

John Marlyn

Good For You, Mrs. Feldesh

WHEN she came to Main Street, the old woman paused and, as in an old familiar ritual, stopped and slowly turned completely around to look at the sign on the roof.

"The Palace," it said in rich green and gold. But it was the figure of the man and girl above that held her attention. Just barely outlined in red neon, she could make of them almost what she wished, the man handsome and tenderly whispering, the girl graceful and slender.

Her lips parted as she looked up at them, dancing there against the night sky. Three distinct steps they took together and with every step the man's head drew closer and closer to his partner's; but never would his lips touch hers. At the third step, when she felt he was about to kiss her, both figures vanished.

"Maybe it's better that way," the old woman said to them. "Worse things could happen, believe me."

Her feet ached.

Once more the dancing girl began lowering her head to that shoulder it would never rest upon.

The old woman nodded. Five hours it had taken her to clean and scrub and wax in there. But now everything in the dance hall shone and sparkled. She smiled because she liked to think of it that way.

Her back ached. Only four days ago she had been to see Dr. Mueller, recommended by Mrs. Stengel.

"'Pains in my back and legs,' I told him," she muttered. "And he says, 'Go home—don't worry. There's nothing wrong.'"

Tears came to her eyes. "But with Mrs. Stengel who's as fat as a pig, she comes to him with the same pains and he gives her medicine and says, 'Come back next week.'"

She walked on. The silence of the dark streets reminded her of that deeper night-silence on the farm and of her early years in this country. Lying awake in bed night after night, listening, she would hear it,

always at the same time, the far-away plaintive cry of the train whistle, giving voice, it seemed to her, to all the lonely men and women lying awake as she was, a stranger in the terrifying immensity of the midnight prairie.

But to think of that farm was to think of the money they had lost because stubbornly and violently her husband Demetrius had insisted on keeping it in Hungarian kronen. Nine days after they arrived in Canada, the first World War had started and it became worthless.

When she tried to get it changed into Canadian money her husband had objected; when she insisted, he had turned really ugly and threatened her, and that was the end of it.

What they had suffered the first winter, she didn't want to remember.

But it would still be there, that money he had clung to, in that old tobacco tin under the pile of stones where he had hidden it in the northeast pasture.

The stones formed a mound a few feet from the fence and the road that led to town, a town not so very much larger than her village in the old country. But when was it that she had so unexpectedly seen for the first time how very different things were here in this new land? Different even beyond what was so visible; the wooden sidewalks, the drugstore, the bank, and a little restaurant owned by a Chinese man—the first Chinese man she had ever seen. She had gone up and down the street in front of his restaurant half a dozen times or more that first Saturday night just to look at him.

In the fourth year after their arrival it must have been, in the year Andreas had had all that trouble with his teeth. She had taken him to town and after leaving the dentist, had gone for a short walk. It was good to be away from the farm and in a cool clean dress again. Here and there, strangers, men and women, moving about their lawns and front gardens, nodded to her as she passed by.

She had seen Mr. and Mrs. Collins on their verandah and they must certainly have caught sight of her, so there was no time to turn back. Mrs. Collins was in a rocking chair, her husband sitting on the top step.

Mrs. Collins was reading the newspaper.

Andreas said something and tugged at her hand.

She scarcely heard him. She had never seen or even heard of such a thing—a woman reading a newspaper. She stared in astonishment across at the woman who so calmly went on reading.

It looked silly and unnatural, as though a hen were to get up one morning and start to crow. She felt like laughing.

Mrs. Collins lowered her head. "Tom", she said, "be a dear and give me the second half, will you?"

Tom—Mr. Collins—was the wealthiest man in the town. Whenever she had seen him in the general store which he owned, she had always crept away and never daring to ask him to attend her, had always waited for one of his younger clerks.

And now here—she moistened her lips and thought of those dark villages in the old country, and of what would have happened to a woman who would have dared to make such a spectacle of herself, and still gazing in confusion at the two people sitting there had already started to walk on when Mrs. Collins looked fully at her. Anna lowered her head. Ever since that shameful night in town in the summer of their second year in the country, she had tried to avoid Mrs. Collins.

