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Fulfillment
by
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Anne Bradley had been conscious for some time of the persistent ticking of the mantle clock. Above the shuffling of the deck, the calling of bids, the slapping of cards as the hands were played, the ticking clock was ominous in its warning. No one else at the party seemed to be watching the time.

Mary Graves gave wonderful bridge parties. The prizes were sure to ^{be} extraordinary and worth making every effort to win.

Anne pushed back her already smooth dark hair and fastened a pin more securely into the knot on her neck. Perhaps, she reflected, no one else had a dead-line to meet. Some husbands could be persuaded to eat down town on bridge club days. Baby-sitters were paid by the hour and would stay until mothers returned.

If I had a baby, Anne straightened her slender shoulders in her well-fitting dress as a feeling of warmth spread over her, I wouldn't even be at a bridge party, she thought. I would be taking my baby for a walk or playing with it in front of the fire at home. Or I might be getting the evening meal, Anne's mind wandered on, with the baby in a high-chair. The kitchen

would be warm and fragrant with the smell of food cooking. The door-bell would ring. I would grab up the baby from his chair and hurry to the door to let John in. And John would——

"It's your play, Anne!", her partner said for the second time, "and spades are trumps. "

The clock chimed half past four. I'll have to leave, Anne thought. They won't like it. John wants me at home when he gets there, and I'll barely make it now in the traffic rush.

"The time", she said. "It's half past four. I must be home by five."

"But, Anne, you can't leave now. It's our first chance for a score at this table", pleaded her partner.

Mary Graves, cards in hand, left her own table and came over to Anne. "I'm sorry we are running so late, Anne", she said. "I'm going to serve right after this hand. My cook has a new pastry she learned to make at cooking school."

Anne, confused and apologetic, looked around for help. "Here, Betty," she said. "You're dummy at your table. Take my cards and play for me", and she thrust the cards fan-shape into her hands.

"At least go to the kitchen and Jennie will give you a taste of the dessert", Mary said.

"Thanks so much, Mary, but I won't take the time", Anne called back as she ran up the carpeted stairs for her coat. "It's been fun this afternoon." The room seemed very quiet as she let herself out the front door. She knew her friends would have much to say about her when they put down their cards for their tea-cups. The cold outside air felt good to her burning cheeks, and she was relieved to be on her way.

Inside the car with her foot on the accelerator, her thoughts left the party and concentrated on herself. She knew that basically she was the same shy person she had been six years ago when she married John. That underneath the expensive clothes she was wearing was the same lonely, passionate heart of the girl in the bargain-rack clothes bought on a small allowance. Marriage had changed her way of living materially without releasing the warmth of love of which she was capable.

It began to rain, the slow drizzle of an autumn rain which might turn to sleet. In the glow of the traffic lights the pavement glistened, now red, then green with a moment of amber between. Anne waited at one intersection until two nuns holding black umbrellas over their coiffed heads marshalled a group of rain-coated children across the street. They are from the orphanage and are on their way to evening vespers, she thought. She could picture the row of children entering the church, genuflecting to the Virgin Mary, kneeling in the pews, the light of candles falling on tumbled hair only partially covered by rain-caps. A little girl holding to one sister's hand was skipping to keep up. She's too little to be walking in this rain, Anne was thinking when the honking of horns behind her reminded her that the lights had changed.

As she drove on through the fast-falling darkness, the loneliness of her childhood years came back in a flood of memories. She had been an only child with only a large family of dolls for companions. Because of her father's work they had moved around the country a great deal. "Do we have to move again, Dan?" she remembered her mother saying one time. "Anne has just found a little girl companion. "Times are hard, Ruth. I have to make a living.", her father answered.

"When I grow up", Anne had told her little friend on leaving, "I'm going

to have dozens of babies. Then they will all move with me when I have to go."

As she grew older, the baby-sitting she did was not satisfying for the children were usually in bed and asleep, and Anne was back in her loneliness again. In her freshman year in High School, she had been the Madonna in the Christmas Vespers. She had been chosen because of her long hair which the costumer had arranged to fall over her shoulders from under the blue scarf which covered her head. The real baby she had held in her arms had been warm and pulsating with life. She had felt all the potentialities of motherhood as she cradled the baby throughout the long Nativity scene.

When she drove in on the driveway at home, she pulled herself out of her reverie and returned once more to the exigencies of her immediate world. The maid was putting a log on the fire. "I thought you were going to be late", she said in a slightly accusing tone. "I would have mixed the drinks if you had told me what you wanted."

