

[Mrs. Lola Roberts]

February 21, 1939.

Mrs. Lola Roberts (white)

Vanderbilt Hotel,

Asheville, N. C.

Widow,

Douglas Carter, writer.

NEUROTIC Original Names Changed Names

Mrs. Roberts Mrs. Ramsey [C9 - N.C.?)

NEUROTIC

“I never did like it in the North, although I lived most of my live there. I was born in Georgia, where my father and mother met. She was from Pennsylvania, and was visiting in the city where my father had a wholesale-grocery business. He had been married before, and had several children, but his first wife and some of the children had died. He served in the Confederate Army, and was made a captain just before the war ended - he was only 21 at the time. I never did know him very well, because I was only a child when he died. We were living here then. He had retired with what he thought was a comfortable income. He owned properties in Georgia, and moved here to live with my half sister, his youngest daughter by his first wife - she was his favorite. But toward the last he had lots of trouble with his investments, and when he died it first appeared that his property would not cover his debts.”

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Mrs. Ramsey was seated in her hotel room. She is 43 years old, but looks 55 or so. She is very thin, and her hair is mostly gray. Her teeth are noticeable bad, and she seems undernourished, but her eyes are bright, and she has a wide forehead. Her clothes are new and fashionable, rather dark, but not somber. She twisted and moved about in the chair incessantly.

"Isn't it warm here for February? I can't seem to get enough air in this room - it's so stuffy. It was zero when we left New York. I don't remember it being this warm here in February. Does it get awfully hot here in summer now? I remember the summers as being cool. I wonder if we'll be able to find a comfortable place to live. I want to stay here if I can find something to suit me. And all this fog and smoke - isn't that something now? I don't remember such fog here.

"Oh, I'm so tired!" (Emphasis on the "so".) She and her daughters had arrived the day before, from her former home in one of the larger cities of northern New York. "I didn't sleep a wink on the train, and the first night it seemed that we stopped at every little station. At the hotel in Washington I rested a few hours, but then we had to spend another night on the train, and I was worn out when we got here. Sister had engaged rooms for us at the Pine Top Inn, and they were terrible. I couldn't have stayed there. The furniture and the rugs were old and worn, and we were not on the front of the building. I couldn't eat the food, either.

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The rates were very reasonable - American plan - but we had to come uptown to get some sandwiches. And they put lettuce and mayonnaise on mine, and I had to send them back. My car hadn't come, either, and we had to hire one yesterday afternoon. I couldn't just sit around the hotel all day. We shipped the car two days before we left, and it should have been here by the time we arrived. I believe the man did say, thought that it would take about five days.

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"We went to all of the uptown hotels yesterday afternoon, and looked at their available rooms, and finally decided on this one. I was too tired to move our things last nights though - we moved the first thing this morning. Yes, it is more expensive here. We are paying \$5 a day here - European plan - and we have just this one room. At the place Sister picked out for us the rate was \$85 a month. We had two rooms there, with a bath between, but I didn't like the looks of the tub, and couldn't even take a bath. We will only be here, though, until we can find a furnished apartment or small house; unless I decide I don't want to stay here. I would like to be near Sister, though. I don't have any other folks, now."

There are two daughters: Helen, 22, is slender and beautiful; Alice, 5 is dark and bashful. Neither has much to say. There is a large bed for the mother and Alice ("She 4 will not sleep alone"), and a single bed for Helen. The room is not small, but there are two trunks and several handbags which rather crowd things. They travel with a small radio, a motion-picture camera, and a large Thermos bottle, and Alice has a huge doll with her constantly.

After her father died, Mrs. Ramsey and her mother went to Pennsylvania to live. Her mother had inherited for life a small income from some of her own people, and her husband's Georgia property had finally yielded a trust fund from which she received about \$50 a month. A shrewd executor had made some good trades and sales; had borrowed money, bought other properties, and sold them; paid all the debts of the estate, and wound up with a fund of about \$10,000, which was seemingly well invested, and drawing 6% interest. They lived in boardinghouses in Pennsylvania, moving often from place to place, after a few years they settled in New Jersey. Once or twice they visited their folks in this State, and at other times kept in touch with them by mail.

