GALE ZONA

A DAUGHTER OF THE MORNING

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CHAPTER I

I found this paper on the cellar shelf. It come around the boys' new overalls. When I was cutting it up in sheets with the butcher knife on the kitchen table, Ma come in, and she says:

"What you doin' *now*?"

The way she says "now" made me feel like I've felt before – mad and ready to fly. So I says it right out, that I'd meant to keep a secret. I says:

"I'm makin' me a book."

"Book!" she says. "For the receipts you know?" she says, and laughed like she knows how. I hate cooking, and she knows it.

I went on tying it up.

"Be writing a book next, I s'pose," says Ma, and laughed again.

"It ain't that kind of a book," I says. "This is just to keep track."

"Well, you'd best be doing something useful," says Ma. "Go out and pull up some radishes for your Pa's supper."

I went on tying up the sheets, though, with pink string that come around Pa's patent medicine. When it was done I run my hand over the page, and I liked the feeling on my hand. Then I

saw Ma coming up the back steps with the radishes. I was going to say something, because I hadn't gone to get them, but she says:

"Nobody ever tries to save me a foot of travelin' around."

And then I didn't care whether I said it or not. So I kept still. She washed off the radishes, bending over the sink that's in too low. She'd wet the front of her skirt with some suds of something she'd washed out, and her cuffs was wet, and her hair was coming down.

"It's rack around from morning till night," she says, "doing for folks that don't care about anything so's they get their stomachs filled."

"You might talk," I says, "if you was Mis' Keddie Bingy."

"Why? Has anything more happened to her?" Ma asked.

"Nothing new," I says. "Keddie was drinking all over the house last night. I heard him singing and swearing – and once I heard her scream."

"He'll kill her yet," says Ma. "And then she'll be through with it. I'm so tired to-night I wisht I was dead. All day long I've been at it – floors to mop, dinner to get, water to lug."

"Quit going on about it, Ma," I says.

"You're a pretty one to talk to me like that," says Ma.

She set the radishes on the kitchen table and went to the back door. One of her shoes dragged at the heel, and a piece of her skirt hung below her dress.

"Jim!" she shouted, "your supper's ready. Come along and eat it," – and stood there twisting her hair up.

Pa come up on the porch in a minute. His feet were all mud from the fields, and the minute he stepped on Ma's clean floor she begun on him. He never said a word, but he tracked back and forth from the wash bench to the water pail, making his big black footprints every step. I should think she *would* have been mad. But she said what she said about half a dozen times – not mad, only just whining and complaining and like she expected it. The trouble was, she said it so many times.

"When you go on so, I don't care how I track up," says Pa, and dropped down to the table. He filled up his plate and doubled down over it, and Ma and I got ours.

"What was you and Stacy talkin' about so long over the fence?" Ma says, after a while.

"It's no concern of yours," says Pa. "But I'll tell ye, just to show ye what some women have to put up with. Keddie Bingy hit her over the head with a dish in the night. It's laid her up, and he's down to the Dew Drop Inn, filling himself full."

"She's used to it by this time, I guess," Ma says. "Just as well take it all at once as die by inches, *I* say."

"Trot out your pie," says Pa.

As soon as I could after we'd done the dishes, I took my book up to the room. Ma and I slept together. Pa had the bedroom off the dining-room. I had the bottom bureau drawer to myself for my clothes. I put my book in there, and I found a pencil in the machine drawer, and I put that by it. I'd wanted to make the book for a long time, to set down thoughts in, and keep track of the

different things. But I didn't feel like making the book any more by the time I got it all ready. I went to laying out my underclothes in the drawer so's the lace edge would show on all of 'em that had it.

Ma come to the side door and called me.

"Cossy," she says, "is Luke comin' to-night?"

"I s'pose so," I says.

"Well, then, you go right straight over to Mis' Bingy's before he gets here," Ma says.

I went down the stairs – they had a blotched carpet that I hated because it looked like raw meat and gristle.

"Why don't you go yourself?" I says.

"Because Mis' Bingy'll be ashamed before me," she says; "but she won't think you know about it. Take her this."

I took the loaf of steam brown bread.

"If Luke comes," I says, "have him walk along after me."

The way to Mis' Bingy's was longer to go by the road, or short through the wood-lot. I went by the road, because I thought maybe I might meet somebody. The worst of the farm wasn't only the work. It was never seein' anybody. I only met a few wagons, and none of 'em stopped to say anything. Lena Curtsy went by, dressed up in black-and-white, with a long veil. She looks like a circus rider, not only Sundays but every day. But Luke likes the look of her, he said so.

"You're goin' the wrong way, Cossy!" she calls out.

"No, I ain't, either," I says, short enough. I can't bear the sight

of her. And yet, if I have anything to brag about, it's always her I want to brag it to.

Just when I turned off to Bingy's, I met the boys. We never waited supper for 'em, because sometimes they get home and sometimes they don't. They were coming from the end of the street-car line, black from the blast furnace.

"Where you goin', kid?" says Bert.

I nodded to the house.

"Well, then, tell her she'd better watch out for Bingy," says Henny. "He's crazy drunk down to the Dew Drop. I wouldn't stay there if I was her."

I ran the rest of the way to the Bingy house. I went round to the back door. Mis' Bingy was in the kitchen, sitting on the edge of the bed. She had the bed put up in the kitchen when the baby was born, and she'd kept it there all the year. When I stepped on to the boards, she jumped and screamed.

"Here's some steam brown bread," I says.

She set down again, trembling all over. The baby was laying over back in the bed, and it woke up and whimpered. Mis' Bingy kind of poored it with one hand, and with the other she pushed up the bandage around her head. She was big and wild-looking, and her hair was always coming down in a long, coiled-up mess on her shoulders. Her hands looked worse than Ma's.

"I guess I look funny, don't I?" she says, trying to smile. "I cut my head open some – by accident."

I hate a lie. Not because it's wicked so much as because it

never fools anybody.

"Mis' Bingy," I says, "I know that Mr. Bingy threw a dish at you last night and cut your head open, because he was drunk. Well, I just met Henny, and he says he's down to the Inn, crazy drunk. Henny don't want you should stay here."

She kind of give out, as though her spine wouldn't hold up. I guess she had the idea none of the neighbors knew.

"Where can I go?" she says.

There was only one place that I could think of. "Come on over with me," I says. "Pa and the boys are there. They won't let him hurt you."

She shook her head. "I'd have to come back some time," she says.

"Why would you?" I asked her.

She looked at me kind of funny.

"He's my husband," she says – and she kind of straightened up and looked dignified, without meaning to. I just stood and looked at her. Think of it making her look like that to own that drunken coward for a husband!

"What if he is?" I says. "He's a brute, and we all know it."

