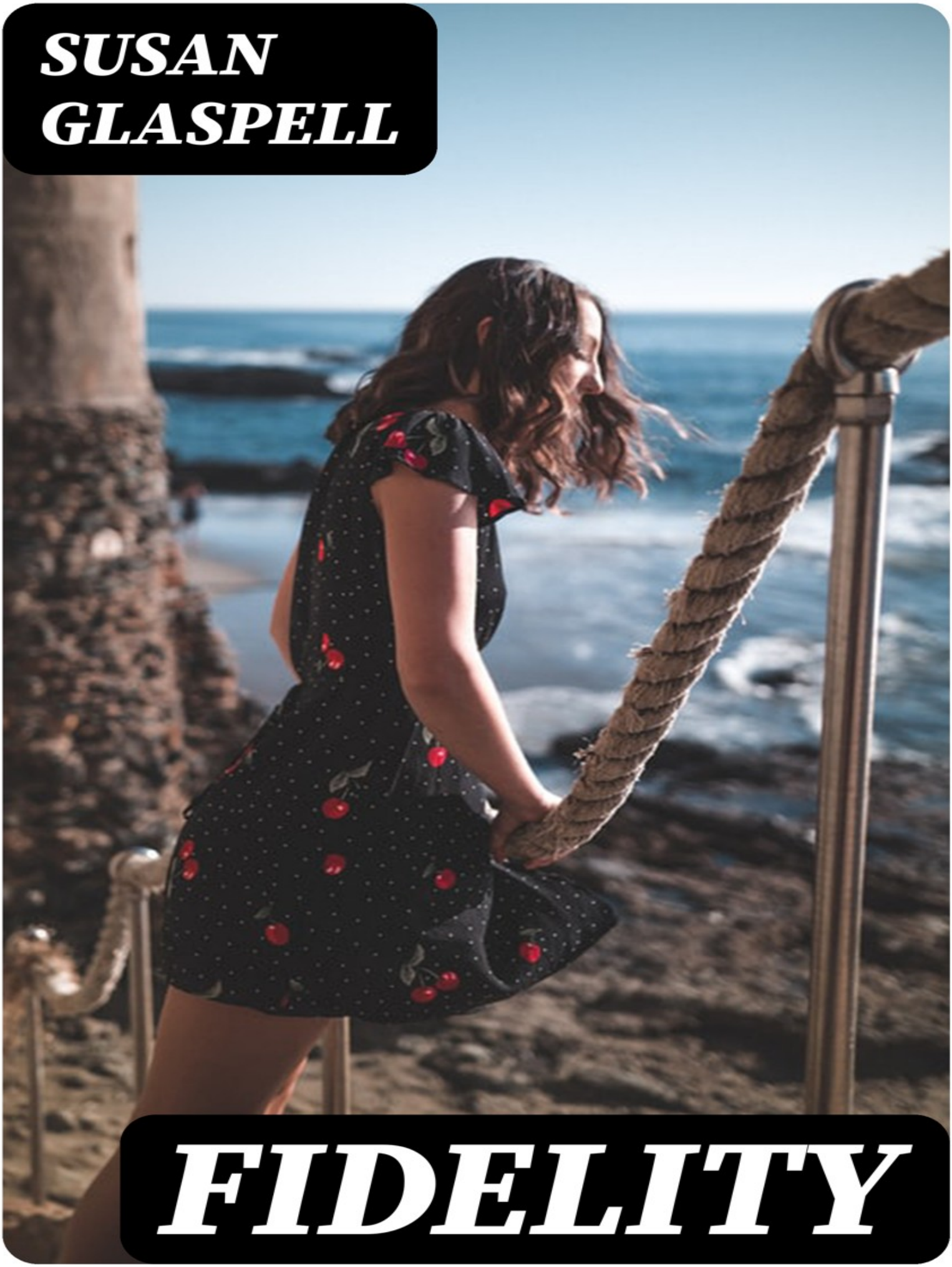
SUSAN GLASPELL



FIDELITY

Susan Glaspell

Fidelity

A Novel

EAN 8596547243908

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

Table of Contents

It was hard to get back into the easy current of everyday talk. Cora Albright's question had too rudely pulled them out of it, disturbing the quiet flow of inconsequential things. Even when they had recovered and were safely flowing along on the fact that the new hotel was to cost two hundred thousand dollars, after they had moved with apparent serenity to lamentation over a neighbor who was sick in bed and without a cook, it was as if they were making a display of the ease with which they could move on those commonplace things, as if thus to deny the consciousness of whirlpools near by.