Yes, and taken my one evening duty away from me, Anne reflected inwardly. "I like to fix my husband's drink, Martha", she said. "I know just how he likes it." Martha muttered as was her habit, but the remark was lost in the starchy rustle of her uniform as she returned to the kitchen.

Anne threw her coat over a chair and went to the kitchen. As she cracked ice and mixed the drink, she wanted to ask Martha what was in the oven for dinner. But knowing her fondness for surprises and seeing the dessert lurking out of sight under a white towel on the table, she did not do so.

She was waiting in front of the fire, the shaker and glasses on a tray near at hand when John came. She went to meet him. He kissed her on both cheeks. "Don't get too close until I dry off", he said. The smell of wet wool mingled with the wood smoke. He clasped his hands behind him to straighten

his shoulders bent from too long hours at his desk.

"It's good to come in out the rain and find you waiting for me. I hope you haven't been out in this foul weather."

"Just a bridge game at Mary Graves", Anne answered as she handed him his drink. John unfolded his evening paper, settled himself in a big chair, and scanned every head-line as he sipped his drink. Anne picked up her knitting and waited for him to finish. The pattern never varied in the early evening. The only variance was the exact time that Martha announced dinner. Anne thought she must listen behind the serving -room door until she heard John's paper fall to the floor beside his chair. Such had been the pattern set by John's mother in her life-time, and so had it continued after Anne became mistress. Such efficiency and regularity of the household were due to Martha's well-established habits and Anne's ability to conform.

The dinner was good, the meat neither rare nor too well-done, the salad tossed until each green leaf was coated with its tangy dressing, the dessert rich in fruits and nuts. Martha rustled in and out anticipating every want. Anne wished she could ring for service of some kind just once to relieve the monotony of being so well cared-for.

When they returned to the living-room, Anne waited until Martha had cleared the table in the dining-room before she asked the question she had had in mind all during dinner. "Could we go to the Symphony Concert tonight?" she asked. "I heard this afternoon there are seats left."

John's answer was not unexpected. "You know I don't care for music of that kind. I couldn't stand a whole evening of it. Besides I have some contracts which I must work on tonight."

"I wouldn't mind going alone", Anne said trying to keep the eagerness out of her voice.

"Not on a night like this. You have your records. Play your own concert where you are warm and safe by your own fireside." John picked up his brief case and went to his study at the back of the house away from the noise of the street.

"I'm going out for the evening, Mrs. Bradley", Martha announced appearing at the door dressed for a rainy night.

"It's a bad night", Anne replied. "Have a good time." She is probably going across the street to gossip with the Wiley's maid, she thought, and found herself envying Martha and her freedom to go out on a rainy night if she so desired.

The record player had been John's wedding gift to her. She chose at random a record from the cabinet, and when she heard the first notes of the Brahms Symphony, there sprang into her mind her first meeting with John Bradley. She remembered how his face looked in the half-light of the concert hall as he sat beside her a stranger, a dark face with heavy brows which gave her a feeling of power and strength. She had gone alone to the matinee concert. None of the girls in the business school she was attending cared for music like she did. Her father knowing her love for music had bought her a season ticket for the symphony concerts when she went to the city to study. The hours she spent there made up for the loneliness of the city life which stifled and oppressed her with its heartliness.

The seat beside her that afternoon had been empty until the last number before the intermission. Anne removed her coat from the seat to make room for the late-comer. He helped her put it around her shoulders before the Brahms number began. The freshness of the outdoor air he brought with him together with the scent of tobacco had been pleasant in the over-heated auditorium.

When the music ended, Anne looked in dismay at her program torn half in two with the tenseness of the emotion she had felt. He had laughed at her discom-

future and said, "Better let me buy you a drink in the foyer. I see you are alone." She had gone with him, and they had learned much about each other during the intermission.

"I come to a concert to relieve tension, not to acquire it ", he said as she tried to explain how she had felt during the music. "Perhaps if I held your hand , you could save the other half of your program for a souvenir", he said when they were back in their seats again and the lights were dimming. Anne put her hand in his and gave herself up to the unexpected joy of companionship coupled with the flood of music flowing over her.

After the concert he had said with real regret, "Now I must go back to the office to finish the job I ran away from this afternoon. It wasn't the music that caused me to buy a concert ticket, just plain escapism. When may I see you again?"