She cried a little. "You hadn't ought to speak to me so," she says. "If I go, how'll I earn my living, and the baby's?" she says.

I hadn't thought of that. "That's so," I says. "You are tied, ain't you?"

I couldn't get her to come with me. She's got the bed made up in the front room up-stairs, and she was going up there that night

and lock her door, and leave the kitchen open.

"He may not be so bad," she says. "Maybe he'll be so drunk he'll tumble on the bed asleep, or maybe he'll be sick. I always hope for one of them."

I went back through the wood-lot. It was so different out there from home and Mis' Bingy's that it felt good. I found a place in a book once that told about the woods. It gave me a nice feeling. I used to get it out of the school library whenever it was in and read the place over, to get the feeling again. Almost always it gave it to me. In the real woods I didn't always get it. They come so close up to me that they bothered me. I always thought I was going to get to something, and I never did. And yet I always liked it in the wood-lot. And it was nice to be away from home and from Mis' Bingy's.

I forgot the whole bunch of 'em for a while. It was the night of a moon, and you could see it in the trees, like a big fat face that was friends with you. When a bird did just one note, it felt pleasant. After a while I stopped still, because it seemed as if something was near to me; but I wasn't scared, even if it was quite dark. I thought to myself that I wisht my family and all the folks I knew was still and kept to themselves same as the trees does, instead of rushing at you every minute, out loud. I never knew any folks that acted different from that, though. Luke was just like that, too.

I was thinking of this when I see him coming to meet me, down the path. He ain't a big man, Luke.

"Hello, Cossy," he says. "That you?"

"Hello, Luke," I says. I dunno why it is – with the boys at home I can joke. But Luke, he always makes me feel just plain. I just says "Hello, Luke," and stood still, and waited for him to come up to me. He turned and walked along beside me.

"I was afraid I wouldn't meet you," he says. "I was afraid I'd miss you. My, it's a good thing to get you somewheres by yourself."

"Why?" I says.

"Oh, the boys are always around, or your pa, or somebody. I've got a right to talk to you sometimes by yourself."

"Well, go ahead, then. Talk to me."

All of a sudden he stopped still in the path.

"Do you mean that?" he ask.

"Mean what?" I says. I couldn't think what he meant.

"That I can talk to you now? My way?"

"Oh," I says. I knew then. I guess I should have known before, if I'd stopped to think. But someway I never could put my mind on Luke all the time he was saying anything.

"Cossy," he says, "I've tried to talk to you; you always got round it or else somebody else come in. You know what I want."

I didn't say anything. I sort of waited, not so much to see what he was going to do as to see what I was going to do.

Then he didn't say anything. But he put his arm around me, and put his hand around my arm. I let him. I wasn't mad, so I didn't pretend.

"Let's us sit down here," he says.

We sat under a big tree and he drew my head down on his shoulder.

"You're all kinds of a peach," he says, "that's what you are, Cossy – I bet you've known for weeks I want you to marry me. Ain't you?"

"Yes," I says, "I s'pose I have."

He laughed. "You're a funny girl," he says.

"It's silly to pretend," I says.

"You bet," he says, "it's silly to pretend. Give me a kiss, then. Kiss me yourself."

I did. I had to see whether I was pretending not to want to, or whether I really didn't want to. I see right away that I didn't want to.

"Marry me, Cossy," he says. "Will you?"

I was twenty years old. For a long time Ma had been asking me why I didn't marry some nice young man. "Marry some nice young man," she says. "You'll be happier, Cossy." Why would I be happier, I wondered. What would make me happy? There would be, I supposed, a great deal of this kind of thing. I thought it was honest to talk it over with Luke.

"What for?" I says.

"Because I love you," says Luke serious; "and I want you."

I laughed out loud. "Them's funny reasons for a bargain," I says.

He kind of drew off. "Oh, well," he says, "it's all I've got. If

you don't think it amounts to anything – "

"That's why you should marry me," I says. "But I want to know why I should marry you."

"Don't you love me?" says Luke.

"I donno," I told him. "I don't like to kiss you so very well."

"Cossy, listen," Luke said. "All that'll come. Honest, it will, dear. Just trust me, and marry me. I need you."

"Well, but, Luke," I says, "I donno if I need you. I don't believe I do."

"You listen here," he says, sort of mad. "You'll have a home of your own – "

"Why, wouldn't I live on your folks's farm?" I says.

"Oh, well, yes," Luke says. "But – I love you, Cossy!" he ends up. "Can't you understand? I love you."

He said it like the reason. I begun to think it was.

"You've got to marry somebody," says Luke.

I knew that well enough. Home was bad enough now, but when one of the boys brought a wife there it would be worse. I'd have to marry somebody.

"I'd like to get away from home," I says. "Ma and I don't get along, and Pa's like a bear the whole time."

"You'd ought not to say such things, Cossy," says Luke.

"Why not?" I says. "They're true. That is about the only reason I can think of why I should marry you. That, and because I've got to marry somebody."

I thought he'd be mad. Instead, he had his arms around me

and was kissing me.

"I don't care what you marry me for," he says. "Marry me, anyhow!"

I thought: "I s'pose I'd get used to him. I don't like the boys, either. I can't bear Henny. Every girl seems to act as if it was all right, after she gets away. Maybe it is."

Two people were coming along the path. Luke and I sat still – it was so dark nobody could notice us where we were. I heard them talking and then I heard Ma's voice. I knew right off Henny had told her about Keddie, and she was going to try to get Mis' Bingy to come home with us.

" … On my feet from morning till night," she was saying, "till it seems as though I should drop. I don't know how I stand it."

Pa was with her. "Stand it, stand it!" he says. "Anybody'd think you had the pest in the house. I'm sick of hearin' you whine."

"I know," says Ma, "nobody thinks I'm worth anything now. But after I'm dead and gone – "

"Oh, shut up," says Pa. And they went by us.

I stood up, all of a sudden. Anything would be better than home.

"Luke – " I says.

In a few years maybe him and me would be talking the same as Ma and Pa. Maybe he'd be hanging around the Dew Drop Inn, same as Keddie Bingy. What of it? All women took the chance.

"Luke," I says, "all right."

"Do you mean you will?" says Luke. I liked him the best I'd

ever liked him, the way he says that.

"I said 'all right,'" I says. "You be a good husband to me and I'll be a good wife to you."

Luke kind of scared me, he was so glad.

On the way home he didn't talk much. As soon as we got to our house I made him go. I'd begun to feel the tired way I do every time I'm with him – as if I'd ironed or done up fruit.

Ma and Pa hadn't come back yet. I went up to Ma's and my room and lit the lamp. It was on a bracket, and stuck up behind it was a picture of me when I was a baby. I just stood and stared at it. I hadn't thought of it before – but what if Luke and I should have one?

