

THE  
TWO  
SAPPLINGS

MAZO  
DE LA ROCHE

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# THE TWO SAPLINGS

BY  
MAZO DE LA ROCHE

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FOR  
GRIZEL HARTLEY  
REMEMBERING HAPPY HOURS  
SPENT IN HER HOUSE IN ETON COLLEGE

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# The Two Saplings

## CHAPTER I

MISS HOLT'S nursing home was in a dignified street in the West End of London. Till the day when she took it over, it had been a private residence. In the time of the Regency it had been the scene of many entertainments, extravagances and absurdities, but it had become more and more decorous till, at last, its end was this. It was rather a dingy but an expensive nursing home, to which some of the best-known doctors and surgeons sent their patients.

Miss Holt did not much like obstetrical cases, but an occasional baby was brought into the world beneath her roof and, on this November morning, there were two in the nursery. Both were two days old. Both had been borne on Armistice Day, 1925. Nurse Jennings was busy washing and dressing them when Miss Nairn, the elderly but vigorous and upright Sister-in-charge, came in. She liked to have a peep at the babies when there were any in the house. They were so new and fresh, a happy contrast to the sufferers under her care. One naked baby was across Nurse Jennings's knee, his pinkish bald head looking too large for his body, his buttocks white from a dusting of talcum powder. Miss Nairn bent over and kissed the back of his neck, the snowy streamers on her starched cap falling over her shoulders.

"Dear little mite," she murmured. "Which is he—the Englishman or the American?"

"The American," Miss Jennings murmured absently, for her mind was busy with her own affairs. She deftly turned the baby over and began powdering his front. His eyes were tight shut and he wore an expression of ancient endurance.

"Odd, isn't it, the way he happened to be born over here?"

"Yes, Sister. I mean, I hadn't heard."

"Well, his parents were to have sailed for home two months ago, but they were in a motor accident and the father—Mr. Wylde his name is—was

badly hurt. By the time he was well enough for the journey it was too late for Mrs. Wylde and they had to stay in London for the birth.”

“That was a bit of bad luck,” said Nurse Jennings, still in a haze.

“Do you think,” asked the Sister, “that maybe he has wind? He’s making a face and drawing up his legs.”

Nurse Jennings was thinking,—“Get along, you old busybody,” but she answered:

“Oh, no, Sister. He has no wind. He couldn’t be better. Nor the other one either.”

“Bless their hearts!” said Miss Nairn. She went to the cot where the other infant lay wrapped in a warm little blanket and bent over him. “Mm,” she murmured. “Whose wee precious is he? Have you finished with him, Nurse?”

“Yes, Sister.” She added to herself,—“And I’d get along better if you’d stay out of the way.”

“They’re named already,” said Miss Nairn.

“Are they really, Sister?”

“Yes. This one is Mark and that one is Palmer. Palmer Wylde. I quite like it.”

“So do I, Sister.” She kept thinking: “Why don’t you go, you old busybody!” Her mind revolved around her quarrel with her fiancé.

Miss Nairn had taken the baby up from his cot. She exclaimed:

“I don’t like the way you have these cot coverings. How often have I explained how I want them! I’ve no patience with such stupidity.”

She laid the baby on a pillow on the table and attacked the two cots, deftly rearranging the coverings as she liked them to be. Nurse Jennings watched her meekly but she felt as though her nerves would crack. This was her half-day off and if she got no word from Edgar . . .

“Now, do you see?” said Miss Nairn. “Come and take a good look.”

Nurse Jennings bundled the baby in his blanket and came to her side.

“Yes, Sister,” she answered, in a daze.

A complaining cry came from the bundle in her arms.

“Is he hungry?” asked the Sister. “Is it time to take him to his mother?”

“Almost time, Sister.”

A young nurse appeared in the doorway.

“The new patient has arrived, Sister,” she said. “And would you please come?”

Miss Nairn bustled off, her cap-strings flying in a way that suggested wings.

Nurse Jennings gave a gasp of relief.

“My God,” she said aloud. “What an old nuisance!”

She laid the baby she was holding on the table beside the other. She heard the hum of the lift, then the opening of its door, a murmur of voices. She must speak to Jimmy, the lift-man. She glided to the door and peeped out. Figures were disappearing down the passage. The lift was about to descend. She flew out to it and caught Jimmy’s arm.

“I say,” she gasped, “has the postman been?”

“Yes, Miss.”

“Is there a letter for me?”

It was strictly against the rules to rush out to the lift-man about one’s letters but she couldn’t help that. If she didn’t hear from Edgar it meant that all was over between them. The immaculate bosom of her uniform vibrated with the beating of her heart.

“No,” he answered, “there weren’t a letter for you—not that I saw. But Thomas ’e sorted the mail. Perhaps your letter went to your own quarters. That’s where it ought to go, isn’t it?” There was a slight rebuke in his tone. He closed the door of the lift and moved the lever. It began to descend.

She hurried back to the nursery. Everything there looked unreal to her. Everything would look unreal till she had heard from Edgar. God, she hadn’t known she loved him so! If he didn’t write to her she’d just have to put her pride in her pocket and send him a beseeching letter. She couldn’t go on like this. She’d soon make a mess of her work and get into trouble. She looked at the babies’ charts. It was time for the American baby to go to his mother to be nursed. The two babies lay side by side on the table, one red-faced and disinterested and the other red-faced and preparing to squall. She’d pop them in their cots to be ready when wanted.

The young nurse who before had been at the door, reappeared. She said:



“Mr. Wylde has sent the loveliest flowers for her. Pink roses and carnations. You ought to see them.”

“Look here, Carter,” said Nurse Jennings, “I want you to do me a favour. I want you to go to our hall and see if there’s a letter there for me. Do go, like a dear, and I’ll do you a good turn when the chance comes.”

She knew that Nurse Carter was just going off duty and that there was no infringement of rules in what she asked.

“All right,” answered Carter good-naturedly, “I’ll go. Really you ought to see those roses. They’re beauties. Mr. Wylde is awfully nice. He’s so friendly. She’s nice too, but a handful to wait on.”

“Carter, do go! If I don’t get this letter my time off will be spoilt.”

She was alone again. Her mind was chaotic. She picked up the American baby to put him in his cot. But *was* it the American baby? She gave him a puzzled look. On which end of the table had she laid him? On which end of the table had Sister laid the English baby? For a moment her mind stopped working and she just stared in blank bewilderment at the two. Then she pulled herself together.

She bent over the two babies and examined them carefully. She could find nothing to distinguish them. The one that had been about to cry was now tranquil. The other had puckered up his face into despairing pink creases. Their wrappings were identical. She broke out in a cold sweat. She looked at the two cots as though that might help her. She looked at the two charts but found nothing there. She walked distractedly to the window and stared out, thinking she might thus clear her mind. The thin fog was separating, pierced by shafts of hazy sunlight. The street was quiet. She turned back to the room. She was trembling all over. She could hear Carter’s footsteps. Carter was coming in at the door.

“Well,” she exclaimed cheerfully, “here’s your old letter. I hope you’re satisfied.”

It was easy to see Edgar’s handwriting on the envelope, even before she had it in her own hand. The relief made her forget everything for a moment. She tore open the letter and read:

“DEAR OLD GIRL,

Let’s forget our little dust-up. I’ll be waiting at the usual place this afternoon. I think and always shall think there’s no one like you. Love and kisses.

She put the note in the pocket of her uniform.

“Everything all right?” asked Nurse Carter.

“Just perfect. Thanks, Carter. Are you off now?”

She was alone once more with the two babies. She went to them with a false determination in her bearing.

“Now, you,” she muttered, “let’s have no more nonsense about this.”

But they lay before her inscrutable, sinister in their weakness and similarity. God, why hadn’t she examined them more carefully when she knew which was which! Certainly one showed more distinct eyebrows than the other. One’s nostrils were a shade wider. But which? The right thing to do would be to call in Sister Nairn and the parents. But would they know one from the other? She was positive that they wouldn’t. Not one of them knew the babies as well as she herself did, and she’d never have got them mixed up if her mind hadn’t been in such a state because of her quarrel with Edgar. For days, since before these two were born, she’d been completely upset. If she confessed what she’d done she’d be in for a hell of a time. She’d be up before Miss Holt. She’d have to leave the nursing home. She’d be done for. It wasn’t as though Edgar was able to support her. It would be two years at the least before they could marry.

Suddenly she felt so weak that her legs almost gave way beneath her. She supported herself against the table, staring down at the babies. She’d got to decide which was the Englishman and which the American, and right away. Two pairs of opaque blue eyes opened and looked up at her, as though accusingly. She whispered: “You little devils! You don’t care a damn which you are. You don’t care if I’m ruined and lose my job!”

Still they gazed at her with animal detachment in their opaque eyes. One sucked in his lips, making his mouth no more than a buttonhole. The other showed his pink gums as though in a mocking smile.

If only she could have them to herself, strip them and force herself back to the moment before she mixed them up, she thought she might be able to identify them. But there was no chance of that and her mind reached the state when it refused to work. She could hear someone coming. Swiftly she returned the babies to the cots.

Mrs. Wylde’s nurse came in to fetch her baby. It was time for him to be fed. She went straight to his cot and peeped in.

“My word,” she said, “he looks nice and bright this morning!”

Nurse Jennings all but screamed,—“Don’t take that one! It’s not him!” But she stood in miserable silence while the nurse lifted him in her arms and cuddled him there.

“I believe he’s the best of the two,” said the nurse.

“I don’t see much difference in them,” said Nurse Jennings.

“Well, it was wonderful, wasn’t it, having two lovely boys born here the very same day when we hadn’t had a lying-in case for months?”

“I don’t like them,” said Nurse Jennings.

“The cases or the babies?”

“Neither. They get on my nerves.”

“Why, Jennings, I thought you loved babies.”

“Not two at a time. We haven’t the facilities here.”

“Well, you are getting fussy. Are you going out with Edgar this afternoon?”

“Yes.” She drew a deep breath, as one who has been submerged under water. She grasped at her own happiness and thrust indecision and worry behind her. Anyhow, one baby was as good as another, if they both were normal and healthy. Each of the mothers would have a perfectly good baby and an equal chance that it was her own. Mrs. Wylde’s nurse carried the baby in to her.

“Here he comes,” she said, “fresh as a daisy and hungry as a hunter.”

Mrs. Wylde held out her slender white arms, in a gesture a little consciously exquisite. She held him to her breast a moment, before uncovering it. The nurse looked down at her admiringly. A tremor of greed passed through the baby. He opened his mouth. As he grasped her breast she had a moment’s hesitation, a strangeness, almost a fear. Then it passed. She laughed and looked up at the nurse.

“He’s a wonder, isn’t he?”

“Yes, indeed. He’s a lovely baby—and how hungry he is!”

“It’s a queer thing, nurse, how well I am with this baby. I mean, I had so much worry with my husband’s accident. Then, having everything strange

about me. After my little girl was borne I was a wreck. But now the doctor says I can sail for home at the end of this month.”

“That’s lovely. *And* what a prize to take home with you!”

“Do you know, I can feel a difference in him since the last time I nursed him. He’s quicker and stronger somehow.”

“Yes, it’s surprising how they change.”

The baby had nursed for the second time that day when his father came softly into the room. He stood looking down at the pair in the bed with a tender, somewhat tired, smile.

“Well, Camilla,” he said, “you look more like yourself this morning.”

“I am. I had a pretty good night.”

“That’s fine. How’s the youngster?”

“You can see for yourself.” She drew the covers back from his head. The baby opened his eyes. He spread his fingers till his hand looked like a pink starfish.

Robert Wylde touched him gingerly. “He’s pretty red. Is that all right? Janet wasn’t quite so blistered-looking.”

“Janet’s like me. He’s going to be fair. He’s like you.”

“Gosh.” He gave a sigh, for it still tired him to stand. He limped to a chair and sat down. His stick made a clatter as he put it on the floor. His wife started and her grey eyes widened in annoyance. “Goodness, you’re noisy.”

“I’m sorry, Camilla.”

“Baby jumped from head to foot.”

“Too bad. I can’t get used to this cane.”

Suddenly she remembered his roses. She exclaimed:

“Oh, darling, thanks so much for the lovely roses! Just look at them! They make even this room cheerful. Come and kiss me again.”

He smiled, got up and limped to the bed. He bent over her and planted a kiss on her cheek. “Gosh,” he said, “I’m glad you’ve come through this so well, Camilla.” He examined the roses. “They are nice, aren’t they? I got the best they had.”

“They’re lovely.” She looked toward the window. “What is it doing out? If the windows were cleaner I might see. Considering what this is costing, I think it’s pretty badly run.”

“Well, you’ll soon be out of it. I got our reservations yesterday. Good position amidships. Near the dining-room elevator. To be convenient for you.”

Her fine eyes darkened with disappointment.

“Why, darling, you know I hate being near the elevators. The noise of them keeps up till all hours. After what I’ve been through I must have my proper rest. You’ll just have to go back to the steamship office and make an exchange.”

He shifted in his chair and passed his hand over his face. He said, —“Now, look here, Camilla, we were quite near the elevators coming over and you didn’t seem to mind.”

“Because I was up late myself then. And I did complain of them. I complained of them several times. Only of course you wouldn’t remember.”

“Well, I’ll go back to the office and see what I can do,” he answered resignedly. He pressed his hand to the injured part of his leg, which was aching.

I hope, she thought, he isn’t going to fuss over that leg every time he is annoyed at me. She closed her eyes and caressed the downy head on her shoulder with her lips. A sensuous peace stole over her.

He took the brightly-coloured plan of the ship from his pocket, put on his glasses and examined it earnestly.

After a moment she said,—“The man across the way is visiting his wife, too. His name is Captain Rendel.”

“He came up in the elevator with me.”

“Oh. What’s he like?”

“Like all other Englishmen. Afraid I’d speak to him.”

“Did you?”

“Of course not. He had some flowers in a paper. It looked like about three daisies.”

“Goodness!” She laughed. “Is he good-looking?”

“Tall and thin with a kind of bend in the middle. I liked his clothes.”

“Well, I must say, Robert, you look nice enough for anyone this morning.”

He was gratified. “Thanks, Camilla.”

The nurse came in for the baby.

“Let’s have a look at him,” said Wylde, “in the daylight—such as it is.”

“He’s a beauty, sir,” said the nurse.

She put the baby into his arms.

He limped to the window and scrutinized it with a tender half-humorous look.

“My wife thinks he’s like me,” he remarked to the nurse.

She thought him very good-looking and said:

“I hope so, sir.”

“Is that a sort of compliment?” he asked with a boyish grin.

“You really shouldn’t be holding him,” interrupted his wife’s voice. “Dear knows how germy your clothes are.”

“That’s true,” he agreed, and handed over the baby.

The nurse carried him off.

“Robert,” said his wife solemnly, “we must give him every advantage we possibly can.”

“You bet,” he agreed.

In the room across the way the Rendels were talking about their baby.

Phyllis Rendel chuckled. “It’s ridiculous,” she said, “how fast the tiny things develop. At any rate I hadn’t realized till this minute that he has eyebrows. Look at them.”

“I’m dashed if I can see any.”

“Look from this angle. They’re almost white but they’re there.”

“What amuses me is his nose. He’s a funny-looking little codger altogether.”

“Certainly he’s not so pretty as Clive was at his age. He takes after his poor mother, I’m afraid.”

“I hope he does. One like me is enough.”

“Dick, don’t pretend you don’t know you’re handsome.”

“Then don’t you go calling yourself his poor mother.”

They laughed together. They were relieved that the ordeal was over. The child was healthy. Now they could return to their home in the country. Soon Phyllis would be able to ride again. Their life would go on in its accustomed pleasant groove. The baby had been borne in the London nursing home because Mrs. Stuart-Grattan, Phyllis Rendel’s mother, had a deep-seated distrust of the general practitioner in the country. He had attended her daughter when the first child was born and she had had a very bad time. Mrs. Stuart-Grattan had plenty of means and a strong will. If Phyllis would have her baby in the nursing home, she would pay all expenses. She had, and the expenses were heavy.

The two fathers stood waiting for the lift. The passage was dim. The wan electric light made the men’s faces sallow, gave them a careworn look of false age. Robert Wylde leaned heavily on his stick and stared through the iron grille behind which the lift would appear. He would come again in the evening to see Camilla. Between then and now the day stretched purposeless, except for the visit to the steamship office. He wished Camilla had been satisfied with the stateroom. Still, he supposed she was right. It might be noisy.

The lift was coming. It stopped. Neither man moved forward to enter first. Then, seeing he was expected to because of his stick, Wylde stepped hastily through the door. The floor of the lift was not quite level with the floor of the passage. He stumbled and would have fallen but for Dick Rendel, who caught him by the arm and held him. Reddening with annoyance at what he looked on as his own stupidity, Wylde thanked him. The lift slid downward. In silence they descended, passed through the hall and into the street. The pale sunlight had deepened to a dusky gold. A flower-seller’s barrow appeared around the corner. The Englishman turned suddenly to the American.

“I hope you weren’t hurt,” he said.

“Oh, no. I’ve been in an accident and it’s made me clumsy, that’s all.”

“You’re from America, eh?”

“Yes, my accident kept us here. That’s why our baby was borne in London.” He had a sudden desire to talk to another man. “I suppose you live here,” he said.

“No,” answered Rendel vaguely. “In the country.” And he added with unexpected familiarity, “How is your family doing?”

“Fine, thanks. How’s yours?”

“Couldn’t be better. It’s my second son. The other is three years old.”

Nurse Jennings, in her outdoor things, passed them on her way to meet Edgar. She gave them a swift, appraising look. She had a queer light-headed feeling as she passed them. Then she giggled and giggled.



## CHAPTER II

THE cross-Channel steamer was nearing the cliffs of Dover. The sun was shining but there was a shrewdness in the breeze. It was late spring.

Camilla Wylde turned up the collar of her coat and drew the rug about her knees. She wished Robert were there to do it for her. But he never seemed to be on hand at the moment when he was needed. Now he had not been near her for a long while. She might be in desperate need of him but he'd go right on being preoccupied by his own doings. What *was* he doing? she wondered. Talking over the European situation, she guessed, with some chance acquaintance. She was a little tired of the European situation. It was always boiling up to something and then subsiding into bickerings. Robert seemed inclined to take this crisis seriously, to be glad they were on their way back to America. She wanted a cigarette but knew she could not light it in the strong breeze. It was annoying. She kept imagining what it would be like to light a cigarette, to draw from it those first satisfying puffs.

She wondered where Palmer was. She wished he would come and get his warm sweater. After that nasty cold he'd had in Paris he needed special care. She took up her book and tried to read. But she was uneasy. She was certain that the Customs would charge a ridiculous duty on the things she had bought in Paris. If only Robert weren't so terribly honest about declaring their purchases! She remembered the time she and Janet had come over by themselves and how she hadn't declared anything and had got away with it.

Palmer came up. "Hey, Mom," he said, "did you see all those planes?"

"No, darling, I was reading. But you're just the boy I want. I want you to put on your sweater. Here it is." She drew it from behind her and handed it to him with a tender yet half-annoyed look. "You'd stay out till you froze and never notice it."

He drew back from her as though she were offering him poison.

"Why, Mom," he exclaimed, "you don't want to roast me alive, do you? Gee whizz, just feel me! I'm hot as an oven already." He held out a rather grimy hand and round brown wrist.

“No. I don’t want to feel you. I want you to put your sweater on.” She pushed it against him.

“The boy I was with up in the bow has nothing but a cotton shirt on!”

“Palmer, will you *please* believe that mother knows best, and do what she tells you?”

When Camilla began to talk of herself in the third person, Palmer began to feel bored. He’d rather do what she said than go on listening to her. He took the thick striped sweater and began to struggle into it, as though there were not an instant to be lost.

“Palmer, do it more quietly. Goodness’ sakes, you’ll have it torn in another minute.”

“O.K., Mom.” There was defiant acquiescence in his voice. Then suddenly he gave her his sweet smile and escaped. The sweater wrinkled across his shoulders but, somehow, Palmer always wore his clothes well. He had a good figure and a good walk.

She was tired of fresh air. She yawned and thought of the moment when she would have a hot bath and a cigarette in her bedroom in the hotel. Now she saw Robert coming toward her down the deck. He had a boy Palmer’s age with him. It must be the boy Palmer had spoken of, for he wore a soft white shirt open at the throat. He was tanned a deep brown. Contrasted with his skin, his fair hair and eyebrows looked almost silvery. Robert and the boy stopped quite near her and leant against the rail staring at some planes circling overhead. She watched them, feeling rather amused by the similarity of their attitudes. Each had his elbows bent above the rail, his legs stiff, his face upturned and jaw dropped; one large figure; one small; it was ridiculous.

When the planes had passed she caught Robert’s eye and beckoned to him. He came, smiling.

“What is it, Camilla?”

“I’ve been dying for a smoke for ages but I can’t get a light in this wind. I feel stiff all over. Who is that boy?”

He gave her a cigarette, lighted it from his fighter, and said,—“You might feel better if you walked around. I don’t know who the youngster is but he’s mighty intelligent. He’s with his parents—they’re English.”

She closed her eyes and took a few delicious puffs at the cigarette. When she opened them the boy had drawn a little closer. He was looking at her

with polite interest. She smiled.

He returned the smile, flushed a little and was turning away, when she asked:

“Have you been on your vacation too?”

He nodded. “Yes. We’ve been to Italy.”

“Is this your first trip there?”

“Oh, no. Some of us always go in the summer holidays.”

“It’s pretty hot there in the summer, isn’t it?”

“Rather.”

“I should think you’d go to Norway or Sweden.”

“Well, you see, my grandmother—that is, one of my grandmothers—lives in Bordighera.”

Robert interrupted,—“There’s that queer-looking plane again! I’ve never seen one just like it.”

He and the boy stared upward, and Camilla was struck by their resemblance. This time, however, it was more than mere attitude. If the boy had been Robert’s son people would have said he was the image of his father. What a strange thing resemblance was! There was Palmer, not really looking like any of the family. And here this strange boy with a profile so extraordinarily like Robert’s. He had even the same odd little nick in the edge of the nostril and the cleft in the chin. She wished they would not keep moving their heads about. She would like to have them right in front of her and compare them. She began to talk to the boy to keep him from going away.

“Aren’t you chilly in that thin shirt?” she asked. “I should think after being in Italy you’d feel this wind raw. I certainly do.”

“I’m quite warm,” he answered a little distantly, as though he were afraid she was going to be interfering.

“I think you’ve met my son,” she added quickly. “He was speaking of you. He’s like you, he never feels the cold.”

“Yes,” he agreed. “I see him now up in the bow. I think I’ll find out what he’s up to!” He ran off.

Camilla drew a deep breath. She turned to Robert who had sat down beside her.

“I’ll be damned,” she said, “if I’ve ever seen anything like it! It’s enough to frighten you.”

He looked at her blankly. “What’s enough to frighten you?”

“The resemblance between you and that boy. He’s a hundred times more like you than Palmer is.”

“So what?”

She laughed. “So what yourself? Perhaps your interest in him has some foundation.”

But, though she laughed, she stared hard at Robert. He bore her scrutiny with the calm of the deeply innocent.

“I’ve got to find out his name,” she said. “I guess Palmer will know it.”

Robert grunted. “Boys never know names,” he said.

As they spoke, Palmer came running toward them dishevelled and excited.

“We’ll land in half an hour!” he exclaimed. “Hadn’t we better collect our baggage, Boss?”

“Keep your hair on,” said his father. “What’s the name of the boy you were with?”

“Boy! What boy?” Palmer looked up and down the deck.

“Well, you were with a boy a minute ago, weren’t you?”

“Oh, him! I dunno.” He made as if to go. Camilla caught him and held him. “Palmer, listen to me: you’re to go and find that boy and ask him his name.”

“Gosh, Mom, I don’t want to know his name.” He moved his arm under her fingers as though she were hurting him.

She felt like hurting him. But she controlled herself and said,—“I want to know his name, Palmer. It doesn’t matter why. Just go back to him and, in a moment or so, say, just casually, that you’d like to know his name. Then, as soon as you can, come back and tell me.”

He gave her a look of mingled pity and reproach.

“I do wish he wasn’t so heedless!” she said to Robert.

“They’re all alike at that age.”

Palmer made the effort and made it successfully. But, back with his mother, he quite forgot the errand he had been on and talked excitedly of a ship they were passing.

“I want the binoculars,” he said, rummaging behind Camilla to find them.

“I haven’t got them,” she said impatiently. “Your father has them. Palmer, what is the boy’s name?”

