

BEHAVE

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# BEHAVE

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**SOHO**

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*To three strong women:  
Juliet G., Karen F., and Kathleen T.*

*And to my mother, Cherilynn “Catherine” Cress Romano, PhD,  
who has shared her love of psychology with many.*

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.

—John Watson, *Behaviorism*, 1930

O brave new world, / That has such people in't!

—William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 5, Scene 1,  
quoted in the 1919 *Vassarion*, the Vassar College yearbook

I can almost hear you exclaiming: “Why, yes, it is worth while to study human behavior in this way, but the study of behavior is not the whole of psychology. It leaves out too much. Don't I have sensations, perceptions, conceptions? Do I not forget things and remember things, imagine things, have visual images and auditory images of things I once have seen and heard? Can I not see and hear things that I have never seen or heard in nature? Can I not be attentive or inattentive? Can I not will to do a thing or will not to do it, as the case may be? Do not certain things arouse pleasure in me, and others displeasure? Behaviorism is trying to rob us of everything we have believed in since earliest childhood.”

Having been brought up on introspective psychology, as most of you have, these questions are perfectly natural and you will find it hard to formulate your psychological life in terms of behaviorism. Behaviorism is new wine and it will not go into old bottles; therefore I am going to try to make new bottles out of you.

—John Watson, *Behaviorism*, 1930



PART I  
LITTLE ALBERT



1935

**WHIP-POOR-WILL FARM, CONNECTICUT**

“Why are you doing this?” John asks, coming home to the farm from Manhattan, finding me out of bed, at the corner desk, typing in my nightgown at 8 P.M., the boys already asleep and my dinner, a bowl of chicken soup, ignored at my elbow. Prescription for dysentery: hydrate relentlessly. And I’m trying. But it becomes tiresome, all these bowls of broth and cups of sugar water, and the inevitable visceral responses that become more painful, day and night. The stomach, regardless of what any other organ has to say, does not want nutrition. The stomach and the bowels and all those layers of unstriped, smooth muscle with their associated glands (how John loves to talk of those invisible places and their powerful relationships to our visible physical behaviors) want only to be left alone.

“Doing what?” I say, tugging out the paper, turning it over, neatening the edges of a growing pile.

“Working so hard when you’re supposed to be recuperating.”

I shield the paper with my forearm, like a teenage girl hiding her diary. We have been married close to fifteen years now, we have survived scandal, infidelities, and depressions (his, mine, the nation’s), and mostly I feel we know each other as well as anyone can. And



still, every human seems to remain to every other a mystery—despite John’s strenuous disavowal of all things intangible.

It is the one thing any human can truly own: her private thoughts. But what do you do when you’re married to a man who says “thought,” as we generally refer to it, and the mind, and consciousness, and especially the soul, don’t exist?

John runs a hand through his hair—now silver but as thick as when we first met. He remains as handsome to me now as when he was forty, and I was—well—half that age. I can smell the city on him. The stale cigarette funk of the train car, but also cologne, kept in his desk drawer, reapplied before leaving the Graybar Building. And the drink—bourbon, invariably—he stopped to have with a fellow ad man or behavior consultant. Even when he—*we*—worked in the lab with babies, he made it a point not to smell of sour milk. There are opportunities to be missed if you don’t send out the right stimuli.

“Who’s it for?” he asks finally, gesturing to the overturned pile.

He means which popular magazine. *Cosmopolitan*? *Parents*? John has written for most of them. I’ve had my own luck a couple of times. But this pile of fifty pages I’ve managed to accumulate in a week isn’t meant for any magazine.

When I don’t answer, he fidgets with his cuff links. A gift from Stanley, when John made VP. And still, he misses the days when he earned a fraction of what he earns now, but commanded the respect of real scientists and scholars, instead of salesmen and radio announcers.

“I heard you asked Ray to bring down some old Johns Hopkins boxes from the attic,” he says. “I’ve always said I should get rid of all that stuff up there.”

“Not the lab files, surely.”

He starts to nod grudgingly, then shakes his head. “What’s important is already published. I can’t see the point in keeping every scrap of paper.”

“I suppose that’s true.”

“And no one’s ever going to have a need for my private papers, or yours. Burn it all.”

“Burn it *all*,” I repeat, making him smile. Haven’t I heard him say that a hundred times? And he’ll do it someday, I know he will, regardless of my own thoughts about posterity, or my own occasional desires to look back and see what we did, whether we’re remembering things correctly, why our very own publications offer one version here and another slightly different one there, whether there are facts I overlooked in my youthful desire to be his indispensable assistant.