So they seemed to Dr. Deane Franklin, who, secured by the shadow of the porch vine, could smile to himself at the way he saw through them. Though Deane Franklin's smile for seeing through people was not so much a smile as a queer little twist of the left side of his face, a screwing up of it that half shut one eye and pulled his mouth out of shape, the same twist that used to make people call him a homely youngster. He was thinking that Cora's question, or at any rate her manner in asking it, would itself have told that she had lived away from Freeport for a number of years. She did not know that they did not talk about Ruth Holland any more, that certainly they did not speak of her in the tone of everyday things.

And yet, looking at it in any but the Freeport way, it was the most natural thing in the world that Cora should have asked what she did. Mrs. Lawrence had asked if Mr. Holland—he was Ruth's father—was getting any better, and then Cora

had turned to him with the inquiry: "Do you ever hear from Ruth?"

It was queer how it arrested them all. He saw Mrs. Lawrence's start and her quick look over to her daughter—now Edith Lawrence Blair, the Edith Lawrence who had been Ruth's dearest friend. It was Edith herself who had most interested him. She had been leaning to the far side of her big chair in order to escape the shaft of light from the porch lamp. But at Cora's question she made a quick turn that brought her directly into the light. It gave her startled face, so suddenly and sharply revealed, an unmasked aspect as she turned from Cora to him. And when he quietly answered: "Yes, I had a letter from Ruth this morning," her look of amazement, of sudden feeling, seemed for the instant caught there in the light. He got her quick look over to Amy—his bride, and then her conscious leaning back from the disclosing shaft into the shadow.

He himself had become suddenly conscious of Amy. They had been in California for their honeymoon, and had just returned to Freeport. Amy was not a Freeport girl, and was new to his old crowd, which the visit of Cora Albright was bringing together in various little reunions. She had been sitting over at the far side of the group, talking with Will Blair, Edith's husband. Now they too had stopped talking.

"She wanted to know about her father," he added.

No one said anything. That irritated him. It seemed that Edith or her mother, now that Cora had opened it up, might make some little attempt at the common decencies of such a situation, might ask if Ruth would come home if her father died, speak of her as if she were a human being.

Cora did not appear to get from their silence that she was violating Freeport custom. "Her mother died just about a

year after Ruth—left, didn't she?" she pursued.

"About that," he tersely answered.

"Died of a broken heart," murmured Mrs. Lawrence.

"She died of pneumonia," was his retort, a little sharp for a young man to an older woman.

Her slight wordless murmur seemed to comment on his failure to see. She turned to Cora with a tolerant, gently-spoken, "I think Deane would have to admit that there was little force left for fighting pneumonia. Certainly it was a broken life!"—that last was less gently said.

Exasperation showed in his shifting of position.

"It needn't have been," he muttered stubbornly.

"Deane—Deane!" she murmured, as if in reproach for something of long standing. There was a silence in which the whole thing was alive there for those of them who knew. Cora and Edith, sitting close together, did not turn to one another. He wondered if they were thinking of the countless times Ruth had been on that porch with them in the years they were all growing up together. Edith's face was turned away from the light now. Suddenly Cora demanded: "Well, there's no prospect at all of a divorce?"

Mrs. Lawrence rose and went over to Amy and opened a lively conversation as to whether she found her new maid satisfactory. It left him and Edith and Cora to themselves.

"No," he answered her question, "I guess not. Not that I know of."

"How terrible it all is!" Cora exclaimed, not without feeling; and then, following a pause, she and Edith were speaking of

how unbecoming the new hats were, talking of the tea one of their old friends was giving for Cora next day.

He sat there thinking how it was usually those little things that closed in over Ruth. When the thought of her, feeling about her, broke through, it was soon covered over with—oh, discussion of how some one was wearing her hair, the health of some one's baby or merits of some one's cook.

He listened to their talk about the changes there had been in Freeport in the last ten or twelve years. They spoke of deaths, of marriages, of births; of people who had prospered and people who had gone to pieces; of the growth of the town, of new people, of people who had moved away. In a word, they spoke of change. Edith would refer things to him and he occasionally joined in the talk, but he was thinking less of the incidents they spoke of than of how it was change they were talking about. This enumeration of changes gave him a sense of life as a continuous moving on, as a thing going swiftly by. Life had changed for all those people they were telling Cora about. It had changed for themselves too. He had continued to think of Edith and the others as girls. But they had moved on from that; they were moving on all the time. Why, they were over thirty! As a matter of fact they were women near the middle thirties. People talked so lightly of change, and yet change meant that life was swiftly sweeping one on.