Palmer looked up and down the deck. “What boy?” he asked.

“Good heavens! The English boy you’ve been with all the way across.”

“I haven’t been with him all the way across. I’ve been with you most of the time.” He wrinkled his smooth brow. “His name is Mark—Mark Rendel. Say, Boss, can I have the binoculars?”

Robert gave them him and he hurried off.

Camilla sat lost in thought. Her mind moved through the mists of memory trying to form some solid shape to which she might attach the name. “Mark Rendel,” she repeated softly. “I’m sure I’ve heard it before.”

Robert had an extraordinarily good memory for names. He thought a moment, then said,—“Rendel was the name of the people whose baby was born in the nursing home the same day as Palmer. Captain Rendel, the man’s name was.”

“And they named the baby Mark! Why, Robert, what an astounding coincidence! That boy is the baby! If his parents are with him, then we six are meeting again on this boat. Did you ever hear of anything so strange?”

“It certainly is a coincidence,” he agreed.

Both sat silent for a space, absorbed by the singularity of what had happened. He noticed the way she had clenched her hands and was looking at them out of narrowing eyes, as though they held some secret which she was afraid would escape her.

“Yes,” she repeated. “This Mark Rendel is the Mark Rendel who was borne just across the corridor from Palmer—on the same day—the same day.”

“Huh-huh,” he agreed, listening to the pound of the waves against the side of the ship. In an odd way he was trying to protect himself against what

she might say next. They sat silent a space.

She unclenched her hands. She looked strange.

“Robert, it couldn’t have happened, could it? Do you know what I mean? . . . Oh, Robert, that place was so carelessly run! Wouldn’t it be terrible if——” Her voice broke. “Oh, Robert!”

He looked at her almost pleadingly. “Camilla, I want you to put any sensational idea right out of your head.”

“But, Robert—the boy—why, he’s the image of you! Everybody’s always saying how much like me Janet is. But she’s not half as much like me as that boy is like you. Oh, Robert, he’s so like you.”

“It’s just a chance resemblance. It couldn’t be anything else. Don’t get excited.”

“But I’ve got to know; I’ve got to find those people!” She struggled up from her chair and pushed the rug away from her.

He gathered it up and folded it.

“Come,” she said impatiently. “We haven’t any time to spare. I must talk to them.”

He laid the neatly folded rug on her chair.

“You saw the man,” she said, as they went along the deck. “What did he look like?”

“I forget. I think he was tall and thin. He’d a small dark moustache.”

“Do you see that couple in the corner reading? He’s reading the *Sketch*. Is that the man?”

Robert looked at him carefully. “Yes. That’s him. I’d know him anywhere. He hasn’t changed.”

“Don’t move for a minute. Stand right here and look out at the water. Be talking to me. I want to have a look at them before I speak.”

He obediently stared at the broken, foam-flecked waves of the Channel. He said, in a hurried undertone:

“Take my advice, Camilla. Don’t speak to these people. You’ve an impossible idea in your head. They’ll think you’re crazy. Take my advice, just for once. Just take my advice, Camilla.”

“I’m always taking your advice,” she retorted. “But I’d never have another moment’s peace if I didn’t probe this thing. Robert—Palmer looks like that woman! God, she smiled then and it was Palmer’s smile! I’m going to speak to her.”

She went straight over to the two people absorbed in their illustrated weeklies. She said, in her clear, emphatic voice, her body tense:

“Pardon me, but aren’t you Mrs. Rendel?”

The Englishwoman raised her eyes to Camilla’s face in a look that was curious but not unfriendly.

“Yes,” she answered, “I am!”

Captain Rendel had got to his feet. His expression was polite but slightly irritated. Then, as he noticed how attractive Camilla was, his irritation faded.

Camilla looked straight into Mrs. Rendel’s eyes. “We’ve never met,” she said, “but we went through the same experience in rooms opposite one another in Miss Holt’s nursing home in London, thirteen years ago last November. Do you remember?”

Mrs. Rendel looked puzzled, then smiled. She said,—“Yes, I remember. There was an American baby borne the same day as my boy. Are you his mother?”

“Yes. I’m Camilla Wylde. This is my husband.”

Robert’s face was heavy with reluctance as he came forward and shook hands. He said to Captain Rendel:

“You saved me from falling when I was getting into the elevator in the nursing home. Do you remember?”

It was plain that Captain Rendel did not remember. But he said,—“Yes, yes,—of course.”

“I guess I’ve changed a lot since then. I’ve got a corporation and grey hair. But I’d have known you anywhere.” He looked anxiously at Camilla, waiting to see what she would do next.

Captain Rendel dragged forward two empty chairs and the four sat down somewhat uneasily.

“I’m afraid we’re just going to dock,” said Mrs. Rendel. “I must find Mark.”

Camilla twisted her fingers together in her lap. She was very pale. "I've got something terribly important to say," she began breathlessly. "It's about our two boys. You must listen to me."

"For my part," interrupted Robert, "I'm against saying anything. I think it's a mistake."

Camilla's fine grey eyes looked searchingly into Captain Rendel's face. "You wouldn't want to live under a delusion, would you? If you found something mysterious in your life I think you'd want to clear it up."

Now he looked defensive but he said,—“Yes. I'd want to clear it up.”

"Oh, you must think I'm crazy! But I'm not. It's only that a terrible suspicion is tormenting me. That is, ever since I saw your boy and my husband together. Your boy is the image of my husband." She saw the blood mount to their faces. Their look of wanting to escape from a demented person. "Please don't think I'm crazy," she said, tears filling her eyes. "This is as terrible for me as it is for you. What I think has happened is that the nurse got our babies mixed and that you have our boy and that we have yours."

The colour receded from Mrs. Rendel's face. It looked pale and set. She rose. She was a fine-looking woman in a careless blond way, as though she lived a country life and had never had anything in it to conceal. She said coldly, addressing Robert:

"I think you will understand that my husband and I can't listen to this. I'm afraid your wife is not well."

He was miserably embarrassed, still he couldn't have Camilla spoken of that way. He said:

"My wife's well enough, but she's worried to death over this thing. And it does seem queer when you think about it."

He looked so sane, his blunt features so steady, yet so troubled, they had to give him their attention, their respect. Mrs. Rendel addressed him:

"Do you yourself think there is anything in this?"

"Well, I don't know what to think." He hesitated, then added, as with an effort,—“We've often wondered about Palmer's looks. He doesn't resemble either of our families.”

Camilla interrupted,—“But he does look like you, Mrs. Rendel. Before I spoke to you I saw you smile and—it was Palmer's smile. He has hazel



eyes, so have you.” Her eyes devoured Mrs. Rendel. “And there’s so much more! The set of the head—the curve of the chin—the bend of the eyebrows—it’s amazing.”

Mrs. Rendel replied curtly,—“It’s impossible.”

Captain Rendel looked about him. “People are staring at us,” he said. “We can’t talk about it here. Anyhow, we’re landing.”

The two boys came running up. They looked surprised, almost shocked, to find their parents talking familiarly together. Then Palmer exclaimed:

“Say, there’s the funniest-looking gull up there! It’s different than any of the others. Come and look! Golly, it’s the grandfather of them all.”

He talked on but no one heard what he said. The four stood transfixed, their eyes scrutinizing the two candid boy faces, while fearful suspicion linked them together in a chain from which they could not tear themselves.

Phyllis Rendel tried to. “There is nothing in this,” she said, “and I refuse to listen to it.”

“We must listen,” objected her husband. “We can’t shirk it. We shall have to meet again. Where are you staying?”

“At the Dorchester,” answered Robert. “Can you come there tomorrow morning? Then we’ll be able to talk in peace.”

“Yes. We’ll be there,” answered Captain Rendel at once.

“It’s been terrible to me to speak of this,” said Camilla. “But I had to. I couldn’t go on in such appalling uncertainty, could I?”

“I think it would have been much better,” answered Phyllis Rendel. She began to gather up her belongings in a confused way, as though she scarcely knew what she was doing.

All about them the other passengers were surging toward the companion-way. The two boys had not waited to hear what was being said, nor had they been conscious of the scrutiny they were under. Now they appeared carrying their private belongings. Palmer was laden with things he had picked up abroad.

“When you’ve been about more,” said Mark Rendel, “you won’t want everything you see.”

Palmer bumped against him, almost throwing him off his balance.

“You look just like a tripper back from Blackpool,” laughed Mark.

“Oh, yeah,” said Palmer.

The six were swallowed up in the crowd, down the stairs, across the gangway, on to the pier. There the spring sunshine beat down hotly. Gulls circled and whimpered above them. Porters shouted. In the Customs sheds it was cool and draughty. The Wylde, under the letter W, the Rendels, under R, were quite separated. Yet a shadowy but powerful bond linked them together. None was so conscious of this as Camilla Wylde. She felt feverishly excited. She had a feeling of exaltation, as though she held the threads of their destinies in her hands. She had one more glimpse of the Rendels. She saw Captain Rendel's head above the crowd, then glimpsed all three as they got into the car sent to meet them by Phyllis Rendel's mother. Robert was engaging a taxi. Their luggage was in a neat pile.

## CHAPTER III

A FIRE had been lighted in Mrs. Stuart-Grattan's drawing-room but so far it was only a bright-coloured crackling blaze that threw little heat. The room was chilly. But its large windows looked on to Regent's Park in its living springtime brightness, so that the room was cheerful. The trees in the Park seemed to surge with life, billowing one after the other in their bright verdure, with here and there the rosy fountain of a pink hawthorn in flower. Two little girls in pale mauve coats and hats and carrying large brightly-painted hoops were just entering the tall iron gates with their governess. A nurse, in sober grey, was pushing a perambulator and at the same time manœuvring two small dogs on leads.

There were flowers in the room. Gay polyanthus had been planted in large pots and these gave the effect of a tiny garden in the window. Captain Rendel stood looking down at them, avoiding his wife's eyes.

"If you knew," she said, "how I loathe doing this you wouldn't ask me to."

"That's just being stupid," he answered tersely. "We must face facts. If we didn't we'd have no peace in the future. The thing to do is to clear up the mystery, whatever it is. You keep on saying there's nothing to it. If you're so sure of that, why are you afraid to go?"

Her low voice broke into harshness,—“Would you be willing to give up Mark?”

“No. No more than you. But I think Mrs. Wylde is absolutely sincere and deserves some consideration from us. God, we had all this out last night, didn't we?”

She answered brokenly,—“I scarcely slept an hour.”

“We shall all of us feel better when we've sifted the thing to the bottom.” He looked at his wrist-watch.

In the taxi they scarcely spoke, he looking through the window at the moist, gleaming spring streets, she straight ahead of her, seeing now the face

of Camilla Wylde, now Mark's face, now, with a stab of apprehension, the face of the strange boy with his long-lashed hazel eyes so like her own.

Camilla and Robert were waiting for them in their sitting-room. Robert, with a forced air of nonchalance, asked them if they would have cocktails. They took sherry instead. The four raised their glasses to their lips and set them down. Robert's hand was trembling. Camilla was the first to speak. Her voice was tense.

"I guess none of us had a very good night," she said, "and I guess we've a pretty hard time ahead of us till this thing is cleared up. I, for one, can't have a minute's peace till it is. It's like a nightmare, isn't it?" Her eyes swept the faces of the other three.

Robert's face was a sallow mask of weariness. Captain Rendel looked cool, almost imperturbable. But in Phyllis Rendel's eyes there was a cold hate and resentment.

"How do you expect to clear it up?" she asked. "And, if you find that the babies really were exchanged, do you think we shall have peace then?"

Camilla exclaimed, with a dramatic gesture of her small hand, on which an emerald flashed:

"I'll throw the whole enquiry up, if you others think we ought to!"

"No," answered Captain Rendel decidedly. "It's too late for that. I wish you'd tell us, Mrs. Wylde, just what grounds you have for suspicion, outside what may well be a chance resemblance between our son and your husband."

"Very well," she answered. "We'll speak of the resemblance first." She took another sip of her cocktail to steady herself. Then she rose and went to a drawer in an occasional table. She took a box from it and returned to her seat. She moved gracefully. She wore a black suit and a very small black-and-white hat. Her feet were beautifully shod. A silver-fox cape lay on the back of her chair. She was quite calm now, and again she had that look of exaltation.

"I have a daughter of seventeen," she said. "Her name is Janet and she just adores her father. We have a photo of him, taken when he was twelve, and I brought it with me on this trip so I could have a miniature painted from it by a distinguished artist I know in London. It is for Janet's birthday. He has already done one of me from life and one of Janet from a photo. When we arrived at the hotel yesterday this box was waiting for me. It contains the miniature and the photo it was made from. I'll let you see them."

She opened the box and took from it the miniature, which she handed to Phyllis Rendel, and gave the photograph to Captain Rendel. There was dead silence in the room while husband and wife bent their gaze on the likenesses.

“I want you to notice,” Camilla said, “the shape of the head, the strongly marked eyebrows, the little nick in the side of the nostril. I saw Mark only a very little while but I noticed these things, and of course the colouring which is identical. Now, just look at my husband and you will see those characteristics in the grown-up man.”

Obediently the Rendels raised their eyes from the portraits and looked at Robert. He sat looking heavily back at them, his hands clasped on his stomach.

“Let’s see the miniature.” Captain Rendel stretched out his hand and made the exchange with his wife. There was a prolonged silence in the room. Then he said:

“If it weren’t for the clothes and the haircut, Mark might have sat for the pictures. It’s a strange coincidence that you should have had them with you.”

“It’s beyond coincidence,” exclaimed Camilla. “Surely something completely outside our will brought us four—us six—together! The whole thing is predestined. We’ve just got to let ourselves be swept along.”

Phyllis laid the photograph on the table.

“There is nothing in all this,” she said. “What can you prove by a chance resemblance? And what do you *want* to prove? Do you want to take my boy from me and ask me to accept yours in return? Have you no love for him?”

Camilla answered fiercely,—“I love him so much that I must know the truth for his sake. Nothing else will do. I have to be perfectly selfless in this, no matter what I suffer. And I can see that Captain Rendel feels the same.”

He returned,—“You spoke of some other proof, Mrs. Wylde. What was that?”

“It was instinct, nothing more. But it was an animal instinct and I guess that’s as true as anything there is. When the baby was two days old—I remember the exact day because it was foggy outside and Robert had sent us glowing crimson roses—the nurse brought baby to me to be nursed. When she put him into my arms and I cuddled him a queer feeling of strangeness came over me, as though he were not my baby at all. It lasted just a moment and then I forgot all about it. But last night when I lay tossing and couldn’t

get a wink of sleep, till I took a dose of my sedative, the sensation came over me again. I was back in the hospital with the feeling that I had a strange baby in my arms.” She sank back against her silver-fox cape, looking pale and exhausted.

Captain Rendel said,—“That is very interesting. I think the best thing for us to do is for your husband and me to go to the nursing home and try to find the nurse who was in charge of the infants on that day. She would probably lie. But on the other hand she might give us some help.” He turned to Robert Wylde. “What do you say?”

“All right,” said Robert heavily. “If the ladies think we’d better. What do you think, Mrs. Rendel?”

“It’s out of my hands.” She spoke abruptly. “Go if you wish.”

“I think,” said Camilla, “you’re absolutely right. I think you ought to go at once.”

Robert got himself out of his chair. “Do you remember the name of the nurse who bathed the youngsters?” he asked.

“Her name was Nurse Jennings. I remember because we had a maid of the same name at the time.” She turned to Phyllis Rendel. “Wasn’t Jennings her name?”

“I don’t remember. Yes—I believe it was.” She turned to her husband. “I think I shall go home. You can tell me afterward what happens.”

“Oh, please stay with me!” Camilla went impulsively to her and took her hand. “The time won’t seem nearly so long if we are together. Besides, you must be here when they come back. We can’t do anything without you.”

“Yes, Phyllis, I think you should stay here. If Mr. Wylde and I are to be away too long I shall ring you up.” He rose quickly and took up his hat and stick.

The two women were alone. Phyllis Rendel sat with her back to the light, her hands clenched in her lap. Anger surged in her because of what had been done to her in these spring days when she should have been happy returning home after a visit to Italy. Left alone with her, Camilla felt shy and wondered what she could find to say to her. Her support and her background seemed to have gone with the two men. She bore the silence as long as she could and then said:

“Don’t let’s talk about this awful thing. Let’s clear our minds if we can and talk of what’s left undisturbed in our lives . . . Will you tell me what

other children you have?"

"You're leaving me them, are you?" said Phyllis bitterly.

"Oh, Mrs. Rendel, don't feel like that! I can't bear you to think that I'd wilfully harm you. It is just the sense of horrible uncertainty that drives me on. It's the sense of living in a fog. Even a stern wild mountain-top is better than that, isn't it?"

"I suppose so." She put her hands to her temples, then took off her brown felt hat and laid it on the floor beside her chair. "My head aches so," she said.

Camilla looked at her sitting there, in her well-cut tweed coat and skirt, her feet planted side by side. She saw her run her hands through her fair curling hair and, before she could stop herself, she said:

"Palmer's hair curls too. All the rest of us have such straight hair."

The other seemed not to hear. Again she pressed her fingers to her temples. Camilla sprang up.

"I'm going to get you an aspirin," she said.

Left alone, Phyllis Rendel softly beat on the arm of her chair with her clenched hand. Her eyes had a dazed look. When the aspirin tablet was brought she took it meekly.

"Won't you lie down on the chesterfield for a while? Aspirins always work better if you rest." If she could get Phyllis to rest, she herself might relax till the men came back.

The door opened and Palmer put in his head.

"Hey, Mom, when are we going to eat?"

"Come in, darling, and speak to Mrs. Rendel. You remember meeting her yesterday."

"Yep," said Palmer. He came in confidently and smiled at Phyllis. "Why didn't you bring Mark with you?"

Her eyes searched his face. "Mark has gone to the Zoo."

"To the Zoo! Gosh, why can't I go to the Zoo! Tell me where it is, Mrs. Rendel, and I'll start out right now. Give me some money, Mom, so I can start out for the Zoo."

"Palmer," said Camilla, "you cannot go to the Zoo alone."

“What’s to hinder me? I’m not scared, am I? How long is it since Mark started for the Zoo, Mrs. Rendel?”

“Oh, some time ago. You see, we’re staying near Regent’s Park, so Mark walks there.”

“What bus should I take?”

“Palmer,” said Camilla, “go down to the dining-room and get yourself some lunch. Then, when your father comes back, perhaps he’ll take you.”

“Oh, yeah! I know how it will be. He’ll keep me waiting till we’ll just have time to see owls before the Zoo closes.” He thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out a handful of silver. “I guess I’ve got enough,” he said. “But if I had a little more I’d take a taxi. I’d get there quicker and I’d be safer.”

Camilla rose, found a ten-shilling note and gave it to him. She straightened his tie and kissed him. “Hadn’t you better have lunch before you go?”

“I guess I can get a hot-dog there or a Chelsea bun or a plum pudding, or something. Anyways I’m not hungry, now I know I’m starting for the Zoo.”

“You are to take a taxi,” said Camilla, “and be back here by five o’clock.”

He was gone. Camilla waited for Phyllis to say something. Then, as Phyllis did not speak, she asked:

“Well—did you see?”

“I saw nothing unusual,” answered Phyllis coldly.

Camilla gave an impatient sigh. Phyllis stared down at the buses moving slowly along Park Lane, at the rounded tree-tops in Hyde Park and the people sitting in the little green chairs. She saw Palmer waiting on the street corner. Then she saw him mount a bus. Camilla was repeating:

“I do wish you’d lie down on the chesterfield—the aspirin will do you more good.”

“It’s very warm here. Could we have a window open?”

“It will let the noise and dust in. But, of course, if you want it open——” She moved slowly toward a window.

“Never mind. I’ll take off my coat.” She took it off, showing the strong supple lines of her body in its silk blouse, and hung it carefully over the



back of a chair. Then she lay down, pushing the pillow under her cheek and drawing up her long legs.

Camilla thought,—“And twenty-four hours ago I’d never seen her! And she is Palmer’s mother!”

The time would pass quicker, she thought, if she were by herself. There was nothing about Phyllis she could understand and every moment spent with her was an effort. She went to her bedroom and sat down by a table where she would get the scent of a nosegay of spring flowers Robert had bought her. She lighted a cigarette.

Sinking back in her chair she recaptured that strange moment in the nursing home when the two-days-old Palmer had felt an alien in her arms. If only she had followed up this animal instinct what misery might have been spared them all! But she had denied it—pushed it from her. Now they had to face a possible agonizing upheaval. Her eager brain sought means of mitigating its pain. No one could say, she thought through sudden tears, that she did not render up herself to life and whatever it brought of change and cruelty. It was a part of her philosophy to give herself and give herself again—not counting the cost. It was strange, she thought, how she had this power of living outside herself, watching her own gestures in the performance of life, as an observer. One thing it did was to make it possible for her to keep her head where others were flustered. Twice she tiptoed into the other room and saw that Phyllis Rendel slept, her back hunched toward the light, one hand covering her face.

She grew hungry and ordered chicken sandwiches and coffee for the two of them, but Phyllis did not wake and Camilla ate her share in her bedroom alone. She drank three cups of coffee, then she put on a little powder and lipstick and tried to read the morning paper. The headlines told of the renewed threat of war but she could not settle down to read, not at such a crisis in her own life. Suddenly she became unbearably anxious. Her heart began to thud. Surely the men would come soon, or telephone!

Soon they came, entering the outer room quietly, with masculine deliberation. She hurried to meet them. Both were looking at Phyllis, asleep on the divan. She beckoned them and took them into her room.

“It would be cruel to wake her,” she whispered. “She has such a headache.”

She closed the door softly. It was strange having Captain Rendel here, in these intimate surroundings, when a few hours ago he had been a stranger.

He sat down on the window-sill and crossed his legs. He looked composed but she could feel that he was shaken. It was Robert who spoke.

“Well,” he said, “we’ve seen Nurse Jennings.”

Camilla breathed,—“Yes? And does she remember anything?”

Robert’s face was inexpressibly weary but he remained standing. “It was all terribly easy, Camilla,” he said. “It seemed like you said—just fate. First we found the elevator man at the nursing home. He was the very same man. He remembered Nurse Jennings and that she’d been there in 1925 and had left two years later to get married. He knew where she lived and we went at once to her house.”

Captain Rendel interrupted,—“She might have lived in Islington or the Midlands, but she lived just two streets away and, when we rang the door-bell, she opened the door herself. It all fitted in like the bits in a jigsaw puzzle.”

Camilla’s eyes were bright with excitement. “Did she recognize you?”

“Not at first,” answered Robert. “But when we told her who we were, she remembered us. Captain Rendel handled the situation splendidly. He let her see that she wouldn’t be in for any trouble, whatever she said. We wanted everything kept secret. At first she pretended that she couldn’t remember anything. But she wasn’t good at dissembling. You only had to look at her face to see that she remembered doing something wrong. After a little questioning it came out. When the babies were two days old, she said, the Sister—you remember the old lady—came into the nursery when she was bathing the infants. She was in a sort of scolding mood and complained about the way the cribs were made up. She took one baby out—you understand that Nurse Jennings was bathing the other—and laid it on a pillow on the table. She fussed about the cot clothes and got the nurse completely rattled.”

“You mustn’t forget that Nurse Jennings had a private worry of her own that day,” put in Captain Rendel. “I imagine that had more to do with the mix-up than the Sister’s interference.”

“Yes,” agreed Robert.

“Do hurry,” exclaimed Camilla impatiently.

“Well, the Sister left and Nurse Jennings was twice interrupted before she got the babies washed, dressed and back into their cots. By that time, she said, she was scared stiff, for she simply didn’t know which was which!”

“My God!” Camilla’s voice came between her fingers. “She made that mistake and said nothing! She left us to face this terrible thing thirteen years later! I was right, wasn’t I? My instinct told me truly. Oh, if only I’d done something about it then!” She threw herself into her chair and broke into wild crying.

Phyllis came to the door and looked in at them.

“What have you found out?” she asked.

“We’re pretty certain, Mrs. Rendel,” answered Robert, “that what my wife suspected is true. She’s very upset.”

Camilla’s crying had lasted only a few moments. Now she was shaken by silent sobs. She kept twisting a ring on her finger.

“There is no need to do anything about it,” said Phyllis. “We can keep it secret. No one will know but ourselves. It would hurt the boys too terribly.”

“I absolutely agree with Mrs. Rendel,” said Robert.

“It would turn their world upside-down,” she continued, “and just at the age when they need steadying. I don’t know anything about Palmer, but Mark is a very sensitive boy.”

