wine cheeks, floss of white hair, contemptuous eyes. He was not happy in the social changes of thirty years. Three decades ago, Dr. Westlake, Julius Flickerbaugh the lawyer, Merriman Peedy the Congregational pastor and himself had been the arbiters.

That was as it should be; the fine arts—medicine, law, religion, and finance—recognized as aristocratic; four Yankees democratically chatting with but ruling the Ohioans and Illini and Swedes and Germans who had ventured to follow them. But Westlake was old, almost retired; Julius Flickerbaugh had lost much of his practice to livelier attorneys; Reverend (not The Reverend) Peedy was dead; and nobody was impressed in this rotten age of automobiles by the "spanking grays" which Ezra still drove. The town was as heterogeneous as Chicago. Norwegians and Germans owned stores. The social leaders were common merchants. Selling nails was considered as sacred as banking. These upstarts—the Clarks, the Haydocks—had no dignity. They were sound and conservative in politics, but they talked about motor cars and pump-guns and heaven only knew what new-fangled fads. Mr. Stowbody felt out of place with them. But his brick house with the mansard roof was still the largest residence in town, and he held his position as squire by occasionally appearing among the younger men and reminding them by a wintry eye that without the banker none of them could carry on their vulgar businesses.

As Carol defied decency by sitting down with the men, Mr. Stowbody was piping to Mr. Dawson, "Say, Luke, when was't Biggins first settled in Winnebago Township? Wa'n't it in 1879?"

"Why no 'twa'n't!" Mr. Dawson was indignant. "He come out from Vermont in 1867—no, wait, in 1868, it must have been—and took a claim on the Rum River, quite a ways above Anoka."

"He did not!" roared Mr. Stowbody. "He settled first in Blue Earth County, him and his father!"

("What's the point at issue?") Carol whispered to Kennicott.

("Whether this old duck Biggins had an English setter or a Llewellyn. They've been arguing it all evening!")

Dave Dyer interrupted to give tidings, "D' tell you that Clara Biggins was in town couple days ago? She bought a hot-water bottle—expensive one, too—two dollars and thirty cents!"

"Yaaaaaah!" snarled Mr. Stowbody. "Course. She's just like her grandad was. Never save a cent. Two dollars and twenty—thirty, was it?—two dollars and thirty cents for a hot-water bottle! Brick wrapped up in a flannel petticoat just as good, anyway!"

"How's Ella's tonsils, Mr. Stowbody?" yawned Chet Dashaway.

While Mr. Stowbody gave a somatic and psychic study of them, Carol reflected, "Are they really so terribly interested in Ella's tonsils, or even in Ella's esophagus? I wonder if I could get them away from personalities? Let's risk damnation and try."

"There hasn't been much labor trouble around here, has there, Mr. Stowbody?" she asked innocently.

"No, ma'am, thank God, we've been free from that, except maybe with hired girls and farm-hands. Trouble enough with these foreign farmers; if you don't watch these Swedes they turn socialist or populist or some fool thing on you in a minute. Of course, if they have loans you can make 'em listen to reason. I just have 'em come into the bank for a talk, and tell 'em a few things. I don't mind their being democrats, so much, but I won't stand having socialists around.

But thank God, we ain't got the labor trouble they have in these cities. Even Jack Elder here gets along pretty well, in the planing-mill, don't you, Jack?"

"Yep. Sure. Don't need so many skilled workmen in my place, and it's a lot of these cranky, wage-hogging, half-baked skilled mechanics that start trouble—reading a lot of this anarchist literature and union papers and all."

"Do you approve of union labor?" Carol inquired of Mr. Elder.

"Me? I should say not! It's like this: I don't mind dealing with my men if they think they've got any grievances—though Lord knows what's come over workmen, nowadays—don't appreciate a good job. But still, if they come to me honestly, as man to man, I'll talk things over with them. But I'm not going to have any outsider, any of these walking delegates, or whatever fancy names they call themselves now—bunch of rich grafters, living on the ignorant workmen! Not going to have any of those fellows butting in and telling ME how to run MY business!"

Mr. Elder was growing more excited, more belligerent and patriotic. "I stand for freedom and constitutional rights. If any man don't like my shop, he can get up and git. Same way, if I don't like him, he gits. And that's all there is to it. I simply can't understand all these complications and hoop-te-doodles and government reports and wage-scales and God knows what all that these fellows are balling up the labor situation with, when it's all perfectly simple. They like what I pay 'em, or they get out. That's all there is to it!"

"What do you think of profit-sharing?" Carol ventured.

Mr. Elder thundered his answer, while the others nodded, solemnly and in tune, like a shop-window of flexible toys, comic mandarins and judges and ducks and clowns, set quivering by a breeze from the open door:

"All this profit-sharing and welfare work and insurance and old-age pension is simply poppycock. Enfeebles a workman's independence—and wastes a lot of honest profit. The half-baked thinker that isn't dry behind the ears yet, and these suffragettes and God knows what all buttinskis there are that are trying to tell a business man how to run his business, and some of these college professors are just about as bad, the whole kit and bilin' of 'em are nothing in God's world but socialism in disguise! And it's my bounden duty as a producer to resist every attack on the integrity of American industry to the last ditch. Yes—SIR!"

Mr. Elder wiped his brow.

Dave Dyer added, "Sure! You bet! What they ought to do is simply to hang every one of these agitators, and that would settle the whole thing right off. Don't you think so, doc?"

"You bet," agreed Kennicott.

The conversation was at last relieved of the plague of Carol's intrusions and they settled down to the question of whether the justice of the peace had sent that hobo drunk to jail for ten days or twelve. It was a matter not readily determined. Then Dave Dyer communicated his carefree adventures on the gipsy trail:

"Yep. I get good time out of the flivver. 'Bout a week ago I motored down to New Wurttemberg. That's forty-three——No, let's see: It's seventeen miles to Belldale, and 'bout six and three-quarters, call it seven, to Torgenquist, and it's a good nineteen miles from there to New Wurttemberg—seventeen and seven and nineteen, that makes, uh, let

me see: seventeen and seven 's twenty-four, plus nineteen, well say plus twenty, that makes forty-four, well anyway, say about forty-three or -four miles from here to New Wurttemberg. We got started about seven-fifteen, prob'ly seven-twenty, because I had to stop and fill the radiator, and we ran along, just keeping up a good steady gait——"

Mr. Dyer did finally, for reasons and purposes admitted and justified, attain to New Wurttemberg.

Once—only once—the presence of the alien Carol was recognized. Chet Dashaway leaned over and said asthmatically, "Say, uh, have you been reading this serial 'Two Out' in Tingling Tales? Corking yarn! Gosh, the fellow that wrote it certainly can sling baseball slang!"

The others tried to look literary. Harry Haydock offered, "Juanita is a great hand for reading high-class stuff, like 'Mid the Magnolias' by this Sara Hetwiggin Butts, and 'Riders of Ranch Reckless.' Books. But me," he glanced about importantly, as one convinced that no other hero had ever been in so strange a plight, "I'm so darn busy I don't have much time to read."

"I never read anything I can't check against," said Sam Clark.

Thus ended the literary portion of the conversation, and for seven minutes Jackson Elder outlined reasons for believing that the pike-fishing was better on the west shore of Lake Minniemashie than on the east—though it was indeed quite true that on the east shore Nat Hicks had caught a pike altogether admirable.

The talk went on. It did go on! Their voices were monotonous, thick, emphatic. They were harshly pompous, like men in the smoking-compartments of Pullman cars. They did not bore Carol. They frightened her. She panted, "They will be cordial to me, because my man belongs to their tribe. God help me if I were an outsider!"

Smiling as changelessly as an ivory figurine she sat quiescent, avoiding thought, glancing about the living-room and hall, noting their betrayal of unimaginative commercial prosperity. Kennicott said, "Dandy interior, eh? My idea of how a place ought to be furnished. Modern." She looked polite, and observed the oiled floors, hard-wood staircase, unused fireplace with tiles which resembled brown linoleum, cut-glass vases standing upon doilies, and the barred, shut, forbidding unit bookcases that were half filled with swashbuckler novels and unread-looking sets of Dickens, Kipling, O. Henry, and Elbert Hubbard.

She perceived that even personalities were failing to hold the party. The room filled with hesitancy as with a fog. People cleared their throats, tried to choke down yawns. The men shot their cuffs and the women stuck their combs more firmly into their back hair.

Then a rattle, a daring hope in every eye, the swinging of a door, the smell of strong coffee, Dave Dyer's mewing voice in a triumphant, "The eats!" They began to chatter. They had something to do; They could escape from themselves. They fell upon the food—chicken sandwiches, maple cake, drug-store ice cream. Even when the food was gone they remained cheerful. They could go home, any time now, and go to bed!

They went, with a flutter of coats, chiffon scarfs, and good-bys.

Carol and Kennicott walked home.

"Did you like them?" he asked.

"They were terribly sweet to me."

"Uh, Carrie——You ought to be more careful about shocking folks. Talking about gold stockings, and about showing your ankles to schoolteachers and all!" More mildly: "You gave 'em a good time, but I'd watch out for that, 'f I were you. Juanita Haydock is such a damn cat. I wouldn't give her a chance to criticize me."

"My poor effort to lift up the party! Was I wrong to try to amuse them?"

"No! No! Honey, I didn't mean——You were the only up-and-coming person in the bunch. I just mean——Don't get onto legs and all that immoral stuff. Pretty conservative crowd."

She was silent, raw with the shameful thought that the attentive circle might have been criticizing her, laughing at her.

"Don't, please don't worry!" he pleaded.

Silence

"Gosh; I'm sorry I spoke about it. I just meant——But they were crazy about you. Sam said to me, 'That little lady of yours is the slickest thing that ever came to this town,' he said; and Ma Dawson—I didn't hardly know whether she'd like you or not, she's such a dried-up old bird, but she said, 'Your bride is so quick and bright, I declare, she just wakes me up.'"

Carol liked praise, the flavor and fatness of it, but she was so energetically being sorry for herself that she could not taste this commendation.

"Please! Come on! Cheer up!" His lips said it, his anxious shoulder said it, his arm about her said it, as they halted on the obscure porch of their house.

"Do you care if they think I'm flighty, Will?"

"Me? Why, I wouldn't care if the whole world thought you were this or that or anything else. You're my—well, you're my soul!"

He was an undefined mass, as solid-seeming as rock. She found his sleeve, pinched it, cried, "I'm glad! It's sweet to be wanted! You must tolerate my frivolousness. You're all I have!"

He lifted her, carried her into the house, and with her arms about his neck she forgot Main Street.

CHAPTER V

I

"WE'LL steal the whole day, and go hunting. I want you to see the country round here," Kennicott announced at breakfast. "I'd take the car—want you to see how swell she runs since I put in a new piston. But we'll take a team, so we can get right out into the fields. Not many prairie chickens left now, but we might just happen to run onto a small covey."

He fussed over his hunting-kit. He pulled his hip boots out to full length and examined them for holes. He feverishly counted his shotgun shells, lecturing her on the qualities of smokeless powder. He drew the new hammerless shotgun out of its heavy tan leather case and made her peep through the barrels to see how dazzlingly free they were from rust.

The world of hunting and camping-outfits and fishing-tackle was unfamiliar to her, and in Kennicott's interest she found something creative and joyous. She examined the smooth stock, the carved hard rubber butt of the gun. The shells, with their brass caps and sleek green bodies and hieroglyphics on the wads, were cool and comfortably heavy in her hands.

Kennicott wore a brown canvas hunting-coat with vast pockets lining the inside, corduroy trousers which bulged at the wrinkles, peeled and scarred shoes, a scarecrow felt hat. In this uniform he felt virile. They clumped out to the livery buggy, they packed the kit and the box of lunch into the back, crying to each other that it was a magnificent day.

Kennicott had borrowed Jackson Elder's red and white English setter, a complacent dog with a waving tail of silver hair which flickered in the sunshine. As they started, the dog yelped, and leaped at the horses' heads, till Kennicott took him into the buggy, where he nuzzled Carol's knees and leaned out to sneer at farm mongrels.

The grays clattered out on the hard dirt road with a pleasant song of hoofs: "Ta ta ta rat! Ta ta ta rat!" It was early and fresh, the air whistling, frost bright on the golden rod. As the sun warmed the world of stubble into a welter of yellow they turned from the highroad, through the bars of a farmer's gate, into a field, slowly bumping over the uneven earth. In a hollow of the rolling prairie they lost sight even of the country road. It was warm and placid. Locusts trilled among the dry wheat-stalks, and brilliant little flies hurtled across the buggy. A buzz of content filled the air. Crows loitered and gossiped in the sky.

The dog had been let out and after a dance of excitement he settled down to a steady quartering of the field, forth and back, forth and back, his nose down.

"Pete Rustad owns this farm, and he told me he saw a small covey of chickens in the west forty, last week. Maybe we'll get some sport after all," Kennicott chuckled blissfully.

She watched the dog in suspense, breathing quickly every time he seemed to halt. She had no desire to slaughter birds, but she did desire to belong to Kennicott's world.

The dog stopped, on the point, a forepaw held up.

"By golly! He's hit a scent! Come on!" squealed Kennicott. He leaped from the buggy, twisted the reins about the whip-socket, swung her out, caught up his gun, slipped in two shells, stalked toward the rigid dog, Carol pattering after him. The setter crawled ahead, his tail quivering, his belly close to the stubble. Carol was nervous. She expected clouds

of large birds to fly up instantly. Her eyes were strained with staring. But they followed the dog for a quarter of a mile, turning, doubling, crossing two low hills, kicking through a swale of weeds, crawling between the strands of a barbed-wire fence. The walking was hard on her pavement-trained feet. The earth was lumpy, the stubble prickly and lined with grass, thistles, abortive stumps of clover. She dragged and floundered.

She heard Kennicott gasp, "Look!" Three gray birds were starting up from the stubble. They were round, dumpy, like enormous bumble bees. Kennicott was sighting, moving the barrel. She was agitated. Why didn't he fire? The birds would be gone! Then a crash, another, and two birds turned somersaults in the air, plumped down.

When he showed her the birds she had no sensation of blood. These heaps of feathers were so soft and unbruised—there was about them no hint of death. She watched her conquering man tuck them into his inside pocket, and trudged with him back to the buggy.

They found no more prairie chickens that morning.

At noon they drove into her first farmyard, a private village, a white house with no porches save a low and quite dirty stoop at the back, a crimson barn with white trimmings, a glazed brick silo, an ex-carriage-shed, now the garage of a Ford, an unpainted cow-stable, a chicken-house, a pig-pen, a corn-crib, a granary, the galvanized-iron skeleton tower of a wind-mill. The dooryard was of packed yellow clay, treeless, barren of grass, littered with rusty plowshares and wheels of discarded cultivators. Hardened trampled mud, like lava, filled the pig-pen. The doors of the house were grime-rubbed, the corners and eaves were rusted with rain, and the child who stared at them from the kitchen window was smeary-faced. But beyond the barn was a clump of scarlet geraniums; the prairie breeze was sunshine in motion; the flashing metal blades of the

windmill revolved with a lively hum; a horse neighed, a rooster crowed, martins flew in and out of the cow-stable.

A small spare woman with flaxen hair trotted from the house. She was twanging a Swedish patois—not in monotone, like English, but singing it, with a lyrical whine:

"Pete he say you kom pretty soon hunting, doctor. My, dot's fine you kom. Is dis de bride? Ohhhh! Ve yoost say las' night, ve hope maybe ve see her som day. My, soch a pretty lady!" Mrs. Rustad was shining with welcome. "Vell, vell! Ay hope you lak dis country! Von't you stay for dinner, doctor?"

"No, but I wonder if you wouldn't like to give us a glass of milk?" condescended Kennicott.

"Vell Ay should say Ay vill! You vait har a second and Ay run on de milk-house!" She nervously hastened to a tiny red building beside the windmill; she came back with a pitcher of milk from which Carol filled the thermos bottle.

As they drove off Carol admired, "She's the dearest thing I ever saw. And she adores you. You are the Lord of the Manor."

"Oh no," much pleased, "but still they do ask my advice about things. Bully people, these Scandinavian farmers. And prosperous, too. Helga Rustad, she's still scared of America, but her kids will be doctors and lawyers and governors of the state and any darn thing they want to."

"I wonder——" Carol was plunged back into last night's Weltschmerz. "I wonder if these farmers aren't bigger than we are? So simple and hard-working. The town lives on them.

We townies are parasites, and yet we feel superior to them. Last night I heard Mr. Haydock talking about 'hicks.' Apparently he despises the farmers because they haven't reached the social heights of selling thread and buttons."

"Parasites? Us? Where'd the farmers be without the town? Who lends them money? Who—why, we supply them with everything!"

"Don't you find that some of the farmers think they pay too much for the services of the towns?"

"Oh, of course there's a lot of cranks among the farmers same as there are among any class. Listen to some of these kickers, a fellow'd think that the farmers ought to run the state and the whole shooting-match—probably if they had their way they'd fill up the legislature with a lot of farmers in manure-covered boots

—yes, and they'd come tell me I was hired on a salary now, and couldn't fix my fees! That'd be fine for you, wouldn't it!"

"But why shouldn't they?"

"Why? That bunch of——Telling ME——Oh, for heaven's sake, let's quit arguing. All this discussing may be all right at a party but——Let's forget it while we're hunting."

"I know. The Wonderlust—probably it's a worse affliction than the Wanderlust. I just wonder——"

She told herself that she had everything in the world. And after each self-rebuke she stumbled again on "I just wonder——"

They ate their sandwiches by a prairie slew: long grass reaching up out of clear water, mossy bogs, red-winged black-birds, the scum a splash of gold-green. Kennicott smoked

a pipe while she leaned back in the buggy and let her tired spirit be absorbed in the Nirvana of the incomparable sky.

They lurched to the highroad and awoke from their sun-soaked drowse at the sound of the clopping hoofs. They paused to look for partridges in a rim of woods, little woods, very clean and shiny and gay, silver birches and poplars with immaculate green trunks, encircling a lake of sandy bottom, a splashing seclusion demure in the welter of hot prairie.

Kennicott brought down a fat red squirrel and at dusk he had a dramatic shot at a flight of ducks whirling down from the upper air, skimming the lake, instantly vanishing.

They drove home under the sunset. Mounds of straw, and wheat-stacks like bee-hives, stood out in startling rose and gold, and the green-tufted stubble glistened.

As the vast girdle of crimson darkened, the fulfilled land became autumnal in deep reds and browns. The black road before the buggy turned to a faint lavender, then was blotted to uncertain grayness. Cattle came in a long line up to the barred gates of the farmyards, and over the resting land was a dark glow.

Carol had found the dignity and greatness which had failed her in Main Street.

II

Till they had a maid they took noon dinner and six o'clock supper at Mrs. Gurrey's boarding-house.

Mrs. Elisha Gurrey, relict of Deacon Gurrey the dealer in hay and grain, was a pointed-nosed, simpering woman with iron-gray hair drawn so tight that it resembled a soiled handkerchief covering her head. But she was unexpectedly cheerful, and her dining-room, with its thin tablecloth on a long pine table, had the decency of clean bareness.

In the line of unsmiling, methodically chewing guests, like horses at a manger, Carol came to distinguish one countenance: the pale, long, spectacled face and sandy pompadour hair of Mr. Raymond P. Wutherspoon, known as "Raymie," professional bachelor, manager and one half the sales-force in the shoe-department of the Bon Ton Store.

"You will enjoy Gopher Prairie very much, Mrs. Kennicott," petitioned Raymie. His eyes were like those of a dog waiting to be let in out of the cold. He passed the stewed apricots effusively. "There are a great many bright cultured people here.

Mrs. Wilks, the Christian Science reader, is a very bright woman—though I am not a Scientist myself, in fact I sing in the Episcopal choir. And Miss Sherwin of the high school—she is such a pleasing, bright girl—I was fitting her to a pair of tan gaiters yesterday, I declare, it really was a pleasure."

"Gimme the butter, Carrie," was Kennicott's comment. She defied him by encouraging Raymie:

"Do you have amateur dramatics and so on here?"

"Oh yes! The town's just full of talent. The Knights of Pythias put on a dandy minstrel show last year."

"It's nice you're so enthusiastic."

"Oh, do you really think so? Lots of folks jolly me for trying to get up shows and so on. I tell them they have more artistic gifts than they know. Just yesterday I was saying to Harry Haydock: if he would read poetry, like Longfellow, or if he would join the band—I get so much pleasure out of playing the cornet, and our band-leader, Del Snafflin, is such a good musician, I often say he ought to give up his barbering and become a professional musician, he could play the clarinet in Minneapolis or New York or anywhere, but—but I

couldn't get Harry to see it at all and—I hear you and the doctor went out hunting yesterday. Lovely country, isn't it. And did you make some calls? The mercantile life isn't inspiring like medicine. It must be wonderful to see how patients trust you, doctor."

"Huh. It's me that's got to do all the trusting. Be damn sight more wonderful 'f they'd pay their bills," grumbled Kennicott and, to Carol, he whispered something which sounded like "gentleman hen."

But Raymie's pale eyes were watering at her. She helped him with, "So you like to read poetry?"

"Oh yes, so much—though to tell the truth, I don't get much time for reading, we're always so busy at the store and——But we had the dandiest professional reciter at the Pythian Sisters sociable last winter."

Carol thought she heard a grunt from the traveling salesman at the end of the table, and Kennicott's jerking elbow was a grunt embodied. She persisted:

"Do you get to see many plays, Mr. Wutherspoon?"

He shone at her like a dim blue March moon, and sighed, "No, but I do love the movies. I'm a real fan. One trouble with books is that they're not so thoroughly safeguarded by intelligent censors as the movies are, and when you drop into the library and take out a book you never know what you're wasting your time on. What I like in books is a wholesome, really improving story, and sometimes——Why, once I started a novel by this fellow Balzac that you read about, and it told how a lady wasn't living with her husband, I mean she wasn't his wife. It went into details, disgustingly! And the English was real poor. I spoke to the library about it, and they took it off the shelves. I'm not narrow, but I must say I don't see any use in this deliberately dragging in immorality!

Life itself is so full of temptations that in literature one wants only that which is pure and uplifting."

"What's the name of that Balzac yarn? Where can I get hold of it?" giggled the traveling salesman.

Raymie ignored him. "But the movies, they are mostly clean, and their humor——Don't you think that the most essential quality for a person to have is a sense of humor?"

"I don't know. I really haven't much," said Carol.

He shook his finger at her. "Now, now, you're too modest. I'm sure we can all see that you have a perfectly corking sense of humor. Besides, Dr. Kennicott wouldn't marry a lady that didn't have. We all know how he loves his fun!"

"You bet. I'm a jokey old bird. Come on, Carrie; let's beat it," remarked Kennicott.

Raymie implored, "And what is your chief artistic interest, Mrs. Kennicott?"

"Oh——" Aware that the traveling salesman had murmured, "Dentistry," she desperately hazarded, "Architecture."

"That's a real nice art. I've always said—when Haydock & Simons were finishing the new front on the Bon Ton building, the old man came to me, you know, Harry's father, 'D. H.,' I always call him, and he asked me how I liked it, and I said to him, 'Look here, D. H.,' I said—you see, he was going to leave the front plain, and I said to him, 'It's all very well to have modern lighting and a big display-space,' I said, 'but when you get that in, you want to have some architecture, too,' I said, and he laughed and said he guessed maybe I was right, and so he had 'em put on a cornice."

"Tin!" observed the traveling salesman.

Raymie bared his teeth like a belligerent mouse. "Well, what if it is tin? That's not my fault. I told D. H. to make it polished granite. You make me tired!"

"Leave us go! Come on, Carrie, leave us go!" from Kennicott.

Raymie waylaid them in the hall and secretly informed Carol that she musn't mind the traveling salesman's coarseness—he belonged to the hwapollwa.

Kennicott chuckled, "Well, child, how about it? Do you prefer an artistic guy like Raymie to stupid boobs like Sam Clark and me?"

