NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07604820 0

CORNERS

CLIFFORD RAYMOND

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

FOUR CORNERS

CLIFFORD RAYMOND

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

FOUR CORNERS

BY

CLIFFORD RAYMOND

AUTHOR OF "ONE OF THREE," "THE MYSTERY OF HARTLEY HOUSE," "BORROWED LIVES," ETC.

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

c 1921.

30

Digitized by Google

Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
133288B

COPYRIGHT, 1921,
BY CLIFFORD RAYMOND

PROPERTY
OF THE
NEW YORK
SOCIETY LIBRARY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Digitized by Google
Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

FOUR CORNERS

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

FOUR CORNERS

CHAPTER I

THE SOUTHEAST

EFFA PEPPER and Samuel Pepper had not spoken a word directly to each other, except once, in twenty years. They lived in the house they had entered as bride and groom forty years before. They had no children and were dependent upon each other, but if they declared wants or intentions to each other they spoke to the cat.

There were now, as there were when they started housekeeping, beehives under the green gage plums in the back yard. There also were damson plums, cherries, grapes and peaches. The back yard was of nearly two acres with two gardens and many bushes. In one garden Effa grew pinks and poppies, geraniums and pansies. In the other she raised vegetables.

Habit was the law of Effa's life, habit plus curiosity. Gossip was the only art Effa knew. It was her decoration of life.

Samuel Pepper had been blind for ten years. He was independent in the house because nothing ever was changed there. His rocking-chair always was, day by day, exactly in the same place by the west window of the sittingroom, ten feet from the hard

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

coal burner and two feet from the table on which Effa kept the lamp and her mending and knitting.

Samuel knew the position of every chair and table in the house. They were to-day where they had been for ten years and they would be there to-morrow and the next day and so on until Effa died or the house burned down.

Samuel could walk through the rooms as independently as if he had his eyesight, but when he went into the garden it was a different matter. He said he never quite could get the hang of the garden. He would find himself, or be found, in the raspberries on the south side when he thought he was in the blackberries on the west side.

Frequently he got lost in the bushes and shrubs and was in a hopeless condition. Effa would not herself rescue him but when it became necessary for some one to extricate him from the impenetrable forest into which he had plunged she would go to the kitchen porch and call across the fence "Amanda! Amanda! Father's lost in the yard again!"

That would bring Mrs. Popp, her next door neighbor, to Samuel's assistance. He always protested that help was not necessary.

"Just as soon as I found them lilac bushes," he would say, "I'd know the way to the pump and from the pump I can go anywhere."

It did not excite any comment in the neighborhood that Effa and Samuel did not speak. Occasionally when a visitor showed interest in what might be mentioned of the eccentricities of the pair some one might find a matter of local pride in detailing the best known escapades of Effa and Samuel.

The condition in which they found themselves was common rather than unusual. Marriage had formed

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

a habit of life for them. They would have been lost without each other, and they hated each other at the same time. It was not a passionate active hate. It was a comfortable sustaining hate which gave them an interest in each other.

It was common enough for husband and wife to have nothing but a vindictive interest in each other. Any number of the women had the instinct of the female spider. When they ceased bearing children or if they had no children they developed antipathies for the men. Habit, convention and form kept the man and woman together under one roof but it was not required that they have affection for each other.

The marriage was one of instinct, impulse, convenience and convention directed by propinquity and considered rationally from the viewpoint of a life's upkeep for both—one to provide the roof and the food, the other to keep the house clean and cook the meals. They did not become disillusioned. They never had illusions.

Effa and Samuel had become eccentric in their attitude towards each other, having allowed a thoroughly enjoyable period of irritation to develop into a habit.

Their legend was confused. Probably neither Effa nor Samuel could have given an accurate version of it. It was so long ago. By one account Samuel, wearied by a recital of his shortcomings, had asked Effa to hold her gab. By another Effa, furious at Samuel's plaintive but continuing criticism of some sour cream in the breakfast coffee, had asked him to hold his.

A week or two of silence followed. Effa and Samuel may have found in that silence a mode of living. It

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

persisted, although at first there must have been inconveniences in it.

