



1933

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A year after the death of her husband, Mme. Carette, with her two daughters, Berthe and Marie, has been forced to move to a smaller apartment. Although the new apartment is near the old one, the two girls, worried about the adult mysteries of change, death, and absence, stay awake at night, frightened about ghosts in the house.

The strict social conventions of the middle-class Carette family are revealed by the fact that the daughters never see their mother wearing a bathrobe and that the only English Mme. Carette thinks her daughters need to use are the phrases: "I don't understand," "I don't know," and "No, thank you." The most telling statement in the story is the mother's insistence that the children never refer to their mother as a seamstress but must say instead, "My mother was clever with her hands."

The children are often looked after by the landlord, M. Grosjean, and his Irish wife, who live downstairs. The story communicates the inarticulate fear and loneliness of the Carette family because of the loss of the husband and father; its artistry lies in the subtle way Gallant conveys that fear and loneliness.

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