He turned from that too somber thinking to Amy, watched her as she talked with Mrs. Lawrence. They too were talking of Freeport people and affairs, the older woman bringing Amy into the current of life there. His heart warmed a little to Edith's mother for being so gracious to Amy, though, that did not keep him from marveling at how she could be both so warm and so hard—so loving within the circle of her approval, so unrelenting out beyond it.

Amy would make friends, he was thinking, lovingly proud. How could it be otherwise when she was so lovely and so charming? She looked so slim, so very young, in that white dress she was wearing. Well, and she was young, little older now than these girls had been when they really were "the girls." That bleak sense of life as going by fell away; here *was* life—the beautiful life he was to have with Amy. He watched the breeze play with her hair and his whole heart warmed to her in the thought of the happiness she brought him, in his gratitude for what love made of life. He forgot his resentment about Ruth, forgot the old bitterness and old hurt that had just been newly stirred in him. Life had been a lonely thing for a number of years after Ruth went away. He had Amy now—all was to be different.

They all stood at the head of the steps for a moment as he and Amy were bidding the others goodnight. They talked of the tea Edith was to give for Amy the following week—what Amy would wear—how many people there would be. "And let me pick you up and take you to the tea tomorrow," Edith was saying. "It will be small and informal—just Cora's old friends—and then you won't have so many strangers to meet next week."

He glowed with new liking of Edith, felt anew that sweetness in her nature that, after her turning from Ruth, had not been there for him. Looking at her through this new friendliness he was thinking how beautifully she had developed. Edith was a mother now, she had two lovely children. She was larger than in her girlhood; she had indeed flowered, ripened. Edith was a sweet woman, he was thinking.

"I do think they're the kindest, most beautiful people!" Amy exclaimed warmly as they started slowly homeward through the fragrant softness of the May night.

CHAPTER TWO

Table of Contents

He had known that Amy would ask, and wondered a little at her waiting so long. It was an hour later, as she sat before her dressing-table brushing her hair that she turned to him with a little laugh and asked: "Who is this mysterious Ruth?"

He sighed; he was tired and telling about Ruth seemed a large undertaking.

Amy colored and turned from him and picked up her brush. "Don't tell me if you don't want to," she said formally.

His hand went round her bared shoulder. "Dearest! Why, I want to, of course. It's just that it's a long story, and tonight I'm a little tired." As she did not respond to that he added: "This was a hard day at the office."

Amy went on brushing her hair; she did not suggest that he let it go until another time so he began, "Ruth was a girl who used to live here."

"I gathered that," she replied quietly.

Her tone made no opening for him. "I thought a great deal of her," he said after a moment.

"Yes, I gathered that too." She said it dryly, and smiled just a little. He was more conscious than ever of being tired, of its being hard to tell about Ruth.

"I gathered," said Amy, still faintly smiling, though, her voice went a trifle higher, "that you thought more of her—" she hesitated, then amended—"think more of her—than the rest of them do."

He answered simply: "Yes, I believe that's so. Though Edith used to care a great deal for Ruth," he added meditatively.

"Well, what did she do?" Amy demanded impatiently. "What *is* it?"

For a moment his cheek went down to her soft hair that was all around her, in a surge of love for its softness, a swift, deep gratitude for her loveliness. He wanted to rest there, letting that, for the time, shut out all else, secure in new happiness and forgetting old hurts.

But he felt her waiting for what she wanted to know and so with an effort he began: "Why, you see, dear, Ruth—it was pretty tough for Ruth. Things didn't go right for her—not as they did for Cora and Edith and the girls of her crowd. She—" Something in the calm of Amy's waiting made it curiously hard to say, "Ruth couldn't marry the man she cared for."

"Why not!" she asked dispassionately.

"Why, because it wasn't possible," he answered a little sharply. "She couldn't marry him because he wasn't divorced," he said bluntly then.

Amy's deep gray eyes, they had seemed so unperturbed, so unsympathetically calm, were upon him now in a queer, steady way. He felt himself flushing. "Wasn't divorced?" she said with a little laugh. "Is that a way of saying he was married?"

He nodded.

"She cared for a man who was married to someone else?" she asked with rising voice.