Once in the twenty years Effa had spoken directly to Samuel. They were regular church-goers. In going to church Samuel took Effa's arm. They did not speak but Effa conformed to Samuel's necessities and to public opinion. Occasionally, of a Sunday morning before the church bells rang for Sunday school she would see that Samuel had forgotten his days again and did not know it was Sunday. Then she would say to the cat:

"Pound, ask father if he isn't going to get ready for church."

They had gone to church on the occasion of this speaking. The minister, a very active and anxious young custodian of souls with a leaning towards the theatric and a desire for accomplishment, had decided to raise the church debt. Many a minister never survives that experience with an unbroken spirit.

When the sermon was over Effa's apprehensions, which were acute, caught the significance of an impending event and she knew it would be unpleasant. The sermon had been short. That was indication, in itself, of something to come unexpectedly to the congregation.

The minister introduced the subject of the church debt and the worshipers began to look serious. The minister then introduced a Mr. Livingston who, he said, had been very successful in extricating churches in other cities from financial embarrassments.

Mr. Livingston was brisk and the directness of his method was terrifying. After a short speech of disquieting enthusiasm and confidence—if Mr. Livingston's confidence were justified the congregation's

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

case was hopeless—he said that ushers would go from pew to pew and as the contributions were made the name and amount would be announced and he, in the pulpit, would repeat the name and amount.

Effa then spoke to Samuel, the only time in twenty years.

"We are going home," she said and she led him out. She was the only one in the congregation resolute enough to escape.

The Peppers gave ten dollars a year to the church. Effa also gave a dollar and a half to home missions. She did not believe in foreign missions, she said, with so much need right at home. Samuel gave a dollar and a half to foreign missions because Effa did not believe in them. Souls in darkness needed the light, he said.

The Peppers were agreed in one thing. They gave enough.

Samuel's chair was at the West window but Effa's was across the room in the bay window where she had a view, directly across the street, of the home of the banker, A. Knowles, a view across the other street of the Trumbull residence and, on the other corner, of the strange home where the Puseys lived.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER II

THE NORTHEAST

TO the North from the Pepper residence, which was a story and a half red brick, half covered with ivy, was the home of Timothy Pusey.

Its structure outraged the neighborhood, which was gossipy, because it seemed built against gossip—and therefore invited it. Mr. Pusey might have pleaded, if he had wanted to appear in a neighborhood court, that he merely had rented the place, having found it suitable.

He was inoffensive and he had not designed or built the place. It had been designed and built by a spirited dowager.

She was Mrs. Clayton, still known to the older folk as Sassy Howard. Effa and Samuel remembered when Sassy, a young woman, used to come out of the Howard driveway, riding astride, in riding breeches. She had two or three beaux in the town but they were frightened by her wit and her easy contempt for them. She married abroad and came back a widow.

Then she remodeled the old Howard place—tore the old house down and built one flush with the street. It was of gray brick and arose thirty feet on the street side before there was a window—a contemptuous flank of brick with dormers high up, nearly under the eaves. She inclosed the whole lot, of nearly

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

two acres, within a fifteen foot brick wall. There was a small gate of iron between thick brick posts.

If any one wanted entrance there was a bell at one of the posts. If it were rung some one might come to the gate. If no one came there was no entrance.

Within there were marvelous gardens and walks and clumps of evergreens and part of the old grove of white oaks. The dowager may have come home to live a blighted life. She built the house and brought over an English gardener to do the work within the walls. Then she tired of it and went abroad. She had plenty of money and no responsibilities. Evidently it had been a relief to startle the townsfolk for a while but it was not a complete life for Sassy Howard even if she were a dowager.

Mrs. Pepper said she had heard that Sassy was living in Monte Carlo, but that was because Effa never had heard, short of Hell, of any other place so bad, in her way of thinking and information, as Monte Carlo. There the Devil was incarnate and there she knew Sassy Howard must be.

No one ever knew, in the town, why Sassy's life had been blighted or why, in consequence, she had wanted to build a wall to contain a distracted soul. Mrs. Pepper said she understood that Sassy's lover had killed her husband at Monte Carlo and afterwards had killed himself, but that again was merely Effa's imagination doing its best.