"No, sir! No, sir! No, sir!" I says, all the while I put myself to bed.

CHAPTER II

Toward morning I heard somebody scream. I was dreaming that I was with Luke in the grove, and that he touched my hand, and that it was me that screamed. I heard it again and again, with another noise. Then I woke up. It wasn't me. It was somebody else.

I sat up in bed and shook Ma. She snores, and I couldn't hardly wake her. By the time she sat up I heard Pa move. When we got to the stairs I heard him at the back door.

"What's wanted?" I heard him say.

"Quick, quick! Lemme in! Lemme in!" I heard from outside. I knew it was Mis' Bingy. We got down-stairs just as Pa opened the door, and she come in. Everything about her was blowing – her long hair and her outing nightgown and the baby's shawl. She could hardly breathe, and she leaned against the door and tried to lock it. I went and locked it for her. She sat down, and the baby was awake and crying, so she jounced it up and down, without knowing she was doing it, while she told what was the matter. She twisted up her hair, and I didn't think she knew she done that, either. She had on a blue calico waist to a work dress, over her nightgown, and her bare feet were in shoes, with the laces dangling. Ma took one look at her, and went and put on the teakettle. She said afterward she never knew she done that, either.

Mis' Bingy told us what happened. She had been laying awake up-stairs when he come home. He called her, and she didn't answer. Then he brought a flatiron and beat at the door. Then he yelled that he'd bring the ax. When he went for it, she slipped out of her bedroom and locked the door, and hid in the closet under the stairs till she heard him run up 'em. Then she started.

"He'll kill me," she says. "He said he'd kill me. I've never known him like this before."

Pa come back from his room, part dressed.

"I'll go and get the constable," he says.

"Oh," says Mis' Bingy, "don't arrest him! Don't do that!"

"Lookin' for to be killed?" says Pa. "And us, too, for a-harborin' you here?"

She fell to crying then, and the baby cried. Mis' Bingy said things to herself that we couldn't understand. Ma come and brought her a cup of hot water with the tea that was left in the teapot poured in it. Ma had a calico skirt around her shoulders, and she was in her bare feet.

"He'll kill *you*," Ma says to Pa, "on your way to the constable. I wouldn't go past that house for anything, to-night."

I remember how anxious she looked at him. She was anxious, like Mis' Bingy'd been when she said not to arrest Keddie.

Pa muttered, but he didn't go out. In a little while, Ma said best get some rest, so we went up to the room again, and took Mis' Bingy. Her and Ma laid down on the bed, and I got the canvas cot that was folded up in there. My feet stuck out, and I couldn't

go to sleep. But the funny thing to me was that both Ma and Mis' Bingy went to sleep in a little while.

I laid there, waiting for it to get light. The window was a little bit gray, and off in the wood-lot I could hear a bird wake up and go to sleep again. I liked it. Early in the morning always seemed to me like some other time. Things acted as if they was something else. Even the bureau looked different… Pretty soon the sky changed, and the dark was thin enough so I could see Ma and Mis' Bingy. Ma's light-colored hair had got all around her face. I thought how young she looked asleep. She looked so little and soft. She looked as if she'd be nice. I guess she would have been if she hadn't had so much to do. I never remembered her when she didn't have too much to do, except once when she broke her arm; and her arm hurt her so that she was cross anyway. Once, when the boys bought her a plaid silk, she was nice for two days; but then wash-day come and spoiled it again, and she couldn't get back.

Ma never had much. I don't believe any of us know her like she'd be if she had things to do with, and didn't have to work so hard, and Pa and the boys wasn't all the time picking on her. They all say mean things. I do, too, of course. I always dread our meals. We don't scrap over anything particular, but everything that comes up, somebody's always got some lip to answer back. And Ma's easy teased and always looking for slaps. That's me, too; I'm easy teased, though I don't look for it. Laying there asleep, Ma seemed like somebody I didn't know, and I felt sorry

for her. She was having a rotten life.

And Mis' Bingy. The bandage was off her head, and I saw the big red mark. She was awful thin and blue-looking, with cords in her neck. She was young, not more than thirty. Ma was old; Ma was forty, and, awake, she looked it. I could see Mis' Bingy's bare arm, and it was strong as an ox. It laid around the baby, that was sleeping on her chest. I liked to look at it. But I thought about her life, too, and I wondered how either Ma or her kept going at all. And what made them willing to. Neither of 'em was having a real life. Look what love had brought them to…

And there was me, starting in the same way, with Luke.

It was broad daylight by then, so I could see around the room. There wasn't a carpet, and the plaster was cracked. So was the pitcher, that was just for show, anyhow, because we washed in the kitchen. I'd tried to fill it for a while, but Ma said it was putting on. In a little bit we would all be sprucing up in the kitchen, with Ma trying to get breakfast and everybody yipping out at everybody else.

And I'd just fixed it so's that all my life would be the same thing as their lives.

I slipped out of bed and began to dress. It wasn't Sunday, but I opened the drawer where my underclothes were, and took out them that had lace edging. I put on my best shoes and my white stockings. Then I went out in the hall closet and got down my new muslin that I'd worn only once that summer, and I took it over my arm and went down in the kitchen. When I was all ready

I went through the door that opened stillest, and outdoors.

Out there was as different as if it didn't belong. You thought of the fresh smell of it before you thought of anything else. Nothing about it had been used. And the thin sunshine come right at you, slanting. Over the porch the morning-glories were all out. I pulled off a whole great vine of 'em and put it around my neck. Then I ran. I wasn't going to go anywheres or do anything. But I was clean and dressed up, and outdoors was just as good as anybody else has.

I went down the road toward the sun. It seemed as if I must be going toward something else, better than all I knew. I felt as if I was a person, living like persons live. I wondered why I hadn't done this every morning. I wondered why everybody didn't do it. I kind of wanted to be doing it together with somebody. Everybody I knew done things so separate. I wisht everybody was with me.

I wanted to sing. So I did – the first thing that come into my head. I put my head back, so's I could see the two rows of the trees ahead, almost meeting, and the thick blue between them. And then I sung the first thing that come into my head, and I sung it to the top of my voice:

"O Mother dear, Jerusalem,
When shall I come to Thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys when shall I see?
O happy harbor of God's saints!

O sweet and pleasant soil!
In thee no sorrow can be found,
Nor grief nor care nor toil."

And when I got to the end of the verse somebody said:

"I don't believe you can possibly mind if I thank you for that?"

The man must have been sitting by the road, because he was right there beside me, standing still, with his hat in his hand.

I says, "I can't sing. I just done that for fun."

"That's what was so delightful," he says. And then he says, "Are you going to the village? May I walk along with you?"

