

DENVER HOLIDAY

"Yes, girls, I'm going to take a trip. I'm going to Denver!" Maude Ella's voice was a little shrill as she announced this startling news to her friends. Carefully she adjusted her bright rimless glasses.

"No Maudie—really?" Esther looked at her unbelievably and a little enviously.

"I am! I've decided and I'm sticking to my decision this time. Honestly, girls, do you realize I've never been anywhere, not even out of this state? I think it's about time I did a little travelling. And anyway, I think I need it after this terrible year---don't I now—frankly?"

She looked at them eagerly, a little pathetically, snapping her purse open and shut with a nervous twitch of her fingers.

The girls agreed in a way that warmed Maude Ella's heart.

"Well, I'll say you do," Josephine rasped. She had a persistently dry throat and she cleared it constantly and coughed so much that some of her pupils complained to their parents and there was a little notion stirring in the town that she might have "you know what." Josephine was a loyal friend, and already she felt a thrill at the thought of Maudie's trip.

It was true. All that Maude Ella said was true. She needed a trip. She deserved it after all she'd been through. Teaching for fifteen years had been fun, had been nice in when she faced it squarely. If she had been able to change grades every few years instead of teaching second graders year in and year out, she might have felt a little stir of progress in the air. She always had the feeling that her children never grew up. There they were, every September, the same braids, the same red or pale faces, the same teeth out always, the same shuffling feet. Still, they were sweet and she had been patient---most of the time. She used to think she had been cut out to be a teacher---that is, up to now. Now something had changed.

For a long time the feeling had been growing that perhaps her life might have been different. What if she had gone away to a State University instead of to a small Teachers College? She might have joined a sorority (imagine Maude Ella Roke a Theta or a Pi Phi---it just might have happened) and she might have met the man, a tall handsome fraternity boy with a profession in mind. Then a little home, perhaps a big one, with all the right things in it, and a boudoir with a dressing table full of bottles of exciting perfumes, and small curly headed children bouncing about on a satin quilted bedspread. She yearned for these things even now, though she knew in her heart it was too late. Time had a way of passing cruelly fast. Now and then she felt almost smothered, and if she thought about it too long when she was depressed and tired she often ended her sad reveries with a mental picture of herself beating wildly at a stone wall, and crying and crying and crying. It relieved her to have these secret inward agonies. Outwardly she was the soul of propriety and even happy composure. Such a well-balanced girl, the school board had always said- That was why she had kept her position in her own home town for fifteen years.

Maude Ella was thirty-eight, but in her best moments she used to tell herself she felt twenty and not a year older. That was before her mother's illness. She and her mother lived in a very small box-like house eleven blocks from the grade school. Maude Ella was born in that house, an only child, and as long as she could remember nothing was ever changed or replaced in it from the time her mother married. Perhaps that was because Maude Ella had always been such a quiet undestructive child, never putting her feet on chairs or bringing food into the parlor or kicking up the rugs or forgetting to wash her hands before and after meals. Two women in the house (her father had died when she was five), two careful women, would naturally not be hard

on things. Besides, Maude Ella's mother was a very thrifty woman. She didn't believe in wasting money, and she brought Maude Ella up to respect the dollar, to use it wisely and well, and above all, never to use it unthinkingly. She held a theory that most people in this world would be comfortably well off if they just learned to spend money her way and to save money her way. Money, she said, was simply 'thrown down the gutter for things like trips, fancy furniture, movies, imagining that she believed it. Constant acquiescence had been the easier way, and perhaps her mother had been right. She couldn't definitely decide while her mother lived.

People used to ask her now and then at the close of the school year: "Are you taking a vacation this summer?" And Maude Ella would invariably reply with, an unsteady, nervous little laugh: "Oh, we'll be busy canning. You know our garden---worse than a baby---it just has to be tended every minute. Besides, it's so much fun being outdoors close to nature. Mother always did tell me it's the best tonic in the world for whatever ails you, better than the seashore or the mountains---just a paradise in your own back yard."