"My dear! Let's go home, and play pinochle, and laugh, and be foolish, and slip up to bed, and sleep without dreaming. It's beautiful to be just a solid citizeness!"

III

From the Gopher Prairie Weekly Dauntless:

One of the most charming affairs of the season was held Tuesday evening at the handsome new residence of Sam and Mrs. Clark when many of our most prominent citizens gathered to greet the lovely new bride of our popular local physician, Dr. Will Kennicott. All present spoke of the many charms of the bride, formerly Miss Carol Milford of St. Paul. Games and stunts were the order of the day, with merry talk and conversation. At a late hour dainty refreshments were served, and the party broke up with many expressions of pleasure at the pleasant affair. Among those present were Mesdames Kennicott, Elder——

Dr. Will Kennicott, for the past several years one of our most popular and skilful physicians and surgeons, gave the town a delightful surprise when he returned from an extended honeymoon tour in Colorado this week with his charming bride, nee Miss Carol

Milford of St. Paul, whose family are socially prominent in Minneapolis and Mankato. Mrs. Kennicott is a lady of manifold charms, not only of striking charm of appearance but is also a distinguished graduate of a school in the East and has for the past year been prominently connected in an important position of responsibility with the St. Paul Public Library, in which city Dr. "Will" had the good fortune to meet her. The city of Gopher Prairie welcomes her to our midst and prophesies for her many happy years in the energetic city of the twin lakes and the future. The Dr. and Mrs. Kennicott will reside for the present at the Doctor's home on Poplar Street which his charming mother has been keeping for him who has now returned to her own home at Lac-qui-Meurt leaving a host of friends who regret her absence and hope to see her soon with us again.

IV

She knew that if she was ever to effect any of the "reforms" which she had pictured, she must have a starting-place. What confused her during the three or four months after her marriage was not lack of perception that she must be definite, but sheer careless happiness of her first home.

In the pride of being a housewife she loved every detail—the brocade armchair with the weak back, even the brass water-cock on the hot-water reservoir, when she had become familiar with it by trying to scour it to brilliance.

She found a maid—plump radiant Bea Sorenson from Scandia Crossing. Bea was droll in her attempt to be at once a respectful servant and a bosom friend. They laughed together over the fact that the stove did not draw, over the slipperiness of fish in the pan.

Like a child playing Grandma in a trailing skirt, Carol paraded uptown for her marketing, crying greetings to housewives along the way. Everybody bowed to her, strangers and all, and made her feel that they wanted her, that she belonged here. In city shops she was merely A Customer—a hat, a voice to bore a harassed clerk. Here she was Mrs. Doc

Kennicott, and her preferences in grape-fruit and manners were known and remembered and worth discussing . . . even if they weren't worth fulfilling.

Shopping was a delight of brisk conferences. The very merchants whose droning she found the dullest at the two or three parties which were given to welcome her were the pleasantest confidants of all when they had something to talk about—lemons or cotton voile or floor-oil. With that skip-jack Dave Dyer, the druggist, she conducted a long mock-quarrel. She pretended that he cheated her in the price of magazines and candy; he pretended she was a detective from the Twin Cities. He hid behind the prescription-counter, and when she stamped her foot he came out wailing, "Honest, I haven't done nothing crooked today—not yet."

She never recalled her first impression of Main Street; never had precisely the same despair at its ugliness. By the end of two shopping-tours everything had changed proportions. As she never entered it, the Minniemashie House ceased to exist for her. Clark's Hardware Store, Dyer's Drug Store, the groceries of Ole Jenson and Frederick Ludelmeyer and Howland & Gould, the meat markets, the notions shop—they expanded, and hid all other structures. When she entered Mr. Ludelmeyer's store and he wheezed, "Goot mornin', Mrs. Kennicott. Vell, dis iss a fine day," she did not notice the dustiness of the shelves nor the stupidity of the girl clerk; and she did not remember the mute colloquy with him on her first view of Main Street.

She could not find half the kinds of food she wanted, but that made shopping more of an adventure. When she did contrive to get sweetbreads at Dahl & Oleson's Meat Market the triumph was so vast that she buzzed with excitement and admired the strong wise butcher, Mr. Dahl.

She appreciated the homely ease of village life. She liked the old men, farmers, G.A.R. veterans, who when they gossiped sometimes squatted on their heels on the sidewalk, like resting Indians, and reflectively spat over the curb.

She found beauty in the children.

She had suspected that her married friends exaggerated their passion for children. But in her work in the library, children had become individuals to her, citizens of the State with their own rights and their own senses of humor.

In the library she had not had much time to give them, but now she knew the luxury of stopping, gravely asking Bessie Clark whether her doll had yet recovered from its rheumatism, and agreeing with Oscar Martinsen that it would be Good Fun to go trapping "mushrats."

She touched the thought, "It would be sweet to have a baby of my own. I do want one. Tiny——No! Not yet! There's so much to do. And I'm still tired from the job. It's in my bones."

She rested at home. She listened to the village noises common to all the world, jungle or prairie; sounds simple and charged with magic—dogs barking, chickens making a gurgling sound of content, children at play, a man beating a rug wind in the cottonwood trees, a locust fiddling, a footstep on the walk, jaunty voices of Bea and a grocer's boy in the kitchen, a clinking anvil, a piano—not too near.

Twice a week, at least, she drove into the country with Kennicott, to hunt ducks in lakes enameled with sunset, or to call on patients who looked up to her as the squire's lady and thanked her for toys and magazines. Evenings she went with her husband to the motion pictures and was boisterously greeted by every other couple; or, till it became too cold, they sat on the porch, bawling to passers-by in motors, or to neighbors who were raking

the leaves. The dust became golden in the low sun; the street was filled with the fragrance of burning leaves.

V

But she hazily wanted some one to whom she could say what she thought.

On a slow afternoon when she fidgeted over sewing and wished that the telephone would ring, Bea announced Miss Vida Sherwin.

Despite Vida Sherwin's lively blue eyes, if you had looked at her in detail you would have found her face slightly lined, and not so much sallow as with the bloom rubbed off; you would have found her chest flat, and her fingers rough from needle and chalk and penholder; her blouses and plain cloth skirts undistinguished; and her hat worn too far back, betraying a dry forehead. But you never did look at Vida Sherwin in detail. You couldn't. Her electric activity veiled her. She was as energetic as a chipmunk. Her fingers fluttered; her sympathy came out in spurts; she sat on the edge of a chair in eagerness to be near her auditor, to send her enthusiasms and optimism across.

She rushed into the room pouring out: "I'm afraid you'll think the teachers have been shabby in not coming near you, but we wanted to give you a chance to get settled. I am Vida Sherwin, and I try to teach French and English and a few other things in the high school."

"I've been hoping to know the teachers. You see, I was a librarian——"

"Oh, you needn't tell me. I know all about you! Awful how much I know—this gossipy village. We need you so much here. It's a dear loyal town (and isn't loyalty the finest thing in the world!) but it's a rough diamond, and we need you for the polishing, and we're ever so humble——" She stopped for breath and finished her compliment with a smile.

"If I COULD help you in any way——Would I be committing the unpardonable sin if I whispered that I think Gopher Prairie is a tiny bit ugly?"

"Of course it's ugly. Dreadfully! Though I'm probably the only person in town to whom you could safely say that. (Except perhaps Guy Pollock the lawyer—have you met him?—oh, you MUST!—he's simply a darling—intelligence and culture and so gentle.) But I don't care so much about the ugliness. That will change. It's the spirit that gives me hope. It's sound. Wholesome. But afraid. It needs live creatures like you to awaken it. I shall slave-drive you!"

"Splendid. What shall I do? I've been wondering if it would be possible to have a good architect come here to lecture."

"Ye-es, but don't you think it would be better to work with existing agencies? Perhaps it will sound slow to you, but I was thinking——It would be lovely if we could get you to teach Sunday School."

Carol had the empty expression of one who finds that she has been affectionately bowing to a complete stranger. "Oh yes. But I'm afraid I wouldn't be much good at that. My religion is so foggy."

"I know. So is mine. I don't care a bit for dogma. Though I do stick firmly to the belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and the leadership of Jesus. As you do, of course."

Carol looked respectable and thought about having tea.

"And that's all you need teach in Sunday School. It's the personal influence. Then there's the library-board. You'd be so useful on that. And of course there's our women's study club—the Thanatopsis Club."

"Are they doing anything? Or do they read papers made out of the Encyclopedia?"

Miss Sherwin shrugged. "Perhaps. But still, they are so earnest. They will respond to your fresher interest. And the Thanatopsis does do a good social work—they've made the city plant ever so many trees, and they run the rest-room for farmers' wives. And they do take such an interest in refinement and culture. So—in fact, so very unique."

Carol was disappointed—by nothing very tangible. She said politely, "I'll think them all over. I must have a while to look around first."

Miss Sherwin darted to her, smoothed her hair, peered at her. "Oh, my dear, don't you suppose I know? These first tender days of marriage—they're sacred to me. Home, and children that need you, and depend on you to keep them alive, and turn to you with their wrinkly little smiles. And the hearth and——" She hid her face from Carol as she made an activity of patting the cushion of her chair, but she went on with her former briskness:

"I mean, you must help us when you're ready. . . . I'm afraid you'll think I'm conservative. I am! So much to conserve. All this treasure of American ideals. Sturdiness and democracy and opportunity. Maybe not at Palm Beach. But, thank heaven, we're free from such social distinctions in Gopher Prairie. I have only one good quality—overwhelming belief in the brains and hearts of our nation, our state, our town. It's so strong that sometimes I do have a tiny effect on the haughty ten-thousandaires. I shake 'em up and make 'em believe in ideals—yes, in themselves. But I get into a rut of teaching. I need young critical things like you to punch me up. Tell me, what are you reading?"

"I've been re-reading 'The Damnation of Theron Ware.' Do you know it?"

"Yes. It was clever. But hard. Man wanted to tear down, not build up. Cynical. Oh, I do hope I'm not a sentimentalist. But I can't see any use in this high-art stuff that doesn't encourage us day-laborers to plod on."

Ensued a fifteen-minute argument about the oldest topic in the world: It's art but is it pretty? Carol tried to be eloquent regarding honesty of observation. Miss Sherwin stood out for sweetness and a cautious use of the uncomfortable properties of light. At the end Carol cried:

"I don't care how much we disagree. It's a relief to have somebody talk something besides crops. Let's make Gopher Prairie rock to its foundations: let's have afternoon tea instead of afternoon coffee."

The delighted Bea helped her bring out the ancestral folding sewing-table, whose yellow and black top was scarred with dotted lines from a dressmaker's tracing-wheel, and to set it with an embroidered lunch-cloth, and the mauve-glazed Japanese tea-set which she had brought from St. Paul. Miss Sherwin confided her latest scheme—moral motion pictures for country districts, with light from a portable dynamo hitched to a Ford engine. Bea was twice called to fill the hot-water pitcher and to make cinnamon toast.

When Kennicott came home at five he tried to be courtly, as befits the husband of one who has afternoon tea. Carol suggested that Miss Sherwin stay for supper, and that Kennicott invite Guy Pollock, the much-praised lawyer, the poetic bachelor.

Yes, Pollock could come. Yes, he was over the grippe which had prevented his going to Sam Clark's party.

Carol regretted her impulse. The man would be an opinionated politician, heavily jocular about The Bride. But at the entrance of Guy Pollock she discovered a personality. Pollock was a man of perhaps thirty-eight, slender, still, deferential. His voice was low. "It was very good of you to want me," he said, and he offered no humorous remarks, and did not ask her if she didn't think Gopher Prairie was "the livest little burg in the state."

She fancied that his even grayness might reveal a thousand tints of lavender and blue and silver.

At supper he hinted his love for Sir Thomas Browne, Thoreau, Agnes Repplier, Arthur Symons, Claude Washburn, Charles Flandrau.

He presented his idols diffidently, but he expanded in Carol's bookishness, in Miss Sherwin's voluminous praise, in Kennicott's tolerance of any one who amused his wife.

Carol wondered why Guy Pollock went on digging at routine law-cases; why he remained in Gopher Prairie. She had no one whom she could ask. Neither Kennicott nor Vida Sherwin would understand that there might be reasons why a Pollock should not remain in Gopher Prairie. She enjoyed the faint mystery. She felt triumphant and rather literary. She already had a Group. It would be only a while now before she provided the town with fanlights and a knowledge of Galsworthy. She was doing things! As she served the emergency dessert of cocoanut and sliced oranges, she cried to Pollock, "Don't you think we ought to get up a dramatic club?"

CHAPTER VI

I

WHEN the first dubious November snow had filtered down, shading with white the bare clods in the plowed fields, when the first small fire had been started in the furnace, which is the shrine of a Gopher Prairie home, Carol began to make the house her own. She dismissed the parlor furniture—the golden oak table with brass knobs, the moldy brocade chairs, the picture of "The Doctor."

She went to Minneapolis, to scamper through department stores and small Tenth Street shops devoted to ceramics and high thought. She had to ship her treasures, but she wanted to bring them back in her arms.

Carpenters had torn out the partition between front parlor and back parlor, thrown it into a long room on which she lavished yellow and deep blue; a Japanese obi with an intricacy of gold thread on stiff ultramarine tissue, which she hung as a panel against the maize wall; a couch with pillows of sapphire velvet and gold bands; chairs which, in Gopher Prairie, seemed flippant. She hid the sacred family phonograph in the dining-room, and replaced its stand with a square cabinet on which was a squat blue jar between yellow candles.

Kennicott decided against a fireplace. "We'll have a new house in a couple of years, anyway."

She decorated only one room. The rest, Kennicott hinted, she'd better leave till he "made a ten-strike."

The brown cube of a house stirred and awakened; it seemed to be in motion; it welcomed her back from shopping; it lost its mildewed repression.

The supreme verdict was Kennicott's "Well, by golly, I was afraid the new junk wouldn't be so comfortable, but I must say this divan, or whatever you call it, is a lot better than that bumpy old sofa we had, and when I look around——Well, it's worth all it cost, I guess."

Every one in town took an interest in the refurnishing. The carpenters and painters who did not actually assist crossed the lawn to peer through the windows and exclaim, "Fine! Looks swell!"

Dave Dyer at the drug store, Harry Haydock and Raymie Wutherspoon at the Bon Ton, repeated daily, "How's the good work coming? I hear the house is getting to be real classy."

Even Mrs. Bogart.

Mrs. Bogart lived across the alley from the rear of Carol's house. She was a widow, and a Prominent Baptist, and a Good Influence. She had so painfully reared three sons to be Christian gentlemen that one of them had become an Omaha bartender, one a professor of Greek, and one, Cyrus N. Bogart, a boy of fourteen who was still at home, the most brazen member of the toughest gang in Boytown.

Mrs. Bogart was not the acid type of Good Influence. She was the soft, damp, fat, sighing, indigestive, clinging, melancholy, depressingly hopeful kind. There are in every large chicken-yard a number of old and indignant hens who resemble Mrs. Bogart, and when they are served at Sunday noon dinner, as fricasseed chicken with thick dumplings, they keep up the resemblance.

Carol had noted that Mrs. Bogart from her side window kept an eye upon the house. The Kennicotts and Mrs. Bogart did not move in the same sets—which meant precisely the same in Gopher Prairie as it did on Fifth Avenue or in Mayfair. But the good widow came calling.

She wheezed in, sighed, gave Carol a pulpy hand, sighed, glanced sharply at the revelation of ankles as Carol crossed her legs, sighed, inspected the new blue chairs, smiled with a coy sighing sound, and gave voice:

"I've wanted to call on you so long, dearie, you know we're neighbors, but I thought I'd wait till you got settled, you must run in and see me, how much did that big chair cost?"

"Seventy-seven dollars!"

"Sev——Sakes alive! Well, I suppose it's all right for them that can afford it, though I do sometimes think——Of course as our pastor said once, at Baptist Church——By the way, we haven't seen you there yet, and of course your husband was raised up a Baptist, and I do hope he won't drift away from the fold, of course we all know there isn't anything, not cleverness or gifts of gold or anything, that can make up for humility and the inward grace and they can say what they want to about the P. E. church, but of course there's no church that has more history or has stayed by the true principles of Christianity better than the Baptist Church and——In what church were you raised, Mrs. Kennicott?"

"W-why, I went to Congregational, as a girl in Mankato, but my college was Universalist."

"Well——But of course as the Bible says, is it the Bible, at least I know I have heard it in church and everybody admits it, it's proper for the little bride to take her husband's vessel of faith, so we all hope we shall see you at the Baptist Church and——As I was saying, of course I agree with Reverend Zitterel in thinking that the great trouble with this nation today is lack of spiritual faith—so few going to church, and people automobiling on Sunday and heaven knows what all. But still I do think that one trouble is this terrible waste of money, people feeling that they've got to have bath-tubs and telephones in their houses——I heard you were selling the old furniture cheap."

"Yes!"

"Well—of course you know your own mind, but I can't help thinking, when Will's ma was down here keeping house for him—SHE used to run in to SEE me, real OFTEN!—it was good enough furniture for her. But there, there, I mustn't croak, I just wanted to let you know that when you find you can't depend on a lot of these gadding young folks like the Haydocks and the Dyers—and heaven only knows how much money Juanita Haydock blows in in a year—why then you may be glad to know that slow old Aunty

Bogart is always right there, and heaven knows——" A portentous sigh. "—I HOPE you and your husband won't have any of the troubles, with sickness and quarreling and wasting money and all that so many of these young couples do have and——But I must be running along now, dearie. It's been such a pleasure and——Just run in and see me any time. I hope Will is well? I thought he looked a wee mite peaked."

It was twenty minutes later when Mrs. Bogart finally oozed out of the front door. Carol ran back into the living-room and jerked open the windows. "That woman has left damp finger-prints in the air," she said.

II

Carol was extravagant, but at least she did not try to clear herself of blame by going about whimpering, "I know I'm terribly extravagant but I don't seem to be able to help it."

Kennicott had never thought of giving her an allowance. His mother had never had one! As a wage-earning spinster Carol had asserted to her fellow librarians that when she was married, she was going to have an allowance and be business-like and modern. But it was too much trouble to explain to Kennicott's kindly stubbornness that she was a practical housekeeper as well as a flighty playmate. She bought a budget-plan account book and made her budgets as exact as budgets are likely to be when they lack budgets.

For the first month it was a honeymoon jest to beg prettily, to confess, "I haven't a cent in the house, dear," and to be told, "You're an extravagant little rabbit." But the budget book made her realize how inexact were her finances. She became self-conscious; occasionally she was indignant that she should always have to petition him for the money with which to buy his food. She caught herself criticizing his belief that, since his joke about trying to keep her out of the poorhouse had once been accepted as admirable humor, it should continue to be his daily bon mot. It was a nuisance to have to run down the street after him because she had forgotten to ask him for money at breakfast.

But she couldn't "hurt his feelings," she reflected. He liked the lordliness of giving largess.

She tried to reduce the frequency of begging by opening accounts and having the bills sent to him. She had found that staple groceries, sugar, flour, could be most cheaply purchased at Axel Egge's rustic general store. She said sweetly to Axel:

"I think I'd better open a charge account here."

"I don't do no business except for cash," grunted Axel.

She flared, "Do you know who I am?"

"Yuh, sure, I know. The doc is good for it. But that's yoost a rule I made. I make low prices. I do business for cash."

She stared at his red impassive face, and her fingers had the undignified desire to slap him, but her reason agreed with him. "You're quite right. You shouldn't break your rule for me."

Her rage had not been lost. It had been transferred to her husband. She wanted ten pounds of sugar in a hurry, but she had no money. She ran up the stairs to Kennicott's office. On the door was a sign advertising a headache cure and stating, "The doctor is out, back at——" Naturally, the blank space was not filled out. She stamped her foot. She ran down to the drug store—the doctor's club.

As she entered she heard Mrs. Dyer demanding, "Dave, I've got to have some money."

Carol saw that her husband was there, and two other men, all listening in amusement.

Dave Dyer snapped, "How much do you want? Dollar be enough?"

"No, it won't! I've got to get some underclothes for the kids."

"Why, good Lord, they got enough now to fill the closet so I couldn't find my hunting boots, last time I wanted them."

"I don't care. They're all in rags. You got to give me ten dollars——"

Carol perceived that Mrs. Dyer was accustomed to this indignity. She perceived that the men, particularly Dave, regarded it as an excellent jest.

She waited—she knew what would come—it did. Dave yelped, "Where's that ten dollars I gave you last year?" and he looked to the other men to laugh. They laughed.

Cold and still, Carol walked up to Kennicott and commanded, "I want to see you upstairs."

"Why—something the matter?"

"Yes!"

He clumped after her, up the stairs, into his barren office. Before he could get out a query she stated:

"Yesterday, in front of a saloon, I heard a German farm-wife beg her husband for a quarter, to get a toy for the baby—and he refused. Just now I've heard Mrs. Dyer going through the same humiliation. And I—I'm in the same position! I have to beg you for money. Daily! I have just been informed that I couldn't have any sugar because I hadn't the money to pay for it!"

"Who said that? By God, I'll kill any——"

"Tut. It wasn't his fault. It was yours. And mine. I now humbly beg you to give me the money with which to buy meals for you to eat. And hereafter to remember it. The next time, I sha'n't beg. I shall simply starve. Do you understand? I can't go on being a slave——"

Her defiance, her enjoyment of the role, ran out. She was sobbing against his overcoat, "How can you shame me so?" and he was blubbering, "Dog-gone it, I meant to give you some, and I forgot it. I swear I won't again. By golly I won't!"

He pressed fifty dollars upon her, and after that he remembered to give her money regularly . . . sometimes.

Daily she determined, "But I must have a stated amount—be business-like. System. I must do something about it." And daily she didn't do anything about it.

III

Mrs. Bogart had, by the simpering viciousness of her comments on the new furniture, stirred Carol to economy. She spoke judiciously to Bea about left-overs. She read the cook-book again and, like a child with a picture-book, she studied the diagram of the beef which gallantly continues to browse though it is divided into cuts.

But she was a deliberate and joyous spendthrift in her preparations for her first party, the housewarming. She made lists on every envelope and laundry-slip in her desk. She sent orders to Minneapolis "fancy grocers." She pinned patterns and sewed. She was irritated when Kennicott was jocular about "these frightful big doings that are going on." She regarded the affair as an attack on Gopher Prairie's timidity in pleasure. "I'll make 'em lively, if nothing else. I'll make 'em stop regarding parties as committee-meetings."

Kennicott usually considered himself the master of the house. At his desire, she went hunting, which was his symbol of happiness, and she ordered porridge for breakfast, which was his symbol of morality. But when he came home on the afternoon before the housewarming he found himself a slave, an intruder, a blunderer. Carol wailed, "Fix the furnace so you won't have to touch it after supper. And for heaven's sake take that

horrible old door-mat off the porch. And put on your nice brown and white shirt. Why did you come home so late? Would you mind hurrying?

Here it is almost suppertime, and those fiends are just as likely as not to come at seven instead of eight. PLEASE hurry!"

She was as unreasonable as an amateur leading woman on a first night, and he was reduced to humility. When she came down to supper, when she stood in the doorway, he gasped. She was in a silver sheath, the calyx of a lily, her piled hair like black glass; she had the fragility and costliness of a Viennese goblet; and her eyes were intense. He was stirred to rise from the table and to hold the chair for her; and all through supper he ate his bread dry because he felt that she would think him common if he said "Will you hand me the butter?"

IV

She had reached the calmness of not caring whether her guests liked the party or not, and a state of satisfied suspense in regard to Bea's technique in serving, before Kennicott cried from the bay-window in the living-room, "Here comes somebody!" and Mr. and Mrs. Luke Dawson faltered in, at a quarter to eight. Then in a shy avalanche arrived the entire aristocracy of Gopher Prairie: all persons engaged in a profession, or earning more than twenty-five hundred dollars a year, or possessed of grandparents born in America.