"No, I ain't going to town," I says. "I ain't going anywheres much. But you can walk where you want to. The road's free."

He walked side of me. I looked at him. He was good-looking. He was so clean – that was the first thing I noticed about him. Clean, and sort of brown and pink, with nothing more on his face than was on mine, and yet he looked manly. He was big. He had a wide way with his shoulders, and he held his head nice. I liked to look at him, so I did look.

And all at once I says to myself, What did I care so I got some fun out of it. Other girls was always doing this. Lena Curtsy would have talked with him in a minute. Maybe I could get him to ask me to go to a show. I couldn't go, but I thought I'd like to make him ask me.

"Was you lonesome?" I ask', looking at him.

He didn't say anything. He just looked at me, smiling a little. I

thought I'd better say a little more. I wanted him to know I wasn't a stick, but that I was in for fun, like a city girl.

"You don't look like a chap that'd be lonesome very long," I says. "Not if you can get acquainted *this* easy."

He kept looking at me, and smiling a little.

"Tell me," he says, "do you live about here?"

"Me? Right here. I'm the original Maud Muller," I says.

"And what do you do besides rake hay?" he says.

I couldn't think what else Maud Muller done. I hadn't read it since Fifth Reader. So I says:

"Well, she don't often get a chance to talk with traveling gentlemen."

"That's good," he says, "but – I wouldn't have thought it."

I see he meant because I done it so easy and ready, so I give him as good as he sent.

"Wouldn't *you*?" I says. "Well, I s'pose you get a chance to flirt with strange girls every town you strike."

He looked at me again, not smiling now, but just awfully interested. I see I was interesting him down to the ground. Lena Curtsy couldn't have done it better.

"Flirt," he says over. "What do you mean by 'flirt'?"

I laughed at him. "You're a pretty one to ask that," I says, "with them eyes."

"Oh," he says serious, "then you like my eyes?"

"I never said so," I gave him. "Do you like mine?"

"Let me look at them," he said.

We stopped in the road, and I looked him square in the eye. I can look anybody in the eye. I looked at him straight, till he laughed and moved on. He seemed to be thinking about something.

"I think I like you best when you sing," he said. "Won't you sing something else?"

"Sure," I says, and wheeled around in the road, and kind of skipped backward. And I sung:

> "Oh, oh, oh, oh! Pull down the blinds!
> When they hear the organ play-ing
> They won't know what we are say-ing.
> Pull down the blinds!"

I'd heard it to the motion-picture show the week before. I was thankful he could see I was up on the nice late tunes.

"I wonder," says the man, "if you can tell me something. I wonder if you can tell me what made you pick out this song to sing to me, and what made you sing that other song when you were alone?"

All at once the morning come back. Ever since I met him I'd forgot the morning and the sun, and the way I'd felt when I started out alone. I'd just been thinking about myself, and about how I could make him think I was cute and up-to-date. Now it was just as if the country road opened up again, and there I was on it, opposite the Dew Drop Inn, just being me. I looked up at him.

"Honest," I says, "I don't know. I guess it was because I wanted

you to think I was fun."

He looked at me for a minute, straight and deep.

"By Jove!" he says, and I didn't know what ailed him. "Have you had breakfast?" he ask', short.

"No," I says.

"You come in here with me and get some," he says, like an order.

He led the way into the yard of the Dew Drop Inn. There's a grape arbor there, and some bare hard dirt, and two or three tables. Nobody was there, only the boy, sweeping the dirt with a broom. We sat down at the table in the arbor. It was pleasant to be there. A house wren was singing his head off somewhere near. A woman come out and sloshed water on the stone at the back door and begun scrubbing. A clock in the bar struck six.

Joe Burkey, that keeps the Inn, come out and nodded to me.

"Joe," I says, "did Keddie Bingy come back here?"

Joe wiped his hands on the cloth on his arm, and then brushed his mustache with it, and then wiped off the table with it.

"I don't know nothin' about K. Bingy," says Joe. "I t'run him out o' my place last night, neck *and* crop, for bein' drunk and disorderly. I ain't seen him since."

I looked up at Joe's little eyes. They looked like the eyes of the wolf in the picture in our dining-room. Joe's got a fat chin, and a fat smile, but his eyes don't match them.

"You coward and you brute," I says to him, "where did Keddie Bingy *get* drunk and disorderly?"

Joe begun to sputter and to step around in new places. The man I was with brought his hand down on the table.

"Never mind that," he says, "what you've to do is bring some breakfast. What will you have for your breakfast, mademoiselle?" he says to me.

"Why," I says, "some salt pork and some baking powder biscuit for me, and some fried potatoes and a piece of some kind of pie. What kind have you got?"

"Apple and raisin," says Joe, sulky. But the man I was with he says:

"Suppose you let me order our breakfast. Will you?"

"Suit yourself, I'm sure," says I. "I ain't used to the best."

The man thought a minute.

"Back there a little way," he says, "I crossed something that looked like a trout stream. Is it a trout stream?"

"Sure," says Joe and I together.

"How long," says the man, "would it take that boy there to bring in a small catch?"

"My!" I says, "he can do that quicker'n a cat can lick his eye. Can't he, Joe?"

"Very well," says the man. "We will have brook trout for breakfast. Make a lemon butter for them, please, and use good butter. With that bring us some toast, very thin, very brown and very hot, with more good butter. Have you some orange marmalade?"

"Sure," says Joe, "but it costs thirty cents a jar; I open the

whole – "

"Some orange marmalade," says the man. "And coffee – I wonder what that good woman there would say to letting me make the coffee?"

"Her? She'll do whatever I tell her," says Joe. "But we charge extra when guests got to make their own coffee."

"And now," says the man, getting through with that, "what can you bring us while we wait? Some peaches?"

"The orchard," says Joe, "is rotten wid peaches."

"Good," says the man. "Now we understand each other. If mademoiselle will excuse me, we will set the coffee on its way."

I set and waited, thinking how funny it was for a man to make the coffee. All Pa ever done in his life to help about the cooking was to clean the fish.

I went and played with a kitten, so's not to have to talk to Joe. I didn't know what I might say to him. When I come back the table was laid with a nice clean cloth and napkins that were ironed good and dishes with little flowers on. When the woman come out to the well, I ask' her if I could pick some phlox for the table. She laughed and said yes, if I wanted to. So I got some, all pink. I was just bringing it when the man come back.

"Stand there, just for a minute," he says.

I done like he told me, by the door of the arbor. I thought he was going to say something nice, and I hoped I'd think of something smart and sassy to say back to him. But all he says was just:

"Thank you. Now, come and sit down, please."

We fixed the flowers. Then Joe brought a basket of beautiful peaches, and we took what we wanted. The man took one, and sat touching it with the tips of his fingers, and he looked over at me with a nice smile.