Again he only nodded, feeling incapable, when Amy looked at him like that, of saying the things he would like to be

saying for Ruth.

Abruptly she drew her hair away. "And you can sympathize with—*like*—a person who would do that?"

"I certainly both sympathize with and like Ruth."

That had come quick and sharp, and then suddenly he felt it all wrong that a thing which had gone so deep into his own life should be coming to Amy like this, that she should be taking the attitude of the town against his friend, against his own feeling. He blamed his way of putting it, telling himself it was absurd to expect her to understand a bald statement like that. At that moment he realized it was very important she should understand; not only Ruth, but something in himself—something counting for much in himself would be shut out if she did not understand.

It made his voice gentle as he began: "Amy, don't you know that just to be told of a thing may make it seem very different from what the thing really was? Seeing a thing from the outside is so different from living through it. Won't you reserve judgment about Ruth—she is my friend and I hate to see her unfairly judged—until some time when I can tell it better?"

"Why have *you* so much to do with it? Why is it so important I do not—judge her?" Amy's sweetness, that soft quality that had been dear to him seemed to have tightened into a hard shrewdness as she asked: "How did *you* happen to know it all from within?"

He pushed his chair back from her and settled into it wearily. "Why, because she was my friend, dear. I was in her confidence."

"I don't think I'd be very proud of being in the confidence of a woman who ran away with another woman's husband!"

Her hostile voice fanned the old anger that had so many times flamed when people were speaking hostilely of Ruth. But he managed to say quietly: "But you see you don't know much about it yet, Amy."

He was facing her mirror and what he saw in it made him lean forward, his arms about her, with an impulsive: "Sweetheart, we're not going to quarrel, are we?"

But after his kisses she asked, as if she had only been biding her time through the interruption; "*Did* she run away with him?"

His arm dropped from her shoulder. "They left together," he answered shortly.

"Are they married now?"

"No."

Amy, who had resumed the brushing of her hair, held the brush suspended. "*Living* together—all this time—and *not* married?"

"They are not married," was his heated response, "because the man's wife has not divorced him." He added, not without satisfaction: "She's that kind of a person."

Amy turned and her eyes met his. "What kind of a person?" she said challengingly. "I presume," she added coolly, "that she does not believe in divorce."

"I take it that she does not," was his dry answer.

She flushed, and exclaimed a little tremulously: "Well, really, Deane, you needn't be so disagreeable about it!"

Quickly he turned to her, glad to think that he had been disagreeable; that was so much easier than what he had been trying to keep from thinking.

"I didn't mean to be disagreeable, Amy dear. I suppose I've got in the habit of being disagreeable about Ruth: people here have been so hard about her; I've resented their attitude so."

"But why should you *care*? Why is it such a personal matter to you?"

He was about to say, "She was my friend," but remembering he had said that before, he had anew a sense of helplessness. He did not want to talk about it any more. He had become tired out with thinking about it, with the long grieving for Ruth and the sorrowing with her. When he found Amy their love had seemed to free him from old hurts and to bring him out from loneliness. Wonderful as the ecstasy of fresh love was he had thought even more of the exquisite peace that rests in love. Amy had seemed to be bringing him to that; and now it seemed that Ruth was still there holding him away from it. The thought brushed his mind, his face softening for the instant with it, that Ruth would be so sorry to have that true.

Amy had braided her hair; the long fair braid hung over her shoulder, beautifully framing her face as she turned to him. "Had you supposed, when you all knew her, when she was in your crowd, that she was—that kind of a person?"

His blood quickened in the old anger for Ruth; but there was something worse than that—a sick feeling, a feeling in which there was disappointment and into which there crept something that was like shame.

The telephone rang before he need reply. When he turned from it, it was to say hurriedly, "I'll have to go to the hospital, Amy. Sorry—that woman I operated on yesterday —" He was in the next room, gathering together his things before he had finished it.

Amy followed him in. "Why, I'm so sorry, dear. It's too bad—when you're so tired."

He turned and caught her in his arms and held her there close in a passion of relief at the gentleness and love of her voice that swept away those things about her he had tried to think were not in his mind. Amy was so sweet!—so beautiful, so tender. Why of course she wouldn't understand about Ruth! How absurd to expect her to understand, he thought, when he had blurted things out like that, giving her no satisfaction about it. He was touchy on the subject, he gladly told himself, as he held her close in all the thankfulness of regaining her. And when, after he had kissed her good-by she lifted her face and kissed him again his rush of love for her had power to sweep all else away.