She didn't tell them there was an angle to it all that got very tedious. That was the canning---the glorious results of all their endless labor in the summer sun. Somehow, canning had never really appealed to Maude Ella. But her mother had a passion for it that almost passed understanding. Everything, everything the earth produced that could be preserved in a glass jar, was forthwith plucked from the earth and cleaned and cooked and packed and placed upon the-cellar shelves. Her mother's only regret was that no successful way of canning lettuce had ever been discovered. It irritated her to find herself always in the same predicament in June-- always planting more lettuce than they could comfortably eat. At night she used to wake up and think about those green rows of tender leaves in at dusk when she took a last look at the lettuce burgeoning in the garden. Such melancholy interims came and went, for she was so briskly occupied most of the summer preserving the food that could be saved that she had little time for brooding.

And so the summers passed for both of them: mornings and afternoons and evenings devoted to the persistent rites of canning. Maude Ella's enthusiasm had been on the wane for many years now, but she was patient with her mother, in the same kind of way that she was patient with her second-graders. Unfortunately, Maude Ella had never been too interested in eating. Perhaps that was why she stayed skinny. Her mother was always telling her to put some flesh on those sharp bones, but no amount of prodding ever brought the appetite her mother had, and that was that. Besides, overproduction in the garden always necessitated eating last year's canned goods, leaving the newly preserved fruits and vegetables to grow pile and sometimes a little soft till their turn came. Once she ventured to bring from the cellar a particularly bright jar of red beets. Just as she was about to open it her mother laid affirm hand on the lid, whirled it towards her rapidly, and turned a spiteful look on her daughter. "Maude Ella, this is dated 1948. We still have six jars of 1947 beets. Take these back!"

And so the years went by, and if Maude Ella found herself defeated again and again in the little house her "teacher," and sometimes confiding a secret trustfully. She was used to her life, used to these shadowy disturbing dreams that came unawares by day or by night.

When Maude Ella's mother got sick the world became a gruesome place. Her mother had never been sick. Such a possibility had never once occurred to them, and its suddenness terrified them both. There was nothing to be done. It was a long and crucifying experience.

After her mother died, Maude Ella moved like a lost shadow between the school and the little white house. Everything seemed changed, nothing was familiar or satisfying. A strange hollowness fluttered about her heart; something unaccountably alien hovered in the air. She

could feel a change coming over her. It was real and definite, like a bright veil floating down from the sky and gently enveloping her. This was towards the end of May. She felt the bonds grow tighter and tighter. At night she would suddenly sit up violently, even from a deep sleep, and brush the hair from her face. Or was it the veil? One night her past tore apart, all at once, with a clean cut rip. She could almost hear it. Jumping out of bed, she pattered to the open window and peered into the night.

"I'm going to take a trip," she said aloud. "That's it-- a trip---a vacation. Something I've always wanted. I'm going to have a holiday!"

Maude Ella decided on Denver. "Denver is really a city, good hotels, parks, theatres, trips to nearby mountains, so many wonderful things in Denver; and still it's not too far away, not like New York---and mercy, I'd be scared to death to go to New York alone. I just wouldn't know the first thing about it." Not that she knew the first thing about Denver, but it was closer and sounded comforting and solid; besides, the train fare just wouldn't amount to half as much and only one night in a Pullman.

"A Pullman: Imagine---something I've always longed to do. It just seems so romantic listening to Esther and the girls telling about it---the porters, the dining car. But talk about expensive food: I just can't believe it. Oh well, what have I earned my money for if not to spend some of it on a good time?" Instantly a vision of her mother flashed before her, and for a moment her eyes dropped as if to avoid her. The next instant she looked up bravely and set her jaw as firmly as she could. Maude Ella never could look firm. Her chin was flat and weak and often it trembled almost imperceptibly. But the spirit inside her rallied, and she heard herself saying a bit defiantly, "I want a good time and I'm going!"