“It might ruin their lives.” Robert spoke as though in fear of interruption. “The Press may be different in England but in America such an occurrence would be front-page news.”

“What we must do now,” said Phyllis, “is to forget about this meeting and go our separate ways. On my part, I am perfectly satisfied with Mark.”

“And I with Palmer,” added Robert conclusively.

The other two sat silent, looking into the faces of the speakers, but now Captain Rendel said,—“After all, blood is thicker than water. When you discover that the boy you’ve looked on as your son hasn’t one drop of your blood and that another boy is actually yours—it makes a difference, doesn’t it?”

“Not to me!” exclaimed his wife. “Not to me!” She came into the room and stood facing him. “Mark and I have been mother and son for thirteen years. Nothing can change that. Our lives are so woven together that any talk of blood-relationship is just nonsense.”

Captain Rendel turned to Camilla. “What do you feel about it, Mrs. Wylde?” he asked.

Her clear grey eyes were wide open now. Her hands were steady. So was her voice. She spoke as though she had concentrated with her whole soul on her answer.

“I feel that we are being moved by forces stronger than ourselves and that we must surrender to them—no matter what our desires are. I love Palmer just as much as Mrs. Rendel loves Mark. At the same time my heart goes out to my other son—I’d feel that I’d failed him if I gave him nothing of myself. Perhaps I’d sound conceited if I talked about a sense of duty. But there’s something stern in me that tells me clearly I’ve got to forget self in this and give Mark what it is in me to give—as I have given to Palmer. And it’s the same with you others. You can’t escape it. If you let your son grow up without ever having known you, you’ll commit a sin against him and against yourselves.”

“I quite agree,” said Captain Rendel.

“If you know what Mrs. Wylde means,” said his wife, “it is more than I do.”

“It’s clear enough, isn’t it?” answered Camilla. “To some natures truth is so necessary they can’t exist without it.”

Phyllis pressed her fingers against her temples.

“I’m afraid I’m not one of them. It seems to me, Mrs. Wylde, that you are so self-sufficient you don’t really need anyone but yourself. Therefore you are able to take a cool view of this calamity.”

Camilla answered passionately,—“I’m not cool—I’m in a ferment. I feel as though I were drowning. But I still can see the future, and, if we four are to have any peace in it, we’ve got to do what is right now. Let’s go into the other room and talk.”

She led the way. Phyllis Rendel’s hair clung flat against her head on one side and was tousled on the other, her skirt was wrinkled from lying on it. Camilla mechanically went to the couch and plumped the pillows. Robert asked Captain Rendel what he would have to drink.

The two men ordered whiskey and soda. Phyllis would take nothing. It was three o’clock but no one was hungry.

“Do you mind if I open a window?” asked Captain Rendel. He opened one and a light breeze and the roar of traffic came in. He sat down where the breeze blew on him and said to Camilla:

“I think you have some plan in your mind.”

Robert drank half of his whiskey and soda and passed his hand over his face. He looked anxiously at Camilla. But Phyllis stared stubbornly straight ahead of her. Camilla sat poised, ready to speak. She said:

“We’re changing all the time, aren’t we? Every crisis turns us into a new person. We just have to make ourselves big enough to meet it or we’re overwhelmed by it. I do believe we can meet this—without hurting ourselves too terribly and without hurting the children at all.” The words came rushing from her lips that were set in tense lines. “Now why can’t we divide Mark and Palmer between their two homes? Teach them to love the parents they’ve never known, as well as those they’ve always known. We’d not tell them anything to shock them. We’d see how Palmer got on with you and how Mark got on with us—just as visitors. Then—when they are older and each has adjusted himself to the new life—we’ll tell them everything. We’ll tell them that it will simply mean that they have two homes instead of one—four parents to love them and guide them, instead of two.” As she finished her eyes were bright with tears.

“I will never give up Mark,” said Phyllis Rendel.

## CHAPTER IV

**B**UT she did agree to give him up for a year. That first day they could not persuade her and indeed Robert did not try. He just sat miserably listening to the persuasions of the other two. He knew that Camilla was sincere in her conviction that the boys should learn to love their original as well as their adopted parents. He knew that Captain Rendel believed blood to be thicker than water. But it went bitterly against his grain to uproot the two young creatures from all to which they were accustomed, with the prospect ever in view of telling them the disintegrating truth. It hurt him dreadfully to see Phyllis Rendel with that look, as it were, of being at bay while her husband and Camilla argued round and round the subject.

They separated, with her still resisting, but Robert could see that she would finally give in. It was her own mother, Mrs. Stuart-Grattan, who at last persuaded her. Phyllis had poured out the story to her, hoping to have her support, but her mother said it would be impossible to let Palmer grow up knowing nothing of his British heritage, knowing nothing of his kin. She saw no reason why the two boys should be injured by having two homes instead of one, and, with the world as it was, it might be of great benefit to them to be familiar with both England and America.

Phyllis felt worn out. She gave in. She would not see the Wyldes again in London but Captain Rendel had a long talk with them. He invited them to spend the following week-end at his house in the Cotswolds.

The first thing Camilla did was to buy Palmer a supply of clothes from one of the best London shops. "He must look like the English boys," she said, "so he'll not feel embarrassed. Boys are so queer."

Palmer was exhilarated by his new wardrobe. Before leaving home Camilla had made it clear to him that, as so much money was being spent on him in this trip abroad, any clothes that were bought should be bought for his sisters. But now all was changed. He was decked in fine raiment. Gifts were poured out on him. It seemed that he had only to ask for a thing and it was handed to him. Not so long ago he had considered clothes as no more than a concession to grown-up decorum. The raggeder and dirtier they were the better he had liked them. But lately a change had come over him. He had

begun to cast appraising looks at his reflection in the mirror. He had begun to notice the colour of his tie.

Now, in these smart new suits, he greatly fancied himself. He looked into his parents' eyes in humble affection that they should do so much for him.

At the end of the week they took the train for Stroud on their way to Oakley Manor, the Rendels' place.

It was almost a three hours' journey by train. They had a first-class carriage to themselves. Robert had provided an armful of illustrated weeklies and the latest American newspapers he could find. But they read little. Their eyes were charmed by the loveliest revealing of springtime in all the world: hedges white with may; streams shining blue between the verdant meadows; primrose wreaths growing, as though arranged, in field corners; flocks of rotund sheep, their lambs running from play to press a full udder; hayricks, two-thirds sliced off for winter fodder; shadows of birds flitting across the grass. The time passed quickly. Palmer had never been so restful on a train journey.

He sat opposite Robert and, when their eyes met, they smiled. Robert had felt that he and Palmer, as the boy grew older, were going to be good friends, companions even, though he himself was too busy a man to spend as much time as he would have liked with his children. He felt a little more cheerful at the thought of parting with Palmer than he had when the decision was first reached. After all, a year would soon pass. He had fair hopes that neither boy would make himself the object of great affection in his new home. On his part he would oppose with all his force any revelation of the truth to them before they reached manhood. He had stated this to Camilla very strongly and she had been surprisingly acquiescent. She had seemed satisfied with the knowledge that she was to have Mark with her for a time and that Palmer was to absorb the atmosphere that, by birth, was his heritage.

They left the train at Stroud. A slender dark boy of seventeen came up to them with an easy welcome on his handsome face.

"I'm Clive Rendel," he said. "I've come to meet you."

They shook hands and he led them to an old-fashioned but well-kept car.

"We have a car that's a little less archaic," he said, as they settled themselves and their luggage, "but this is roomier."

The car moved smoothly but he was a reckless driver. Robert felt decidedly on edge but Camilla seemed not to mind, even though in their

own car she often irritated him by her nervousness. Now she talked gaily with young Rendel, not seeming to notice how he skimmed corners concealed by hedges or all but grazed the wheels of lorries. Happily they soon left the town and were in the open road among the hills.

The hills rolled, unbelievably green, in every direction. It was as though nature had forgotten everything but humps and hollows. She rounded herself in daisied hills. She sank herself in verdant hollows. She tried new shapes, then cast them aside and returned with love to the rising and sinking. Sometimes a stone house rose on a hill-top or a little farm pressed for room between two hills. Sometimes the eye was held by the golden shine of a newly thatched cottage. Robert had a feeling that he would like to live here, far away from crowds and business. Though he never complained, he often got very tired.

Captain Rendel came out to the car to meet them. He was friendly and seemed determined to make this difficult situation pass off as easily as possible. A maid-servant carried in the travelling-bags. Up here the wind blew strong and very cool. Sometimes it blew in clear, wild gusts between the hills, sometimes whistled steadily above them. This would be a stormy spot!

Oakley Manor had stood against its storms since the days of Queen Elizabeth, and from that time the Rendels had lived there from one generation to another, their characteristics modified by the changes of the centuries but in their essence still the same. The house was of Cotswold stone and many-gabled. The chimneys were tall and severe in outline but the glossy ivy leaves reached upward to embrace them. The steep roof was shingled by Cotswold stone that, through the centuries, had acquired a peculiar golden stain which gave it the effect of being sunlit even on dull days. But, above all, the walls had for so long been the bulwark of human passions and sufferings, against the world outside; had risen above the darkness of death, guarded the mystery of many births, survived the fall of royal dynasties and the rise of others, remained unchanged in the changefulness of the ages, so that the house was as true to the hills as they to it and no one could look at it without feeling in it a noble value that, in a sense, was greater than the value of man or nature.

Camilla, Robert and Palmer felt this in their different ways. It gave Camilla a rapt sensation. She wanted to absorb it into her own being, to carry it away with her, as something from which she would never part. It moved her to realize that Palmer, who was her boy and always would be, in spite of everything, had sprung from here. It filled her with wonder that this



should be so and he show nothing alien to the New World in his characteristics.

Robert was conscious of the speed at which his own life was passing and of how little leisure he had had for the fulness of living. He had a moment's envy of Dick Rendel standing there with, it seemed, all the time in the world on his hands. He thought of long quiet days among these hills. He thought of the preciousness of life and how hard it was to close one's hand on it.

Palmer had no conscious thought, but, for a moment, he gave himself up to a thorough survey of the house. He drank it in, smiled, then nudged Robert with his elbow.

"Hey, Boss," he said, "I wish you'd buy one like that. I like it."

Tea was waiting in the drawing-room. Phyllis Rendel was very different from the woman they had met in London. Now she had control of herself, had made up her mind to go through with the ordeal demanded of her, and showed outward cheerfulness, at least. Camilla watched her as she shook hands with Palmer. It was odd how she kept her eyes averted from him. She looked straight at Robert and Camilla but never gave Palmer more than a swift glance.

"I'm sure you must be hungry," she said, pouring the tea.

They had seated themselves in the pale room. The walls were panelled in faded damask, pale china figures were grouped in cabinets. An English setter was lying on the white hearth-rug.

"I never want to drive that car again!" exclaimed young Clive. "One might as well drive the Lord Mayor's coach. You should have seen the faces of our guests when they beheld it."

Camilla laughed. "On the contrary, we simply loved it. We've never had such a perfect drive."

Clive devoured a tea-cake in one bite. Palmer did not quite know what to do with himself. He was relieved when Mark appeared in the doorway, followed by a boy about a year younger. Mark came at once and shook hands with the Wylde. There was an electric tension in the room. Phyllis said, as though carefully arranging her words:

"You younger boys are to have tea in the nursery. Nanny will have it waiting."

"Jumping Jerusalem," thought Palmer, "tea in the *nursery*!"

Phyllis added casually,—“This is my youngest son. Humphrey, come and speak to Mr. and Mrs. Wylde.”

The boy came forward with a shy assurance.

“Three boys!” exclaimed Camilla. “I don’t think you mentioned this one.”

“There was so much else to talk about,” said Phyllis Rendel.

Easy to see, thought Camilla, why she had not spoken of her youngest son. There was no such striking resemblance between him and Palmer as between Mark and Robert, but anyone seeing the two boys in the room together might have guessed they were brothers. Humphrey was more fair, his cheeks were pinker, but there were the long-lashed hazel eyes, the same curve to the lips! The three young boys went off together. Their feet clattered noisily up the oak stairway.

Captain Rendel spoke little. His thoughts were concentrated on the complicated arrangements that must be made. Robert, too, had little to say. He felt extraordinarily unreal. If the solid stone house had dissolved like a mirage, leaving him on a stark hillside alone, he would have felt no more unreal. But Clive made up for their lack of conversation. He looked admiringly, as he talked and laughed, at Camilla and the clothes she wore. Phyllis encouraged him as though she would postpone the moment when they four would be left alone together.

Captain Rendel moved impatiently in his chair. He said at last:

“Clive, I wish you’d go and tell Fletcher to be sure to order that hay tonight.”

“I did tell him,” returned Clive amiably.

“Then tell him again. You know how forgetful he is.”

Clive was gone. The tea-things had been taken away. Dick Rendel had gone to both doors and closed them carefully. He returned to his chair, sat down and lighted a cigarette. Then he said:

“Mark’s been told.”

Robert started up aghast. “You have told him!” he repeated.

“Well, of course, not everything. Simply that a splendid opportunity has turned up for him to experience something of American life. I asked him how he would like to visit you in Boston for a time. I told him that your boy

would spend an equal time with us. He said he thought it would be a good idea. He said he'd love to go to Boston."

"Did he?" said Robert. "Well, you got off easily. I'm afraid it won't be so simple as all that with Palmer. You see, he's an only son, and, I'm afraid, sort of spoilt."

"He may be frightfully homesick," said Phyllis. "The ocean seems very wide to a child. Do you think you had better risk it?"

"He will get over that," said Dick Rendel.

"I'll talk to him. I'll explain to him what a wonderful time he'll have." A tremor of emotion came into Camilla's voice. "Poor little darling—when I think of the callous cruelty of that nurse, I could kill her!"

Phyllis returned hotly,—“Then why should we add cruelty to cruelty?”

"My God, Phyllis," exclaimed Dick Rendel, "we've had all this out before! We've decided that we parents cannot let our boys grow up in a foreign country and have no say in their upbringing."

"You and Mrs. Wylde decided it," she answered sullenly. "I think Mr. Wylde feels as I do."

"It's certainly hard to part with the youngsters even for a year," said Robert.

Camilla's eyes flashed. "Are you willing to live a lie?" she demanded.

"Most of us do, in one way or another," answered Phyllis.

"I don't! I must have truth or I can't survive."

Dick Rendel put in wearily,—“We've gone over all this before. Anyhow it's only an experiment. If it doesn't turn out well we can exchange the boys at any time. They know nothing of what we are going through. Mark is delighted at the thought of a visit to America and I'm pretty sure Palmer will be happy with us. It seems to me unnatural that any parent should have no curiosity about the child they begot or gave birth to.”

"Yes, yes," cried Camilla, "I'm full of curiosity about Mark. He's such an interesting boy. Robert took to him the moment he met him, didn't you, Robert?"

"I certainly did."

"I have no curiosity," said Phyllis. Then she sat silent while the others made arrangements.

“I expect that the schooling will present a difficulty,” said Dick Rendel. “English and American methods are pretty different, aren’t they? Mark was to enter Eton at the Michaelmas term. The examination is in May. I imagine I can arrange for a special exam. for Palmer, if we find he needs it. I have a few wires I can pull. What about his Latin? You don’t go in very strongly for the classics in America, do you?”

“I’m afraid,” said Robert, “you’ll find him behind in Latin. But he’s a real bright boy, with a good memory. He has always stood well in his grades.”

“Good. I can’t say that Mark is studious. But he is intelligent. He’s very fond of reading and he’s good at games too. He’s going to make a fine cricketer.”

“They play baseball in America.”

Dick Rendel blew out his cheeks. Then he said,—“Of course, I’d forgotten that.”

The three talked on and on.

## CHAPTER V

PALMER and Mark, who had been born under the same roof in London, now again woke under the same roof. They had lain side by side in their two cots in the nursing home; now they woke side by side in a big four-poster with the April sun already shining through the small diamond-paned casement. The curtains of the bed were faded to a strange dun colour, so was the quilt that lay on them. Their combined clothing lay strewn over chairs and floor. The bleating of lambs came in at the open casement, and the sound of a mower.

“Hello,” said Mark. “Sleep well?”

“You bet.”

“Feel ready for anything?”

“Sure!”

“Do you like fishing?”

“Yeh.”

“Good. We’ll have some. I hope they don’t make us go to church.”

“Gosh, I hope not.”

They stared into each other’s eyes. Mark’s had a speculative look in them. He was finding it hard to keep his father’s injunction to say nothing to Palmer of the proposed visits. He could not resist asking:

“Would you like to stay here for a bit?”

“You bet I would.”

“You could have a pretty good time.”

“We’ve got to go tomorrow. My father’s got to attend to his business.”

“What does he do?”

“He’s head of an insurance company. What does yours do?”

“That’s pretty obvious, isn’t it?”

“What?”

“Army, of course. He got the V.C. in the Great War.”

“Gosh, did he? If there is another war will he fight?”

“He was badly wounded in the last. Both his brothers were killed.”

“Say, that was too bad! Are you going into the Army?”

“I think so. I’m not quite sure.” He hesitated and then added,—“I wish I could visit America.”

“C’mon over and see us. We’d give you a whale of a time.”

“Perhaps I shall.”

They stared into each other’s eyes. They grinned. Then Palmer’s hand stole across the sheet. His fingers found a tender spot between Mark’s ribs. Mark doubled up. Then he pushed a knee into Palmer’s middle. They rolled and twisted, choking with laughter. The four-poster creaked beneath them. Their noise attracted Humphrey and he came bounding in from the next room. There was a pillow-fight. In the midst of it Mrs. Maltby, the nurse, bustled in. She was short, stout, with rosy cheeks and round light eyes. She wore a grey cotton dress and large white apron. She scolded them energetically, but plainly was exhilarated by such scenes.

“Such carryings-on!” she exclaimed, “making rags and tatters of the pillow-cases! You’ll come straight to your breakfast or you’ll get none. Look at your clothes! Pick your jacket up at once, Mark! Humphrey, let me look at your ears!” She took Humphrey off to his own room.

“He’s her darling,” observed Mark. “You’ll soon discover that. If you want to have Nanny in your hair, just hurt Humphrey.”

“It seems kinda funny,” said Palmer, getting into his shirt, “for fellows of your age to have a nurse around.”

Mark was unembarrassed. “I expect we shall always have Nanny about,” he said. “She was Clive’s nurse. Now she looks after the linen in term time and after us in the hols.”

The boys had breakfast with her in what was once the nursery. A large rocking-horse stood in one corner and there were cupboards full of toys. There were kippers and toast for breakfast. Palmer did not care much for either but he was in holiday mood and ready to accept what came his way. The meal was a series of under-the-table scufflings among the boys, and reprimands from Mrs. Maltby. They drank tea instead of milk and Palmer

noticed how Humphrey was waited upon by the nurse, who even spread the marmalade on his toast.

After breakfast they went to the stables. Palmer had inspected the four hunters the evening before. Now they went from stall to stall, feeding them sugar, Mark and Humphrey pointing out their various characteristics.

“Do you hunt?” asked Mark.

“No. But I learned to ride last summer at camp.”

“What camp?” asked Humphrey.

“Camp Kagamakoon.”

Mark gave a shout of laughter. “Lord, what a name!”

Palmer answered rather huffily,—“It’s Indian. We’ve lots of Indian names.”

“Was the camp good fun?”

“Pretty good.”

“Tell me about it.”

Mark listened eagerly while Palmer described, with fair exaggeration, the doings at the summer camp. Mark drew a deep breath.

“I wonder if I shall go there,” he said.

Palmer stared. “You?”

“Well, I might one day, you know.” He reddened at what he had almost said. To take Palmer’s mind off it he exclaimed:

“What about fishing? Cut into the house, Humphrey, and ask Dad if we may go.”

Humphrey ran off obediently. In a short space he was back. He said,—“Daddy says we may go. But your mother wants to see you first, Palmer. She’s up in her room. Daddy told me to send you there before we go fishing.”

“Great gosh, what does she want now!” exclaimed Palmer. He had been for so many weeks deprived of the companionship of other boys that he did not want to waste a moment. He entered Camilla’s room with a pucker on his fair forehead and a look that warned her to be brief and to the point. She came to meet him, kissed him, then closed the door.

“Say, Mom,” he began, “I’m in an awful hurry. I——”

“Palmer”—she could not control the tremor in her voice—“you will just have to wait a little while. I’ve something terribly important to say to you.” Then she laughed and pressed him against her side. “Well, I needn’t be so solemn about it. It’s going to be just heaps of fun for you. I guess you can’t imagine what these nice Rendels have suggested.”

“The only Rendels I care about have suggested goin’ fishin’,” he said.

She drew him on to a settee beside her. He saw that intense look come over her face which meant that, on his part, the struggle was lost before it was begun. He did not yet know what it was about but he sensed something he was not going to like, and he stiffened himself against her hand that was stroking the back of his neck.

“Listen, Palmer. You know how often I have said that it’s my ambition you should play an important part in the life of your country. Now nothing will help you to do this so much as knowing other countries. I mean, the way people live in other countries, especially England, which speaks the same language as we do and has the same ideals.”

“You’ve always said,” he objected, “that nothing would help me as much as studying hard at school.”

“Yes, I did say that, when you were younger. But now you’re old enough to benefit by travel. That’s why your father and I brought you on this expensive trip.”

“I thought us kids were just taking turns and that it was my turn,” he said argumentatively. “Honey-Lou says she’s coming over and she ain’t going to help govern America, is she?”

“She may. Who knows?”

“Well, if she does, I don’t want to be there.”

“That is not what we are discussing, Palmer.”

“Well, it’s important to me.”

She forced herself to be patient. “I know it is, darling. But what I am going to tell you about is something that’s got to be settled immediately.”

He wriggled. “Mark’s waiting for me to go fishing.”

“Now listen, Palmer. When you hear what I am going to tell you, you’ll agree it means more to you than the best fishing in the world.”

He was interested in spite of himself.



“Captain Rendel has invited you,” she went on a little breathlessly, “to have a real good visit here. Isn’t that kind? You’ll live just like an English boy. You’ll learn all about English life. Your mind will be broadened. You’ll come back to America with all sorts of new ideas. You’ll have a grand time.”

“How can Poppa take the time off from business?”

She gave him a deep look that somehow brought him a feeling of apprehension.

“Your father and I can’t stay,” she said gently. “I only wish we could. But we have our responsibilities at home. You understand that, don’t you, darling?”

He drew back from her.

“You’re not talking about leaving me here all alone, are you?” he said.

“Alone! Now, Palmer, that’s not like you. You went off to camp last year and just loved it.” She hurried on. “The idea is that you’ll stay here and study English life and Mark will go back with us and study American life. Mark thinks it’s a grand idea.”

“Mark never said a word about it to me.”

“He was told not to, not till you and I had had a talk. But he’s just delighted at the opportunity to see America.”

“Then let him come back with us,” said Palmer loudly. “I’d like to have him. I’d sure like to have him. I’m not going to stay here!” His mouth quivered.

“Now listen, Palmer. Your father and Captain and Mrs. Rendel and I have gone to a lot of trouble to arrange this for you two boys. You’re not going to spoil everything, are you, by making a fuss? You’re not going to make me feel ashamed of you because you’re not as manly as Mark, are you? Why, the time will pass so quickly you’ll hardly realize it. It won’t be very different to going to boarding-school, will it?”

“I was home every week-end from school. I—I knew you and Poppa were there.” Tears were almost choking him. “I had friends at school. Here I’d be alone. I’d have no one. Besides—there’s the ocean.”

“The ocean?”

He answered fiercely,—“Well, it’s pretty wide, isn’t it?”

“You said yourself what a little while it took us to come over!”

“Glory, Mom, can’t you see the difference between crossing the ocean with your family and staying behind with it between you and them?”

Camilla gave a tender little laugh. She took him in her arms. “Of course I see. And I’ll feel just as badly as you. But I’m not letting myself think of my present suffering. Only of your future good. And I *know* what a lovely time you’ll have here. I *know* what kind of people you’ll be with.”

“How can you tell? They may be just on their best behaviour. You hardly know them.”

“Darling, I met them years and years ago when you were just a baby.”

“If Mark was staying it wouldn’t be so bad.”

She felt that he was weakening. She was shocked then when he dropped to his knees on the floor, covered his face with his hands and began to cry. “I don’t want to be left,” he sobbed. “I don’t want to be left.”

The door opened and Robert came in. With his face full of concern he bent over Palmer.

“What’s the matter, old man?” he asked. Palmer did not reply. He just stretched out his arms and wrapped them about Robert’s legs. “Oh, Boss,” he sobbed, “don’t make me stay here! I want to go home!”