Even while they were removing their overshoes they were peeping at the new decorations. Carol saw Dave Dyer secretively turn over the gold pillows to find a price-tag, and heard Mr. Julius Flickerbaugh, the attorney, gasp, "Well, I'll be switched," as he viewed the vermilion print hanging against the Japanese obi.

She was amused. But her high spirits slackened as she beheld them form in dress parade, in a long, silent, uneasy circle clear round the living-room. She felt that she had been magically whisked back to her first party, at Sam Clark's.

"Have I got to lift them, like so many pigs of iron? I don't know that I can make them happy, but I'll make them hectic."

A silver flame in the darkling circle, she whirled around, drew them with her smile, and sang, "I want my party to be noisy and undignified! This is the christening of my house, and I want you to help me have a bad influence on it, so that it will be a giddy house. For me, won't you all join in an old-fashioned square dance? And Mr. Dyer will call."

She had a record on the phonograph; Dave Dyer was capering in the center of the floor, loose-jointed, lean, small, rusty headed, pointed of nose, clapping his hands and shouting, "Swing y' pardners—alamun lef!"

Even the millionaire Dawsons and Ezra Stowbody and "Professor" George Edwin Mott danced, looking only slightly foolish; and by rushing about the room and being coy and coaxing to all persons over forty-five, Carol got them into a waltz and a Virginia Reel. But when she left them to disenjoy themselves in their own way Harry Haydock put a one-step record on the phonograph, the younger people took the floor, and all the elders sneaked back to their chairs, with crystallized smiles which meant, "Don't believe I'll try this one myself, but I do enjoy watching the youngsters dance."

Half of them were silent; half resumed the discussions of that afternoon in the store. Ezra Stowbody hunted for something to say, hid a yawn, and offered to Lyman Cass, the owner of the flour-mill, "How d' you folks like the new furnace, Lym? Huh? So."

"Oh, let them alone. Don't pester them. They must like it, or they wouldn't do it." Carol warned herself. But they gazed at her so expectantly when she flickered past that she was

reconvinced that in their debauches of respectability they had lost the power of play as well as the power of impersonal thought. Even the dancers were gradually crushed by the invisible force of fifty perfectly pure and well-behaved and negative minds; and they sat down, two by two. In twenty minutes the party was again elevated to the decorum of a prayer-meeting.

"We're going to do something exciting," Carol exclaimed to her new confidante, Vida Sherwin. She saw that in the growing quiet her voice had carried across the room. Nat Hicks, Ella Stowbody, and Dave Dyer were abstracted, fingers and lips slightly moving. She knew with a cold certainty that Dave was rehearsing his "stunt" about the Norwegian catching the hen, Ella running over the first lines of "An Old Sweetheart of Mine," and Nat thinking of his popular parody on Mark Antony's oration.

"But I will not have anybody use the word 'stunt' in my house," she whispered to Miss Sherwin.

"That's good. I tell you: why not have Raymond Wutherspoon sing?"

"Raymie? Why, my dear, he's the most sentimental yearner in town!"

"See here, child! Your opinions on house-decorating are sound, but your opinions of people are rotten! Raymie does wag his tail. But the poor dear——Longing for what he calls 'self-expression' and no training in anything except selling shoes. But he can sing. And some day when he gets away from Harry Haydock's patronage and ridicule, he'll do something fine."

Carol apologized for her superciliousness. She urged Raymie, and warned the planners of "stunts," "We all want you to sing, Mr. Wutherspoon. You're the only famous actor I'm going to let appear on the stage tonight."

While Raymie blushed and admitted, "Oh, they don't want to hear me," he was clearing his throat, pulling his clean handkerchief farther out of his breast pocket, and thrusting his fingers between the buttons of his vest.

In her affection for Raymie's defender, in her desire to "discover artistic talent," Carol prepared to be delighted by the recital.

Raymie sang "Fly as a Bird," "Thou Art My Dove," and "When the Little Swallow Leaves Its Tiny Nest," all in a reasonably bad offertory tenor.

Carol was shuddering with the vicarious shame which sensitive people feel when they listen to an "elocutionist" being humorous, or to a precocious child publicly doing badly what no child should do at all. She wanted to laugh at the gratified importance in Raymie's half-shut eyes; she wanted to weep over the meek ambitiousness which clouded like an aura his pale face, flap ears, and sandy pompadour.

She tried to look admiring, for the benefit of Miss Sherwin, that trusting admirer of all that was or conceivably could be the good, the true, and the beautiful.

At the end of the third ornithological lyric Miss Sherwin roused from her attitude of inspired vision and breathed to Carol, "My! That was sweet! Of course Raymond hasn't an unusually good voice, but don't you think he puts such a lot of feeling into it?"

Carol lied blackly and magnificently, but without originality: "Oh yes, I do think he has so much FEELING!"

She saw that after the strain of listening in a cultured manner the audience had collapsed; had given up their last hope of being amused. She cried, "Now we're going to play an idiotic game which I learned in Chicago. You will have to take off your shoes, for a starter! After that you will probably break your knees and shoulder-blades."

Much attention and incredulity. A few eyebrows indicating a verdict that Doc Kennicott's bride was noisy and improper.

"I shall choose the most vicious, like Juanita Haydock and myself, as the shepherds. The rest of you are wolves. Your shoes are the sheep. The wolves go out into the hall. The shepherds scatter the sheep through this room, then turn off all the lights, and the wolves crawl in from the hall and in the darkness they try to get the shoes away from the shepherds—who are permitted to do anything except bite and use black-jacks. The wolves chuck the captured shoes out into the hall. No one excused! Come on! Shoes off!"

Every one looked at every one else and waited for every one else to begin.

Carol kicked off her silver slippers, and ignored the universal glance at her arches. The embarrassed but loyal Vida Sherwin unbuttoned her high black shoes. Ezra Stowbody cackled, "Well, you're a terror to old folks. You're like the gals I used to go horseback-riding with, back in the sixties. Ain't much accustomed to attending parties barefoot, but here goes!" With a whoop and a gallant jerk Ezra snatched off his elastic-sided Congress shoes.

The others giggled and followed.

When the sheep had been penned up, in the darkness the timorous wolves crept into the living-room, squealing, halting, thrown out of their habit of stolidity by the strangeness of advancing through nothingness toward a waiting foe, a mysterious foe which expanded and grew more menacing. The wolves peered to make out landmarks, they touched gliding arms which did not seem to be attached to a body, they quivered with a rapture of fear. Reality had vanished. A yelping squabble suddenly rose, then Juanita Haydock's high titter, and Guy Pollock's astonished, "Ouch! Quit! You're scalping me!"

Mrs. Luke Dawson galloped backward on stiff hands and knees into the safety of the lighted hallway, moaning, "I declare, I nev' was so upset in my life!" But the propriety was shaken out of her, and she delightedly continued to ejaculate "Nev' in my LIFE" as she saw the living-room door opened by invisible hands and shoes hurling through it, as she heard from the darkness beyond the door a squawling, a bumping, a resolute "Here's a lot of shoes. Come on, you wolves. Ow! Y' would, would you!"

When Carol abruptly turned on the lights in the embattled living-room, half of the company were sitting back against the walls, where they had craftily remained throughout the engagement, but in the middle of the floor Kennicott was wrestling with Harry Haydock—their collars torn off, their hair in their eyes; and the owlish Mr. Julius Flickerbaugh was retreating from Juanita Haydock, and gulping with unaccustomed laughter. Guy Pollock's discreet brown scarf hung down his back. Young Rita Simons's net blouse had lost two buttons, and betrayed more of her delicious plump shoulder than was regarded as pure in Gopher Prairie. Whether by shock, disgust, joy of combat, or physical activity, all the party were freed from their years of social decorum. George Edwin Mott giggled; Luke Dawson twisted his beard; Mrs. Clark insisted, "I did too, Sam—I got a shoe—I never knew I could fight so terrible!"

Carol was certain that she was a great reformer.

She mercifully had combs, mirrors, brushes, needle and thread ready. She permitted them to restore the divine decency of buttons.

The grinning Bea brought down-stairs a pile of soft thick sheets of paper with designs of lotos blossoms, dragons, apes, in cobalt and crimson and gray, and patterns of purple birds flying among sea-green trees in the valleys of Nowhere.

"These," Carol announced, "are real Chinese masquerade costumes. I got them from an importing shop in Minneapolis. You are to put them on over your clothes, and please

forget that you are Minnesotans, and turn into mandarins and coolies and—and samurai (isn't it?), and anything else you can think of."

While they were shyly rustling the paper costumes she disappeared. Ten minutes after she gazed down from the stairs upon grotesquely ruddy Yankee heads above Oriental robes, and cried to them, "The Princess Winky Poo salutes her court!"

As they looked up she caught their suspense of admiration. They saw an airy figure in trousers and coat of green brocade edged with gold; a high gold collar under a proud chin; black hair pierced with jade pins; a languid peacock fan in an out-stretched hand; eyes uplifted to a vision of pagoda towers. When she dropped her pose and smiled down she discovered Kennicott apoplectic with domestic pride—and gray Guy Pollock staring beseechingly. For a second she saw nothing in all the pink and brown mass of their faces save the hunger of the two men.

She shook off the spell and ran down. "We're going to have a real Chinese concert. Messrs. Pollock, Kennicott, and, well, Stowbody are drummers; the rest of us sing and play the fife."

The fifes were combs with tissue paper; the drums were tabourets and the sewing-table. Loren Wheeler, editor of the Dauntless, led the orchestra, with a ruler and a totally inaccurate sense of rhythm.

The music was a reminiscence of tom-toms heard at circus fortune-telling tents or at the Minnesota State Fair, but the whole company pounded and puffed and whined in a sing-song, and looked rapturous.

Before they were quite tired of the concert Carol led them in a dancing procession to the dining-room, to blue bowls of chow mein, with Lichee nuts and ginger preserved in syrup.

None of them save that city-rounder Harry Haydock had heard of any Chinese dish except chop sooey. With agreeable doubt they ventured through the bamboo shoots into the golden fried noodles of the chow mein; and Dave Dyer did a not very humorous Chinese dance with Nat Hicks; and there was hubbub and contentment.

Carol relaxed, and found that she was shockingly tired. She had carried them on her thin shoulders. She could not keep it up. She longed for her father, that artist at creating hysterical parties. She thought of smoking a cigarette, to shock them, and dismissed the obscene thought before it was quite formed. She wondered whether they could for five minutes be coaxed to talk about something besides the winter top of Knute Stamquist's Ford, and what Al Tingley had said about his mother-in-law. She sighed, "Oh, let 'em alone. I've done enough." She crossed her trousered legs, and snuggled luxuriously above her saucer of ginger; she caught Pollock's congratulatory still smile, and thought well of herself for having thrown a rose light on the pallid lawyer; repented the heretical supposition that any male save her husband existed; jumped up to find Kennicott and whisper, "Happy, my lord? . . . No, it didn't cost much!"

"Best party this town ever saw. Only——Don't cross your legs in that costume. Shows your knees too plain."

She was vexed. She resented his clumsiness. She returned to Guy Pollock and talked of Chinese religions—not that she knew anything whatever about Chinese religions, but he had read a book on the subject as, on lonely evenings in his office, he had read at least one book on every subject in the world. Guy's thin maturity was changing in her vision to flushed youth and they were roaming an island in the yellow sea of chatter when she realized that the guests were beginning that cough which indicated, in the universal instinctive language, that they desired to go home and go to bed.

While they asserted that it had been "the nicest party they'd ever seen—my! so clever and original," she smiled tremendously, shook hands, and cried many suitable things regarding children, and being sure to wrap up warmly, and Raymie's singing and Juanita Haydock's prowess at games. Then she turned wearily to Kennicott in a house filled with quiet and crumbs and shreds of Chinese costumes.

He was gurgling, "I tell you, Carrie, you certainly are a wonder, and guess you're right about waking folks up. Now you've showed 'em how, they won't go on having the same old kind of parties and stunts and everything. Here! Don't touch a thing! Done enough. Pop up to bed, and I'll clear up."

His wise surgeon's-hands stroked her shoulder, and her irritation at his clumsiness was lost in his strength.

V

From the Weekly Dauntless:

One of the most delightful social events of recent months was held Wednesday evening in the housewarming of Dr. and Mrs. Kennicott, who have completely redecorated their charming home on Poplar Street, and is now extremely nifty in modern color scheme. The doctor and his bride were at home to their numerous friends and a number of novelties in diversions were held, including a Chinese orchestra in original and genuine Oriental costumes, of which Ye Editor was leader. Dainty refreshments were served in true Oriental style, and one and all voted a delightful time.

VI

The week after, the Chet Dashaways gave a party. The circle of mourners kept its place all evening, and Dave Dyer did the "stunt" of the Norwegian and the hen.

CHAPTER VII

I

GOPHER PRAIRIE was digging in for the winter. Through late November and all December it snowed daily; the thermometer was at zero and might drop to twenty below, or thirty. Winter is not a season in the North Middlewest; it is an industry. Storm sheds were erected at every door.

In every block the householders, Sam Clark, the wealthy Mr. Dawson, all save asthmatic Ezra Stowbody who extravagantly hired a boy, were seen perilously staggering up ladders, carrying storm windows and screwing them to second-story jambs. While Kennicott put up his windows Carol danced inside the bedrooms and begged him not to swallow the screws, which he held in his mouth like an extraordinary set of external false teeth.

The universal sign of winter was the town handyman—Miles Bjornstam, a tall, thick, red-mustached bachelor, opinionated atheist, general-store arguer, cynical Santa Claus. Children loved him, and he sneaked away from work to tell them improbable stories of sea-faring and horse-trading and bears. The children's parents either laughed at him or hated him. He was the one democrat in town. He called both Lyman Cass the miller and the Finn homesteader from Lost Lake by their first names. He was known as "The Red Swede," and considered slightly insane.

Bjornstam could do anything with his hands—solder a pan, weld an automobile spring, soothe a frightened filly, tinker a clock, carve a Gloucester schooner which magically went into a bottle. Now, for a week, he was commissioner general of Gopher Prairie. He was the only person besides the repairman at Sam Clark's who understood plumbing. Everybody begged him to look over the furnace and the water-pipes. He rushed from house to house till after bedtime—ten o'clock. Icicles from burst water-pipes hung along the skirt of his brown dog-skin overcoat; his plush cap, which he never took off in the house, was a pulp of ice and coal-dust; his red hands were cracked to rawness; he chewed the stub of a cigar.

But he was courtly to Carol. He stooped to examine the furnace flues; he straightened, glanced down at her, and hemmed, "Got to fix your furnace, no matter what else I do."

The poorer houses of Gopher Prairie, where the services of Miles Bjornstam were a luxury—which included the shanty of Miles Bjornstam—were banked to the lower windows with earth and manure. Along the railroad the sections of snow fence, which had been stacked all summer in romantic wooden tents occupied by roving small boys, were set up to prevent drifts from covering the track.

The farmers came into town in home-made sleighs, with bed-quilts and hay piled in the rough boxes.

Fur coats, fur caps, fur mittens, overshoes buckling almost to the knees, gray knitted scarfs ten feet long, thick woolen socks, canvas jackets lined with fluffy yellow wool like the plumage of ducklings, moccasins, red flannel wristlets for the blazing chapped wrists of boys—these protections against winter were busily dug out of moth-ball-sprinkled drawers and tar-bags in closets, and all over town small boys were squealing, "Oh, there's my mittens!" or "Look at my shoe-packs!" There is so sharp a division between the

panting summer and the stinging winter of the Northern plains that they rediscovered with surprise and a feeling of heroism this armor of an Artic explorer.

Winter garments surpassed even personal gossip as the topic at parties. It was good form to ask, "Put on your heavies yet?" There were as many distinctions in wraps as in motor cars.

The lesser sort appeared in yellow and black dogskin coats, but Kennicott was lordly in a long raccoon ulster and a new seal cap. When the snow was too deep for his motor he went off on country calls in a shiny, floral, steel-tipped cutter, only his ruddy nose and his cigar emerging from the fur.

Carol herself stirred Main Street by a loose coat of nutria. Her finger-tips loved the silken fur.

Her liveliest activity now was organizing outdoor sports in the motor-paralyzed town.

The automobile and bridge-whist had not only made more evident the social divisions in Gopher Prairie but they had also enfeebled the love of activity. It was so rich-looking to sit and drive—and so easy. Skiing and sliding were "stupid" and "old-fashioned." In fact, the village longed for the elegance of city recreations almost as much as the cities longed for village sports; and Gopher Prairie took as much pride in neglecting coasting as St. Paul—or New York—in going coasting. Carol did inspire a successful skating-party in mid-November. Plover Lake glistened in clear sweeps of gray-green ice, ringing to the skates. On shore the ice-tipped reeds clattered in the wind, and oak twigs with stubborn last leaves hung against a milky sky. Harry Haydock did figure-eights, and Carol was certain that she had found the perfect life. But when snow had ended the skating and she tried to get up a moonlight sliding party, the matrons hesitated to stir away from their radiators and their daily bridge-whist imitations of the city. She had to nag them. They

scooted down a long hill on a bob-sled, they upset and got snow down their necks they shrieked that they would do it again immediately—and they did not do it again at all.

She badgered another group into going skiing. They shouted and threw snowballs, and informed her that it was SUCH fun, and they'd have another skiing expedition right away, and they jollily returned home and never thereafter left their manuals of bridge.

Carol was discouraged. She was grateful when Kennicott invited her to go rabbit-hunting in the woods. She waded down stilly cloisters between burnt stump and icy oak, through drifts marked with a million hieroglyphics of rabbit and mouse and bird. She squealed as he leaped on a pile of brush and fired at the rabbit which ran out. He belonged there, masculine in reefer and sweater and high-laced boots. That night she ate prodigiously of steak and fried potatoes; she produced electric sparks by touching his ear with her finger-tip; she slept twelve hours; and awoke to think how glorious was this brave land.

She rose to a radiance of sun on snow. Snug in her furs she trotted up-town. Frosted shingles smoked against a sky colored like flax-blossoms, sleigh-bells clinked, shouts of greeting were loud in the thin bright air, and everywhere was a rhythmic sound of wood-sawing. It was Saturday, and the neighbors' sons were getting up the winter fuel. Behind walls of corded wood in back yards their sawbucks stood in depressions scattered with canary-yellow flakes of sawdust. The frames of their buck-saws were cherry-red, the blades blued steel, and the fresh cut ends of the sticks—poplar, maple, iron-wood, birch—were marked with engraved rings of growth. The boys wore shoe-packs, blue flannel shirts with enormous pearl buttons, and mackinaws of crimson, lemon yellow, and foxy brown.

Carol cried "Fine day!" to the boys; she came in a glow to Howland & Gould's grocery, her collar white with frost from her breath; she bought a can of tomatoes as though it

were Orient fruit; and returned home planning to surprise Kennicott with an omelet creole for dinner.

So brilliant was the snow-glare that when she entered the house she saw the door-knobs, the newspaper on the table, every white surface as dazzling mauve, and her head was dizzy in the pyrotechnic dimness. When her eyes had recovered she felt expanded, drunk with health, mistress of life. The world was so luminous that she sat down at her rickety little desk in the living-room to make a poem. (She got no farther than "The sky is bright, the sun is warm, there ne'er will be another storm.")

In the mid-afternoon of this same day Kennicott was called into the country. It was Bea's evening out—her evening for the Lutheran Dance. Carol was alone from three till midnight. She wearied of reading pure love stories in the magazines and sat by a radiator, beginning to brood.

Thus she chanced to discover that she had nothing to do.

II

She had, she meditated, passed through the novelty of seeing the town and meeting people, of skating and sliding and hunting. Bea was competent; there was no household labor except sewing and darning and gossipy assistance to Bea in bed-making. She couldn't satisfy her ingenuity in planning meals. At Dahl & Oleson's Meat Market you didn't give orders—you wofully inquired whether there was anything today besides steak and pork and ham. The cuts of beef were not cuts. They were hacks. Lamb chops were as exotic as sharks' fins. The meat-dealers shipped their best to the city, with its higher prices.

In all the shops there was the same lack of choice. She could not find a glass-headed picture-nail in town; she did not hunt for the sort of veiling she wanted—she took what

she could get; and only at Howland & Gould's was there such a luxury as canned asparagus. Routine care was all she could devote to the house. Only by such fussing as the Widow Bogart's could she make it fill her time.

She could not have outside employment. To the village doctor's wife it was taboo.

She was a woman with a working brain and no work.

There were only three things which she could do: Have children; start her career of reforming; or become so definitely a part of the town that she would be fulfilled by the activities of church and study-club and bridge-parties.

Children, yes, she wanted them, but——She was not quite ready. She had been embarrassed by Kennicott's frankness, but she agreed with him that in the insane condition of civilization, which made the rearing of citizens more costly and perilous than any other crime, it was inadvisable to have children till he had made more money. She was sorry——Perhaps he had made all the mystery of love a mechanical cautiousness but——She fled from the thought with a dubious, "Some day."

Her "reforms," her impulses toward beauty in raw Main Street, they had become indistinct. But she would set them going now. She would! She swore it with soft fist beating the edges of the radiator. And at the end of all her vows she had no notion as to when and where the crusade was to begin.

Become an authentic part of the town? She began to think with unpleasant lucidity. She reflected that she did not know whether the people liked her. She had gone to the women at afternoon-coffees, to the merchants in their stores, with so many outpouring comments and whimsies that she hadn't given them a chance to betray their opinions of her. The men smiled—but did they like her? She was lively among the women—but was she one

of them? She could not recall many times when she had been admitted to the whispering of scandal which is the secret chamber of Gopher Prairie conversation.

She was poisoned with doubt, as she drooped up to bed.

Next day, through her shopping, her mind sat back and observed. Dave Dyer and Sam Clark were as cordial as she had been fancying; but wasn't there an impersonal abruptness in the "H' are yuh?" of Chet Dashaway? Howland the grocer was curt. Was that merely his usual manner?

"It's infuriating to have to pay attention to what people think. In St. Paul I didn't care. But here I'm spied on. They're watching me. I mustn't let it make me self-conscious," she coaxed herself—overstimulated by the drug of thought, and offensively on the defensive.

III

A thaw which stripped the snow from the sidewalks; a ringing iron night when the lakes could be heard booming; a clear roistering morning. In tam o'shanter and tweed skirt Carol felt herself a college junior going out to play hockey. She wanted to whoop, her legs ached to run. On the way home from shopping she yielded, as a pup would have yielded. She galloped down a block and as she jumped from a curb across a welter of slush, she gave a student "Yippee!"

She saw that in a window three old women were gasping. Their triple glare was paralyzing. Across the street, at another window, the curtain had secretively moved. She stopped, walked on sedately, changed from the girl Carol into Mrs. Dr. Kennicott.

She never again felt quite young enough and defiant enough and free enough to run and halloo in the public streets; and it was as a Nice Married Woman that she attended the next weekly bridge of the Jolly Seventeen.

IV

The Jolly Seventeen (the membership of which ranged from fourteen to twenty-six) was the social cornice of Gopher Prairie. It was the country club, the diplomatic set, the St. Cecilia, the Ritz oval room, the Club de Vingt. To belong to it was to be "in." Though its membership partly coincided with that of the Thanatopsis study club, the Jolly Seventeen as a separate entity guffawed at the Thanatopsis, and considered it middle-class and even "highbrow."

Most of the Jolly Seventeen were young married women, with their husbands as associate members. Once a week they had a women's afternoon-bridge; once a month the husbands joined them for supper and evening-bridge; twice a year they had dances at I. O. O. F. Hall. Then the town exploded. Only at the annual balls of the Firemen and of the Eastern Star was there such prodigality of chiffon scarfs and tangoing and heart-burnings, and these rival institutions were not select—hired girls attended the Firemen's Ball, with section-hands and laborers. Ella Stowbody had once gone to a Jolly Seventeen Soiree in the village hack, hitherto confined to chief mourners at funerals; and Harry Haydock and Dr. Terry Gould always appeared in the town's only specimens of evening clothes.