She bought a ticket for the middle of June, giving herself two weeks to prepare her clothes. She felt almost guilty as she glanced over her wardrobe. "To think I've been wearing these same old things for years and years. Honestly, I should have had more pride, even if my pupils were new every fall and didn't have to look at these old rags year after year. When I think of Esther and the lovely things she buys herself. The high heels she wears in the classrooms. No wonder people are always complimenting her. But I still think it's foolish to teach in high heels. I'd get a pair to go with my good dress."

Her good dress did not, as yet, exist. She couldn't decide whether to make it or whether to buy one in nearby Fremont, where they had really good shops---New York models, she had heard. In the long run it would save a lot of wear and tear on her nerves if she just went to Fremont and bought everything. And goodness knows, the list of things she would need was appalling, now that she came to think of it. Not even a decent piece of luggage to her name, "And they say leather is sky high. Still, you can't expect to go to a good hotel with a cheap suit case and have them think you're anybody. A good piece of luggage always makes people wonder about you."

She did so want people to wonder about her. She felt, somehow, that she had great possibilities. All those articles on personality and beauty she had been reading in a magazine Josephine lent her set her thinking, and often now she would stand before her mirror to try out some of the suggestions offered by Madame Valda. Her hair, for one thing, was straight and colorless, and she was thrilled with the idea of getting her first permanent in Fremont, and maybe betting a rinse. "Not a dye, mind you, for heaven's sake, no:." She couldn't bear the idea of dyed or bleached hair; it was revolting, cheap---but just a rinse to bring out the highlights, that was different. Decent people did that. She jotted down a memorandum: "Make appointment at beauty shop."

Then there was her complexion. It wasn't bad, really, but, on the other hand, it wasn't too good--a little on the sallow side, with a few dark speck here and there, and always that roughness on her chin. Just recently she had read about a wonderful new makeup that came in the form of a flat cake or something, that simply covered everything and gave a perfectly alluring look to almost any kind of skin. "But who was it," she tried to recall, "told me that it's very hard on the complexion, even causes terrible eruptions sometimes, like eczema?" It was a horrible thought and for a moment Maude Ella felt she had better stick to plain powder and let it go at that. But on second thought she wrote on her list, boldly and firmly: Cake' Made-up.

There were so many things to think of when one was taking a trip. Not only important items like suitable dresses but details like gloves, underwear, nightgowns, a decent purse, the kind that would go with everything. For she had, in the beginning, made up her mind to be practical. There was no use in having a hodgepodge of clothes. She would just have to choose between black and brown or maybe navy blue and stick to it. Just so everything matched. She finally decided on brown. It seemed so simple after that: a brown suit (her old tan coat would be perfectly good for a wrap--she had worn it five years but only to church), brown shoes, gloves, hat, purse, maybe a white blouse or two. She hoped she'd have time to make the blouses. They really were ridiculously expensive and nothing to them, really. And her good dress.

It would have to be something with brown in it so that she could use the same gloves and purse and shoes. Night after night she sat up making her lists, adding, crossing out, then changing her mind again. It all took time and thought but she felt it was worth it and it filled her days.

The fifteenth of June she was on the train. Excited and almost frightened at the thought that she might have forgotten the most important thing of all, she checked and rechecked her possessions. No---they were all there. The suitcase at her feet was still a kind of miracle of beauty in her eyes. Never had she imagined herself carrying anything so elegant. And considering that it wasn't as expensive as she had thought it would be made it seem doubly delightful. Of course, it wasn't real leather. The clerk had assured her, however, that these new plastic materials were superior to leather, that soon everyone would be coming to them, and they were so much cheaper. Well, anyway, it's the newest thing, thought Maude Ella, and was happy.

