

were sitting in the study which her mother had just abandoned for her afternoon nap, and Portia had busied herself sorting over the litter of papers her mother's activities always left.

"I want to tell you all about it," Rose said. "I'd like to tell you every smallest thing about it, if it were possible, so that you could—remember it as I do."

She tried to do this; to give her sister—not a narrative (her letters, after all, had put Portia in possession of the outlines of the story)—but at least an interpretation of it that would go to the bottom; things she couldn't write in her letters, the actuating desires and hopes that lay behind the things she'd done. But the attempt collapsed. She was talking in a vacuum. Her phrases grew more disjointed until she felt that they were meaningless. At least, scrambling back to solid ground again, she told Portia that she wanted to pay back to her the cost of her education, as well as that could be calculated, and of her trousseau.

Portia's negative of this proposition was as keen and straight as a knife-edge. The thing wasn't to be discussed; not to be considered for an instant. "We're perfectly well off, mother and I. We're living easily within our income out here, and—we're as contented as possible." The cadence of those last three words had a finality about it that closed the subject.

Portia didn't want to share, vicariously, in the life she'd made possible for Rose. The branch had withered indeed and didn't want the pain of feeling the sap struggling up under its bark again. The ashes had better be left banked up about the fading coal. The silence was like the click of a closing door. Then Portia said:

"What does the North Side bunch think of you now you've come back? And those Lake Forest friends of yours? They must have been hideously scandalized. Are they going to forgive you?"

"Oh, they're lovely to me," said Rose. "The only one I've loathed out with is Frederica. She'll be a long time making it up with me, if she ever does."