Harmless Mr. Pusey had rented the place because it suited him and he liked it, and he fell heir to all its accumulations of suspicion, conjecture and distrust.

Probably Mr. Pusey and his family could have

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

overcome the traditions of the house if it had not so completely seemed to meet the needs of the Pusey family. The neighborhood was convinced that if the Puseys had not been able to find just such a place they would have built it. Therefore all the sins of Sassy Howard were forgotten and all of them were remembered as of the authorship of Timothy Pusey.

That blank wall which arose sheer to the dormer windows was an outrage to the neighborhood's sense of convivial gossip. It set itself inscrutably against the conversation which was the essence of life. Other places had their lawns and wide porches. Beyond their iron or wooden picket fences was free range for the eye and speculation, but there were the strange Puseys behind the prohibitive walls and the neighborhood resented it and blamed Timothy Pusey for something he had not built.

The advent of the Puseys, in its manner, was enough to agitate the neighborhood by a portent of mystery and flutter it by a sign of alienism. Sassy Howard's house had stood vacant almost a year when one day in the summer it was seen that the iron gate was standing open and some small boys, peering around the brick gate posts, ran home to tell their mothers that a man had come out of the house and had walked about the gardens.

The children were afraid of the place. That was a protection to it, from their carelessness and destructiveness. They had heard what their elders said of Sassy Howard and it had fascinated them, not with anything which might be related to reality but with suggestions of wickedness which might be supernatural. The gardens were overgrown with weeds and the desolation was that of Godlessness.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Much as the children would have loved to prowl about an abandoned house, none had tried to climb the walls, but when they saw the gate open, an inexplicable fact, they peered in curiously and timidly and then ran home to say that they had seen a man.

The mothers were interested and many of them found some reason for walking by the Howard place within the following fifteen minutes. The gate was carelessly open. It was a regret which vexed Effa Pepper unremittingly for a month, and as an alternating current for two more that she had not been at home when this opportunity was offered. She would have gone in through the open gate, in the proclaimed spirit of a praiseworthy neighborhood responsibility, to find out who the stranger was and why he was there.

The other women did not have her daring, imagination or enterprise and none went in, but some did see a tall, thin man, abstracted and not observing, come out, lock the gate, put the key in his pocket and walk away. He did not seem to think that he needed any explanation. He did not even seem to know that he was in a neighborhood except, as Mrs. Popp afterwards told Effa Pepper, he stopped for a while to look at the Knowles' house. He even went up the side street to look at it and crossed the street to stand with his back against the Howard wall and look up at the upper windows of the Knowles' residence as if calculating how much of a view of the Howard garden might be obtained at such an angle from the windows.

Then he went on his way, not paying any attention to anything else although the parade of matrons by the Howard gate was something conspicuous in the

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

consciousness of the matrons themselves. He went on his way, unobserving, otherwise than for the Knowles' house incident, but much observed. Speculation reaped and threshed many crops for several days but there was nothing but chaff and no grain. That was all there was to it and by a fortnight discussion had fully abated.

Then it was revived. Four carpenters came, with the key to the gate. Several loads of lumber were hauled and the deserted place came to life with the sound of hammering and the voices of the workmen.

Effa Pepper could make inquiries this time and she did, but persistence and genius for cross-examination did her no good.

He didn't know, the carpenter contractor said. They were making some repairs and alterations at the orders of Mrs. Clayton (Sassy Howard). Maybe it was for her. Maybe it was for a tenant. He didn't know. He hadn't asked. The principal alteration was the building of a small platform on the roof with steps and a railing down to a dormer window which opened upon a slope of the roof.

He did not know what it was for. He had his plan and his orders. It looked silly to him and it was hard to build but it would not disfigure the house as much as he thought it might owing to the fact that the big chimney hid some of it and it was beyond the ridge of the roof.

Some one wanted to get out of the dormer window, climb up the stairs and have a place to stand on the platform where there was, within the circle of the neighboring tree tops, a clear view of the sky. That was all he knew.

The carpenters finally completed their work and

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the gate again was closed and locked for two weeks. When it was opened again it was to greater mysteries. Some one was moving in.