Everything hadn't worked out quite as she had intended. But maybe it was just as well. The Pullman, for instance. Somehow she had thought that the Pullman was included in the price of the railroad ticket and had been much bewildered when she found herself in the chair car. She asked the conductor about it a little timidly, and was told she could get a Pullman seat for ten dollars more. She just laughed nervously and plucked at her nose and said Oh, she didn't mind a bit, this was just fine, and besides, she didn't sleep well at night anyway. "Ten dollars!" she gasped to herself. "Isn't that ridiculous!" A good thing there had been a mistake. When she thought of what she could buy with ten dollars: "Really, some people just throw money around as if it were paper:"

It was like that business of a permanent. She knew they were cheaper if you gave yourself one---everything all there in a little box for a dollar, and probably the same ingredients the beauty shops used. But one day, a long time ago, when she had mentioned a permanent to Esther, who was really inexcusably-extravagant, Esther had said, "And for heaven's sake, don't try one of those cheap home perms that come in a box. Nothing can compare, in my estimation, to a wave given by an expert. You can tell it every time." Maude Ella had agreed heartily, but when the time came, and when she discovered that the cheapest one she could get cost nine dollars, she faltered. "Why, that would buy me two hats and a couple pairs of stockings:"

Her home permanent didn't turn out exactly the way she wished. Too frizzy, somehow, and mercy, she could scarcely get a comb through it. As a matter of fact she broke three teeth out of the new fifty-cent comb she had bought in Fremont, and this irritated her so that she almost cried.

Dinner in the diner that night was not what she called a success. Everything was so strange and formal and there was simply no choice. You just had to sit there and be robbed. "Honestly," she gasped to herself as she read the menu, "how do they have the nerve to charge such scandalous prices?" For the first time since the trip began she thought of her mother, of how outraged she would have been. The thought was not pleasant. Maude Ella began feeling a little guilty, and now and then it occurred to her that this decision to take a trip might have been a bit too impulsive. Was it really going to be worth it? For awhile she stared out of the diner window and watched the passing landscape restlessly. A little surge of panic swept through her at the thought of what still lay before her. She, who had yearned for this adventure for so many years that she sometimes thought she couldn't bear it if she didn't get away---somewhere---anywhere; she, who had planned almost feverishly for this event, now found herself imagining what it would be like to be back in Lester, safe within the walls of her little white house on Ivy street. "But this is just a mood," she assured herself. "I'm really terribly excited about it all. Honestly, I never thought this wonderful thing could happen to me: Guess I'm just tired."

She slept fitfully in the chair car and stayed away from the diner the next morning, wondering why it hadn't occurred to her to pack her food for the trip the way that woman with the child in the seat beyond had done. All the good canned stuff she had in her cellar, and here she was, wondering if she wouldn't starve before noon. The rest of the morning she spent in quavering anticipation, always mindful, how ever, that she must keep a close grip on her purse.

"I've never carried so much money in my life, she thought. She figured she wouldn't use half of it, but it was a nice feeling, knowing you had a small fortune in your hand end could spend it if you wanted to. Still, it was a worry. Sometimes her hand ached from the grasp of her fingers on the clasp, but she wasn't going to be a green horn and have it snatched---nosiree! Leaning her head back on the seat, she closed her eyes and let her imagination leap from one adventure to another---adventures that were to burst in full flower, making up all at once for the drabness of the years, the poverty of the sum of her existence.

The ecstatic center of her dreams was, naturally, a man. Maude Ella admitted this to herself. None of her friends had ever guessed what longings surged within her innermost heart. There had never been too many men in Lester, or so it seemed to Maude Ella, and those who had been there always seemed to shy away from her, even when she was young. It was hard to understand. It wasn't because she was homely, she argued unconvincingly. She knew homeliness when she saw it, and certainly didn't blame some men. She was sure she must once have been attractive in a simple old-fashioned sort of way. Of course, you couldn't expect to look the same at thirty-eight as you did at sixteen, but still---she was sure there was a man somewhere, a man looking for a matures refined, well-read Maude Ell& (think of what a companion

she could be to the right kind of man), a woman of principles and ideals. She had never done an immoral thing in her life. She wondered now what it would be like to do something you just couldn't confess to anyone, not even to your closest friend. For a moment the thought excited her, and she felt a flutter of uneasiness. Her throat felt full and thick. It had never been hard for Maude Ella to resist temptations, little ones that didn't matter much; but she wondered what would happen if she had the chance to---well, you know. "I just wouldn't have the courage." she said to herself, "I know I couldn't do it. It would really be too horrible!"