CHAPTER THREE

Table of Contents

It was in that mood of passionate tenderness for Amy, a glow of gratitude for love, that he sent his car swiftly toward the hospital. His feeling diffused warmth for the town through which he drove, the little city that had so many times tightened him up in bitterness. People were kind, after all; how kind they were being to Amy, he thought, eager to receive her and make her feel at home, anxious that she be happy among them. The picture of Edith as she stood at the head of the steps making plans for Amy warmed his heart to her. Perhaps he had been unfair to Edith; in that one thing, certainly, she had failed as a friend, but perhaps it was impossible for women to go that far in friendship, impossible for them to be themselves on the outer side of the door of their approval. Even Amy.... That showed, of course, how hard it was for women whose experiences had all fallen within the circle of things as they should be to understand a thing that was—disrupting. It was as if their kindly impulses, sympathy, tenderness, were circumscribed by that circle. Little as he liked that, his own mood of the moment, his unrecognized efforts at holding it, kept him within that sphere where good feeling lived. In it were happy anticipations of the life he and Amy would have in Freeport. He had long been out of humor with his town, scornful. He told himself now that that was a wrong attitude. There was a new feeling for the homes he was passing, for the people in those homes. He had a home there, too; it seemed to make him one with all those people. There was warmth in that feeling of being one with others.

He told himself that it was absurd to expect Amy to adjust herself all in a minute to a thing he had known about for years, had all the time known from within. He would make Amy understand; if Ruth came, Amy would be good to her. At heart she was not like those others, and happiness would make her want to be kind.

He saw her face lifted for that second good-by kiss—and quickened his speed. He hoped he would not have to be long at the hospital, hoped Amy would not be asleep when he got back home. He lingered happily around the thought of there being a home to go back to, of how Amy would be there when he got back.

But it was at a slower speed that, an hour later, he traveled those same streets. He had lost his patient. It was no failure of the operator, but one of those cases where the particular human body is not equal to the demand made upon it, where there was no reaction. He got no satisfaction in telling himself that the woman could not have lived long without the operation; she had not lived with it—that was the only side it turned to him. The surgery was all right enough, but life had ebbed away. It brought a sense of who was master.

He had been practising for twelve years, but death always cut deep into his spirit. It was more than chagrin, more than the disheartenment of the workman at failure, when he lost a patient. It was a real sense of death, and with that a feeling of man's final powerlessness.

That made it a different town through which he drove upon his return; a town where people cut their way ruthlessly through life—and to what end? They might be a little kinder to each other along the way, it would seem, when this was what it came to for them all. They were kind enough about death—not so kind about the mean twists in life.

That feeling was all wrapped up with Ruth Holland; it brought Ruth to him. He thought of the many times they had traveled that road together, times when he would take her where she could meet Stuart Williams, then pick her up again and bring her home, her family thinking she had been with him. How would he ever make Amy understand about that? It seemed now that it could not be done, that it would be something they did not share, perhaps something lying hostilely between them. He wondered why it had not seemed to him the shameful thing it would appear to anyone he told of it. Was that something twisted in him, or was it just that utter difference between knowing things from within and judging from without? To himself, it was never in the form of argument he defended Ruth. It was the memory of her face at those times when he had seen what she was feeling.

He was about to pass the Hollands'—her old home. He slackened the car to its slowest. It had seemed a gloomy place in recent years. The big square house in the middle of the big yard of oak trees used to be one of the most friendly-looking places of the town. But after Ruth went away and the family drew within themselves, as they did, the hospitable spaciousness seemed to become bleakness, as if the place itself changed with the change of spirit. People began to speak of it as gloomy; now they said it looked forsaken. Certainly it was in need of painting—new sidewalks, general repairs. Mr. Holland had seemed to cease caring how the place looked. There weren't flowers any more.

In the upper hall he saw the dim light that burns through the night in a house of sickness. He had been there early in the evening; if he thought the nurse was up he would like to stop again. But he considered that it must be almost one—too late for disturbing them. He hoped Mr. Holland was

having a good night; he would not have many more nights to get through.

He wished there was some one of them to whom he could talk about sending for Ruth. They had not sent for her when her mother died, but that was sudden, everyone was panic-stricken. And that was only two years after Ruth's going away; time had not worked much then on their feeling against her. He would have to answer her letter and tell her that her father could not live. He wanted to have the authority to tell her to come home. Anything else seemed fairly indecent in its lack of feeling. Eleven years—and Ruth had never been home; and she loved her father—though of course no one in the town would believe *that*.