The streets had been crowded with farmers like themselves, laughing and talking, and it had been exciting after the lonely weeks on the farm to be with people again, to see the lights in the drugstore window and the barber shop and to look once again at the Chinese owner of the restaurant. She had forgotten that all of this, the bright movement of people and their talk which was such a pleasure to her, was a thing which Demetrius dreaded.

She had stopped at Collins' store window to look at a dress, and Demetrius, evidently unaware that she was not beside him, walked on a few steps until finding himself alone, returned, and with a back-handed blow sent her reeling off the wooden sidewalk and into the ditch beside the road.

There was water in it; she remembered standing there in a daze, thinking only that she was wearing her best shoes and stockings, when a man stretched down his hand and pulled her back up to the sidewalk. It was not until then that she heard the shouting and saw the men around Demetrius pushing against him. One of them struck him, and then another, and for a moment she wondered what he had done to provoke them.

She saw him standing there as though stupefied by what was happening, then breaking through, he grabbed her hand and was about to run when a policeman appeared. He placed himself in front of them.

Voices from the crowd came to her. She understood little, but sufficiently; this man—Demetrius, they meant—had struck this woman.

"But I'm his wife," she wanted to protest and felt the policeman's eyes upon her and saw herself as she must have appeared to him, her hair coming undone, her shoes and stockings and the hem of her dress covered with mud.

"My husband ain't—" she stammered. "He didn't mean—" and found no words to finish what she wanted to say and began to cry, not only because of the disgrace that had come upon them, but it was not the first time that they had been in trouble with an official in this country. The policeman might already know that they were the same people who had had police trouble before because this was the man who had beaten one of his harvest labourers.

She gazed across at the policeman as contritely as she could. "We—we are sad," she said, but the policeman was looking at Demetrius.

"No beat wife anymore," the policeman said slowly and distinctly, and to emphasize what he was saying raised his hand and with his forefinger prodded Demetrius on the chest. "You understand?" he said. "No beat wife or you get in trouble."

And that was all. They were free to go. She tugged at Demetrius' arm.

In all her married life, she had never seen him so afraid. He had already learned that it was not permitted to strike others. But he hadn't known that he could not strike his wife. And seeing him there in such fear, trying so painfully to understand, she suddenly felt sorry for him.

The people around them began to move on. As she turned with Demetrius, she saw Mrs. Collins standing behind the window of the store.

She was a buxom elderly woman who on Saturday nights helped in the store, quietly, leisurely waiting on her friends and acquaintances. There was a dignity about her that attracted Anna, and a feeling that she could only describe by saying that Mrs. Collins seemed to respect herself. How long it seemed to her she had been hoping that one night in the store Mrs. Collins would smile across at her and walk over and ask her if she could be of help.

Looking at her on that night, as she looked at her now, she wondered how much Mrs. Collins had seen.

But now Mrs. Collins swung forward in her rocking chair and smiled.

"Hello, Mrs. Feldesh," she said, "Going for walk?"

Mr. Collins raised his head and smiled too. "Been a hot day, hasn't it?" he said.

But how could this be, she wondered. The richest people in town. How could they be so friendly to her? She didn't know what to say, and shyly nodded and finally said "yes" and walked quickly away.

For months afterwards, she remembered that afternoon. Then it grew dim.

There was work to do. She helped in the fields sometimes. And she had her own kitchen garden to tend and there were the children and the house and the chickens to look after.

She bought her first piece of store soap and Demetrius threw it out of the window. One day a man in a covered wagon came to the farm; he was a baker and he would come every day if she wanted. She bought a loaf and Demetrius squashed it into a lump and threw it at her. She bought a little box of face powder to use on the Saturdays she went to town and Demetrius never noticed, but she didn't use it on Sundays when they went to church because it seemed wicked.