A baby a few seats ahead of her began to squall, and Maude Ella glanced suspiciously about as if she thought the people who lay sprawled awkwardly in their seats might be reading her thoughts. They looked dirty. She put her crumpled handkerchief to her forehead. "Mercy, I'm in a sweat!"

The hotel was in the center of the city. Josephine had recommended it, and Maude Ella was irritated with Josephine. "I wonder if she deliberately chose this hotel to impress me, or if she did used to stop here herself. I just don't see how she could afford it, staying a week at a time!"

Maude Ella was determined to get out the next day and look for some quiet, unobtrusive place. This was all right for a day and a night. It would have been too embarrassing to look shocked at the rates, as if she were poor or something. Besides, it would be an experience for one night, just having dinner here and watching the men and women stroll in to dine and dance. Those passing through the lobby, looking as if they owned the place, excited her imagination. A little shiver ran through her body. She felt almost as if she were doing something a bit naughty just to be there, to be watching them without their knowing it.

When she entered the dining room it was almost empty. She had half a notion to turn back fearing she had made some horrible mistake (was her watch right?). But then she saw a couple chatting intimately in a far corner at a small table and a waiter coming towards her briskly, so she let herself be led to a table near the window.

"Isn't this perfectly splendid!" she breathed to herself, smoothing the brown gloves over the purse in her lap and adjusting her glasses. Such a beautiful room, such an air!

Her gaze wandered casually over the empty tables---the snow-white linen, the crystal goblets, the gleaming silver, the roses on each table bending gracefully from tall vases. She knew she should have waited awhile until there were more people. "I'll just take my time though and not hurry. After all, I'm paying for this and probably paying plenty."

She realized she was paying more than plenty when she looked at the menu. Her lips drew up into a tight little line and her eyelids flickered. "Honestly, this is outrageous! How can anyone enjoy a meal that costs five dollars?" But she knew it was too late. There was nothing cheaper. Besides, if she ordered a complete dinner she could take her time, sort of dilly dally at the table and just chalk it up to experience. She gripped her purse for the thousandth time. Strange, she wasn't very hungry. Wouldn't it turn out like that just when she was about to burn up five dollars? Well---ho hum. Pushing the cuticles back on her fingernails she examined them critically and wished she had had the nerve to paint them red.

The dining room began to fill with people; smart looking women and men walked by her table casually but with an air of submerged excitement. Maude Ella watched the women toss their expensive wraps over the backs of their chairs. She was fascinated by the sight of smooth white arms and the glitter of bracelets and rings. She ate slowly and carefully, not particularly enjoying the food, wondering now and then why she had come, feeling alternate moments of exhilaration and something that came close to depression.

That evening she stayed in her room to read a newspaper but soon realized she was not in the mood for that. She was restless. Something ought to be happening, she thought, but she didn't know what. "Maybe I should go to bed and get a good night's sleep and then try and make some plans for tomorrow after I check out of this hotel. I simply will not go on wasting money this way." Maude Ella's night was wakeful with disturbing dreams.

It was quite by chance that she met Mayme Newton then 'next day in the park. Lucky there was a park so close to the hotels. It saved carfare and was a nice restful place that didn't

cost a penny. Maude Ella thought that perhaps, here she might make plans for her week in Denver. Long ago she had given up the idea of a trip to the mountains. She was certain she'd get altitude sickness and spoil everything. That was that. She might go to a movie in the afternoon—something light---and maybe have a sundae afterwards in a drug store. While she was meditating dreamily on a huge banana split she heard, suddenly, a sharp voids cry: "Oh, the dear little things! Aren't they just too sweet?"