Robert took him under his arms and heaved him to his feet. He sat down with him on his knee. Palmer cast himself on Robert’s breast.

Camilla sprang up and walked about the room.

“I never dreamed,” she said, “that we’d have to go through a scene like this. I thought Palmer had more intelligence and self-control.”

“Well, you can’t expect him not to be sort of upset, Camilla.” Robert’s face was heavy with concern.

“I did expect it! And I expected you to help me instead of hindering me.”

Palmer raised his head and glared at her.

“Then it was all your idea!” he said.

She came and knelt before him, raising her fine grey eyes to his. She took his hands in hers.

“We four parents have all agreed that the exchange will be a wonderful experience for you and Mark. But—perhaps because I have more imagination than the others—I see more clearly what it may mean to your future.”

Robert’s arms about him had calmed him. He said,—“Do you mean it might help me to grow up to be President or something?”

“I do indeed. Difficult times are ahead of us and we need leaders of international outlook.”

Robert heaved a sigh.

“I’ll tell you what, Palmer,” he said, “if you’ll do this, without any more fuss, I’ll buy you that rifle we saw in the store window in Boston. It’s really far too expensive a one for a boy, but I’ll buy it for you as soon as you come home.”

“When could I come back home?”

Robert looked enquiringly at Camilla.

She answered quickly,—“We’ll not set any exact time. We’ll see how you get on.”

“But I wanta know.”

“Well . . . you’ll have the summer in Cornwall. Then in the fall we’ll find out how you are getting on, and, if you’re getting on all right, we’ll make it a little longer.”

“And if I’m not getting on all right—what then?”

“Palmer, we must not think of that. We must feel that you’ll get along gloriously. I *know* you will. I feel it in the very depths of me.”

He looked unconvinced but he had lost the battle. Camilla held up Mark’s example to him, emphasized the pleasures in store. Robert talked of the rifle. They persuaded him.

Half an hour later Camilla led him into the bathroom and, wetting her own face-cloth under the cold-water tap, pressed it to his hot eyes. He raised his eyes to her in gratitude. He felt a tiny boy again, yet strangely lonely.

Camilla said,—“Always remember, Palmer, that no one loves you as I do. That is why I am so ambitious for you. That is why I want you always to see the light of reason and truth. Nothing else will do.”

He had a queer, emptied-out feeling as he ran across the tender green grass of the lawn to meet the other boys, who were to wait for him by a door in the wall that led to the meadow. Perhaps it was because he had cried, his eyes been wetted by salty water, that colours looked deeper, more intense to him. There was an odd unreality about the lovely springtime scene.

The other boys were waiting, fishing-rods in hand. They confronted him accusingly.

“We thought you’d gone back to bed,” said Mark. “What the dickens were you doing?”

“I had to have a talk with my father and mother.”

“Oh, what a good little boy!” exclaimed Humphrey. “He had to have a nice Sunday-morning talk with his dear parents!”

“Shut up,” said Mark. “Well, there’s no time to spare if we’re going to get any fishing before lunch. Come along.” He led the way through the ivy-hung door.

“Bags to choose my fly first,” said Humphrey.

“You’re to take what’s given you,” returned Mark.

“Bags to use the rod that was Uncle Harry’s.”

“Palmer is going to use that.”

The wind was in their faces. The meadow sloped down and down. Below, the stream showed itself bright among the willows. A thrush was singing the sweetest notes he knew. Playful twin lambs left the flock and ran alongside the boys.

When they reached the stream Mark, in a business-like way, opened the book of bright-coloured flies and scanned them. From them he cast a contemplative look at the stream. It was fed at this spot by a glassy, transparent spring and was the colour of whey. A little lower down, large stones had been placed in the stream to make homes for the fish. Now the stones were moss-covered and the water rippled and curled itself about them.

“What sort of fly shall I give you?” mused Mark. “A Blue Dun? An Alder? Why, I’ll tell you! I’ll give you a Palmer! That’s the ticket? Eh, Humphrey?”

“Sure,” said Palmer. “I’d like a Palmer. I didn’t know there was a Palmer. I didn’t know flies had names. At home I fish with a hook and

worm.”

“That’s good fun too.” He gave a slanting look at Palmer, then turned to Humphrey. “Look here,” he said. “You go a bit farther down. Two of us are enough here. Besides, you can’t stop talking.”

“But I want to stay here.”

Mark turned on him sharply. “Will you do what you’re told!”

Humphrey grumbled a little but he moved down the stream. A cock pheasant rose with a startled cry. A cuckoo gave his deep, muffled note. Mark and Palmer exchanged a long look. Then Mark said:

“So you know all about it.”

“Yeh.” Palmer bit his lip.

“How do you like the idea?”

“I guess it’s all right. But I wish we were going to be together.”

“So do I. I wish you could stay here for six months and then I could go to America for six months. We could do everything together.”

“That would be swell.”

“Of course you’ll have Humphrey, but he’s an awful little ass in some ways. See that you keep him in order. You have to take a firm stand with him.”

“That’ll be O.K. . . . Say, Mark, do you s’pose it’s going to do us a lot of good?”

“Do you mean exchanging homes for a while?”

“Yeh. I mean, do you think it would help me to get on in the world later on? Not to be President, of course, but something or other?”

Mark laughed. “I don’t expect it will help us much, but it will be a lark. And I expect my father is right when he says it will be an experience we’ll never lose. We’ll never be just the same sort of boys again.” His contemplative eyes rested on Palmer’s troubled face.

“I think you’ll like it,” he said. “My father is a good sort, and my mother is never fussy. Humphrey’s a pest sometimes, but, if you keep him down, he’s all right. Clive will give you advice when you want it and lots of times when you don’t. We’ll write to each other often and compare notes, shall

we? You give me the low-down on my country and I'll do the same for yours.”

Talking with Mark, Palmer felt immensely cheered. The future seemed somehow bearable. If only Mark were going to stay with him he felt that he could better bear being left behind in England. There was something comforting in Mark. It was rather like having his father beside him.

Mark was soon absorbed in giving him lessons in casting his line. He instructed him with great earnestness, as though Palmer's future hung on his ability to cast the olive-coloured fly as a living thing on the surface of the brook. They caught half-pounders where, later in the season, four-pounders would be killed.

When they turned homeward, Humphrey ran up to them. He was jubilant at having caught as many trout as they two together. He was jealous of the quick intimacy between Mark and Palmer. To show off, he ran up behind a sheep which was drinking by a pool and suddenly pushed it in. There was wild commotion in the pool as the poor sheep floundered and finally got herself out. She stood shaking her woolly body while consternation looked out of her pale-lashed eyes.

Across the fields came the striking of the clock in the stable tower. The boys began to run, laughing and jostling each other, the trout bouncing about in their fishing-baskets. Palmer thought he could be happy here if only Mark might stay with him.

## CHAPTER VI

THE time passed so quickly that the six people concerned in this chess-like exchange in their relations toward each other, felt moved to take their new positions by a power outside themselves. Even Camilla, who had been more steady in the experiment than any of the other parents, had a strange unreal feeling. Palmer seemed suddenly, since his outburst at the breaking of the news to him, very small and vulnerable. She woke in the night and had a mind to cry out when morning came,—“Let’s put an end to this! Let us separate and be as we were!” But with daylight she was again caught up by the strange exhilaration of the experiment.

Robert pressed forward doggedly. If the thing had to be done, let it be done and over with. He had a talk with Dick Rendel about education. He had a talk with Palmer in which he was falsely cheerful and, to Palmer, appeared unfeeling. When he and Phyllis were together there was a wordless sympathy between them.

Mark was the happiest of the six. He was swept along by his desire for adventure. But, at the last, when he came to say good-bye, he discovered something strange in the atmosphere. Dressed in his travelling clothes and followed by Humphrey, he had come into the morning-room where Phyllis and Dick waited. He was very excited but he spoke quietly.

“Good-bye, Mummie. Good-bye, Daddy.”

He came toward them, his eyes bright, his nostrils a little dilated. Then he stopped.

“Is anything the matter?” he asked.

Dick laughed. “Well, you’re going away, aren’t you? Isn’t that enough to make us look serious?”

“Well . . . I thought . . . you looked rather funny.”

“We feel funny.”

Phyllis took Mark’s hand and held it against her cheek. Of her three boys he was her favourite. It was all wrong to have favourites among one’s

children, she knew, but there had always been something in Mark toward which her spirit moved in sympathy and understanding. She loved Clive who was his father's favourite, and Humphrey who was her baby, but there was something different about Mark. There was something so steadfast, yet so finely poised in him. The knowledge that she had not actually given birth to him had made no difference. This parting for a year was going to be cruel—and what lay beyond, at the end of the year?

“You will be careful about the water,” she said. “You know you are inclined to be reckless. And, if you take a chill, go to bed. Will you promise?”

“For the forty-second time, yes,” said Mark. “Mummie, how hot your cheek is!”

“Your hand is nice and cool.” She drew it across her lips and kissed it.

“Try to remember at least a quarter of my admonitions,” said Dick. “And be sure to write good long letters. We shall want to know all your impressions.”

“Oh, yes.”

“Write to me too,” put in Humphrey.

“Humphrey will miss you terribly in the holidays,” said Phyllis.

“He'll have Palmer.”

“I don't much like him.”

“Then you're a silly little ass.”

“Humphrey will miss you. Won't you, Humphrey?”

“Oh, I shall get on.” He spoke huffily.

Mrs. Maltby bustled in. She tucked a clean handkerchief in Mark's pocket. “Now remember,” she cautioned, “you're not to be greedy when you first go on board ship. If you are, you'll be seasick.”

“All right, Nanny.” He threw his arms about her and hugged her.

“The car's at the door!” shouted Humphrey.

Phyllis clasped Mark to her breast.

“Good-bye, my darling.”

“Good-bye, Mummie. And you'll write and tell me all the news, won't you?”



“Indeed I shall.”

“Good-bye, Mark,” said Dick.

“Good-bye, Daddy.” They gripped hands. A look passed between them. Once again Mark was conscious of something he could not understand.

Again Humphrey shouted and, in a moment, they all were in the hall in the confusion of leaving. Mark bent to kiss the top of the setter’s head.

“Good-bye, old fellow,” he said. “Be good till I come home again.”

Palmer had been quite calm when he had said good-bye to Camilla and Robert. Everything had moved so swiftly at the last that he had felt only bewildered excitement but none of the exhilaration Mark felt. Still, he was more reconciled to the change. At night he and Mark had lain awake in the four-poster talking of all they would do.

But now Mark was gone. His father and mother were gone. Captain and Mrs. Rendel had disappeared into the house. He and Humphrey were left together on the flagged terrace where cushions of Alpine plants spread above the crevices. The mellowed stone of the house with its many leaded-paned windows rose behind them and, away and away, the hills, the valleys and the woods.

Humphrey said,—“Well, they’re gone.”

“Sure,” agreed Palmer.

“I wish I might have gone too.”

“So do I.”

Humphrey stared. “Didn’t you want to stay?”

“Not much.”

“Then why did you?”

“I had to.”

“Oh.” Humphrey looked at him curiously.

The air was full of bird song. Round white clouds were casting their shadows on the hills. All this was so much a part of Humphrey’s life that he was scarcely conscious of it. He said:

“I’m to have Mark’s horse while he is away. Granny gave it to him on his last birthday. Shall we go to the stable?”

“O.K.”

Humphrey saddled and mounted the mare. He cantered round and round the paddock. It was rather nice having Mark out of the way. Now he would be able to do pretty much as he liked. But he trotted up to Palmer and said after a little:

“Want to try her?”

“I don’t mind.” He spoke without enthusiasm.

“Of course, if you don’t *want* to——”

“I’ll try her.”

Humphrey dismounted and Palmer got into the saddle. The mare was frisky. He galloped her round and round the paddock. Humphrey was laughing. He said, when Palmer trotted up to him:

“I say, who taught you to ride?”

“I learned at camp.”

“You ride like a stable-boy. But perhaps that’s the way everyone rides in America.”

“The hell we do!” bawled Palmer. “We ride as good as any Englishman!”

They settled down to lively recrimination.

Some cousins from Cirencester came to tea. There were three children, all girls. They were charmed by Palmer’s way of talking. They crowded about him.

“Oh, listen to Palmer!” they cried. “Isn’t it lovely to hear him! Say some more, Palmer!”

Obligingly he gave a spirited display of his vocabulary. He made his voice as nasal as he could. For a while it amused him to send the pink-cheeked little girls into ecstasies of gigglings, but he tired of it and went away by himself. He felt lost, alone. He felt himself a foreigner to those about him. Even the way he spoke was a subject for laughter. He wondered if Mark would feel as strange in America. If your family was with you it was all right, but being alone made everything different.

He held his lips stiff and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He trotted across the meadows down to the brook. The air was thrilling with joyful sounds, the gurgling of the stream, the call of the cuckoo, the singing of a lark. The path was moss-grown and soft beneath the feet. Where a tree

had fallen and rotted, a mass of glowing violets had sprung from its trunk. He found a throng of marsh marigolds by a bend of the stream and beyond them a little brood of dabchicks with their mother. But he was alone.

When night came he crept far down beneath the bed-clothes, pulling them tightly over his head. In this shelter he felt better. After a while he slept.

The next day Mrs. Maltby was in a bustle getting Humphrey ready for school. His trunk was set in the middle of the nursery and she was constantly trudging between it and his bedroom. Humphrey was the centre of interest. No one paid much attention to Palmer. The Rendels thought it best to let him settle down in his own way. They thought it was better to ignore him a little than to fuss over him. But he felt lonesome. "I'm lonesome," he said to himself. "I'm lonesome. I wonder what they're going to do with me."

Then Humphrey was gone to his preparatory school. In two days Clive would leave for Eton. He called Palmer into the library and said:

"Look here, I'm going to try to find out how much Latin you know. From what your father says I imagine you will never pass the exam. for Eton without special coaching."

He sat down by the leather-covered table, looking rather severe. Palmer grew hot all over.

"Gee," he thought, "am I in a spot?"

He fixed his eyes apprehensively on Clive's handsome face.

Clive handed him an open book and pointed.

"Now," he said, "let's hear you construe this."

Palmer simply couldn't. Clive's eyebrows went up. He chose a passage near the beginning. "Then try this," he said.

Palmer floundered feebly through half a paragraph.

Clive groaned. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know any boy of your age existed who knew so little Latin. You'll never get into Eton without special coaching. Are you good in other subjects? Maths, for instance."

"I've always been near the top of my grades."

"Your grade! What's that?"

"You call them forms."

“I see. Well, if you’re good in other things we may be able to cram you in Latin. Do you know any English history?”

“Only about George III. And I’ve read stories about Robin Hood and King Arthur and his Knights.”

Clive stared, then laughed good-humouredly.

“Well, I’ll tell my governor and see what he thinks. I know of a crammer in Malvern.”

The result was that Dick Rendel made a trunk call to Malvern. After a short conversation he told Phyllis that he had arranged to take the boy there the next day. She answered indifferently:

“Very well. I shall see that his things are ready.”

“Really, Phil,” he returned, with some exasperation, “I think you might take a little interest in the boy.”

“You started all this.”

“You agreed.”

“It was against my will.”

“He’s your son as much as mine.”

“I find nothing in him that makes me feel the relationship.”

“How can you—if you don’t try?”

“I do try.”

“You have not had a single talk with him alone.”

“Give me time!” she broke out. “Good heavens, I’m just trying to get used to giving up Mark!”

“That’s only temporary, Phyllis. You will have him back again.”

She wrung her fingers together.

“I wonder.”

He came to her and kissed her.

“Look here, darling—this affair has made you nervy and depressed. It’s not surprising. But you’ll feel different in a little while. I’ll send him to Malvern for a term. Then we can get acquainted with him in the holidays. He seems quite a nice kid. . . . I think he’s feeling pretty homesick.”

“Oh, that woman!” she broke out again. “How could she do such a thing to us! I know her sort. All that talk about truth is rubbish. What she is after is sensation. She doesn’t care what she does to her child or to ours—so long as she has excitement and a sense of power.”

“When you say *her* child and *ours*, Phyllis,” he asked, with a meaning look, “which do you mean?”

Her eyes filled with burning tears. “I don’t know,” she whispered. “Either, I suppose.”

He spoke with forced cheerfulness. “Well, we’ll see what we can make of the little codger. As for Mark, he will have a great experience. Don’t imagine that I have in any sense given him up. I only feel——”

“Oh, I know, I know.” She moved from him and went to the window. Through it she could see Palmer, perched on the wall beside the terrace, a small, somewhat disconsolate figure.

The next day he set out with Dick Rendel for Malvern. His trunk was in the back of the car and Mrs. Maltby had given him a package containing a cake, some tarts and six bananas. They sped along the smooth road among the hills. They went through greystone villages, past ancient ivy-covered churches into open, level country. Dick talked a good deal, trying to draw Palmer out. Palmer lost some of his shyness but somehow he could not feel quite at his ease. His answers puzzled Dick Rendel. Sometimes he seemed even younger than Humphrey. At other times there was a startling shrewdness in him, most noticeable when the question of money came up. He appeared very conscious of its value and showed a keen desire to acquire it with as little fatigue to himself as possible. To Mark money was a matter of his weekly allowance and what windfalls came his way from godparents or grandmothers. Palmer seemed more conscious of the future than Mark was. He spoke like a grandfather of what a queer place the world was becoming but, when it came to world affairs, his knowledge was slight as compared to Mark’s.

Still, Dick thought, the drive had not been without fruit. He was a little nearer this strange boy whom he had begot, who looked at him with eyes so like Phyllis’.

It was late afternoon when they neared Malvern. First they glimpsed the hills in the distance, then lost them. For a time they drove past park-lands and orchards and commons. Then suddenly, after a bend in the road, the hills loomed before them stark, like prehistoric animals, raising their humps

against the sky. Close in their shadow lay Malvern, the cream-coloured houses with their iron balconies and square roofs making it look like a Continental town. These hills had none of the roundness of the Cotswolds, no wooded valleys or bright streams. They were austere, immutable, bringing twilight to Malvern long before its time.

“Now there are some hills for you,” said Dick Rendel cheerfully. “You’ll have some fine walks over them. When you get to the top you can look right across to Wales and the Black Mountains.”

Palmer regarded the hills pessimistically. He didn’t like the looks of them at all. He thought,—“Gosh, they’re going to be a headache!”

When the car stopped he took one end of his trunk and they set it down at the gate of a square slate-coloured house behind a white brick wall. There was a wrought-iron gate in the wall. They passed through it along a brick walk and Dick tapped on an iron knocker. The door was at once opened by the tutor himself. He greeted them with a wide smile. Palmer looked on while the two men shook hands. Then Dick introduced him to Mr. Cutler.

Palmer’s hand was limp. Mr. Cutler’s was even limper. Their two hands fell apart after a depressing contact. But Mr. Cutler still smiled.

“Come in,” he said. “We are waiting tea for you, and the other boys are eager to meet the young visitor from America.”

If the hills, thought Palmer, were a headache, what was the tutor? Gee, am I in a spot? he thought. He slunk into the dining-room behind the two men. A tall woman and two youths and a small boy were already there. The tutor introduced the woman as Mrs. Cutler. She had a thin face, with very red cheeks, black hair which she wore in a Dutch cut, and long earrings. She gripped Palmer’s hand in a bony clasp and asked him how he was enjoying England.

“It’s swell.”

“And how do you think you will like being at school here?”

“It’ll be swell.”

She laughed merrily. She turned to the two youths.

“Isn’t he quaint?” she exclaimed.

They agreed that he was. Then Mrs. Cutler turned to the small boy. “This is Corbold,” she said. “You two must be the greatest of friends.”

Corbold who was ten, very small and thin, with mouse-coloured hair and large grey eyes, bowed gravely.

“Now for tea!” cried Mrs. Cutler. “You must be starving after your long motor drive. Captain Rendel, will you sit here? And I’m sure the two small people will want to sit together.”

They sat down at the table. On it was a large plate of thick bread and butter, a large plate of thin currant loaf, a plum-cake, a sponge-cake, a plate of chocolate biscuits, a pot of blackberry jam and a jar of honey.

“We are having a special tea in your honour, Wylde,” said Mrs. Cutler. “I must warn you that we don’t always live so lavishly. Do we, Evans?” She turned to the dark, sharp-featured youth.

“No, indeed,” he agreed, laying two slices of currant loaf face to face and cutting them into convenient squares.

Perhaps there had been too much heartiness in his tone, perhaps she disapproved of his table manners, at any rate she gave him a chilly glance.

“How do you take your tea?” she asked Palmer.

“I don’t take it,” he answered. “I take milk.”

Her face fell, then she laughed gaily. “Of course, you shall have milk.” She rang a silver bell that stood on the table and a round-shouldered, round-eyed maid appeared.

“Effie,” said Mrs. Cutler, “bring Master Wylde a mug of milk. Bring that pretty little mug with the picture of the Abbey on the side.”

The mug was indeed pretty and indeed little.

Palmer disposed of the milk in three mouthfuls. Mrs. Cutler pressed him to have more of the currant loaf.

“I hope you are enjoying your tea,” she said.

“It’s swell,” he answered.

As he ate he listened to Captain Rendel and Mr. Cutler discussing his studies. Mr. Cutler talked as though his life depended on how much Latin and English history he could cram into Palmer.

As he said good-bye to him at the door, Dick Rendel bent over Palmer and said,—“I hope everything here will be all right, old man. Work hard and you’ll be able to take a good place in your form. Write and let me know how you get on.”

He was gone. Palmer went upstairs to the room he was to share with Corbold. His trunk had already been unpacked, his clothes hung up or neatly laid in the chest of drawers. The room had once been large but was now divided into two by matchboarding which did not quite reach the ceiling.

“Who sleeps on the other side of that?” Palmer asked Corbold.

“Ames,” answered Corbold, and added,—“I wish he didn’t.”

“So do I. It’s a nuisance. Where does Evans sleep?”

“Across the passage. He studies all the time. He’s Welsh. Ames wouldn’t study at all if Mr. Cutler didn’t make him. He’s failed in his matric, twice. His father says if he fails next term he must find a job.”

Outside it was beginning to rain. It had turned cold and a chill damp air came in at the open window. Palmer closed it with a bang.

“Suffering cats,” he said, “this place would freeze a brass monkey!”

“It is pretty cold,” agreed Corbold. “But it’s nothing to what it was in the winter. You should have seen my chilblains.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Since last September. You see, my parents live in India. My father is an officer. My mother came to England to see me last summer.”

“Oh,” said Palmer, looking him over curiously. There was something odd and lonely about little Corbold. “Then I guess you don’t often see your folks.”

“I haven’t seen my father since I was five. When my mother came last summer I was in a prep school. My mother wanted to see me alone at the very first. So they sent her to the form-room where I was. But there were fifteen of us there and she didn’t know which was me, and I didn’t recognize her.”

“And she hadn’t seen you since you were five?”

“No. When they brought me to England I lived in a nursery school till I was eight. Then I went to the prep school. I wasn’t very well. So I had my tonsils out and then I got a heart condition and so they sent me here where I’ll be quiet and have good care.” He moved his eyes from Palmer’s face to his own hands. He began to touch the fingers of his left hand with the forefinger of his right as though he were counting them. He went over them several times in this way.



“What do we do now?” asked Palmer.

“We have prep for tomorrow, but I thought you’d like to see our room.”

“How do you like it here?” asked Palmer.

Corbold smiled. “Well, I think it’s pretty poisonous. But Mr. Cutler is a good crammer. If you’ve any brains at all he’ll stuff them with knowledge for you. He says I haven’t any, so it’s lucky for me I’m delicate, because he often longs to take the hide off me.”

A bell sounded from below.

In a classroom where there were several desks and a table they found Mr. Cutler waiting. He greeted Palmer with toothy anticipation.

“Now,” he said, “we’ll see what this young fellow knows.” He frowned at Corbold. “Remember,” he said, “you have fifty lines to do.”

When Mr. Cutler was finished with him Palmer felt that he had been mentally turned inside-out. But he was not so discouraged as he had expected to be. Mr. Cutler had been prepared to find him backward in certain subjects. In some, he seemed quite pleased with him. He beamed at Palmer.

“We will do it,” he said. “It will be quite a task but we will do it.”

Yet Palmer had never felt more depressed than when he climbed the two flights of stairs to his room. Corbold was already there, undressing. He began to talk at once, glad of Palmer’s company.