She met her husband in New Jersey, and their courtship was short and violent. After the marriage it developed that Mr. Ramsey did not like his mother-in-law, and would not permit her to live with them. Mother and daughter had never been separated, and both became really ill when the bridegroom's decision was announced. It nearly broke up the romance, but she finally went with her husband, and her 5 mother returned to the South

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to recuperate. Mr. Ramsey dealt in securities, and was doing very well indeed. He had gone to New Jersey on a business trip, and remained long enough to win his wife. Upon his return to northern New York, he established her in a handsome home, bought her an automobile, and bedecked her with expensive clothes. This was in 1916, and Helen was born the following year.

Mrs. Ramsey wrote to her mother daily, and the letter reciprocated, but never set foot in her daughter's home. However, Mr. Ramsey permitted his wife to visit her mother occasionally - sometimes in the South, sometimes in New Jersey or Pennsylvania. Helen adored her grandmother, and was adored by her, but they never saw very much of one another, because the visits were always short. Besides, Mrs. Ramsey did not like to travel by train - it made her nervous - and she was not permitted to take long trips in her automobile: both her husband and her doctor forbade it. Helen attended the public schools, and wanted to go to college, or finishing school, but, "I couldn't bear for her to be away from me," said Mrs. Ramsey. She wanted to get a job, too, but could not, for the same reason.

Alice was born in 1913, about a year after Mrs. Ramsey's mother died, and by that time Mr. Ramsey's business had declined alarmingly. He had squeezed through the financial difficulties of 1929, but the following years brought no return of his former affluence. He had to mortgage his home. Mrs. Ramsey had a nervous breakdown. Later, she suspected that her husband had become interested in another woman. She often accused him of it, and he neither affirmed nor denied it, merely left the house. Sometimes he would be gone for several days, without letting her know his whereabouts. In time, he proposed a divorce, offering to turn over to her certain money and property. She refused, and had another breakdown. He moved away, and sent her a check each month for expenses. After a time, she agreed to the divorce and property settlement, having made up her mind to return to the South, but it was too late: his business had gone from bad to worse, the mortgage on

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the house was about to be foreclosed, and other creditors were making demands which he could not meet. He shot himself.

Some of his life insurance had been paid up, and one of the policies, a small one, she collected in cash. From the others she will get a monthly income of \$150 for life. She bought a new car, medium-priced, because the large one she had been using, and thought was hers, turned out to be in her husband's name, and was liquidated along with the rest of the estate, which was insolvent. The investment of her mother's trust fund turned out badly, in the end, and now there is no income from that source. If any part of the 7 capital is recovered, it will be divided between Mrs. Ramsey and her half sister.

“My car finally came - this morning - but I thought they would never get it unloaded. I went down there about nine, and the man said it had arrived, but had not been switched to the unloading platform. He said they would have it out about noon, he thought. I went back about 11:30, and they were just placing the freight car at the platform. I watched them, and it made me so nervous I could hardly stand it. They jerked it so. I was just sure my car would be damaged. And then it looked like they wouldn't be able to get the door open - the door to the freight car, I mean. When they finally got it open, there was my car inside, and it was all right, but it took them the longest time to get it loose. They fasten it to the floor, you know, to keep it from rolling around. I didn't see them when they fastened it - I mean, when it was shipped. Helen just drove it on the platform, and one of the men put it in the freight car, and we left. I really hadn't thought much about their fastening it to the floor, and I was worried about it all the time until I saw it was safe. Some of the nails stuck to the floor of the freight car when they took the blocks loose, and instead of pulling them out, they just bent them down, and then they drove the car right over them! I thought it would ruin my tires, but the man said it wouldn't hurt them 8 a bit; that the nails couldn't stick into the tires, since they had been hammered down flat - but I don't know - it looked pretty bad to me.”

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Twisting her hands nervously, she continued, "We have looked at lots of places already - about 20, at least - and we found one that Helen likes - I didn't like any of them - but I don't know - we may take it - Helen likes it so. The rent is \$35 a month, furnished, except for linen. Telephone, gas, electricity, and heat will be extra. There's no telling what that'll amount to. But I don't like the gas stove. We used gas in New York, but I had a range so much nicer than the one over there. Helen does most of the cooking, but I don't know whether I can put up with that stove or not. And I'm afraid it will be too hot there in summer; the windows seem very small to me. Does it get very hot here in summer now? It used to be cool, as I remember it.

"Oh, I'm so tired!"