Maude Ella turned her head. The woman who had spoken was sitting on a nearby bench feeding crumbs to the birds. "Why, yes, why didn't I think of bringing some crumbs?"

It seemed very natural to go on chatting after that. Mayme Newton was her name. In ten minutes Maude Ella discovered a miraculous thing: Miss Newton taught school---Fifth grade---in Milltown, Iowa.

"Well, if that isn't a coincidence:" Maude Ella exclaimed. "I teach in Lester---Second grade."

"Really---do you? Well, well!"

"Isn't it funny? I mean---meeting another teacher first thing? I mean---it's nice."

Mayme Newton smiled in a motherly sort of way that made Maude Ella glow with gratitude. She was suddenly cheered to the point of wanting to clasp her new companion to her bosom. Instead asked, in a voice bordering on pain: "Are you vacationing too---alone?"

"Yes, my second day here. I plan to stay a week, so I have five more days to go. Wonderful city---Denver."

"Yes, isn't it?"

"Where are you staying?" Mayme Newton clicked her words a bit brusquely, but Maude Ella was impressed. She fumbled at the clasp of her purse.

"Why---the Plaza---but it's terribly expensive."

"The Plaza!! Mayme whistled. "If I stayed at the Plaza I'd run out of money in two days and have to hitch-hike back to Iowa. What made you go there? Of course, maybe you can afford it---" and she looked Maude Ella over with a searing glance.

"Oh, no I certainly can't. A friend recommended it--- a young lady--a teacher."

"A teacher: Must be making a better salary than I do:" Again Mayme Newton whistled faintly through her teeth, small hamster-like teeth, but very white, very clean.

"I'll tell you what," she added after a moment's hesitation. "Move in with me. I have a double bed---if you don't mind a double bed, and we can split the most, which is very reasonable anyway."

Maude Ella could think of nothing nicer than sharing the cost and sharing the bed with this nice, clean, friendly companion. Suddenly Denver seemed entrancing.

"Why, I'd love it!" she exclaimed, clasping and unclasping her fingers. They were moist with excitement. "Perhaps we'd better go to the Plaza now and I'll check out"

Mayme Newton's room was not exactly exclusive, but it was just around the corner from the park. It was clean and it was cheap. Right down in the center of town, near the stores, near the movies. Mayme felt as proud of it as if she had unearthed it from the ruins of an ancient city.

And how Maude Ella loved this little room! Sleeping in it at night with Mayme, listening to the clatter in the streets, the wild honking horns of cars, the sudden whistles and bells jangling in the air, watching the neon lights flash and disappear, flash, and disappear so that light and shadow played constantly about the room at night, Maude Ella felt safe and content. It almost made her never want to leave it. Not that they did---much. Mayme was such a card. Really, you

could listen to her droll stories for hours on end and simply go into hysterics over the funny things she told, especially those scandalous bits about the principal aid superintendent at the Milltown school. And Mayme never seemed to wear out.

Maude Ella used to gasp: "Stop it, Mayme! Stop it! I'm dying of laughter, literally dying! you'll have a corpse on your hands!" But yet she urged her on: "Go on, finish what you were telling me about his highness, Mr. Burke. I never heard of such a crazy thing happening to a man!"

And so the days sped on, full of talk, mostly Mayme's, but so witty, so exhilarating. Now and then they played cards on the washstand or took a walk around the park, or stopped in some drug store for a soda after dinner. Mayme had discovered an excellent little hash house where they could get a really filling meal, without dessert, for fifty cents. So they felt they owed themselves the daily treat of a soda. Sitting in a drug store was fun, so many people to watch. And with Mayme there to point out the ridiculous aspects of these strangers, making them all look stupid and silly, made Maude Ella double up with suppressed laughter. It was screamingly funny to hear Mayme says: "Look at that girl in the red hat. Thinks she's pretty all right, but look at her mouth---positively idiotic. Must have used, barn paint on her lips." Then, "And look---a wedding ring! Of all things! Can't see what any man would see in her!"