“It’s jolly nice to have someone to talk to,” he said. “Ever since I came here I’ve never had anyone to talk to. Do you like being here or do you wish you were home with your mother?”

“I guess I’d sooner be home.”

“So should I. I’m always remembering India, even though I was only five when I left. Have you brothers and sisters?”

“Two sisters in America.”

“I have a sister. She’s seventeen. She was twelve when my mother brought us to England. She was a nice little girl then. But what do you suppose? When Mummie met her again, last summer, Barbara had grown into just the sort of girl Mummie can’t bear. They simply did not hit it off.”

Palmer stared. “Didn’t they like each other?”

“No, Mummie told me how disappointed she was in Barbara. And Barbara had imagined Mummie as much nicer.”

“Was your mother disappointed in you?”

Corbold smiled happily. “Oh, no, we got along famously together. We went to Switzerland. The only thing about me that disappointed Mummie was my health.”

Palmer looked at his thin little body. “You are awful skinny,” he said. “Do they give you enough to eat?”

“Yes. But the food’s beastly. You can’t judge by tonight’s tea.”

“I have a cake in that box, and some tarts and bananas. Like some?”

“You bet I should.”

Palmer opened the box. They cut the cake with a ruler. Palmer could not eat much, but Corbold, in a kind of nervous greed, devoured a large slice, two tarts and a banana.

The window in the bathroom stood wide open and the rain was drifting in. Before he closed it, Palmer stood looking up at the hills. He knew he was looking at them, because he could see lights twinkling high up. There was no hot water. The two towels were worn thin and both had been used. When he went back to the bedroom, Corbold was already in bed. He exclaimed:

“You’d better hurry up. There’ll be trouble if Ames comes up and finds our light burning.”

“Huh,” said Palmer scornfully. But his morale was weak. He did not feel ready for an encounter with Ames.

Corbold was hopping out of bed again. “I forgot to say my prayers,” he exclaimed.

He knelt by the bed and began to gabble a prayer. At first he just gabbled, as though to get finished in a hurry, then he began to cry. It was just a soft sniffing but it made Palmer uncomfortable. He looked the other way till he heard Corbold get into bed, then he glanced uneasily at him. Corbold was sitting up in bed. He was touching his fingers in that odd way, as though he were counting them.

“Why do you do that?” asked Palmer.

Corbold gave a sly look. “I don’t know. I’ve been doing it a long time. I began it in India.” But he shut his hands and thrust them beneath the bed-

clothes. Then he said,—“It’s funny, Wylde, but saying my prayers always makes me cry. It doesn’t really matter.”

“Why do you say them, then?”

“I promised my mother I would. And I want to, because I’ve special things to ask, you know.”

Palmer grunted. He didn’t know what to say. He got into his narrow bed that stood beside Corbold’s and drew the coverings up to his chin. The coverings seemed very thin. It was dark and silent save for the gurgling of a gutter just outside.

“Good night, Corbold,” said Palmer.

After a little Corbold said,—“I wish you’d call me David. I haven’t anyone who calls me David in this house.”

“O.K., David. And you call me Palmer.”

At first Palmer thought that the sobbing sound came from the eave. Then he discovered that Corbold was crying again. He lay feeling miserable, wondering what to do, when he heard Ames coming up the stairs. A light flashed above the partition. He could hear Ames throw his books on the table, pull up a chair and strike a match. Evidently he was settling down to smoke and study. Palmer wondered what Ames would do if he heard Corbold crying. He soon found out. Ames rapped sharply on the partition and called:

“Stop that blubbing in there!”

There was dead silence for a few moments, then Corbold began to cry more loudly than he had before and on an hysterical note. Palmer went hot all over.

In the next room the chair was pushed back. Ames sprang to his feet and came lightly and quickly to Corbold’s bedside. He switched on the light. Palmer intensely disliked his fat face and small cruel eyes. Ames jerked the bed-coverings from Corbold, who began to double himself up. However, Ames held him still with a hand on the back of his neck. With the other hand he drew down the trousers of Corbold’s pyjamas and smacked him repeatedly with a hair-brush he had brought with him.

Petrified, Palmer looked on. He saw Corbold’s thin little buttocks grow scarlet, then an ugly, dark red.

“Now,” said Ames, “if I have to come in here again I’ll take the other side of the brush to you.”

He turned to Palmer. “This goes on all the time,” he said. “I can’t study. I haven’t the life of a dog. Don’t you mention this to Cutler.” He went back to his room.

Palmer’s heart was beating fast. There had been something especially vicious in the way Ames had beaten Corbold. Before he left he had turned out the light. Palmer could hear Corbold getting under the blankets—crying very softly, then ceasing. He heard Evans go into Ames’ room and the two talk together in low tones. Then he fell fast asleep.

He did not stir until morning, when a loud bell woke him from sleep. Through the window he could see the great hump of a hill, purple against the clear blue sky. The air that came in was moist and sweet. He looked anxiously at Corbold, who had just opened his eyes.

“Hey, David,” he said, “you awake?”

Corbold smiled back at him. As they dressed they made no reference to what had happened the night before. The Cutlers, the two youths and the two small boys, gathered round the table for breakfast.

Mr. Cutler’s eyes glinted in anticipation of the day’s work. He was immaculate, in contrast to the untidy youths. Evans’ beard had begun to grow but apparently he had not yet noticed it. There was no cream or fruit juice on the table but the pretty little mug was at Palmer’s place, filled to the brim with bluish milk.

Mrs. Cutler beamed at him. “You see,” she said, “I remember your tastes.”

“Oh, yeah?” said Palmer.

He looked across the table at Corbold, eating thick porridge with thin milk. He had dark shadows under his eyes. Palmer wondered if the Cutlers had heard anything of the crying and whacking the night before. He noticed that neither of them looked at Corbold or spoke to him. He believed they knew all about it and didn’t care. After breakfast, work began.

With ruthless zeal Mr. Cutler went from one to another of his pupils, cramming each in his turn. He went in order of age, beginning with the Welshman, who received him with an equally fierce desire for knowledge. He ended with Corbold, on whom he poured irritation he had collected on the way. Corbold got so excited that he could not take in anything and his

answers often consisted of,—“Yes, sir—please, sir—I know—just a minute, sir—just a minute—please, sir, I knew just a minute ago.”

Palmer had gone to a very modern school where he had had a good deal of time for play. He found the day long and exacting. He was tired at the end. Then came a pleasant surprise. The boys were allowed to go where they liked about the town. Even the hills were not out of bounds. If they chose to buy their tea in a tea-shop, so much the better. Corbold said that Ames often did this but Evans and himself never. He was too shy to go alone to a tea-shop.

“But I’ll go if you’ll come with me, Palmer,” he said. “I have plenty of money.”

“The hell I will,” said Palmer. “You’ll come with me.”

Banging the gate behind them they felt suddenly hilarious. They could see Ames’ lumpish figure ahead of them plodding toward Church Street. It was sunny and warm but already the dark hills were casting their first shadow over the town. The street went steeply up to the Terrace where Corbold said the best tea-shops were. Half-way up a gipsy woman with bright brown eyes and a gay scarf over her head was selling bunches of mimosa. Its exotic scent filled the air. Palmer noticed her buttoned boots and her bare toes right out on the pavement. The street was full of people at this hour and motor-cars and lorries were crowding round the steep bend that led to the Terrace.

Up there Palmer stopped to stare at the ancient Foley Arms where the gilded lion and unicorn reared themselves above the low doorway. They found a tea-shop unpolluted by the presence of Ames, and Palmer ordered a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a chocolate milk-shake and a pineapple sundae with a marshmallow sauce.

But the waitress had nothing more complicated than vanilla ice-cream. Palmer astonished her by his capacity for this. Corbold exclaimed:

“It’s great fun having you here, Palmer. It makes me feel quite different. I don’t think I shall mind even that beast’s lickings now.” His eyes were bright with happiness.

Palmer glowered. “I’d like to take that lousy throw-back for a ride,” he said. “Why do you stand it? Why don’t you complain?”

“I think Cutler knows.”

“Then tell Mrs. Cutler.”

“I think she knows too. I don’t think they like to offend Ames. Besides, they don’t much like me.”

“Then why don’t you write and tell your folks?”

Corbold reddened, then he said,—“Well, you see, my mother thought she’d found a jolly good place for me here and if I told her about Ames she’d begin worrying all over again.”

Palmer scowled. “Gosh, I hate that guy!” he said. “I’d bust a gut laughing if I saw him run over by an army truck.”

“So should I,” agreed Corbold. “I’d bust a gut laughing if I saw him skinned alive.”

They became so hilarious over their ice-cream that people stared at them.

This hatred for Ames drew them even closer together. Palmer sometimes found it hard to come down to the level of the ten-year-old, but on the other hand there was always that admiring audience for whatever he did. Saturday was the same as other days, but on Sunday after service in the Abbey Church they were free. They spent the day in the hills, running along the narrow paths that wound their way through gorse and bracken. The hills unfolded themselves to the far purple horizon of Wales. Below gleamed the reservoir like a little blue lake. Two horsemen ambled along the paths and a flock of sheep bundled themselves out of the boys’ way. Eastward the plain lay, sunning itself. Only a few white clouds drew their shadows across the land.

The boys lay on a warm slope to eat their lunch. They had supplemented what had been given them by purchases of the afternoon before. Corbold looked like a different boy with his cheeks red and his teeth showing in laughter. They talked of various ways by which they would like to do in Ames. The night before, Palmer had been witness to another scene that had filled him with a cold anger.

Side by side they lay, their bodies supple as young lambs, their eyes on the hill opposite which rose, in its prehistoric bareness, out of a nest of apple blossoms from the orchard at its base. But their thoughts were of the tortures to which they would like to subject Ames. Palmer had to confess that Corbold was the best at thinking them up. In truth Corbold made him open his eyes at the ingenuity of them. At the thought of some especially good one they would roll on the hillside in joy.

There was no way of locking the door of their room, but two nights later, before Ames came upstairs, they dragged their washing-stand across the door and, against the partition, the chest of drawers. They lay whispering, suffocated by suppressed laughter, their hearts thudding against their ribs. It seemed a long time before Ames' heavy step sounded on the stair. He went into Evans' room for a while. Then he came slowly into his own and turned on the light. Corbold was giggling audibly.

“Shut up!” warned Palmer in a fierce whisper.

Half dead from excitement, Corbold controlled himself. They heard Ames settle down to study.

“Now,” whispered Palmer.

They crept out of bed.

“Go ahead,” ordered Palmer.

Corbold tried to cry but could only giggle.

“I can't.”

“You've gotta cry!”

“I can't.”

“Then you've got to pretend to.”

But Corbold could produce nothing more than an hysterical squeak. Palmer clapped his hand over the little boy's mouth. Then he himself began to give a very good imitation of Corbold's weeping. Corbold stopped giggling and listened, entranced.

Ames' voice came from beyond the partition.

“Shut up, in there,” he growled.

The two boys stealthily mounted the chest of drawers. Its top was mounded with their ammunition. They looked over the partition. Ames' back was turned to them. His feet were on a chair. An open box of chocolates was at his side. Palmer gave a really horrible howl. Ames sprang up.

“Take that, you lousy throw-back!” said Palmer. He hurled a boot at Ames' head. “Give him both barrels, David!”

Corbold followed with another boot. They threw brushes, soap-dishes, a can of water and a dozen cooking eggs which Palmer had that day bought, in

quick succession. For a moment Ames was dazed. He had got a hard blow in the eye. Then he recovered himself and ran into the passage to the boys' door. The washing-stand was wedged between it and the foot of Palmer's bed. Ames could not open it.

He tore back to his own room, mounted his chair and prepared to climb over the partition. Palmer switched off the light. As Ames came down on one side of the partition the two small boys scrambled over it and dropped into Ames' room. In terror they fled from it and down the stairs. Corbold was shrieking. The Cutlers came out of their bedroom. Mrs. Cutler was wrapped in a bath-square.

"Oh, Mr. Cutler, save us!" cried Palmer. "That big guy up there is trying to kill us! He's gone berserk!"

Mrs. Cutler screamed and Mr. Cutler looked apprehensively up the stairway. Horrible thumpings and bumpings came from above. Then Ames appeared. "If you don't move those two little bastards to another room, I shall leave," he shouted. One of his eyes was closed and his nose was bleeding. Mr. Cutler was relieved. He said sternly:

"I cannot have such language in my house. You will apologize at once to my wife."

"Sorry," muttered Ames, and flung back to his room. His door banged.

The Welshman had never looked up from his books but his black brows made a fine bridge above his nose as he forced himself to concentrate in spite of the noise.

The next day the belongings of the two boys were carried down to a room on the same floor as the Cutlers. Little Corbold was no longer ill-treated by Ames. His companionship with Palmer, their walks on the hills, made a happy boy of him. By degrees he ceased to cry when he said his prayers. In truth, he gabbled them as fast as he could, for he was thinking of the promised pillow-fight with Palmer.

Palmer went through the days with endurance. The weeks piled up behind him and the future stretched in a confused fog ahead. Sometimes he wondered if ever he would see his own home again. He had letters from Mark telling of the good time he was having there, and these made him feel more cast-off than ever. He had been used to a school where lessons were made easy, where the entertainment of the pupils was one of the principal preoccupations of the staff. Mr. Cutler cared for nothing but learning. He left



no stone in Palmer's mental equipment unturned. Palmer himself was surprised at how fast he was learning.

Camilla's letters brought Boston so close to him, he felt he could put out his hand and touch it. He would shut his eyes and run across Beacon Street on to the Common. He would look in at the windows of Schwartz's store and watch doughnuts being cooked. He would stand by the river and watch the Harvard crews practising. He dared not let himself think long about Camilla.

Robert wrote regularly too, but his letters were not so vivid. He ended each one by some such remark as,—“Don't have such a good time that you forget us.”

Palmer would set his jaw. “Hey, Boss,” he would growl, “what you givin' us? As though I could ever forget you!”

His own letters home were brief and non-committal. They sounded almost as though he were forgetting.

## CHAPTER VII

SCHOOLS in America close at the middle of June but in England the holidays do not begin till the end of July. July seemed very long. The sun beat down hotly on the streets of Malvern, though to Palmer, inured to Boston's climate, it threw only a mild warmth. Still it was sometimes a relief when the hills rose in their grandeur and drew their curtain across its brightness.

July had much thunder weather. The air was close and full of rumours of war. Sometimes Mr. Cutler forgot the cramming of his pupils and gave them his opinion on international affairs. Every late afternoon the boys went into the streets which had become so familiar. Every day they had ice-cream, for both had plenty of pocket-money. They bought fresh fruit and ate it in the public gardens, or in the graveyard in the shadow of the Abbey. Sometimes, in the gardens, Palmer would hear American voices and strain his ears to catch what they were saying. Once he heard an old lady say she was from Boston and, before he could stop himself, he broke out with:

“H’ya, Ma’am, I’m from Boston too!”

They had a long conversation. She was staying on for the Drama Festival. She knew members of his family in Massachusetts. She invited the boys to the Abbey Hotel to tea with her.

The time had come for leaving. Palmer strained toward it but Corbold looked miserable. Good spirits and appetite had left him. He kept on saying how he wished he might spend the holidays with Palmer. He made Palmer feel old and responsible.

At last Dick Rendel came with his car to fetch Palmer. He looked sharply at him as they shook hands.

“You look a bit pale,” he said. “Have you been well?”

“Yes, I’m O.K. Do you remember David Corbold? I guess we’ll have to say good-bye now, David.”

Mr. Cutler had already told of Palmer's fair progress so there was no need for delay. Dick Rendel found the atmosphere of the house depressing.

He wanted to get away. Before leaving he turned to Corbold and said:

“I went to Sandhurst with a chap named Corbold. I was with him afterward in Mesopotamia. I wonder if he’d be related to you.”

“My father’s name is Roger,” said Corbold. “And he was in Mesopotamia.”

“By George, it’s the same man! He’s stationed in India now, isn’t he? Where are you spending your holidays?”

“He’s spending them here,” said Palmer quickly. “He’s nowhere else to go.”

Dick Rendel looked down into their two faces.

“Like to spend a fortnight with us in Cornwall?” he asked.

So lightly was despair changed to joy for Corbold.

His things took up little room. The boys squeezed themselves into the two-seater beside Dick Rendel. He asked them many questions about their work and how they had enjoyed themselves. At first they were cautious, then they gave their unvarnished opinion of Mrs. Cutler’s catering, and, with some embellishment, told of the affair of Ames.

“But why did he come into your room at night and lick you?” asked Dick.

“He just got that way,” answered Palmer. “He’d some sort of complex.”

“He was a swine,” said Corbold. “But we got even with him. You should have seen his face, all covered with blood and egg.”

Dick Rendel laughed delightedly.

Palmer admired the way Mrs. Rendel took the news of an unexpected boy’s going to Cornwall with them. She even seemed glad to have little Corbold. But Palmer had a queer feeling that himself she didn’t like. There was a look in her eyes when they rested on him, as though she tried not to see him. Yet she sometimes looked at him so intently that it made him uncomfortable. He was glad his own mother wasn’t queer like Mrs. Rendel. There was clearness in his mother’s eyes and you knew what she was thinking.

It was fine to be back at Oakley Manor. He had a feeling of pride, of knowing all about it, as he and Corbold dashed about the grounds and followed the curves of the stream, now winding its way among the rich

herbage of summer. There had been a week of rain and storm but now calm had come and a tranquil blue sky. Every flower and blade of grass was bowed with its weight of moisture. Fields of corn stood golden-red waiting to be cut, but not so bright as the gay poppies that massed among it. Ox-eye daisies, swinging harebells, blue crane's-bill grew beside the hedges where wild clematis and pink roses found support for their climbing.

The food was so good. The tender meat, the rich milk, the home-made bread, the big, ripe, golden gooseberries, the honey in the comb, all were exhilarating to boyish stomachs. Then there was the comfort of the good beds, the fine sheets, the downy pillows. Mrs. Maltby made much of them in the two days that passed before the return of Clive and Humphrey. She too made Palmer a little uncomfortable by her way of looking at him. Once she put her hands on either side of his face and held it still. She smiled but then she shook her head and drew a deep breath. "There sure is something funny about me," thought Palmer.

"Is there something funny about my face?" he asked Corbold.

Corbold looked at him judicially. "Well," he agreed, "it is rather funny."

"Am I hard to look at?" asked Palmer anxiously.

"Not to me. But then I'm used to you."

Corbold and Humphrey took to each other at first sight. Indeed Palmer felt a little chagrin when the two of them tore off together to inspect some treasure of Humphrey's.

In a few days they all were packed into two cars and set forth for Cornwall. The Rendels' house was on a bay on the north coast. It was stone, plastered and whitewashed. The windows looked right out across the sea. It was very different from the Atlantic of the New England coast to which Palmer was used, for it stretched in streaks of sapphire blue, jade green, apple green and rose. He shared a room with the two younger boys. He suddenly found himself grown beyond them. He found himself full of strange and mysterious thoughts. He wanted to wander among the rock-pools, staring down into the miniature forests that grew there, or lie stretched on his back listening to the pounding of the breakers or the steady inward-pressing tide. Or he would wander on the cliffs, high above the sea, where the grass was cropped short by sheep and their little black droppings lay like dark berries. He had never before heard a skylark. Now he would stare skyward while a winging speck mounted up and up, while song dripped down like silver rain.

One day Dick Rendel said to him,—“I think you like England pretty well, don't you, Palmer?”

“It's swell,” answered Palmer promptly. Dick looked intently at the end of the cigarette he was smoking, and then asked,—“How would you like to live in England? I mean—how would you like to be an Englishman?”

“I'd like it fine if I'd been born one. But I'm an American and I'd go nuts if I thought I had to be anything else.”

Dick gave a sudden bark of laughter. “You're a character, Palmer,” he said.

One day an odd thing happened. The three boys had gone to a sandy cove to bathe. They splashed and wrestled in the incoming waves, then lay on the sand for a while. Palmer was very cold, for he was used to the tepid water of a New Hampshire lake. He had never liked sea bathing. His pleasure was to stay in the water for an hour. Now he drew a damp towel about him and burrowed into the sand. Humphrey and David were talking sheer nonsense. He lay listening to them, thinking what kids they were. A flock of gulls came walking toward them across the glistening sand. There was the sweet sucking sound of the incoming wavelets. The boys crept higher up on the sand to avoid getting wet again. It was time to go home but they could not make up their minds to leave. At last Humphrey sat up and looked about him. He exclaimed:

“I say, we'd better cut for home.”

The two rocky points that embraced the cove were already touched by the tide. The boys jumped up and began to run but their feet sank in the soft sand. When they reached the point of rock, rough waves were tumbling against it, slithering back to disclose the jagged surface beneath, then surging forward with renewed strength. They knew they dare not attempt to round the point. Yet above, the cliff rose steeply.

“Gee—are we in a spot?” said Palmer.

“We can get up,” answered Humphrey. He began climbing nimbly.

But they could not do it. They were forced to remain on a ledge over which, in another half-hour, the waves would curl. They stood, a forlorn little group, waving their towels and shouting. They were not yet really frightened.

But, as the tide grew ever closer, the first chill of panic crept over them.

“Now,” said Palmer, “all together! Yell till you bust!” They shouted with all their strength.

A faint cry rose above the sound of the waves, reaching Phyllis Rendel and Clive walking on the cliff. They ran to the edge and peered over.

“Here we are!” shouted Humphrey. “Come and save us! We’re drowning!”

Clive gripped a wind-twisted tree at the edge of the cliff with one hand and, with the other, clung to his mother’s hand who let herself over the edge. First she drew up David, then Humphrey, then, almost exhausted, Palmer. He was much the heaviest.

She sank down on the grass with him in her arms. The tide had reached his knees. She had saved him just in time. A strange melting sweetness ran through his veins. He relaxed in the shelter of her arms. For a moment she held him close. His face was against her breast. A strange happiness surged through her. For that moment he was hers.

Then Clive lifted her to her feet. “Poor old dear,” he said, supporting her. To the boys he said,—“You kids deserve a damned good hiding!”

After that the days sped quickly. David’s visit was extended through the holidays. He grew hardier and happier every day. Cablegrams were exchanged between Dick Rendel and Major Corbold. The result of these was that David was to go to the preparatory school which the Rendel boys had attended. It hurt Phyllis to see how happy the boys were without Mark. “Upon my word,” she said to Humphrey, “you are so taken up with Palmer and David, you seem never to give a thought to Mark.”

“But I do, Mummie, I often think of him. But these boys are here and Mark isn’t.”

“I suppose, if he never came back, it would be all the same to you,” she said bitterly.

“But he is coming back, isn’t he?”

“Of course. It’s all right, dear. Still, I do like to know you think of him sometimes.”

“Indeed I do,” said Humphrey, throwing great earnestness into his voice.

Dick had overheard. He said afterward to Phyllis,—“It’s scarcely fair to Humphrey to accuse him of forgetting Mark. After all, he’s only a child. You can’t expect him to keep the absent one in his mind.”

“I don’t,” she returned passionately. “I don’t. I expect everyone to be quite resigned to parting with him. I can see how you, for one, are letting that boy take Mark’s place with you.”

“Phil, do you realize that ‘that boy’ is your own son?”

“Yes.” She spoke stubbornly.

“Well, it makes you seem very harsh.”

“I don’t care.” She turned away.

“Phil, can’t you work up an atom of natural feeling for Palmer?”

“No.”

“Well, a third of his time here is gone. The rest will soon pass.”

She asked abruptly,—“What are you going to do if war is declared?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I think if that happens, he ought to be sent home.”

Rendel flushed. “Sent home, eh?”

“Then you want to keep him and let Mark stay over there?”

“My God, you wilfully misunderstand me!”

“I must say I find you difficult to understand.”

“All I want is that you should not speak so harshly of Palmer.”

“I don’t speak harshly.”

He got up and strode about the room. The mantelpiece was covered with shells the children had brought from the shore. He picked up one and held it to his ear. The faint purring sound calmed him. After a little he said:

“What I should like to achieve is some sort of common footing where all six of us could meet and somehow bridge over—what happened in the nursing home.”

“It can’t be bridged over!” she cried. “The only thing to do is to accept it. If we tell the boys nothing and keep on shuttlecocking them back and forth across the Atlantic they will be utterly spoilt. If eventually we tell them the truth, how can it do anything but confuse them and weaken their characters? They’ll feel that they have no real country—no real parents. Oh, I’m sick at heart over the situation! I wish that woman had died before she brought it about.”

“Well, well,” he said soothingly, “we must just try to make the best of it.”

“There is no best!”