Anne gave him her telephone number as they waited for a taxi to take her home. He called that night as she was trying to prepare a lesson for next day's class, and they had planned another meeting. Their courtship had been quick and exciting, but never again did music play a part in it. Anne with John for a companion no longer felt the need for music to relieve the loneliness of her city life. He had ^{her} taken _{her} to see the big house where he had lived alone since the death of his mother and asked her what changes she would like to make when she came there to live.

"None right now," she answered, but mentally she was planning which room would be the nursery. The one with the southern exposure would be fine because it opened out on a green lawn shaded by big trees.. Later, John told her that had been his room as he was growing up.

Anne had done all the things a young bride does on coming into a new community. She had canvassed her block for Welfare Drives, helped wherever needed

in church affairs, given her time for the success of cultural events. She knitted for the children of her bridge club friends occasionally laying away an exquisite little garment among folds of tissue paper in her own drawer. At one meeting of her club when the talk had been mostly about the rearing of children and household affairs, Louise White had said, "We shouldn't bore Anne with all this small talk about children and house-keeping. She has a maid to keep her house and no children to get in her way." Anne knew that Louise was not being unkind, but the growing fear that she was to be childless became more real. I've been married five years, she thought, five years of coming and going with no destination in sight, a frittering away of time with never enough to keep me busy even for one day. She went that day to see a doctor.

Dr. Morton was not a young man and had had many cases like Anne's. At first he was reassuring. "You're still young, Anne," he told her. "There's plenty of time ahead."

"Thirty years old is not young for child-bearing," Anne countered. "Besides we are becoming so settled in our ways. We can almost set our clocks by the way we do things. Every afternoon I am at home at five o'clock because John does not want to come home to an empty house. He's becoming more and more absorbed in his business, and I am having more and more of my time on my hands. We need a real interest, something to plan for in the future."

The next time Anne went to see Dr. Morton he said to her as she was leaving, "This seems to be becoming an obsession with you, Anne. Have you ever thought of adopting a child?"

Anne with her hand on the door-knob searched his eyes for confirmation. "Do you think that might be the thing to do?" she asked. "I understand it is a long process."

"You might start the ball rolling. At least, it would give you the

new interest you want." He hunted in his desk for a phamplet from a Child-rens' Agency. "Read this over and see what you think."

Anne read the phamplet several times before she gave it to John to read. She watched him as he turned the pages and knew that his quick mind was taking in all the information.

"I'd have to think about this for some time,"he said. "I've known of some cases that haven't worked out too well. You're asking for trouble, not receiving it naturally as nature intended."

Anne knew that John was not a man of hasty decisions. That he spent many hours deciding business transactions she was well aware of from the work he brought home. That he was thinking of posterity and their lack of it was apparent when they stopped one day on one of their drives at a small cemetary where his ancestors were buried. He told her the history of his family as he read the inscriptions on the weather-beaten tomb-stones. Anne rubbed her hand over the old stones and felt the chill of the cold marble enter through her finger-tips and pass through her body. Was she to be the one to break this chain to the past because of her inability to forge a new link?

Tonight as the music surged around her and the fire in the fireplace went out, Anne became concerned with her lack of immortality. She believed that immortality could only be achieved through the life of a child. As neither she nor John had brothers or sisters, they would become forgotten names on tomb-stones in a short time for there would be no one to remember. The red light on the fecord player glowed for a long time after the music had ended before Anne turned it off and went to bed.

Last night's mood was still with her at breakfast, and she was only half listening as John talked about what he had accomplished by his evening's work. Have you thought any more about adoption? The question came out of Anne's thinking but remained unasked for John was pushing back his

chair and getting ready to leave. This isn't the time, thought Anne. I must be patient.

"Tonight at five o'clock, Anne. This house is too big without you in it," John said as he went out the door.

Martha came in to clear the table. Anne took her coffee cup to the window and stood looking out at the garden. She wondered what she could do to pass the long day ahead of her uncharted for any course which affected her. Then she remembered that a big package of fall bulbs had been delivered the day before. She would get into old clothes, wrap up warmly, and spend the morning digging holes in the wet ground, placing bulbs in them, filling in with dirt, mounding over them against the cold of winter.

"Where did the expressman put the bulbs that came yesterday?" she asked Martha as she was removing the cloth from the table and folding it neatly along its creases.