Lunches they managed, somehow, in their room, just simple fare like crackers and cheese and an apple, but so much more fun than going out and paying heaven knows what for something 'not nearly so nourishing. They even managed to take

in two movies, but after the second Mayme put her foot down. "Not worth two cents in my opinion---such trash!" Maude Ella agreed. Movies got worse and worse, week after week. Much more fun to stay at home evenings in their little room, comfortable in their muslin nightgowns and cotton wrappers, brushing their hair, creaming their faces to get the city dirt out of their pores, talking and talking.

Thus life went on, like an idyll, for five lyric days. And the last night Maude Ella lay quietly in the double bed by the window which was open to the sounds of the city and a faint suggestion of far-off mountains. She felt sad. This was the end---the end of her holiday. Such a lovely time! It couldn't be the end of a friendship, though, not a friendship like theirs---deep and intimate and sincere. They were like sisters, they had so much in common---teaching and all, and not being married. Maude Ella felt a sudden pride in being a teacher, independent of men, just like Mayme. Still, it was sad to think of this being the last night.

"Mayme, don't you hate to see our vacation come to an end? Hasn't it been just marvelous?"

Mayme was braiding her hair in front of a small mirror that hung above the washstand. She didn't stop braiding.

"Why, yes, but I must say I've been getting a little restless these last two days. Guess I'M ready to go back to the old grind."

"Are you? Somehow, I'm not. It's all been so heavenly. Maybe we could do this again next summer. You'll come back, won't you---won't you, Mayme? You always do."

"Just today I was thinking---" Mayme wound a rubber band firmly on the end of her braid, "just today, that maybe next time I'd better move on farther for once and see something of California."

She clicked the comb on the edge of the washstand, turned out the light and crept into bed beside Maude Ella. Maude Ella felt a deep dark weight on her chest. She barely whispered: "California? But that's so far away. It's so---so expensive to go so far."

"Yes, I know. Don't tell me it's expensive. But I've been saving my money for years with that in view and now I have a friend out there who says I can stay with her for two weeks, which would save me a hotel bill. So I feel I owe it to myself to go."

Maude Ella tried to say "That's wonderful" but her lips wouldn't open. They felt cold and stiff. The neon lights blared blindingly. She closed her eyes but the flash burned through her eyelids.

"Well," she finally murmured, "it's been wonderful of you to take me in like this. I'm sure I should have been completely---lost--"

"Oh, think nothing of it. Saved me half the price of the room to have you here and we had some fun. Hope you didn't mind the double bed."

"Oh, no---" Maude Ella's voice sank to a whisper. "I liked it. It's been lots of fun---really."

Slowly, stiffly, she turned her face to the wall. Her body seemed suddenly crushed. She pulled her arms painfully up from her sides and covered her face. She wanted to cry. But she knew she mustn't cry, not before Mayme, and her fingers pressed the tears back into her eyes. There was a fearful ache in her breast.

Mayme had not moved on her side of the bed. Everything was quiet, so ominously quiet that Maude Ella felt frightened.

They used to talk before they went to sleep. Something had happened to Mayme too---it was all so strange.

A faint wisp of hope blew into Maude Ella's heart: perhaps Mayme too was thinking of how lovely it had been, of how she couldn't bear to go to California after all, not after this; of how perfect it had been, too perfect to end! Maude Ella let the tears come now. She waited for Mayme to speak and strained her ears, fearful of missing the sound of those reassuring words she felt hovering in the air, in the dark that covered her.

But Mayme stirred indifferently, turned on her back, and dropped into a slow, peaceful snoring, deep and guttural, increasing, increasing, increasing:

Maude Ella drew the sheet over her head. "Good-night, Mayme," she whispered "good-night."

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