He returned somewhat grimly,—“I expect we shall shortly have things to cope with which will overshadow even this.”

“You mean war!”

“Yes. I believe it’s coming.”

And, within a fortnight, it did.



## CHAPTER VIII

THE weather had been fair for the voyage, which, to Camilla and Mark at least, was full of interest and pleasurable excitement. Her mind was easy about Palmer, for she was sure he was in good hands. She felt that he was at an age when a year in England, part of it spent in an English school, would be splendid experience for him. He would thank her for it later on. And, during that year, here was her other son to become acquainted with, in whom to sow the seeds of a son's love for her. They were equally her sons: one because he had come from her body; one because she had, for thirteen years, lavished a mother's love on him, and he had known no other mother.

She was proud of Mark on board ship. He seemed older than Palmer and could talk with ease to the people they met. He carried himself with distinction, contrasting to the swaggering walk which Palmer affected and which Robert thought amusing. He was intelligently interested in everything about him. He was good at games and won a prize for deck tennis. He was full of life and eager for the experiences that lay ahead. Camilla felt that already there was a bond between them.

As for Robert, his business affairs, from which he had been absent longer than he had planned, reached out to clutch at him before he was half-way across the Atlantic. He became preoccupied. His vacation was over and now he must make up for it. He hoped the experiment they were making with the two youngsters would turn out all right. But, when he thought of Palmer, his heart sank. He was going to miss him terribly and he was afraid Palmer would be very homesick. He liked what he saw of Mark but he guessed it would be a long while before he would feel he really knew him. Mark was the product of a very different system.

The day they arrived was unspringlike. The sky was grey and an icy wind swept across the pier. They were delayed in landing because of a fussy Immigration official who had to be convinced that the English boy was being brought into the country with no evil intent. Everyone was delayed, everything held up, while heavy books of rules were produced and searched

for reference. At last Mark was reluctantly granted permission to land and to remain in America for one year.

Their daughters were waiting for Camilla and Robert on the pier. As they hugged their parents the girls poured out their tale of long waiting in the cold. They talked both at once, full of excitement. They had had, just the day before, Robert's letter telling them to expect Mark for a long visit and that Palmer was to remain for a time in England. They greeted Mark with friendly curiosity. Janet, who was eighteen, had her mother's beautiful black hair and clear grey eyes but her features were not so finely cut as Camilla's. There was more softness yet sturdiness about her. Honey-Lou, aged nine, had a turned-up nose, two abrupt pigtailed and a piercing voice.

Mark stared out of the window of the taxi to catch every possible glimpse of the city. After London it seemed small and quiet. The girls and Camilla had gone in a taxi together. He was alone with Robert.

Robert pointed out places of interest as they passed. Their two heads were close together. Once Mark gave Robert a swift scrutinizing glance. He decided that he liked Robert very much. It was only a short while till they reached the house in Beacon Street. The other taxi was already there.

Inside the house Honey-Lou took Mark by the sleeve.

"Come on," she urged, "and I'll show you Palmer's room. You're going to have it while you're here. You're not a scrap like Palmer. Janet says she hopes you behave better."

"I'll try," said Mark gravely.

He suffered himself to be dragged hither and yon by Honey-Lou. He wished Palmer were there! What fun they would have had together! He liked Palmer's room. He noticed what a lot of books, most of them quite new, there were on the bookshelves.

"My brother," said Honey-Lou, "has an English coat and English pants and an English tie. Mommy brought them to him last time she was in London. I'm going next time, but when I go I'll buy my clothes in Paris. Come on downstairs. We're going to eat. Aren't you hungry? I am. I couldn't eat my breakfast. I was too excited."

Camilla greeted them gaily in the living-room.

"Come, children," she cried. "There are sandwiches and coffee waiting!" She put an arm about each. "How do you like our house, Mark?"

“I think it’s beautiful,” he answered, suddenly shy. Seeing Camilla and Robert with their daughters made him feel an outsider.

Janet offered him sandwiches.

“What sort do you like?” she asked.

“All sorts.”

He was hungry. The sandwiches and coffee were delicious.

“Well, it’s grand to be home again,” said Robert, his arm about Honey-Lou perched on the arm of his chair.

He tried to keep his mind off Palmer, but the youngster’s set face, when they had said good-bye, disturbed him. He caressed Honey-Lou’s pigtails.

“What are you going to do with Mark?” he asked. “I think you ought to take him out and show him the Common and the Gardens.”

“All right. Can we go to the pictures?”

“I think there are other things Mark would rather do.”

“It’s too cold to do anything else. I want to see *The Wizard of Oz*.”

“She’s seen it twice already,” put in Janet. Honey-Lou glared at her. “I want to see it again.”

Robert put his hand in his pocket. “I’ll give the money to Mark.” He handed him a dollar.

“Thank you, sir.” He turned the money over in his hand. “How much is this? About four shillings?”

“It’s a dollar!” Honey-Lou was scornful. “Don’t you know a dollar when you see one?”

“If you can’t be more polite,” said Camilla sternly, “you’ll stay at home.”

“It’s a good thing you’re back,” said Janet. “She’s getting absolutely impossible.”

Honey-Lou gripped Mark’s hand as they marched along Beacon Street. A pale sunlight brightened the sombre façades of the substantial houses. Mark was exhilarated. He swung Honey-Lou’s hand in his.

The little lake in the Gardens was ruffled by the wind. A few children, dressed in heavy dark-coloured snow-suits, played in little groups or walked with their nurses beneath the bare trees. Spring flowers were sending up

tentative shoots from the cold earth. Women in fur coats sat on the sunniest benches. The shadows of the bare branches played across the paths. Why, thought Mark, spring has scarcely begun here! He thought of Kensington Gardens and the morning he had run along the paths—it must be three weeks ago—how the trees had been in full leaf, the hawthorns in bud, and how the beds of pink and purple hyacinths had blazed against the emerald grass. He remembered the bareheaded, barelegged children, in their fawn or pink or mauve coats, who rode in prams or rolled their hoops alongside.

“I say, Honey-Lou,” he asked, “when do you get spring here?”

“Wait and see. It will come good and plenty. You’ll nearly roast.”

They crossed the street and went on to the Common. At the crossing Honey-Lou insisted on buying peanuts to feed the pigeons.

“But your father didn’t say you could,” said Mark.

“Who cares? He gave me the money, didn’t he?”

“No. He gave it to me.”

“You’re to spend it as I want, he said.”

Mark gave in. They fed the pigeons and he gladly would have stayed on the Common to watch the passers-by, the Italian boys shouting and wrestling, the smartly-dressed negresses; most interesting of all, the game of baseball progressing in one corner. But there would be time for these things later. He would wander through the streets, find out all about the State Building with its gilded dome, read the legends on the monuments. He let himself be led by Honey-Lou to *The Wizard of Oz*.

Camilla was submerged in putting her house in order. It was amazing how things got out of order even with a reliable housekeeper left in charge. But it was good to be at home again. She met Robert when he returned from his office, wearing one of her prettiest dinner dresses. Her face was tranquil. She did not look in the least tired.

“How have things gone?” he asked.

“Well, I’m getting some sort of order in the house. But I’ve a lot to do yet. The girls were delighted with their frocks. Janet looks perfectly lovely in that maize one.”

“That’s fine. How’s Mark?”

“Very happy, I think. It’s strange, isn’t it, that he should show no regret at leaving home for a year? There’s something queer about it. Either they are

a cold family—I think Mrs. Rendel certainly is—or he just hadn't a natural affection for them. Of course, he doesn't show his feelings the way Palmer does."

"I don't see how you can possibly think of Mrs. Rendel as cold. She was a good deal more upset at parting with Mark than you at parting with Palmer." Instantly he wished he had not said that. It would be upsetting to Camilla, just when she was feeling so happy.

Camilla's fine eyes widened. "How could you say such a cruel thing, Robert? You know there were nights when I scarcely slept, before we left England. I felt heart-broken. But what could I do? I was helpless—as we all were!"

"I know, I know. What I meant was that Mrs. Rendel made more fuss at the first."

"She was shocked and she lost her self-control. But later on, when I made the arrangements with her, she was as cold as ice. He's by far the more human of the two."

"Yes, I thought he was quite a nice fellow. How do Mark and Honey-Lou get on together?"

"Oh, she's going to be absolutely devoted to him, as she is to Palmer."

Honey-Lou had come into the room unheard. Now she observed:

"I'm not devoted to Palmer. He's a pest. I'm not devoted to Mark either. He's high-hat. He was bossing me about the whole time we were out, and he says the very name of hot-dog is revolting."

Robert laughed and kissed her. "You're a great girl, Honora-Louise!"

She snuggled against him ecstatically. "My, it's nice to have you back, Daddy! I'm sick and tired of minding that old sour-puss, Janet."

Several friends came in that evening. It was pleasant to Mark to be treated as a grown-up, allowed to stay up as late as he chose. Everyone seemed determined to make him feel happy and at home. As he had for years spent his holidays in Italy they asked him how the Italians felt about the prospect of war. After being one of three boys, always kept in his place by an older brother, it was pleasant to be deferred to.

He was tired but happy when he went upstairs to bed. As he undressed he thought of the long letter home which he would write tomorrow. He pictured his father reading it aloud after breakfast, passing it on to Nanny,

sending it to Eton for Clive to read, with the injunction to forward it to Humphrey. He would write a special letter to Palmer. He'd give a good deal to know how Palmer was getting on.

He was sitting up in Palmer's bed reading *Moby Dick* which he had discovered on the bookshelves when there came a tap on the door. He said,—"Come in," and Camilla entered. She wore a long glimmering silk dressing-gown and her hair was about her shoulders.

"Do you mind if I come in?" she asked.

He gave her a happy smile and closed the book. She sat down on the side of the bed.

"I'm afraid I've let you stay up terribly late," she said.

"I don't mind. I like it."

"Still, I don't suppose you're used to it."

"I'm not a bit tired."

"What are you reading?"

"A book called *Moby Dick*. It has gorgeous illustrations."

"Yes. That was one of Palmer's presents on his last birthday."

"He has a lot of books. We have too, but they are pretty old and sort of common property."

She took one of his hands in hers. "I want you to be very, very happy, Mark. I want you to look back on this year as one of the happiest in your life. If anything goes wrong, you'll let me know, won't you?"

"Yes, I will." But he was suddenly shy, as if he were afraid she was going to infringe on his privacy.

She saw this and gave her light, pretty laugh.

"Nothing will go wrong, I'm sure. . . . Now, if I leave you, will you promise to put out your light in twenty minutes?" She noticed an old-fashioned gold watch, heavily chased, standing in a leather case on the bedside table.

"What an interesting old watch!" she exclaimed, taking it up.

"It was my grandfather's. He was killed at Majuba Hill. I'm named after him."

“Oh.” She turned the watch thoughtfully in her hand, then returned it to its place. She rose and bent over him.

“Do you mind being kissed good night?” she asked.

When she went back to her own room, Robert had just entered it.

“I’m going to have a hot bath,” he said, “and get to bed.”

He noticed then that she was crying.

“Why, what’s the matter, Camilla?”

She leant sobbing against his shoulder.

“I’ve just kissed my son for the first time,” she said, “and he is thirteen years old.”

## CHAPTER IX

A SUDDEN change took place in the night. The icy wind sank. A warm rain began to fall. It rained all the next morning while Mark was writing letters, but after lunch the sun came out hotly and, when Mark strolled across the Common, a miracle had taken place. The trees had, in this short space, uncurled their leaves and he walked under a bower of green. Boys were bathing in the pond. In the Gardens the swan-boats were making their first voyage across the little lake, laden with children. Gardeners were planting out flowering shrubs. There was no spring, Mark thought, as he leant over the little bridge and watched the boats; yesterday was winter, today is summer. It was an exciting place to be in and now he could explore it as he chose, for Honey-Lou was off to the school she attended each day. A few days would pass before he himself went to school.

He settled very comfortably into the ways of the household. Janet and her friends found him amusing, with his mixture of grown-up manners and lack of experience. He had led the cloistered life of the English schoolboy. What was an old story to Palmer was new and exciting to Mark. What Camilla found trying was his untidiness. She had thought Palmer was untidy, but never had he strewn his belongings about as did Mark, who had been waited on, hand and foot, all his life. He was rather trying, too, about his meals, wanting the food to which he was accustomed, showing no desire to acquire a taste for the new. More than once she felt distinctly irritated. It seemed unbearable that she could exert no real authority over her son.

She felt this strongly a fortnight after Mark had begun school. He was to spend his Sundays at the Wyldes'. There were not many weeks left until the end of term. He had taken a good place in his grade with the exception of a few subjects. He was somewhat behind the other boys in mathematics and spelling and he knew nothing of American history. But he was advanced far beyond them in classics. He wrote a perfect hand. He wrote and spoke French very well. He was good at games, though his attempts at baseball brought howls of mirth from his fellows. But they were, on the whole, friendly toward him. He settled down without too much difficulty. He found the teachers kind and helpful.



On his second Sunday Camilla said to him, when she came to say good night:

“I wonder if you know, Mark, that your teeth need attention. As you lie on your back I can see that some of your teeth are not in perfect position. They need regulating.”

“Do they?” he returned politely, but without interest.

“Very badly,” she answered with more firmness. “I have made an appointment for you with Dr. Graves, my dentist, and telephoned the school you will be late on Monday.”

He put his finger in his mouth. “That tooth,” he said, “aches a bit when I eat ice-cream.”

“But you should have told me.”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

“I can’t help being surprised,” she said, “that your teeth haven’t been straightened before now. Of course the irregularity is slight but it keeps your smile from being as attractive as it ought to be.”

He laughed. “It’s good enough for me.”

“Evidently the Rendels thought so.” She spoke crisply. Then controlling her irritation, she added,—“They’ll be delighted, and so will you, with Dr. Graves’ work. He is the best man in Boston for children’s teeth.”

A withdrawing look had come into his eyes. “It’s very kind of you,” he said gravely, “to offer to have my teeth straightened, but I think my parents would have had it done if they’d thought it necessary.”

“Now, Mark,” she said, smiling, “that’s just silly. Your parents” (she forced the word to her lips) “were probably too busy to properly attend to your teeth. I’m sure they’d be delighted to have it done over here.”

“They’re not nearly so busy as you are,” he answered argumentatively, “and I think they’d rather look after me themselves, thank you.”

She was breathing quickly. She said,—“Don’t let’s go on talking about it, Mark. I’ve made the appointment for ten, Monday. I’ll take you to the office myself and we’ll see just how long the straightening will require. I imagine it can be done in a year, as the teeth aren’t very much out of place.” She smiled cheerfully, though she felt angered by his wrong-headedness and by what seemed to her his rather superior air where the Rendels were concerned.

“I don’t think I want my teeth straightened,” he returned, as though that put an end to the discussion.

“Well, we’ll not argue about it.” She bent and gave him a cool kiss. “I think Dr. Graves will be able to convince you how foolish you are.”

To Robert she said,—“Mark has a will like iron. If I’d had him always with me, he wouldn’t be so stubborn.”

“I guess he wouldn’t,” answered Robert. “But don’t worry. Graves will persuade him and, if he doesn’t, what does it matter? My teeth were never straightened and I’ve got along all right.”

“That’s just plain silly,” she retorted.

Mark had indeed a strong will. Even after the interview with Dr. Graves, he refused to change his mind. Camilla felt almost unnerved as she drove him back to the school. Mark sat beside her, small and detached, looking straight ahead of him.

Camilla did not again refer to the matter. She was charming to him when he came from school at the next week-end, but an element of tenseness had come into their relations. Once or twice she spoke to him with an air of quick authority, as though she looked for opposition from him. Toward the end of June the family went to their summer home on an island in a New Hampshire lake.

Lake Osonaga lay below the foothills of the Adirondacks. The mountain peaks rose dark-blue in the distance. Dense woods crowded the shores of the lake, which were indented with many little bays where the pines cast their shadows on the peaceful water. The island where the Wylde lived had once been farmland though part of it was wooded. They shared the island with another family but they owned the greater part and lived in the old white farmhouse. Their neighbours, the Greenes, had built themselves a picturesque log-house on the very edge of the lake. The two families were close friends and the young people had been brought up in a pleasant intimacy. Both families were watching with approval the progress of the friendship between Janet and young Gideon Greene. He was an undergraduate at Harvard and his sisters were lively girls of twelve and fifteen.

The first morning that Mark woke in the New England farmhouse he lay dazed for a space, not able to collect his thoughts. Where was he now? He had had many changes but this seemed the most stupendous to him. This place was so different from all other places he knew. Now indeed he felt

himself in a new world. It was very early morning. He could tell by the ruddy sunlight. He lay still and looked about the room.

It was small, the walls were of pine and here and there knots made curious shapes in the boards. There was the pleasant, keen scent of the wood. A hooked mat, in the design of a sailing ship, lay by the bed. A patchwork quilt lay folded at the foot. The house was very still but the song of birds came through the window. Through it he could see barn-swallows darting across the limpid blue of the sky. He thought he would start out, all by himself, and explore.

He pulled on his trousers and jersey and threw his bathing-trunks and bath-towel over his shoulder. In the passage he could hear Robert steadily snoring. He liked Robert and he felt sorry for him because he had to go back to the town tomorrow. Robert had not nearly such a good time, he thought, as his own father had. The stairs creaked horribly, but at last he was out in the open. He drew a deep breath of happiness.

Behind the house stretched a large field surrounded on three sides by the woods. The grass was tall and starred by little blue flowers and bright-faced daisies. The field sloped steeply down to the lake, glimpsed between the trees, and a narrow path led to it from the door. He ran down the path, feeling the tickle of the grasses against his bare ankles.

The woods were deliciously cool, the path slippery with pine needles. He trotted where it led, the tranquil lake to his left, the great pines to his right. There had been a hurricane the year before and many of the tallest trees had been blown down. Some had fallen across the path. He clambered over them or crept under. One was a grand silver birch and he stopped to stroke the satin smoothness of its bark. He peeled off a little. He would make something out of the bark later on and send it home to his mother for a present. How kind she had been to agree to his coming out here! He realized that it had been a hard pull for her.

Half a mile along the path he discovered a little point and a sandy cove. On the sand were lying two canoes and a skiff, all ready for use. He had never been in a canoe but now he would learn to paddle. He would make Humphrey green with envy. He got into his trunks and ran out across the ripple of sand into the lake. He plunged and swam.

He swam again, later in the day, when all the family went in. He felt he never could stay too long in this temperate water. He romped with Janet and Honey-Lou, who swam as well as he did. Robert promised him they would go fishing that evening. Camilla joined them a little later. She looked

beautiful in her bathing-dress, Mark thought. She could dive and swim like a boy. She did her utmost in front of Mark. She wanted him to be proud of her.

When, in the evening, they went in a body to their neighbours she had a little possessive air toward Mark. She kept him near her and encouraged him to join in the talk. Mrs. Greene said she thought the experiment with the two boys would be splendid for them, but she wondered how Camilla had the strength of mind to leave Palmer so far away for a whole year, especially in such times as these. Camilla, feeling a certain criticism in her friend's tone, went into careful details of her visit to the Rendels, of their way of living and of the care Palmer would have. As for war, it had been threatening for so long without coming, surely they could count on another year of peace and, if it did come, Palmer would be safe in the English countryside till he was sent for. She refused to think of war. Indeed Camilla took it as an almost personal affront that Europe, where she went every spring, should be threatened.

Mark had never seen a house like the Greens', and it seemed to him quite perfect for a summer's pleasure. Round the large living-room ran a gallery from which the bedrooms opened. It produced a jolly, communal atmosphere, he thought. He liked the deep verandah, the white-coated Filipino who circulated iced ginger-ale and Coca-Cola throughout the evening. He liked the Greene family, with the one exception of Gideon Greene.

He did not very much like him on that first evening. Soon he felt active dislike. Young Greene owned a fast motor launch and it was his chief occupation to race up and down the lake in it. Timid canoeists and fishermen were terrified of him. Robert, as a fisherman, disliked the launch, and though he realized that Janet was going to make a good match for herself, he felt no real warmth toward his future son-in-law. The two had become engaged soon after the reunion at Lake Osonaga.

There was nothing Mark enjoyed more than tearing about the lake in the speed-boat with the other young people. There was a recklessness, a devil-may-careness which was a new element in life to him. He had been brought up to a rigid consideration of the rights of others. Now he experienced the pleasure of ruthless high speed. They sang and shouted as they ripped the waves apart. Their thin summer garments fluttered against their sides.

Young Greene soon discovered that Mark was sensitive and that he could easily be annoyed. It amused him to get Mark in a temper that would send the three younger girls into delighted giggles. Janet was always on

Mark's side and, for some reason, that spurred Greene on. He resented Mark and often compared him unfavourably with Palmer.

"He's so high-hat," he would say, when Janet stood up for Mark, "and aissy. He's so goddam British that you only have to look at the back of his neck to hear the band playing 'Rule, Britannia.'"

Week after week there was perfect weather. The woods, the lake, the distant mountains, all day long received the blessing of the sun and, at night, the enchantment of the moon. Flowers turned to berries, grass to grain, fledglings to winging birds, Mark's pink-and-whiteness to Indian brown.

Every week the news grew worse. The name of Poland became the threat of disaster.

"You can bet your bottom dollar," Gideon Greene said to Mark, "that we're going to keep out of this war. So don't you go asking us to fight your battles for you."

"We don't want you," returned Mark hotly. "England and France can lick Germany without your help."

"Then why didn't you do it in the last war?" asked Gideon, smiling.

"If you're going to start that," said Janet, "I'll jump overboard."

"Mark would jump in and save you," laughed Gideon, "without my help. Just the way England's going to save Democracy without our help."

"You said yesterday," answered Mark, turning pale, "that Democracy had nothing to do with it."

"Neither it has! it's going to be a war for power—nothing else. If England wants to get into it, let her get out of it! She needn't expect us to foot the bill." His smile had died. There was a savage note in his voice.

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" cried Janet.

"Oh, for crying out loud!" shouted Gideon, laughing again.

They had been loitering in a water-lilied bay. Now he let out the speed and the launch bounded into the open. Mark sat white and rigid. As Janet and he went up the path to the house he said:

"I shall never go out in that boat again, Jan."

"You mustn't mind Gid. They're all like that at Harvard. He'll get over it."

“I wish you weren’t engaged to him, Jan.”

Janet laughed and, walking behind Mark on the narrow path, propelled him gently forward by her hands laid on his shoulders. She said:

“Some day you and Gid will be the best of friends. You’ve got to be, for my sake, because I’m so fond of you both, though he is a big silly and you’re a little silly.”

Gideon himself tried a few days later to make friends with Mark.

“Come on out in my boat,” he said. “Let’s kiss and make up.”

Mark turned a rigid face on him. “I’ll see you in hell,” he said, “before I go out in your boat again.” He ran off into the woods.

In those days he hung for news over the radio which stood in the living-room. Camilla hated to see him wasting the good hours of sunshine and fresh air, when he should have been carefree and happy, in this tense expectancy of war news. She said:

“Mark, dear, I can’t have you humped up before the radio like this. It’s perfectly lovely outdoors. Do run along and leave worrying to us grown-ups.”

“I’m not worrying.”

“Yes you are. I wish you could see the lines in your forehead. You look like a little old man.” She laid her cool hand on his brow.

He drew away and a stubborn look came into his eyes. “I get plenty of exercise,” he said. “I came in just a little while ago.”

“It’s much longer than you think. I am afraid I must insist. I noticed how little breakfast you ate.”

“I had too much ice-cream last night.”

“Nonsense.” She smiled but she put her hand in front of him and turned off the radio. “It’s suffocating in here. Run off and find the girls. They want your opinion about a butterfly they’ve caught.”

He rose and she noticed how much taller and thinner he had got during the summer.

“Won’t you have a glass of milk before going out, dear?” she asked.

“No, thank you. I hate milk.”

“Why, Mark, you said only the other day you’d never tasted such good milk in your life!”

“I know, but I hate it.”

“I think you’re being just a little perverse. It’s annoying, I know, not to be allowed to do exactly as you want to, but I didn’t expect you to be quite so unreasonable.”

He looked at her without speaking.

“I’m quite willing,” she said, “to let you listen to a certain amount of radio news, but I must put a limit on it. I do think I’m being reasonable, don’t you?”

“Quite. Thank you.” He gave a stiff little bow and left her.

Camilla pressed her fingers to her temples. “He has the power of exhausting me,” she thought. “He is so hard. And you just can’t convince him he’s ever wrong. He has a will like iron.”