His car had slowed almost to a stop; there was a low whistle from the porch and someone was coming down the steps. It was Ted Holland—Ruth's younger brother.

"Hello, Deane," he said, coming out to him; "thinking of coming in?"

"No, I guess not; it's pretty late. I was just passing, and wondering about your father."

"He went to sleep; seems quiet, and about the same."

"That's good; hope it will keep up through the night."

The young fellow did not reply. The doctor was thinking that it must be lonely for him—all alone on the porch after midnight, his father dying upstairs, no member of the immediate family in the house.

"Sent for Cy, Ted?" he asked. Cyrus was the older brother, older than both Ted and Ruth. It was he who had been most bitter against Ruth. Deane had always believed that if it had not been for Cyrus the rest of them would not have hardened into their pain and humiliation like that.

Ted nodded. "I had written, and today, after you said what you did, I wired. I had an answer tonight. He has to finish up a deal that will take him a few days, but I am to keep him informed—I told him you said it might be a couple of weeks—and he'll come the first minute he can."

There was a pause. Deane wanted to say: "And Ruth?" but that was a hard thing to say to one of the Hollands.

But Ted himself mentioned her. "Tell you what I'm worrying about, Deane," he blurted out, "and that's Ruth!"

Deane nodded appreciatively. He had always liked this young Ted, but there was a new outgoing to him for this.

"Father asked for her this afternoon. I don't care whether he was just right in his mind or not—it shows she's *on* his mind. 'Hasn't Ruth come in yet!' he asked, several times."

"You send for her, Ted," commanded the doctor. "You ought to. I'll back you up if Cy's disagreeable."

"He'll be disagreeable all right," muttered the younger brother.

"Well, what about Harriett?" impatiently demanded Deane. "Doesn't she see that Ruth ought to be here?" Harriett was Ruth's sister and the eldest of the four children.

"Harriett would be all right," said Ted, "if it weren't for that bunch of piety she's married to!"

Deane laughed. "Not keen for your brother-in-law, Ted?"

"Oh, I'll tell you, Deane," the boy burst out, "for a long time I haven't felt just like the rest of the family have about Ruth. It was an awful thing—I know that, but just the same it was pretty tough on *Ruth*. I'll bet she's been up against it, good and plenty, and all we've seemed to think about is the way

it put us in bad. Not mother—Cy never did really get mother, you know, but father would have softened if it hadn't been for Cy's everlasting keeping him nagged up to the fact that he'd been wronged! Even Harriett would have been human if it hadn't been for Cy—and that upright husband she's got!"

The boy's face was flushed; he ran his hand back through his hair in an agitated way; it was evident that his heart was hot with feeling about it all. "I don't know whether you know, Deane," he said in a lowered voice, "that mother's last words were for Ruth. They can't deny it, for I was standing nearest her. 'Where's Ruth?' she said; and then at the very last—'Ruth?'"

His voice went unsteady as he repeated it. Deane, nodding, was looking straight down the street.

"Well," said Ted, after a minute, "I'm not going to have *that* happen again. I've been thinking about it. I did write Ruth a week ago. Now I shall write to her before I go to bed tonight and tell her to come home."

"You do that, Ted," said the doctor with gruff warmth. "You do that. I'll write her too. Ruth wrote to me."

"Did she?" Ted quickly replied. "Well"—he hesitated, then threw out in defiant manner and wistful voice, "well, I guess Ruth'll find she's got one friend when she comes back to her old town."

"You bet she will," snapped Deane, adding in another voice: "She knows that."

"And as for the family," Ted went on, "there are four of us, and I don't know why Ruth and I aren't half of that four. Cy and Harriett haven't got it all to say."

He said it so hotly that Deane conciliated: "Try not to have any split up, Ted. That would just make it harder for Ruth, you know."

"There'll not be any split up if Cy will just act like a human being," said the boy darkly.

"Tell him your father was asking for Ruth and that I told you you must send for her. See Harriett first and get her in line."

"Harriett would be all right," muttered Ted, "if let alone. Lots of people would be all right if other people didn't keep nagging at them about what they ought to be."

Deane gave him a quick, queer look. "You're right there, my son," he laughed shortly.