The old woman glanced over her shoulder at a store she had passed and slowly made her way back to stand and stare with eyes brightening and the stern lines of her mouth softening into a smile at the figure of a little girl in the show window, in immaculate white shoes and stockings, in a crisp pink little dress.

Still nodding, she sighed and smiling again, walked on.

She began thinking of that day on which that woman had appeared, a middle-aged woman, on a Monday morning when she was doing the washing.

She announced that she was Miss MacKinnon, the new district nurse, and that she was glad of this opportunity to introduce herself.

To introduce? What did that mean?

Ashamed of her appearance and the disorder in the kitchen, dreading that they had once again violated some law or custom in this country, she nevertheless managed to smile at her as she led her to the front room—the parlor, she remembered it was called in English.

"Will you come to the parlor," she asked, and pleased with herself, continued, "I will go and—and come right away back."

In the bedroom she slipped into a fresh dress and removing her kerchief, arranged her hair.

A district nurse. She considered this. It sounded as though she were a state official. But how? Could a woman be an official in this country?

She returned to her visitor in the front room. She had scrubbed the floor here and polished the furniture only on Saturday. The blinds were half drawn. It was cool. Everything was clean and tidy.

The woman's first words frightened her. She had come because of Albert.

What could he have done? "He's sick!" she cried.

The woman shook her head. "We think Albert needs glasses," she said calmly. "Reading glasses," she explained, and raising both hands to her eyes blinked through the circles she made with her fingers.

"Aaah, eyeglasses," Anna exclaimed triumphantly.

They laughed together and unexpectedly she liked this woman, even if she was dressed a little too much like a man.

She was thin and dark and no longer young, but there was something fresh about her in that neat-fitting suit and the small white collar on her blouse.

They looked at one another. If only she could understand better, Anna thought, and listened. If only she would stay, if only for a little while longer, to break the silence of the lonely weeks and months so that she could talk, just talk to another woman, to someone who understood.

"Will you maybe?" She flushed. What were the words? "Coffee to have?" she said desperately, "and cake—a little cake. Please to say yes?"

Was she mistaken? It seemed to her that the nurse—what was her name?—while moving in her chair, glanced quickly once more around her.

"For once the washing can wait." Anna ran out excitedly; added wood to the fire to keep the washtub water heating; the kettle was still boiling.

Half an hour later they were still talking, and she was aware of the time passing and proud that this fine, educated woman should find sufficient pleasure in her company to stay so long. She said something that Anna failed to grasp. But then clearly she heard, as Miss MacKinnon pursed her lips: "I do all I can to help those people, Mrs. Feldesh, but they're not so poor they can't afford a bar of soap and a scrubbing brush. My superior says I'm too hard on them, but I'm not. I know what it is to be poor. When my family settled here my father had only the strength of his arms and his will—the will to make something of himself. We lived practically on oatmeal, Mrs. Feldesh."

Anna nodded and groped and managed to say that one of the things she liked in this country was that people were not afraid to admit they had once been poor.

Miss MacKinnon nodded too and in a moment of unexpected silence Anna asked her, because it was the first thing that came to her mind and because it was easy to express, how one prepared this oatmeal.

But an oatmeal pudding and cookies and with a prune filling. She shuddered.

"—cheap, nourishing and wholesome food, Mrs. Feldesh. I'm delighted you asked me," the nurse concluded and glanced at her watch. "But now I must go."

Anna walked with her to the gate where Miss MacKinnon's horse and little buggy stood. They remained for a moment absently watching the farmer in the next field working at a stump.

"He's certainly working hard," Miss MacKinnon said.

"Yes," Anna replied. "He's a real bugger—" and sensed instantly from the woman's expression that what she had said was wrong, that what she had always feared had now happened.

"It's bad?" she asked and seeing the scarlet flush on the woman's face, realized that it must be not merely wrong but indecent.

"A real bugger for punishment," Andreas had exclaimed, seeing the same farmer last winter chopping down a tree.

Sadly she looked across at this woman whom she liked so very much and whom she admired and had so anxiously hoped to make her friend.