"And now, my child," he says, "tell me your name."

I always hate to tell folks my name. In the village they've always made fun of it.

"What do you want to bother with that for?" I says. "Ain't I good enough without a tag?"

He spoke almost sharp. "I want you to tell me your name," he says.

So I told him. "Cosma Wakely," I says.

He looked funny. "Really?" he says. "*Cosma?*"

"But everybody calls me 'Cossy,'" I says quick. "I know what a funny name it is. My grandmother named me. She was queer."

"*Cossy!*" he says over. "Why, Cosma is perfect."

"You're kiddin' me," I says. "Don't you think I don't know it."

He didn't say he wasn't.

"Ain't you going to tell me your name?" I says. "Not that I s'pose you'll tell me the right one. They never do."

"My name," he says, "is John Ember."

"On the square?" I asked him.

"Yes," he says. He was a funny man. He didn't have a bit of come-back. He took you just plain. He reminded me of the way I acted with Luke. But usually I could jolly like the dickens.

"You travel, I guess," I says. "What do you travel for?"

He laughed. "If I understand you," he said, "you are asking me what my line is?"

I nodded. I'd just put the pit in my mouth, so I couldn't guess something sassy, like pickles.

"I have no line," he says. "It's an area."

"Huh?" I says – on account of the pit.

"I travel," says he, "for the human race. But they don't know it."

"Sure," I says, when I had it swallowed, "you got to sell to everybody, I know that. But what do you sell 'em?"

He shook his head.

"I don't sell it," he says. "They won't buy it. I shall always be a philanthropist. The commodity," says he, "is books."

"Oh!" I says. "A book agent! I'd have taken you for a regular salesman."

"I tell you I *don't* sell 'em," he says. "Nobody will buy. I just write 'em."

I put down my other peach and looked at him.

"An author?" I says. "You?"

"Thank you," says he, "for believing me. Nobody else will. Now don't let's talk about that. Do you mind telling me something about yourself?"

"Oh," I says, "I've got a book all made out of wrapping paper. It ain't wrote yet, it's in the bottom drawer. But I'm going to write one."

"Good!" he says. "Tell me about that, too."

I don't know what made me, except the surprise of finding that he was what he was, instead of a traveling man. But the first thing I knew I was telling him about me; how I'd stopped school when I was fourteen, and had worked out for a little while in town; and then when the boys got the job in the blast furnace, I came home to help Ma. I told him how the only place I'd ever been, besides the village, was to the city, twice. Only two things I didn't tell him at first – about what home was like, and about Luke. But he got them both out of me. Because I wound up what I was telling him with something I thought was the thing to say. Lena Curtsy always said it.

"I've just been living at home for four years now," I said. "I s'pose it's the place for a girl."

I remember how calm and slow he was when he answered.

"Why no," he says. "Your home is about the last place in the world a girl of your age ought to be."

"What do you know about my home?" I asked him quick.

"I don't mean your home," he says. "I mean any home, if it's your parents' home. If you can't be in school, why aren't you out by this time doing some useful work of your own?"

"Work," I says. "I do work. I work like a dog."

"I don't mean doing your family's work," he said. "I mean doing your own work. Of course you're not going to tell me you're happy?"

"No," I says, "I ain't happy. I hate my work. I hate the kind

of a home I live in. It's Bedlam, the whole time. I'm going to get married to get out of it."

"So you are going to be married," he says. "What's the man like – do you mind telling me that?"

I told him about Luke, just the way he is. While I talked he was eating his peaches. I'd been through with mine quite a while now, so I noticed him eat his. He done it kind of with the tips of his fingers. I liked to watch him. He sort of broke the peach. The juice didn't run down. I remembered how I must have et mine, and I felt ashamed.

Before I was all through about Luke, Joe come in with the trout, and some thin, crispy potatoes on the platter, and the toast and the marmalade; and Mr. Ember went to see about the coffee. He brought it out himself, and poured it himself – and it smelled like something I'd never smelled before. And now, when he begun to eat, I watched him. I broke my toast, like he done. I used my fork on the trout, like him, and I noticed he took his spoon out of his cup, and I done that, too, though I'd got so I could drink from a cup without a handle and hold the spoon with my finger, like the boys done. I kept tasting the coffee, too, instead of drinking it off at once, even when it was hot, like I'd learned the trick of. I didn't know but his way just happened to be his way, but I wanted to make sure. Anyway, I never smack my lips, and Luke and the boys do that.

"Now," he said, "while we enjoy this very excellent breakfast, will you do me the honor to let me tell you a little something

about me?"

I don't see what honor that would be, and I said so. And then he told me things.

I'm sorry that I can't put them down. It was wonderful. It was just like a story the teacher tells you when you're little and not too old for stories. It turned out he'd been to Europe and to Asia. He'd done things that I never knew there was such things. But he didn't talk about him, he just talked about the things and the places. I forgot to eat. It seemed so funny that I, Cossy Wakely, should be listening to somebody that had done them things. He said something about a volcano.

"A volcano!" I says. "Do they have them *now*? I thought that was only when the geography was."

"But the geography *is*, you know," he says. "It is now."

"Did that big flat book all mean now?" I says. "I thought it meant long ago. I had a picture of the Ark and the flood and the Temple, and when the stars fell – "

"Oh, the fools!" he says to himself; but I didn't know who he meant, and I was pretty sure he must mean me.

All the while we were having breakfast, he talked with me. When it was over, and he'd paid the bill – I tried my best to see how much it was, so as to tell Lena Curtsy, but I couldn't – he turned around to me and he says:

"The grass is not wet this morning. It's high summer. Will you walk with me up to the top of that hill over there in the field? I want to show you the whole world."

"Sure," I says. "But you can't see much past Twiney's pasture from that little runt of a hill."

We climbed the fence. He put his hand on a post and vaulted the wire as good as the boys could have done. When he turned to help me, I was just doing the same thing. Then it come over me that maybe an author wouldn't think that was ladylike.

"I always do them that way," I says, kind of to explain.

"Is there any other way?" says he.

"No!" says I, and we both laughed. It was nice to laugh with him, and it was the first time we'd done it together.

The field was soft and shiny. There was pretty cobwebs. Everything looked new and glossy.

"Great guns!" I says. "Ain't it nice out here?"

"That's exactly what I've been thinking," says he.

We went along still for a little ways. It come to me that maybe, if I could only say some of the things that moved around on the outside of my head, he might like them. But I couldn't get them together enough.

"It makes you want to think nice thoughts," I says, by and by.

"Doesn't it?" he says, with his quick, straight look. "And when it does, then you do."

"I don't know enough," I says. "I wisht I did."

I'll never, never forget when we come to the top of the little hill. He stood there with nothing but the sky, blue as fury, behind him.

