

## Susan's Room

1924

"The evening brings all home," the last ringleted girl had finished off the ballad on a hopeful note--she would have given her ears for a praising word from Miss Duff--and night and quiet came again to the house on Highland Street. Regular as the curtain of nightfall was Susan Duff's routine in closing away her teaching day. Shoulders back, her tall frame straightened, even though there was no one in the house to meet for the evening but herself, she performed a brisk tally of the hours of lessons in the account book she kept handy atop the piano, then the balky old doors of the music parlor were slid shut. Next a quick stop in the hallway bath to freshen her face with a rinse of cold water; an adjusting glance into the mirror, that pool of candor; hairpins

change  
Thats →  
use only for

Night on  
Highland

don't  
SD

Briskly  
she  
tallied  
her  
generous  
student as  
marrow

Humming  
• tune  
night

Sheep  
music shuffled  
shuffles of  
music

bottomless  
facial  
descriptions

add an  
atmosphere  
sentence -  
- alt. time  
of day?  
- shadows -

or  
move  
"shuffles  
back"  
add an action  
to go w/ it?  
deduce

taken out, and her chestnut hair shaken down. Onward to her stovetop supper, which she raced through as though still making up for her father's interminable graces over expiring food. Now, with a pat to the kitchen and a cursory locking of doors and windows, she was ready to ascend.

As fixed as a star, the telltale glow of her gable window appeared over Helena at the last of dusk and burned on past respectable bedtime. You might think a woman of her early climb in life, singled out by her father's God for a soaring voice to lift His hymns and then casting away choirsong for the anthems of a harsh young century, would find it a hard comedown to be faced with a nightly audience of only herself. You'd be as wrong as you could be, Susan would have you know. The hours beyond dark she counted as her own, free and clear of beginner lessons and quavery approximations of high C.

This night, however, no sooner was she upstairs than she whipped to a halt in front of the alcove of window, her gaze drawn down the hillside to the state capitol dome, resting as it did on the center of the government of Montana like a giant's copper helmet. The dome still was alight with the festoon of bulbs that had brought in 1924, four months ago, which seemed to her uncalled for.

more  
 this to  
 p. 3 ?

Physical  
 detail of  
 Susan?  
 eyes?  
 voice?  
 snapping  
 in mouth of  
 a  
 letter program

"Blaze," Susan addressed the civic constellation in the gratered Fifeshire burr she was born to, "see if I care."

She gave a throaty chuckle at herself and wended her way toward her desk. The attic-like room extended the full length of the house--loft quarters for a married pair of servants, this must have originally been--and Susan used the expanse like a rambler cottage perched above the formal quarters of downstairs. The rolltop desk, a divan, a phonograph, what had been her father's Morris chair and footstool, onyx-topped sidetables, a blue-and-black knitted comforter on the sill seat of the strategically aimed gable window, sets of bookshelves, a spinet piano, the whopping Duff family Bible on a reading stand of its own, all populated what was in actual fact her bedroom.

This mob of comforts drew her up out of public day as if lifting her into a lifeboat, and Susan tallied the necessity of this each time, too. Liberal with the night, inventive as she probably ever was going to be in her fortieth year under heaven, she was convinced she was most herself in these private hours, this room where the minute hand did not count. The time of footlights and the song-led marches for the right of women to vote were forever tucked into the past, she knew, and as to the tongues of the town down there beyond the base of the stairs,

"Burma  
hole in  
(daylight?)  
(year?)  
treasury

radio?

She....  
(abstract?)

held to  
refined

she could do nothing about those. But up here, she got busy at life's amended version of Susan Duff. There were encouraging letters to be written to favorite former pupils. (Tonight's, which took lip-biting concentration, to the breathy young soprano whose recent *lieder* recital in Milwaukee had not found favor there.) The afternoon's newspapers to be devoured, the *Herald* for spite and the *Independent* for sustenance. Books in plenitude; at this point she was determinedly attempting the novels of D.H. Lawrence. Music, of course; the phonograph sang perfectly on command, restorative in itself to a teacher of voice. And she still was secretary of the Montana chapter of the Flanders Field Remembrance Alliance, which took her to a drafty meeting hall once a month and obliged her to see to official correspondence in between. Tonight, as always, she shifted scene every so often, her tall solo figure suddenly on the move as if she were a living chess piece. Time did not lag here in her industrious garret, it was not allowed to.

When it was nearing midnight and she had just begun to salt away another day between diary covers, she faintly heard the turn of a key in the front door and then the rhythm of him coming up the stairs to her for the first time in four years.

# constant  
at one  
always we  
1  
lower

Fitzgerald?

cut?

add phrase  
after  
"complete" →  
clinical enough  
to  
obscure  
new  
effort

7  
7  
permitted