Moving in always gave excitement and pleasure to the neighborhood. There was furniture to appraise, a mode of life to conjecture, poverty, competency or affluence to be estimated and new people to be criticized.

The neighborhood was so long established that these excitements of change were not of frequent occurrence, but the change in Sassy Howard's house was thrilling.

Effa Pepper, when she invaded the place to question the carpenter, had observed how the gardens were overgrown with Joe Pie weed, dogbane, sweet clover, thistles, burdock, the banes of her garden experience. Moss was on the flagstones of the walks, grass grew rankly along the borders, burr bearing weeds were everywhere. Pitiful perennials of the old gardens and annuals which had seeded themselves were choked and there was the suggestive desolation of a place which had been lovely because some one had loved it and was now a ruin because that one had forgotten it.

Some one was moving in, but such people, when they were seen! There were two, a man and a woman, swarthy, voluble, loud, gesticulatory and inexplicable —foreigners, and of the worst type—Effa Pepper thought. A foreigner, to the neighborhood, was something aside from human nature. There were some in the town, inoffensively connected with its industries, offensively in contact with conventions.

The man and the woman were outrageous. They shouted and made gestures on the sidewalk when

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

the furniture drays came up. They wore outlandish clothing, with spots of color. They embraced convulsively when they could not make the furniture movers understand anything, after they had unlocked the gate at the driveway, but the drays were driven inside, unloaded and came out empty and the neighborhood had much to excite its curiosity and little to satisfy it.

For nearly a week the house seemingly was occupied, although the foreigners were not seen. No light was to be seen at night. The walls did not allow many lights to be seen if all were lighted, but there was the oppressive sense in the community that people—even foreigners were in a fashion people—had moved into the weed grown desolation and had been absorbed in it.

One day Effa Pepper saw that the foot walk gate again had been left unlocked and standing open and she went across the street again to find out what she could. She penetrated the gardens far enough to see that the weeds were disappearing and that the man was at work putting everything in shape.

Then he saw her and came running towards her with so many gesticulations that she did not stop to meet him but went out by the gate again. The man closed and locked it.

A few days later the neighborhood began to feel that something else had taken place in the house. It was difficult to say what until one day the tall, thin, abstracted man, who had been seen before, was seen again coming out of the gate.

Later a brass plate was put up on the left hand post of the gate. It carried an inscription, as follows:

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

TIMOTHY PUSEY

OCULIST AND OPTICIAN

ASTRONOMICAL LENSES
AND INSTRUMENTS

BUSINESS CALL—THREE RINGS

It was an old plate which Timothy had used before when he was grinding lenses and selling merchandise.

There was a brass bell handle below the plate.

That was the advent of the Puseys, and no one knew how they had come, unless at night, or how many or of what character they were.

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER III

THE SOUTHWEST

THE Trumbulls' house was white with green shutters. It was built to three stories with many dormers and gables and had a tower room rising in the center above the third story. It had two large porches.

The Trumbulls preferred lawn to garden. Their house sat a hundred feet back from the street and, with the exception of a peony bed at the right of the brick walk to the front door and a pansy bed close to the west wall, there was nothing on the front grounds but well-cut turf and a few trees.

The Trumbulls had no fence. Their lawn started from the sidewalk, arose by a gentle terrace and spread on back of the house, ending at a trelliswork which concealed clothes yard and garden. There was a garden but a man worked it. The Trumbulls had no bucolic interests. The few trees which gave some shade to the lawn were noble ones and the place had a simple old-fashioned dignity of beauty and comfort.

There was a great deal of wealth in the family, as wealth was estimated in the community. Sarah Spencer had money from her father when she married Henry Trumbull. He also had money and had made more. The Trumbulls did as they liked be-

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

cause their position was assured and they didn't care whether it was assured or not.

Nothing could be done satisfactorily in the neighborhood and few important things in the town without the inclusion of one or more of the Trumbulls in the planning and management.

Mr. Trumbull was a little gray man of whom the impressionable part of the neighborhood stood as much in awe as it did of A. Knowles, the banker. A. Knowles was in porte and being a person of importance, but the awe which Henry Trumbull inspired was one arising from the knowledge that this quiet little gray man, always unobtrusive, on the street or in his home, was the genius of the Trumbull wealth, success and happiness.