"He works strong—hard, I mean," she stammered. "I heard somebody say when he's a hard worker, he's a bugger for punishment."

"It's not a nice word, Mrs. Feldesh."

The nurse thanked her for the coffee and cake, got into her buggy and smiled in a way that still seemed friendly, Anna thought, as she opened the gate.

Miss MacKinnon had already raised the reins and settled back in her seat when she lowered them and looked earnestly down at her.

"Mrs. Feldesh," she said. "People sometimes say I'm a little too forward. They've even intimated I'm officious."

Anna stared up at her in wonder.

"I do hope you won't mind what I'm going to say, Mrs. Feldesh," the nurse continued. "Believe me when I say it's well meant. If you lived in the city I'm sure you would long ago have found your way to an English class at night school".

"To school?" Anna cried. "Me!" and drew away in sudden fright. "But where to school? Not with my own children?"

Her laughter sounded unnatural to her.

"No, Mrs. Feldesh. At night with Miss Butler, their teacher. Why don't you think about it? If you like, I'll mention it to her."

"No," Anna said. "Please not to say anything. I will think about it first, thank you. I enjoyed so much to talk to you."

Miss MacKinnon had raised the reins again. "And I enjoyed it too, Mrs. Feldesh, and thank you again. But now I must really be off."

The old woman paused on the corner of Logan Avenue. She was tired, and she was hungry.

"But where was I," she said, and remembered that through her fears and all her apprehensions there had remained, fixed in her mind, the image of herself on her own porch one evening reading the newspaper, or a book even, and saw herself quietly and easily talking to a delighted Miss MacKinnon and on a Saturday in the store to Mrs. Collins. How surprised they would be.

She smiled and wondered how it would feel to be able to read English and suddenly she wished that that nurse had never set foot in her house. How did she know that she had not grown too stupid? And what would happen if she started and failed and everybody heard of it?

The next afternoon, a few minutes after school closed, she crept quietly to the open doorway of the schoolroom and waited. The teacher, a slender woman with brown hair and grey eyes, sat at her desk sorting papers.

"Oh—it's Mrs. Feldesh," she said. "Please come in. Is something the matter, Mrs. Feldesh?" She rose and offered her a chair.

"No—no—please. Nothing is wrong." Anna moistened her lips.

"Miss Butler." She lowered her hand to the desk to stop it from shaking. "I want please you should—make me—do me a big favour."

"Why, I'd be glad to."

Anna shook her head and tried to smile. "Please not to say yes yet. You don't know what I'm going to ask. I want you should show me—learn me to read and write."

She felt the heat-flush on her cheeks rising to her forehead as she watched intently for the sign of a smile, or even of laughter, for anything that would tell her what the woman was thinking.

In fact, Miss Butler was smiling. "I'd be happy to, Mrs. Feldesh."

Anna lowered her head. "You're a good—you're good," she mumbled.

Miss Butler shook her head. "I'm a teacher, Mrs. Feldesh. I like to teach. Would you like to start this evening?"

"Tonight!" Anna looked at her in alarm. Leaning across the desk, she whispered: "Nobody should know, Miss Butler, It should be a secret. Please to promise me."

"I think we can do that," the teacher said quietly. "Would it be convenient then for you to come to my home? I live with my sister whom we can trust to be silent."

And so it was arranged. But adamantly Miss Butler refused even to hear of being paid. Anna returned home that afternoon with her first lesson to do.

Late that night in the parlor, with Demetrius and the children asleep, she sat at the little table beside the sofa with the first clean page of her exercise book before her.

Again and again as the weeks passed by she went to bed with the frightening conviction that she would never learn.

Sometimes in the silent peaceful hours she would look down at her lesson and remember the longing to be doing what she was doing now. The day was coming very soon when she would be able to open a book or a newspaper and read what was in it.

The summer passed and the winter, and she was no longer afraid to present herself at Miss Butler's door.

Sometimes when her lessons were done, she would open the Eaton's catalogue and it was a joy to read for herself what was written there.