In the next two days she did not once find Mark at the radio. He seemed to be keeping out of her way. Then Honey-Lou said, as though inconsequently:

“Mark goes over to the Hamills’ to listen to their radio. He likes it over there. They’re kind, he says.”

The Hamills had the little post-office on the nearby mainland.

“How does he go there?”

“He rows across. He stays there a long while. He says the Hamills are kind.”

A tiny pulse began to beat in Camilla’s throat. There was a sensation of trembling in her breast. But she kept her face calm. “Honey-Lou,” she said, “I have a letter to Daddy I want to mail. Let’s paddle over to the post-office now, before the sun gets any hotter.”

“Mark’s there now, I think.” Honey-Lou gave her a shrewd look.

“Is he? It doesn’t matter.”

“Can I buy an Eskimo pie and a cone?”

“If you like.”

They went down the path to the shore. The tall grass of the field was ripened to a swarthy gold. Brown-eyed-susan scattered through it like gipsy

girls wandering. The devil's-paintbrush held up his scarlet warning. Underneath crept the bright leaves of poison-ivy.

"Look out for it!" cried Camilla, and swung Honey-Lou across the danger. "Those bare ankles of yours!"

"I'm not allergic to it," said Honey-Lou, "but Palmer was. Do you remember Palmer?"

"How *can* you ask such a question, Honey-Lou? As though I could forget Palmer."

"I wish Palmer'd come home and Mark'd go back to England. He's not going to get on well here. Gid Greene says so. Mark's snagged him already."

"I am afraid Mark is too critical."

"Mark says the Hamills are kind."

"You have told me that twice already."

"I didn't think you'd heard. You acted like you hadn't heard."

Camilla pushed the canoe. She loved the soft crunch of its keel on the sand. In the fast-filling groove it left, a little frog was squatting.

"Be careful, darling! Don't step on him," she cried.

Honey-Lou, all sleek mahogany-coloured legs and arms, scrambled into the canoe. Camilla put a paddle into her hands. They glided out on the blueness of the lake. Today the feel of fall was in the air. A haze dimmed the far-off mountain peaks. The foliage on the nearby islands showed here and there a maple, reddening from gold. Fallen leaves were blown on their fateful journey across the lake. One had as its passenger a lonely caterpillar. Summer was over, thought Camilla, and how strange a summer! And disappointing. At this moment she felt less near to Mark than she had at its beginning. Yet she felt the chill intimacy that anger brings. Oh, why had fate done this thing to her—taken away her child for thirteen years, then returned him, but only half-returned him, set in a strange mould! And she dare not tell him who he was.

They walked up the hot sandy path to the post-office. They could hear a man's voice talking loudly over the radio. They paused by an open window and saw Mark sitting by the radio, his hands on the arms of the chair. Mrs. Hamill was bent over by the stove, taking a pan of cookies out of the oven. It must be insufferably hot in there.



Honey-Lou jumped up and down, peeping into the window. She began to giggle.

“Come,” said Camilla, and led the way into the post-office.

Mrs. Hamill handed out the bundle of letters and newspapers. She raised her voice above the voice of the radio.

“Things look awful bad,” she said. “Your little English boy’s here listening in. He seems to like to come to my place. He’s welcome. I guess he’s sort of lonesome for home since all the trouble began.”

“He’s a great deal better off where he is,” answered Camilla coldly.

“Well, what about your own boy? Are you goin’ to leave him over there if war comes?”

“Not for a moment after there is any danger. Mr. Wylde and I are convinced that he will be perfectly safe. If there is fighting, it will be on the Continent.”

“The English boy says he wishes he was back home.”

Camilla fixed the stamp to her letter and dropped it into the box without speaking, but she was deeply angry. To think that Mark would tell these Hamills he wished he was back in England! To think that he had no affection or gratitude in return for the care she had poured on him!

When he returned to the farmhouse she was alone on the verandah with a book. She looked across it at him coming up the steps. His face was troubled and beads of sweat stood on his forehead. She exclaimed:

“How could you treat me so, Mark! You know very well that, if you simply *must* listen to the radio continually, I’d a thousand times sooner you did it here than in that kitchen of Hamill’s? It’s certainly humiliating for me to go to the post-office and find you there and then have Mrs. Hamill behave as though she were the only friend you have.”

He stood looking down at his shoes without speaking for a space. They were canvas shoes and there was a small hole in one, through which his bare toe peeped in a ridiculous and innocent way. Then he said slowly:

“I knew you didn’t like to hear the wireless very much, so I went to the Hamills’ because they don’t mind. They’re very kind.”

She fixed her eyes compellingly on his.

“Am I so unkind then? You seem to spend a good deal of your time repeating how kind the Hamills are.”

A quiver passed over his face, but he returned her gaze steadily. “I didn’t mean that. Of course you’ve been very kind. But I expected you would. I didn’t expect the Hamills to be so kind to a foreigner.”

“You’re not a foreigner, Mark! We don’t think of English people as foreigners. We speak the same language. We have very much the same way of life.”

“I feel like a foreigner.”

“But why should you?” she cried in exasperation and hurt. “If you knew how cruel you are being! You make me feel that I have utterly failed in making you one of us. What is the matter? What have I done? You weren’t like this a little while ago.” His eyes were wet with tears.

“I expect it’s the war.”

“There is no war—yet.”

“There will be.” He could see that it was in her mind to come to him, to take him in her arms. He turned quickly and ran down the steps of the verandah and across the field.

Two days later war was declared.

## CHAPTER X

MARK liked the school to which he returned at the beginning of the term. The boys were friendly, the masters interested in him. He threw himself into his studies and games. He was good at football. He watched the mails eagerly for an answer to the letter he had written to Captain Rendel. He had written:

“DEAR FATHER,

I am writing to say that I think I should go home now instead of waiting till spring. I think you will agree that I ought to go now there is war. You know I am not just a child now. I shall be fourteen in a few weeks. I think my place is at home. It has been a great experience for me to live in America, but I do want to go home now. I hope you will agree that I ought to go home.

Lots of love to Mummie and Nanny,

Your loving son,  
MARK.”

About the time this arrived in England the Wyldes had a letter from Palmer. He wrote:

“DEAR MOM AND DAD,

I guess you’ve heard there’s a war on. Anything you don’t know about it over there I’ll tell you. I guess it’s going to be a big one. Captain Rendel thinks I’ll be perfectly safe here till my time is up. Then I’ll come home with bells on, you can bet. You can depend on me. I’ll send you the right news. Don’t believe everything the papers say.

Love to all the folks at home,  
PALMER.

P.S.—I guess you’d die laughing if you could see me in my Eton pants and coat and high hat. I’d make a dog laugh.”

Captain Rendel's reply to Mark's letter was disappointing. There was no reason, he wrote, why the period of Mark's stay in America should be shortened. He appreciated Mark's feelings but he thought it would be foolish to disarrange the plans which had been so carefully made. He had enough on his mind without the addition of any new arrangements.

The letter was disappointing but not so much so as it would have been a few weeks earlier. Mark was swept along by the activities of the school. He resigned himself to wait cheerfully for the time when he could return to England. He was growing fast. The clothes he had brought with him were becoming short in the leg and arm. Fortunately, the tailor had made them with deep hems. As his body developed his mind became subject to moods of depression that sometimes reached the border of fear. These were mostly at night, when he would wake from troubling dreams. These dreams were not of war but they were full of vague and tormenting shapes. They were chaotic. He could have found no words for describing them.

In October the *Royal Oak* was sunk at Scapa Flow. An uncle of Mark's, his mother's brother, was among the officers lost. He was a young man of thirty and Mark's favourite uncle. Camilla thought the boy showed more sorrow in this loss than was natural for one so young. And, after it, his dreams became even more troubling. He would get up in the night and sit by the open window of his cubicle, till the cold air chilled and calmed him.

He shrank from the week-end in Boston because Gideon Greene was almost always there. He would escape by taking Honey-Lou to the cinema. But at the dinner-table he had to listen to Greene's talk and he was always talking. He had written an article for a magazine on the attitude of the Harvard Undergraduate to the war, and the praise or blame he had had for that was the subject of many monologues on his part. Camilla and Janet were proud of Gideon's leap into public notice. Robert bore with him patiently, but Mark felt for him a helpless hatred.

He suffered from what, to him, was the overheating of school and home. He would run down the steep slippery streets of Beacon Hill to the river and stand, facing the raw November wind and the icy water, till he was refreshed. After one of these Sundays he developed a severe cold and was kept in bed for a fortnight. The doctor discovered that he had enlarged tonsils.

Camilla nursed him herself. She even welcomed the illness because it gave her the opportunity to draw nearer to him. His coughing kept her awake and she was in and out of his room several times each night. The

weather had turned bitterly cold. Robert was worried about her but she insisted on caring for Mark without help.

She was rewarded by the look Mark gave her when she came into the room. She was touched, too, by his solicitude for her. Palmer had accepted her ministrations with the unquestioning egoism of childhood, never noticing whether or not she looked tired, but Mark often said,—“You shouldn’t be waiting on me like this. Perhaps you’ll take the cold from me.”

She laughed at the idea. She did take the cold, but she was able to keep up. She would sit by his bed and play games with him and they would cough in turn.

When he was convalescent she said to him:

“Now, Mark, I’ve something nice to propose. How would you like to go to Palm Beach for a couple of weeks? We’d go together and get back the strength we’ve lost. We’d lie on the sand in the sun and watch the waves and have a perfectly lovely time.”

His eyes lighted. “That would be splendid. When can we go?”

“Next week. I have a particular reason for taking you. The doctor says your tonsils must come out and we think you ought to get built up first.”

His expression changed to one of defence.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “but I won’t have my tonsils out. My mother wouldn’t want that done to me.”

That pulse in Camilla’s throat began to throb. She demanded sharply:

“Will you tell me why?”

“She doesn’t believe in the operation. She says they grow again. One of her brothers—the one who went down in the *Royal Oak*—had his tonsils out. And they grew again and were worse than ever. She says she’ll never let that be done to one of her children.”

“What perfect nonsense!”

“That’s what she thinks,” he returned stubbornly. “You can write and ask her.”

Camilla spoke in a reasoning tone,—“That’s an isolated case, Mark. There is not one chance in a thousand it would happen to you.”

“My mother’s tonsils,” he went on, “used to bother her when she was a girl but they quite got over it. She gargled every day with salt and water and

cured them. It will be the same with me, if I can remember to gargle with salt and water. I'm very like my mother."

"Like *her!*" exclaimed Camilla. "Why, Mark, you're not a scrap like her!"

"Oh, I know I don't look like her. But my nature is like hers. The same things make us ill and the same things cure us. She often says so. It's different with Humphrey. He looks like her but his nature is like one of her brothers—the one who is an officer in the *Hood*."

"You're such a sensible boy, Mark," said Camilla gently, "I just can't bear to hear you being plain silly. And it's terribly silly to say that salt and water will cure your tonsils when the best doctor in Boston says they've *got* to come out. He says you'll never have a perfectly well day till they do."

"Does he?" Mark looked interested.

"So do be sensible! Just think—there's no reason for us to go to Palm Beach, if you won't have the operation! It would be a pity not to go to Palm Beach, wouldn't it?"

"I shan't mind."

She fixed her eyes on his. "Do you know what I think? I think you're *afraid!* Afraid of a little operation like that!"

He was unperturbed. He said,—“Yes, I am. And so is my mother. She hates fussing of all sorts. She says there is nothing as good for children as a little wholesome neglect.”

He sat looking at Camilla, his head resting on the back of the chair, his lips parted. She could see the two teeth that needed straightening. She had a feeling of angry impotence. He was her child, yet always Phyllis Rendel stood between them.

"You talk," she said, "of fighting for England. You'd make a poor sort of soldier or sailor if those tonsils aren't removed."

She rose. "I think you are behaving very badly, Mark. I'm disappointed in you." She left the room.

She went downstairs and found Robert taking off his overcoat in the hall. He kissed her and they went into the living-room.

"How's Mark?" he asked.

“I’m in despair with him!” she broke out. “He’s as stubborn as a mule. He refuses to have his tonsils out because his *mother* doesn’t approve of the operation. It’s maddening to have that woman’s opinion continually thrown in my teeth. Oh, why didn’t I get hold of him before he was so set in his ways! How could fate have played such a horrible trick on me! Do you know, Robert, there are moments when I positively hate Mark. Isn’t it horrible? But I just can’t help it. And I believe he hates me too. After all I’ve done to win his love!”

Robert’s quiet voice was steady to her.

“Nonsense, Camilla. Neither of you hates the other. It’s just that you’re not accustomed to open opposition, and Mark resents orders from any but his parents.”

“His *parents!*”

“Yes. Custom is stronger than nature any time. Palmer is more my boy than Mark is. He’s more your boy than Mark is. I never wanted this experiment. In my opinion it’s a failure and the sooner we put an end to it the better pleased I’ll be. I like Mark. I admire him. But I don’t feel near to him.”

“You haven’t the time to study him.”

“Has your study of him helped you?”

She broke out,—“Oh, I wish I could have them both! That would be the perfect solution.”

“I’m afraid that’s impossible. Now about those tonsils. I think I’d better cable Captain Rendel.”

Camilla agreed and the cable was sent off. It was a fortnight before they received a reply. It was:

“Think operation had better be postponed till Mark’s return to England. RENDEL.”

“Just what I expected!” exclaimed Camilla. “And to think he might have had it done here, under the most perfect conditions! It’s nothing short of criminal.”

“He seems perfectly well now.”

“You ought to hear him breathe at night. He sounds all choked up.”

“Well, we can’t do anything about it. Have you decided if you’re going to take him to Florida?”

“I am certainly not. He’ll find my will is as strong as his.”

Mark regained his usual health but did not return to school till after the Christmas holidays. He felt much happier but, when Camilla came into the room, he had a way of slipping out. Christmas in Boston was good fun, he thought. He and Honey-Lou followed the carol-singers through the snowy streets of Beacon Hill, where lighted candles were in all the windows and doors stood open, inviting them to enter and have cake and coffee.

Back at school in January he thought,—“Just a few months more and I shall be leaving for home.” He crossed off each day on a calendar. He read and re-read the letters from England till he knew them almost by heart.



## CHAPTER XI

PALMER was standing in front of a pier-glass in a room conveniently across the passage from his own. He had on his Eton suit and had now adjusted the stiff snow-white collar and neat tie. His black boots were glossy but they were dull as compared with the gloss on his top-hat. He placed it on his smooth fair head at half a dozen angles and at last found one that achieved the very zenith of jauntiness and *savoir faire*. He stared at his reflection in a curious mixture of pride and derision.

He stood immobile for a space, taking in every detail of his outfit. Then he backed away from the pier-glass and returned, as though to greet his own reflection. He raised his hand to the brim of his hat and saluted. He repeated this ceremony, only varying it this time by touching his hat in an off-hand manner. Next time he ceremoniously raised the hat. Next he gave the Nazi salute. Then he bowed deeply with one hand on his stomach.

“Polly voo Francie?” he asked of his reflection.

Finally he tilted the hat over his eyes and thrust his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. He stuck out his jaw.

He adjured his reflection,—“Come on, sling out the dough! You sure look as though you had lots of it.”

Mrs. Maltby came into the room. She began to gather up the many sheets of tissue paper in which his clothes had been wrapped. She said:

“You’re to go downstairs and show yourself. My word, you do look smart! Mind you don’t get a spot on that suit and, when you get to school, don’t go hanging that hat on the floor the way Mr. Clive does.” The look of wonder with which she sometimes regarded him came over her face. “Well, well,” she muttered, “it passes everything.”

Palmer entered the sitting-room with composure, though his colour was a little heightened. He could not believe that he would not be laughed at. But he was given a look of approval by Dick Rendel, who exclaimed at once:

“A jolly good fit! You’ll do, Palmer. But a junior mustn’t wear his hat at that angle. Show him, Clive.”

Clive sprang up and set the hat properly on Palmer's head. He gave his tie a tweak.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"O.K. Will I be seeing you sometimes at Eton?"

Clive looked dubious. "Not very often. But I'll put you on to the ropes. Don't worry."

"Gee, I never worry," said Palmer.

Humphrey came jauntily into the room. He had left his preparatory school and was that day entering Dartmouth College. In his naval uniform he was the pride of Mrs. Maltby's heart. But Phyllis saw him with a stab at her heart, remembering her brother at Humphrey's age. She sat, her long legs extended, smoking a cigarette. There was a remote look in her eyes.

"Look at Palmer!" exclaimed Humphrey jocularly.

"What's the matter with me?" asked Palmer truculently.

"Everything. Who'd want to go to Eton?"

"Don't be a little ass," said Clive. Dick regarded the three tolerantly. Turning to Phyllis he said,— "A pretty good-looking trio, eh?"

Through the smoke of her cigarette she gave him a glance that had something faintly hostile in it. During the past months he had been conscious of her withdrawing from him. He knew the reason for it. But what else could he have done? he often asked himself. He could scarcely have refused to take his part in the experiment. It had been right and just that Mark and Palmer should see something of the parents who had given them birth, that those parents should establish some sort of bond with them. Phyllis certainly had not done her share in making Palmer one of the family. On the contrary, she had somehow withdrawn from Clive and Humphrey. She was less affectionate in her manner, as though she felt resentment toward them all for Palmer's intrusion into their midst. When Mark's letters came she would read them without comment, fold them up and put them away. She never showed Dick the letters she wrote to Mark. Always she had wanted a life without complications. She came of a family of loyal but tempered affections and a tradition of duty. Now she faced undreamed-of complications and could not tell where her duty lay. The loyal strain in her clung stubbornly to Mark.

Palmer was infinitely happier at Eton than he had been at Mr. Cutler's. For one thing, he was not nearly so hard-worked. He felt no gratitude to Mr.

Cutler for the way he had slaved over him, just a bounding relief to be away from that house, away from the sight of Ames.

He liked his little room beneath the sloping roof that almost touched the floor, the great beam that cut it in half. He was fortunate in being in the house of a master of good private means so that the boys were well fed. But Palmer found the hours of meals trying. Sometimes he got indigestion. The distance between breakfast and the two o'clock lunch was too great, the buns offered at eleven not to his taste. He would fill up on the various things that attracted him in the shops. He could be seen trotting into Baldwin's End carrying paper bags and up to his room where the feast was laid. Camilla never wrote to him without enclosing an order for a small sum of money. Other boys discovered his affluence and he found himself popular. His vocabulary too was an asset. Even Ellis-Carter, the boy he fagged for, was interested in it and began a dictionary of Americanisms which he hoped to find useful later on when he went into the Diplomatic Service.

But the only real friend Palmer made was a boy named Tramerter. He was a thin, high-spirited boy who was constantly in trouble. But punishment had no effect on him. He was heir to a title but not much else, yet somehow he always got on. He and Palmer would sit in the refreshment-room of The Cockpit or Tull's, eating Banana Mess in large quantities and making plans for illicit activities. Tramerter had a passion for dormice and white rats, which he kept hidden in his room in nests varying from an old top-hat to a corner in his chest of drawers. He and Palmer took them for walks, in their pockets. They burnt incense and sprinkled cologne in Tramerter's room to kill their odour.

Camilla had striven to make Palmer fastidious in his habits but now he threw his belongings about as he chose. It would have been hard to say which room, his or Tramerter's, was untidiest. Their drawers stood half open, vomiting out their underwear. Their trousers lay on the floor just where they had slipped out of them. Their top-hats were flung into a corner.

Camilla wrote careful letters to Palmer about the history of Eton. She directed him to see certain places in the ancient buildings and to write his impressions of them. This was a great fag for Palmer but he obediently did what he could about it. He even found where Shelley's name was carved and reported to her that he had been much impressed by it. He wandered, a small slim figure, among the pillared antiquities of the past. He stared up, in wonder, at the youthful figure of Henry the Sixth, Eton's founder, who, sceptre in hand, showed his fine robes and aquiline profile against the autumn sky. On Sunday morning he would crowd with other small boys into

the Chapel and, when the service was over, select his hat from the hundreds piled in the ante-chapel and hasten with Tramerter past its buttresses across the dim street that smelt of fallen leaves, to their tea.

Palmer saw little of Clive after the first fortnight, when Clive did his best to warn him of the things he must and must not do. So much freedom, combined with so many incomprehensible rules and customs! Sometimes Palmer was confused but he doggedly did his best to understand. Many of the rules Clive could not explain the reason for. They had been made so long ago that no one remembered their origin.

He learned that on only one side of the street was it permissible for him to walk, that he must not turn down the collar of his greatcoat or roll his umbrella, or be seen eating the smallest sweet in the street. He never tired of exploring the old streets. He was glad when Ellis-Carter sent him on an errand to Windsor. He liked the great bulk of the Castle, rising on its hill, sentries guarding its gates.

Tramerter was frequently caned, for various good reasons. Though he groaned a good deal when he got back to his room, he did not really much mind. In truth, he despised the Upper boy who gave him a light caning.

“The beating Pierce gave me,” he explained, “was so absolutely piffling that he himself was ashamed and came to me afterward and apologized for it.”

Palmer had several narrow escapes, then a day came when he was discovered to be ringleader in a minor but noisy disturbance.

“You’ll get tanned, as sure as your name is Wylde!” said Tramerter, in sympathy mingled with pleasure that Palmer’s turn had come.

Palmer was no coward but the formality of the Eton system intimidated him. All day he felt a sinking in the stomach. What he dreaded happened. The Library fag—a plump, smug little fellow—tapped on the door. Palmer opened it tremblingly. Yes, he was summoned! His hour had struck.

“Better put on something extra,” said Tramerter.

But Palmer was too excited to take the time. Better hurry and have it over with. On the way downstairs he kept muttering,—“Oh, Mom, I wish I was out of here!” And, outside the door of the Library, he added,—“Hey, Boss, send me a magic carpet or something! I wanta go home.” He stood with his heart thumping, but no magic came to his aid. He went in.

Erskine, the Captain of the House, was waiting. He put a few pointed questions which Palmer answered in a small husky voice. Out of the corner of his eye he saw other members of the Library sitting about reading. Clive was among them but no one took any notice of Palmer. No one looked up when he was condemned and told to go outside and wait.

A draught swept down the passage. A window was open and he could hear the hoarse whistle of a boat on the river. He could hear, too, furniture being moved inside the Library and the swish of a cane as the Captain tested its suppleness. The readers were no longer engrossed but were helping Erskine in the selection. But, when Palmer again entered, their eyes were fixed on their books.

“Shut the door,” ordered Erskine.

Palmer closed it.

“Now bend over. Touch your toes.”

Palmer tried to bend but he suddenly felt old and stiff.

“Lower,” said Erskine.

He managed to touch his toes. Now all eyes were on him. Whew, how it hurt! The cane cut the air. His legs felt rigid as pokers. His buttocks on fire. Now everyone in the room was giving him rapt attention.

“Enough,” said Erskine.

Palmer straightened himself. Again the readers were buried in their books, as though they had seen nothing.

“Good night,” said Erskine politely.

“Good night,” added all the others, looking rather surprised to find Palmer there.

“Good night,” he got out huskily. He ran up the stairs.

Along the passage the doors opened and boys' heads were stuck out. “How many?” they demanded.

Palmer added three to the number of strokes. Tramerter was waiting for him in his room. He had brought all his dormice and his best white rat to comfort him. Palmer cast his troubles behind him.

The term slipped past in hazy autumn sunshine, in early winter fogs. The boys filled sandbags and piled them against the richest of the carvings, heaped them about the statue of Henry the Sixth. The thought that bombs

might be dropped on them filled them with a strange hilarity. Palmer hoped that a bomb or two would drop before he left in the spring. His letters home were filled with war news, for he had the feeling that the news they got in America was not accurate. English idioms began to crop up in his letters.

“Why, he’s getting to be a thorough little Englishman!” Robert exclaimed ruefully. “He doesn’t think we know anything over here.”

Mid-December came with red sunrises and hoar frost on the ancient walls. The river flowed brown between dank russet banks. Sometimes all was hidden in fog. The Carol Service came, with the choir in their crimson cassocks marching into the Chapel. Palmer liked best “The Holly and the Ivy” and “In Dulci Jubilo.” Something stirred in him—he did not know what—making him both sad and joyful. What troubled him was, though he could not have put it into words, that he felt a part of all this—yet for ever an outsider.

The Rendels spent the Christmas holidays with Phyllis’ mother in London. Mrs. Stuart-Grattan had seen little of Palmer and she made up her mind to get better acquainted. She said to her daughter:

“I don’t think you are taking a proper interest in the child. I think he is a very nice boy, and, when all’s said and done, he’s yours.”