The qualities of the home were magnificent to the townspeople. Their source was seemingly so inadequate for the dynamics required and yet in fact so completely competent.

"I declare," said Amanda Popp to Effa Pepper, "I sometimes look at him going down the street and feel as if a mouse was the father of elephants," which was not exactly what she meant but it touched the periphery of her idea.

Three ladies from the church, seeking contributions to the organ fund, had thought to divide the Trumbulls for purposes of contribution. The cause being so worthy they hoped that Sarah Trumbull would think that she was contributing for the family and that Henry Trumbull would think that he was doing the family share.

They were simple minded ladies and they were greatly astonished when Mr. Trumbull asked, as his first question: "How much did Mrs. Trumbull give?"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

In a flutter of guilty emotions they said she had given two hundred and fifty dollars.

"I'll double it," said Henry, smiling, "just to maintain my own importance."

The ladies had called upon him at his office. Henry was a wagon manufacturer and his plant was a large one. The neighborhood had no idea that carrying the Trumbull home was a small thing. The wagon plant was the big thing and the three ladies seeing him in proper relation to his work found that, as he sat in his quiet office behind his mahogany desk, he seemed, to their amazed eyes, to grow and grow in bulk until he was the colossus able to bear all the great plant with its series of tall chimneys and he was the chief of this tribe of workmen.

They subsequently spread their impressions to a number of ladies with enthusiastic declamation and ejaculation and in consequence the quiet little gray man, when seen on the street or on his lawn, was observed as something superhuman.

Sarah Trumbull was intended by nature for the work of her life. That was to be the perfect wife Henry Trumbull wanted, the perfect companion and comfort he wanted, make his home just the home he wanted and be the mother of the large family he wanted.

She was fair and of almost dowager plumpness. Henry thought that in a party dress she looked regal. He never went to parties but when she and her daughters came down from dressing they always went into the library where Henry, at the reading lamp, would look up, over his paper or book, and scrutinize them before they went to their carriage.

It gratified Sarah that, much as Henry loved his daughters, his first look always was at her. If she

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

had a new gown he always noticed it. If her hair were done in a new way he saw that. He always told her she was beautiful and she always knew that to him she was. That kept her emotionally young and happy.

Henry's two elder sons, who also went to parties, would come down later. They drove cars. Their mother loved the dignity of a carriage with two horses. That belonged to her day.

Sarah knew, as she left Henry sitting comfortably by the reading lamp, that he was contented. After they had gone his two small sons would come down in their pajamas and sit on the arms of his chair for a half hour before going to bed. Then Henry would read until he was sleepy.

For two people who wanted a large family Henry and Sarah had been fortunate. Agnes, Beatrice and Elizabeth were their daughters. Their older sons were Norman and Conrad. Then there were the two younger ones, Bob and Jim. Bob was nearing long trousers and was in the Ivanhoe and Charlemagne era. Jim was in the Tom Sawyer, barefoot and sore toe age.

Mr. Trumbull found Agnes the most satisfying. She was like her mother. Beatrice was the most perplexing. She was like nothing in his experience. Elizabeth, he thought, was the happiest although she was not as pretty as her sisters. Henry thought that she might gain beauty as her character, already indicated as fine, grew more mature.

In Conrad he recognized himself again. Here was another little gray man who later would not go out to parties. Norman puzzled and interested him. He did not understand Beatrice and he did not understand Norman, but he had great respect for them

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

both—more respect, probably, although certainly not more affection, than he had for all the others.

When Beatrice smoked her first cigarette she did it with her father in the library. He did not know what a proper father ought to say to such a daughter at just that minute. He was glad Sarah was not there at the time.

"I thought this was the place to begin," said Beatrice, as she lighted the cigarette awkwardly. "I'm told there is a good reason for doing it. I don't want to miss anything."

"I wonder what I ought to say to you?" Henry asked.

"What does an old time father say to a daughter?" Beatrice asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," said her father. "I'm just wondering what your mother will say. We never had modern advantages."