When her secret became known it no longer mattered. Who could laugh at her now when she had already mastered the subjunctive mood? Who would dare?

Appropriately, it was Mrs. Collins who first congratulated her. For the first time, too, she had waited on her. Anna was leaving the store when Mrs. Collins drew her behind the rack of cotton dresses, smiled at her and whispered, "Good for you, Mrs. Feldesh. I hope you don't mind my mentioning it. We're all proud of you."

On the wagon on the way home, Anna began to sing to herself until she noticed that Demetrius was glaring at her. She grew silent then.

But why should he, and her sons too, object so violently because she was learning to read and write? The time she spent at Miss Butler's or at her lessons was not time stolen from him or the family. She still looked after them, cooked their meals, and kept them and the house too, clean and neat, and did her work about the farm.

When they got home, Demetrius would probably kick the door open because it was stuck, or yell and roar or perhaps break something.

More he didn't dare to do, at least not out in the open.

Yet the thought persisted that what she was doing was unnatural. Were they right then and she wrong? But then the thought came to her one night that Mrs. Collins would never have asked herself this question and neither would Miss MacKinnon nor Miss Butler. And for the first time it struck her that Mrs. Collins and these other women had a regard for themselves that she lacked.

Perhaps, she reflected, when she had learned to read and write she too would look upon herself in that way. She began to smile.

The old woman looked up and smiled too. Late in summer, almost two years after she had started, the lessons came to an end.

She stood on that night, outside Miss Butler's door, and then on the road looking back, not wanting to go home yet, but to be with people who would somehow make real for her what she had accomplished. She wished she could have spoken with Mrs. Collins, or better still with Miss MacKinnon. It seemed wrong that she should be alone tonight, that this wonderful night should pass as though nothing had happened.

She walked on up the hill from the top of which she could see her house. The lamp was on in the kitchen and that was as it should be, but then faintly she heard a sound that was only too familiar. She became frightened.

As she reached the back door, she heard Demetrius shouting in the kitchen and Andreas and Jenö encouraging him. There was the crash of something breaking. She opened the door and saw Felix at the foot of the stairs and behind him Albert and the girls, all of them laughing and screaming with pleasure at the sight of their father who stood drunkenly swaying in his underwear in front of the stove, smashing a chair against it. Her old exercise books and her readers lay torn and scattered on the floor.

She ran past him, got the younger children upstairs, and came down again as Demetrius tore the last few pages out of one of her textbooks. She looked past him as she came into the room, at Andreas and Jenö leaning back against the table, their eyes coldly, almost indifferently, upon her.

"I'll kill you—" Demetrius said in English.

He repeated the words and coming toward her, looked in that expressionless and yet sinister way around him at the doors and windows, that told her only too clearly what he was going to do. As his arm rose to strike her, she resolved for the first time not to accept it, and quaking and forcing herself to remain erect and not to shield herself, stared back at him, into those dull, unfeeling eyes she knew so well.

"No," she said. "No," and watched trembling as he leaned forward to gape at her and turn away one lurching step and come back again to peer into her face. Then he turned his head once more away from her and she followed his gaze to Andreas and Jenö who stood silently watching and waiting, and with her heart sinking, she understood what he would now do, what he would have to do to uphold himself before them.

He raised his hand again slowly and looked at his sons who unwaveringly looked back at him. And then before she knew that he had made the decision, he struck her, his first blow numbing her. She covered her face with her hands as he hit her again, and suddenly she found herself on the floor against the edge of the bottom stair, with a pain so sharp in her back that she began to scream and stopped because it might frighten the children upstairs.

After awhile she crawled upstairs to the bedroom.

The old woman looked up. She remembered every knothole in the ceiling above that bed. Her back ached.

An old affliction this, and it had started that night he had beaten her. For weeks afterwards she had been unable to get out of bed and had had to get their neighbour's eldest daughter, Bertha, a silent, stolid girl, to come and help with the housework. Nearly a month later she was still dragging herself apathetically through the house. Mrs. Collins sent her a parcel of books. Day after day she sat with them unopened, staring out at the fields.