"He left them in the garage, and a man from the nursery came yesterday and put them out while you were at the party."

"Oh", Anne said, and turned her head so that Martha could not see her disappointment. She looked out again at the garden. The man had been neat. She could not tell where the bulbs had been planted. I won't even know where to look for them next spring, she thought.

She followed Martha to the kitchen. "It's your cleaning day, Martha," she said. "Let me make the dessert for dinner tonight. I know a good one my mother used to make." She reached into a drawer for an apron.

Martha opened the ice-box door and showed her a chocolate covered mixture. "I made an ice-box cake while you were at breakfast this morning," she said, and closed the door. Anne ^{shut} closed the apron drawer and left the kitchen.

She decided to call Nancy Evans and ask her to meet her some place for lunch. Nancy had been one of the girls in her class at school. She had

married before Anne had and lived in another part of town. She had two little girls both of which would be of school age now. While she waited for Nancy to answer, she remembered the last time she had seen the children. Two plain-looking little girls with long straight hair held back from their foreheads with black ribbon bands. She had met them and Nancy for an outing at the zoo. The wonderful sights they had seen had excited the little girls until their faces were almost beautiful. At lunch which they had eaten at a park restaurant, Anne had tucked napkins under their chins, cut up their meat, buttered their bread, given each one half of her own ice-cream. Nancy laughed and said, "It's a good thing, Anne, that you haven't a child of your own for you would spoil it terribly."

"I'd be a lot busier than I am now," Anne had replied. That had been two years ago. She had planned many times to see them again, but for many reasons the plans had failed. But she could still feel the pressure of the little hands in hers as they walked along the avenues in the zoo lined with cages of wild animals.

Nancy's voice was resonant with pleasure when she knew it was Anne calling. "My cleaning woman is here today," she said in answer to Anne's luncheon suggestion. "She can give the girls their lunch when they come from school at noon. I can meet you any place you say."

Anne suggested a tearoom which would be about half way for both of them. "That's fine," Nancy said. "I have an engagement in that neighborhood, later."

"I'll tell you about it when I see you."

Anne hung up the phone with a more satisfied feeling. At least today is taken care of, she thought. Nancy would have stories to tell about her girls, and she could enjoy them vicariously. She was at the tearoom with a table engaged before Nancy got there.

"I'm sorry to be late," Nancy said when she arrived rather breathless. "Last minute things which you probably don't have in your well-ordered household."

"No, but I wish I did," Anne replied. She was a good listener as Nancy gave a running account of their activities. She admired the pictures of the little girls which Nancy had with her and asked many questions about them.

The food was good, and the time passed so quickly and pleasantly that Nancy was startled when she saw it was almost three o'clock.

"I'm due at the Childrens' Hospital at three. It's my one civic duty. I go each Friday afternoon to help in the wards. Why don't you come with me, and I'll drive you back to your car on my way home?"

Anne was glad to fill out her afternoon with something new. She went with Nancy, and followed her from the parking lot at the hospital to the ward where she was to work. "Perhaps your friend would like to put on a gown and help, too", the nurse said as Nancy was getting into hers.

"Oh, I would," Anne answered. She scrubbed her hands and listened to the instructions the nurse was giving.

"This little girl is learning to walk with her new brace," the nurse explained as she helped the child to balance herself on her feet. Big brown eyes too big for the little face and darkened with the pain she had known looked up at Anne hopefully. In a few minutes she was getting the support and confidence she needed. There were other children to help, but Anne kept returning to the little girl.

As she was getting ready to leave, the child spoke for the first time. In a voice weakened by illness she said, "Thank you for helping me". Anne bent down and kissed the pallid little cheek. "I'll come again," she said. That's a promise. Watch for me."

She asked many questions as she and Nancy walked down the corridor with the nurse.

"Her name is Dorothy, but we call her Dottie. She is an orphan from the Childrens' Home, five years old. She's had a bad case of polio, but is making some progress. Anne knew before she left the hospital that she must keep her promise to Dottie very soon and signed up for two afternoons a week for volunteer duty. Nancy took her back to where her car was parked, and the two friends went their separate ways.