"Now look," he says. "There's New York, over there."

"You can't see New York from here!" I says. "Not with no specs that was ever invented."

He went right on. "Down there," he says, "are St. Louis and Cincinnati and New Orleans. Across there is Chicago. And away on there are two days of desert – two days, by express train! – and then mountains and a green coast, and San Francisco and the Pacific. And then all the things we talked about this morning: Japan and India and the Alps and London and Rome and the Nile."

I wondered what on earth he was driving at.

"Which do you want to do," says he, "go there, and try to find these places? You won't find them, you know. But at least, you'll know they're in the world. Or live down there in a little farm-house like that one and slave for Luke?"

"But I can't even try to find them places," I says. "How could I?"

"Maybe not," he says. "Maybe not. I don't say you could. All I mean is this, Why not think of your life as if you have really been born, and not as if you were waiting to be born?"

"Oh," I says, "don't you s'pose I've thought of that? But I can't get away."

"Yes, you can," he says, looking at me, earnest. "Yes, you can. If you just say the word."

I was as tall as he was, and I looked right at him, with all the strength I had.

"Do you think," I says, "that because I'm from the country I

ain't on to all such talk as that? Do you think I don't know what them kind of hold-outs means? We ain't such fools as you think we are, not since Hattie Duffy thought she was going to Paris, and ended in the bottom of a pond. They's only one way any of us ever gets to see any of them things, and don't you think we're fooled unless we want to be. No, sir. We ain't that fresh."

He scared me the way he whirled round at me.

"You miserable little creature!" he said. "What are you talking about?"

"Well," I says, "don't you ever think I – "

Then he done a funny thing. He drew a deep breath, and took his hat off and looked up at the sky and off over the fields.

"After all," he said, "thank God this is the way you are beginning to take it! When a country girl can protect herself like that, it is growing safe for her to be born. Listen to me, child," he says.

He had me puzzled for fair by then. I just listened.

"Just now," he says, "I called you a miserable little creature. That was because you quite naturally mistook me for one of the wretched hunters whom women have been trying to evade since the beginning. Well, I was wrong to call you that. Instead, I applaud your magnificent ability to take care of yourself. I applaud even more in the incident – but I won't bother you with that."

I kept trying to see what he meant.

"Now you must," he said, "try to understand me. What I meant

to say to you was that with the whole world to choose from, you are, in my opinion, quite wrong to settle down here to your farm and your Luke and the drudgery you say you loathe, without ever giving yourself a chance to choose at all. Perhaps you would come back and settle here because you wanted to… I hope you would do that, under somewhat different conditions. But don't settle here because you're trapped and can't get out."

"But I can't get out – " I was beginning, but he went on:

"I know perfectly well that a great part of the world would think that I ought not to be talking to you like that. They would say that you are 'safe' here. That you and Luke would have a quiet, contented life. But I care nothing at all for such safety. I think that unreasonable contentment leads to various kinds of damnation. If you were an ordinary girl I should not be talking to you like this. I should not have the courage – yet; not while life treats women as it treats them now. But in spite of your vulgarity, you are a remarkable woman."

"In spite of *what*?" I says.

"I mean it," he says, "and you must let me tell you, because you seem to be, in all but one thing, a fine straightforward creature. But in the way you treat men, you *are* vulgar, you know. Not hopelessly, just deplorably. Now tell me the truth. Why did you pretend to flirt with me? For that isn't your natural manner. You put it on. Why did you do that?"

I could tell him that well enough.

"Why," I says, "I guess it was the same as the singing. I wanted

you to know I wasn't a stick. I wanted you to think I was lively and fun. It's the way the girls do. I can't do it as good as they do, I know that."

"Promise me," he says, "that if ever you do get out, you'll be the fine and straightforward one – not the other one."

"I shan't get out," I says. "I can't get out."

"'I can't get out,'" he says over. "'I can't get out.' It's a great mistake. If you feel it in you to get out, then you'll get out. That's the answer."

"I do," I says. "I always have. I wake up in the mornings…"

I'll never know what it was that come over me. But all of a sudden, the me that laid awake nights and thought, and the me that had come out in the sun that morning was the only me I had, and it could talk.

"Oh," I says, "don't you think I'm the way I seemed back there on the road. I'm different; but I'm the only one that knows that. I like nice things. I'd like to act nice. I'd like to be the way I could be. But there ain't enough of me to be that way. And I don't know what to do."

He took both my hands.

"And I don't know what you're to do," he said. "That is the part you must find for yourself. It's like dying – yet a while, till they get us going."

We stood still for a minute. And then I saw what I hadn't seen before – what a grand face he had. He wasn't like the handsome men on calendars or on cigar boxes, or on the signs. He was like

somebody else I hadn't ever seen before. His face wasn't young at all, but it looked glad, and that made it seem young.

"I wish you wouldn't ever go way," I says.

"I ought to be miles from here at this moment," he says. "Now see here … I want to give you these."

He took two cards out of his pocket, and wrote on them.

"This one is mine," he says. "If you do come to the city, you are surely to let me know that you are there. And if you take this other card to this address here, this gentleman may be able to give you work. Now good-by. I'm going to cut through the meadow, and I suppose you'll be going back."

He put out his hand.

"Don't go," I says. "Don't go. I shan't ever find anybody to talk to again."

"That's part of your job, you know," he says. "Remember you *have* a job. Good-by, child."

He went off down the slope. At the foot of it he stopped.

"Cosma!" he shouts, "don't ever let them call you anything else, you know!"

"I won't," I says. "Honest, I won't, Mr. Ember."

I watched him just as far as I could see him. On the road he turned and waved his hand. When he was out of sight I started to go back home. But when I see things again, I'll never forget the lonesomeness. Things was like a sucked-out sack. I laid down in the grass – I haven't cried since the last time Pa whipped me, six years ago, but I thought I was going to cry now. Then I happened

to think that was the way I'd have done before I met him; but it wasn't the way I must do now. Instead, I got up on to my feet and I started for home on the run. It was like something was starting somewheres, and I *had* to hurry.

CHAPTER III

Mother was scrubbing the well-house.

"Cossy Wakely," she says, "where you been?"

"Walking," I says.

"Walking!" says she; "with all I got to do. I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself. My land, what you got on your best clothes for?"

"Mother," I says, "you call me 'Cosma' after this, will you?"

She stared at me. "Such airs," she says. "And callin' me 'Mother.' Who you been with? What you rigged out like that for?"

"I didn't dress up for anybody," I says, "only because I wanted to."

"Such a young one as you've turned out," says she. "What's to become of you I don't know. Wait till your Pa comes in – I'll tell him."