It was summer again on a day she was to remember as long as she lived that she set out with the letter the doctor had given her, addressed to a specialist in Winnipeg. It was a short trip, only a few hours, and she had been able to get Bertha in again to look after the children.

The old woman shook her head sadly as she recalled how often on that farm, and how desperately, she had longed to get away, if even for a few hours, to visit the city.

Yet on that afternoon, she had scarcely raised her head as she wandered listlessly around the streets in the vicinity of the railway station.

Once, on the corner of Higgins and Main, she had stopped to stare at the people, especially the women and girls, in dresses that barely covered their knees, and with their hair cut so short. They looked so carefree and unrestrained.

As she turned back, a woman coming out of a store glanced at her and suddenly stopped. Anna hesitated and walked on. Behind her she heard the woman calling her by name. But how? She heard her again

and saw her, a city woman, in a short fresh cotton dress and silk stockings, smiling and coming toward her.

"Mrs. Feldesh—Anna—" the woman laughed. "You don't remember me?"

Anna stared at her—a stranger with bright blue eyes and high cheekbones, faintly powdered and rouged.

"On the boat!" the woman cried.

Anna stood back. "Even before then," she said at last, very slowly. "In that big waiting shed in Hamburg. You're from Debrecin—You're Mary Nemeth—Mary." She held out her hands.

They burst into tears and embraced and drew apart and looked at one another.

"I live not far—on Fountain Street," Mary said. "You will come please to—ah, let's talk Hungarian, my God. My husband says I'll never learn."

"So you're married?" Anna said, and remembered that Mary was only a few years younger than herself.

The house was not far.

There was the smell of floor wax in the living room and a warm glow of light through the yellow window blinds.

"You talk English so well," Mary said enviously. "But I'm forgetting how to speak Hungarian and I can't really talk English—not even yet. Bill says soon I won't be able to talk at all." She burst into laughter. "He says that's the kind of wife he likes; one who can't talk at all. He's always making fun like that." She looked radiant.

"Bill's English," she added abruptly and flushed. "As soon as we saw each other we knew. Even papa admits—oh, I never told you about papa. When I told mamma I wanted to marry Bill and she told papa, he started to shout and said he'd throw me out of the house.

"You know why he didn't?" Mary asked. "Because even if I was scared, anyway I talked back to him. 'All right,' I said, 'throw me out, but it's not the same here as in the old country. I'll show you.' And I did. I got a job in an overall factory and with overtime I made nearly as much as he did. For two months he never talked to me—not a word. Then one day he said, 'All right, enough already with this foolishness. You're getting as thin as a stick in that factory. Tell that Bill of yours he should come and see me.'"

She clasped her hands tightly in her lap. "Bill's wonderful," she continued, and stopped abruptly and flushed again and sprang to her feet. "But all the time I'm talking about me."

Anna rose too. "I must go now," she said.

"But I thought you would stay and have something to eat and see the children," Mary cried. "And Mrs. Geske, you remember? We could go and visit her; she lives only five minutes away."

"I'd like to but I have an appointment with a doctor," Anna said.

"With a doctor!" Mary exclaimed. "It's nothing serious?"

"No—no." She moved to the door. "A backache, that's all. I'm so glad you're happy Mary. It's been so good to see you again."

As she turned to leave she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror above the chesterfield and for the first time in more years than she could remember really looked at herself, at the forty-year old woman who was staring at her and who looked even more than fifty, upon whose haggard face it seemed she could trace every sorrow she had ever known and in that same instant too as though she had spent all the past years of her life in sleep, wakened and gazed at herself, at those worn and aged features beside this woman's fresh and smiling face and realized it was too late; it was too late to undo what had been done to her.

If she had never come to this country she would never have known. Would that have been better, she wondered, and fiercely shook her head. How could it be better to live like an animal in ignorance? She looked at her face again and it was all she could do to stop herself from weeping.