"I'm not sure that this is an advantage," said Beatrice, puffing. "I only get a nasty taste. They say you must inhale to get a thrill. Oh, I got it then. Oh, something went way down into my lungs and it makes me giddy——"

"I suppose that every parent nowadays," said Henry, "must strive to adapt and adjust, but, Beatrice, make it as easy for us as possible and don't have me as a witness when you inform your mother of this or reveal your new accomplishment to her."

Henry's idea was that both Beatrice and Norman got a considerable dramatic enjoyment out of heterodoxy, but he found he was mistaken at least as to Norman. He found real evidence of a reflective nature proceeding *a priori* but ready for reading.

If Henry had known it he astonished these two of his children more than they could astonish him.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

They looked carefully into his library one day, into his own particular shelves of books. He to them also always had been the quiet little gray man, loving and kind.

"Well," said Norman to Beatrice, after they had looked over the books, "I believe we must admit that father is our intellectual equal. That's a discovery, isn't it, Bee, to make in a parent?"

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER IV

THE NORTHWEST

THE Trumbull residence alone would have made this street intersection important. The residence of A. Knowles, the banker, on the fourth of its four corners made it conspicuous.

The Knowles residence was designed to be conspicuous. Any one who knew Mrs. Knowles must always have thought of her as timid, frequently frightened and sometimes lost in it.

She was lost in the house just as she was lost beside Mr. Knowles. He and the house each reduced her to insignificance. Either one would have done it. Together they obliterated her.

She seemed to have lost her sense of direction in life, to be constantly turning unexpected corners and coming into strange corridors. Some people thought her pathetic, some thought her silly; some pitied her; many pitied A. Knowles.

Mrs. Knowles seemed to have no explanation of herself and to find no excuse for herself. In the absence of a reason for herself she was becoming smaller, frailer, less incarnate, less purposeful every year. She was such a lady as smooths the silk of her dress over her knees and needs a hassock for her feet.

If anything so assertive as happiness ever could be said to be hers, she may have been happy the two

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

weeks before Christmas. Then she was busy stringing popcorn on threads with a needle, making popcorn balls and filling pink gauze stockings with hard candies and nuts.

These were for the Sunday school Christmas tree. A. Knowles was superintendent of the Sunday school. Its respectability and his importance made a dignified combination creditable to both elements in it.

Christmas itself was a terrible day for her. It said: "Childless, childless, childless," to her in endless repetition. A. Knowles never remained at home Christmas. Mrs. Knowles sat nearly all day long at a window in her bedroom watching the streets, watching the children. She did not know what A. Knowles did. He may have spent the day at the bank. She did not know. He never told her where he was going. She knew he could not remain in the house. She had to stay. There was no one's Christmas which included her.

It was a strange process of selection which had joined her and A. Knowles. Effa Pepper said that she had known the Burton family when they lived in Mineral Springs, which was a town fifteen miles distant. Mrs. Knowles had been a Burton—Lulu Burton. Mrs. Pepper said she had been a fat little girl and a rosy cheeked plump young woman, esteemed very pretty and very good humored and happy—but not much sense, said Effa—a giggly girl but nice and very kind and popular.

Effa did not know how A. Knowles had come to marry her. There was a period in A. Knowles' life which even Effa did not know much about. His father, Simon Knowles, had established the bank and it was always understood that the son was to succeed him there. The Knowleses, Effa said, had always

Digitized by Google Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

been a very proud family and thought and spoke a great deal of advantages.

Old Simon himself had been given advantages by his father and he wanted his own son to have them. Effa did not know what benefits any one got from advantages or what any one would describe as advantages. She knew they included going away to school and to college, and young Knowles had also gone abroad.

It would have been violent nonsense in the case of any other than the Knowles family, but there was in the neighborhood and in the town such a tradition of respect for the Knowleses that whatever they did gained rationality because they did it.

The residence of A. Knowles indicated what he intended his family to have. Mrs. Knowles was what his family was.

Fresh from advantages, A. Knowles had come home and soon afterwards married Lulu Burton. Simon Knowles was living then. A. Knowles and his wife went to house-keeping in a cottage just west of Simon's home on the corner, but the neighborhood soon saw that the Knowles family was just beginning to make advantages count. The old house in which three generations of Knowles had lived was moved far back to the north. Simon and his wife continued to live in it and building operations were begun on the old site.