"Mother," I says, "I'm twenty years old. You call me 'Cosma,' and let me call you 'Mother.' And don't feel you have to scold me all the time."

"I'll quit scolding you fast enough," she says, "when you quit deserving it. Go and get out of them togs, the dishes are waiting for you."

I went in the house. Mis' Bingy was not there, up-stairs or down. I went back to the door and asked about her.

"Why, she's gone home," says Mother. "You didn't s'pose she was going to live here, did you?"

"Home?" I says. "Where that man is?"

"We can't all pick out our homes," she says, scrubbing the boards.

Pa heard her. He was just coming in from the barn with the swill buckets to fill.

"That's you," he says, "finding fault with the hands that feeds you. Where'd you be, I'd like to know, if it wasn't for this home and me? In the poorhouse."

Mother straightened up on her knees by the well.

"Mean to say I don't pay my keep?" she says.

For a minute she seemed young and somebody, like when she was asleep.

"Not when you dish up such pickings as you done this morning," says Pa.

She screamed out something at him, and I ran across the yard toward Mis' Bingy's. They were going on so hard they forgot about me.

The grove was still. I wished *he* could have seen it. As soon as I got in it, I forgot about home, and the time before come back on me, like some of me singing. That was it – some of me singing. But I see right off the grove was different. It was almost as if he *had* been in it, and had showed me things about it. I begun looking out at it the way I thought he'd be looking at it. There seemed to be more of the grove than I thought there was. Then I

thought how he'd never be there in it, and how I'd prob'ly never see him again, and something in me hurt, and I didn't want to go on. What was the use?.. What was the use?.. What was the use?..

Mis' Bingy's house lay all still in the sun. The sunflowers and hollyhocks by the back door and the chickens picking around looked all peaceful and like home. I thought Mr. Bingy must be sleeping off his drunk, and her keeping quiet not to disturb him.

The kitchen door was standing open and I stepped up on the porch. And then I heard a terrible cry, from right there in the room.

"Go back – back, Cossy!" Mis' Bingy said. "He'll kill you!"

All in an instant I took it in. She was sitting crouched on the bed, shielding the baby with a pillow. And he set close beside the door, sharpening his hatchet.

He jumped up when he see me. I remember his red eyes and his teeth, and his thin whiskers that showed his chin through. Then he sprang forward, right toward me and on to me, with his hatchet in his hand.

I donno how I done it. For no reason, I guess, only that I'm big and strong and he was little and pindling. I know I never stopped to think or decide nothing. I dodged his hatchet and I jumped at him. I threw my whole strength at him, with my hands on his face and his throat. He went down like a log, because I was so much bigger and so strong. But that wouldn't have saved us, only that, as he fell, he hit his head on the sharp corner of the cook stove. He rolled over on his back, and the hatchet flew out on the zinc.

"You killed him!" Mis' Bingy says. She sat up, but she didn't go to him.

"We ain't no time to think of that," I says. "Get your things and come."

She didn't ask anything. She took the baby and run right and got a bundle of things she'd got ready. I see then that she had on her best black dress, and the baby was all dressed clean and embroidered. I picked up the hatchet, and we went out the door, and shut it behind us. She never looked back, even when we got to the door; and I noticed that, because it wasn't like Mis' Bingy, that's soft and frightened.

"I don't mind what he done to me," she said, "but just now he took the baby – and touched her hand – to the hot griddle."

She showed me.

"I hope he's dead," I said.

"Where shall I go?" she says. "My God, where shall I go?"

"Ain't you no folks?" I asked her.

"Not near enough so's I've got the fare," she says. "Anyhow, I don't want to come on to them."

We was in the grove at the time. I donno as it would have come to me so quick if we hadn't been there.

"Mis' Bingy," I says, "let's us go to the city together, you and me. And find a job."

I thought she'd draw back. But she just stopped still in the path and looked at me round the baby's head.

"You couldn't do that, could you?" she says.

"Yes," I says. "I didn't know it before, but I know it now. I could do that."

She kep' on looking at me, with something coming in her face.

"You couldn't go to-day, could you?" she says.

I hadn't thought of to-day, but the thing was on me then.

"Why not to-day as good as any day?" I says.

"Your Ma – " she says.

"This is different," I says. "This is for me to do."

We come to the edge of the grove, and across the open lot I could see Mother. She was spreading out her scrubbing cloth on the grass to dry. I went up to her, and I wasn't scared nor I didn't dread anything because I was so sure.

"Mother," I says, "Mis' Bingy and I are going up to the city together to get some work. And we're goin' to-day. But first I've got to go and find somebody. I donno but I've killed Mr. Bingy."

I don't remember all the things she said. All of a sudden, my head was full of other things that stood out sharp, and I couldn't take in what was going on all around, not with what I had to think about. Mis' Bingy sat down by the well-house and went to nursing the baby, and Mother stood up before her asking her things. I left 'em so, and ran down the road to the Inn. That was the nearest place I could get anybody.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning by that time. All this had happened to me before it was time to get the potatoes ready for dinner. I remember thinking that as I run. There was the Inn – and Joe was out wiping off the tables in the yard, with the same

dirty cloth, and straightening up the chairs.

"Joe," I says, "I ain't sure, but I think I've hurt Mr. Bingy pretty bad. Is there somebody can go up to their house and see?"

Joe stared, his thick, red, open lips and his red tongue looking more surprised than his little wolf eyes.

"What?" he says.

When I'd made him know, he got two men from the field and they run up the road toward Bingy's. On the Inn window-sill was the same kitten I'd played with while I was waiting for the coffee. I went and got it and sat down at the table where we'd been. It seemed a day since I was there. I seemed like somebody else. For the first time I wondered what would be if Keddie Bingy was dead. But it wasn't the being arrested or stood up in the court room or locked in jail that I thought of, and it wasn't Keddie at all. All I kept thinking was:

"If Keddie's dead, I won't never see *him* again."

I sat there going over that, and holding the kitten. It was a nice little kitten that looked up in my face more helpless than anything but a baby, or a bird, or a puppy. I felt kind of like some such helpless things. The world wasn't like what I thought it was. More things happened to you than I ever knew could happen. I always thought they happened just to other folks. The tables and the bare, swept dirt didn't look as if anything was happening anywheres near them, and yet down the road maybe was a dead man that I'd killed. And a mile and more away by now *he* was, and a little bit ago he'd been here, and the me that set there with

him had been somebody else. And the me that had been awake before daybreak that morning probably wouldn't ever be me at all, any more. Everything was different forever. I saw something on the ground, down by the arbor. It was the pink phlox I had picked. They threw it away when they wanted to wash the glass. It seemed so helpless, laying there without any water. I went and got it and put it on my dress.