“When you’re dead, you’re all dead,” he says.

“No proof to the contrary.”

He’s relieved by my pretense of agreeability, and yet he can see past it. Perhaps he knows me better than I know myself. John has always maintained that we are unable to observe our own behaviors, which is why others’ behaviors are so much easier to predict and control. Which is always an “out” of sorts, if one chooses to take it. He certainly did.

“What *were* you looking for, Rar?”

**I’m looking, I suppose, for** how it all started: our love, his most important theories, our biggest contributions, our biggest mistakes. And at the same time, I find myself looking away, making excuses, as if I were too immature and impressionable to have known any better.

The most difficult part, you would think, is realizing that the person you idealized, whom you regarded as infallible, was imperfect all along. Instead, the hardest part is stopping to wonder what was so imperfect or unfinished within oneself as to impede comprehension of the obvious. There wouldn’t be any experts telling us all what to do if we thought for ourselves, if we held our ground and asked the right questions. That’s the most important thing a scientist can do, isn’t it? Ask the right questions?

It’s tricky for any woman to sort out her feelings, but most of all

when her husband is a national expert on feelings, especially the unconditioned ones we are born with, which create the foundation for everything else. John always said there are only three: fear, rage, and love, the latter really only a reaction to erotic stimulation. The first and perhaps most powerful—fear—was the one that obsessed him, and the one we worked on together in the early years, by kindling small newspaper fires in front of babies, by letting our tender subjects touch candle flames, by sending rats scurrying across their laps, and rabbits, monkeys, and dogs jumping and lunging all over the place. (None of which frightened most infants, which was the point.) Only two things seem to stimulate an unconditioned fear response: sudden loud noises, or a sudden loss of stability. Having the rug pulled out from under you, in other words. Which is how I'm feeling now.

Don't blame him, I remind myself. He was more honest, even in his errors and duplicities, than any man I have ever known.

I'm not making sense of it yet.

There is one remembered image (John doesn't believe in mental images at all, but I can't find a better term) that refuses to leave me. It has always been playing on some forbidden film screen of my mind, but it has flashed with a particular insistency during the last two weeks of fevers and gastric distress.

**The windowless psychological testing room** is warm, as we wait for our camera man to return and to record the footage that will advance—so Dr. Watson hopes—the immature field of psychology. The first thousand feet of film alone costs \$450, a considerable expenditure in 1919. Our nine-month-old subject—"Albert B."—is being remarkably stoic about all the fuss. His round head, bald except for a few flossy, sweat-dampened strands, swivels slowly in the direction of the closed door, though his eyes remain unfocused, lids heavy. A thin line of drool runs from his slick, ruby lips to the top of his velvet-smooth chest. As he

tires, his chest settles closer to mine, so that I can feel his heat, and his heartbeat, through my blouse.

Dr. Watson's face turns toward mine. *What do you think?*

What I want at that moment is simply to avoid seeming incompetent, to avoid falling out of this swift-moving roadster in which I've managed, with great luck, to gain a seat. Drawing on everything I know as a budding scientist, I try to sound merely clinical.

"He seems . . . healthy."

"Yes," Dr. Watson says, inhaling deeply. He seems relieved. It is one of the few times I have witnessed him betraying any doubt. It is one of the first times he has seemed to need me. *Good.*

The little monkey, of the organ grinder's type, is penned up, outside the door. As is the dog. Somewhere there is a rabbit, too—it shows up on the film, later—but I can't recall where it's kept. (I don't trust myself, in other words. But that has always been part of the problem.)

In a corner basket, a rat scuffles, and next to it, in a large brown bag, a confined pigeon tries to lift its wings, making the bag shudder and jump. I pull Albert closer, muffling my racing pulse against his soft chest: pride, relief, adult desire, and an infant's vulnerability all mixed together in that moment which I can feel in my memory as damp heat in a small room thrumming, waiting. Later, he will be in tears, shuddering and terrified. Not from pain—we never hurt them physically, of course. (Does that make it all right? Would I be asking if it did?) For now, our uncomplaining subject releases a bubbling sigh and settles ever deeper, drowsy and trusting, in my arms.

Was Albert healthy? Was he normal? They are not the only questions—not by a long shot.