There was a moment's intimate pause. There seemed not a sound on the whole street save the subdued chug-chug of Deane's waiting machine. The only light in the big house back in the shadowy yard was the dim light that burned because a man was dying. Deane's hand went out to his steering wheel. "Well, so long, Ted," he said in a voice curiously gentle.

"'By, Deane," said the boy.

He drove on through the silent town in another mood. This boy's feeling had touched something in his heart that was softening. He had always been attracted to Ted Holland—his frank hazel eyes, something that seemed so square and so pleasant in the clear, straight features of his freckled face. He had been only a youngster of about thirteen when Ruth went away. She had adored him; "my good-looking baby brother," was her affectionate way of speaking of him. He was thinking what it would mean to Ruth to come home and find this warmth in Ted. Why, it might make all the difference in the world, he was gratefully considering.

When he came into the room where Amy was sleeping she awoke and sat up in bed, rubbing sleepy eyes blinded by the light. "Poor dear," she murmured at sight of his face, "so tired?"

He sat down on the bed; now that he was home, too tired to move. "Pretty tired. Woman died."

"Oh, Deane!" she cried. "Deane, I'm *so* sorry."

She reached over and put her arms around him. "You couldn't help it, dear," she comforted. "You couldn't help it."

Her sympathy was very sweet to him; as said by her, the fact that he couldn't help it did make some difference.

"And you had to be there such a long time. Why it must be most morning."

"Hardly that. I've been at the Hollands' too—talking to Ted. Poor kid—it's lonesome for him."

"Who is he?" asked Amy.

"Why—" and then he remembered. "Why, Ruth Holland's brother," he said, trying not to speak consciously. "The father's very sick, you know."

"Oh," said Amy. She moved over to the other side of her bed.

"They're going to send for Ruth."

Amy made no reply.

He was too utterly tired to think much about it—too worn for acute sensibilities. He sat there yawning. "I really ought to write to Ruth myself tonight," he said, sleepily thinking out loud, "but I'm too all in." He wanted her to take the letter off

his conscience for him. "I think I'd better come to bed, don't you, honey?"

"I should think you would need rest," was her answer.

She had turned the other way and seemed to be going to sleep again. Somehow he felt newly tired but was too exhausted to think it out. He told himself that Amy had just roused for the minute and was too sleepy to keep awake. People were that way when waked out of a sound sleep.

CHAPTER FOUR

Table of Contents

The next evening Dr. Franklin got home for dinner before his wife had returned from her tea. "Mrs. Franklin not home yet?" he asked of Doris, their maid; he still said Mrs. Franklin a little consciously and liked saying it. She told him, rather fluttered with the splendor of it—Doris being as new to her profession as he to matrimony—that Mrs. Blair had come for Mrs. Franklin in her "electric" and they had gone to a tea and had not yet returned.

He went out into the yard and busied himself about the place while waiting: trained a vine on a trellis, moved a garden-seat; then he walked about the house surveying it, after the fashion of the happy householder, as if for the first time. The house was new; he had built it for them. From the first moment of his thinking of it it had been designed for Amy. That made it much more than mere house. He was thinking that it showed up pretty well with the houses of most of their friends; Amy needn't be ashamed of it, anyhow, and it would look better in a couple of seasons, after things had grown up around it a little more. There would be plenty of seasons for them to grow in, he thought, whistling.

Then he got the gentle sound of Edith's pretty little brougham and went down to meet them. She and Amy looked charming in there—light dresses and big hats.

He made a gallant remark and then a teasing one. "Been tea-tattling all this time?"

"No," smiled Edith; "we took a ride."

"Such a beautiful ride," cried Amy. "Way up the river."

He had helped her out and Edith was leaning out talking to her. "I think I'd better come for you about one," she was saying. He thought with loving pride of how quickly Amy had swung into the life of the town.

During dinner he sat there adoring her: she was so fair, so beautifully formed, so poised. She was lovely in that filmy dress of cloudy blue. Amy's eyes were gray, but the darkness of her long lashes gave an impression of darkness. Her skin was smooth and fair and the chiseling of her features clean and strong. She held herself proudly; her fair hair was braided around a well-poised head. She always appeared composed; there never seemed any frittering or disorganizing of herself in trivial feeling or movement. One out of love with her might find her rather too self-possessed a young person.

So engaged was Deane in admiring her that it was not until they were about to leave the table that he was conscious of something unusual about her; even then he did not make out the excitement just beneath her collected manner.