She was so quiet at dinner that John asked her what she had been doing. Anne told him about her lunch with Nancy Evans and that she had gone with her to the Childrens' Hospital. "No child's eyes should be that sad," she said irrelevantly. When John looked at her in surprise, she told about Dottie and her work with her that afternoon. John listened attentively until he had to leave for a meeting. Anne played records all evening while she looked through knitting books and planned a sweater for the thin little shoulders of a little girl with almost black eyes. It must be bright red, a cherry red, she planned, to brighten up that colorless little face, and a beret to match. I'll see what I can do with that straggley hair the next time I go.

The weeks with the new interest for Anne went by quickly. Spring came early. When the bulbs in Anne's garden bloomed, she took a bouquet of daffodils to Dottie. "Are they real flowers?" Dottie asked, squeezing them in her white little hands and looking at them in awe.

"I picked them in my garden just for you," Anne answered. "They lived all winter way down deep in the ground in hard little bulbs, and pushed their up when spring came." Then she had an idea which she dared not impart to the child until she had talked first with the nurse.

The next time she came, she brought the finished sweater and beret. After Dottie had walked the full length of the ward to show off her new outfit, Anne said, "Miss Blake says I may take you with me to see my garden." For the first time there was color in the little face. "Let's go right now," Dottie said.

and put her hand in Anne's.

Anne covered the little legs with a blanket and drew the child close to her before they drove off. She drove slowly pointing out many signs of spring along the way. At the house she helped her from the car and adjusted the brace before they started their walk around the garden. Dottie picked as many flowers as her hands would hold exclaiming over each one as if it were a treasure. Anne catching sight of the curtains moving at the kitchen window called to Martha to come out. Anne told her about Dottie as the child clung to her. But when Martha said she had baked cookies and would the little girl like some, she lost her shyness. They sat at Martha's table in the kitchen and ate cookies and drank milk. Martha found a box for her flowers and gave her some cookies to take home. Martha followed them out to the car. Anne thought, Martha's human, too, when it comes to the soft touch of a child.

It was the happiest spring Anne had known for a long time. John remarked about her increased spirits and asked what vitamins she was taking. Anne showed him a picture of Dottie taken on one of their trips to the park. The child was dabbling her good little foot into the water at the wading pool her head thrown back in laughter as she clung to a pole for support. "She's all the vitamins I need," she replied. She told John each time they went on an excursion to the park, to the lake shore where they built sand castles, to the zoo with Dottie in a wheel chair to save her the long walk, to the store to buy a new doll.

"The other children don't seem to mind when I take Dottie out for they all have parents who come regularly to see them." John was interested and remembered to ask her about each visit.

Dottie's progress was more rapid now. Anne dreaded the time when she would have to go back to the Home and take her place among the other children there for she felt that her services would not be needed as much then.

Then came the day when Dottie was gone from the hospital. "The doctor

said she could go back to the Home for we are so crowded here. She cried when she left for she was afraid she would not see Mrs. Bradley again," the nurse explained. "I told her you would go to the NHome to see her."

"Oh, I will, I will," Anne replied, and began a new round of duties in the ward. Gray eyes, blue eyes, black, and brown looked up at her as she stooped over little beds or amused restless little convalescents. But she could not put ^{out} of her mind the wistful dark eyes of Dottie's. She left early so that she could stop by the Home. Dottie came as fast as her brace would let her when she heard that Mrs. Bradley wanted to see her. Anne held her close while they planned for their next outing. In the well-scrubbed atmosphere of an institution Anne felt the aloneness of the child. She arranged with the matron to take Dottie with her the next time she came, and drove home planning their time together.

It was raining on that day. The wind was changing, a pushing back of spring with raw gusts. People were hurrying along the street eager to get to their destinations. A milk wagon horse waiting while the driver serviced a small grocery store lowered its head against the chilling rain. "A day not fit for man nor beast," Anne remembered her father saying on days similar to this one.

Dottie was waiting in her red sweater and cap when Anne came, standing on tip-toe on her good leg to look out the high window in the entrance hall.

"The other children said you wouldn't come, but I knew you would," she said happily as she settled herself beside Anne in the car.

Anne envied the simple faith of a child as they drove away. "It's too bad weather for anything out of doors today. We are going to my house," she announced. Dottie leaned back against the seat while Anne gave all her attention to driving in the freezing rain.

It was Martha's afternoon out. There was a fire laid in the living-room in anticipation of a sudden reversion to winter. Anne lighted it and

watched the glow of the flames on Dottie's face as she stretched her thin little legs to the warmth.

"How would you like to help me make cookies?" she asked after a while.

