

burning and rather shadowy people moving about quietly and speaking in low voices. We were ushered into the insane ward. It was a vast room filled with cots. On each cot lay, or sat, women in all stages of dementia. Their clothes had been taken away. They wore shapeless hospital wraps. The hair of some was hanging in wisps about their cheeks. Others stared into space with dull eyes from deadened faces. At the sight of a man (myself), all the women sat up and fastened their empty eyes on me.

Grandmother's cot was in a far corner. She was perfectly composed and never more charming. "I am delighted to see you both," she said. We did what we could to reassure her. What had happened was commonplace enough in such cases. My grandmother had been staying at a Y.W.C.A. About two o'clock in the morning, "they" (there is always a "they") had driven a spike through the ceiling and began to pump gas into the room. In her terror, my grandmother had run down to the street in her nightdress and tried to board a street car.

We took Grandmother home and gave her a room. "You will have to stay up tonight," my mother said to me. "She may try to kill us all." The family settled into sleep. I sat downstairs, reading. Presently, I heard bare feet patter down the stairs. Grandmother began to throw open windows and doors. I closed them. She threw them open again. "They're pumping gas in here," she said, "the house is full of gas." I tried to explain to her that, if there were any gas, I would notice it too. Finally, I got her back to bed. I went back to reading. Ten minutes later, she was throwing open the doors and windows again. This kept up all night. For years, in addition to our old tensions, this dark, demoniac presence sat at the heart of our home.

Usually, her movements were almost soundless and she seemed to be able to move with abnormal swiftness. She would be standing beside you before you knew she was there. Winter and summer, she wore a long sealskin coat in the house. For long periods, she would be quiescent. Then a spell would come. She would float downstairs, take a knife from the kitchen and sit by the window in my mother's bedroom, where she knew that she should not go. There, muttering and growling, an ominous figure in her sealskin coat, she would rock back and forth, the knife clutched defiantly in front of her. "You will have to take the knife away from her again," my mother would say. My grandmother was quite powerful and there was usually a sharp scuffle before I got the knife. I suppose nobody ever