Perhaps none of the questions would even matter, except for what followed: years upon years of consequences for one silly, poorly executed experiment I'd much rather forget, no chance to temper or improve upon it and—no, I am understating things already, I am being a coward, it is bigger than all that—no chance to turn back a tide that washed a

great many of us out to sea. If everything had stayed in the lab, it would be different. The lab was only where it started, I realize now.

One thunderclap of truth.

And now I am like one of those hundreds of babies we studied: grip loosening, falling with a pure and unconditioned panic, through the air.

## CHAPTER 1



But I need to start before I ever knew John, and well before motherhood, if only to prove to myself that I rose to challenges and coped with larger-than-life personalities before. I need to remember that I did have an earlier life, and my own ideas, too.

Vassar College, 1916.

The Vassar Brothers Labs.

Outside: that glorious musty smell of leaves starting to dry and color, shrivel and drop. Scarlet and amber brightening our world of brick and stone, skies fresh and blue overhead. September, that most hopeful month. Some people prefer May—lilies and hyacinths, white gloves and pearls—but I've always preferred autumn, the season of rededication, when one experiences that same thrill in the breast that one gets walking into a vast library with its smells of old pages and oiled banisters. All those books still to be read. All those centuries of knowledge. Feeling humbled within the context of all that intelligence—but at the same time, elevated. Made part of something larger.

Inside the labs: standing at attention in front of a microscope, paired with my dear friend Mary, waiting for our professor to enter the room—Margaret Floy Washburn, the first woman in the entire

country to receive a PhD in psychology, from Cornell, four years before I was born. The author of a textbook, *The Animal Mind*, written just around the time I was first learning to read.

Mary was also a sophomore, but older than me, because I'd entered Vassar early. We'd missed crossing paths for most of freshman year—each lurkers in our ways, with noses in our books. But then we'd finally noticed each other—I recall the first time I saw her stiff corona of curls bouncing as she strode with an enviable sense of determination through Main—and I'd found someone with whom I could discuss Wilhelm Wundt and John Dewey all the way back to Rousseau and Locke, from whose work on education Mary paraphrased the very first day we met: “We are like chameleons; we take our hue and the color of our moral character, from those who are around us.” Being always a chameleon of sorts and one who took pride in picking the right creature to emulate, I determined that she would be my study and lab partner, whenever possible.

On this particular morning in September, across the Atlantic, scores of French and German men (no one we knew) were probably off dying at the Battle of the Somme, while we girls rubbed tired eyes and rebraided loose hair, expecting class to begin. Mary, too restless to wait, was fixing an unlabeled slide under the microscope clip.

“What do you see?”

“It looks like a blob.” She wrinkled her nose, turning the dials.

“An amoeba,” I corrected her—though of course, she knew as much, and was only being flip. “I was just reading a paper about the periodic appearance and disappearance of the gastric vacuole . . .”

“Are you sure we're in the right class?” she interrupted without looking up from the eyepiece. “Because I didn't sign up for zoology. I thought we were here to study the complexities of the human mind.”

The room, already hushed—girls in drab cardigans and ankle-length skirts, whispering in twos and threes—had become uniformly silent, but Mary was too engrossed in her slide to notice. Loudly, she

said, “Our teacher may be one of Cattell’s ‘thousand most important men in science,’ but perhaps she’s mixed us up with some other class. How long are we going to have to wait, anyway?”

From the doorway across the room, through which she had entered on low-heeled, sensible black shoes, Miss Washburn answered. “You don’t have to wait at all. You may be dismissed now, if you’d prefer.”

A long pause, allowing us to behold her: firm helmet of wavy hair, just starting to silver, with a tiny, darker knot at the nape; deep lines around her mouth formed by years of rigorous concentration. “Name?”

“Cover. Mary Cover.”

“And you’re partnered with . . . ?”

I took a half step away from the microscope, chin up. “Rosalie Rayner.”

“Rayner. Good.” Miss Washburn took her time looking over the registration sheet in her hand. “Rayner, you don’t have an objection to studying animals, do you?”

“No, Miss Washburn.”

“Not even amoebas?”

“No, not at all.”

“Do you think an amoeba has a mind?”

The back of my knees softened into jelly. “I’m sorry, Miss Washburn, but I don’t know.”

Miss Washburn pulled out a high stool and settled herself onto it, legs crossed at the ankle. A delicate chain of swinging black beads shifted against her broad chest and then settled, as we watched, listened, and faintly perspired.

“Don’t be sorry, Miss Rayner. You don’t know. *We* don’t precisely know. Not knowing is a perfectly appropriate place to start. Sometimes it’s even the right place to end.”