Phyllis interrupted passionately,—“He is not mine, Mother! And never can be. If strangers—foreigners—have had your child till he is thirteen, can he ever be really yours? No, I can’t do any better than I’m doing. What has happened has horribly complicated my life”—she hesitated, then added, in a shaking voice—“and my emotions.”

Her mother took her hand. Their fingers twined together. Each knew the heart-break the other had suffered in the loss of that brave officer who had gone down in the *Royal Oak*.

“Well, well,” said Mrs. Stuart-Grattan, “we must just do the best we can.”

She did her part by having some intimate hours with Palmer. She drew him on to talk. She told him a great deal of the family history and puzzled him more than once by the way she tried to make him feel a share in it. But he liked her. He liked her best of all the family and would seek her out in her own sitting-room, where the tables were covered with silver-framed photographs of children and men in naval uniform. Palmer would put his arm about her shoulder and press his cheek to hers.

Once she said,—“When you go back to America I suppose you’ll forget all this.”

“No,” he answered at once. “I’ll always remember it.”

“I am glad of that. What I’m hoping is that something of England will have got into your bones and that you’ll take it back with you and always keep it.”

“Yes. And I’ll always want to come back and visit.”

“How would you like to stay here for another year?” He gave a little embarrassed laugh, for he was anxious not to hurt her feelings.

“I couldn’t do that,” he said. “It’s a whole-time job being an American these days.”

Dick Rendel took Palmer and Humphrey to pantomimes and children’s plays, still running in spite of the war. But everyone knew that things were going to get much worse. Children were being evacuated from the congested areas of London to the country. In January the rationing of bacon and ham, butter and sugar, came into force. Three submarines were sunk by enemy action. People began to talk of sending their children out to Canada and America for the duration of the war.

The Rendels had a letter from Camilla offering to take Humphrey for that period. He could go out with Palmer. And, of course, Mark would stay on.

At first Phyllis refused, but by spring events were more and more threatening. Dick was absorbed in war work. Clive was leaving Eton to take a course in flying. Both urged her to accept the generous invitation. It would be a relief to all, they said, if the children were safely established in America, where their nerves would be under no strain and where they would certainly have the abundant food needed for growing boys.

“But,” Phyllis exclaimed desperately, “Mark wants so badly to come home. In every letter he begs us to let him come as soon as possible.”

“Does a kid that age know what is good for him?” asked Clive. “Don’t you remember how nervy he used to get in a thunder-storm? And how he hated the sight of blood? I should think you’d be thankful for such an offer.”

Dick added,—“You must remember, too, the danger in his crossing the ocean.”

“You don’t object to exposing Humphrey to that danger,” she retorted.

“Humphrey will be going toward safety,” said Clive. “Mark would be risking his life to come into what is going to be the front line.” He put his arm about her. “Come now, Mummie, it isn’t like you to be so unreasonable.”

After a time they overcame her, but she never really believed they were right. She wrote to Camilla, trying hard to make her letter seem grateful, but she only achieved what, to Camilla, seemed a tone of cold acquiescence.

“Just think,” Camilla said to Robert, “we have offered to take two lively youngsters into our home for goodness knows how many years and this is the best she can do in the way of thanks.”

“I have a feeling she has never liked us,” said Robert.

“It is not a matter of like or dislike. It’s a matter of utter selfishness. She just takes it for granted that we should turn our house into a boarding-school.”

“Well, after all,” said Robert, “one of the boys is Palmer and you were wishing, not long ago, you could have both Mark and Palmer. You said it would solve the whole problem.”

“Do you know, Robert, I often see traits of yours in Mark. And not the pleasantest ones, either. He has your very way of reminding me of what I said ages ago and trying to make me seem selfish and unreasonable.”

Robert reddened. Then, after a pause, he said:

“I sort of think we ought to let Mark go back to England. He badly wants to go. I don’t think he seems very well or happy.”

“He’d be well if he’d have his tonsils out!” she cried. “As for being happy—do you think he’d be happy in a country that’s likely to be bombed to pieces at any moment? You seem to forget that Mark is your very own son.”

“Yes, I do, sometimes,” he admitted.

The arrangements moved forward. A new invitation was added to that already sent. The Greenes, Camilla’s neighbours in New Hampshire, were eager to do their part to help English children. So Camilla suggested that they should take in little Corbold, of whom Palmer had so often written in his letters.

The Rendels held the three boys in readiness. But it was no easy matter to book their sailings. One disappointment followed another. The boys ran



wild over Oakley Manor. May came and Dick Rendel hastened to Italy to bring his mother to England. She was well past seventy. She was nervously exhausted and heart-broken at leaving the villa where she had, for so many years, made her home. The wildness of the boys was a trial to her. They were brimming over with a kind of crazy excitement. Little Corbold was growing used to uprootings and now cared little where he went so long as he was treated well. Humphrey was naturally high-spirited and boisterous. Palmer's year of visiting was over—he was going home! All the rules, the traditions he had absorbed at Eton, fell away from him. He was Palmer Wylde, an American, quite finished with the Old World, buoyant with the thought of return to the New.

It was mid-June before they sailed. Dick and Phyllis motored them to the ship. Clive had suffered an accident in his training and Phyllis' thoughts were with him as she had seen him in hospital the day before. They crowded on to the pier with other parents who were giving up their children for they knew not how long. Perhaps they might never see them again. But the children were too excited to feel sorrow. When it was Phyllis' turn to say good-bye to Palmer, she suddenly drew him close and held him for a short space.

“Good-bye, Palmer,” she said. “You'll come again sometime and perhaps then we'll get better acquainted.”

“Good-bye, Mrs. Rendel,” he answered, “and thanks a lot for all you've done for me.”

“You must look after Humphrey and David,” put in Dick, “and you two younger ones must do as Palmer says.”

There was a jostling, an outward surge, the ringing of a bell. The children moved forward on their pilgrimage.

In those days Camilla worried herself almost ill. She pictured the bombing of the ship, the frantic children struggling in the sea, Palmer's little body sinking down into the deep. She could not sleep and there were dark shadows under her eyes. Robert too was anxious.

But then the joyful news came that the ship would dock in New York that day. The family, with the exception of Robert, were already settled for the summer at Lake Osonaga. It was Robert who was to meet the boys.

He stood watching the approach of the ship bearing its bright burden. Somehow its coming seemed to bring the war extraordinarily close to him. He felt that he might stretch out his hand and touch the bowed shoulders of

the oppressed, look into the eyes of the wounded. Tears filled his own eyes. As he heard the children singing the tears ran down his cheeks. His heart was wrung by a gratitude that was pain, to see the ship safe, majestic, after her peril.

How many children there were—all being marshalled into order by those in charge! He would have a time of it to find Palmer.

Then suddenly he saw the three boys together, Palmer the tallest; how he had grown!

“Hey, Palmer! Hello!” he shouted. He took off his hat and waved it.

Palmer saw him. He pointed out Robert to the other two, but he moved forward in orderly fashion.

“They’ve tamed him,” thought Robert. “A year ago nothing would have held him back.”

Then the curtain of a year ago was swept back and he hugged Palmer to him.

“Hey, Boss——” said Palmer, and clutched Robert in an iron grip.

Robert took the boys back to Boston. The four spent the night in the house on Beacon Hill.

Palmer dogged Robert’s footsteps. Wherever Robert went, there was Palmer! He had little to say. He just stared at Robert in a kind of ecstasy. Then suddenly he would grip him about the middle and all but squeeze the breath out of him.

That night Palmer said,—“Hey, Boss, I’m going to sleep with you!”

“Oh, no, Palmer. I don’t think you’d better do that. You’d rest better in your own bed.”

“Don’t you *want* me to sleep with you?”

“Sure, I want you. But I think you’d sleep better in your own bed.”

“I don’t want to sleep. I want to be with you.”

Robert gave in. Though he had a poor night’s rest he was glad he had done so, for Palmer poured out the intimate story of his life in England. It seemed that he never would want to settle down and sleep.

“Are you glad you did it?” asked Robert.

“You bet. Now it’s over and I’m home again. But, honest, Boss, at the first I thought I was going to die.”

Never had he talked so freely to Robert.

Next day they motored to New Hampshire. Robert took a week’s holiday. The house was full of boys’ voices. Palmer hugged Camilla, Janet and Honey-Lou in turn, then all together. The Greenes came over to claim little Corbold.

“Say!” cried the Greene girls. “Just listen to Palmer’s English accent! It’s so thick you could cut it with a knife!”

“Shucks,” said Palmer, but not ill-pleased, “I don’t sound English at all compared to these guys.”

Camilla looked from him to Mark, her eyes shining. She had a sense of strength and fine purpose. During these years of war she would mould the characters of the two, devote her days to developing them into splendid manhood.

She stretched out her hand and took a hand of each. Their young fingers closed about hers.

## CHAPTER XII

MARK was oddly detached from the scene about him. He was absent-minded and, when he was half-finished doing something, would forget what he was about. Physically he was at Lake Osonaga but his spirit was in England. The evacuation of Dunkirk had swept his young being like a torrent. Relentlessly, giving him no rest, his imagination pictured the terror and grandeur of the scene. At night he dreamed of England beleaguered, vast hordes of enemy soldiers scaling, with dreadful ease, the smoking cliffs. But sometimes he pictured the Cotswolds, peaceful in summer-time. He would see the brook moving secretly between its lush banks; the tiny islands of forget-me-nots that cast the reflection of their blueness on the ripples; the bending willows, their oval leaves fluttered by the breeze so that the white undersides were upturned, making the woods silvery.

He would take Humphrey out in the canoe with him where they could talk, in solitude, of home. When Humphrey had been a week in America, Mark said to him:

“Look here, Humphrey, I want you to write to Daddy and say you think I ought to go home. Tell him how tall I’ve grown and how I don’t feel happy over here.”

“But these people are awfully kind, aren’t they? David says he never was a spoilt boy in his life before. The Greenes give him whatever he wants.”

“That has nothing to do with me,” Mark answered impatiently. His voice rose. “I tell you I’ve *got* to go home! I think you can help me, if you write just what I say. I’ll dictate the letter to you.”

“Why don’t you write yourself?” asked Humphrey argumentatively.

“I have written—and they tell me how much better off and safer I am here! I don’t want to be safe. I want to go home.”

“If they won’t listen to you they’ll never listen to me. If I were you and wanted to go back I’d make Mrs. Wylde tired of having me. I’d make her

glad to be rid of me. I'd tell her I wanted to leave and ask her to write. There'd be some punch to that."

There was sense, Mark thought, in what Humphrey said, but he could not bring himself to the point of being troublesome. Too much kindness had been shown him for that. It would be better, he thought, to tell Camilla frankly that go he must, and persuade her to write to his parents. In the meantime he himself would write once more, try his utmost to bring them to his way of thinking. He wrote:

*"Dear Father,*

I can't tell you how hard it is for me to remain in America when things are going so badly at home. Everyone here says England is bound to be defeated. Of course I don't believe that, but I think we are going to have a terrible struggle for victory. I do want to go home and do something to help. When you see me you will be surprised by how tall and strong I have grown. I could do almost any kind of work. Mummie will know that Humphrey is safe, so that ought to be a comfort to her. I will be no trouble to anyone and I will strain every bit of me to help. *Please* cable me to come. I am very restless and unhappy. *Please* don't refuse.

Your loving son,  
MARK."

The summer wore on while he waited for an answer. However, he felt more tranquil. Even when time passed and no cable came he still was hopeful. His father would write rather than cable, because there would be so much to say, so many directions about his leaving, the booking of his passage. He began to go over his belongings, the things he had collected since coming to America, to sort them over and decide what he would take back with him. He gave what he thought he could not take to the other boys. This generosity made him very popular.

"Just look," exclaimed Palmer to Camilla, "what Mark has given me! His microscope! Isn't it a dandy?"

"Why, I gave him that at Christmas! How could he give it away?"

"He doesn't want it any more. And he's given his kodak and his books to Humph. Gosh, he's generous!"

Camilla went straight to Mark.

“I feel hurt,” she said, “that you should give away my Christmas present. It was a strange thing to do. You seemed delighted with it at the time.”

He flushed deeply. “I was. And I still like it—just as much. But—I think I may be going home and I can’t take a lot of things with me, you know.”

“Oh, Mark,” she said, “how can you be so foolish! You know perfectly well there’s no chance of you going back. It would be a crazy thing to do. You have little idea of what an air raid is like or you would thank God you are safe with us.” She put her arm about him. “Come, do be reasonable! You make me feel I’ve been a complete failure when you behave like this. And I’ve tried—I can’t tell you how I’ve tried—to make you happy.”

“I know. You’ve been very kind. All of you. But my place is in England and—I want to go. I’ve written home to say so.”

She felt that she might break down, lose her self-control. He was her own child and he was standing there telling her that his place was in a foreign country that was to be devastated by war. It was unbearable. She was afraid of what she might say if she remained with him. A dreadful jealousy of his love for Phyllis Rendel made her ill. She turned abruptly away, crossed the meadow and went into the woods.

The day was to be fiercely hot but beneath the pines and hemlocks it was still cool. Tall ferns brushed her knees. Birds fluttered among the branches. It was strange, she reflected, how when Mark made her angry he always brought to mind certain unhappy times she had had with Robert. Such times never occurred now, but she still remembered that antagonistic something in him which, in Mark, was still more pronounced. It was something detached and stubborn as if there were part of him one could not get near. But Robert had mellowed, become gentler with the years. Often she was proud of how well they got on together as compared with other couples of their acquaintance. She took a part of the credit to herself, for she knew that she had learned more self-control and had gained in good humour and tolerance.

She passed through the open space where the hurricane had blown down some of the noblest of the pines. There they lay prone, their jagged stumps already wreathed in ferns and wild climbing plants. A resinous scent filled the air. She never could get used to the sight of the fallen trees. The feeling of hurt was too personal. She felt that she suffered with the pines.

She could hear the creak of rowlocks and, when she reached the shore, she saw Mark in the row-boat pulling steadily in the blazing sun. Of course he was going to the post-office to see if there was a letter for him. She hoped

he would get one that would settle things definitely, make him realize how hopeless any idea of returning to England was. She sat down on a moss-covered rock and waited for his return.

He was not gone long. Once more the creak of rowlocks sounded above the lapping of the little waves. She saw him rounding the point. He turned the boat into the shade quite near her and, shipping the oars, took a letter from his pocket. His back was to her so she could not see his face, but he was still for a space, as motionless as the shadow of a tree on the glassy little bay.

She saw him take his penknife from his pocket and slit open the envelope. She thought how Palmer would have torn it open. As Mark read the letter the current gently moved the boat, turning it so that he faced her. She saw that his face was transfigured by happiness. It was as though a light had flamed within him. That must mean only one thing—that Captain Rendel had written telling him that he might return to England!

Camilla's heart began to beat rapidly. She trembled with anger. How dare he give his permission for Mark to return? Mark was hers and she would not part with him. She would refuse! She would not let him go. She felt a fierce anger against the boy that his face should so light up at the thought of going.

“Mark,” she called out sharply, “Mark!”

His face was bright from that inner glow as he raised it to hers.

“I've had a letter from my father,” he called out. “Shall I come and read it to you?”

“Yes.”

As the boat glided toward her, her feeling of possession in him became almost painful. She would fight the forces that were striving to take him away from her. The time had come, she thought, her eyes fixed on his bright face, to tell him everything. She had known the time would come. She had felt that she was prepared for it. She had a feeling of exaltation. The strain of all this secrecy had been so great. A shoal of tiny minnows were circling at the shore's brink. They darted away as the bow of the boat loomed above them. Mark sprang to the beach and, with a strong deft movement, drew the boat on to the sand. How he had developed in the past year! She watched him, turning over in her mind the words which she was about to disclose, trying to choose the perfect, the most poignant ones.

Mark's teeth were gleaming in his tanned face. He caught her impulsively by the arm and drew her toward the shade of the pines.

"Isn't it splendid?" he said. "I can't tell you how happy I am. It isn't that I don't like this place or—" again he gave a swift pressure on her arm—"or being with you and all the rest of the family. But I'm growing up. I feel that I can be of some use over there and I've been able to make my father feel that too. He says if you and Mr. Wylde are willing——" He broke off with a little laugh, then added,—“But I'll bet you will be glad to be rid of me! I know I have been a young beast sometimes this summer! Shall I read you my father's letter?"

*But, Mark, he isn't your father!* She kept turning the words over in her mind, trying to choose the right ones. She discarded these. They were too abrupt. She mustn't shock him. She must tell him the whole truth, quite simply, very tenderly, holding his hand in hers, so that the glowing love of her motherhood might pass from her body into his. *Mark, I have something to say to you. It all began years ago, on the day you and Palmer were born.* She thought that would be the simple, the perfect beginning of the story. She would throw open her heart to him. Make him understand, as well as she could, what she had been through. She drew him to the fallen silver birch whose trunk stretched, gleaming white, above the pine needles. A red squirrel had darted along its length, leaping, a bright arc of fright, into the undergrowth.

They sat down on the fallen tree and Mark began to stroke its smoothness with his brown hand. A new vitality was surging in him. He could not keep his body still. He swung his legs and she again noticed the shabby canvas shoes, the glimpse of a bare toe. Now was the time to begin. She stretched out her hand and took his.

He gave it a quick, responsive grip. "Isn't it splendid?" he said.

"It hurts one," she returned, in a low voice, "to know you are so happy to leave us."

"Oh, it's not the leaving you!" he exclaimed. "It's the going home that makes one glad! I've loved all this"—he looked about him as though he would imprint the picture of the woods on his memory—"but I want terribly to be where I belong, don't you see?"

Now was the time to tell him. But words that usually came so fluently to Camilla failed her. She could only say:



“I’m glad to think you loved the place . . . the trees . . . but I wish you’d loved me.” It wasn’t a good beginning. She must not embarrass him. She must tell the story simply, in words that would go straight to his heart. Sometimes she thought that his defensive attitude toward her was the result of the bewilderment at the unknown forces within him, drawing him to her.

He looked at her questioningly. “Have you something to tell me?” he said.

She thought she had never seen a face so transfigured. His face had often looked old for his years in the past months. He had worn the expression of a man, experienced and even bitter. Now he looked just a child, tender and transfigured by gladness. His face was like the face of a flower that had been drooping but was now raised toward the sun and the breeze. A feeling of tenderness for him welled in her heart. In truth she had never before felt quite such a sense of tenderness toward any human being as she now felt toward Mark. He seemed suddenly fragile and terribly vulnerable. She thought of him setting out to face the dangers of the sea and later the dangers of the land, and so eager to face them! But nothing that could befall him, on sea or on land, would wound him so cruelly as what she had in her mind to tell him. She saw that, suddenly, and with terrible clarity. He would find himself torn up by the roots—belonging nowhere! She had hoped he would put out new roots here but he had not. He was staunch in his loyalties, as indeed Palmer was in his. She pictured the shock in Palmer’s face if the truth were revealed to him. For the first time in her life she considered a problem with no thought of herself. She seemed absolutely selfless. Yet at that moment both boys seemed a part of her, as though she actually had borne them both. All she wanted was their happiness—to preserve that at any cost to herself. It was what Robert wanted. It was what the Rendels wanted. Only she had had wrong, dark thoughts. Now the way lay clear and bright before her. Neither boy must ever be told the truth. There had been suffering enough because of it. She put a hand on each of his cheeks and kissed him.

“I only want to tell you,” she said, “how happy I am for you.”

Robert saw them coming. Lunch was waiting and he had come out to ring the bell that hung in a small cupola at the back of the house. In former times this bell had been rung to call the farm-hands to their meals. He dropped the rope and the clang of the bell died on the air. The startled barn-swallows that had darted away began to return.

Robert opened the white wicket gate.

“You’re late,” he said, smiling at the two.

“No wonder,” said Camilla. “We have such news!”

Mark looked anxiously up into Robert’s face. “I’ve had a letter from my father,” he said.

“Well, I was wondering. I could see you had good news. What is it?”

“He says I may go home. I had told him, you see, how I feel about it. Do you mind?”

Robert looked at Camilla.

“It’s made Mark very happy,” she said.

Mark said to Robert, “There’s a letter for you, too. I imagine it will explain just what I am to do. He has a friend on a mission to Washington and I think I am to go back with him.”

Again the look of gladness transfigured his face. He looked no more than a child. Robert put an arm about him.

“I’m glad for your sake, Mark,” he said.

The other boys came running out of the house. Mark ran to meet them. “I’m going home!” he called out.

“Back to England?” cried Palmer.

“Yes. Back to England.”

“That’s fine!” said Palmer, and with a sudden manly gesture he gripped Mark’s hand. “I know just how you feel. As though you could turn hand-springs! I felt the same way when my time was up and I was on my way home. Not that I didn’t like it there. Just as you’ve liked it here. But, oh, boy, it’s grand to be home!” He turned suddenly and flung both arms about Camilla. “We’re all happy now. You’ve got me back and pretty soon Mark’s mother will have him!”

“What do you feel about it, Humphrey?” asked Robert.

Humphrey had looked a little subdued at the news but now his face brightened. “It’s all right for Mark to go,” he said, “but I want to stay here for a while. I haven’t seen and done half the things I want to. I’m having a jolly good time.”

Palmer turned again to Mark. “You tell them over there,” he said, “that America will be in it before long. We’ll be fighting side by side. We can lick

the world that way.”

Mark stood looking from one face to another, not able to find words—his gladness shining out of his eyes. Then the three boys dashed across the lawn together.

“Don’t go away!” shouted Robert. “Lunch is waiting. Here come the girls!”

Janet and Honey-Lou were coming up the path from the lake. They had been picking blackberries. The boys ran to tell them the news.

Camilla took Robert’s hand. “Were you surprised at me?” she asked. “I mean—taking this the way I have?”

“Yes—I was very surprised. I thought——” He hesitated.

“I know. You thought I’d be terribly upset and would oppose Mark’s going and make everyone miserable.”

He flushed and gave a little laugh. “Well——”

“And so I was going to. But something happened to me, Robert, when I was alone in the woods with Mark. I saw quite clearly that he belonged to the Rendels—not to us. To England—not to America. They have made him what he is. It would be terribly cruel to uproot him—just as it would be terribly cruel to uproot Palmer. I saw, too, that parenthood can’t be shared. Children are either yours or they aren’t. Sharing them would kill something in them that is their right. It’s their certainty, their confidence in us. Both Mark and Palmer fit absolutely into their places and we mustn’t ever change that. . . . I know you’ve seen it this way all along, Robert. I’ve been slower than you . . . and selfish. I’ve had to feel my way through a lot of things that hurt, but—I’ve done it!”

He felt her hand within his tremble. He saw tears in her eyes. He put his arm about her and drew her to him.

“Camilla,” he said, “I can’t tell you how relieved—how happy I am about this. You’re being splendid——”

“No, I’m not!” she interrupted. “I’m just now accepting the truth. And I am not so unhappy as you may think I am. Not so disappointed, I mean. Well, I couldn’t have both boys, could I? And I have Palmer as my very own. Did you see the look he gave me? Mark could never look at me like that. There’s another thing, Robert. I’ve often felt proud of the way you and I get on together. But lately, deep inside me, there’s been a feeling that I was

losing you. Through my own fault! This morning that feeling is gone. I can't tell why, but it's gone!"

"I hadn't any such feeling," he protested stoutly. "But I was conscious of something between us. I thought I'd just got dull and uninteresting to you. . . . Camilla, I do love you. Everything's going to be all right, isn't it?"

"Everything *is* all right! Look at those boys!"

Palmer and Mark had scrambled to the top of a fern-crowned rock that jutted up from the lawn. They stood there, clasped in a rough embrace, their slender figures silhouetted against the sunny sky. Their faces were lively with the purpose of youth. To Robert and Camilla they suddenly seemed, not two unimportant young boys, but as symbols of the future. Robert said:

"Their sort—the American and the Englishman—will have to build a new world when this war is over. And I must say, they look well fitted for the job."

Janet, Honey-Lou and Humphrey called to them from the verandah:

"We're going to begin lunch! We just can't wait any longer. Do come!"

Robert and Camilla, linked together, went into the house.

"Gosh, I'm starving!" exclaimed Palmer. "Come along, Mark."

But Mark was suddenly grave. He looked out across the fair land and the lake. There welled up in him a love for the place—a feeling of kinship for those who lived there. He would not forget. He would come back when he was a man. Palmer and he would always be friends. He turned his head and his eyes looked into Palmer's. Palmer became grave too. They exchanged a look of affectionate understanding.

## THE END

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## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Two Saplings* by Mazo de la Roche]