She scarcely remembered her parting from Mary. They embraced. Once she turned back and waved.

Back on Main Street, she took the letter to the specialist out of her handbag and tore it up.

She remembered Mary's words. "I'll show you," she had said. The words were so childishly inappropriate they were pathetic. Only a few years here in this country and that girl, whom she remembered more clearly now, that shy, timid girl had found the courage to stand up for herself, to take her life into her own hands and make of it what she had determined it should be.

As she continued on her way, she recalled that on the boat she had thought of Mary as a kind and decent girl but in some ways a little silly, too. And yet this woman, silly or not, valued herself, and obviously was held in regard by her husband. And when she stood up to her father, she must have done so with the conviction that she had the right to make her own choice, a right unthinkable in the old country, or if thinkable, then only in hope or fantasy.

Anna dried her eyes. All the while she was living with Demetrius, waiting on him hand and foot, cowering every time he raised his arm, working out in the fields like an animal, disregarded in her home, this woman was quietly and happily living her life here in the city, loving and being loved and held in respect.

How could she fail to envy her? This woman had everything and she had nothing. Only a few years separated them—a few years and an abyss, which no matter what happened now, she would never be able to cross.

Dusk was falling when she got to the station; to hold off the thought of reaching home, she fell into a deep stupor that persisted even when she found herself on the silent empty main street of the town.

As she approached the farm, she began to tremble. She walked up the familiar and now hateful path to the house, opened the kitchen door, looked in to see that the children were asleep, and was about to leave when she noticed that the cot which she had set up for Bertha was unoccupied. She had probably gone home after putting the children to bed.

She crossed the narrow hallway to her bedroom, grasped the bedpost to steady herself, and was standing on one foot removing her shoe, when she let it fall from her hand. Demetrius stopped snoring. The girl Bertha, beside him, wakened and sitting up in bed blinked and raised her hands to cover her breasts.

They remained so, looking at one another, then Bertha's right hand moved out and unerringly found hers, Anna's own housecoat, hanging from the nail on the wall.

Anna kicked off her other shoe and ran downstairs, her mind in a turmoil of jubilation and torment, of freedom now at last in sight, and anguish at the recollection of those firm young breasts.

She was in the living room and had already started to pack, folding her linen into her father's great wickerwork trunk, laughing and crying and unable to believe her deliverance should have come so easily, when she saw the girl again standing barefooted in the doorway.

Anna rose from her knees and faced her. "All that time" she said, "when I was sick and sleeping down here, you and my husband—". She stopped. It was a measure of the change in her that if she had discovered this between them only yesterday she would have crept into a corner and wept.

The girl seemed suddenly to fall into the room. Behind her Demetrius, in his night shirt, came in and seeing the open trunk, looked, Anna observed, not to her for an answer, but to the girl.

"She knows," Bertha said. "She's going."

"Yes", Anna nodded and smiled. Tomorrow night, somewhere, it didn't matter where, she would be sleeping alone in Winnipeg with the children.

She felt as though her body sang at the prospect of being free of him, and in the same moment, felt she could have torn her housecoat from that strumpet's shoulders and beaten her unmercifully. She noticed that Demetrius was avoiding her eyes. He turned abruptly and pushing the girl out of the room, followed her upstairs.

The old woman paused at Olafson's, the photographer, on Laura Avenue. A few more steps and she would be home. In Olafson's front window were samples of his work and in the very centre stood the picture of little Helena, her granddaughter, the girl she had so long expected and so eagerly yearned for.

"So alright," she said. "For me it was anyway too late.

But it was worth it, the heartache and the drudgery and the long hard weary years. Her eyes shone.

As she stood there it seemed to her that through this bright and lovely child, through this granddaughter of hers, she would be able, more perfectly even than through her daughters, to live the complete life of a free woman here, and grow with her, and see through those clear young eyes what daily unfolded, and awaken to young womanhood again and so bring the sad shattered fragments of her life together once more and become a whole person again.

She smiled and walked on, glad to be reaching home at last.