Another pause, the tinkling of water in the plumbing, running in another lab over our heads. The distant, purring jet of a Bunsen



burner. A faint sniff of some sulfurous chemical. I loved those sounds and smells. Even in my embarrassed concern for Mary, and for myself, I couldn't be anything but deliriously happy at that moment.

"Go ahead, everyone," Miss Washburn said. "Take your seats."

We did, and I could feel Mary holding her breath next to me, waiting to discover whether she had been merely warned or actually expelled from the class. But Miss Washburn was not interested in making things clear. Mary's cheeks held onto their red flush for most of that first hour. Turning the focus knob, her hand shook.

We would have to wait most of a week until Mary got back a graded lab report to know she hadn't been banished. But in a way that was slower to reveal itself, she had. For two more years we both progressed well in our studies, each of us optimistic if uncertain about our futures, each of us distinctly skewed toward the sciences. And yet at the beginning of senior year, when Miss Washburn invited a select group of senior students to enroll in her Special Projects in Psychology seminar, Mary wasn't invited. When Mary, intent on protesting, interrupted Miss Washburn on the way to one of her classes, Miss Washburn explained: "You weren't satisfied with the lab you took with me before. I don't imagine you'll be satisfied with this class either."

We were both shocked. Mary was one of the best psychology students at Vassar.

Mary thought that a private meeting in Washburn's office might offer a better climate for persuasion, and I offered to tag along, waiting on a plump, tapestry-covered bench in the hall outside faculty offices. From my seat on the bench, I worked at deciphering a German publication of new lectures by Freud—*Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*—missing every third or fourth word, and swung my shoes against the floor, softly tapping out the rhythm of a popular tune while I absentmindedly played with the charm bracelet on my left wrist. My mother had given me the bracelet, and Mary had given me my favorite charm, the little magnifying glass, symbolizing my love

for science (evidently, no beaker- or brain-shaped charms were commonly available).

As soon as I saw Mary emerge and walk right past me, I knew things had gone badly.

“Don’t say it,” she said, intent on moving as quickly as possible away from the source of her humiliation, her pointed chin with its faint cleft just starting to tremble.

“Oh, Mary,” I said, struggling to catch up. “You’ll be fine.”

I took her arm so we could walk down the dark hall, past the sconce-lighted portraits and old windows. The wavy leaded glass of each window blurred the view of rust-colored trees outside. “You’re our best and brightest. You’ll be fine.”

“How will I possibly be fine if I can’t even rise to the top within our own little college? Three years of paying my dues and I’m being *excluded*.”

“There will be a portrait of you hanging in the labs someday. ‘Mary Cover,’ our next famous psychologist.”

“I don’t want to be famous. That has nothing to do with it.” Mary hurried our pace. Joined at the elbow, we bobbed out of sync, heels clicking and squeaking against the scuffed wooden floors. “I want to contribute. I want to understand. I’d just like to work with humans—if that’s not so much to ask—instead of worms and rats and color-blind fish.”

“It was just . . . rotten luck. You rubbed her the wrong way. Calling her one of Cattell’s ‘most important men,’ and all.”

Mary snickered. “Your fault, for telling me about that.”

I was the one who read every journal announcement, every newsletter, every history of the newer “scientific psychology,” from James and Hall to Titchener and Angell.

“Yes, my fault,” I said, feeling the happiness well up inside me, glad that Mary wasn’t feeling demolished at that moment.

“Self-righteous bat,” Mary said.

How old was Washburn really? Early forties. She seemed ancient to us both.

“Cave-dwelling crone.”

“Half-blind hermaphrodite.”

“Don’t worry,” I said, buoyed by the snicker in Mary’s voice. “We’ll fix it.”

“I admire your optimism, Rosalie,” Mary said with faux formality, giving my elbow a grateful squeeze. Then she dropped into a huskier whisper, the sound of so many afternoon library conversations, so many sleepy picnics in the shade of ancient campus trees. “But don’t hold your breath.”

Mary was the type of woman Vassar was intended to produce, the type who wouldn’t just run off and get married but would actually *do something*. She was needed. Goodness, we were all needed—and more than that, committed to making the world a better place.