He wanted to show her what he had done to the vines and they went out in the yard. Presently they sat down on the garden-seat which he had moved a little while before. He had grown puzzled now by Amy's manner.

She was smoothing out the sash of her dress. She sang a little under her breath. Then she said, with apparent carelessness: "Mrs. Williams was at the tea today."

He knit his brows. "Mrs.—?" Then, understanding, his face tightened. "Was she?" was his only reply.

Amy sang a little more. "It's her husband that your friend is living with, isn't it?" she asked, and the suppressed

excitement came nearer to the surface though her voice remained indifferent.

He said "Yes" shortly and volunteered nothing. His face had not relaxed.

"What a sad face she has," Amy murmured.

"Think so?" He reached over and picked up a twig and flipped a piece of it off his finger. "Oh, I don't know. I call it cold rather than sad."

"Oh, well, of course," cried Amy, "*your* sympathies are all on the other side!"

He did not reply. He would try to say as little as possible.

"I must say," she resumed excitedly, then drew herself back. "Mrs. Blair was telling me the whole story this afternoon," she said quietly, but with challenge.

The blood came to his face. He cleared his throat and impatiently threw away the twig he had been playing with. "Well, Edith didn't lose much time, did she?" he said coldly; then added with a rather hard laugh: "That was the reason for the long ride, I suppose."

"I don't know that it is so remarkable," Amy began with quivering dignity, "that she should tell me something of the affairs of the town." After an instant she added, "I am a stranger here."

He caught the different note and turned quickly to her. "Dearest, there's nothing about the 'affairs of the town' I won't tell you." He put his arm around the back of the seat, the hand resting on her shoulder. "And I must say I don't think you're much of a stranger here. Look at the friends you've made already. I never saw anything like it."

"Mrs. Blair does seem to like me," she answered with composure. Then added: "Mrs. Williams was very nice to me too."

His hand on her shoulder drew away a little and he snapped his fingers. Then the hand went back to her shoulder. "Well, that's very nice," he said quietly.

"She's coming to see me. I'm sure I found her anything but cold and hard!"

"I don't think that a woman—" he began hotly, but checked himself.

But all the feeling that had been alive there just beneath Amy's cool exterior flamed through. "Well, how you can stand up for a woman who did what *that* woman did—!"

Her cheeks were flaming now, her nostrils quivered. "I guess you're the only person in town that does stand up for her! But of course you're right—and the rest of them—" She broke off with a tumultuous little laugh and abruptly got up and went into the house.

He sat there for a time alone, sick at heart. He told himself he had bungled the whole thing. Why hadn't he told Amy all about Ruth, putting it in a way that would get her sympathies. Surely he could have done that had he told her the story as he knew it, made her feel what Ruth had suffered, how tormented and bewildered and desperate she had been. Now she had the town's side and naturally resented his championing of what was presented as so outrageous a thing. He went over the story as Edith would give it. That was enough to vindicate Amy.

He rose and followed her into the house. She was fingering some music on the piano. He saw how flushed her face was, how high she carried her head and how quick her breathing.

He went and put his arms around her. "Sweetheart," he said very simply and gently, "I love you. You know that, don't you?"

An instant she held back in conflict. Then she hid her face against him and sobbed. He held her close and murmured soothing little things.

She was saying something. "I was so happy," he made out the smothered words. "It was all so—beautiful."

"But you're happy *now*," he insisted. "It's beautiful *now*."

"I feel as if my marriage was being—spoiled," she choked.

He shook her, playfully, but his voice as he spoke was not playful. "Look here, Amy, don't say such a thing. Don't let such a thing get into your head for an instant! Our happiness isn't a thing to talk like that about."

"I feel as if—*that woman*—was standing between us!"

He raised her face and made her look into his own, at once stern and very tender. "Amy love, we've got to stop this right *now*. A long time ago—more than ten years ago—there was a girl here who had an awfully hard time. I was sorry for her. I'm sorry for her now. Life's hit her good and hard. We're among the fortunate people things go right for. We can be together—happy, having friends, everybody approving, everybody good to us. We're mighty lucky that it is that way. And isn't our own happiness going to make us a little sorry for people who are outside all this?" He kissed her. "Come now, sweetheart, you're not going to harden up like that. Why, that wouldn't be *you* at all!"

She was quiet; after a little she smiled up at him, the sweet, reminiscently plaintive little smile of one just comforted. For the moment, at least, love had won her. "Sometime I'll tell you anything about it you want to know," he said, holding