"I have watched cook make them at the Home but she wouldn't let me help." Dottie held to Anne's hand as they went to the kitchen. Anne tied a big apron over her dress and lifted her to a high stool by the kitchen counter. The afternoon was gray with rain. Anne turned on all the lights. She chose an easy recipe and let Dottie sift the flour, beat the eggs, and do as much of the mixing of the dough as she could manage. She could find no fancy cookie-cutters so they took turns cutting them free-hand. The cookies baked unevenly for the dough was too thick in some places and too thin in others. But the sight of their strange creations and the smell of baking so intrigued the two cooks that they sampled a first one and then another. They were laughing at a fat clown whose hat had fallen off in the oven, when the swinging door into the kitchen opened, and John with a surprised look came in.

"I came home early because of the storm. It's snowing hard now, one of those late spring storms which makes driving hazardous. I made it without too much trouble, but it is going to be bad going from here on." John reached for a cookie and ate it while Anne explained what she and Dottie were doing.

"I wouldn't want you to go out in this storm," he said. "Could you phone the matron and tell her we will keep the child all night and bring her home in the morning?"

"That's a wonderful plan," Anne answered, and went to the telephone. When she returned, Dottie was showing John the cookies she had made and John was eating the ones she picked out for him.

"The matron says we may keep her," she reported gaily. "Now you two get out of the kitchen while I concentrate on something more nourishing than cookies for

dinner. "

Anne felt a rush of emotion as she watched John lift Dottie down from her stool, and with his arm around her help her through the swinging door. She looked in the living-room once as she arranged three trays for their meal. John was reading the comic strips to Dottie as she sat beside him on the sofa. When she came in with a tray in her hands, John put up a table in front of the fire and placed three chairs around it. Dottie watched gleefully and could hardly wait until they were seated around the table and ready to eat. She folded her hands and said her grace before picking up her fork. She liked her food and asked for more of the jello salad. When Anne reported there was no more in the ice-box, John slipped his onto her plate. She gave him a radiant smile as she dipped her spoon into the shimmering green coolness of the salad.

Anne was a long time cleaning up the kitchen from the cooky baking and dinner preparations. She found a sleepy little girl and a quiet man by the fire when she returned to the living-room.

"Where will she sleep?" John asked. "This is a strange house. She shouldn't be alone when she is used to so many around her." He pulled the relaxed child to him and supported her while Anne planned.

"We could make her a bed on the chaise longue in our room. The back lets down until it is flat." She watched John covertly while she made the suggestion.

"I'll come with you for you may need me." John lifted Dottie gently and stood her on her feet. Together the three of them went up the stairs, John's and Anne's arms meeting around the child.

Anne chose pink sheets for Dottie's improvised bed and a warm white blanket. John removed the brace from Dottie's leg, and Anne helped her to undress. She pinned up a housecoat of hers for a nightgown and tied a ribbon around the small waist for snugness. Dottie burrowed down between the sheets.

"Your face looks like a pansy in a bed of pink flowers," Anne told her

as she tucked and retucked the blanket around her. When she could find nothing more to do, she followed John downstairs leaving a low light burning.

John picked up his brief case and took it to his study returning immediately without it. He sat down by the fire and leafed through the pages of a magazine. Anne was restless and made several trips upstairs to see if Dottie was covered.

"I wonder if all mothers are as solicitous of their children as you are over this little girl," he mused after her third trip.

"It's because I have become so fond of her as I have seen her in the hospital and the Home. . . Such a frail little thing to grow up without any parents. She doesn't even remember her father and her mother. " Anne knew she would be crying if kept up that line of thought. She got up quickly and started for the stairs. "I thought I heard her cry out," she said.

This time John followed her. Together they stood looking down at the sleeping child. John rubbed his finger over the soft skin of the little hand relaxed outside the blanket, then held it in his own. The little clothes, limp and formless, lay over the back of a chair. The shoes, toes scarred from stumbling, were under the chair. The heavy brace was pushed back out of the way under the bed. The child sighed in her sleep and turned her head exposing one cheek rosy from its contact with the pillow.

"She's lovely, Anne," John whispered. "A storm-ridden little craft that needs a safe port. We could do so much for her. I wonder"—. Anne stopped breathing as she waited for him to continue. "Would she be for adoption?"

"I'll find out all about that tomorrow," Anne said. She put her head on John's shoulder to hid her sobs. "I think I have been waiting for this all spring."