In Europe, the Great War dragged on. Society, government, and even religion seemed to offer few solutions to problems of an incomprehensible scale. And yet, still, my fellow students and I retained our idealism, an unspoken sense that whatever was dismantled or destroyed, something else newer and better would rise up to take its place. Scientists urged us to believe that with the help of new education methods and a commitment to societal improvements, reforming man’s worst habits was more than possible, it was *inevitable*. Look how much our own suffragette mothers had done to reform the world ahead of us, as they liked to remind us when we showed any sign of forgetting their labors and sacrifices.

Mary Cover’s mother was more committed than my own. I was glad that my mother didn’t distribute pins and handbills when she came to visit, but of course, we all wanted the same thing: equality of opportunity. And weren’t we practically there already? A few more states to be persuaded, a few more legal details to be pinned down, but the battle had been won. Hadn’t it?

We were meant to exceed our mothers' ambitions. We were meant to walk down that cleared path into a new American century of progress and enlightenment. Relying on experimental science, not phrenology or philosophy or voodoo, we would understand what made people tick. We would understand—in addition to how to mix a Manhattan and dance the fox-trot—how to make people healthier, happier, better in character and in conduct from the very start.

**The day after Mary's snub** by Miss Washburn, I walked past our teacher's house on Professors' Row. I had to circle back twice before mustering the courage to step up to the front door. I lifted and dropped the tarnished brass knocker: no reply.

To one side, a single struggling rosebush hunched, defeated, against the wall, next to a window I could just see into, pricking my hip on the branches as I angled in closer for a better view. The curtains, faded from years of sunlight to the point of near transparency, had been left parted. Inside, I could make out a small wooden desk of Quaker-like simplicity with stacks of papers, a typewriter, and a plain chair, with a white sweater folded neatly over the back. Also on the desk: one small and spidery green plant doing only a little better than the rosebush, pushed into a drinking glass full of tangled roots and brown water. No rugs or tapestries, no framed photographs or paintings, no side tables with crystal decanters, no other decoration in this monastic cottage. An answer to my question: How does a single, educated woman live?

When the curtain shifted, I startled and nearly fell into the rosebush again, but it was only a long-haired Persian cat that had leaped onto the sill, eyeing me skeptically through the glass, as if sensing with feline intuition my presumptions about Miss Washburn's choices and sacrifices. For why, at the age of nineteen, was I interested in practically any other person, except as an embodiment of who I should, or might, become?

I hadn't told Mary I planned to make any of these visits. Mary was pretending she'd forgotten about the matter. But I had my speech planned.

The next day, when Miss Washburn opened her faculty office door, I blurted, "I would like you to consider admitting Mary Cover into your class."

"Come in, come in. I *have* considered. You presume I haven't?"

"And?"

Miss Washburn invited me in and served us both Earl Grey tea on a small round table flanked by two peach-colored wing chairs. I took one sip of mine, but I made so much clatter setting the cup back on its saucer that I resolved not to sip again until the very end, and then to finish it off in one gulp. Miss Washburn took her time with her own cup, sipping and smiling, comfortable with the silence.

This room, at least, had more to occupy my gaze than her house would have had—proof of which place she considered her true home. There, across from me on the wall, were single and group portraits of men—the first-generation psychologists, clutching their cigars. There was G. Stanley Hall at Clark University, presiding over a group that included prestigious visitors from Europe: Freud and Carl Jung. There, in a separate portrait—and was his influence already fading?—was the father of American psychology, William James. Below a set of dark and piercing eyes, the bottom of his face was entirely hidden under a bushy mustache and square-cut beard. He looked grumpy and unapproachable, but from my own readings I knew that he'd actually helped one of the very first non-degreed women psychologists by allowing her to sit in on his class at Harvard, even when the other men boycotted in response.

That was the world from which Miss Washburn had herself emerged: victorious, fully degreed, recognized. Why was she making things so hard for another woman student?

"Rosalie," Miss Washburn said at last, setting down her cup.

“There’s no shortage of competent seniors eager to fill those seats. Mary wasn’t the only person who was told she’ll have to choose another psychology class. And I’m not arrogant enough to think I’m the only professor with whom she’d benefit.”

Damn the clatter. I drained my cup of tea. “But she’s an excellent student. If Mary can’t be in the class,” I said, setting down my cup firmly, “then I withdraw.”

Miss Washburn finally looked surprised, at least for a moment, until her startled expression softened into a rueful smile.

“You plan to withdraw,” she said.

“Yes.” I settled my hands atop the folds of my wool-skirted lap. “That’s correct.”

“No,” she said.

“Pardon me?”

“No,” she said again.

She stood and went to the window, looked out—there it all was, the world that had been her refuge for years. The world that had also been mine—*almost* enough. But no: not enough. Not at all. I felt the scratchy tingle of it, like some rash or fever just coming on. As a wide-eyed freshman, I’d been excited just to board the train to New York City, followed by the Empire line farther north, to Poughkeepsie. Away from my parents: Could there have been any greater excitement than that? Only in my fourth year was I starting to feel in want of something more than collegial, single-sex refuge. Only now was I pining for the invigoration of other places, other people, and perhaps moments like this: an opportunity to take sides, to sometimes go too far.

Miss Washburn returned to stand behind her chair. “Rosalie, you’re a careful student. I don’t mean timid. You’re thoughtful and objective. You’re deeply committed, with good habits and a solid work ethic, but you don’t overreach. We need that.”

*Careful. Thoughtful. Solid.* Was that the only impression I made?

She continued, “Psychology in our decade is like a three-year-old. It’s at the runabout stage. It’s growing by leaps and bounds, but it’s also making messes—or it will be. It’s separating itself from everything that came before, and it’s still deciding who its friends will be, just as you’re evidently deciding who *your* friends must be.” She smiled. How amusing I was to her, with my narrow loyalties and small concerns. “Does that make sense?”

I nodded, but only to be polite. Never mind about friendship: evidently she knew nothing about that. Better to focus on academics. To her, the field of psychology might have seemed new and on shaky ground, but to me, it was old: thirty years, at least. James had called it not a science, “just a hope of a science,” but enough with caution and modesty. Why this constant fear of everything new when the very point of science was to invite the new into our lives: the bubbling-over of beakers, the occasional shattering of glass?

“Do you get along with your parents?” Miss Washburn asked.

“As a matter of fact, I do.”

“Any younger siblings?”

“No,” I said, confused about what she was implying. I had an older sister, Evelyn. We were seven years apart and not close.

“I see.”

But that *I see* bothered me. I was surprised to hear that kind of fainting-couch questioning coming from her, a scientist dedicated to objective laboratory techniques.

A secretary knocked and opened the door a crack. Miss Whitehall, a teacher of classics in her eighties, needed Miss Washburn to pop down the hall, just for a moment. She smiled apologetically. “Perhaps you could refill our tea.”

I took our cups over and, alone in the room, found my eye wandering again, from the photos on the wall to the papers on the desk—was there something there about Mary, or anything that could help my cause?—and then to a piece of pale lavender stationery

next to the typewriter, the letter half written. It was addressed to a female friend (fine, so she had *one*) in New York State. They were corresponding, evidently, about Emerson. Miss Washburn was saying that she could take a little Emerson—*as medicine, but not as regular food*—and about introspection in general, and about life. *The great thing is to look out for opportunities to help in little ways, and let the rest go.* And further down the page: *I am a very ordinary individual. There was a time when I feebly attempted to be other than ordinary, but I missed so much of wholesome fun and good fellowship that I was glad to give up the attempt.*

Resigned to being “ordinary.” Well, that was another mark against her.

I refilled the cups hurriedly, hearing footsteps coming back down the hall.

“It was only about her cat,” Miss Washburn said as she entered, smiling. “I’m watching Felix for her this weekend.”

Turning serious, she continued. “Rosalie, you’re worried about a friend. But I’m worrying about something larger: a set of ideas that will greatly influence society. The young women who graduate from Vassar and go on to advanced degrees will soon enough become my own colleagues. Someday, they’ll be the women who challenge my own work. That’s as it should be.”

So she was open to change, but only change so slow we might not see it or feel it, or arrive at a new shore anytime soon. Change at the regal pace of an ocean liner. I’d made a trip, with my mother, in an ocean liner once. Three weeks of boredom and nausea, sitting on deck chairs, playing whist.

There was a knock at the door—another student, with an appointment.

“I’ll see you in class,” Miss Washburn said, reaching out to shake my hand, soft fingers—loose skin over bone—gently enclosing mine. I did not wish to be so gentle in return.



“Thank you for your time,” I said. “Yes, I’ll see you in Abnormal.”

She cocked her head. “But you were signed up for Special Topics as well. You’re doubling up this semester. I thought we’d understood each other.”

“I’m off to see the registrar next,” I said, pulling away. “It’s so hard to fit everything in. I do the same thing at Thanksgiving dinners, loading up my plate with more than I can possibly digest. That’s childish, don’t you think? Better to make firm choices. But thank you for the tea.”