The advantages of A. Knowles had given him some ideas of architecture but no idea of taste. What he wanted was magnificence and grandeur. Bigness was what he wanted. Expense was what he wanted. He wanted marble and granite, brass and copper, mahogany and ebony.

Simon also wanted all this for his son and his

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

son's children and the architects gave it to them. Even during construction the place was a marvel to the neighborhood. Its vast and heavy materials had the Four Corners in a massive disorder for several years. The Four Corners thought the pyramids were being built.

Every evening Simon Knowles and A. Knowles came to look at it and the children of the neighborhood, playing, after supper, in the sand, would scamper off. Even they knew that it was not proper to intrude upon so solemn a thing as this visitation.

On Sunday mornings Mrs. A. Knowles joined her husband and his father in the visitation which was made just before church time. Any one could see that she was frightened, even then, to look at this great structure taking shape gradually and to think that it was to be her home.

In the cottage with a simple husband and simple babies Lulu Burton might have been happy and have kept her plump prettiness but she had married an importance and a pile and there were no babies.

Old Mrs. Simon Knowles died before the house was finished and Old Simon died soon after his son had installed the timid Lulu in it.

Lulu could not support the life. Effa Pepper said it was gospel that she really had been out of her mind for months, worn to nothing by contact with the house, and by contact with A. Knowles—lost and distracted and, worst of all, a Rachel mourning for children which had not been and were not to be.

The house was, in reality, a mausoleum. It had been built for the Knowles family and there was no family. The son who would have received it from his father had not been born.

It stood as an enormity testifying to Lulu Burton's

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

failure. Only one thing had been asked of her. She was to bear children, to become a mother, a Knowles mother, and she had failed.

"I wonder if he thought she ought to fill that house," Effa Pepper said once.

"No," said Amanda Popp, "one child would have filled it for him if the child had been *his* son."

Digitized by Google

Original from
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

CHAPTER V

THE Knowles residence had been occupied many years before the Puseys took the Sassy Howard house on the other corner. Norman Trumbull was a young man when the Puseys came, he already had three years in college. He had been one of the little boys who ran away from the sand piles of evenings after supper when Simon Knowles and A. Knowles came to contemplate what their money was building for their family.

People in various parts of the town still might say to visitors: "We'll drive over this evening and show you the Knowles residence," but the Four Corners were settled down until the Puseys unsettled them.

Sassy Howard never tried to get along with the neighborhood, but the neighborhood, although spiteful, could take pride in her. She was magnificent, suggesting, as has been said, the gilded deviltries of Monte Carlo to Effa Pepper. She was on the horizon of the neighborhood's narrow vision as something regal and fabulous and wicked. She might have met kings and had princes for lovers.

She served not only the neighborhood but the whole town as a celebrity. The Knowles residence filled the eye, but Sassy Howard not only would fill the eye, if she showed herself, but what could be told a newcomer or visitor of her would fill the ear for an entire evening.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

When she moved away and rented her house the neighborhood, eliminating the Trumbulls and A. Knowles, resented it. The feeling was that she had at last done the most inconsiderate thing she could have thought of.

Mrs. A. Knowles was the most disconsolate person in the neighborhood but no one knew that. No one ever knew what Mrs. Knowles' emotions might be. Lulu Burton, failure and nonentity, had been fascinated and thrilled by Sassy Howard. She had spent hours looking out of windows for a glimpse of the regal Sassy coming out in her carriage.

Mrs. A. Knowles' deep, passionate thought was: "Oh, if I only had been a beautiful, wicked woman instead of this." She hoped Sassy was or had been wicked. That was her sanctuary of individualism, of rebellion and aspiration. It was her defiance, this terrible, secret, brave wish and she could carry it to church with her, and there was not a start or flicker of protest anywhere within her.

Once, as the congregation was standing singing the doxology, as she was standing by A. Knowles in the Knowles' family pew, with A. Knowles still invested with the atmosphere of the offices of superintendent of Sunday school, with the peace of the sermon and service upon everybody and everything, she said it—almost in a whisper.