The afternoon-bridge of the Jolly Seventeen which followed Carol's lonely doubting was held at Juanita Haydock's new concrete bungalow, with its door of polished oak and beveled plate-glass, jar of ferns in the plastered hall, and in the living-room, a fumed oak Morris chair, sixteen color-prints, and a square varnished table with a mat made of cigar-ribbons on which was one Illustrated Gift Edition and one pack of cards in a burnt-leather case.

Carol stepped into a sirocco of furnace heat. They were already playing. Despite her flabby resolves she had not yet learned bridge. She was winningly apologetic about it to Juanita, and ashamed that she should have to go on being apologetic.

Mrs. Dave Dyer, a sallow woman with a thin prettiness devoted to experiments in religious cults, illnesses, and scandal-bearing, shook her finger at Carol and trilled, "You're a naughty one! I don't believe you appreciate the honor, when you got into the Jolly Seventeen so easy!"

Mrs. Chet Dashaway nudged her neighbor at the second table. But Carol kept up the appealing bridal manner so far as possible. She twittered, "You're perfectly right. I'm a lazy thing. I'll make Will start teaching me this very evening." Her supplication had all the sound of birdies in the nest, and Easter church-bells, and frosted Christmas cards. Internally she snarled, "That ought to be saccharine enough." She sat in the smallest rocking-chair, a model of Victorian modesty. But she saw or she imagined that the women who had gurgled at her so welcomingly when she had first come to Gopher Prairie were nodding at her brusquely.

During the pause after the first game she petitioned Mrs. Jackson Elder, "Don't you think we ought to get up another bob-sled party soon?"

"It's so cold when you get dumped in the snow," said Mrs. Elder, indifferently.

"I hate snow down my neck," volunteered Mrs. Dave Dyer, with an unpleasant look at Carol and, turning her back, she bubbled at Rita Simons, "Dearie, won't you run in this evening? I've got the loveliest new Butterick pattern I want to show you."

Carol crept back to her chair. In the fervor of discussing the game they ignored her. She was not used to being a wallflower. She struggled to keep from oversensitiveness, from becoming unpopular by the sure method of believing that she was unpopular; but she hadn't much reserve of patience, and at the end of the second game, when Ella Stowbody sniffily asked her, "Are you going to send to Minneapolis for your dress for the next soiree—heard you were," Carol said "Don't know yet" with unnecessary sharpness.

She was relieved by the admiration with which the jeune fille Rita Simons looked at the steel buckles on her pumps; but she resented Mrs. Howland's tart demand, "Don't you find that new couch of yours is too broad to be practical?" She nodded, then shook her head, and touchily left Mrs. Howland to get out of it any meaning she desired. Immediately she wanted to make peace. She was close to simpering in the sweetness with which she addressed Mrs Howland: "I think that is the prettiest display of beef-tea your husband has in his store."

"Oh yes, Gopher Prairie isn't so much behind the times," gibed Mrs. Howland. Some one giggled.

Their rebuffs made her haughty; her haughtiness irritated them to franker rebuffs; they were working up to a state of painfully righteous war when they were saved by the coming of food.

Though Juanita Haydock was highly advanced in the matters of finger-bowls, doilies, and bath-mats, her "refreshments" were typical of all the afternoon-coffees. Juanita's best friends, Mrs. Dyer and Mrs. Dashaway, passed large dinner plates, each with a spoon, a fork, and a coffee cup without saucer.

They apologized and discussed the afternoon's game as they passed through the thicket of women's feet. Then they distributed hot buttered rolls, coffee poured from an enamel-ware pot, stuffed olives, potato salad, and angel's-food cake. There was, even in the most strictly conforming Gopher Prairie circles, a certain option as to collations. The olives need not be stuffed. Doughnuts were in some houses well thought of as a substitute for the hot buttered rolls. But there was in all the town no heretic save Carol who omitted angel's-food.

They ate enormously. Carol had a suspicion that the thriftier housewives made the afternoon treat do for evening supper.

She tried to get back into the current. She edged over to Mrs. McGanum. Chunky, amiable, young Mrs. McGanum with her breast and arms of a milkmaid, and her loud delayed laugh which burst startlingly from a sober face, was the daughter of old Dr. Westlake, and the wife of Westlake's partner, Dr. McGanum. Kennicott asserted that Westlake and McGanum and their contaminated families were tricky, but Carol had found them gracious. She asked for friendliness by crying to Mrs. McGanum, "How is the baby's throat now?" and she was attentive while Mrs. McGanum rocked and knitted and placidly described symptoms.

Vida Sherwin came in after school, with Miss Ethel Villets, the town librarian. Miss Sherwin's optimistic presence gave Carol more confidence. She talked. She informed the circle "I drove almost down to Wahkeenyan with Will, a few days ago. Isn't the country lovely! And I do admire the Scandinavian farmers down there so: their big red barns and silos and milking-machines and everything.

Do you all know that lonely Lutheran church, with the tin-covered spire, that stands out alone on a hill? It's so bleak; somehow it seems so brave. I do think the Scandinavians are the hardiest and best people——"

"Oh, do you THINK so?" protested Mrs. Jackson Elder. "My husband says the Svenskas that work in the planing-mill are perfectly terrible—so silent and cranky, and so selfish, the way they keep demanding raises. If they had their way they'd simply ruin the business."

"Yes, and they're simply GHASTLY hired girls!" wailed Mrs. Dave Dyer. "I swear, I work myself to skin and bone trying to please my hired girls—when I can get them! I do everything in the world for them. They can have their gentleman friends call on them in the kitchen any time, and they get just the same to eat as we do, if there's, any left over, and I practically never jump on them."

Juanita Haydock rattled, "They're ungrateful, all that class of people. I do think the domestic problem is simply becoming awful. I don't know what the country's coming to, with these Scandahoofian clodhoppers demanding every cent you can save, and so ignorant and impertinent, and on my word, demanding bath-tubs and everything—as if they weren't mighty good and lucky at home if they got a bath in the wash-tub."

They were off, riding hard. Carol thought of Bea and waylaid them:

"But isn't it possibly the fault of the mistresses if the maids are ungrateful? For generations we've given them the leavings of food, and holes to live in. I don't want to boast, but I must say I don't have much trouble with Bea. She's so friendly. The Scandinavians are sturdy and honest——"

Mrs. Dave Dyer snapped, "Honest? Do you call it honest to hold us up for every cent of pay they can get? I can't say that I've had any of them steal anything (though you might call it stealing to eat so much that a roast of beef hardly lasts three days), but just the same I don't intend to let them think they can put anything over on ME! I always make them pack and unpack their trunks down-stairs, right under my eyes, and then I know they aren't being tempted to dishonesty by any slackness on MY part!"

"How much do the maids get here?" Carol ventured.

Mrs. B. J. Gougerling, wife of the banker, stated in a shocked manner, "Any place from three-fifty to five-fifty a week! I know positively that Mrs. Clark, after swearing that she wouldn't weaken and encourage them in their outrageous demands, went and paid five-fifty—think of it! practically a dollar a day for unskilled work and, of course, her food and room and a chance to do her own washing right in with the rest of the wash. HOW MUCH DO YOU PAY, Mrs. KENNICOTT?"

"Yes! How much do you pay?" insisted half a dozen.

"W-why, I pay six a week," she feebly confessed.

They gasped. Juanita protested, "Don't you think it's hard on the rest of us when you pay so much?" Juanita's demand was reinforced by the universal glower.

Carol was angry. "I don't care! A maid has one of the hardest jobs on earth. She works from ten to eighteen hours a day. She has to wash slimy dishes and dirty clothes. She tends the children and runs to the door with wet chapped hands and——"

Mrs. Dave Dyer broke into Carol's peroration with a furious, "That's all very well, but believe me, I do those things myself when I'm without a maid—and that's a good share of the time for a person that isn't willing to yield and pay exorbitant wages!"

Carol was retorting, "But a maid does it for strangers, and all she gets out of it is the pay——"

Their eyes were hostile. Four of them were talking at once Vida Sherwin's dictatorial voice cut through, took control of the revolution:

"Tut, tut, tut, tut! What angry passions—and what an idiotic discussion! All of you getting too serious. Stop it! Carol Kennicott, you're probably right, but you're too much ahead of the times. Juanita, quit looking so belligerent. What is this, a card party or a hen fight? Carol, you stop admiring yourself as the Joan of Arc of the hired girls, or I'll spank you. You come over here and talk libraries with Ethel Villets. Boooooo! If there's any more pecking, I'll take charge of the hen roost myself!"

They all laughed artificially, and Carol obediently "talked libraries."

A small-town bungalow, the wives of a village doctor and a village dry-goods merchant, a provincial teacher, a colloquial brawl over paying a servant a dollar more a week.

Yet this insignificance echoed cellar-plots and cabinet meetings and labor conferences in Persia and Prussia, Rome and Boston, and the orators who deemed themselves international leaders were but the raised voices of a billion Juanitas denouncing a million Carols, with a hundred thousand Vida Sherwins trying to shoo away the storm.

Carol felt guilty. She devoted herself to admiring the spinsterish Miss Villets—and immediately committed another offense against the laws of decency.

"We haven't seen you at the library yet," Miss Villets reproved.

"I've wanted to run in so much but I've been getting settled and——I'll probably come in so often you'll get tired of me! I hear you have such a nice library."

"There are many who like it. We have two thousand more books than Wakamin."

"Isn't that fine. I'm sure you are largely responsible. I've had some experience, in St. Paul."

"So I have been informed. Not that I entirely approve of library methods in these large cities. So careless, letting tramps and all sorts of dirty persons practically sleep in the reading-rooms."

"I know, but the poor souls——Well, I'm sure you will agree with me in one thing: The chief task of a librarian is to get people to read."

"You feel so? My feeling, Mrs. Kennicott, and I am merely quoting the librarian of a very large college, is that the first duty of the CONSCIENTIOUS librarian is to preserve the books."

"Oh!" Carol repented her "Oh." Miss Villets stiffened, and attacked:

"It may be all very well in cities, where they have unlimited funds, to let nasty children ruin books and just deliberately tear them up, and fresh young men take more books out

than they are entitled to by the regulations, but I'm never going to permit it in this library!"

"What if some children are destructive? They learn to read. Books are cheaper than minds."

"Nothing is cheaper than the minds of some of these children that come in and bother me simply because their mothers don't keep them home where they belong. Some librarians may choose to be so wishy-washy and turn their libraries into nursing-homes and kindergartens, but as long as I'm in charge, the Gopher Prairie library is going to be quiet and decent, and the books well kept!"

Carol saw that the others were listening, waiting for her to be objectionable. She flinched before their dislike. She hastened to smile in agreement with Miss Villets, to glance publicly at her wrist-watch, to warble that it was "so late—have to hurry home—husband—such nice party—maybe you were right about maids, prejudiced because Bea so nice—such perfectly divine angel's-food, Mrs. Haydock must give me the recipe—good-by, such happy party——"

She walked home. She reflected, "It was my fault. I was touchy. And I opposed them so much. Only——I can't! I can't be one of them if I must damn all the maids toiling in filthy kitchens, all the ragged hungry children. And these women are to be my arbiters, the rest of my life!"

She ignored Bea's call from the kitchen; she ran up-stairs to the unfrequented guest-room; she wept in terror, her body a pale arc as she knelt beside a cumbrous black-walnut bed, beside a puffy mattress covered with a red quilt, in a shuttered and airless room.

CHAPTER VIII

"DON'T I, in looking for things to do, show that I'm not attentive enough to Will? Am I impressed enough by his work? I will be. Oh, I will be. If I can't be one of the town, if I must be an outcast——"

When Kennicott came home she bustled, "Dear, you must tell me a lot more about your cases. I want to know. I want to understand."

"Sure. You bet." And he went down to fix the furnace.

At supper she asked, "For instance, what did you do today?"

"Do today? How do you mean?"

"Medically. I want to understand——"

"Today? Oh, there wasn't much of anything: couple chumps with bellyaches, and a sprained wrist, and a fool woman that thinks she wants to kill herself because her husband doesn't like her and——Just routine work."

"But the unhappy woman doesn't sound routine!"

"Her? Just case of nerves. You can't do much with these marriage mix-ups."

"But dear, PLEASE, will you tell me about the next case that you do think is interesting?"

"Sure. You bet. Tell you about anything that——Say that's pretty good salmon. Get it at Howland's?"

II

Four days after the Jolly Seventeen debacle Vida Sherwin called and casually blew Carol's world to pieces.

"May I come in and gossip a while?" she said, with such excess of bright innocence that Carol was uneasy. Vida took off her furs with a bounce, she sat down as though it were a gymnasium exercise, she flung out:

"Feel disgracefully good, this weather! Raymond Wutherspoon says if he had my energy he'd be a grand opera singer. I always think this climate is the finest in the world, and my friends are the dearest people in the world, and my work is the most essential thing in the world. Probably I fool myself. But I know one thing for certain: You're the pluckiest little idiot in the world."

"And so you are about to flay me alive." Carol was cheerful about it.

"Am I? Perhaps. I've been wondering—I know that the third party to a squabble is often the most to blame: the one who runs between A and B having a beautiful time telling each of them what the other has said. But I want you to take a big part in vitalizing Gopher Prairie and so——Such a very unique opportunity and——Am I silly?"

"I know what you mean. I was too abrupt at the Jolly Seventeen."

"It isn't that. Matter of fact, I'm glad you told them some wholesome truths about servants. (Though perhaps you were just a bit tactless.) It's bigger than that. I wonder if you understand that in a secluded community like this every newcomer is on test? People cordial to her but watching her all the time. I remember when a Latin teacher came here from Wellesley, they resented her broad A. Were sure it was affected. Of course they have discussed you——"

"Have they talked about me much?"

"My dear!"

"I always feel as though I walked around in a cloud, looking out at others but not being seen. I feel so inconspicuous and so normal—so normal that there's nothing about me to

discuss. I can't realize that Mr. and Mrs. Haydock must gossip about me." Carol was working up a small passion of distaste. "And I don't like it. It makes me crawly to think of their daring to talk over all I do and say. Pawing me over! I resent it. I hate——"

"Wait, child! Perhaps they resent some things in you. I want you to try and be impersonal. They'd paw over anybody who came in new. Didn't you, with newcomers in College?"

"Yes."

"Well then! Will you be impersonal? I'm paying you the compliment of supposing that you can be. I want you to be big enough to help me make this town worth while."

"I'll be as impersonal as cold boiled potatoes. (Not that I shall ever be able to help you 'make the town worth while.') What do they say about me? Really. I want to know."

"Of course the illiterate ones resent your references to anything farther away than Minneapolis. They're so suspicious—that's it, suspicious. And some think you dress too well."

"Oh, they do, do they! Shall I dress in gunny-sacking to suit them?"

"Please! Are you going to be a baby?"

"I'll be good," sulkily.

"You certainly will, or I won't tell you one single thing. You must understand this: I'm not asking you to change yourself. Just want you to know what they think. You must do that, no matter how absurd their prejudices are, if you're going to handle them. Is it your ambition to make this a better town, or isn't it?"

"I don't know whether it is or not!"

"Why—why——Tut, tut, now, of course it is! Why, I depend on you. You're a born reformer."

"I am not—not any more!"

"Of course you are."

"Oh, if I really could help——So they think I'm affected?"

"My lamb, they do! Now don't say they're nervy. After all, Gopher Prairie standards are as reasonable to Gopher Prairie as Lake Shore Drive standards are to Chicago. And there's more Gopher Prairies than there are Chicagos. Or Londons.

And——I'll tell you the whole story: They think you're showing off when you say 'American' instead of 'Ammurrican.' They think you're too frivolous. Life's so serious to them that they can't imagine any kind of laughter except Juanita's snortling. Ethel Villets was sure you were patronizing her when——"

"Oh, I was not!"

"——you talked about encouraging reading; and Mrs. Elder thought you were patronizing when you said she had 'such a pretty little car.' She thinks it's an enormous car! And some of the merchants say you're too flip when you talk to them in the store and——"

"Poor me, when I was trying to be friendly!"

"——every housewife in town is doubtful about your being so chummy with your Bea. All right to be kind, but they say you act as though she were your cousin. (Wait now! There's plenty more.) And they think you were eccentric in furnishing this room—they think the broad couch and that Japanese dingus are absurd. (Wait! I know they're silly.)

And I guess I've heard a dozen criticize you because you don't go to church oftener and——"

"I can't stand it—I can't bear to realize that they've been saying all these things while I've been going about so happily and liking them. I wonder if you ought to have told me? It will make me self-conscious."

"I wonder the same thing. Only answer I can get is the old saw about knowledge being power. And some day you'll see how absorbing it is to have power, even here; to control the town——Oh, I'm a crank. But I do like to see things moving."

"It hurts. It makes these people seem so beastly and treacherous, when I've been perfectly natural with them. But let's have it all. What did they say about my Chinese house-warming party?"

"Why, uh——"

"Go on. Or I'll make up worse things than anything you can tell me."

"They did enjoy it. But I guess some of them felt you were showing off—pretending that your husband is richer than he is."

"I can't——Their meanness of mind is beyond any horrors I could imagine. They really thought that I——And you want to 'reform' people like that when dynamite is so cheap? Who dared to say that? The rich or the poor?"

"Fairly well assorted."

"Can't they at least understand me well enough to see that though I might be affected and culturine, at least I simply couldn't commit that other kind of vulgarity? If they must know, you may tell them, with my compliments, that Will makes about four thousand a

year, and the party cost half of what they probably thought it did. Chinese things are not very expensive, and I made my own costume——"

"Stop it! Stop beating me! I know all that. What they meant was: they felt you were starting dangerous competition by giving a party such as most people here can't afford. Four thousand is a pretty big income for this town."

"I never thought of starting competition. Will you believe that it was in all love and friendliness that I tried to give them the gayest party I could? It was foolish; it was childish and noisy. But I did mean it so well."

"I know, of course. And it certainly is unfair of them to make fun of your having that Chinese food—chow men, was it?—and to laugh about your wearing those pretty trousers——"

Carol sprang up, whimpering, "Oh, they didn't do that! They didn't poke fun at my feast, that I ordered so carefully for them! And my little Chinese costume that I was so happy making—I made it secretly, to surprise them. And they've been ridiculing it, all this while!"

She was huddled on the couch.

Vida was stroking her hair, muttering, "I shouldn't——"

Shrouded in shame, Carol did not know when Vida slipped away. The clock's bell, at half past five, aroused her. "I must get hold of myself before Will comes. I hope he never knows what a fool his wife is. . . . Frozen, sneering, horrible hearts."

Like a very small, very lonely girl she trudged up-stairs, slow step by step, her feet dragging, her hand on the rail. It was not her husband to whom she wanted to run for protection—it was her father, her smiling understanding father, dead these twelve years.

III

Kennicott was yawning, stretched in the largest chair, between the radiator and a small kerosene stove.

Cautiously, "Will dear, I wonder if the people here don't criticize me sometimes? They must. I mean: if they ever do, you mustn't let it bother you."

"Criticize you? Lord, I should say not. They all keep telling me you're the swellest girl they ever saw."

"Well, I've just fancied——The merchants probably think I'm too fussy about shopping. I'm afraid I bore Mr. Dashaway and Mr. Howland and Mr. Ludelmeyer."

"I can tell you how that is. I didn't want to speak of it but since you've brought it up: Chet Dashaway probably resents the fact that you got this new furniture down in the Cities instead of here. I didn't want to raise any objection at the time but——After all, I make my money here and they naturally expect me to spend it here."

"If Mr. Dashaway will kindly tell me how any civilized person can furnish a room out of the mortuary pieces that he calls——" She remembered. She said meekly, "But I understand."

"And Howland and Ludelmeyer——Oh, you've probably handed 'em a few roasts for the bum stocks they carry, when you just meant to jolly 'em. But rats, what do we care! This is an independent town, not like these Eastern holes where you have to watch your step all the time, and live up to fool demands and social customs, and a lot of old tabbies always busy criticizing. Everybody's free here to do what he wants to."

He said it with a flourish, and Carol perceived that he believed it. She turned her breath of fury into a yawn.

"By the way, Carrie, while we're talking of this: Of course I like to keep independent, and I don't believe in this business of binding yourself to trade with the man that trades with you unless you really want to, but same time: I'd be just as glad if you dealt with Jenson or Ludelmeyer as much as you ran, instead of Howland & Gould, who go to Dr. Gould every last time, and the whole tribe of 'em the same way. I don't see why I should be paying out my good money for groceries and having them pass it on to Terry Gould!"

"I've gone to Howland & Gould because they're better, and cleaner."

"I know. I don't mean cut them out entirely. Course Jenson is tricky—give you short weight—and Ludelmeyer is a shiftless old Dutch hog. But same time, I mean let's keep the trade in the family whenever it is convenient, see how I mean?"

"I see."

"Well, guess it's about time to turn in."

He yawned, went out to look at the thermometer, slammed the door, patted her head, unbuttoned his waistcoat, yawned, wound the clock, went down to look at the furnace, yawned, and clumped up-stairs to bed, casually scratching his thick woolen undershirt.

Till he bawled, "Aren't you ever coming up to bed?" she sat unmoving.

CHAPTER IX

I

SHE had tripped into the meadow to teach the lambs a pretty educational dance and found that the lambs were wolves. There was no way out between their pressing gray shoulders. She was surrounded by fangs and sneering eyes.

She could not go on enduring the hidden derision. She wanted to flee. She wanted to hide in the generous indifference of cities. She practised saying to Kennicott, "Think perhaps I'll run down to St. Paul for a few days." But she could not trust herself to say it carelessly; could not abide his certain questioning.

Reform the town? All she wanted was to be tolerated!

She could not look directly at people. She flushed and winced before citizens who a week ago had been amusing objects of study, and in their good-mornings she heard a cruel sniggering.

She encountered Juanita Haydock at Ole Jenson's grocery. She besought, "Oh, how do you do! Heavens, what beautiful celery that is!"

"Yes, doesn't it look fresh. Harry simply has to have his celery on Sunday, drat the man!"

Carol hastened out of the shop exulting, "She didn't make fun of me. . . . Did she?"

In a week she had recovered from consciousness of insecurity, of shame and whispering notoriety, but she kept her habit of avoiding people. She walked the streets with her head down. When she spied Mrs. McGanum or Mrs. Dyer ahead she crossed over with an elaborate pretense of looking at a billboard. Always she was acting, for the benefit of every one she saw—and for the benefit of the ambushed leering eyes which she did not see.

She perceived that Vida Sherwin had told the truth. Whether she entered a store, or swept the back porch, or stood at the bay-window in the living-room, the village peeped at her. Once she had swung along the street triumphant in making a home. Now she glanced at

each house, and felt, when she was safely home, that she had won past a thousand enemies armed with ridicule. She told herself that her sensitiveness was preposterous, but daily she was thrown into panic. She saw curtains slide back into innocent smoothness. Old women who had been entering their houses slipped out again to stare at her—in the wintry quiet she could hear them tiptoeing on their porches. When she had for a blessed hour forgotten the searchlight, when she was scampering through a chill dusk, happy in yellow windows against gray night, her heart checked as she realized that a head covered with a shawl was thrust up over a snow-tipped bush to watch her.

She admitted that she was taking herself too seriously; that villagers gape at every one. She became placid, and thought well of her philosophy. But next morning she had a shock of shame as she entered Ludelmeyer's The grocer, his clerk, and neurotic Mrs. Dave Dyer had been giggling about something. They halted, looked embarrassed, babbled about onions. Carol felt guilty. That evening when Kennicott took her to call on the crochety Lyman Casses, their hosts seemed flustered at their arrival. Kennicott jovially hooted, "What makes you so hang-dog, Lym?" The Casses tittered feebly.

Except Dave Dyer, Sam Clark, and Raymie Wutherspoon, there were no merchants of whose welcome Carol was certain. She knew that she read mockery into greetings but she could not control her suspicion, could not rise from her psychic collapse. She alternately raged and flinched at the superiority of the merchants. They did not know that they were being rude, but they meant to have it understood that they were prosperous and "not scared of no doctor's wife." They often said, "One man's as good as another—and a darn sight better." This motto, however, they did not commend to farmer customers who had had crop failures. The Yankee merchants were crabbed; and Ole Jenson, Ludelmeyer, and Gus Dahl, from the "Old Country," wished to be taken for Yankees. James Madison Howland, born in New Hampshire, and Ole Jenson, born in Sweden, both proved that

they were free American citizens by grunting, "I don't know whether I got any or not," or "Well, you can't expect me to get it delivered by noon."

It was good form for the customers to fight back. Juanita Haydock cheerfully jabbered, "You have it there by twelve or I'll snatch that fresh delivery-boy bald-headed." But Carol had never been able to play the game of friendly rudeness; and now she was certain that she never would learn it. She formed the cowardly habit of going to Axel Egge's.

Axel was not respectable and rude. He was still a foreigner, and he expected to remain one. His manner was heavy and uninterrogative. His establishment was more fantastic than any cross-roads store. No one save Axel himself could find anything. A part of the assortment of children's stockings was under a blanket on a shelf, a part in a tin ginger-snap box, the rest heaped like a nest of black-cotton snakes upon a flour-barrel which was surrounded by brooms, Norwegian Bibles, dried cod for ludfisk, boxes of apricots, and a pair and a half of lumbermen's rubber-footed boots. The place was crowded with Scandinavian farmwives, standing aloof in shawls and ancient fawn-colored leg o' mutton jackets, awaiting the return of their lords. They spoke Norwegian or Swedish, and looked at Carol uncomprehendingly. They were a relief to her—they were not whispering that she was a poseur.

But what she told herself was that Axel Egge's was "so picturesque and romantic."

It was in the matter of clothes that she was most self-conscious.

When she dared to go shopping in her new checked suit with the black-embroidered sulphur collar, she had as good as invited all of Gopher Prairie (which interested itself in nothing so intimately as in new clothes and the cost thereof) to investigate her. It was a smart suit with lines unfamiliar to the dragging yellow and pink frocks of the town. The Widow Bogart's stare, from her porch, indicated, "Well I never saw anything like that before!" Mrs. McGanum stopped Carol at the notions shop to hint, "My, that's a nice

suit—wasn't it terribly expensive?" The gang of boys in front of the drug store commented, "Hey, Pudgie, play you a game of checkers on that dress."

Carol could not endure it. She drew her fur coat over the suit and hastily fastened the buttons, while the boys snickered.

II

No group angered her quite so much as these staring young roues.

She had tried to convince herself that the village, with its fresh air, its lakes for fishing and swimming, was healthier than the artificial city. But she was sickened by glimpses of the gang of boys from fourteen to twenty who loafed before Dyer's Drug Store, smoking cigarettes, displaying "fancy" shoes and purple ties and coats of diamond-shaped buttons, whistling the Hoochi-Koochi and catcalling, "Oh, you baby-doll" at every passing girl.

She saw them playing pool in the stinking room behind Del Snafflin's barber shop, and shaking dice in "The Smoke House," and gathered in a snickering knot to listen to the "juicy stories" of Bert Tybee, the bartender of the Minniemashie House. She heard them smacking moist lips over every love-scene at the Rosebud Movie Palace. At the counter of the Greek Confectionery Parlor, while they ate dreadful messes of decayed bananas, acid cherries, whipped cream, and gelatinous ice-cream, they screamed to one another, "Hey, lemme 'lone," "Quit dog-gone you, looka what you went and done, you almost spilled my glass swater," "Like hell I did," "Hey, gol darn your hide, don't you go sticking your coffin nail in my i-scream," "Oh you Batty, how juh like dancing with Tillie McGuire, last night? Some squeezing, heh, kid?"

By diligent consultation of American fiction she discovered that this was the only virile and amusing manner in which boys could function; that boys who were not compounded of the gutter and the mining-camp were mollycoddles and unhappy. She had taken this

for granted. She had studied the boys pityingly, but impersonally. It had not occurred to her that they might touch her.

Now she was aware that they knew all about her; that they were waiting for some affectation over which they could guffaw. No schoolgirl passed their observation-posts more flushingly than did Mrs. Dr. Kennicott. In shame she knew that they glanced appraisingly at her snowy overshoes, speculating about her legs. Theirs were not young eyes there was no youth in all the town, she agonized. They were born old, grim and old and spying and censorious.

She cried again that their youth was senile and cruel on the day when she overheard Cy Bogart and Earl Haydock.

Cyrus N. Bogart, son of the righteous widow who lived across the alley, was at this time a boy of fourteen or fifteen. Carol had already seen quite enough of Cy Bogart. On her first evening in Gopher Prairie Cy had appeared at the head of a "charivari," banging immensely upon a discarded automobile fender. His companions were yelping in imitation of coyotes. Kennicott had felt rather complimented; had gone out and distributed a dollar. But Cy was a capitalist in charivaris. He returned with an entirely new group, and this time there were three automobile fenders and a carnival rattle. When Kennicott again interrupted his shaving, Cy piped, "Naw, you got to give us two dollars," and he got it.

A week later Cy rigged a tic-tac to a window of the living-room, and the tattoo out of the darkness frightened Carol into screaming. Since then, in four months, she had beheld Cy hanging a cat, stealing melons, throwing tomatoes at the Kennicott house, and making ski-tracks across the lawn, and had heard him explaining the mysteries of generation, with great audibility and dismaying knowledge. He was, in fact, a museum specimen of

what a small town, a well-disciplined public school, a tradition of hearty humor, and a pious mother could produce from the material of a courageous and ingenious mind.

Carol was afraid of him. Far from protesting when he set his mongrel on a kitten, she worked hard at not seeing him.

The Kennicott garage was a shed littered with paint-cans, tools, a lawn-mower, and ancient wisps of hay. Above it was a loft which Cy Bogart and Earl Haydock, young brother of Harry, used as a den, for smoking, hiding from whippings, and planning secret societies. They climbed to it by a ladder on the alley side of the shed.

This morning of late January, two or three weeks after Vida's revelations, Carol had gone into the stable-garage to find a hammer. Snow softened her step. She heard voices in the loft above her:

"Ah gee, lez—oh, lez go down the lake and swipe some mushrats out of somebody's traps," Cy was yawning.

"And get our ears beat off!" grumbled Earl Haydock.

"Gosh, these cigarettes are dandy. 'Member when we were just kids, and used to smoke corn-silk and hayseed?"

"Yup. Gosh!"

Spit. Silence.

"Say Earl, ma says if you chew tobacco you get consumption."

"Aw rats, your old lady is a crank."

"Yuh, that's so." Pause. "But she says she knows a fella that did."

"Aw, gee whiz, didn't Doc Kennicott used to chew tobacco all the time before he married this-here girl from the Cities? He used to spit—-Gee! Some shot! He could hit a tree ten feet off."

This was news to the girl from the Cities.

"Say, how is she?" continued Earl.

"Huh? How's who?"

"You know who I mean, smarty."

A tussle, a thumping of loose boards, silence, weary narration from Cy:

"Mrs. Kennicott? Oh, she's all right, I guess." Relief to Carol, below. "She gimme a hunk o' cake, one time. But Ma says she's stuck-up as hell. Ma's always talking about her. Ma says if Mrs. Kennicott thought as much about the doc as she does about her clothes, the doc wouldn't look so peaked."

Spit. Silence.

"Yuh. Juanita's always talking about her, too," from Earl. "She says Mrs. Kennicott thinks she knows it all. Juanita says she has to laugh till she almost busts every time she sees Mrs. Kennicott peerading along the street with that 'take a look—I'm a swell skirt' way she's got. But gosh, I don't pay no attention to Juanita. She's meaner 'n a crab."

"Ma was telling somebody that she heard that Mrs. Kennicott claimed she made forty dollars a week when she was on some job in the Cities, and Ma says she knows posolutely that she never made but eighteen a week—Ma says that when she's lived here a while she won't go round making a fool of herself, pulling that bighead stuff on folks that know a whole lot more than she does. They're all laughing up their sleeves at her."

"Say, jever notice how Mrs. Kennicott fusses around the house? Other evening when I was coming over here, she'd forgot to pull down the curtain, and I watched her for ten minutes. Jeeze, you'd 'a' died laughing. She was there all alone, and she must 'a' spent five minutes getting a picture straight. It was funny as hell the way she'd stick out her finger to straighten the picture—deedle-dee, see my tunnin' 'ittle finger, oh my, ain't I cute, what a fine long tail my cat's got!"

"But say, Earl, she's some good-looker, just the same, and O Ignatz! the glad rags she must of bought for her wedding. Jever notice these low-cut dresses and these thin shimmy-shirts she wears? I had a good squint at 'em when they were out on the line with the wash. And some ankles she's got, heh?"

Then Carol fled.

In her innocence she had not known that the whole town could discuss even her garments, her body. She felt that she was being dragged naked down Main Street.

The moment it was dusk she pulled down the window-shades all the shades, flush with the sill, but beyond them she felt moist fleering eyes.

III

She remembered, and tried to forget, and remembered more sharply the vulgar detail of her husband's having observed the ancient customs of the land by chewing tobacco. She would have preferred a prettier vice—gambling or a mistress. For these she might have found a luxury of forgiveness. She could not remember any fascinatingly wicked hero of fiction who chewed tobacco. She asserted that it proved him to be a man of the bold free West. She tried to align him with the hairy-chested heroes of the motion-pictures. She curled on the couch a pallid softness in the twilight, and fought herself, and lost the

battle. Spitting did not identify him with rangers riding the buttes; it merely bound him to Gopher Prairie—to Nat Hicks the tailor and Bert Tybee the bartender.

"But he gave it up for me. Oh, what does it matter! We're all filthy in some things. I think of myself as so superior, but I do eat and digest, I do wash my dirty paws and scratch. I'm not a cool slim goddess on a column. There aren't any! He gave it up for me. He stands by me, believing that every one loves me. He's the Rock of Ages—in a storm of meanness that's driving me mad . . . it will drive me mad."

All evening she sang Scotch ballads to Kennicott, and when she noticed that he was chewing an unlighted cigar she smiled maternally at his secret.

She could not escape asking (in the exact words and mental intonations which a thousand million women, dairy wenches and mischief-making queens, had used before her, and which a million million women will know hereafter), "Was it all a horrible mistake, my marrying him?" She quieted the doubt—without answering it.

IV

Kennicott had taken her north to Lac-qui-Meurt, in the Big Woods. It was the entrance to a Chippewa Indian reservation, a sandy settlement among Norway pines on the shore of a huge snow-glaring lake. She had her first sight of his mother, except the glimpse at the wedding. Mrs. Kennicott had a hushed and delicate breeding which dignified her woodeny over-scrubbed cottage with its worn hard cushions in heavy rockers. She had never lost the child's miraculous power of wonder. She asked questions about books and cities. She murmured:

"Will is a dear hard-working boy but he's inclined to be too serious, and you've taught him how to play. Last night I heard you both laughing about the old Indian basket-seller, and I just lay in bed and enjoyed your happiness."

Carol forgot her misery-hunting in this solidarity of family life. She could depend upon them; she was not battling alone. Watching Mrs. Kennicott flit about the kitchen she was better able to translate Kennicott himself. He was matter-of-fact, yes, and incurably mature.

He didn't really play; he let Carol play with him. But he had his mother's genius for trusting, her disdain for prying, her sure integrity.

From the two days at Lac-qui-Meurt Carol drew confidence in herself, and she returned to Gopher Prairie in a throbbing calm like those golden drugged seconds when, because he is for an instant free from pain, a sick man revels in living.

A bright hard winter day, the wind shrill, black and silver clouds booming across the sky, everything in panicky motion during the brief light. They struggled against the surf of wind, through deep snow. Kennicott was cheerful. He hailed Loren Wheeler, "Behave yourself while I been away?" The editor bellowed, "B' gosh you stayed so long that all your patients have got well!" and importantly took notes for the Dauntless about their journey. Jackson Elder cried, "Hey, folks! How's tricks up North?" Mrs. McGanum waved to them from her porch.

"They're glad to see us. We mean something here. These people are satisfied. Why can't I be? But can I sit back all my life and be satisfied with 'Hey, folks'? They want shouts on Main Street, and I want violins in a paneled room. Why——?"

V

Vida Sherwin ran in after school a dozen times. She was tactful, torrentially anecdotal. She had scuttled about town and plucked compliments: Mrs. Dr. Westlake had pronounced Carol a "very sweet, bright, cultured young woman," and Brad Bemis, the

tinsmith at Clark's Hardware Store, had declared that she was "easy to work for and awful easy to look at."

But Carol could not yet take her in. She resented this outsider's knowledge of her shame. Vida was not too long tolerant. She hinted, "You're a great brooder, child. Buck up now. The town's quit criticizing you, almost entirely. Come with me to the Thanatopsis Club. They have some of the BEST papers, and current-events discussions—SO interesting."

In Vida's demands Carol felt a compulsion, but she was too listless to obey.

It was Bea Sorenson who was really her confidante.

However charitable toward the Lower Classes she may have thought herself, Carol had been reared to assume that servants belong to a distinct and inferior species. But she discovered that Bea was extraordinarily like girls she had loved in college, and as a companion altogether superior to the young matrons of the Jolly Seventeen. Daily they became more frankly two girls playing at housework. Bea artlessly considered Carol the most beautiful and accomplished lady in the country; she was always shrieking, "My, dot's a swell hat!" or, "Ay t'ink all dese ladies yoost die when dey see how elegant you do your hair!" But it was not the humbleness of a servant, nor the hypocrisy of a slave; it was the admiration of Freshman for Junior.

They made out the day's menus together. Though they began with propriety, Carol sitting by the kitchen table and Bea at the sink or blacking the stove, the conference was likely to end with both of them by the table, while Bea gurgled over the ice-man's attempt to kiss her, or Carol admitted, "Everybody knows that the doctor is lots more clever than Dr. McGanum."

When Carol came in from marketing, Bea plunged into the hall to take off her coat, rub her frostied hands, and ask, "Vos dere lots of folks up-town today?"

This was the welcome upon which Carol depended.

VI

Through her weeks of cowering there was no change in her surface life. No one save Vida was aware of her agonizing. On her most despairing days she chatted to women on the street, in stores. But without the protection of Kennicott's presence she did not go to the Jolly Seventeen; she delivered herself to the judgment of the town only when she went shopping and on the ritualistic occasions of formal afternoon calls, when Mrs. Lyman Cass or Mrs. George Edwin Mott, with clean gloves and minute handkerchiefs and sealskin card-cases and countenances of frozen approbation, sat on the edges of chairs and inquired, "Do you find Gopher Prairie pleasing?" When they spent evenings of social profit-and-loss at the Haydocks' or the Dyers' she hid behind Kennicott, playing the simple bride.

Now she was unprotected. Kennicott had taken a patient to Rochester for an operation. He would be away for two or three days. She had not minded; she would loosen the matrimonial tension and be a fanciful girl for a time. But now that he was gone the house was listeningly empty. Bea was out this afternoon—presumably drinking coffee and talking about "fellows" with her cousin Tina. It was the day for the monthly supper and evening-bridge of the Jolly Seventeen, but Carol dared not go.

She sat alone.

CHAPTER X

THE house was haunted, long before evening. Shadows slipped down the walls and waited behind every chair.

Did that door move?

No. She wouldn't go to the Jolly Seventeen. She hadn't energy enough to caper before them, to smile blandly at Juanita's rudeness. Not today. But she did want a party. Now! If some one would come in this afternoon, some one who liked her—Vida or Mrs. Sam Clark or old Mrs. Champ Perry or gentle Mrs. Dr. Westlake. Or Guy Pollock! She'd telephone——

No. That wouldn't be it. They must come of themselves.

Perhaps they would.

Why not?

She'd have tea ready, anyway. If they came—splendid. If not—what did she care? She wasn't going to yield to the village and let down; she was going to keep up a belief in the rite of tea, to which she had always looked forward as the symbol of a leisurely fine existence. And it would be just as much fun, even if it was so babyish, to have tea by herself and pretend that she was entertaining clever men. It would!

She turned the shining thought into action. She bustled to the kitchen, stoked the wood-range, sang Schumann while she boiled the kettle, warmed up raisin cookies on a newspaper spread on the rack in the oven. She scampered up-stairs to bring down her filmiest tea-cloth. She arranged a silver tray.

She proudly carried it into the living-room and set it on the long cherrywood table, pushing aside a hoop of embroidery, a volume of Conrad from the library, copies of the Saturday Evening Post, the Literary Digest, and Kennicott's National Geographic Magazine.

She moved the tray back and forth and regarded the effect. She shook her head. She busily unfolded the sewing-table set it in the bay-window, patted the tea-cloth to smoothness, moved the tray. "Some time I'll have a mahogany tea-table," she said happily.

She had brought in two cups, two plates. For herself, a straight chair, but for the guest the big wing-chair, which she pantingly tugged to the table.

She had finished all the preparations she could think of. She sat and waited. She listened for the door-bell, the telephone. Her eagerness was stilled. Her hands drooped.

Surely Vida Sherwin would hear the summons.

She glanced through the bay-window. Snow was sifting over the ridge of the Howland house like sprays of water from a hose. The wide yards across the street were gray with moving eddies. The black trees shivered. The roadway was gashed with ruts of ice.

She looked at the extra cup and plate. She looked at the wing-chair. It was so empty.

The tea was cold in the pot. With wearily dipping fingertip she tested it. Yes. Quite cold. She couldn't wait any longer.

The cup across from her was icily clean, glisteningly empty.

Simply absurd to wait. She poured her own cup of tea. She sat and stared at it. What was it she was going to do now? Oh yes; how idiotic; take a lump of sugar.

She didn't want the beastly tea.

She was springing up. She was on the couch, sobbing.

II

She was thinking more sharply than she had for weeks.

She reverted to her resolution to change the town—awaken it, prod it, "reform" it. What if they were wolves instead of lambs? They'd eat her all the sooner if she was meek to them. Fight or be eaten. It was easier to change the town completely than to conciliate it! She could not take their point of view; it was a negative thing; an intellectual squalor; a swamp of prejudices and fears. She would have to make them take hers. She was not a Vincent de Paul, to govern and mold a people. What of that? The tiniest change in their distrust of beauty would be the beginning of the end; a seed to sprout and some day with thickening roots to crack their wall of mediocrity. If she could not, as she desired, do a great thing nobly and with laughter, yet she need not be con-tent with village nothingness. She would plant one seed in the blank wall.

Was she just? Was it merely a blank wall, this town which to three thousand and more people was the center of the universe? Hadn't she, returning from Lac-qui-Meurt, felt the heartiness of their greetings? No. The ten thousand Gopher Prairies had no monopoly of greetings and friendly hands. Sam Clark was no more loyal than girl librarians she knew in St. Paul, the people she had met in Chicago.

And those others had so much that Gopher Prairie complacently lacked—the world of gaiety and adventure, of music and the integrity of bronze, of remembered mists from tropic isles and Paris nights and the walls of Bagdad, of industrial justice and a God who spake not in doggerel hymns.

One seed. Which seed it was did not matter. All knowledge and freedom were one. But she had delayed so long in finding that seed. Could she do something with this

Thanatopsis Club? Or should she make her house so charming that it would be an influence? She'd make Kennicott like poetry. That was it, for a beginning! She conceived so clear a picture of their bending over large fair pages by the fire (in a non-existent fireplace) that the spectral presences slipped away. Doors no longer moved; curtains were not creeping shadows but lovely dark masses in the dusk; and when Bea came home Carol was singing at the piano which she had not touched for many days.

Their supper was the feast of two girls. Carol was in the dining-room, in a frock of black satin edged with gold, and Bea, in blue gingham and an apron, dined in the kitchen; but the door was open between, and Carol was inquiring, "Did you see any ducks in Dahl's window?" and Bea chanting, "No, ma'am. Say, ve have a svell time, dis afternoon. Tina she have coffee and knackebrod, and her fella vos dere, and ve yoost laughed and laughed, and her fella say he vos president and he going to make me queen of Finland, and Ay stick a fedder in may hair and say Ay bane going to go to var—oh, ve vos so foolish and ve LAUGH so!"

When Carol sat at the piano again she did not think of her husband but of the book-drugged hermit, Guy Pollock. She wished that Pollock would come calling.

"If a girl really kissed him, he'd creep out of his den and be human. If Will were as literate as Guy, or Guy were as executive as Will, I think I could endure even Gopher Prairie. It's so hard to mother Will. I could be maternal with Guy. Is that what I want, something to mother, a man or a baby or a town? I WILL have a baby. Some day. But to have him isolated here all his receptive years——

"And so to bed.

"Have I found my real level in Bea and kitchen-gossip?

"Oh, I do miss you, Will. But it will be pleasant to turn over in bed as often as I want to, without worrying about waking you up.

"Am I really this settled thing called a 'married woman'? I feel so unmarried tonight. So free. To think that there was once a Mrs. Kennicott who let herself worry over a town called Gopher Prairie when there was a whole world outside it!

"Of course Will is going to like poetry."

III

A black February day. Clouds hewn of ponderous timber weighing down on the earth; an irresolute dropping of snow specks upon the trampled wastes. Gloom but no veiling of angularity. The lines of roofs and sidewalks sharp and inescapable.

The second day of Kennicott's absence.

She fled from the creepy house for a walk. It was thirty below zero; too cold to exhilarate her. In the spaces between houses the wind caught her.

It stung, it gnawed at nose and ears and aching cheeks, and she hastened from shelter to shelter, catching her breath in the lee of a barn, grateful for the protection of a billboard covered with ragged posters showing layer under layer of paste-smeared green and streaky red.

The grove of oaks at the end of the street suggested Indians, hunting, snow-shoes, and she struggled past the earth-banked cottages to the open country, to a farm and a low hill corrugated with hard snow. In her loose nutria coat, seal toque, virginal cheeks unmarked by lines of village jealousies, she was as out of place on this dreary hillside as a scarlet tanager on an ice-floe. She looked down on Gopher Prairie. The snow, stretching without break from streets to devouring prairie beyond, wiped out the town's pretense of being a

shelter. The houses were black specks on a white sheet. Her heart shivered with that still loneliness as her body shivered with the wind.

She ran back into the huddle of streets, all the while protesting that she wanted a city's yellow glare of shop-windows and restaurants, or the primitive forest with hooded furs and a rifle, or a barnyard warm and steamy, noisy with hens and cattle, certainly not these dun houses, these yards choked with winter ash-piles, these roads of dirty snow and clotted frozen mud. The zest of winter was gone. Three months more, till May, the cold might drag on, with the snow ever filthier, the weakened body less resistent. She wondered why the good citizens insisted on adding the chill of prejudice, why they did not make the houses of their spirits more warm and frivolous, like the wise chatterers of Stockholm and Moscow.

She circled the outskirts of the town and viewed the slum of "Swede Hollow." Wherever as many as three houses are gathered there will be a slum of at least one house. In Gopher Prairie, the Sam Clarks boasted, "you don't get any of this poverty that you find in cities—always plenty of work—no need of charity—man got to be blame shiftless if he don't get ahead." But now that the summer mask of leaves and grass was gone, Carol discovered misery and dead hope. In a shack of thin boards covered with tar-paper she saw the washerwoman, Mrs. Steinhof, working in gray steam. Outside, her six-year-old boy chopped wood. He had a torn jacket, muffler of a blue like skimmed milk. His hands were covered with red mittens through which protruded his chapped raw knuckles. He halted to blow on them, to cry disinterestedly.

A family of recently arrived Finns were camped in an abandoned stable. A man of eighty was picking up lumps of coal along the railroad.

She did not know what to do about it. She felt that these independent citizens, who had been taught that they belonged to a democracy, would resent her trying to play Lady Bountiful.

She lost her loneliness in the activity of the village industries—the railroad-yards with a freight-train switching, the wheat-elevator, oil-tanks, a slaughter-house with blood-marks on the snow, the creamery with the sleds of farmers and piles of milk-cans, an unexplained stone hut labeled "Danger-. Powder Stored Here." The jolly tombstone-yard, where a utilitarian sculptor in a red calfskin overcoat whistled as he hammered the shiniest of granite headstones. Jackson Elder's small planing-mill, with the smell of fresh pine shavings and the burr of circular saws.

Most important, the Gopher Prairie Flour and Milling Company, Lyman, Cass president. Its windows were blanketed with flour-dust, but it was the most stirring spot in town. Workmen were wheeling barrels of flour into a box-car; a farmer sitting on sacks of wheat in a bobsled argued with the wheat-buyer; machinery within the mill boomed and whined, water gurgled in the ice-freed mill-race.

The clatter was a relief to Carol after months of smug houses. She wished that she could work in the mill; that she did not belong to the caste of professional-man's-wife.

She started for home, through the small slum. Before a tar-paper shack, at a gateless gate, a man in rough brown dogskin coat and black plush cap with lappets was watching her. His square face was confident, his foxy mustache was picaresque. He stood erect, his hands in his side-pockets, his pipe puffing slowly. He was forty-five or -six, perhaps.

"How do, Mrs. Kennicott," he drawled.

She recalled him—the town handyman, who had repaired their furnace at the beginning of winter.

"Oh, how do you do," she fluttered.

"My name 's Bjornstam. 'The Red Swede' they call me. Remember? Always thought I'd kind of like to say howdy to you again."

"Ye—yes——I've been exploring the outskirts of town."

"Yump. Fine mess. No sewage, no street cleaning, and the Lutheran minister and the priest represent the arts and sciences. Well, thunder, we submerged tenth down here in Swede Hollow are no worse off than you folks. Thank God, we don't have to go and purr at Juanity Haydock at the Jolly Old Seventeen."

The Carol who regarded herself as completely adaptable was uncomfortable at being chosen as comrade by a pipe-reeking odd-job man. Probably he was one of her husband's patients. But she must keep her dignity.

"Yes, even the Jolly Seventeen isn't always so exciting. It's very cold again today, isn't it. Well——"

Bjornstam was not respectfully valedictory. He showed no signs of pulling a forelock. His eyebrows moved as though they had a life of their own. With a subgrin he went on:

"Maybe I hadn't ought to talk about Mrs. Haydock and her Solemcholy Seventeen in that fresh way. I suppose I'd be tickled to death if I was invited to sit in with that gang. I'm what they call a pariah, I guess. I'm the town badman, Mrs. Kennicott: town atheist, and I suppose I must be an anarchist, too. Everybody who doesn't love the bankers and the Grand Old Republican Party is an anarchist."

Carol had unconsciously slipped from her attitude of departure into an attitude of listening, her face full toward him, her muff lowered. She fumbled:

"Yes, I suppose so." Her own grudges came in a flood. "I don't see why you shouldn't criticize the Jolly Seventeen if you want to. They aren't sacred."

"Oh yes, they are! The dollar-sign has chased the crucifix clean off the map. But then, I've got no kick. I do what I please, and I suppose I ought to let them do the same."

"What do you mean by saying you're a pariah?"

"I'm poor, and yet I don't decently envy the rich. I'm an old bach. I make enough money for a stake, and then I sit around by myself, and shake hands with myself, and have a smoke, and read history, and I don't contribute to the wealth of Brother Elder or Daddy Cass."

"You——I fancy you read a good deal."

"Yep. In a hit-or-a-miss way. I'll tell you: I'm a lone wolf. I trade horses, and saw wood, and work in lumber-camps—I'm a first-rate swamper. Always wished I could go to college. Though I s'pose I'd find it pretty slow, and they'd probably kick me out."

"You really are a curious person, Mr.——"

"Bjornstam. Miles Bjornstam. Half Yank and half Swede. Usually known as 'that damn lazy big-mouthed calamity-howler that ain't satisfied with the way we run things.' No, I ain't curious—whatever you mean by that! I'm just a bookworm. Probably too much reading for the amount of digestion I've got. Probably half-baked. I'm going to get in 'half-baked' first, and beat you to it, because it's dead sure to be handed to a radical that wears jeans!"

They grinned together. She demanded:

"You say that the Jolly Seventeen is stupid. What makes you think so?"

"Oh, trust us borers into the foundation to know about your leisure class. Fact, Mrs. Kennicott, I'll say that far as I can make out, the only people in this man's town that do have any brains—I don't mean ledger-keeping brains or duck-hunting brains or baby-spanking brains, but real imaginative brains—are you and me and Guy Pollock and the foreman at the flour-mill. He's a socialist, the foreman. (Don't tell Lym Cass that! Lym would fire a socialist quicker than he would a horse-thief!)"

"Indeed no, I sha'n't tell him."

"This foreman and I have some great set-to's. He's a regular old-line party-member. Too dogmatic. Expects to reform everything from deforestration to nosebleed by saying phrases like 'surplus value.' Like reading the prayer-book. But same time, he's a Plato J. Aristotle compared with people like Ezry Stowbody or Professor Mott or Julius Flickerbaugh."

"It's interesting to hear about him."

He dug his toe into a drift, like a schoolboy. "Rats. You mean I talk too much. Well, I do, when I get hold of somebody like you. You probably want to run along and keep your nose from freezing."

"Yes, I must go, I suppose. But tell me: Why did you leave Miss Sherwin, of the high school, out of your list of the town intelligentsia?"

"I guess maybe she does belong in it. From all I can hear she's in everything and behind everything that looks like a reform—lot more than most folks realize. She lets Mrs. Reverend Warren, the president of this-here Thanatopsis Club, think she's running the works, but Miss Sherwin is the secret boss, and nags all the easy-going dames into doing something. But way I figure it out——You see, I'm not interested in these dinky reforms. Miss Sherwin's trying to repair the holes in this barnacle-covered ship of a town by

keeping busy bailing out the water. And Pollock tries to repair it by reading poetry to the crew! Me, I want to yank it up on the ways, and fire the poor bum of a shoemaker that built it so it sails crooked, and have it rebuilt right, from the keel up."

"Yes—that—that would be better. But I must run home. My poor nose is nearly frozen."

"Say, you better come in and get warm, and see what an old bach's shack is like."

She looked doubtfully at him, at the low shanty, the yard that was littered with cord-wood, moldy planks, a hoopless wash-tub. She was disquieted, but Bjornstam did not give her the opportunity to be delicate. He flung out his hand in a welcoming gesture which assumed that she was her own counselor, that she was not a Respectable Married Woman but fully a human being. With a shaky, "Well, just a moment, to warm my nose," she glanced down the street to make sure that she was not spied on, and bolted toward the shanty.

She remained for one hour, and never had she known a more considerate host than the Red Swede.

He had but one room: bare pine floor, small work-bench, wall bunk with amazingly neat bed, frying-pan and ash-stippled coffee-pot on the shelf behind the pot-bellied cannon-ball stove, backwoods chairs—one constructed from half a barrel, one from a tilted plank-and a row of books incredibly assorted;

Byron and Tennyson and Stevenson, a manual of gas-engines, a book by Thorstein Veblen, and a spotty treatise on "The Care, Feeding, Diseases, and Breeding of Poultry and Cattle."

There was but one picture—a magazine color-plate of a steep-roofed village in the Harz Mountains which suggested kobolds and maidens with golden hair.

Bjornstam did not fuss over her. He suggested, "Might throw open your coat and put your feet up on the box in front of the stove." He tossed his dogskin coat into the bunk, lowered himself into the barrel chair, and droned on:

"Yeh, I'm probably a yahoo, but by gum I do keep my independence by doing odd jobs, and that's more 'n these polite cusses like the clerks in the banks do. When I'm rude to some slob, it may be partly because I don't know better (and God knows I'm not no authority on trick forks and what pants you wear with a Prince Albert), but mostly it's because I mean something. I'm about the only man in Johnson County that remembers the joker in the Declaration of Independence about Americans being supposed to have the right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'

"I meet old Ezra Stowbody on the street. He looks at me like he wants me to remember he's a highmuckamuck and worth two hundred thousand dollars, and he says, 'Uh, Bjornquist——'

"'Bjornstam's my name, Ezra,' I says. HE knows my name, all rightee.

"'Well, whatever your name is,' he says, 'I understand you have a gasoline saw. I want you to come around and saw up four cords of maple for me,' he says.

"'So you like my looks, eh?' I says, kind of innocent.

"'What difference does that make? Want you to saw that wood before Saturday,' he says, real sharp. Common workman going and getting fresh with a fifth of a million dollars all walking around in a hand-me-down fur coat!

"'Here's the difference it makes,' I says, just to devil him. 'How do you know I like YOUR looks?' Maybe he didn't look sore! Nope,' I says, 'thinking it all over, I don't like your application for a loan. Take it to another bank, only there ain't any,' I says, and I walks off on him.

"Sure. Probably I was surly—and foolish. But I figured there had to be ONE man in town independent enough to sass the banker!"

He hitched out of his chair, made coffee, gave Carol a cup, and talked on, half defiant and half apologetic, half wistful for friendliness and half amused by her surprise at the discovery that there was a proletarian philosophy.

At the door, she hinted:

"Mr. Bjornstam, if you were I, would you worry when people thought you were affected?"

"Huh? Kick 'em in the face! Say, if I were a sea-gull, and all over silver, think I'd care what a pack of dirty seals thought about my flying?"

It was not the wind at her back, it was the thrust of Bjornstam's scorn which carried her through town. She faced Juanita Haydock, cocked her head at Maud Dyer's brief nod, and came home to Bea radiant. She telephoned Vida Sherwin to "run over this evening."

She lustily played Tschaikowsky—the virile chords an echo of the red laughing philosopher of the tar-paper shack.

(When she hinted to Vida, "Isn't there a man here who amuses himself by being irreverent to the village gods—Bjornstam, some such a name?" the reform-leader said "Bjornstam? Oh yes. Fixes things. He's awfully impertinent.")

IV

Kennicott had returned at midnight. At breakfast he said four several times that he had missed her every moment.

On her way to market Sam Clark hailed her, "The top o' the mornin' to yez! Going to stop and pass the time of day mit Sam'l? Warmer, eh? What'd the doc's thermometer say it

was? Say, you folks better come round and visit with us, one of these evenings. Don't be so dog-gone proud, staying by yourselves."

Champ Perry the pioneer, wheat-buyer at the elevator, stopped her in the post-office, held her hand in his withered paws, peered at her with faded eyes, and chuckled, "You are so fresh and blooming, my dear. Mother was saying t'other day that a sight of you was better 'n a dose of medicine."

In the Bon Ton Store she found Guy Pollock tentatively buying a modest gray scarf. "We haven't seen you for so long," she said. "Wouldn't you like to come in and play cribbage, some evening?" As though he meant it, Pollock begged, "May I, really?"

While she was purchasing two yards of malines the vocal Raymie Wutherspoon tiptoed up to her, his long sallow face bobbing, and he besought, "You've just got to come back to my department and see a pair of patent leather slippers I set aside for you."

In a manner of more than sacerdotal reverence he unlaced her boots, tucked her skirt about her ankles, slid on the slippers. She took them.

"You're a good salesman," she said.

"I'm not a salesman at all! I just like elegant things. All this is so inartistic." He indicated with a forlornly waving hand the shelves of shoe-boxes, the seat of thin wood perforated in rosettes, the display of shoe-trees and tin boxes of blacking, the lithograph of a smirking young woman with cherry cheeks who proclaimed in the exalted poetry of advertising, "My tootsies never got hep to what pedal perfection was till I got a pair of clever classy Cleopatra Shoes."

"But sometimes," Raymie sighed, "there is a pair of dainty little shoes like these, and I set them aside for some one who will appreciate. When I saw these I said right away,

'Wouldn't it be nice if they fitted Mrs. Kennicott,' and I meant to speak to you first chance I had. I haven't forgotten our jolly talks at Mrs. Gurrey's!"

That evening Guy Pollock came in and, though Kennicott instantly impressed him into a cribbage game, Carol was happy again.

V

She did not, in recovering something of her buoyancy, forget her determination to begin the liberalizing of Gopher Prairie by the easy and agreeable propaganda of teaching Kennicott to enjoy reading poetry in the lamplight. The campaign was delayed. Twice he suggested that they call on neighbors; once he was in the country. The fourth evening he yawned pleasantly, stretched, and inquired, "Well, what'll we do tonight? Shall we go to the movies?"

"I know exactly what we're going to do. Now don't ask questions! Come and sit down by the table. There, are you comfy? Lean back and forget you're a practical man, and listen to me."

It may be that she had been influenced by the managerial Vida Sherwin; certainly she sounded as though she was selling culture. But she dropped it when she sat on the couch, her chin in her hands, a volume of Yeats on her knees, and read aloud.

Instantly she was released from the homely comfort of a prairie town. She was in the world of lonely things—the flutter of twilight linnets, the aching call of gulls along a shore to which the netted foam crept out of darkness, the island of Aengus and the elder gods and the eternal glories that never were, tall kings and women girdled with crusted gold, the woful incessant chanting and the——

"Heh-cha-cha!" coughed Dr. Kennicott. She stopped. She remembered that he was the sort of person who chewed tobacco. She glared, while he uneasily petitioned, "That's great stuff. Study it in college?

I like poetry fine—James Whitcomb Riley and some of Longfellow—this 'Hiawatha.' Gosh, I wish I could appreciate that highbrow art stuff. But I guess I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks."

With pity for his bewilderment, and a certain desire to giggle, she consoled him, "Then let's try some Tennyson. You've read him?"

"Tennyson? You bet. Read him in school. There's that:

> And let there be no (what is it?) of farewell
> When I put out to sea,
> But let the——

Well, all of it but——Oh, sure! And there's that 'I met a little country boy who——' I don't remember exactly how it goes, but the chorus ends up, 'We are seven.'"

"Yes. Well——Shall we try 'The Idylls of the King?' They're so full of color."

"Go to it. Shoot." But he hastened to shelter himself behind a cigar.

She was not transported to Camelot. She read with an eye cocked on him, and when she saw how much he was suffering she ran to him, kissed his forehead, cried, "You poor forced tube-rose that wants to be a decent turnip!"

"Look here now, that ain't——"

"Anyway, I sha'n't torture you any longer."

She could not quite give up. She read Kipling, with a great deal of emphasis:

There's a REGIMENT a-COMING down the GRAND Trunk ROAD.

He tapped his foot to the rhythm; he looked normal and reassured. But when he complimented her, "That was fine. I don't know but what you can elocute just as good as Ella Stowbody," she banged the book and suggested that they were not too late for the nine o'clock show at the movies.

That was her last effort to harvest the April wind, to teach divine unhappiness by a correspondence course, to buy the lilies of Avalon and the sunsets of Cockaigne in tin cans at Ole Jenson's Grocery.

But the fact is that at the motion-pictures she discovered herself laughing as heartily as Kennicott at the humor of an actor who stuffed spaghetti down a woman's evening frock. For a second she loathed her laughter; mourned for the day when on her hill by the Mississippi she had walked the battlements with queens. But the celebrated cinema jester's conceit of dropping toads into a soup-plate flung her into unwilling tittering, and the afterglow faded, the dead queens fled through darkness.

VI

She went to the Jolly Seventeen's afternoon bridge. She had learned the elements of the game from the Sam Clarks. She played quietly and reasonably badly. She had no opinions on anything more polemic than woolen union-suits, a topic on which Mrs. Howland discoursed for five minutes. She smiled frequently, and was the complete canary-bird in her manner of thanking the hostess, Mrs. Dave Dyer.

Her only anxious period was during the conference on husbands.

The young matrons discussed the intimacies of domesticity with a frankness and a minuteness which dismayed Carol. Juanita Haydock communicated Harry's method of shaving, and his interest in deer-shooting. Mrs. Gougerling reported fully, and with some

irritation, her husband's inappreciation of liver and bacon. Maud Dyer chronicled Dave's digestive disorders; quoted a recent bedtime controversy with him in regard to Christian Science, socks and the sewing of buttons upon vests; announced that she "simply wasn't going to stand his always pawing girls when he went and got crazy-jealous if a man just danced with her"; and rather more than sketched Dave's varieties of kisses.

So meekly did Carol give attention, so obviously was she at last desirous of being one of them, that they looked on her fondly, and encouraged her to give such details of her honeymoon as might be of interest. She was embarrassed rather than resentful. She deliberately misunderstood. She talked of Kennicott's overshoes and medical ideals till they were thoroughly bored. They regarded her as agreeable but green.

Till the end she labored to satisfy the inquisition. She bubbled at Juanita, the president of the club, that she wanted to entertain them. "Only," she said, "I don't know that I can give you any refreshments as nice as Mrs. Dyer's salad, or that simply delicious angel's-food we had at your house, dear."

"Fine! We need a hostess for the seventeenth of March. Wouldn't it be awfully original if you made it a St. Patrick's Day bridge! I'll be tickled to death to help you with it. I'm glad you've learned to play bridge. At first I didn't hardly know if you were going to like Gopher Prairie. Isn't it dandy that you've settled down to being homey with us!

Maybe we aren't as highbrow as the Cities, but we do have the daisiest times and—oh, we go swimming in summer, and dances and—oh, lots of good times. If folks will just take us as we are, I think we're a pretty good bunch!"

"I'm sure of it. Thank you so much for the idea about having a St. Patrick's Day bridge."

"Oh, that's nothing. I always think the Jolly Seventeen are so good at original ideas. If you knew these other towns Wakamin and Joralemon and all, you'd find out and realize

that G. P. is the liveliest, smartest town in the state. Did you know that Percy Bresnahan, the famous auto manufacturer, came from here and——Yes, I think that a St. Patrick's Day party would be awfully cunning and original, and yet not too queer or freaky or anything."

CHAPTER XI

I

SHE had often been invited to the weekly meetings of the Thanatopsis, the women's study club, but she had put it off. The Thanatopsis was, Vida Sherwin promised, "such a cozy group, and yet it puts you in touch with all the intellectual thoughts that are going on everywhere."

Early in March Mrs. Westlake, wife of the veteran physician, marched into Carol's living-room like an amiable old pussy and suggested, "My dear, you really must come to the Thanatopsis this afternoon. Mrs. Dawson is going to be leader and the poor soul is frightened to death. She wanted me to get you to come. She says she's sure you will brighten up the meeting with your knowledge of books and writings. (English poetry is our topic today.) So shoo! Put on your coat!"

"English poetry? Really? I'd love to go. I didn't realize you were reading poetry."

"Oh, we're not so slow!"

Mrs. Luke Dawson, wife of the richest man in town, gaped at them piteously when they appeared. Her expensive frock of beaver-colored satin with rows, plasters, and pendants of solemn brown beads was intended for a woman twice her size. She stood wringing her hands in front of nineteen folding chairs, in her front parlor with its faded photograph of

Minnehaha Falls in 1890, its "colored enlargement" of Mr. Dawson, its bulbous lamp painted with sepia cows and mountains and standing on a mortuary marble column.

She creaked, "O Mrs. Kennicott, I'm in such a fix. I'm supposed to lead the discussion, and I wondered would you come and help?"

"What poet do you take up today?" demanded Carol, in her library tone of "What book do you wish to take out?"

"Why, the English ones."

"Not all of them?"

"W-why yes. We're learning all of European Literature this year. The club gets such a nice magazine, Culture Hints, and we follow its programs. Last year our subject was Men and Women of the Bible, and next year we'll probably take up Furnishings and China. My, it does make a body hustle to keep up with all these new culture subjects, but it is improving. So will you help us with the discussion today?"

On her way over Carol had decided to use the Thanatopsis as the tool with which to liberalize the town. She had immediately conceived enormous enthusiasm; she had chanted, "These are the real people. When the housewives, who bear the burdens, are interested in poetry, it means something. I'll work with them—for them—anything!"

Her enthusiasm had become watery even before thirteen women resolutely removed their overshoes, sat down neatly, ate peppermints, dusted their fingers, folded their hands, composed their lower thoughts, and invited the naked muse of poetry to deliver her most improving message. They had greeted Carol affectionately, and she tried to be a daughter to them. But she felt insecure. Her chair was out in the open, exposed to their gaze, and it was a hard-slatted, quivery, slippery church-parlor chair, likely to collapse publicly and

without warning. It was impossible to sit on it without folding the hands and listening piously.

She wanted to kick the chair and run. It would make a magnificent clatter.

She saw that Vida Sherwin was watching her. She pinched her wrist, as though she were a noisy child in church, and when she was decent and cramped again, she listened.

Mrs. Dawson opened the meeting by sighing, "I'm sure I'm glad to see you all here today, and I understand that the ladies have prepared a number of very interesting papers, this is such an interesting subject, the poets, they have been an inspiration for higher thought, in fact wasn't it Reverend Benlick who said that some of the poets have been as much an inspiration as a good many of the ministers, and so we shall be glad to hear——"

The poor lady smiled neuralgically, panted with fright, scrabbled about the small oak table to find her eye-glasses, and continued, "We will first have the pleasure of hearing Mrs. Jenson on the subject 'Shakespeare and Milton.'"

Mrs. Ole Jenson said that Shakespeare was born in 1564 and died 1616. He lived in London, England, and in Stratford on-Avon, which many American tourists loved to visit, a lovely town with many curios and old houses well worth examination. Many people believed that Shakespeare was the greatest play-wright who ever lived, also a fine poet. Not much was known about his life, but after all that did not really make so much difference, because they loved to read his numerous plays, several of the best known of which she would now criticize.

Perhaps the best known of his plays was "The Merchant of Venice," having a beautiful love story and a fine appreciation of a woman's brains, which a woman's club, even those who did not care to commit themselves on the question of suffrage, ought to appreciate. (Laughter.) Mrs. Jenson was sure that she, for one, would love to be like Portia. The play

was about a Jew named Shylock, and he didn't want his daughter to marry a Venice gentleman named Antonio——

Mrs. Leonard Warren, a slender, gray, nervous woman, president of the Thanatopsis and wife of the Congregational pastor, reported the birth and death dates of Byron, Scott, Moore, Burns; and wound up:

"Burns was quite a poor boy and he did not enjoy the advantages we enjoy today, except for the advantages of the fine old Scotch kirk where he heard the Word of God preached more fearlessly than even in the finest big brick churches in the big and so-called advanced cities of today, but he did not have our educational advantages and Latin and the other treasures of the mind so richly strewn before the, alas, too ofttimes inattentive feet of our youth who do not always sufficiently appreciate the privileges freely granted to every American boy rich or poor. Burns had to work hard and was sometimes led by evil companionship into low habits. But it is morally instructive to know that he was a good student and educated himself, in striking contrast to the loose ways and so-called aristocratic society-life of Lord Byron, on which I have just spoken. And certainly though the lords and earls of his day may have looked down upon Burns as a humble person, many of us have greatly enjoyed his pieces about the mouse and other rustic subjects, with their message of humble beauty—I am so sorry I have not got the time to quote some of them."

Mrs. George Edwin Mott gave ten minutes to Tennyson and Browning.

Mrs. Nat Hicks, a wry-faced, curiously sweet woman, so awed by her betters that Carol wanted to kiss her, completed the day's grim task by a paper on "Other Poets." The other poets worthy of consideration were Coleridge, Wordsworth Shelley, Gray, Mrs. Hemans, and Kipling.

Miss Ella Stowbody obliged with a recital of "The Recessional" and extracts from "Lalla Rookh." By request, she gave "An Old Sweetheart of Mine" as encore.

Gopher Prairie had finished the poets. It was ready for the next week's labor: English Fiction and Essays.

Mrs. Dawson besought, "Now we will have a discussion of the papers, and I am sure we shall all enjoy hearing from one who we hope to have as a new member, Mrs. Kennicott, who with her splendid literary training and all should be able to give us many pointers and—many helpful pointers."

Carol had warned herself not to be so "beastly supercilious." She had insisted that in the belated quest of these work-stained women was an aspiration which ought to stir her tears. "But they're so self-satisfied. They think they're doing Burns a favor. They don't believe they have a 'belated quest.' They're sure that they have culture salted and hung up." It was out of this stupor of doubt that Mrs. Dawson's summons roused her. She was in a panic. How could she speak without hurting them?

Mrs. Champ Perry leaned over to stroke her hand and whisper, "You look tired, dearie. Don't you talk unless you want to."

Affection flooded Carol; she was on her feet, searching for words and courtesies:

"The only thing in the way of suggestion——I know you are following a definite program, but I do wish that now you've had such a splendid introduction, instead of going on with some other subject next year you could return and take up the poets more in detail.

Especially actual quotations—even though their lives are so interesting and, as Mrs. Warren said, so morally instructive. And perhaps there are several poets not mentioned today whom it might be worth while considering—Keats, for instance, and Matthew

Arnold and Rossetti and Swinburne. Swinburne would be such a—well, that is, such a contrast to life as we all enjoy it in our beautiful Middle-west——"

She saw that Mrs. Leonard Warren was not with her. She captured her by innocently continuing:

"Unless perhaps Swinburne tends to be, uh, more outspoken than you, than we really like. What do you think, Mrs. Warren?"

The pastor's wife decided, "Why, you've caught my very thoughts, Mrs. Kennicott. Of course I have never READ Swinburne, but years ago, when he was in vogue, I remember Mr. Warren saying that Swinburne (or was it Oscar Wilde? but anyway:) he said that though many so-called intellectual people posed and pretended to find beauty in Swinburne, there can never be genuine beauty without the message from the heart. But at the same time I do think you have an excellent idea, and though we have talked about Furnishings and China as the probable subject for next year, I believe that it would be nice if the program committee would try to work in another day entirely devoted to English poetry! In fact, Madame Chairman, I so move you."

When Mrs. Dawson's coffee and angel's-food had helped them to recover from the depression caused by thoughts of Shakespeare's death they all told Carol that it was a pleasure to have her with them. The membership committee retired to the sitting-room for three minutes and elected her a member.

And she stopped being patronizing.

She wanted to be one of them. They were so loyal and kind. It was they who would carry out her aspiration. Her campaign against village sloth was actually begun! On what specific reform should she first loose her army? During the gossip after the meeting Mrs. George Edwin Mott remarked that the city hall seemed inadequate for the splendid

modern Gopher Prairie. Mrs. Nat Hicks timidly wished that the young people could have free dances there—the lodge dances were so exclusive. The city hall. That was it! Carol hurried home.

She had not realized that Gopher Prairie was a city. From Kennicott she discovered that it was legally organized with a mayor and city-council and wards. She was delighted by the simplicity of voting one's self a metropolis. Why not?

She was a proud and patriotic citizen, all evening.

II

She examined the city hall, next morning. She had remembered it only as a bleak inconspicuousness. She found it a liver-colored frame coop half a block from Main Street. The front was an unrelieved wall of clapboards and dirty windows. It had an unobstructed view of a vacant lot and Nat Hicks's tailor shop. It was larger than the carpenter shop beside it, but not so well built.

No one was about. She walked into the corridor. On one side was the municipal court, like a country school; on the other, the room of the volunteer fire company, with a Ford hose-cart and the ornamental helmets used in parades, at the end of the hall, a filthy two-cell jail, now empty but smelling of ammonia and ancient sweat. The whole second story was a large unfinished room littered with piles of folding chairs, a lime-crusted mortar-mixing box, and the skeletons of Fourth of July floats covered with decomposing plaster shields and faded red, white, and blue bunting. At the end was an abortive stage. The room was large enough for the community dances which Mrs. Nat Hicks advocated. But Carol was after something bigger than dances.

In the afternoon she scampered to the public library.

The library was open three afternoons and four evenings a week. It was housed in an old dwelling, sufficient but unattractive. Carol caught herself picturing pleasanter reading-rooms, chairs for children, an art collection, a librarian young enough to experiment.

She berated herself, "Stop this fever of reforming everything! I WILL be satisfied with the library! The city hall is enough for a beginning. And it's really an excellent library. It's—it isn't so bad. . . . Is it possible that I am to find dishonesties and stupidity in every human activity I encounter? In schools and business and government and everything? Is there never any contentment, never any rest?"

She shook her head as though she were shaking off water, and hastened into the library, a young, light, amiable presence, modest in unbuttoned fur coat, blue suit, fresh organdy collar, and tan boots roughened from scuffling snow.

Miss Villets stared at her, and Carol purred, "I was so sorry not to see you at the Thanatopsis yesterday. Vida said you might come."

"Oh. You went to the Thanatopsis. Did you enjoy it?"

"So much. Such good papers on the poets." Carol lied resolutely. "But I did think they should have had you give one of the papers on poetry!"

"Well——Of course I'm not one of the bunch that seem to have the time to take and run the club, and if they prefer to have papers on literature by other ladies who have no literary training—after all, why should I complain? What am I but a city employee!"

"You're not! You're the one person that does—that does—oh, you do so much. Tell me, is there, uh——Who are the people who control the club?"

Miss Villets emphatically stamped a date in the front of "Frank on the Lower Mississippi" for a small flaxen boy, glowered at him as though she were stamping a warning on his brain, and sighed:

"I wouldn't put myself forward or criticize any one for the world, and Vida is one of my best friends, and such a splendid teacher, and there is no one in town more advanced and interested in all movements, but I must say that no matter who the president or the committees are, Vida Sherwin seems to be behind them all the time, and though she is always telling me about what she is pleased to call my 'fine work in the library,' I notice that I'm not often called on for papers …

… though Mrs. Lyman Cass once volunteered and told me that she thought my paper on 'The Cathedrals of England' was the most interesting paper we had, the year we took up English and French travel and architecture. But——And of course Mrs. Mott and Mrs. Warren are very important in the club, as you might expect of the wives of the superintendent of schools and the Congregational pastor, and indeed they are both very cultured, but——No, you may regard me as entirely unimportant. I'm sure what I say doesn't matter a bit!"

"You're much too modest, and I'm going to tell Vida so, and, uh, I wonder if you can give me just a teeny bit of your time and show me where the magazine files are kept?"

She had won. She was profusely escorted to a room like a grandmother's attic, where she discovered periodicals devoted to house-decoration and town-planning, with a six-year file of the National Geographic. Miss Villets blessedly left her alone. Humming, fluttering pages with delighted fingers, Carol sat cross-legged on the floor, the magazines in heaps about her.

She found pictures of New England streets: the dignity of Falmouth, the charm of Concord, Stockbridge and Farmington and Hillhouse Avenue. The fairy-book suburb of Forest Hills on Long Island. Devonshire cottages and Essex manors and a Yorkshire High Street and Port Sunlight. The Arab village of Djeddah—an intricately chased jewel-box. A town in California which had changed itself from the barren brick fronts and slatternly

frame sheds of a Main Street to a way which led the eye down a vista of arcades and gardens.

Assured that she was not quite mad in her belief that a small American town might be lovely, as well as useful in buying wheat and selling plows, she sat brooding, her thin fingers playing a tattoo on her cheeks. She saw in Gopher Prairie a Georgian city hall: warm brick walls with white shutters, a fanlight, a wide hall and curving stair. She saw it the common home and inspiration not only of the town but of the country about. It should contain the court-room (she couldn't get herself to put in a jail), public library, a collection of excellent prints, rest-room and model kitchen for farmwives, theater, lecture room, free community ballroom, farm-bureau, gymnasium. Forming about it and influenced by it, as mediaeval villages gathered about the castle, she saw a new Georgian town as graceful and beloved as Annapolis or that bowery Alexandria to which Washington rode.

All this the Thanatopsis Club was to accomplish with no difficulty whatever, since its several husbands were the controllers of business and politics. She was proud of herself for this practical view.

She had taken only half an hour to change a wire-fenced potato-plot into a walled rose-garden. She hurried out to apprize Mrs. Leonard Warren, as president of the Thanatopsis, of the miracle which had been worked.

III

At a quarter to three Carol had left home; at half-past four she had created the Georgian town; at a quarter to five she was in the dignified poverty of the Congregational parsonage, her enthusiasm pattering upon Mrs. Leonard Warren like summer rain upon an old gray roof;

at two minutes to five a town of demure courtyards and welcoming dormer windows had been erected, and at two minutes past five the entire town was as flat as Babylon.

Erect in a black William and Mary chair against gray and speckly-brown volumes of sermons and Biblical commentaries and Palestine geographies upon long pine shelves, her neat black shoes firm on a rag-rug, herself as correct and low-toned as her background, Mrs. Warren listened without comment till Carol was quite through, then answered delicately:

"Yes, I think you draw a very nice picture of what might easily come to pass—some day. I have no doubt that such villages will be found on the prairie—some day. But if I might make just the least little criticism: it seems to me that you are wrong in supposing either that the city hall would be the proper start, or that the Thanatopsis would be the right instrument. After all, it's the churches, isn't it, that are the real heart of the community. As you may possibly know, my husband is prominent in Congregational circles all through the state for his advocacy of church-union. He hopes to see all the evangelical denominations joined in one strong body, opposing Catholicism and Christian Science, and properly guiding all movements that make for morality and prohibition. Here, the combined churches could afford a splendid club-house, maybe a stucco and half-timber building with gargoyles and all sorts of pleasing decorations on it, which, it seems to me, would be lots better to impress the ordinary class of people than just a plain old-fashioned colonial house, such as you describe. And that would be the proper center for all educational and pleasurable activities, instead of letting them fall into the hands of the politicians."

"I don't suppose it will take more than thirty or forty years for the churches to get together?" Carol said innocently.

"Hardly that long even; things are moving so rapidly. So it would be a mistake to make any other plans."

Carol did not recover her zeal till two days after, when she tried Mrs. George Edwin Mott, wife of the superintendent of schools.

Mrs. Mott commented, "Personally, I am terribly busy with dressmaking and having the seamstress in the house and all, but it would be splendid to have the other members of the Thanatopsis take up the question. Except for one thing: First and foremost, we must have a new schoolbuilding. Mr. Mott says they are terribly cramped."

Carol went to view the old building. The grades and the high school were combined in a damp yellow-brick structure with the narrow windows of an antiquated jail—a hulk which expressed hatred and compulsory training. She conceded Mrs. Mott's demand so violently that for two days she dropped her own campaign. Then she built the school and city hall together, as the center of the reborn town.

She ventured to the lead-colored dwelling of Mrs. Dave Dyer. Behind the mask of winter-stripped vines and a wide porch only a foot above the ground, the cottage was so impersonal that Carol could never visualize it. Nor could she remember anything that was inside it. But Mrs. Dyer was personal enough.

With Carol, Mrs. Howland, Mrs. McGanum, and Vida Sherwin she was a link between the Jolly Seventeen and the serious Thanatopsis (in contrast to Juanita Haydock, who unnecessarily boasted of being a "lowbrow" and publicly stated that she would "see herself in jail before she'd write any darned old club papers"). Mrs. Dyer was superfeminine in the kimono in which she received Carol. Her skin was fine, pale, soft, suggesting a weak voluptuousness. At afternoon-coffees she had been rude but now she addressed Carol as "dear," and insisted on being called Maud. Carol did not quite know

why she was uncomfortable in this talcum-powder atmosphere, but she hastened to get into the fresh air of her plans.

Maud Dyer granted that the city hall wasn't "so very nice," yet, as Dave said, there was no use doing anything about it till they received an appropriation from the state and combined a new city hall with a national guard armory. Dave had given verdict, "What these mouthy youngsters that hang around the pool-room need is universal military training. Make men of 'em."

Mrs. Dyer removed the new schoolbuilding from the city hall:

"Oh, so Mrs. Mott has got you going on her school craze! She's been dinging at that till everybody's sick and tired. What she really wants is a big office for her dear bald-headed Gawge to sit around and look important in. Of course I admire Mrs. Mott, and I'm very fond of her, she's so brainy, even if she does try to butt in and run the Thanatopsis, but I must say we're sick of her nagging. The old building was good enough for us when we were kids! I hate these would-be women politicians, don't you?"

IV

The first week of March had given promise of spring and stirred Carol with a thousand desires for lakes and fields and roads. The snow was gone except for filthy woolly patches under trees, the thermometer leaped in a day from wind-bitten chill to itchy warmth. As soon as Carol was convinced that even in this imprisoned North, spring could exist again, the snow came down as abruptly as a paper storm in a theater; the northwest gale flung it up in a half blizzard; and with her hope of a glorified town went hope of summer meadows.

But a week later, though the snow was everywhere in slushy heaps, the promise was unmistakable. By the invisible hints in air and sky and earth which had aroused her every

year through ten thousand generations she knew that spring was coming. It was not a scorching, hard, dusty day like the treacherous intruder of a week before, but soaked with languor, softened with a milky light. Rivulets were hurrying in each alley; a calling robin appeared by magic on the crab-apple tree in the Howlands' yard. Everybody chuckled, "Looks like winter is going," and "This 'll bring the frost out of the roads—have the autos out pretty soon now—wonder what kind of bass-fishing we'll get this summer—ought to be good crops this year."

Each evening Kennicott repeated, "We better not take off our Heavy Underwear or the storm windows too soon—might be 'nother spell of cold—got to be careful 'bout catching cold—wonder if the coal will last through?"

The expanding forces of life within her choked the desire for reforming. She trotted through the house, planning the spring cleaning with Bea.

When she attended her second meeting of the Thanatopsis she said nothing about remaking the town. She listened respectably to statistics on Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Scott, Hardy, Lamb, De Quincey, and Mrs. Humphry Ward, who, it seemed, constituted the writers of English Fiction and Essays.

Not till she inspected the rest-room did she again become a fanatic. She had often glanced at the store-building which had been turned into a refuge in which farmwives could wait while their husbands transacted business. She had heard Vida Sherwin and Mrs. Warren caress the virtue of the Thanatopsis in establishing the rest-room and in sharing with the city council the expense of maintaining it. But she had never entered it till this March day.

She went in impulsively; nodded at the matron, a plump worthy widow named Nodelquist, and at a couple of farm-women who were meekly rocking. The rest-room resembled a second-hand store. It was furnished with discarded patent rockers, lopsided

reed chairs, a scratched pine table, a gritty straw mat, old steel engravings of milkmaids being morally amorous under willow-trees, faded chromos of roses and fish, and a kerosene stove for warming lunches. The front window was darkened by torn net curtains and by a mound of geraniums and rubber-plants.

While she was listening to Mrs. Nodelquist's account of how many thousands of farmers' wives used the rest-room every year, and how much they "appreciated the kindness of the ladies in providing them with this lovely place, and all free," she thought, "Kindness nothing! The kind-ladies' husbands get the farmers' trade. This is mere commercial accommodation.

And it's horrible. It ought to be the most charming room in town, to comfort women sick of prairie kitchens. Certainly it ought to have a clear window, so that they can see the metropolitan life go by. Some day I'm going to make a better rest-room—a club-room. Why! I've already planned that as part of my Georgian town hall!"

So it chanced that she was plotting against the peace of the Thanatopsis at her third meeting (which covered Scandinavian, Russian, and Polish Literature, with remarks by Mrs. Leonard Warren on the sinful paganism of the Russian so-called church). Even before the entrance of the coffee and hot rolls Carol seized on Mrs. Champ Perry, the kind and ample-bosomed pioneer woman who gave historic dignity to the modern matrons of the Thanatopsis. She poured out her plans. Mrs. Perry nodded and stroked Carol's hand, but at the end she sighed:

"I wish I could agree with you, dearie. I'm sure you're one of the Lord's anointed (even if we don't see you at the Baptist Church as often as we'd like to)! But I'm afraid you're too tender-hearted. When Champ and I came here we teamed-it with an ox-cart from Sauk Centre to Gopher Prairie, and there was nothing here then but a stockade and a few soldiers and some log cabins. When we wanted salt pork and gunpowder, we sent out a

man on horseback, and probably he was shot dead by the Injuns before he got back. We ladies—of course we were all farmers at first—we didn't expect any rest-room in those days. My, we'd have thought the one they have now was simply elegant! My house was roofed with hay and it leaked something terrible when it rained—only dry place was under a shelf.

"And when the town grew up we thought the new city hall was real fine. And I don't see any need for dance-halls. Dancing isn't what it was, anyway. We used to dance modest, and we had just as much fun as all these young folks do now with their terrible Turkey Trots and hugging and all. But if they must neglect the Lord's injunction that young girls ought to be modest, then I guess they manage pretty well at the K. P. Hall and the Oddfellows', even if some of tie lodges don't always welcome a lot of these foreigners and hired help to all their dances. And I certainly don't see any need of a farm-bureau or this domestic science demonstration you talk about. In my day the boys learned to farm by honest sweating, and every gal could cook, or her ma learned her how across her knee! Besides, ain't there a county agent at Wakamin? He comes here once a fortnight, maybe. That's enough monkeying with this scientific farming—Champ says there's nothing to it anyway.

"And as for a lecture hall—haven't we got the churches? Good deal better to listen to a good old-fashioned sermon than a lot of geography and books and things that nobody needs to know—more 'n enough heathen learning right here in the Thanatopsis. And as for trying to make a whole town in this Colonial architecture you talk about——I do love nice things; to this day I run ribbons into my petticoats, even if Champ Perry does laugh at me, the old villain! But just the same I don't believe any of us old-timers the town that we worked so hard to build being tore down to make a place that wouldn't look like nothing but some Dutch story-book and not a bit like the place we loved. And don't you

think it's sweet now? All the trees and lawns? And such comfy houses, and hot-water heat and electric lights and telephones and cement walks and everything?

Why, I thought everybody from the Twin Cities always said it was such a beautiful town!"

Carol forswore herself; declared that Gopher Prairie had the color of Algiers and the gaiety of Mardi Gras.

Yet the next afternoon she was pouncing on Mrs. Lyman Cass, the hook-nosed consort of the owner of the flour-mill.

Mrs. Cass's parlor belonged to the crammed-Victorian school, as Mrs. Luke Dawson's belonged to the bare-Victorian. It was furnished on two principles: First, everything must resemble something else. A rocker had a back like a lyre, a near-leather seat imitating tufted cloth, and arms like Scotch Presbyterian lions; with knobs, scrolls, shields, and spear-points on unexpected portions of the chair. The second principle of the crammed-Victorian school was that every inch of the interior must be filled with useless objects.

The walls of Mrs. Cass's parlor were plastered with "hand-painted" pictures, "buckeye" pictures, of birch-trees, news-boys, puppies, and church-steeples on Christmas Eve; with a plaque depicting the Exposition Building in Minneapolis, burnt-wood portraits of Indian chiefs of no tribe in particular, a pansy-decked poetic motto, a Yard of Roses, and the banners of the educational institutions attended by the Casses' two sons—Chicopee Falls Business College and McGilllcuddy University.

One small square table contained a card-receiver of painted china with a rim of wrought and gilded lead, a Family Bible, Grant's Memoirs, the latest novel by Mrs. Gene Stratton Porter, a wooden model of a Swiss chalet which was also a bank for dimes, a polished abalone shell holding one black-headed pin and one empty spool, a velvet pin-cushion in

a gilded metal slipper with "Souvenir of Troy, N. Y." stamped on the toe, and an unexplained red glass dish which had warts.

Mrs. Cass's first remark was, "I must show you all my pretty things and art objects."

She piped, after Carol's appeal:

"I see. You think the New England villages and Colonial houses are so much more cunning than these Middlewestern towns. I'm glad you feel that way. You'll be interested to know I was born in Vermont."

"And don't you think we ought to try to make Gopher Prai——"

"My gracious no! We can't afford it. Taxes are much too high as it is. We ought to retrench, and not let the city council spend another cent. Uh——Don't you think that was a grand paper Mrs. Westlake read about Tolstoy? I was so glad she pointed out how all his silly socialistic ideas failed."

What Mrs. Cass said was what Kennicott said, that evening. Not in twenty years would the council propose or Gopher Prairie vote the funds for a new city hall.

V

Carol had avoided exposing her plans to Vida Sherwin. She was shy of the big-sister manner; Vida would either laugh at her or snatch the idea and change it to suit herself. But there was no other hope. When Vida came in to tea Carol sketched her Utopia.

Vida was soothing but decisive:

"My dear, you're all off. I would like to see it: a real gardeny place to shut out the gales. But it can't be done. What could the clubwomen accomplish?"

"Their husbands are the most important men in town. They ARE the town!"

"But the town as a separate unit is not the husband of the Thanatopsis. If you knew the trouble we had in getting the city council to spend the money and cover the pumping-station with vines! Whatever you may think of Gopher Prairie women, they're twice as progressive as the men."

"But can't the men see the ugliness?"

"They don't think it's ugly. And how can you prove it? Matter of taste. Why should they like what a Boston architect likes?"

"What they like is to sell prunes!"

"Well, why not? Anyway, the point is that you have to work from the inside, with what we have, rather than from the outside, with foreign ideas. The shell ought not to be forced on the spirit. It can't be! The bright shell has to grow out of the spirit, and express it. That means waiting.

If we keep after the city council for another ten years they MAY vote the bonds for a new school."

"I refuse to believe that if they saw it the big men would be too tight-fisted to spend a few dollars each for a building—think!—dancing and lectures and plays, all done co-operatively!"

"You mention the word 'co-operative' to the merchants and they'll lynch you! The one thing they fear more than mail-order houses is that farmers' co-operative movements may get started."

"The secret trails that lead to scared pocket-books! Always, in everything! And I don't have any of the fine melodrama of fiction: the dictagraphs and speeches by torchlight. I'm merely blocked by stupidity. Oh, I know I'm a fool. I dream of Venice, and I live in

Archangel and scold because the Northern seas aren't tender-colored. But at least they sha'n't keep me from loving Venice, and sometime I'll run away——All right. No more."

She flung out her hands in a gesture of renunciation.

VI

Early May; wheat springing up in blades like grass; corn and potatoes being planted; the land humming. For two days there had been steady rain. Even in town the roads were a furrowed welter of mud, hideous to view and difficult to cross. Main Street was a black swamp from curb to curb; on residence streets the grass parking beside the walks oozed gray water. It was prickly hot, yet the town was barren under the bleak sky. Softened neither by snow nor by waving boughs the houses squatted and scowled, revealed in their unkempt harshness.

As she dragged homeward Carol looked with distaste at her clay-loaded rubbers, the smeared hem of her skirt. She passed Lyman Cass's pinnacled, dark-red, hulking house. She waded a streaky yellow pool. This morass was not her home, she insisted. Her home, and her beautiful town, existed in her mind. They had already been created. The task was done. What she really had been questing was some one to share them with her. Vida would not; Kennicott could not.

Some one to share her refuge.

Suddenly she was thinking of Guy Pollock.

She dismissed him. He was too cautious. She needed a spirit as young and unreasonable as her own. And she would never find it. Youth would never come singing. She was beaten.

Yet that same evening she had an idea which solved the rebuilding of Gopher Prairie.

Within ten minutes she was jerking the old-fashioned bell-pull of Luke Dawson. Mrs. Dawson opened the door and peered doubtfully about the edge of it. Carol kissed her cheek, and frisked into the lugubrious sitting-room.

"Well, well, you're a sight for sore eyes!" chuckled Mr. Dawson, dropping his newspaper, pushing his spectacles back on his forehead.

"You seem so excited," sighed Mrs. Dawson.

"I am! Mr. Dawson, aren't you a millionaire?"

He cocked his head, and purred, "Well, I guess if I cashed in on all my securities and farm-holdings and my interests in iron on the Mesaba and in Northern timber and cut-over lands, I could push two million dollars pretty close, and I've made every cent of it by hard work and having the sense to not go out and spend every——"

"I think I want most of it from you!"

The Dawsons glanced at each other in appreciation of the jest; and he chirped, "You're worse than Reverend Benlick! He don't hardly ever strike me for more than ten dollars—at a time!"

"I'm not joking. I mean it! Your children in the Cities are grown-up and well-to-do. You don't want to die and leave your name unknown. Why not do a big, original thing? Why not rebuild the whole town? Get a great architect, and have him plan a town that would be suitable to the prairie. Perhaps he'd create some entirely new form of architecture. Then tear down all these shambling buildings——"

Mr. Dawson had decided that she really did mean it. He wailed, "Why, that would cost at least three or four million dollars!"

"But you alone, just one man, have two of those millions!"

"Me? Spend all my hard-earned cash on building houses for a lot of shiftless beggars that never had the sense to save their money? Not that I've ever been mean. Mama could always have a hired girl to do the work—when we could find one. But her and I have worked our fingers to the bone and—spend it on a lot of these rascals——?"

"Please! Don't be angry! I just mean—I mean——Oh, not spend all of it, of course, but if you led off the list, and the others came in, and if they heard you talk about a more attractive town——"

"Why now, child, you've got a lot of notions. Besides what's the matter with the town? Looks good to me. I've had people that have traveled all over the world tell me time and again that Gopher Prairie is the prettiest place in the Middlewest. Good enough for anybody. Certainly good enough for Mama and me. Besides! Mama and me are planning to go out to Pasadena and buy a bungalow and live there."

VII

She had met Miles Bjornstam on the street. For the second of welcome encounter this workman with the bandit mustache and the muddy overalls seemed nearer than any one else to the credulous youth which she was seeking to fight beside her, and she told him, as a cheerful anecdote, a little of her story.

He grunted, "I never thought I'd be agreeing with Old Man Dawson, the penny-pinching old land-thief—and a fine briber he is, too. But you got the wrong slant. You aren't one of the people—yet. You want to do something for the town. I don't! I want the town to do something for itself. We don't want old Dawson's money—not if it's a gift, with a string. We'll take it away from him, because it belongs to us. You got to get more iron and cussedness into you. Come join us cheerful bums, and some day—when we educate ourselves and quit being bums—we'll take things and run 'em straight."

He had changed from her friend to a cynical man in over alls. She could not relish the autocracy of "cheerful bums."

She forgot him as she tramped the outskirts of town.

She had replaced The city hall project by an entirely new and highly exhilarating thought of how little was done for these unpicturesque poor.

VIII

The spring of the plains is not a reluctant virgin but brazen and soon away. The mud roads of a few days ago are powdery dust and the puddles beside them have hardened into lozenges of black sleek earth like cracked patent leather.

Carol was panting as she crept to the meeting of the Thanatopsis program committee which was to decide the subject for next fall and winter.

Madam Chairman (Miss Ella Stowbody in an oyster-colored blouse) asked if there was any new business.

Carol rose. She suggested that the Thanatopsis ought to help the poor of the town. She was ever so correct and modern. She did not, she said, want charity for them, but a chance of self-help; an employment bureau, direction in washing babies and making pleasing stews, possibly a municipal fund for home-building. "What do you think of my plans, Mrs. Warren?" she concluded.

Speaking judiciously, as one related to the church by marriage, Mrs. Warren gave verdict:

"I'm sure we're all heartily in accord with Mrs. Kennicott in feeling that wherever genuine poverty is encountered, it is not only noblesse oblige but a joy to fulfil our duty to the less fortunate ones. But I must say it seems to me we should lose the whole point of the thing by not regarding it as charity.

Why, that's the chief adornment of the true Christian and the church! The Bible has laid it down for our guidance. 'Faith, Hope, and CHARITY,' it says, and, 'The poor ye have with ye always,' which indicates that there never can be anything to these so-called scientific schemes for abolishing charity, never! And isn't it better so? I should hate to think of a world in which we were deprived of all the pleasure of giving. Besides, if these shiftless folks realize they're getting charity, and not something to which they have a right, they're so much more grateful."

"Besides," snorted Miss Ella Stowbody, "they've been fooling you, Mrs. Kennicott. There isn't any real poverty here. Take that Mrs. Steinhof you speak of: I send her our washing whenever there's too much for our hired girl—I must have sent her ten dollars' worth the past year alone! I'm sure Papa would never approve of a city home-building fund. Papa says these folks are fakers. Especially all these tenant farmers that pretend they have so much trouble getting seed and machinery. Papa says they simply won't pay their debts. He says he's sure he hates to foreclose mortgages, but it's the only way to make them respect the law."

"And then think of all the clothes we give these people!" said Mrs. Jackson Elder.

Carol intruded again. "Oh yes. The clothes. I was going to speak of that. Don't you think that when we give clothes to the poor, if we do give them old ones, we ought to mend them first and make them as presentable as we can? Next Christmas when the Thanatopsis makes its distribution, wouldn't it be jolly if we got together and sewed on the clothes, and trimmed hats, and made them——"

"Heavens and earth, they have more time than we have! They ought to be mighty good and grateful to get anything, no matter what shape it's in. I know I'm not going to sit and sew for that lazy Mrs. Vopni, with all I've got to do!" snapped Ella Stowbody.

They were glaring at Carol. She reflected that Mrs. Vopni, whose husband had been killed by a train, had ten children.

But Mrs. Mary Ellen Wilks was smiling. Mrs. Wilks was the proprietor of Ye Art Shoppe and Magazine and Book Store, and the reader of the small Christian Science church. She made it all clear:

"If this class of people had an understanding of Science and that we are the children of God and nothing can harm us, they wouldn't be in error and poverty."

Mrs. Jackson Elder confirmed, "Besides, it strikes me the club is already doing enough, with tree-planting and the anti-fly campaign and the responsibility for the rest-room—to say nothing of the fact that we've talked of trying to get the railroad to put in a park at the station!"

"I think so too!" said Madam Chairman. She glanced uneasily at Miss Sherwin. "But what do you think, Vida?"

Vida smiled tactfully at each of the committee, and announced, "Well, I don't believe we'd better start anything more right now. But it's been a privilege to hear Carol's dear generous ideas, hasn't it! Oh! There is one thing we must decide on at once. We must get together and oppose any move on the part of the Minneapolis clubs to elect another State Federation president from the Twin Cities.

And this Mrs. Edgar Potbury they're putting forward—I know there are people who think she's a bright interesting speaker, but I regard her as very shallow. What do you say to my writing to the Lake Ojibawasha Club, telling them that if their district will support Mrs. Warren for second vice-president, we'll support their Mrs. Hagelton (and such a dear, lovely, cultivated woman, too) for president."

"Yes! We ought to show up those Minneapolis folks!" Ella Stowbody said acidly. "And oh, by the way, we must oppose this movement of Mrs. Potbury's to have the state clubs come out definitely in favor of woman suffrage. Women haven't any place in politics. They would lose all their daintiness and charm if they became involved in these horried plots and log-rolling and all this awful political stuff about scandal and personalities and so on."

All—save one—nodded. They interrupted the formal business-meeting to discuss Mrs. Edgar Potbury's husband, Mrs. Potbury's income, Mrs. Potbury's sedan, Mrs. Potbury's residence, Mrs. Potbury's oratorical style, Mrs. Potbury's mandarin evening coat, Mrs. Potbury's coiffure, and Mrs. Potbury's altogether reprehensible influence on the State Federation of Women's Clubs.

Before the program committee adjourned they took three minutes to decide which of the subjects suggested by the magazine Culture Hints, Furnishings and China, or The Bible as Literature, would be better for the coming year. There was one annoying incident. Mrs. Dr. Kennicott interfered and showed off again. She commented, "Don't you think that we already get enough of the Bible in our churches and Sunday Schools?"

Mrs. Leonard Warren, somewhat out of order but much more out of temper, cried, "Well upon my word! I didn't suppose there was any one who felt that we could get enough of the Bible! I guess if the Grand Old Book has withstood the attacks of infidels for these two thousand years it is worth our SLIGHT consideration!"

"Oh, I didn't mean——" Carol begged. Inasmuch as she did mean, it was hard to be extremely lucid. "But I wish, instead of limiting ourselves either to the Bible, or to anecdotes about the Brothers Adam's wigs, which Culture Hints seems to regard as the significant point about furniture, we could study some of the really stirring ideas that are

springing up today—whether it's chemistry or anthropology or labor problems—the things that are going to mean so terribly much."

Everybody cleared her polite throat.

Madam Chairman inquired, "Is there any other discussion? Will some one make a motion to adopt the suggestion of Vida Sherwin—to take up Furnishings and China?"

It was adopted, unanimously.

"Checkmate!" murmured Carol, as she held up her hand.

Had she actually believed that she could plant a seed of liberalism in the blank wall of mediocrity? How had she fallen into the folly of trying to plant anything whatever in a wall so smooth and sun-glazed, and so satisfying to the happy sleepers within?

CHAPTER XII

ONE week of authentic spring, one rare sweet week of May, one tranquil moment between the blast of winter and the charge of summer. Daily Carol walked from town into flashing country hysteric with new life.

One enchanted hour when she returned to youth and a belief in the possibility of beauty.

She had walked northward toward the upper shore of Plover Lake, taking to the railroad track, whose directness and dryness make it the natural highway for pedestrians on the plains. She stepped from tie to tie, in long strides. At each road-crossing she had to crawl over a cattle-guard of sharpened timbers. She walked the rails, balancing with arms extended, cautious heel before toe. As she lost balance her body bent over, her arms revolved wildly, and when she toppled she laughed aloud.

The thick grass beside the track, coarse and prickly with many burnings, hid canary-yellow buttercups and the mauve petals and woolly sage-green coats of the pasque flowers. The branches of the kinnikinic brush were red and smooth as lacquer on a saki bowl.

She ran down the gravelly embankment, smiled at children gathering flowers in a little basket, thrust a handful of the soft pasque flowers into the bosom of her white blouse. Fields of springing wheat drew her from the straight propriety of the railroad and she crawled through the rusty barbed-wire fence. She followed a furrow between low wheat blades and a field of rye which showed silver lights as it flowed before the wind. She found a pasture by the lake.

So sprinkled was the pasture with rag-baby blossoms and the cottony herb of Indian tobacco that it spread out like a rare old Persian carpet of cream and rose and delicate green. Under her feet the rough grass made a pleasant crunching. Sweet winds blew from the sunny lake beside her, and small waves sputtered on the meadowy shore. She leaped a tiny creek bowered in pussy-willow buds. She was nearing a frivolous grove of birch and poplar and wild plum trees.

The poplar foliage had the downiness of a Corot arbor; the green and silver trunks were as candid as the birches, as slender and lustrous as the limbs of a Pierrot. The cloudy white blossoms of the plum trees filled the grove with a springtime mistiness which gave an illusion of distance.

She ran into the wood, crying out for joy of freedom regained after winter. Choke-cherry blossoms lured her from the outer sun-warmed spaces to depths of green stillness, where a submarine light came through the young leaves. She walked pensively along an abandoned road. She found a moccasin-flower beside a lichen-covered log. At the end of the road she saw the open acres—dipping rolling fields bright with wheat.

"I believe! The woodland gods still live! And out there, the great land. It's beautiful as the mountains. What do I care for Thanatopsises?"

She came out on the prairie, spacious under an arch of boldly cut clouds. Small pools glittered. Above a marsh red-winged blackbirds chased a crow in a swift melodrama of the air. On a hill was silhouetted a man following a drag. His horse bent its neck and plodded, content.

A path took her to the Corinth road, leading back to town. Dandelions glowed in patches amidst the wild grass by the way. A stream golloped through a concrete culvert beneath the road. She trudged in healthy weariness.

A man in a bumping Ford rattled up beside her, hailed, "Give you a lift, Mrs. Kennicott?"

"Thank you. It's awfully good of you, but I'm enjoying the walk."

"Great day, by golly. I seen some wheat that must of been five inches high. Well, so long."

She hadn't the dimmest notion who he was, but his greeting warmed her. This countryman gave her a companionship which she had never (whether by her fault or theirs or neither) been able to find in the matrons and commercial lords of the town.

Half a mile from town, in a hollow between hazelnut bushes and a brook, she discovered a gipsy encampment: a covered wagon, a tent, a bunch of pegged-out horses. A broad-shouldered man was squatted on his heels, holding a frying-pan over a camp-fire. He looked toward her. He was Miles Bjornstam.

"Well, well, what you doing out here?" he roared. "Come have a hunk o' bacon. Pete! Hey, Pete!"

A tousled person came from behind the covered wagon.

"Pete, here's the one honest-to-God lady in my bum town. Come on, crawl in and set a couple minutes, Mrs. Kennicott. I'm hiking off for all summer."

The Red Swede staggered up, rubbed his cramped knees, lumbered to the wire fence, held the strands apart for her. She unconsciously smiled at him as she went through. Her skirt caught on a barb; he carefully freed it.

Beside this man in blue flannel shirt, baggy khaki trousers, uneven suspenders, and vile felt hat, she was small and exquisite.

The surly Pete set out an upturned bucket for her. She lounged on it, her elbows on her knees. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"Just starting off for the summer, horse-trading." Bjornstam chuckled. His red mustache caught the sun. "Regular hoboes and public benefactors we are. Take a hike like this every once in a while. Sharks on horses. Buy 'em from farmers and sell 'em to others. We're honest—frequently. Great time. Camp along the road. I was wishing I had a chance to say good-by to you before I ducked out but——Say, you better come along with us."

"I'd like to."

"While you're playing mumblety-peg with Mrs. Lym Cass, Pete and me will be rambling across Dakota, through the Bad Lands, into the butte country, and when fall comes, we'll be crossing over a pass of the Big Horn Mountains, maybe, and camp in a snow-storm, quarter of a mile right straight up above a lake. Then in the morning we'll lie snug in our blankets and look up through the pines at an eagle. How'd it strike you? Heh? Eagle soaring and soaring all day—big wide sky——"

"Don't! Or I will go with you, and I'm afraid there might be some slight scandal. Perhaps some day I'll do it. Good-by."

Her hand disappeared in his blackened leather glove. From the turn in the road she waved at him. She walked on more soberly now, and she was lonely.

But the wheat and grass were sleek velvet under the sun-set; the prairie clouds were tawny gold; and she swung happily into Main Street.

II

Through the first days of June she drove with Kennicott on his calls. She identified him with the virile land; she admired him as she saw with what respect the farmers obeyed him. She was out in the early chill, after a hasty cup of coffee, reaching open country as the fresh sun came up in that unspoiled world. Meadow larks called from the tops of thin split fence-posts. The wild roses smelled clean.

As they returned in late afternoon the low sun was a solemnity of radial bands, like a heavenly fan of beaten gold; the limitless circle of the grain was a green sea rimmed with fog, and the willow wind-breaks were palmy isles.

Before July the close heat blanketed them. The tortured earth cracked. Farmers panted through corn-fields behind cultivators and the sweating flanks of horses. While she waited for Kennicott in the car, before a farmhouse, the seat burned her fingers and her head ached with the glare on fenders and hood.

A black thunder-shower was followed by a dust storm which turned the sky yellow with the hint of a coming tornado. Impalpable black dust far-borne from Dakota covered the inner sills of the closed windows.

The July heat was ever more stifling. They crawled along Main Street by day; they found it hard to sleep at night. They brought mattresses down to the living-room, and thrashed and turned by the open window. Ten times a night they talked of going out to soak themselves with the hose and wade through the dew, but they were too listless to take the

trouble. On cool evenings, when they tried to go walking, the gnats appeared in swarms which peppered their faces and caught in their throats.

She wanted the Northern pines, the Eastern sea, but Kennicott declared that it would be "kind of hard to get away, just NOW." The Health and Improvement Committee of the Thanatopsis asked her to take part in the anti-fly campaign, and she toiled about town persuading householders to use the fly-traps furnished by the club, or giving out money prizes to fly-swatting children. She was loyal enough but not ardent, and without ever quite intending to, she began to neglect the task as heat sucked at her strength.

Kennicott and she motored North and spent a week with his mother—that is, Carol spent it with his mother, while he fished for bass.

The great event was their purchase of a summer cottage, down on Lake Minniemashie.

Perhaps the most amiable feature of life in Gopher Prairie was the summer cottages. They were merely two-room shanties, with a seepage of broken-down chairs, peeling veneered tables, chromos pasted on wooden walls, and inefficient kerosene stoves. They were so thin-walled and so close together that you could—and did—hear a baby being spanked in the fifth cottage off.

But they were set among elms and lindens on a bluff which looked across the lake to fields of ripened wheat sloping up to green woods.

Here the matrons forgot social jealousies, and sat gossiping in gingham; or, in old bathing-suits, surrounded by hysterical children, they paddled for hours. Carol joined them; she ducked shrieking small boys, and helped babies construct sand-basins for unfortunate minnows. She liked Juanita Haydock and Maud Dyer when she helped them make picnic-supper for the men, who came motoring out from town each evening. She

was easier and more natural with them. In the debate as to whether there should be veal loaf or poached egg on hash, she had no chance to be heretical and oversensitive.

They danced sometimes, in the evening; they had a minstrel show, with Kennicott surprisingly good as end-man; always they were encircled by children wise in the lore of woodchucks and gophers and rafts and willow whistles.

If they could have continued this normal barbaric life Carol would have been the most enthusiastic citizen of Gopher Prairie. She was relieved to be assured that she did not want bookish conversation alone; that she did not expect the town to become a Bohemia. She was content now. She did not criticize.

But in September, when the year was at its richest, custom dictated that it was time to return to town; to remove the children from the waste occupation of learning the earth, and send them back to lessons about the number of potatoes which (in a delightful world untroubled by commission-houses or shortages in freight-cars) William sold to John. The women who had cheerfully gone bathing all summer looked doubtful when Carol begged, "Let's keep up an outdoor life this winter, let's slide and skate." Their hearts shut again till spring, and the nine months of cliques and radiators and dainty refreshments began all over.

III

Carol had started a salon.

Since Kennicott, Vida Sherwin, and Guy Pollock were her only lions, and since Kennicott would have preferred Sam Clark to all the poets and radicals in the entire world, her private and self-defensive clique did not get beyond one evening dinner for Vida and Guy, on her first wedding anniversary; and that dinner did not get beyond a controversy regarding Raymie Wutherspoon's yearnings.

Guy Pollock was the gentlest person she had found here. He spoke of her new jade and cream frock naturally, not jocosely; he held her chair for her as they sat down to dinner; and he did not, like Kennicott, interrupt her to shout, "Oh say, speaking of that, I heard a good story today." But Guy was incurably hermit. He sat late and talked hard, and did not come again.

Then she met Champ Perry in the post-office—and decided that in the history of the pioneers was the panacea for Gopher Prairie, for all of America. We have lost their sturdiness, she told herself. We must restore the last of the veterans to power and follow them on the backward path to the integrity of Lincoln, to the gaiety of settlers dancing in a saw-mill.

She read in the records of the Minnesota Territorial Pioneers that only sixty years ago, not so far back as the birth of her own father, four cabins had composed Gopher Prairie. The log stockade which Mrs. Champ Perry was to find when she trekked in was built afterward by the soldiers as a defense against the Sioux. The four cabins were inhabited by Maine Yankees who had come up the Mississippi to St. Paul and driven north over virgin prairie into virgin woods. They ground their own corn; the men-folks shot ducks and pigeons and prairie chickens; the new breakings yielded the turnip-like rutabagas, which they ate raw and boiled and baked and raw again. For treat they had wild plums and crab-apples and tiny wild strawberries.

Grasshoppers came darkening the sky, and in an hour ate the farmwife's garden and the farmer's coat. Precious horses painfully brought from Illinois, were drowned in bogs or stampeded by the fear of blizzards. Snow blew through the chinks of new-made cabins, and Eastern children, with flowery muslin dresses, shivered all winter and in summer were red and black with mosquito bites. Indians were everywhere; they camped in dooryards, stalked into kitchens to demand doughnuts, came with rifles across their backs into schoolhouses and begged to see the pictures in the geographies. Packs of timber-

wolves treed the children; and the settlers found dens of rattle-snakes, killed fifty, a hundred, in a day.

Yet it was a buoyant life. Carol read enviously in the admirable Minnesota chronicles called "Old Rail Fence Corners" the reminiscence of Mrs. Mahlon Black, who settled in Stillwater in 1848:

"There was nothing to parade over in those days. We took it as it came and had happy lives. . . . We would all gather together and in about two minutes would be having a good time—playing cards or dancing. . . . We used to waltz and dance contra dances. None of these new jigs and not wear any clothes to speak of. We covered our hides in those days; no tight skirts like now. You could take three or four steps inside our skirts and then not reach the edge. One of the boys would fiddle a while and then some one would spell him and he could get a dance. Sometimes they would dance and fiddle too."

She reflected that if she could not have ballrooms of gray and rose and crystal, she wanted to be swinging across a puncheon-floor with a dancing fiddler. This smug in-between town, which had exchanged "Money Musk" for phonographs grinding out ragtime, it was neither the heroic old nor the sophisticated new. Couldn't she somehow, some yet unimagined how, turn it back to simplicity?

She herself knew two of the pioneers: the Perry's. Champ Perry was the buyer at the grain-elevator. He weighed wagons of wheat on a rough platform-scale, in the cracks of which the kernels sprouted every spring. Between times he napped in the dusty peace of his office.

She called on the Perry's at their rooms above Howland & Gould's grocery.

When they were already old they had lost the money, which they had invested in an elevator. They had given up their beloved yellow brick house and moved into these

rooms over a store, which were the Gopher Prairie equivalent of a flat. A broad stairway led from the street to the upper hall, along which were the doors of a lawyer's office, a dentist's, a photographer's "studio," the lodge-rooms of the Affiliated Order of Spartans and, at the back, the Perry's' apartment.

They received her (their first caller in a month) with aged fluttering tenderness. Mrs. Perry confided, "My, it's a shame we got to entertain you in such a cramped place. And there ain't any water except that ole iron sink outside in the hall, but still, as I say to Champ, beggars can't be choosers. 'Sides, the brick house was too big for me to sweep, and it was way out, and it's nice to be living down here among folks. Yes, we're glad to be here. But——Some day, maybe we can have a house of our own again. We're saving up——Oh, dear, if we could have our own home! But these rooms are real nice, ain't they!"

As old people will, the world over, they had moved as much as possible of their familiar furniture into this small space. Carol had none of the superiority she felt toward Mrs. Lyman Cass's plutocratic parlor. She was at home here. She noted with tenderness all the makeshifts: the darned chair-arms, the patent rocker covered with sleazy cretonne, the pasted strips of paper mending the birch-bark napkin-rings labeled "Papa" and "Mama."

She hinted of her new enthusiasm. To find one of the "young folks" who took them seriously, heartened the Perry's, and she easily drew from them the principles by which Gopher Prairie should be born again—should again become amusing to live in.

This was their philosophy complete . . . in the era of aeroplanes and syndicalism:

The Baptist Church (and, somewhat less, the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian Churches) is the perfect, the divinely ordained standard in music, oratory, philanthropy, and ethics. "We don't need all this new-fangled science, or this terrible Higher Criticism that's ruining our young men in colleges. What we need is to get back to

the true Word of God, and a good sound belief in hell, like we used to have it preached to us."

The Republican Party, the Grand Old Party of Blaine and McKinley, is the agent of the Lord and of the Baptist Church in temporal affairs.

All socialists ought to be hanged.

"Harold Bell Wright is a lovely writer, and he teaches such good morals in his novels, and folks say he's made prett' near a million dollars out of 'em."

People who make more than ten thousand a year or less than eight hundred are wicked.

Europeans are still wickeder.

It doesn't hurt any to drink a glass of beer on a warm day, but anybody who touches wine is headed straight for hell.

Virgins are not so virginal as they used to be.

Nobody needs drug-store ice cream; pie is good enough for anybody.

The farmers want too much for their wheat.

The owners of the elevator-company expect too much for the salaries they pay.

There would be no more trouble or discontent in the world if everybody worked as hard as Pa did when he cleared our first farm.

IV

Carol's hero-worship dwindled to polite nodding, and the nodding dwindled to a desire to escape, and she went home with a headache.

Next day she saw Miles Bjornstam on the street.

"Just back from Montana. Great summer. Pumped my lungs chuck-full of Rocky Mountain air. Now for another whirl at sassing the bosses of Gopher Prairie." She smiled at him, and the Perry's faded, the pioneers faded, till they were but daguerreotypes in a black walnut cupboard.

THE END