Pretty soon I heard them coming back, talking. Joe and one of the men come in sight, and Joe sung out:

"It's all right. He's groaning. Ben's gone for a doctor. What happened?"

I told 'em; but I wanted to get away.

"Well, shave my bones," Joe says, "if you ain't the worst I ever see. Why didn't you leave the woman knock down her own man?"

"Why didn't you leave her get him drunk?" I says. "If I'd have killed him, it'd been you that murdered him, Joe."

"Now, look here," says Joe, "I'm a-carrying on an honest business. If a man goes for to make a fool of himself, is that my lookout, or ain't it? Who do you think lets me keep this business, anyway? It's the U. S. Gover'ment, that's who it is. You better be careful what you sling at this business."

"Then it's the Gover'ment that's a big fool, instead of you and Keddie," I says, and started for home. I remember Joe shouted out something; but all I was thinking was that the day before I'd of thought it was wicked to say what I'd just said, and now I didn't; and I wondered why.

There wasn't a minute to lose now, because if Keddie was groaning he'd be up and out again and looking for both of us. Mother and Mis' Bingy and the baby was still out in the yard by the well-house, and Father was just starting down the road after me.

It's funny, but what, just the day before, would have been a thing so big I wouldn't have thought of doing it, chiefly on account of the row it'd make, was now just easy and natural. They must have said things, I remember how loud their voices were and how I wished they wouldn't. And I remember them saying over and over the same thing:

"You don't need to go. You don't *need* to go. Ain't you always had a roof over you and enough to eat? A girl had ought to be thankful for a good home."

But I went and got my things ready and got myself dressed. I wanted to tell them about the feeling I had that I *had* to go, but I couldn't tell about that, now that I was going, any more than I could tell when I thought I mustn't go.

I did say something to Mother when she come and stood in the bedroom door and told me I was an ungrateful girl.

"Ungrateful for what?" I says.

"For me bringing you up and working my head off for you," she says, "and your Pa the same."

"But, Mother," I says, "that was your job to do. And me – I ain't found my job – yet."

"Your job is to do as we tell you to," says Mother. "The idea!"

I tried, just that once, to make her see.

"Mother," I says, "I'm separate. I'm somebody else. I'm old enough to get a-hold of some life like you've had, and some work I want to do. And I can't do it if I stay here. I'm *separate*– don't you see that?"

Then it come over me, dim, how surprised she must feel, after all, to have to think that, that I was separate, instead of her and hers. I went over toward her – I wanted to tell her so. But she says:

"I don't know what you're coming to. And I'm glad I don't. When I'm dead and gone, you'll think of this."

And then I couldn't say what I'd tried to say. But I thought what she said was true, that I would think about it some day, and be sorry. If it hadn't been for Mis' Bingy, I s'pose I'd have given it up, even then. It's hard to make a thing that's been so for a long time stop being so. But Mis' Bingy needed me, and I was sorry for her; and I liked the feeling.

On the stairs Mother thought of something else.

"What about Luke?" she says.

I hadn't thought of Luke.

"He'd ought to be the one to set his foot down," says Mother, "seeing we can't do anything with you."

Set his foot down – Luke! Why? Because he'd tell me he loved me and I said I'd marry him! I went to the pail for a drink of water, and I stood there and laughed. Luke setting his foot down on me because I said he might!

"She'll come back when she's hungry," says Father. "Don't

carry on so, Mate."

Mate was Mother's name. I hadn't heard Father call her that many times. It come to me that my going away was something that brought them nearer together for a minute. And *Mate*! It meant something, something that she was. She *was* Father's mate. They'd met once for the first time. They'd wanted their life to be nice. I ran up to them and kissed them both. And then for the first time in my life I saw Mother's lip tremble.

"I'll do up your clean underclothes," she says, "and send 'em after you. You tell me where."

"Mother, Mother!" I says, and took hold of her. If it hadn't been for Mis' Bingy I'd have given up going then and there, and married Luke whenever he said so.

It was Mis' Bingy's scared face that give me courage to go, and it was her face that kept my mind off myself all the way to the depot. I thought she was going to faint away when we went by the lane that led up to their house. But we never heard anything or saw anybody. We were going to the depot, and just set there until the first train come along for the city. And all the while we did set there, Mis' Bingy got paler and paler every time the door opened, or somebody shouted out on the platform. She wanted to take the first train that come in and get away anywheres, even if it took us out of our way. But I got her to wait the half hour till the city train come along; and as the time went by she begun to be less willing to go at all.

"Cossy," she says, when we heard the engine whistle, "I've

been wrong. I'm being a bad wife. I'm going back."

"What kind of a wife you're being," I says, "that's got nothing to do with it. It's *her*."

She looked down at the baby. The baby had on her little best cloak, and a bonnet that the ruffle come down over her eyes. She wasn't a pretty baby, her face was spotted and she made a crooked mouth when she cried. But she was soft and helpless, and I didn't mind her being homely.

"I'm taking her away from a father's care," says Mis' Bingy, beginning to cry.

It seemed to me wicked the way she was stuffed full of words that didn't mean anything, like "bad wife" and "father's care." I didn't say anything, though. The baby's hand lay spread out on her cloak, with the burned part done up in a rag and some soda, the way Mother'd fixed it. I just picked up the little hand, and looked up at Mis' Bingy.

When the train come in, she went out and got on to it, without another word.

CHAPTER IV

It was past one o'clock when we got to the city, and we hadn't had anything to eat. We found a lunch place near the depot, and then I spent a penny for a paper, and we set there in the restaurant and tried to find where to go. It wasn't much of any fun, getting to the city, not the way you'd think it would be, because Mis' Bingy and I didn't know where we were going.

The Furnished Room page all sounded pleasant, but when we asked the restaurant keeper where the cheap ones were, most of them was quite far to walk. Finally we picked out some near each other and started out to find them. I carried my valise and Mis' Bingy's, and she had the baby. It was a hot day, with a feel of thunder in the air.

We walked for two hours, because neither of us thought we'd ought to begin by spending car-fare. Mis' Bingy had sixteen dollars that she'd saved, off and on, for two years. I had five dollars. So neither of us was worried very much about money; but we wanted to save all we could. We went to five or six places that were nice, but they cost too much; and to two that we could have taken, only the lady said she didn't want a baby in the house.

"If they're born in your house, do you turn 'em out?" I says to one of 'em.

Pretty soon we found a little grassy place with trees, and big buildings around it, and we went in that and sat down on the grass.

"Mis' Bingy," I says, "was you ever in the city before?"

"Sure I was," she says, proud, "twelve years ago. We come to his uncle's funeral. But he didn't leave him anything."

"I was here once," I says, "when I was 'leven. To have my eyes done to. And once when I was eighteen, when Mother got her teeth. Did you ever go to the theater here?" I ask' her.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.