Lulu Burton Knowles was a very weak, insipid and uninspiring woman but she had, for a time, in one purpose, a great strength of will. It was the will to have at least one child.

She might have been a very poor and weak mother, even as she was a poor and weak woman, but she had a strong will on this one point. One cannot tell what she might have been as a mother. Her backbone

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

might have turned to iron with a sense of final and triumphal accomplishment and she might have reduced even Knowles to subjection. But she had no chance.

Always—for her—the sense of futility, of uselessness. She was misfit, misformed, unfortunate, if not cursed. Marriage was an irretrievable step. The town did not know anything of divorce. It was not thought of. Adultery was possible. Bigamy might be. But divorce was unthinkable.

Lulu Burton Knowles might willingly have released her husband to another woman—she was so ashamed of her own failure—but it never occurred to her—or even to him—that this was legally possible.

If there had been a recognized convention of divorce a third of the families in the neighborhood might have been dissolved—would have been if in husband and wife there had been enough spirit to overcome inertia; sufficient will behind desire.

Even Knowles, headstrong and stubbornly egotistic as he was, never had considered that even for a man of his wealth, there was a way of escape from this woman and a way to the legalized union with another.

The community sentiment, even in his case, was more powerful than the law. The letter of the marriage sacrament was its spirit so far as the indissolubility of the union was concerned. That was because the community knew nothing of particular and selective and abiding companionship in marriage but knew marriage merely conventionally. Young people got married because each sex wanted its complement and both man and woman needed a home. Once done it was not to be mended except by death. There was no understanding of mismating. It was all the same.

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Any man and any woman might be married but once married, they were married.

Lulu Burton Knowles' one strength of will might have carried her into the divorce court if it had not been for this unquestioned sentiment of the neighborhood. She might have submitted, in recognition of Knowles' paternal rights, to free him, but the procedure was unthinkable. It never occurred to her. What she did was remarkable, beyond any one's estimates of her powers, but permissible. She tried to get a baby for adoption.

She did so without saying anything of her plan or efforts to Knowles. She wrote to the superintendents of orphan asylums and foundlings' homes. She made visits to them. It was nerve-racking but she was able to do it.

She wanted a boy, six months old, with gray eyes. A. Knowles had gray eyes and black hair. She wanted a six months old boy baby with gray eyes and black haid. She knew she was incapable of taking care of a younger baby.

She found one and the moment she knew it was the baby of her choice and decision she lost her heart completely to it. Before she could take it, she had to make all arrangements for its comfort, care and upkeep.

During this period of preparation, Lulu Burton Knowles was very nearly being wholly happy. She thought Knowles would approve, love as she did and be happy. She grew animated. There was even a flush in her cheeks and something almost like a laugh in her voice. Knowles wondered what could be the matter with her but knew it was unimportant whatever it was and did not remark of it to her.

Lulu got everything ready—a room furnished as a

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

nursery, a little bed, a carriage, all the little clothes needed—she made some of them herself—boots, wraps, blankets and even some toys. She was almost delirious at times with happiness.

She engaged a nurse for the first month. She read everything she could on the care of babies. When all was ready she had the nurse bring the child to the house and she prepared to give Knowles an astonishment which would enrich his life and make them both as happy as people were at the end of fairy tales.

A. Knowles came home to his moment of wonderful awakening. Lulu had the baby in a basket in the living room. In a vicarious maternalism she was sitting beside the basket knitting little socks. The nurse sat quietly behind the curtains of a door to another room. The baby was asleep. The nurse was waiting and Lulu was palpitating but exquisitely happy and confident.

Knowles came home. He hung up his hat. He proceeded through the formula of his ordinary home coming. He then entered the living room, shook out the newspaper he had carried with him and sat down to read.

Lulu did not say anything but continued to knit. Presently the baby stirred, raised its hands and gave a little cry. Knowles looked over the edge of his paper.

"What was that?" he asked.

"What was what, dear?" asked Mrs. Knowles, delaying the revelation.

"I thought I heard something," he said. "Isn't dinner late?"

"I don't think so."

"I think it is," he said looking at his watch, "five

Digitized by Google
Original from NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY