Truth to Tell

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ALICE GRANT ROSMAN

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CONTENTS

TRUTH TO TELL

CHAPTER ONE

BOY IN A BEECH WOOD

1

"What is the order of the day?" asked Lorna Lowell at breakfast, looking up from her letters.

If this was a polite hint from the mistress of the house that she wanted her menfolk out of the way, only one of them noticed. Hugh, her husband, said "Um?" and went on reading his newspaper with the inattention to outside matters which he had acquired by long practice.

Young Malcolm Dubenny, however, replied at once:

"I think I'll go off on my bike into the country."

"Will you?" asked Lorna encouragingly. "Oh, but my dear, if it's a picnic I must have notice of it. There is probably nothing in the house."

She had immediately a look of comical dismay, but it meant nothing. She really enjoyed playing Aunt Sally with such household problems as this.

Malcolm interposed at once.

"But it doesn't matter, Aunt Lorna. I can get something on the way."

"I have no doubt of it. And return by ambulance from eating twelve ices after a hot ride. No, you don't, my lad."

"Thirteen," contradicted the boy aloofly. "Where I'm going they sell 'em thirteen for a bob."

"And no doubt throw in the ambulance," remarked the master of the house mildly at this point.

"Now *you* are beginning to harp on ambulances," protested Malcolm.

“Well, why not? They are no stranger than some of the instruments in common use. Be reasonable.”

“If the worst comes to the worst I can give you fruit and hard-boiled eggs,” decided Mrs. Lowell, ignoring these pleasantries, and having finished her breakfast she got up at once to go and look into the matter. It was her nature to behave as though there was not a moment to lose, but she was so good-tempered and so little “on the war-path” in this mood that few people found it offensive.

Hugh, who had reached the end of his leading article, watched her go, exchanging a secret smile with the boy, but at the door she whirled round to inquire:

“Is Tim Field going with you, Malcolm? How many of you are there likely to be?”

“Oh, I don’t know ... but we needn’t bother about grub for them,” expostulated Malcolm.

“I should think not indeed,” said Hugh. “What do you think we are—universal providers?”

“No, darling, of course not, but we can’t be niggardly, after all. The pensioner must have his money’s worth.”

A laugh followed her, perfunctory however, for the family joke was an old one, and to Malcolm this morning it was even painful for secret reasons of his own.

He had been dreaming of Sue again.

He could not speak of the dream to any one because he was ashamed of it, believing it a childish habit which he should have long outgrown. And he knew that it was the dream which had prompted him to the expedition into the country, although he had had no idea of going anywhere until Lorna had looked up from her letters with her “What shall I do with Malcolm?” look. The boy knew it well, knew indeed all her looks from long experience, but it was only at such moments as this that his awareness of her, from being instinctive, became conscious and distressing, reminding him of things he was happier to forget.

He was the orphaned son of Hugh’s half-brother, and for nine years the Lowells had been all his family.

And yet not really all. That was the trouble, which out of a clear sky, as it were, could suddenly invade his dreams.

On this September day of 1927 he was just fifteen, a fair-haired youngster of five feet nine, immature and awkward, and with a boy's voice still, inclined to be lordly as became his years, yet with a promise of quality in his wide-set gray eyes and firm chin.

"You are mighty energetic for such a hot day," observed Hugh as his wife departed. "What is the idea? Hasn't your sunburn reached the fashionable shade after all?"

"It's three degrees better than yours anyway," retorted Malcolm with a grin, surveying his hands.

His relations with Hugh were excellent and comfortable and this reminder of the month on the French coast, from which they had recently returned, lifted his spirits a little. For years past it had been an annual event, the favorable rate of exchange making it a far better holiday than the Lowells could have otherwise afforded. Malcolm reveled in it always, swam, lay on the hot beaches, or, while the elders played golf, explored the countryside with chance acquaintances of his own generation. By this time he spoke and read French fluently, though his accent became more and more ostentatiously British, and he had acquired this useful asset so unconsciously that it did not occur to him that more than economy might have moved his uncle and aunt when the holidays were planned.

This was fortunate. He would have resisted like any other normal boy that adult form of combining business with pleasure, and imparting useful knowledge by means of low cunning.

His knowledge of French had helped him to win a scholarship to a public school, which was pretty lucky, he considered, unaware that several other circumstances had been always in his favor. The Lowells had seen to that.

"You'll get a bumper lunch, you know," remarked Hugh to the boy. "That always happens when there is 'nothing in the house,' have you noticed? Her blood is up."

"I could have got something on the way though," persisted Malcolm. "They don't sell ices in the villages either."

"That was hyperbole, old chap. And anyway, think of the saving in pocket-money. You'll need it when term begins unless school menus have changed. Ever fry sausages over a gas-jet? But of course, you don't have gas-jets nowadays ... that's a pity. Sausages and sardines eaten together. Marvelous!"

Hugh rose from these reminiscences, folding his newspaper, and Malcolm went out to look over his bicycle, where in due course Lorna found him, the bumper lunch having been evolved.

"Got any money?" she asked.

"Oh yes, thanks. I have a shilling or so," said Malcolm, in the tone of one who considered these inquiries indelicate.

"One and a penny-halfpenny, I suppose. I know you." Lorna gave him a treasury note in a brisk and business-like manner. "Stow that away carefully in case of need," she said.

"But of course I shan't need it."

"I should hope not indeed, because I shall want it back to-night, but you can't go wandering about the world without any money on you. Come along now. It's a form of insurance, donkey."

"*Superstitious!*" exclaimed the boy with scorn, yet as he took the note and she turned back to the house, there swept over him a wave of regret because he was grateful and had not as usual been able to show it.

She thought of everything, and the treasury note in his inner pocket would give him a sense of grandeur and security all day, but these were not things he could possibly acknowledge or explain to an aunt, or indeed to any one.

2

Mrs. Lowell, having thus crippled her own finances for the day, found it necessary to borrow from Hugh.

"Just till to-night, darling," she explained. "I have given my last pound to Malcolm."

"Given him a pound, woman? Are you mad or suddenly rich? People never bestowed large sums on me at that age, I can tell you. The boy will be ruined by your extravagant notions, or my pocket will, which is much more important. There are other boys to be had but only one bank balance. You really must curb these lavish impulses."

"It is only a loan and he'll return it to-night. He can't go off on these expeditions without money in his pocket."

"I wonder you are not afraid he'll melt in the sun," retorted her husband, but his banter was half serious. "Didn't you hear his gibe about ambulances?

Malcolm is getting to the age when they don't like to be fussed, Lorna."

"I don't fuss," she denied indignantly. "I don't even beg him to be careful of the traffic any more. You can't worry them with your fears, it's so unfair."

But for the first time she looked a little doubtful: "Surely I don't seem to fuss?" she pleaded.

"It was a warning, not a reproach," he assured her. "As an amateur parent you are without compare."

"Parent indeed!" She denied the word heartily. To mother Malcolm was the last thing she had ever attempted or dared to attempt, and she knew the impossibility of making Hugh understand what was in her mind—that perpetual instinct to give the boy, as far as it was humanly possible to do, all that he might have had. Hugh would have thought it not merely a preposterous ambition but sheer folly.

"It isn't really so much in case of accident," she said. "It is good for his morale to have money with him...."

Hugh laughed and took out his wallet, making nothing whatever of this halting explanation. His was an orderly mind, but Lorna's impulses, her mysterious generosities and indignations, while they might puzzle him and seem inconsequent, gave color to his life and warmth to his heart.

"Well, if it pleases you, that's all right," he said. "Still I'm thankful he's not twins."

"There might have been two of them on your shoulders though," she thought, as she watched him go off, "but for me." Whether this was self-congratulation or self-reproach she could not have said. She envied Hugh his calm, his certainty about the things to be done, his acceptance of life as it came, yet sometimes these qualities seemed to her mere insensibility and she wanted to shake him.

Theirs had been a war-marriage, a term much used to excuse the natural vagaries of human nature, but Lorna, downright to a fault, had little patience with catch terms and none whatever with excuses. Hugh had been in the army and she a V.A.D., both had been solitary and without immediate family. They had married like thousands more after an acquaintance of weeks, and for two years had snatched what happiness they could together as leave permitted. But when the end of the conflict came, and Hugh returned from the eastern front early in 1919, it had not been to the life alone

together which they confidently planned, for there had been the child Malcolm.

Lorna, happening to be on the spot and unable to get into touch with Hugh—not indeed even knowing his whereabouts, in the confusion of those first months after the Armistice—had taken over the responsibility for the little boy doubly orphaned by the influenza epidemic then sweeping the country. There had been simply nothing else to be done, and Hugh, of course, had upheld the arrangement; but she could not rid herself of the belief that, had he been there, he might have managed the situation better—above all the negotiations with the Somervilles. They were Malcolm's grandparents and had taken the baby sister Susan, but coldly and unpleasantly repudiated the boy.

Lorna had met Paul Dubenny only once when the two half-brothers chanced to be on leave at the same time, but had heard of him from Hugh, who was much attached to him and had, she suspected, helped him financially up to the time of his own marriage. Paul was the younger by ten years, a light-hearted young man who, in Hugh's phrase, had married expensively some years before the war. Isabel Somerville belonged to a county family, had defied them—at all events quarreled with them—and been cut off in the traditional manner. Outmoded as the phrase had become in these post-war years, the fact to Lorna had seemed unbelievable even in 1918. She had supposed it a case of temper and misunderstanding on both sides, never doubting that the Somervilles, softened by their daughter's death, would be eager to take the children.

Had she been an impulsive and blundering fool to communicate with the Somervilles at all? In despondent moments Lorna was sure of it, at others saw herself more justly as the instrument of inscrutable chance.

She had long ceased to voice these doubts to Hugh. He had assured her that she had been wonderful, but how could he have said less? she sometimes asked herself. They had been lovers reunited after long separation, with all their readjustments and discoveries about each other still to be made. It was Hugh in reality who had been wonderful, taking on this unexpected burden without complaint and being quite naturally a father to Paul's son. Those two were friends. Lorna, too generous to be jealous of their affection, yet knew wistfully that Hugh had had one supreme advantage. He had never had to stand accused as she had done before the child whose sister had been taken from him.

Though she had thought it a pity that the children should be separated, hardships were too common to the time, and her own dilemma and inexperience too great for her to have had any hesitation in handing over the baby girl when the Somervilles agreed to take her, and she had been utterly unprepared for Malcolm's frantic and incredulous grief. He had taken the death of his parents with interest and curiosity. They were killed, he agreed, having evidently been long prepared for this possibility as far as his father at least was concerned, but Sue had not been killed and he wanted her back. He had acquired perhaps during the illness of his parents, if not long before, a sense of responsibility for the two-year-old Sue; and though Lorna had promised him in all good faith that he would see his little sister frequently, here again she had been destined to fail him. When, soon after Hugh's return, they approached the Somervilles to this end, they were curtly informed that a meeting between the children was quite out of the question, and that any further communication from her late son-in-law's family would be handed by Mrs. Somerville to her solicitors.

It had been an empty threat. The Lowells had not the means to fight the powerful Somervilles, even had their inclinations lain in that direction. Hugh had dismissed the whole matter contemptuously, but it had not been so simple for Lorna and, womanlike, she could despise the Somerville arrogance while regretting the loss to Malcolm of the greater advantages his grandparents could have given him.

Standing at the window this September morning watching Hugh out of sight, she awoke to the fact that she had been living over these old confusions again—the train of thought started by his reference to twins; and she sighed. This was all quite absurd. Malcolm was growing up as normal and as full of devilry as the next boy, coming home at the end of each term to make pandemonium in the house, and leaving a strange blank when he went back to school again. He had long since ceased to speak of Sue, and in all probability he never even thought of her now.

3

Malcolm, somewhat later that morning, lifted his bicycle out of the train at a country railway station and set off in the direction of Crofter's End.

Though it was true that he never now spoke of his young sister and though he would have been deeply embarrassed by any reminder of his grief for her at the age of six, he had acquired, in the secret, half-accidental manner of children, certain information of the grandparents who had taken her from him, and stored it away in his mind.

Family quarrel or no—his uncle had made the best of the Somervilles for the boy's own peace of mind in explaining why he could not hope to see Sue again until they were both grown up,—his sense of justice was outraged and he was doggedly determined to get even with them one of these days.

The form of this revenge took on various guises, colored inevitably by the literature he favored with advancing years, but the underlying fact remained and was actually driving him on this summer morning once more into the neighborhood of the enemy. He had made the expedition before secretly and taking care to include in the day's outing some point of the compass which he could mention if questions were asked. He was not afraid that his uncle and aunt would forbid him to go to Crofter's End, but they would try to dissuade him and he was not going to be dissuaded.

If you are measuring yourself against an enemy it is as well to know his proportions. Malcolm would not have put it like that, but obscurely he had felt impelled to see the beastly place somehow or other.

When at last he had actually managed to put this plan into execution, after much scheming and careful study of maps and timetables at the Free Library, he had felt himself the master of the world and quite bold enough to ride up to his grandparents' front door and demand his sister.

That would show them.

But the front door of Crofter's End was not visible to the eye of chance strangers cycling along the road, nor even approached by gates obligingly announcing the name, as Malcolm had vaguely imagined it. In aloof and depressing grandeur the house was withdrawn among lawns and gardens so large that the boy had passed the lodge gates without a glimpse of it, and supposed he had mistaken the road.

Feeling thirsty he had stopped in the little twisting street to buy a lemonade and had inquired:

"What village is this?"

"Crofter's End," had been the reply.

"But I thought that was a house," blurted young Malcolm, taken aback.

"Yes, Mr. Somerville's place. You must have passed it." The woman had looked curiously at the fair-haired lad and come round the counter to the door. "That's the lodge," she had said, pointing; "you going there?"

"Oh no," denied Malcolm, flushing. He did not realize that merely his speech and manner had suggested such a possibility, and hastily paying for

his drink he had ridden off, feeling himself a marked man.

Not daring to slacken pace as he reached the gates beside the lodge for fear of watching eyes, he had sped on to the turn of the road and dismounted again, hesitating what to do next. It was thus that he had discovered the wood running flush with the Somervilles' grounds and an open gate inviting him in.

To Malcolm this morning that earlier self seemed a precious young ass, whose only virtue had been to spot the wood and explore it. He no longer felt himself a marked man, nor expected to see his sister, except possibly by chance at a distance and as a stranger. He meant to go into the wood, from which he had discovered a view of the house, and if challenged and accused of trespassing, he was ready with a credible excuse.

Since his last expedition, he had made a discovery common to growth and only significant because of his preoccupation with Crofter's End—the changing aspect of physical things. Places grew smaller, he had found, as your world enlarged. It stood to reason therefore that this enemy house, which had seemed to his inexperience so vast and untouchable, could not really be as imposing as all that, and he meant to find out.

The dream of Sue, and his aunt's evident desire to be rid of him for the day, had provided the stimulus and the opportunity and here he was, no longer even vaguely depressed, but satisfied to be doing what he had long made up his mind to do, and whistling as he rode along.

The day was tranquil and luminous, the air full of the sweet drowsy scent of new-cut hay. It came from the fields where rooks sat about like stout elderly gentlemen over their wine and cigars when chairs are pulled back and the feasting done. Poppies ran beside the young cyclist, a scarlet thread through the roadside grass, and the deep hedges on either hand were thick with blackberries. There was little traffic this morning, the road was his own, with no hills to climb but only a gentle rise and fall here and there, to be taken switchback fashion and therefore exhilarating.

A companion would have made the expedition perfect, but Malcolm could never have mentioned Sue and the Somervilles even to his best friend, Tim Field. He had not analyzed this peculiar secrecy on the subject, or he might have found it hard to explain. Tim had sisters and referred to them habitually as the little beasts, and it would not have occurred to Malcolm to challenge the title or think it odd. He saw no analogy between other people's sisters and his own, Sue having become to him by this time perhaps more a *casus belli* than a recognizable individual.

As he neared Crofter's End, he insensibly slackened pace a little, put on a dignified nonchalance and looked sharply at the few pedestrians he met, but they were village children or workmen, harmless, incurious and uninteresting, and he saw that he was a fool to expect anything else. People who owned a place like this would go about grandly in enormous cars. They wouldn't walk a yard. They were frightful snobs undoubtedly.

At once satisfied and furious at this discovery, the boy opened the gate into the wood and went boldly in, propping his bicycle against a tree some moments later and climbing a little slope that commanded a view of the house.

There it stood, with its towers or turrets, or whatever you chose to call them, looking enormous as ever.

Yet, not quite so huge as he had thought. He was convinced of it; and in the excitement of this discovery, it was as though time stood still and he saw the house growing smaller and smaller before his eyes.

As on the last occasion the wood was empty and deliciously cool after the heat of the summer road. A ghost of a wind stirred the tops of the beeches, sending a shifting pattern of light and shade over the bracken at his feet, birds chirruped, sang a moment and were still again, and suddenly the boy, yielding to impulse, sat down and opened his basket of sandwiches.

If he was lunching on enemy territory there was a pleasing sense of defiance in the act. He was not going to admit that the beauty of the spot had caught him unawares because that would have been a treachery to his hate, and as he enjoyed his lunch—a bumper one, as his uncle had predicted—he stared at the vista of garden leading to the house which was not, after all, colossal, discounting its virtues.

He saw it framed in a tracery of trees and shrubs and under the brilliance of the mid-day sun. Smooth turf with flower-beds at intervals ran up to the windows, and Malcolm, moving his head from side to side, saw that there were many of these, for the old gray house spread out beyond his view.

That was all very well, he thought, but what sort of fun would it be for a little kid like Sue to live in that enormous place with a lot of stuffy grandparents and people? He visualized these relatives as immensely old and haughty, an aged lady dressed in flowing black, and a fierce old gentleman walking with a cane—shaking it too, probably. Jolly frightening for young Sue, when you came to think of it, that would be.

If they dared to bully her, didn't treat her decently, *he'd* show them.

Malcolm scowled and turning from the sight of the enemy house, lay down on the bracken and stared at the treetops instead.

What after all could he do? It would be years and years before he could even see his sister and learn the truth. However hard he worked, nothing could alter that, and despair seized him so that the whole expedition became ridiculous and he wished he had never come.

Even the triumph of having found Crofter's End less formidable than on his last visit faded and lost its meaning as he saw his revenge as a fruitless and empty dream.

Over his head the beech leaves moved like dancers against the sky and his eyes followed their swaying grace mechanically but he saw them not at all.

Plunged in the depths of depression at his own impotence and wishing neither to stay where he was nor to go home, he turned over and buried his face in the sharp cool sweetness of the bracken.

Something touched his leg. Malcolm, on the defensive in a moment, scrambled up so quickly that a setter pup which had been nosing him leaped back in surprise, and then with lolling tongue and innocent eyes, pranced before him, inviting play.

The boy's face relaxed into a laugh, and with a quick movement he caught the lead which was hanging loose and stooped to make friends with the beast.

"I say, hold on to him. Don't you let him go."

A gate from the grounds into the wood had shot open and Malcolm, looking up, knew almost in a flash that the incredible had happened. Sue was before him.

He recognized her at once, not by any feat of memory, but because she might have been his younger self dressed up in a pink frock. The likeness between the two children was unmistakable. Both were fair-headed and long of leg, both had the same definite chin and direct glance. These were Somerville features, though Malcolm would have felt this no compliment, had there been any one to tell him so.

He was so shaken by this unexpected turn of the wheel—this unlooked-for answer to his distress, that he could only stammer, as the little girl took the lead from him in a business-like manner:

"You're a bit puffed, aren't you?"

She nodded, drew a deep breath and found her voice.

“Well, he’s not supposed to be let off his lead.”

“There’d be a row, would there?” asked Malcolm with quick suspicion.

“If he ran out into the road and was killed there would,” said the little girl. “He’s valuable.”

“Really?”

“Well, look at him.”

Malcolm, rather dashed by the superior knowledge implied in this remark which was merely a familiar quotation from young Susan’s elders, countered it neatly.

“Good thing I was on the spot then, wasn’t it?” he said, in self-congratulation.

“Yes.” Sue looked him over for the first time. She had wound the lead securely round her wrist now and was free to consider minor subjects. “What were you doing in our woods?” she asked.

Malcolm’s carefully arranged excuse for the trespass was to have its uses after all.

“There isn’t any notice up,” he said. “I came in to cool off. It’s pretty hot work cycling to-day.”

“Oh!”

Sue seemed to accept the explanation and gathered up the lead as though to be off, but that was no good. Malcolm exclaimed quickly to detain her, simulating admiration:

“Is he your own, the pup?”

“Oh, well ... sort of ... but not altogether,” said the little girl.

She intended to own the pup in due course, but had not yet quite brought it about; and Malcolm immediately saw the opening she gave him.

“I suppose you share him with your brothers and sisters,” he suggested with infinite cunning.

“Of course not. Because I haven’t any. I’m an orphan,” announced Sue importantly.

“But you can have a brother if you are an orphan,” exclaimed her outraged relative.

“Can you? Well, I haven’t.”

She was clearly indifferent to brothers, and at this calm denial of his existence, Malcolm flung discretion away.

“Oh, haven’t you?” he said. “Do you know who I am? I am Malcolm.”

Sue, who had begun to move off, paused, and the boy’s heart almost stopped beating with a mixture of triumph and dismay. Now he’d done it and the beastly Somervilles would make it hot for him with his uncle and aunt. But let them! He didn’t care.

“How do you spell it?” inquired the little girl.

“M A L C O L M, of course.”

“Oh—h? I thought that was Malcollum, only it didn’t sound quite right somehow.”

“But didn’t they tell you?” inquired the boy, taken aback.

“Well, I didn’t ask them.”

Sue started off again.

“Yes, but look here,” cried Malcolm, unable to believe the evidence of his eyes, “I know who you are too. You are Sue.”

She looked back briefly, not in the least impressed.

“Every one knows that. I’m Susan Somerville.”

“You are nothing of the kind,” shouted the boy furiously.

“Yes, I am.” The young lady of Crofter’s End seemed to remember all at once that this was a strange boy who presumed to question her name, and she flashed round on him with spirit.

“You are *rude*,” she said, “and I am going.”

This time she was really off, and he stumbled after in distress, crying:

“Sue, Sue, come back ... please don’t go.”

But the pup, seeing the chance of movement at last, had taken to his heels, pulling the little girl with him. They were through the gate and once more half the world divided brother and sister.

“Well, don’t forget what I told you anyway,” shouted Malcolm to the tail of a pink frock. He was trembling all over with excitement and indignation

at this latest treachery. “You are not Susan Somerville, you are Sue Dubenny.... Cads!”

She couldn’t hear him, she had gone, and what was the good of standing there shaking his fist at the beastly house?

He flung himself away, seized his bicycle and in a fury of rage and humiliation made for the road, turning his back upon Crofter’s End.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHILDREN

1

A man of sixty in shabby tweeds turning in at the gates of Crofter's End, missed Malcolm's impetuous exit from the woods by two or three important minutes.

Not that Jonathan Somerville would have troubled to attack this casual trespasser wheeling a bicycle out of his property, and it is unlikely that he would have given the boy enough attention to recognize his likeness to many Somervilles before him.

Malcolm's picture of a fierce old man brandishing a stick and riding in proud and powerful limousine was wide of the mark. His grandfather, like other land-holders in these days, had too many more serious problems on his mind to trouble about a schoolboy who chanced to invade his woods; and in spite of having a child in his house, he was out of touch with the young and rarely noticed them.

A serious illness at the time of Sue's advent into the family had undermined his health, and this, and the constant anxiety about money, had aged him prematurely. He made few social contacts nowadays, devoting himself to the place which he loved and must still serve though he was the last of his name.

He had no son, so there was not any question of nursing Crofter's End for an heir, but the habit, ingrained through centuries, persisted. What other place was there, after all, for such men as he in the changing world?

The importance of those two or three minutes by which grandfather and grandson had missed each other was real nevertheless, for Jonathan Somerville was no fool and a little incident at luncheon that morning would

have set him asking straight questions had he seen the boy coming out of the wood.

The gong began to ring as he walked up the drive and he timed it by his watch from force of habit. At the same moment young Sue began to run in the direction of the kennels with her dog.

It was the rule of the house that the gong should be rung ten minutes before the meal because grandfather disliked unpunctuality. He was also said to dislike children, and Sue, well primed in this eccentricity, always took care to keep out of his way.

Straight from her encounter with the strange boy, she managed to deliver up the setter pup, wash her hands and arrive in the dining-room at the right moment, looking neat and demure, and to exchange an understanding smile with granny on the success of this maneuver.

Her grandfather took no notice of her.

They were alone to-day, for Sue's governess was away for the holidays, and Ella Winch, whose mysterious province it was to make herself useful, had gone to town on an errand for Mrs. Somerville.

Sue thought Ella's absence a great advantage, enabling her to share all granny's confidential glances and conversation; grandfather being no talker and adding, moreover, spice to the situation by the danger of his awful presence.

Mrs. Somerville had been a beauty in her youth and was still an attractive woman with a pair of fine eyes and a fondness for clothes. Sue admired her enormously, and the pair were therefore excellent friends.

"Well, did you manage to keep the pup out of mischief?" inquired granny of the little girl, as luncheon began.

"No," said Sue, who rather enjoyed the excitement of making admissions which she knew she could justify next moment.

"What? You didn't?"

"No, he ran away into the wood ... but I caught him again."

"Ah, that was fortunate for you," said granny with sinister meaning, and the two players, one old and one young, exchanged a gleam over this game which both understood.

Sue, reminded of her adventure in the wood, presently remarked:

“I think I’ll call the pup Malcolm, granny.”

She was pleased with this idea which seemed a neat revenge on the strange boy who had presumed to dispute about her name, and was naturally unprepared for her grandmother’s almost violent reception of it.

“Nonsense, Susan!” exclaimed Mrs. Somerville in a tone the child had seldom heard from her. “You will call the dog nothing so preposterous—your grandfather will not allow it.... Jonathan!”

Granny appealing to grandfather. Sue, utterly confounded, gazed in round-eyed alarm at the head of the house.

“If Peters gets an offer for the pup the question of a name need not arise,” said Jonathan Somerville, unconsciously demolishing his granddaughter’s hopes of owning the dog, and not increasing his popularity in that quarter.

“There! ... but such a silly name. Where can you have heard it, goose?”

With a quick return to her usual manner granny was smiling at Sue, making eyes at her, an outsider might have said. It was important to her to know who had been talking to the child and she was something of an expert in handling her admirers.

But Susan, her young wits oversharpened by long contact with granny, had yet enough of a child’s sensitiveness to undercurrents beyond her comprehension to be warned, and she was not going to mention the boy in the wood and her own lapse in speaking to a stranger.

“Well,—there was Malcollum—I mean Malcolm Graeme,” she said, “who flew at the outlaw chieftain Roderick—I don’t know how to pronounce the rest of his name.”

“Outlaws indeed? Flew at. What an expression, child! You and your trashy story-books. I am almost inclined to burn them, one and all,” exclaimed granny, but Sue knew better than that. The danger, whatever it had been, was past and granny was herself again. The little girl laughed at the threat, flirting with granny, and quite missed her grandfather’s reaction to this revealing conversation.

Later, when Mrs. Somerville had gone up to her room to rest, Sue, her one human source of entertainment withdrawn, came out of the house and looked about her for occupation. She felt reluctant to play with the pup which was after all to be taken away from her, for, although she had

ventured no protest, there was a soreness inside her which marked the depth of her disappointment.

As usual it was her grandfather's doing and because that was something from which there was no appeal Sue knew that she would simply have to bear it.

Mrs. Somerville had been brought up in the era of male authority and still automatically used the shibboleths which had curbed her own youth. It would not have occurred to her that this was dishonest and unfair.

"Your father won't hear of it."

"Your grandfather will forbid it," etc., etc.

This labor-saving device has been practiced by excellent wives, mothers and grandmothers with the purest of motives in all ages and sown the seed of innumerable family antipathies.

It was therefore a secretly hostile granddaughter whom Jonathan Somerville suddenly confronted.

"And when did you read 'The Lady of the Lake,' hey?" he asked, looking her up and down.

Sue, standing on one leg like a bird ready to be off at the first hint of danger, answered in her abrupt young voice:

"Oh, one day."

"Hm! You've been taking books out of my library, have you?" exclaimed the old man.

"No, I haven't, grandfather, *really*," denied the little girl, so evidently awed by the suggestion that there was no room for disbelief.

"Then why not? Bless my soul, child, do you think the books are there for ornament?" cried her elder. "Read them ... read them." His eyes grew absent. "Paper and pasteboard, a dead world. Read them, Susan, and bring it to life ... and see that you speak the truth, if only to yourself," said grandfather.

He was gone, and Sue, all other matters forgotten, ran off like the wind to her secret place beneath the old cedar to face this new excitement.

The tree was safely far from observation and its lower branches swept the grass so that within their shelter there were house-room and privacy for a solitary child who must make her own amusements. Here she kept a

discarded waterproof rug, hidden with a litter of odds and ends in an old box which had once contained a croquet set, and this had many uses—to lie on, partition her house or even to envelop her completely on stormy days when she could slip away and sit there safe and warm, watching the tumult of the wind and rain.

To-day she did not even think of the rug but sat on the box, knees under her, her thoughts whirling.

She had had a conversation with grandfather.

That in itself was strange enough, but its subject was even stranger. He had actually told her to go into the library and read the books—that and something about a dead world, which she could not pretend to understand.

The library was her grandfather's territory and therefore to be avoided, but sometimes when he was safely out of the house, she had followed a dusting housemaid round the room, eyeing all these books shut away from her behind glass doors—a tantalizing and hopeless survey, fretting her eager mind.

And now she had been told by grandfather himself to read them.

She was sure there must be a catch in it somewhere.

Grandfather did not like children, but this had never troubled Susan who did not like grandfather, which made them quits. And if there were not a catch in it somewhere, she argued, why had he given her this marvelous privilege? for think what else he had said: "*And learn to speak the truth, Susan, if only to yourself*."

People called you Susan when they wished to be unpleasant and besides —

The little girl, feeling a reproach implied, colored with anger and chagrin. She had never in her life been afraid of telling the truth, so that she had not consciously considered this question until now and, spurred by grandfather, she searched her conscience in vain.

Had he thought after all that she had taken his books? But then, hadn't he almost blamed her for not having done so? It couldn't be that. She went back over the conversation at luncheon and suddenly was on her feet and parting the branches in the direction of the wood. Perhaps her grandfather had seen her talking to the strange boy?

She knew nothing of the important few moments or of the surmises and questions which, but for them, the incident at luncheon might have evoked

from the head of the house. She only knew that he had not asked her about the boy and that had he done so she would have told him the truth.

She was sure he had not seen her.

"*—if only to yourself.*"

Sue, as she went slowly back to her box, puzzled over this mysterious phrase.

"I am a pig," she tried aloud, experimenting, but as she did not really believe herself a pig, this was not the truth and had to be rejected. "I am Susan Somerville," she announced further, with memories of the boy who had presumed to dispute it. That was the truth certainly, but since she had known it already, what was the use of telling it to herself?

No, she could make neither head nor tail of it. Grandfather was simply stupid, and hateful too, despising her.

The little girl sat up straight, her eyes flashing. It was one thing to be disliked by grandfather and quite another to be despised by him, and she was not going to put up with it.

As the brother she did not know she possessed had seen himself riding boldly up to the enemy house and demanding his sister, much for the same reason, Sue determined that she would walk into her grandfather's library and read his books, catch or no catch. *She* wasn't afraid of him.

At least ...

Startled, the little girl found herself face to face with the meaning of that mysterious admonition after all.

"Yes, I am," said Sue.

2

Lorna Lowell had spent a domestic day going through Malcolm's clothes against his return to school, which explained her desire to be rid of him. Late in the afternoon she walked down to the Chiswick High Street to change her library books and was surprised to meet Tim Field and his two small sisters.

"Why, Tim, you didn't go into the country with Malcolm after all then?" she exclaimed.

Tim, too good a confederate to give away his ignorance of the excursion, said with assumed disgust:

“No, I was run in to take the little beasts to a cinema because they go back to captivity to-morrow, good riddance to ’em.”

“Well, you see, there was a new Felix,” explained the smaller beast in earnest extenuation.

“The cat,” translated the larger, perfunctorily.

“Well, there you are. We’ve got to keep abreast of the times, haven’t we?” said Tim, exchanging a glance of lofty amusement with Mrs. Lowell.

Tim was a year older than Malcolm and his chief friend. He liked to assume the airs of a young man about town and would have been much pained to know that Mrs. Lowell thought him dependable.

She was sorry Tim had not gone with Malcolm, and she regretted having made the discovery and so inadvertently spied upon the boy. He had after all other friends, and had certainly not said that Tim would be of the party.

With her usual impetuosity she already saw in imagination Tim disclosing the interview to Malcolm, and suffered under Malcolm’s hypothetical secret scorn.

“But this is preposterous,” she thought, pulling herself together. “I suppose it is the result of being merely an amateur parent. If I had children of my own, I should have more sense.”

Because of the responsibility she had taken long ago, with so much anxiety on Hugh’s account, and the peculiar circumstances, she had not even after all these years been able to rid herself of this special feeling about the boy, or to take him for granted as his uncle did. Sometimes when Malcolm surprised her by some sudden opinion or new mannerism, she would think, “How can I know anything about him really?” not seeing these things as natural to the growth of any child. Hugh, she thought, had the advantage of her here again, for *he* had known the boy’s parents, though denying Malcolm’s likeness to either of them. Isabel, he said, had been a dark little beauty, and Paul a bullet-headed, hefty chap, as Lorna would remember.

Hugh, it was quite evident, suffered none of her doubts and confusion, likeness or no likeness, but took Malcolm as he came, interested in all his concerns, treating him as a reasonable being from the first and taking care that he behaved so. And the happiness of that relationship was always the saving fact to which Lorna’s mind turned with relief in such moments as these when her own clumsiness was in question. She had, in a sense, given Hugh a son.

The afternoon wore on, Hugh came home and dinner-time approached without a sign of Malcolm. Lorna strolled about the garden and with difficulty kept herself from going to the gate, but this was not unusual. When either of her menfolk did not arrive to the minute she saw him injured or dead, though she had at least the strength of mind to keep these terrors to herself.

Dinner was just going in when Malcolm at last appeared and, after clattering upstairs, he came down five minutes late, very damp about the head, but otherwise much as usual.

"Sorry I hadn't time to change, Aunt Lorna, but here's your insurance money all right."

There was a certain triumph in handing over the treasury note, because he had resisted the temptation to break in to it and come home by train. Lorna passed it to Hugh, who remarked:

"Close season for ambulances, I gather? Good."

"Yes, rather."

"Tim didn't go with you after all then," said Lorna who had decided that it would be her wisest course to mention the encounter before he heard it from his friend. "I saw him in the High Street this afternoon."

"No, I didn't ask him, as a matter of fact," replied Malcolm.

"I hope I haven't given the expedition away then," exclaimed his aunt anxiously. "I asked him why he wasn't with you."

"Tim wouldn't worry."

The matter had been of no importance; she had been fussing and without the smallest reason. Malcolm plunged into a discussion on cricket with his uncle, from whom he declared he had won a bet, though Hugh indignantly denied it.

There was no more talk of the day's excursion during dinner.

Afterwards Malcolm, half-way up the stairs, called:

"I say, Aunt Lorna, I couldn't find my old blazer. Have you seen it anywhere?"

"My dear, it's gone.... I gave it away. It wasn't fit to be seen," she explained.

There was a wail of protest from the stairs.

“But you can’t have ... and I wanted it. Most comfortable thing I have.... You really are awful, you know. You have a positive craze for giving my things away.”

Lorna stared at him, thinking of the small boy of nine years ago, with some wild idea that he meant Sue.

“I’ll get you another,” she offered faintly.

“But I don’t want another,” declared the indignant Malcolm. “A fellow can’t go messing about comfortably all dressed up.”

“Your aunt hasn’t committed a robbery with violence, you young savage,” interposed Hugh, “and you may thank her you have a button on your clothes or a whole sock.”

“Yes, I know,” said Malcolm with a reluctant grin, “but you just wait till she loots your wardrobe,” and with a martyred and very audible sigh he retired to change.

“And in a few years he will be raising hell if his ties and handkerchiefs don’t match, and fussing about the crease in his trousers,” thought Hugh as he went on into their garden.

He was amused at the incident, though he had called Malcolm to order. His rather dictatorial tone to Lorna was merely a phase and would pass, and she of course was wax in his hands. Offering him another blazer, for instance. She’d have bought it too and gone without something of her own. The young scamp knew that well enough, however, and was reasonably careful about causing expense. Hugh had noted with approval the prompt return of the treasury note.

“Still, he might mend his manners with advantage—or his manner would perhaps be putting it more fairly. No reason to be quite so abrupt.”

If Hugh had it in mind to drop a tactful hint to this effect that evening, Malcolm defeated it, for when he came down again it was to seek his uncle with an air of purpose.

“Look here, Uncle Hugh, what do you think about Oxford?... I mean, what are your views about a fellow’s going there, in these days?” asked young Malcolm eagerly.

3

The expedition to Crofter’s End had affected Malcolm in a curious way. Undertaken, however unconsciously, in a spirit that was half curiosity and

half bravado, it was to be a milestone in his development, for the boy who returned was older and his values had changed.

After the encounter with Sue he had ridden furiously for miles, taking no heed of his direction, until at last, becoming aware of his own exhaustion, he had dismounted on a stretch of common-land and flung himself down to face this new situation. Sue said she had no brother and that her name was Susan Somerville.

Malcolm's first rage was against himself for not having held his young sister by force while he told her what he thought of this frightful cheek. "What are you doing in our woods?" she had demanded and that was pretty cool sauce too, in Malcolm's opinion, lording it over him, for he had quite as much right to the woods as she had if it came to that. Not that he would take them as a gift from these people who chose to despise his father's name and even rob his sister of it. The boy's memories of his father were few and dim; Paul Dubenny had seen his son for four of his six years only at long intervals when on leave from France. But Paul had his living representative in Hugh Lowell, and in this moment Malcolm's affection for Hugh became crystallized into a passionate loyalty and conscious admiration. He was too young and inexperienced to realize how much the human factor might have had to do with his grandparents' attitude and saw it only as a question of vast acres and wealthy arrogance against the solid worth of a modest house at Kew. His mother had demonstrated her belief that kind hearts were more than coronets, and though Malcolm would have scorned this quotation, so much in vogue by an earlier generation, he certainly applauded her action.

"I don't wonder she cleared out," was how he put it to himself.

He was ashamed now of ever having gone to Crofter's End, or given it a thought, as if such people were anything to him.

He disowned all the race of Somervilles, fortunately unaware that he bore their stamp in every feature. In this mood such a revelation would have been a blow to him, but if the ghosts of the Somervilles smiled it was gently, and he did not hear.

Sue had faded out of the picture by this time. Her calm self-confidence perhaps was so far removed from the helpless infant of his remembrance that this was inevitable. There was nothing he could do about Sue.

Malcolm, lying on the heathery common and growing drowsy from heat and fatigue, had begun busily to think of himself. His future had been often enough discussed, and living on equal terms with two people who took an

intelligent as well as a practical interest in the trend of the times, he knew that these were uncertain. But Hugh Lowell was no defeatist, and the boy had been encouraged to think himself rather lucky than otherwise in growing up in an era unique in living memory and full of change. Learned professions meant an expensive training which it might be difficult to afford him; his tastes did not lie in the direction of mechanics, and the safety of the Civil Service had no attraction for him at all. Hugh had not pressed him for any decision and the boy's desires and ambitions were still vague, but with the spur and discontent of this morning's discovery to move them they became tremendous. Money wasn't everything. He had won his scholarship, and what he had done once he could do again. So Malcolm Dubenny, his eager face to the cooling breeze which had sprung up, planned his future.

It was rather an anti-climax that he should have fallen asleep after this important decision, and he was dismayed to wake up and find it was nearly five o'clock.

He had no idea of his whereabouts and having at last found some one to direct him, he had a long ride back to the railway station against the wind. He could have boarded a train further down the line, but had only a shilling and was uncertain of the fare. When his aunt's treasury note burned his pocket from time to time, he reflected that she would want it returned to-night, being short, no doubt, after the holiday abroad. He knew there was little logic in this argument because he would be able to pay back most of the pound, but his pride and independence were involved. A precious ass he would look, after scoffing at the loan this morning, if he broke into it after all. So he toiled on against the wind, heartening himself by making this a test case for the future he had been planning—the treasury note versus a seat in the train. Naturally the note won.

4

Lorna, sitting in the garden with her book, heard the two voices in earnest conversation, going on and on. She hoped Hugh was not reading the riot act about the blazer incident. She should perhaps have consulted Malcolm this time before giving it away. It was so easy to forget that he was not still a child. She did not like to interrupt the colloquy but remained aware of it so that the novel could not hold her attention, until suddenly the sound ceased and Malcolm came cheerfully round the house to say:

"Good night, old top. I'm going to have a bath and turn in."

Old Top! A rare evidence of his favor.

Hugh, following him to slip into a chair at her side, remarked:

"The young ass has overdone his cycling, and I've advised an early night."

"Who went with him, did you hear?" she asked.

"I gather he must have gone alone, though I didn't ask. He has been talking about his future and must have gone off to think it out. Wants to know if I think he ought to go straight to a job from school, or whether we can 'afford' Oxford if he can get a scholarship. At the moment I rather think he intends to be head of his house and head of the school, as a mere preliminary."

Hugh laughed, though it was clear that the talk had pleased him greatly.

"Oh, but of course he must go to Oxford if he can," declared Lorna at once.

"If he mentioned a desire for the crown jewels you would back him up," teased Hugh.

"Yes, I suppose I should," she admitted.... "But you'd go and get them for him."

Upstairs a light went on and Malcolm's voice was heard in song. He was wildly happy. The disturbing dreams of Sue which had gradually grown more and more infrequent as he left that tragic period of his childhood behind him were to cease altogether now that he had seen her again. And Malcolm, hitherto an unconsidered youngster in the multitude of his fellows, would hereafter walk with a new confidence that world where young sisters have no place.

But Susan Somerville would remember his name.

CHAPTER THREE

SUSAN SOMERVILLE

1

Adventures were not so common in the existence of the little girl that she would easily forget the encounter, and the scene at luncheon with its surprising sequel played their part in fixing it in her mind.

Mrs. Somerville, lying in her darkened room that afternoon, remembered the matter of the name Malcolm uneasily. She had thought it a reference to the son of that scoundrel who had stolen her darling Isabel, and had been thoroughly upset.

She was one of those people who dead acquire virtues which they would heartily have disclaimed in life, and Isabel Dubenny, from being a headstrong and ungrateful daughter who had broken her mother's heart, became the innocent dupe of a scheming nobody.

Mrs. Somerville was determined that Sue should be shielded from such pernicious associations since a beneficent Providence had permitted her to have the child from babyhood and therefore with no unfortunate memories to prevent the good work. Had she been older this would have been impossible, for the harm would have been done.

This being granny's firm conviction, Sue's innocent remark at luncheon had been most unnerving, even though it had transpired that a mere literary reference was intended after all.

She was quite upset when she remembered how sharply she had spoken to the poor child, and began to cast about in her mind for some credible excuse.

She did not see this as self-justification—the greatest folly in one who has something to hide. She would indeed have vigorously and indignantly denied such a description of herself.

Sue was her darling, had taken her poor mother's place as a daughter of the house and was to be her granny's comfort and stay in old age.

Why not a favorite dog of her own after which she had set her heart upon Sue's naming the pup? That would serve. The child would be flattered and pleased. One could always reach them through the affections.

She had no intention of reopening the subject with Sue in person, however, for she felt far too much upset by all these memories of the past. Ella must do it.

It was one of Ella Winch's many duties to save her employer unpleasant tasks, and it followed that she was unpopular in the household. She was perhaps too near the mistress, too all-knowing, too much the ambassador of a hostile monarch when things went wrong.

She had come to Crofter's End seven years ago at the time when Baker, Mrs. Somerville's elderly maid, had begun to be troublesome and had had to go. All servants were inclined to be this nowadays, a luxury denied to such as Ella, the daughter of an impoverished family, who had no particular training or aptitude, and several young brothers and sisters to be educated.

Ella was devoted to Mrs. Somerville and therefore happy, for the old lady liked devotion and encouraged it, treating her as a friend instead of a dependent, or perhaps a favorite slave, according to the point of view.

That afternoon when Ella returned from her errand in town and knocked softly at Mrs. Somerville's door, she was told to come in.

"Ah, my dear, it is good to see your bright face again," sighed a voice from the bed, and although the room was in semi-darkness so that Mrs. Somerville could see nothing at all, the face in question brightened immediately and Ella Winch felt young and gay.

"I have one of my heat headaches. I wonder if you would give me a really cold compress, Ella, before you do anything else," continued the voice from the bed.

"Of course I will. That comes of my going to town. You have been doing too much," scolded Ella.

This was not true but it satisfied both of them, making the old lady feel virtuous and her companion useful and safe. Not that Ella Winch was a hypocrite; she was merely a pleasant, ordinary and rather anxious young woman, self-effacing from necessity and grateful for more kindness than she actually received.

Putting down her packages, she went into the bathroom and presently returned with a cloth soaked in lavender water.

“Ah, that’s better,” sighed the patient. “What should I do without you, my dear. Now draw the curtains and let me have the benefit of the breeze.”

As the girl complied she was subjected to a quick inspection.

“Yes, I was quite right. That color suits you and the little frock is a great success. Now come and tell me whom you met,” ordered Mrs. Somerville.

“Not a soul, except the girls in the wool-shop who were all rather irritable,” said Ella.

“That was great impertinence then. I shall complain and remove my custom, if they were discourteous to you. I will not put up with it. They should be dismissed.”

“Oh, but they were not in the least,” exclaimed Ella. “It is very sweet of you, but please don’t. I should feel dreadful. It was so hot in town and customers can be very maddening. They were not in the least rude really.”

“So much the better for them then,” said the old lady. “Courtesy costs nothing.”

Ella looked uneasily at this fortunate woman who could rest in a cool room and indulge in headaches while the world was full of tired people who lived in terror of losing their work and joining the millions who had none. She was fond of Mrs. Somerville but at moments like this she could not disguise from herself that she must have very little conception of the times in which she lived.

“You won’t write, will you?” she blurted eagerly. “If those poor girls were dismissed through me I should never forgive myself.”

“I dare say. Shiftless creatures and it serves no good purpose to be sentimental about them, Ella,” returned her employer complacently. “However, I will overlook it on this occasion.... But I was forgetting that child and her precious dog, and I can’t deal with it in this state. Ella, you must take a message to Sue for me. She began to chatter about a name for the setter pup at luncheon and I had to silence her rather sharply because children’s talk is liable to irritate her grandfather. Explain that. She will understand and I don’t want her to feel hurt, poor little thing.

“Tell her,” finished Mrs. Somerville indulgently, “that she may call the pup Hero after a dear old dog her granny once loved very much. That will please her. Go now, will you, dear, and then come back.”

So Ella went in search of the child and discovered her moving uncertainly outside the library door as though making up her mind to open it.

"Sue, come away from there," called Ella in a stage whisper, according to habit when within earshot of the master of the house. "Besides, I have a message for you. Quick."

Sue gave Ella a triumphant look on account of her secret about the library and moved nonchalantly a step or two with evident distrust.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I can't scream it," said Ella. "Your granny says you may call the pup Hero. She had to be sharp at lunch because chatter disturbs your grandfather. Hero—a jolly name, isn't it?"

"No," said Sue obstinately. "I don't suppose I'll even get the pup and anyway he's not a hero."

"Oh, but you haven't heard the rest of the message. Hero was the name of a favorite dog of your granny's who died and she loved him very much, so it's a great compliment to the pup."

Ella's persuasive tone merely seemed to Sue an attempt to talk down to her level, and she returned ungraciously:

"Well, why hasn't she ever told me about him then? Granny doesn't even *like* dogs."

This was true and the acuteness of the retort reduced Ella to helplessness, so that she could only say:

"Now you are being most unkind. How can you, Sue, when your granny is so good to you? Why, but for her, you wouldn't have a friend in the world."

"Why wouldn't I?" inquired young Susan bluntly.

But Ella, rather ashamed now of having drawn the little girl's attention to her dependent state, retreated upstairs, saying lightly, as she hoped:

"Well, that's the message anyway."

It distressed her that she could do nothing with Susan, who had a child's diabolical talent for making her feel in the wrong. She was vaguely supposed to be a companion to the little girl in the absence of her governess, but this extra duty was defeated by Sue who openly preferred the service of

one of the maids at her schoolroom supper and bed-time, the only hours of the day when she did not appear to be entirely self-sufficient.

Ella knew nothing of Sue's parentage, except that her mother's marriage had been a tragic mistake and was not to be discussed, and that the little girl had been left penniless. Mrs. Somerville was wont to advance the latter fact when some expense was in question which she did not propose to incur, for she was naturally extravagant, yet inclined to petty economies. Scraps of conversation overheard when visitors were in the house confirmed Ella's suspicion that there was a mystery somewhere. She did not believe in Sue's orphaned condition, and thought the father had been a ne'er-do-well if nothing worse, and deserted his wife and child. They called her Somerville no doubt for fear he would appear and claim her.

She was sorry for Sue until some encounter like this brought her up against an antagonism which she could not understand. Then comparing her with other children the little girl seemed too unchildlike and too sharp. Ella actually disliked her and was dismayed by such a sentiment in herself.

"Well, did you find her and put the matter right?" inquired Mrs. Somerville, when Ella returned to the bedroom.

"Yes—and—I don't think she quite believed me about your Hero, though. She said you had never told *her* about any dog."

The old lady laughed.

"The little puss is jealous of you, Ella. How delicious!" she exclaimed. "My head is much better thanks to your ministrations, and I think I shall drive over to the Lintons'. You shall come with me. I had thought of taking Sue but I am not quite up to her chatter this afternoon and need a more stimulating companion. Children are so limited."

Ella smiled her gratitude.

"But if it is—if she really is jealous, though it seems absurd—don't you think she will be disappointed," she suggested impulsively.

"Nonsense! One must not give in to young people, my dear. Order the car for a quarter past four," was the reply in a tone from which there was no appeal.

Ella, going to obey, hoped she would not encounter Sue and witness her disappointment.

Sue meanwhile had retreated to the garden.

Why wouldn't she have had a friend in the world if granny had not been so good to her? This was not the first time she had had the goodness of her grandparents held up to her by adults who wished her to conform to some standard of their own, and her reason rejected the argument indignantly.

"How good to me?" asked Sue of the empty air as she prowled in the shrubbery, kicking a stone before her in earnest concentration on the problem.

Granny was nice and amusing and most attractive, but being "good to you" was something different from that, she felt sure, and besides, how could it have anything to do with her friends?

It simply wasn't sense, and Ella was just being unpleasant and talking nonsense.... About granny's dog too and what had happened at lunch. It was all quite untrue for granny hadn't silenced her because of grandfather, but had actually drawn him into the conversation and he had said that she probably couldn't have the pup. Didn't that show you? You couldn't believe a word that Ella said.

Sue, much relieved, laughed scornfully at the pretensions of Ella and turned back in the direction of the house. So she saw the car waiting and Ella and her grandmother actually getting into it.

Frantically she began to run, but it was too late. They were off and the little girl stopped again, slipping behind the rhododendrons as though to hide from the world her disappointment and despair.

Ella had done this. With lies and cunning she had got Sue out of the way so that she could go visiting with granny herself.

She was not often conscious of loneliness, but in that moment she knew desolation. The very sound of the horn as the car turned into the narrow road had an air of holiday delights from which she was shut out and the afternoon stretched before her, empty and forlorn. As the sound of the car died away silence enwrapped the world. Not a leaf stirred; no friendly creak of wheelbarrow or garden-roller reached her. The flowers in their beds made bright patches on the grass as unmeaning as a too-familiar picture before her eyes.

Why wouldn't she have had a friend in the world?

In spite of her conviction that this was merely one of Ella's lies, Sue felt vaguely frightened by several things which were not quite memories and

therefore not to be clearly identified, and the self-protective instinct which is a part of childhood, made her brush these thoughts swiftly away.

She moved into the open and looked about her with a frown. To go back to the house and walk boldly into the library seemed too hazardous an adventure with nobody else at home, though she could not have said why. Neither was she in the mood for reading. Taking grandfather at his word was something to be done with caution gradually. She did not want to play with the pup either if Peters meant to sell him, for what was the good of that? She knew now how much she had counted on owning the pup, and suddenly this reminded her of the encounter of the morning and she was bounding towards the wood.

"Malcolm, Malcolm!" she called boldly.

It was companionship she needed, but by this time Malcolm was far away and there was no reply.

Perhaps he would come back. He would go for another ride and come into the wood to cool off. Sue determined to look for him every day.

Now that she thought of him again she found that she did not dislike him, even though he had contradicted her about her name, because when he saw she was offended, he had begged her to come back. She might have gone too, if it hadn't been for the pup. Boys always teased girls and called them names. Sue could remember instances of this peculiar form of male humor now she came to think of it, and saw that it had been stupid to lose her temper with Malcolm. Boys were like that. There was the boy who had stayed with Mrs. Linton once and said Sue wasn't a name at all but a verb.

Sue wondered whether Malcolm could be staying with the Lintons. Wondering was little use, however, so at last she made for the cedar and searched her box for occupation. There was a game she sometimes played, one hand against the other, a railway game, each player throwing dice for the mileage. It was quite exciting in its way, for if your throw brought you into collision with your opponent's train you were penalized and had to begin again. Or you might be going at express speed and find yourself shunted into a siding while the other train rushed grandly by.

She took out the board and counters representing trains, shook the dice-box and scored a double six.

This was a triumph and with pardonable pride she passed the box to her left hand.

"Your turn, Malcolm," she said.

“Malcolm” seemed clumsy at it and let one of the dice slip out as he shook the box, but she kindly gave him another chance.

Having scored a two and a five, he passed it back.

“Buck up now, Susan Somerville,” said Malcolm, the left hand.

Young Susan laughed.

3

But suppose he came back one day when she was not on the look-out for him?

Sue pondered this difficulty for some time before she found a solution, rather daring and therefore attractive. She must leave a message for him.

No one from the house ever went into that part of the wood, though it was just possible that her grandfather might do so. The risk was slight, but it was there and Sue, as she tore a page from an old drawing-book, enjoyed taking it.

She wrote and rewrote her message many times, at last rejecting script for printed letters. Then she went back to the wood and pinned it to the tree against which he had rested his bicycle.

MALCOLM
PLEASE WAIT FOR ME

There was no need of a signature. He would know. Every day for the rest of the summer when the little girl contrived to slip away and look for her friend, she saw her note still waiting. Then the autumn rains came and washed her message into a ghost of itself and at last a winter storm carried it bodily away.

CHAPTER FOUR

TWO OF A KIND

1

The circle of the little girl at Crofter's End was necessarily limited though she did not know it, having few standards of comparison. Mrs. Somerville's complacent picture of Sue in her mother's place as a daughter of the house, omitted two important factors—time and change. In Isabel's childhood motor transport was unknown and cars the newest possession of the adventurous. The Somervilles and their kind lived on their country estates, spent the season in town and did their duty by tenantry and dependents—or left it undone.

Whatever may have been lacking in her young life, Isabel had at least had friends and companions of her own age, living much the same kind of existence, and this was what in a great degree Sue lacked.

Depression had driven most of the old families out of the district; their estates had been sold to the new rich, cut up into building lots or turned into boarding-schools. Isabel's generation had married or gone away to live gayer though possibly harder lives, to bring up modern families who had to be sent to boarding-school and prepared for careers. Few of them had any touch now with Crofter's End. Such as returned to visit parents in the neighborhood and encountered Isabel's daughter, were frankly sorry for her.

"I don't see that Mrs. Somerville made such a success of bringing up a daughter that she should want to repeat the experiment," they would remark caustically, when the reason for the child's name was whispered to them, "and they will have to tell her she is Sue Dubenny eventually. I can see no point in it, to say nothing of the reflection on Isabel. Any one would suppose she wasn't married to the man."

"Hush, darling," the elders would explain, deploring the looseness of modern conversation. "And besides, it is no business of ours. The

Somervilles no doubt have their reasons."

Sometimes the visitor would end by inviting Isabel's daughter to come and stay with her own Shirley or George or whoever it might be, but these suggestions never came to anything.

Sue must be kept at her lessons. Education was so important; or, if it chanced to be holiday-time, her granny could not spare her.

Mrs. Somerville indeed distrusted these young matrons who wore rouge and lipstick as frankly as the 'loose' women of an earlier day, just as she was convinced that the boys and girls who raced the country roads in absurd little cars were 'fast' and ought to be locked up.

Sue, out driving with granny, and meeting some such merry cargo, would eye it secretly and with interest, wondering exactly what you did in order to be fast, because it was clearly so enjoyable.

It was useless to seek information on this point from granny who as a raconteur was unsurpassed but as a conversationalist no good at all. She would talk about all manner of people and things of her own world while the little girl watched the flash of her fine eyes and enjoyed the excitement of responding at the right moment, but to turn the conversational tables upon her was impossible. When Sue, from being a receptive audience, became a questioning human creature, granny would exclaim: "Now run along, child, your chatter makes my head ache," or "You'll know all about that by-and-by."

She had to consult her friends among the servants on the subject of fastness, and received from this source a kind of super-screen version of life as near the truth as granny's, though infinitely more exciting.

Malcolm's picture of 'this great place full of stuffy grandparents and people' as a background for his sister, had not been far wrong therefore, but he had missed the mark in supposing it would frighten her.

Sue moved for the most part confidently through the world and with nothing to tell her that she saw it nearly always out of focus.

The Somervilles no longer had a house in town, but lived quietly, entertaining little. Servants came and went, not faithfully permanent as of old, and fewer in number. It was no doubt partly due to this isolation that so far Sue had never heard the name Dubenny or been given any surreptitious hint, other than the boy Malcolm's—that Somerville was not her name.

Yet, after the manner of orphans, whose very condition sets them apart as peculiar among their fellows, she was curious about her parents, and because of the complete silence on the subject, there had grown up at the back of her mind a vague disquiet which at odd moments pierced the shell of her self-confidence.

The careless questions of occasional playfellows had begun it perhaps: —"Did your mother die when you were born, Sue? What was your father's name? Was he killed in the War?" Sue had very soon learnt that ignorance of these matters was too odd to be admitted, and finding no one willing to enlighten her (for granny merely wept) was drawn to counter them with invention or a brusque change of subject. Invention might have won the day but for her maiden effort at nine years old.

Sue had decided that her mother had died long before she was born. This seemed not only satisfactorily important but reasonable, as nobody had ever seen her that she could find out, and she had tried the story on her governess, a serious young woman who forthwith gave her an elementary lesson in biology.

The almost instant dismissal of the governess had been less due to her up-to-date views than her request to Mrs. Somerville for information about Sue's parents, in order that she might answer any further questions intelligently.

This kind of intelligence was by no means what was required of her, and her successors were informed that their pupil's parents were dead and conversations on the subject to be strictly discouraged. Mrs. Somerville thought them morbid and bad for the child.

"I am sure you will agree with me, my dear," she would say to the governess of the moment with her most charming smile, creating the instant impression that she was an enlightened grandmother.

So Sue gave up inventing stories about her mother, for public consumption at least, and locked the subject away, becoming the more vulnerable therefore to the revelation which must inevitably come.

2

That winter there came to Crofter's End and briefly into the little girl's life, a new acquaintance, her great-aunt Alison Loftus.

Admiral Loftus had, since his retirement from the Navy soon after the War, been governor of one or other of the Colonial islands, and only in

England once on leave. The news that he and Mrs. Loftus would reach home a few days after Christmas determined Jonathan Somerville to go to town to meet them, his wife's arguments notwithstanding. It was foolhardy, she said, in such inclement weather, he would take cold, have pneumonia again, and Alison would not run away. The idea was preposterous. He took no notice of these warnings, for Alison was his only sister and he was much attached to her.

Sue wondered why granny troubled to argue with him, feeling it would be rather exciting to have him out of the house.

In these months she had never again had a conversation with the head of the family, though she had called his bluff by reading in the library now and then—always however when he was at a safe distance, as she would have admitted, obeying his peculiar injunction to speak the truth if only to herself.

The uniqueness of that interview perhaps had kept it in her mind, though its purport still puzzled her, and it would have amazed her very much to know that it was her own blunt speech and direct glance that summer afternoon which had moved him to notice her, reminding him of a child of more than forty years ago.

Sue, judging her by grandfather, felt little interest in this unknown great-aunt, and granny's vivacious references to her confirmed the impression that she must be a very dull old lady, to say the least of it.

"Poor Alison, she has been buried alive in these outlandish places for years, it will be quite a change for her to return to civilization," said granny. "She was as thin as a lathe last time she came home, I remember, and a most unhealthy color. As yellow as mustard, poor creature. And of course she is getting on in years."

Sue, glad that this strange individual did not live at Crofter's End, set herself to enjoy the preparations for the village Christmas treat in grandfather's absence.

She had had to assist at this annual fixture ever since she could remember, but never under such promising auspices.

It was fun to open the boxes of toys which her grandmother always ordered holus-bolus from town, wind up such as were mechanical, try the games and cast a critical eye over the dolls.

She enjoyed helping to dress the tree, and when it was done she visited it from time to time, picturing the excitement and delight of the 'mites,' as her grandmother called the youthful villagers. Unfortunately, when the great

moment arrived the reality did not come up to her expectations. The children, clad in their best clothes and fiercely warned to be of good behavior, did not greet the scene with the unbridled fervor Sue would like to see, and she thought they must be disappointed.

There was worse to follow. It was her part in the entertainment to stand at the foot of the tree and hand over the toys which one of the gardeners, disguised as Santa Claus, cut down for her. Ella meanwhile called up the recipients one by one from a list she had made; and Sue felt it was entirely due to Ella that more than once the gifts were so unsuitable. At last came a dreadful moment when some family having produced a child more than it was supposed to possess, there was only the fairy doll remaining for a boy who flatly refused to receive it. A silver coin had to be hastily sought to make good the deficiency, but that produced an outburst of tears from several infants who wanted to be included in this exciting bounty.

Granny, walking about with the rector and chatting to the mothers, was quite unperturbed by the incident, saying indulgently:

"The mites are tired."

But Sue knew better. The mites were simply furious and she didn't wonder. She felt that they had failed in hospitality and was surprised to remember that in grandfather's presence such a mischance had never occurred.

It may have been due to this discovery that she now continually found herself looking forward to his return; or perhaps it was simply that in her uneventful days the smallest change was an excitement.

When however a note from her grandfather announced that his sister would come with him on a visit to Crofter's End, Sue was utterly dismayed. The presence of this yellow-faced old lady would simply mean that she would never have granny to herself for the rest of the holidays.

Granny was not pleased about it either. How was it, she asked plaintively, that menfolk were so thoughtless about household matters? Did Susan's grandfather suppose that she was not already worn out by all the worry and preparation for Christmas, without having to entertain a visitor at a moment's notice?

"Couldn't you write and ask him not to bring her, granny?" suggested Sue eagerly.

"Certainly not, child. It is a wife's duty to do as her husband desires, at whatever cost to her own feelings."

This was an entirely new idea to Sue. It struck her as a most unfair arrangement and did not increase her affection for her grandfather.

The household was soon in a state of excitement, preparing, one would have supposed, for an invasion rather than a solitary guest just returned from savage regions. As soon as Ella and the maids had been given orders and counter-orders until they were thoroughly imbued with the importance of the occasion and beginning to rush in all directions, Sue was called to help Mrs. Somerville inspect her wardrobe.

"For I must not look like any Dick, Tom and Harry while your Aunt Alison is here, darling, must I?" said granny.

These three were constantly quoted by granny—chiefly as evidence against Sue when she put her elbows on the table, used inelegant words, made a noise or otherwise failed to reach her grandmother's standard of decorum. Sue, usually bored with them, was so tickled at this suggestion of granny in male attire that she exclaimed delightedly:

"Oh, granny, you are funny."

After that the morning was a huge success. Mrs. Somerville liked to be found witty and amusing, and permitted her discerning young granddaughter to choose the gowns she should wear to impress Aunt Alison, saying that she had excellent taste.

"You get it from me, Sue, undoubtedly. I have always known what to wear, and every woman, my dear, should be careful in these matters, whether she be young or old. Take pattern by granny, darling, and you will not go far wrong."

It is to be feared that Sue believed her.

3

The yellow old lady who had been so long away from civilization among savages was unaware of her benighted condition, though she would have been the first to admit that there was nothing peculiar in that, for she had a sense of humor.

She had indeed welcomed the Admiral's appointment though she was glad enough to see again the soft skies and evergreen fields of her native land, and to know that this time she was coming home for good. They had had financial losses some years ago, and this and the death of both sons on active service had made the offer of a vice-regal post acceptable. Things

were better now and they had made up their minds to find a roomy flat in London and enjoy their leisure.

This morning, while Crofter's End was being turned topsy-turvy to receive her, Mrs. Loftus, in her hotel in London, was busy at the telephone.

"Is that you, Irene?... at last. What do you mean by sending me such a letter to meet me when I come home?"

The reply seemed to amuse her, for she laughed.

"Has marriage become a sin then?" she inquired. "Did you suppose I wanted you to retire under a crêpe veil for the rest of your life, or that Nigel would have wished it? Have you been writing to me all these years from a misguided sense of duty, you little wretch? ...

"... Of course I'm a darling. I thought every one knew that. It is one of my few talents. I am going into the country with my brother for a few days and when I come back I shall shake you, and look for a wedding present.... Till then, good-by, dear."

Turning to Jonathan who had come in with the Admiral, she said in explanation:

"Do you remember Irene Clifton who was engaged to Nigel? She is married and was afraid to come and meet me because she thought it would be a shock."

The two men smiled at her amused indignation.

"Irene should have seen you hobnobbing with those minxes coming over," said Michael Loftus. "They were pretty young creatures some of them, playing ducks and drakes with their complexions though, which seemed a pity to me.... Yes, you are shock-proof, Alison, thank heaven."

"Indeed I am not," denied his wife. "Fools shock me, though I daresay I ought to be used to them by this time.... Jon, I think Irene almost certainly knew Isabel."

Jonathan Somerville nodded but she saw at once that he had not followed the thought in her mind, though at first meeting after this long separation, it had seemed to her that their quick comprehension of each other was as keen as ever.

Poor correspondents, both of them, inarticulate where their affections were concerned, they had met on Waterloo Station with the casual speech of two friends in constant touch, but mutually satisfied in the reunion.

Charlotte Somerville was not the woman to relish a deep attachment between her husband and his sister. Few wives perhaps can rise to such magnanimity. Alison had learned to distrust Charlotte, and had only been urged to the visit by something Jonathan had said to her.

"I'd like you to see the child Susan."

That was Jonathan all over. He had made only the conventional references to his wife and had not until then, mentioned his granddaughter at all. Mrs. Loftus, recalling the subject of Isabel's children, had remarked:

"It was a pity you couldn't have the boy, Jon. What is he like?"

"I haven't seen the boy. The father's people took him, you know. They were within their rights, of course. It was after I was down with pneumonia. Not that I could have done anything, I daresay, and what could I do for the boy, if it comes to that? I've had my work cut out to keep the place—in the hope that things may have improved enough to leave Charlotte and the little girl a competence when I go."

"But the children meet, of course?" Mrs. Loftus had protested.

"No. Even if there were any possibility, Charlotte is convinced it would be undesirable at present. Dubenny's relatives seem to be an odd lot. At all events they were uncivil and hostile. It was a wretched business altogether, Alison, but Isabel and I never hit it off somehow and when she quarreled with her mother I was naturally included in the holocaust. Blamed for it too, more than likely, human nature being what it is."

Alison had felt sure of it and deeply distrustful of Charlotte's negotiations about the grandchildren.

"Is Susan like her mother?" she had asked.

"Not in the least, I think. I am no judge of children—I see very little of her, but she has a look of you," Jonathan had finished unexpectedly.

"Of me? Oh, my dear, but how fatal."

She had meant it, seeing Charlotte's dislike of her, but her tone had been light enough to be reassuring if he chose to take it in that spirit.

Instead he had retorted:

"On the contrary, I suspect it may be her salvation."

What had he meant by that exactly? she wondered. His further explanation had been vague—no young people in the neighborhood

nowadays—the child living out of the world with a lot of elderly people and probably no conception of this different age into which she had been born.

He was disturbed she could see, hoped to enlist her help in some way, and although it was difficult to know what she could do, she was sufficiently interested in the child who had "a look of her," to agree to the visit. At this moment there was something more in her mind, however. If Irene, through Nigel, had known his cousin Isabel, she might also know something of Paul Dubenny's family.

Remembering her own sons, she could not rid herself of a feeling of incredulity and uneasiness about the grandson whom Jonathan had never seen.

4

"Now, chick, no more late dinners and Christmas junketing for you," announced granny at luncheon. "You must keep to your own quarters while your great-aunt is here. She is not accustomed to children and will require quiet and rest after her long voyage. You must ask Ella to amuse you, and perhaps for a treat she will have supper with you in the schoolroom this evening.

"For we shall no doubt be talking family business, my dear," added the mistress of the house, always considerate of Ella's feelings.

"Of course," agreed Miss Winch readily. "We might go for a nice long walk, Sue. It will do us good after so much Christmas pudding."

"I didn't have any," returned Sue, who disliked it almost as much as Ella's humor.

She had no intention of going for a walk, but meant to sit at the landing window and witness the arrival of the mustard-colored old lady, and, evading Ella, she took up her place there behind the long curtains as soon as her grandmother was out of the way.

The December day was cold and bright, but beyond the gardens, now a monotone of green, the bare trees of the wood were softened to beauty by a faint mist. The little girl, gazing in this direction, found a sudden sharp pleasure in the picture, a stirring of her consciousness or perhaps her blood to this familiar place.

The sensation was almost like a pain and Sue, who had never experienced anything of the kind before, sat quite still, her eyes taking in the panorama of the wintry scene—long green alleys of turf running between

clipped shrubs and the skeletons of flowering trees; stone urns, weather-worn and empty now, dark masses of holly, cedar and pine, beyond which the wood spread, fan-wise, its protecting arms.

In her rather haphazard life with its unchildlike excitements, there had been no one to tell her that this was what generations of her forefathers had seen looking out of this same window on any wintry day, or that she was living in a changing age that was sweeping such tranquil scenes into the past. But in this moment its beauty stirred some hidden seed within her which would have flowered to love of the place at the right word.

The sound of the car drove away her exaltation, an unfamiliar and slightly suspect feeling, and she drew back out of sight until it would be safe to look down upon the heads of the travelers.

When she saw only her grandfather and a tall figure in a brown fur coat, flatness succeeded her interest in Aunt Alison, who now became like any other guest, simply an interruption to her own affairs. Disconsolately she stalked upstairs to the schoolroom.

Mrs. Loftus, half an hour later, came out of her bedroom and paused to look about her at this once familiar scene. She had always been fond of Crofter's End and it would have amused her to explore the house, reviving old memories, but Charlotte, she knew, would regard such an expedition with disfavor.

Ella Winch, coming upon an apparently hesitating guest, said helpfully:

"May I show you the way?"

Mrs. Loftus laughed.

"No, thank you, my dear," she replied. "I was merely absent-minded. You see I was born here."

"Of course. Stupid of me."

"Not at all. How could you possibly know?"

The visitor nodded kindly to the abashed Miss Winch and went on downstairs, unconscious of an interested audience on the landing above.

Susan had come out of the schoolroom in time to see her great-aunt's tall, graceful figure and white hair, and to hear this utterly surprising statement.

Rushing after Miss Winch she exclaimed eagerly:

"How did she mean—born here? Why was she, Ella?"

"Hush!" Ella, annoyed at having been overheard making a fool of herself, spoke impatiently. "Because this was her home long ago, of course. Because before she married Admiral Loftus, she was Miss Somerville."

"Oh! Like me," said Sue.

"Not in the least like you," returned Miss Winch with irritation. "Now run along and get ready for our walk or we shall be late for tea."

"I'm not coming."

The little girl fled down the stairs as though expecting pursuit, and into the library. Here the hateful Ella would not dare to come because of grandfather, but somehow the knowledge of her own superior valor gave Sue no comfort. She would have found it hard to explain exactly why Ella had suddenly spoilt something which had seemed to her exciting and rather splendid, and left her forlorn; and refusing to submit to this sensation, she went to one of the bookcases and opened its glass doors.

She liked the lofty room with its deep chairs and attractive leathery smell, liked its remoteness from the ordinary life of the household and the continual promise of treasure which the stacked shelves held out to her.

There was a ladder too for the upper reaches of that enchanted country, lovely to perch upon but dangerous perhaps this afternoon with her grandfather in the house. She had not yet lost the belief that it would be bad to be caught by him, permission or no permission, and so she rejected the ladder and carried a handful of books to one of the big chairs.

Aunt Alison had been born at Crofter's End because she was Miss Somerville.

"*Just* like me," said Sue indignantly to the shade of Ella. "I am Susan Somerville, aren't I? Well then!"

Some faint echo of a contradiction reached her consciousness and Sue, turning the pages, made neither head nor tail of what she was reading in consequence.

It was some time before she recalled the boy in the wood—the boy called Malcolm who had never come back.

But what did he know about it? He was just a stranger. Remembering her message to him, she was ashamed of it now, and was glad the rain had washed it away. She looked towards the window and saw that the mists had

deepened and the afternoon was fading into dusk. With one of the daring impulses characteristic of her, she ran across the room and switched on the lights.

"Now, now, why are you running away?"

Her grandfather and aunt, escaping from an unexpected caller, had opened the door, and Sue was caught by the arm in full flight.

"Well, I didn't think you'd be coming in here," she said bluntly.

She did not see the glances exchanged by her elders, nor the smile of one of them because she was watching with some apprehension for her grandfather to discover the books flung in disorder on the chair. His hand no longer held her, but it did not occur to her to move, though she expected annihilation.

"So you have been at the books, have you?" he inquired.

"But you told me to, grandfather," she protested indignantly.

"I daresay I did. I tell people to do many things, but it doesn't always follow that they obey me.... Now then, have you lost your manners, Susan, that you don't even trouble to greet your aunt?"

"She can't possibly remember me, Jon," protested Mrs. Loftus. "She was a baby when I saw her last."

"Was I just born?"

As a polite greeting it may have been inadequate, but Mrs. Loftus answered at once, as one equal to another, not merely moved by the evident urgency of the question but because they were two of a kind.

"You must have been nearly three, I think, and you were fast asleep, so this is really a first meeting. ...But, Jon, it is absurd. She is a Somerville from head to foot."

Sue moved suddenly in the direction of the visitor. Old and young, these two Somerville women smiled at each other.

"Now be off to your play, child. You will be able to talk to your aunt to-morrow."

Susan obeyed, drawing a deep breath. Only the visitor's presence had saved her from his wrath, she was sure, for he had been as sarcastic as ever.

She did not know that this would have surprised him, nor guess that he suffered an awkwardness in his contacts with her, perhaps more painful than

her own.

He supposed that if he had had a son he would have understood him, but girls were somehow outside his sphere. His experience with Isabel may have been responsible for this view and he avoided his granddaughter, rarely knowing what to say to her.

His utterances for this very reason assumed an importance to Sue—also no doubt the fact that her grandmother quoted his authority so consistently. She had not the smallest doubt therefore that his permission to talk to Aunt Alison to-morrow canceled granny's order to make herself scarce, and she was delighted.

Throughout the evening she planned a hundred conversations with the visitor who had said she was a Somerville, thus routing Ella, the boy in the wood and various other enemies not so easy to identify.

CHAPTER FIVE

LOST LOVE

1

Mrs. Loftus was not surprised to encounter the little girl in the garden next morning. She could remember the delight of the keen winter air, damp grass and dripping trees in her own childhood, though the heavily booted and muffled child of those far-off days would have looked a strange object to Sue, she supposed.

Charlotte was not an early riser. It was her habit to breakfast in bed and later, enthroned among pillows, with Ella in attendance, issue her orders for the day. She had urged Mrs. Loftus not to dream of coming down before luncheon, but to have a thorough rest after so much tiresome traveling.

"You must be utterly worn out, you poor creature," she had said pityingly, for in her view the visitor with her worn face and thin figure was indeed a wreck. Her own small, rather plump form and round cheeks were a satisfying contrast and she was sorry for Alison.

Mrs. Loftus, however, did not realize that she was an object for pity, and having always led an active life, would have thought a morning in bed extremely dull. She was eager to see her old home again and putting on a coat had come out to explore.

When Sue suddenly appeared, greeting her with a beaming smile, she said with playful ceremony:

"Good morning, Miss Dubenny."

"Why do you call me that?" inquired Sue, greatly interested. "What is a dew—berry?"

Mrs. Loftus was a quick-witted woman and after the first incredulous glance at the child, exclaimed:

“I am afraid I was wool-gathering as usual, Sue, and thinking of something else. Are you going to take me round the garden?”

Sue assented at once.

“You were born at Crofter’s End, weren’t you?” she said, confidentially.

“Indeed I was but that was so long ago it would seem almost like the dark ages to you.”

Sue, able to believe this of almost any adult, considered the statement.

“Was it dark?”

“Not in the least. Just like this.” Mrs. Loftus paused and lifted her face to the cold air with a sensation of pleasure. “Do you like the wintry smell, Sue?” she inquired.

Sue’s head went up too and she sniffed experimentally.

“Sort of tree-y, do you mean? Yes, I do. Was I born here too?”

It was an urgent question, though just how urgent Mrs. Loftus was not to discover until she had replied:

“No, surely you were born in London, weren’t you?”

Then, seeing the child’s face cloud with evident disappointment, she went on in her kind voice:

“But it is not very important where you are born, darling. The great thing is that you are here.”

To Sue this seemed almost certainly a compliment, and she was cheered at once.

“Why did you say to grandfather that I was a Somerville from head to foot?” she asked curiously.

Her great-aunt laughed.

“Fair head and long legs,” she explained. “So many of the Somervilles have been like that, you see. It’s what people mean by a family trait, I suppose. You would hardly believe it but both your grandfather and I looked much as you do, long ago, except that we had to wear such different clothes —stuffy, you would call them, I expect.”

This was an irresistible subject and the little girl was soon enthralled, as her great-aunt recalled the Crofter’s End of fifty years ago, and the things she had been told of times even earlier than that when Somerville children,

dead before she was born, had played in these gardens—girls in hooped petticoats, girls in pantalettes, boys in knee breeches and buckled shoes, boys with curls to their shoulders.

"How frightful!" exclaimed Sue, enjoying what she imagined to have been the discomfiture of these young males of the past.

But Aunt Alison said if she knew anything, most of them, curls or petticoats notwithstanding, had managed to climb the same trees she and grandfather and Sue had climbed—with awful consequences when discovered, it had been, in *her* childhood if one had the misfortune to be a girl.

"So *unladylike*," explained the narrator, imitating the shocked elders, with delicious humor, "and of course we never dreamt in those days, Sue, that they had probably done exactly the same themselves, and were really thinking we would break our necks."

"Granny always imagines I will too," said Sue, as one making allowance for the eccentricity of age. She found this continuity of experience deeply interesting and rather strange, and the visitor the most satisfying adult she had yet encountered, some one who answered a plain question without argument and actually told her what she wanted to know.

They were friends, they were Somervilles, fair-haired and long of leg. Granny of course was very amusing, but Sue saw now her limitations, and the unreliability of her views. There was nothing in the least yellow about Aunt Alison's face.

On and on they strolled about the old garden, these two companions, until Sue, her heart quite won, came to a decision.

"I suppose you didn't even climb the big cedar, did you?" she asked.

"The cedar at the far end of the shrubbery? That does bring back memories," said Mrs. Loftus, smiling. "Its branches came nearly down to the ground and we used to hide under them."

"Oh! Quick! Come with me."

Sue led the way to her secret house, in which alas Mrs. Loftus found she could hide no longer. She had to stand outside, envying the younger Somerville within.

A wonderful morning, spoilt at last by Ella, for a maid came hurrying in search of Miss Susan, who was wanted by Miss Winch at once, she said.

“Never mind, dear, we shall meet again later,” Mrs. Loftus assured the reluctant little girl. “Perhaps we can go exploring inside and look at the portraits, if your granny doesn’t mind.”

When Susan had gone, she strolled back to the house with a troubled face. In an hour with the most responsive and reasonable person she had ever met, the child had revealed herself unconsciously, at one moment a mirror of her grandmother’s airs and opinions, at another eager, curious, wistful and abysmally ignorant.

“But I expect you have heard all this before,” Mrs. Loftus had said more than once about some piece of family history, yet she had heard nothing, had passed the portraits of bygone Somervilles day by day, and never realized that these were people who had lived.

Time would change all that, however, it was unimportant. The incredible folly, in her great-aunt’s opinion, was that she was being brought up in ignorance of her own name apparently.

Jonathan must be mad to permit it, and what of this question about where she was born?

Mrs. Loftus was perceptive enough to see some connection, however vague, between the two facts and she determined to have a straight talk with her brother without delay.

But Jonathan, believing her still in her room, had left the house and was nowhere to be found, and presently a message arrived from Mrs. Somerville asking the guest to be ready to drive to the Lintons’ for luncheon if she felt sufficiently rested.

An invitation had been sent over by hand, Charlotte having written Mrs. Linton of Alison’s impending arrival in order to bring this about. It was so difficult to know what to do with a guest at this time of year in such a quiet household as hers, she had observed suggestively. When would dear Mrs. Linton spare an hour to come over and see the visitor?

“I am glad that we can do something to entertain you,” she explained to Alison with self-congratulation as they set out, “and after being in the wilds, as it were, for so long, I daresay you will enjoy even a quiet luncheon party.”

Mrs. Loftus agreed cordially and if she had had a surfeit of such festivities “in the wilds” did not say so, for it was evident that Charlotte herself was delighted to be going out, and there was a certain pathos in that. She was rather guileless after all perhaps and very much shut away from the

world. Her complete amiability had disarmed Alison, making her feel she had perhaps been unjust.

Jonathan did not accompany them and the host, whom Alison had known long ago, did not appear, but Mrs. Linton was delighted to renew her acquaintance, and had invited several pleasant people to meet her.

"Why didn't you bring my little friend Sue?" she asked reproachfully.

As Charlotte did not seem to hear the question, Mrs. Loftus said:

"I rather think I saw her going out with her governess."

"Ella Winch," interposed Charlotte, now all attention, and looking sharply at her sister-in-law. "They are the greatest friends and it seems Ella had promised her a little treat."

Murmurs of praise were heard round the table both for Miss Winch and her festivity, whatever it might be, but Mrs. Loftus, remembering Sue's expression upon being summoned by Ella, was a little dubious. It had hardly seemed to suggest an ardent friendship.

Driving home, Charlotte for the first time mentioned her granddaughter, saying with a sigh:

"I must let the child come in and greet you at tea-time, I suppose, if you can put up with her for ten minutes. My poor Isabel's girl ..."

"Of course," returned Alison cordially. "She's a dear little soul. We made friends in the garden this morning."

"Then that is extremely disobedient of Susan, for I expressly forbid her to worry you with her chatter," exclaimed Charlotte, flushing. "I am astounded. She is usually a most amenable child. I can't account for it."

"You mustn't blame Sue, Charlotte. In fact it was entirely my fault. Seeing her running about I asked her to show me the gardens, and she probably felt it would be impolite to refuse. How charmingly you dress her, by the way. I thought that scarlet sweater looked so cozy and gay out of doors this morning. As I told her, she is lucky not to be muffled and booted as we used to be. We had quite a sartorial conversation."

"Yes, I always had a flair for clothes," agreed Charlotte, mollified perhaps by the safety of the topic. "The child inherits it from me, I am thankful to say."

"What a good thing." The other woman spoke without satire, though a little absently. She was trying to decide just how best to frame a question she

wanted to ask.

When later they were waiting for tea, it seemed a good opportunity to speak of Sue, who was to be allowed to come down, and she said:

"Tell me about your little granddaughter, Charlotte. Am I mistaken or are you and Jon bringing her up under the name of Somerville?"

"Most decidedly. Anything else would be quite undesirable," returned Charlotte in a mysterious tone.

"Really. But when so many people know she is a Dubenny aren't you afraid she may hear it elsewhere?" The visitor was remembering with consternation her own innocent lapse of the morning.

"I am perfectly capable of seeing that she does not, Alison. And please be good enough not to mention that name in my house. I won't hear it ... it makes me ill."

"I'm sorry," apologized Mrs. Loftus. "I had forgotten what painful memories it must bring you."

"*Painful?* When I tell you that my granddaughter was brought to me with scarcely any clothes to her back from a squalid room in Bayswater, you will see to what depths that scoundrel had dragged my poor Isabel."

"My dear, how dreadful!"

Mrs. Loftus was profoundly shocked, for on her last brief visit long ago she had heard none of these particulars. Charlotte, in deep mourning for Isabel, had been unable to speak of her without tears, she remembered, and Jonathan only just convalescent after his severe illness. The subject had been avoided therefore, and neither in later meetings between them, nor in his letters had her brother mentioned anything of this.

"No wonder you feel bitter," she said. "And didn't the relatives makes themselves rather unpleasant? Who and what are they, Charlotte?"

"Riff-raff, undoubtedly."

"What a frightful situation ... and that poor little boy.... You and Jon must be worried to death."

"The boy is and can be nothing to us," said Charlotte sharply. "I am thankful to have been able to save that poor baby from the contamination of such people, but the boy was far too old and the mischief done. I could not undertake such a responsibility, and I am determined to cut out the whole

association for Susan's sake. She can have nothing in common with people in such a walk of life."

"Of course not." Mrs. Loftus considered the matter, frowning. "I see that it is a very difficult and delicate position for you," she said at last. "I wonder if Michael and I could be of any help?"

"No, no. Nothing can alter facts," said Mrs. Somerville impatiently.

"You wouldn't like Michael to set some inquiries on foot, privately of course, to find out that the boy is in no want and is at least being educated? I know Jon has all the expenses he can shoulder, and we are not well off, but we would be willing to help."

Charlotte, who had turned slowly purple, was almost beyond speech.

"Will you be good enough to mind your own business," she managed to say violently at last. "I will not put up with interference in this matter.... I absolutely forbid it, do you hear?... I can't bear it.... I am ill ... let me go."

Tears were now streaming down her cheeks and, rushing past her astounded guest, she stumbled from the room.

2

Sue, returned from her so-called treat with Ella Winch, was keeping watch for her grandmother in the hope of being allowed to come down to tea. Stalking about the landing and hanging over the stairs, she could almost feel the Somervilles of the past watching her from their gilt frames, but she would not look at them yet, out of loyalty to Aunt Alison. In the ardor of her first real friendship she could even believe that what had always seemed to her just dark and rather ugly old pictures, would be magically changed when she came to see them at Aunt Alison's side.

Perhaps after tea they would go exploring the house together.

Seeing her grandmother hurry out of the drawing-room and up the stairs, she ran to meet her, then stopped in terror at the sight of her face.

"*Granny!* What is it?"

It was an unfortunate encounter, for Charlotte, remembering the order which the child had disregarded, and almost beside herself with temper, turned her rage upon Sue.

"What is it indeed, you disobedient, naughty girl? I am ashamed of you! Go away ... go into the schoolroom and don't dare to leave it...."

“But, granny, what have I done?”

“You know well what you have done, Susan. Don’t lie to me ...” stuttered her grandmother. “Racing about the garden with your great-aunt when I expressly forbade you to do anything of the kind.”

Sue’s suspicions flew naturally to her enemy Miss Winch.

“I didn’t race her, whatever Ella says,” she cried indignantly.

“Ella indeed,” said her grandmother. “It was your aunt herself who complained to me. And that’s a nice thing, I must say, from a guest in my house.... Go away, this instant. I can’t talk to you. I am too much upset.”

At this moment Ella Winch came running to see what was amiss, and granny burst into tears again and groped for her arm.

“Take me to my room, Ella, my dear, I am ill.... Fetch Mr. Somerville,” she begged.

Sue ran to the schoolroom, shut herself in and stood there blindly, shaking from, head to foot.

It was not the tempest which out of a clear sky had broken over her head, or her grandmother’s anger and tears. She had experienced these before and they would pass. She had been too startled to quote her grandfather’s permission in justification of what she had done, but she did not think of that, even now.

Something horrible had happened to Sue. She had had a friend and lost her. No, she had had not a friend but an enemy who had basely betrayed her, as soon as her back was turned.

She felt cold and rather sick, and creeping across the room she stood with her face pressed to the window looking out. But this time she did not see the long green alleys which only that morning had been peopled with other Somerville children before her dazzled eyes. She saw only a dark and ugly world.

3

Mrs. Loftus walked about the drawing-room, torn between discomfiture and indignation, conscious of having been a fool to suppose that a woman of Charlotte’s mentality would see any matter uncolored by her own private resentments.

She had been so horrified by the description of Isabel's children reduced to rags and penury that all her thoughts had been for the unfortunate boy, taken by these evidently undesirable relatives and condemned to similar conditions. She had not seen as she saw now that Charlotte had transferred her hatred of the father to the boy, and that her own well-meant offers of help had therefore given serious offense. She was sorry, for Jonathan's sake, and when a maid brought in tea, she asked the girl whether her master was in the house.

"He is with the mistress, madam. She is unwell and I was to say would you please not wait tea for them. The master will be down as soon as madam is comfortable."

Alison poured out a cup of tea and drank it, thankful to have something to do; and when Jonathan did come in, looking gray and spent after being subjected to the ordeal by tears, she made him sit down and brought him a whiskey from the dining-room before allowing him to say a word.

"Charlotte has made herself ill. You needn't tell me," she said, "and I am entirely responsible. Yes, I was a fool of course. She was telling me about those two babes of Isabel's and the frightful state they were in, and naturally I was concerned for the poor little boy. I thought Michael and I might perhaps have contrived to do something for him under the rose."

"Yes, yes, but it's no use, Alison," returned her brother. "I should have warned you of course not to mention the subject of Dubenny. It always upsets her intolerably and she makes herself ill."

"Did Charlotte see this place in Bayswater—where I imagine Isabel was living?" asked Alison, frowning. "Did she fetch Sue herself?"

"Good God, no. She was prostrated by the shock of Isabel's death. That and the long strain of my illness—for I was not expected to recover. Poor Charlotte!... She sent Barker, you remember her? Barker was scandalized at the place and I suppose had a good deal to say. There was a young woman there in one of those fancy war uniforms, it appears, who said she was the children's aunt. And the boy appears to have been an ill-conditioned young imp, fought and screamed and so on.... Still, it was months before I was able to hear the woman's story, and God knows how much she may have embroidered it by that time."

"Is Barker with you still?"

"No, she became rather troublesome—too possessive about the child, quarreling with the nurse and so on, and it seemed better to get rid of her.

Charlotte had spoilt her, of course."

Mrs. Loftus looked at him.

"You don't believe Barker's story, Jon," she said with conviction.

"I don't know what to believe. I don't put the same value on a few missing buttons and drab surroundings as a woman would, perhaps. I can't see why Barker should have lied, but she had lived a pampered existence here for a number of years. We knew Dubenny could not afford a place in Mayfair and a large staff of servants, but the absence of these amenities may have shocked the snob in Barker. However, that's beyond the point, Alison. There's too much more behind it—the long quarrel between Isabel and her mother, the reversal of Charlotte's feelings, perhaps naturally, after the poor child's death—putting the blame entirely upon Dubenny's shoulders. You can't argue with a woman when her affections are involved."

Alison let that pass. If generalizations about women were any comfort to him, why dispute them? He had to save Charlotte's face, she supposed, even to her.

"But you had some communications about the children, of course?" she said suddenly. "You know who and what these people are who took the boy?"

"Nothing whatever. The affair was finished and done with by the time I was well enough to hear anything about it. Charlotte no doubt would have been wiser to let the lawyers deal with it, but she had no experience of anything of the kind, and naturally disliked the notion of taking outsiders into her confidence about her differences with Isabel. She simply tore up what little correspondence there was, having the little girl, and washed her hands of the Dubennys."

His sister stared at him.

"And you mean to tell me you have been content to leave it at that?" she exclaimed, incredulously. "Your own grandson ... and you don't know whether he has proper care and a decent education ... even food to eat!"

"My dear Alison, children in these days are not left to starve," returned Jonathan. "You must remember that the father's people have some rights, and that they wished to take the boy presupposes an ability to look after him. We don't know what version of the unhappy affair Dubenny may have given them, but their hostility surely proved that the battle was joined. In their eyes no doubt we are everything that is unspeakable, and what good purpose could be served by stirring up further family quarrels? As Charlotte has the

little girl, far wiser to leave things as they are.... Who are we to say that the lad is not better off?"

"No one can say that without taking the trouble to find out," retorted Mrs. Loftus, almost with heat.

He smiled a little sadly.

"And even then?" he suggested. "Are we so lost to all sense of realities as to believe that all this"—he waved a hand round the old beautiful room —"the surface graces of life, shall we say, are a better preparation for a boy growing up in these times than simpler surroundings and the knowledge that he will have to stand on his own feet?... Oh, don't misunderstand me, I'd have been selfish enough to take the risk and fight for the boy if it had rested with me alone. But there's Charlotte. Better a dinner of herbs, you know, Alison."

That seemed to her the bitterest thing she had ever heard from him, and she said gently:

"Poor Jon!... Ah well, and now what is to be done? Is it any use my going up and trying to soothe Charlotte—or shake her?"

"Not a bit. She has worked herself into a state of mind and the best course is to leave her alone and let it all blow over. It seems damned inhospitable, my dear, but you'll only be made uncomfortable. I rather think you'd be wiser to get back to town in the morning ... and come down again later on," finished Jonathan.

"But of course."

("So it's like that," she thought. "She has told him she won't stir till I am out of the house.")

"I'll go this afternoon, if you don't mind, Jon," she said. "Michael sent me on a batch of letters this morning, and I really have no end of things to see to. Could you look up trains and order the car while I pack?"

She refused to hear his awkward protests that there was no need for such haste, accepted the fiction about returning later, and went up at once to get ready.

Then she remembered Sue, and set off in search of her, but corridors were deserted and not even the useful Miss Winch in sight.

"They haven't come back, I suppose," she said to herself, so sat down and wrote a little note to the child.

She gave this to a maid when she went down, and asked her to put it in the schoolroom for Miss Susan, and then turned, to find Jonathan ready to accompany her to the train.

"I'll write to Charlotte, of course," she said. She had a strong suspicion that this would be a waste of time. Her sister-in-law had always resented her attachment to Jonathan and would make the most of this opportunity for making a breach between them. It was useless to harass him further by suggesting such a possibility, but she did say:

"In the meantime you come to town now and then, I suppose, because there are various things we want to talk over with you."

Jonathan smiled.

"Yes, I shall make a point of having business in town as soon as I can get away. I haven't seen so much of you all these years."

"No."

For the rest of the journey silence fell between them, and these two people tasted the old content of simply being together.

At the last moment as she waited for the train, Alison exclaimed with a sigh:

"I came to see Sue, and now look what I have done, as we used to say. One never learns sense, Jon."

"Yes. By the way, what did you think of the child?" asked Jonathan curiously.

"I wish she was mine," said Mrs. Loftus.

4

Sue, still standing listlessly at the window, heard the car drive away and saw its headlights yellow in the gathering dusk, but felt no interest in it. Her tea lay on the table untouched. She had come in from her expedition in the cold air feeling hungry, but she was now too angry and hurt to think of food, and an emptiness within added to her discomfort.

She looked so white and wretched when Ella came in to summon her to her grandmother that the girl was shocked into sympathy.

"Cheer up, Sue," she said. "Mrs. Loftus has gone, and it doesn't really matter what she said about you."

“I don’t care what *any*body says about me,” retorted the little girl fiercely.

Mrs. Somerville, feeling it necessary to make some explanation to Miss Winch for the scene with Sue, her own tears and the sudden departure of the guest, had told a plausible story, and would certainly end by believing it. Mrs. Loftus, after the interfering manner of relatives, had taken it upon herself to criticize Sue’s manners and behavior, an impertinence to which Mrs. Somerville would not submit. She had been greatly upset and had, she was afraid, spoken her mind to the visitor, who had taken offense. Ella, having her own difficulties with Sue, was easy to convince with such a tale, though she was inwardly astonished that a woman of such equability of manner as Mrs. Loftus should have had so little tact.

Sue went to her grandmother’s room with none of her usual eagerness.

It hardly mattered that granny had now recovered her temper and was ready to make friends; indeed there was an embarrassment in such scenes which merely added to the little girl’s wretchedness.

She knew that her grandmother’s occasional displeasure never lasted very long, and she did not take it seriously, but the reconciliations which came after filled her with discomfort.

Granny, it is to be feared, reveled in them, and was quite persuaded that Sue would have been broken-hearted if she failed to explain to her how much she really loved her in spite of what had taken place.

This afternoon therefore she held out her arms and cooed over the criminal and gave her all the usual assurances which Sue knew by heart and took for granted, as children do, a little bored by this continual repetition of the obvious.

“She’s gone, darling, and we won’t allow her to make mischief between us, nasty creature, complaining of my girlie,” said granny, reverting to baby talk.

“But what did she *say* about me?” asked Sue (who did not care what anybody said), scowling and trying to free herself from granny’s clasp without hurting her feelings.

A plain answer to a plain question was not granny’s way and she said in a soothing voice: “Never mind, my pet, we don’t take any notice of such people, you and I. We’ll forget all about her. She’s old and soured, darling, and should have stayed among her savages....”

“I want to know what she said. *How* did she complain, granny?”

Sue had got away from the bed, indignant, obstinate and not to be recalled in this mood by bright and clever glances, or driven from her purpose. It had not entered her head to disbelieve her grandmother, all her thoughts and questions were directed against the enemy whom she had taken for a friend.

“I didn’t race her about the garden, granny. What did she say?” persisted Sue.

“Oh, some nonsense of the kind, and your chattering of clothes at your age,” announced granny, searching her mind for some phrase of Alison’s from this conversation which she was now persuaded had really taken place. “ ‘How shocking,’ she said, and I told her plainly that I had taught you to be interested in clothes and I would thank her to mind her own business,” finished granny, neatly mingling fact with fiction, with a feeling of triumph for her own part in the altercation.

“But I didn’t chatter about clothes at all. I didn’t,” flared Sue, now quite convinced that her Aunt Alison must be mad as well as hateful.

Quite accustomed to taking a competent part in discussions about her grandmother’s wardrobe, she was too confused to see any connection between ‘clothes’ and the talk of her queerly dressed predecessors with Aunt Alison this morning, and worn out by all this vicarious emotion, she burst into tears. Granny had won the first round.

5

Sue plunged her face in cold water, then rubbed it dry, humming loudly at the same time in the determination not to admit that there was such a person as Aunt Alison in the world.

She had done with her and would never believe in any one again. She was as bad as Ella, or worse, a hundred times worse, because Ella didn’t pretend to be a friend, but told you you were horrid when she thought so.

Sue could respect her avowed enemy, for there was no love lost between them, but not this traitor, for whom her love was lost indeed.

“Sour-faced,” granny had called her, while they agreed that she had better go back to her savages.

Sue peered anxiously in the bathroom mirror, regretting her childish tears, and was startled perhaps by the sourness of the face that looked back

at her, for she puffed out her cheeks and grinned in her determination to look as different from the enemy as possible. Then, loudly singing, she stalked away to the schoolroom and turned on the light.

There was a note on the table, addressed simply "Sue," and she turned it over in surprise. At the Lintons Granny had told her they had been most upset that she had not been brought to luncheon, and had talked a great deal about "dear little Sue." Perhaps this was an invitation to spend to-morrow there or some other day. Sue opened the letter eagerly, hoping it might be to-morrow, stared at the signature, then flung it from her on to the table and backed away.

All her desolation came flooding over her again, but she fought it indignantly. She did not want to read the letter, yet approached it, feeling that she could not just leave it unread.

> "This is to say good-by, dear, because I have to return to town unexpectedly before you get in from your excursion with Miss Winch. I am so sorry that after all we could not explore the house together and look for fair-haired Somervilles among the portraits. You will have to make friends with them without me, Sue.
>
> "I enjoyed our walk this morning and shall like to picture you at Crofter's End doing so many of the things I used to do. How we should have loved your secret house under the cedar!
>
> "Think of me sometimes, won't you?
>
> "Your affectionate
> "AUNT ALISON."

Sue could not have said what she had expected to find in the letter. Her view of the visitor had become so distorted by the afternoon's agitation that nothing could have surprised her more than this simple and friendly little note, and she read it and re-read it suspiciously, still standing at arm's length from the table on which it lay.

The sound of approaching footsteps in the corridor without startled her and she moved away from the letter, then changed her mind and snatching it hastily, she pushed it behind a cushion on the easy chair by the fire and sat on it.

Maggie came in to lay the schoolroom supper, and saw her there, apparently drowsy. She was curious about the sudden departure of the visitor

and the reported indisposition of the mistress of the house, so remarked chattily to her friend Sue:

"It's too bad your auntie has to go back so sudden, isn't it, miss?"

"Well, I don't care," returned Sue, with assumed indifference.

"But it would have been a bit of change to have a visitor in the house all the same. Not that I expect a lady of her age would be of much interest to you. What you want is some children to play with. Still, Mrs. Loftus was very nice, kind of stately and yet, if you know what I mean, with ever such a nice smile," said Maggie. "But my goodness, wasn't she pale?"

"Yellow as mustard," growled the figure by the fire.

"Aw, Miss Sue! yellow indeed? Now I can see you didn't like your auntie."

"Yes, I did, yes, I did," cried Sue with a burst of laughter. "I wanted to see what you'd say. I don't think she was a bit yellow."

"Pulling my leg as usual," sighed Maggie, gathering up her tray; "and I was going to say you had a look of her yourself. So now!"

As the door closed upon Maggie after this illuminating remark, Sue put a hand behind her and brought out the note again, re-reading it with her back turned to the door, so that it could be quickly hidden if any one came in. This instinctive secrecy was her reaction to the bewildering situation more than a tribute to Aunt Alison perhaps, yet now the latter had ceased to be quite the monster she had seemed and became again some one unique in her experience, a grown-up person who had talked to her from the first as an equal and a friend.

The letter, Sue saw triumphantly, did not complain of her chatter or accuse her of being fond of clothes. (Sue was certain she had never mentioned the subject beyond saying 'how frightful' about the boys in silks and long curls.) And beside she had shown Aunt Alison her secret house under the cedar tree, which nobody knew, nobody. *And Aunt Alison hadn't told granny about that.*

Torn between conflicting loyalties, her own quick intelligence against habit and affection, the old love against the new, the child's mind was in confusion.

Granny couldn't possibly have made it up?

Sue suddenly seized the letter, tore it in pieces and flung it into the fire, and if there were little wisdom in this, it was valiant in its way, for she knew that she wanted to believe Aunt Alison rather than her grandmother, and she was horrified.

It was easy to accept quite happily the notion that Ella told lies, and think no worse of Ella than usual; but this was another thing, and quite incredible.

So Sue rejected the true for the false as older and wiser heads might have done in the circumstances. Yet though the victory was with Mrs. Somerville still, she had entered that afternoon the road to defeat. Something had gone from the relationship of these two—the unquestioning faith of one of them.

Sue would never be sure.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LOST BOY

1

"This is a nice thing you are letting me in for, I must say," grumbled Robert Lord to his wife Irene, as they were dressing to go out to dinner with Admiral and Mrs. Loftus. "Are you quite certain a black tie will be all right? You don't think I ought to get into tails, or knee breeches or anything? This Lord High Admiral—or low as the case may be—has been received at Buckingham Palace. I saw it in *The Times*."

"Well, he is a returned governor, and that's one of their perks. No, of course a black tie," said Irene, surveying her face in the mirror with much concentration.

"Perhaps you are right. More respectful to Nigel," remarked Robert wickedly. "I hope you are wearing deep mourning."

"I will, if you are not careful."

"Poor Nigel!"

"Oh, shut up, Robert. We shall be late."

"Well, I'm sorry for the fellow," explained Mr. Lord mildly. "It shows my nice disposition and I'm careful about that. I mean if you have a virtue, it's only right to show it. People mightn't know. You don't think the Admiral will expect me to wear my Orders and Decorations?"

"Have you any?"

"Certainly I have. They had to give me a medal to get me out of the Army, and you'd hardly know it from the V.C. except that it's round."

Irene laughed. She knew him in this mood. It meant that he was dreading the evening before him, and it was a little awkward, she supposed, to meet the parents of the man to whom she had been engaged.

"You needn't be afraid, they are dears," she assured him.

"Yes, I daresay, but it's pretty thick. A chap more or less knows he'll have a mother-in-law when he marries. It's a risk he runs with his eyes open, anyway, but he doesn't expect to take on his wife's ex-mother-in-law-elect, once removed. I wish you'd go without me—seriously, Irene. It would be far more comfortable for every one concerned. The Loftuses will want to talk to you, naturally, and I shall put a constraint upon the whole show."

"Oh no, you won't," exclaimed Irene, hurriedly. "I'm funking it quite as badly as you are. I couldn't possibly go alone."

Mr. Lord whistled.

"We *are* in for a grisly evening, then!"

"No, I don't mean that." Irene clasped her necklace, smoothed out her frock, then looked at him defiantly. "Well, if you must know—when you've wept on a person's shoulder, and declared you will never marry any one now, you feel such a dam' fool...."

"I see it all," beamed Robert. "I am to be taken along as a justification. I thank you for these kind words. They have only to see me and all will be forgiven. You may kiss me, wife."

They continued to hearten each other with such fooleries as the taxi carried them to the hotel where the Loftuses were staying, Robert declaring that if these grandees were as bad as he expected he should refer to "the wife," split his infinitives, and preach that navies were anti-social, just to prove that he was an undesirable acquaintance.

Irene, much as she had liked Nigel's mother, had not seen her for eight years, and she became uneasy about her lipstick, demanding Robert's pocket torch in order to look at the effect in her hand mirror.

"Not at all. Keep your armor on, woman," he returned severely. "It may help the good work, if we have to resort to shock tactics."

The two fine-looking, rather elderly people who greeted them a few moments later were a pleasant surprise to Robert Lord, who had feared emotionalism or pomposity or both.

"I am glad to see you, Irene, and how pretty you look," exclaimed Mrs. Loftus, kissing her, then turning to the young man: "You're Robert? May I call you Robert?"

"Well—er—I don't usually, but as a great favor ... I mean, as long as it isn't considered a precedent."

"You've *clicked*," exclaimed Irene, with a huge sigh of relief to her hostess, and there was general laughter.

Alison Loftus was delighted with them both. The loss of her sons, who were never far from her thoughts, made their generation dear to her, and she was interested in everything about it, its changing fashions in dress, manners, catch-phrases, all that superficial sophistication of a period and its problems which were the eternal problems still.

This quality of hers, and a natural ease of manner acquired by her semi-official life in many corners of the world over a number of years, made her less suspect to younger people than most women of her age. She had always had them about her in a shifting stream, and in coming home to retirement at last she felt that life would seem very unfurnished without them.

These two would perhaps help her to remedy that, to reëstablish contact with other friends of Nigel and Tom, who, when the flat of her dreams was found, would drop in for cocktails sometimes, or fill her guest rooms for a night, coming and going about their lawful occasions.

"We thought it would be more amusing to dine in the restaurant than in solitary state," she said to them. "And besides, you will probably like to dance."

"What an enlightened woman," exclaimed Robert.

"Don't you believe it," put in the Admiral. "She wants to see all the new steps. You are dealing with a pair of Rip van Winkles, my boy."

"I thought the Navy never slept," protested Robert.

"He's thinking of the sun and the British Empire. He's come over all Imperial through meeting a Governor," said Irene.

"Michael has done with all that, my dear. He is no longer 'his Ex.' as the aide-de-camps used to call him behind his back."

"Did you catch them at it, Mrs. Loftus?"

"Catch 'em indeed. She probably encouraged the beggars," declared the Admiral.

"Well, of course. There's nothing more ageing than the respect of one's juniors."

Robert considered his hostess solemnly.

"You'll admit it isn't my fault if you feel more than twenty by now," he said.

"Quite, but don't reduce me to infancy before the evening's out, will you?" she begged.

The four went in to dinner on excellent terms, and whatever sadness the reunion with Irene may have recalled to Nigel's parents, was not for a moment permitted to appear. The young soldier's name was not mentioned at all for some time and then only in a question from Mrs. Loftus to the girl.

"Irene, in the old days did you by any chance ever meet Nigel's cousin Isabel Dubenny?"

"Yes, of course. A little dark, pretty creature. And wait a minute ... what was his name? ... Paul Dubenny. I remember them quite well. Several times when he and Nigel happened to be on leave together, we made a foursome and did a show, or danced. What became of them, Mrs. Loftus?"

Alison Loftus told her, and went on:

"It was Paul I wanted to hear about. I never saw him. We were at Malta when Isabel married and it was a run-away match at that. Her mother was against it and there was a complete break between them which was never mended. I was not in London during the War, but I had a hazy idea one of the boys had mentioned seeing Isabel sometimes. Was Paul Dubenny an impossible sort of person, Irene? ... Yes, my dear, you may smile at my antique phraseology, but I don't mean that he ate with his knife, for instance ... or you would not have chosen to dine with him. But did he strike you as a shiftless good-for-nothing, let us say?"

"Not a bit. He was large and amusing and a very good dancer, I remember, only he always wanted to keep it up all night. Isabel was like that too. They were out for a good time while they could get it, but so were most of us of course."

Mrs. Loftus gave her a brief outline of the condition in which the two children were supposed to have been left, and found Irene incredulous.

"Isabel certainly didn't look hard up," she said, "and Paul would have had his army pay. I seem to think he was in the Field Artillery. It sounds most extraordinary."

"If it had been twelve months after the Armistice and he hadn't had a job to go back to, yes, possibly," interposed Robert, "but you said 1918, didn't

you? Odd."

"But 1918 was frightful enough, when the influenza epidemic was raging," recalled Irene. "I seem to think Isabel was living in the country, so if they were in rooms, she must have brought the children up to meet Paul when he came home from France. Whole households were down with flu' and you couldn't get help and nurses were at a premium. Wouldn't any place look rather squalid where two people had been suddenly stricken by such a plague? And if the aunt, or whatever she was, was in uniform, she must have been still at some job and not free to wash and mend for those small children. It seems quite plausible to me now I look back."

Mrs. Loftus found herself agreeing with this view, the most reassuring light on the situation yet presented. What could Charlotte, remote from realities both physically and mentally, know of the conditions that might prevail in such an emergency?

Without going into family details she told her guests what had happened to Isabel's children and her own reaction to it.

"I feel concerned about the boy and should like to do something for him if he needs it. That is why I was hoping if you had known Paul Dubenny you could tell me something about his people, and whether there was any likelihood of it."

Irene however knew nothing of the Dubennys. Robert suggested looking up the telephone book and the directory as the name was not a common one. When they went to the lounge for coffee he usefully secured both volumes, but his search was in vain. There seemed to be no Dubennys in London.

"What about engaging one of those private inquiry agents?" he suggested.

"I hardly like to do that," explained Mrs. Loftus. "I have already offended my sister-in-law, probably for life, by even raising the topic. She is one of those women who think if a man marries a girl against her fond mother's wishes he must be a scoundrel of the worst description, and has convinced herself the boy takes after his father.... But I don't know why I should inflict all this family history upon you two. Go and dance, won't you?"

"But I am interested," declared Robert. "There must be men I know who were in the Field Artillery who could tell us something about this chap. I gather you don't mind whether he was a scoundrel or not?"

"It is surely beside the point."

“Your interest in the boy is humanitarian?”

“It is nothing of the kind,” declared Mrs. Loftus indignantly. “It is entirely sentimental as this age counts the word. I lost my sons and there is nothing I can do for them any more. That was the law of chance, but suppose it had been the other way?”

“Yes, that’s a thought,” agreed Robert Lord and smiled at her very nicely.

The Admiral was saying to Irene:

“Here, you had better take him away to dance. He is falling in love with my wife.”

And that was true enough in a sense. Robert liked Mrs. Loftus so much that he was already committing himself to track down the Dubennys, if it could be done.

2

“You mean to try to trace this lad then, in spite of Charlotte’s outburst?” Michael Loftus asked Alison when their guests had gone. “Don’t you think you are inviting trouble, my dear?”

“I daresay I am,” she admitted. “But doesn’t it seem monstrous to you that some of us should not make an effort to see whether he has a decent chance in life? Charlotte says the Dubennys were hostile, but why not? Is she to have a monopoly of that sentiment in the quarrel? You and I are sufficiently neutral surely to offer the boy a hand, if occasion requires. The Dubennys are probably not people of means, and in these hard times may find his education a problem. If Charlotte should prove to be right, he may be already thrown upon the world.... Jonathan’s grandson! And if that fool had had a little human feeling and a little tact, Jon might have had the boy ... some one to work for, instead of worrying and striving to no end, except a selfish woman’s comfort.”

“Has it occurred to you,” said her husband, “that Charlotte may have been shrewd enough to see that, Alison. With her curious mentality, and feeling as she does about Dubenny ... never having given Jonathan an heir herself, would she welcome Dubenny’s son in that capacity, however empty a title it may be nowadays?”

Mrs. Loftus looked up quickly.

“She never liked Jonathan’s affection for our boys, you know ... you may be right; though she wouldn’t admit it, even to herself. She wraps up her own actions in a kind of virtuous reasonableness. She even took me in for half an hour.”

She thought again of that day at Crofter’s End, and her drive with her brother to the train, the old content between them in spite of what had passed. And then of the solitary child in the garden, who might have had a similar relationship—at least a companion approaching her own years. What was she going to think of the position later on? Even Charlotte would be powerless to keep her in that artificial atmosphere indefinitely. If her mother had revolted from it in 1912 what of the Susan of some years hence, in a world where it had become the rule rather than the exception for the young to stand upon their rights and go their own way?

Though Charlotte deserved to reap the whirlwind why should Jonathan be swept away in it ... and there was Sue herself ... and this boy, the unknown quantity, to whom Mrs. Loftus found her mind perpetually returning.

Was he perhaps as much of a Somerville as his sister?

She was too clear-sighted to accept the possibility without a smile at her own expense, knowing the wish to be father to the thought.

“It’s the clannish strain in me,” she said to herself. “The boy is probably the image of his father, or some other branch of the family we have never heard of.”

She knew that that had no bearing on the situation. Going to the window she looked out at the night in which a fine rain had begun to fall, her problem lost for a moment in the pleasure of being back in London at last after so many years, a London familiar yet strange, and infinitely exciting to her still, though she was fifty-six.

Below her cars and taxis passed in a steady stream, gathering up the wet road and splitting it into a moving pattern of lights. Pedestrians hurried along under umbrellas, or without them, collars buttoned to the ears and heads down against the rain, jostling each other, separating, converging, as pantomimes and Christmas shows emptied a multitude of home-going people into the January night.

“By Jove, it’s cold, Alison. Are you ready to turn in?” said the Admiral.

She nodded and followed him to the lift. A party of people were coming in through the swing-doors from the street.

Mrs. Loftus shivered in the sudden draught and thought again of the boy, perhaps somewhere out in the cold and rain, not properly clothed and ill-fed, countering that fear however with Irene's commonsense suggestion of the 'squalor' in which he had been left.

Irene was probably right. If he was out at all at this hour it was far more likely to be as one of the hundreds of youngsters going home from the pantomime.

Malcolm Dubenny's unknown relative decided to concentrate upon this more satisfactory picture of him, and went up to bed.

3

Malcolm, already inclined to look with a mixture of tolerance and suspicion upon pantomimes as fare for kids, was in fact comfortably asleep —forgetting the enemy Somervilles and even his sister Susan.

He was at an age to be increasingly aware in fact that young sisters were actually rather a blot on the landscape, an inconvenient impediment to male undertakings.

Tim's home for instance was infested with them at this season.

Tim Field's father belonged to an old established firm of solicitors and his mother drove her own car, divided her days between golf and bridge, and always required a week of dinners in town to make her human again, she said, after her children's holidays. She was quite fond of them, wrote to them meticulously while they were at school in a large and dashing hand (which covered a maximum of notepaper with a minimum of effort) and attended their speech days or other necessary occasions without fail. But she would have liked them to hibernate during the holidays. As Nature had failed to arrange this for her, she encouraged friends and relatives to invite them to stay, occasionally giving in with rather bored astonishment to the insistence of her young that these visits must be returned.

Tim was now old enough to follow his own desires, and preferred knocking about with Malcolm to entertaining or being entertained. Having a financial streak in him he had hired himself to clean his mother's car for a wage these holidays, thereafter engaging Malcolm as unpaid assistant on the grounds that to know nothing about a car practically amounted to illiteracy.

After one strenuous afternoon of this education during Christmas week, Malcolm had had a horrifying experience. The two boys had gone to Tim's room to clean up and regale themselves on mince pies and cake, adjuring tea

because the dining-room was a perfect shambles, Tim said, with the little beasts and their friends.

Shambles seemed almost the right word somewhat later when Malcolm was about to go home, for running down the dark stairs, he found himself treading on something soft and yielding, which first moaned and then attacked him viciously.

"You *trod* on me," came the furious voice of a little beast.

"I say, I'm most frightfully sorry," exclaimed Malcolm, whose heart was thumping with fright. He had thought he had killed it, whatever it was. "But w—what on earth were you doing there?"

"Go away! I came out to be sick, if you must know," retorted the female virago, and Malcolm fled before she could carry this purpose into execution.

It had been an unnerving experience. He could not have believed that little girls were so unpleasantly squashy to tread on, and had momentarily expected a visit from Tim's father announcing that the child was maimed for life and what did Malcolm's uncle propose to do about it? As a lawyer he would have a frightful advantage undoubtedly in extorting damages from Uncle Hugh, who could not possibly afford to pay them.

Nothing of the kind had occurred, however, and Tim, when cautiously sounded next day, had heard of no casualty. His tone had almost seemed to suggest that in killing one of the little beasts Malcolm would have done him a personal favor.

"You're lucky not to have any young sisters, I can tell you," said Tim.

Malcolm agreed. The incident had inoculated him against the tribe, and if the child at Crofter's End had invaded his dreams to-night he would have been disgusted but undisturbed.

The 'hostile relatives' meanwhile—riff-raff of Mrs. Somerville's imagination—were pursuing their scandalous avocations downstairs.

Lorna was knitting a pull-over for Malcolm and at the same time brushing up her German against a change of holiday next summer if conditions in Central Europe should seem sufficiently calm. Hugh, rather doubtfully, had taken up a war novel. People were reading them again; they had recovered from the first revulsion from a subject too painfully near; this was January 1928. Hugh, in spite of his doubts, had become absorbed.

"I am glad he is not an octopus," remarked Lorna.

"Eh?"

"Malcolm." She held out her knitting. "His arms are so long. By the way, I see Tim has acquired his first dinner-jacket."

Hugh looked over the top of his book.

"You might bring up that motion again in about three years' time," he suggested mildly.

His wife laughed.

"You will be lucky if you escape till then," she said, rolling up her work. "I am going to bed to enjoy the vicious luxury of listening to the rain that I am not out in.... Three years.... He'll be eighteen, Hugh."

"Your mathematics are faultless," agreed Hugh. "*He* will be eighteen."

"And a blood, I suppose, if that is the correct term. Young Tim already believes himself almost a blood, I imagine."

"Well, Field can afford it, I daresay, and deal with it if Tim's contemporaries fail in the good work of putting him down. We won't cross our bridges till we come to them. In short," finished Hugh with friendly malice, "the dinner-jacket in my opinion would be bad for his morale."

CHAPTER SEVEN

GROWING PAINS

1

Well before three years had passed, Malcolm did acquire a dinner-jacket by sheer size, or brute force as his uncle chose to put it.

The boy remained in the ‘undesirable’ surroundings to which Charlotte Somerville had condemned him, not in the least aware of how much the household at Kew revolved about him, but fond of his home and ready to rule it. And although as he moved up the school he met and liked many fellows whom he knew to belong roughly to the same world as the Somervilles, he took these friendships coolly and never sought them. He was wary, not having enough experience yet to realize that social values had changed and that moreover snobbery was a personal vice, peculiar to no class in particular.

Because he sought no one, it followed that he was sought. Dubenny was considered a likeable chap; moreover he was becoming something of a power in the school. Doggedly he had kept to his purpose, and certain learned gentlemen, while careful to mask the fact with the accustomed sarcasm, considered him a promising youngster. He became a fair cricketer, played tennis well and was a good shot. In sport he would never set the Thames on fire, but at seventeen he was head of his house with a chance of being head of the school if he stayed the course and did not go up to Oxford too soon. Malcolm privately knew all about that. He could not afford to wait but would make for Oxford when—or if—he won a scholarship—“Mop it up,” in Tim’s phrase, he having no doubts about his friend’s ability to do this. The old intimacy between the two boys had not been broken, though Tim was now at Heidelberg for a year, before going up to Cambridge to study law and enter his father’s firm. During this separation they corresponded and set the various rulers of the world to rights on a number of matters, as became their years.

Malcolm's views were at this time radical in the extreme. Hugh took this as a natural stage until a chance reference to "a set of Tories of the Somerville brand" opened his eyes.

"I am a Tory myself," he pointed out mildly, "but perhaps you are hoping to teach me better."

Malcolm grunted.

"I don't class you with such people as that anyway," he said scornfully.

"It won't do, my boy," declared his uncle, shaking his head. "You are arguing from insufficient premises. Your political consciousness, if it is to be of any use to your generation, must be based on reason and experience, not a private grievance. That sounds a good deal to ask, I expect, but you have quite enough sense to think it over and I believe you'll agree with me. It is hard on you, I know, that through the prejudices of your grandparents you have been denied an ease of life and the much better surroundings you might have had...."

"But I don't ... it isn't," exclaimed Malcolm in horrified denial.

"No, in a sense perhaps you don't and it isn't," returned his uncle, amazed at his heat, "but the fact remains that you were hardly used for no fault of your own. And yet—it's a truism of course—the most worth while things in the long run, Malcolm, are the things you have done by your own effort. You have accomplished a few already. I don't pretend that it is unusual in these days—or that I expected less of you. After all, you have a decent tradition behind you—even presumably on the Somerville side of the family.... What I mean is that it is important to keep a balanced mind and not permit yourself to be prejudiced by an unfortunate personal experience. Hate wealth and position by all means where they breed oppression, but not because they have been denied to you."

"It's not their wealth or position that I mind," declared Malcolm with vigor, "but their insolence to my father's name, calling my sister Somerville and not letting her know she is Susan Dubenny or that I exist."

His uncle stared at him.

"How do you know this? Who said so?"

Malcolm, having thus given himself away, told of those old expeditions to Crofter's End and his encounter with Sue, while Hugh listened in silence. He was amazed at the doggedness with which the youngster of fourteen and fifteen had planned his expeditions and the secrecy with which he had

carried them out, glimpsing for the first time what his wife had always seen, the real difficulty with which adoptive parents must expect to contend in the alien blood of their child. These hitherto unsuspected qualities in Malcolm were no Dubenny characteristics but he was the son also of a Somerville and therefore to those who loved him unpredictable.

"You've kept very quiet about all this," he said ruefully.

"Yes, I know. It wasn't entirely because I thought you'd break my head," explained Malcolm, in the faintly superior tone of one who knows such danger long past. "You'd have thought I was such a frightful ass to have gone. I knew I was, but I was glad I went all the same. Because I knew what I was up against then.... And I made up my mind that I'd show 'em all about names...."

He broke off, some of his eagerness gone.

"And I daresay you'll think that's a pretty rotten reason to have worked for, too," he said gloomily.

Hugh took his pipe out of his mouth, pressed the tobacco and then gave the boy a thoughtful look.

"Well, it was at least a human reason, I daresay," he said at last to console him.

He had seen that he could quite simply accept Malcolm's explanation of his silence and that nothing was changed in their trust of each other. The boy had merely considered it his own affair and stood upon his own feet. How old had he been—the little chap—when he had first learned to do that? Six years old? To have seen all one's visible world collapse—even at six years old—would not leave one quite untouched perhaps.

"I am rather glad this has come out, you know," went on Hugh, "because you will have got it off your chest, and see it in a proper perspective. Perhaps I should have encouraged you to talk of the Somervilles but I supposed you had more or less forgotten them. Your aunt was wiser. She's always had a kind of intuitive anxiety about it."

"Really?" exclaimed Malcolm, astonished. "She never gave me a hint."

"No. You may have noticed her occasional desire to give you the world, however—as you couldn't have Crofter's End," returned Hugh dryly.

"My word, yes, I've noticed that all right ... wrapped up in a spot of abuse though, to deaden the sound," said Malcolm, grinning affectionately at the thought of Lorna.

It had been in Hugh's mind to give the boy a hint of Lorna's uneasy feeling about her own responsibility of which he had never been able to cure her, but seeing Malcolm's expression, he changed his mind. For why suggest it to him after all?

"I don't think I shall mention these revelations to Lorna," he said instead.

"Well, not if she's going to worry about it and fluff out her feathers," agreed Malcolm. "All the same, I should like to know what those people mean by their insolence. There was no reason why they should despise my father—or was there, Uncle Hugh?"

"None whatever ... and I don't suppose they did despise him. Family quarrels are the deuce and people lose their sense of proportion. I shouldn't worry about your sister's name. It seems the height of folly to me but they may have their reasons. Very likely it's purely a matter of sentiment. But they will have to tell her—or some one else will. These things always come out.... Their objection to your mother's marriage was simply that your father had neither the means, position nor prospects to support her as she had been accustomed to live. Up to a point they were quite right, though we may think they put more value on her material well-being than her happiness. Your father was agent on an estate in Rutland belonging to some people called Willard. Your mother was staying in their house when she met him. The Willards were young and not too practical to stand by the pair of them through thick and thin, and when your father went to the War promised to keep his post for him and let your mother live on rent-free in the house. But Willard himself was killed and the place sold. She had to move and had a small cottage in Surrey."

"I remember that."

"It was a very different world, even in 1911, you know, Malcolm, much more conservative, much more secure to all appearances. And to do your grandfather justice he did eventually offer them some financial assistance, but they refused it. They were very much in love and I suppose naturally weren't going to have it supposed that your father had married your mother with an ulterior motive—for what he could get."

"Jolly good! Lot of beastly tyrants," said Isabel Somerville's son. "Well, what is there to despise in that? They ought to admire their independence."

"Hm, yes, theoretically, but the best of us let our personal feelings run away with our sense of justice occasionally," returned his uncle

significantly. “Next time you wish to slate the landed gentry you might remember the name Willard and think again.”

“Rather. Not that I’m given to brooding on the Somervilles though.” Malcolm, awaking to the fact that he had been perhaps spouting a lot of hot air, looked up suspiciously. “I don’t lose any sleep about them.”

“We are both doing that,” returned his uncle, pointing to the clock. “It’s past midnight and high time we turned in.”

He watched the boy uncoil himself from his easy chair, acrobat fashion —six feet of him now, a fit, keen-looking fellow.

“Paul would have been proud of him,” he thought, “whatever the Somervilles may be.”

Malcolm was taking off his shoes, not however with dignity, but kicking them off schoolboy fashion, and catching them in midair.

“Mustn’t wake the lady of the house,” he explained. “She says I weigh a ton.”

2

Susan and Ella Winch walked smartly along the country road in the direction of Crofter’s End. It was a spring afternoon and chilly, so that Ella kept her head down and her chin in the fur collar of her coat, but Sue faced the cold air, loving it as she loved so little nowadays, breathing in all the sweet scents of the season, her head well up, as once she had done at her great-aunt’s side. It was not in conscious and happy imitation this time however; that brief friendship had passed painfully and mysteriously into the long-ago. The Sue of fourteen, taller than Ella now, swaggered a little as she walked, her mind empty, but her eyes taking in all the panorama of the road. The hedges were in full leaf at last and the trees feathered and lovely against the sky. Fruit blossom in a cottage garden sent down a gentle rain of petals to run with the daffodils through the grass, and the afternoon sun lay so glowingly upon this counterpane of patterned green, that Sue felt a strange longing to go and lie on it and forget how tired she was.

She was tired with the aching lethargy of the season, with her own fast growth; with her haste to be on the way home and the fatigue and excitement behind; the permanent and the present weariness melted together into a vast sigh and her steps began to flag.

“Tired?” asked Ella, waiting for her. “You are sure to be for a little while, until you get more used to it.”

Sue grunted.

How should Ella understand that it wasn't the dancing which had tired her, but the fact of being there at all, among all those girls dressed just the same, while she alone was different, girls politely not staring at her but casting covert glances; and that while she hated it and wanted to run, she also wanted so much more terribly to stay, to share their dreadful competence, knowing exactly where to go—down which corridor, in and out of which door, walking not on sufferance but by right, as they did.

Sue had been ill in the winter—nothing serious, but cold after cold which left her thin and far too tall, restless and pale. She could settle to nothing, slept badly and seemed unable to eat.

The doctor had watched her, particularly when she was off her guard, and then talked firmly to Mrs. Somerville. The child needed the company of other children, games, physical exercises, regular hours and occupation. She should be sent to school, and if Mrs. Somerville did not care to have her far away, why not this school at Crofton Beeches, only two miles from her own gates?

Mrs. Somerville disapproved of the school; she had disliked it from the first, having known poor dear Mrs. Fenton, and how heart-broken she had been to think of her beautiful home overrun by those hoydens—Tom, Dick and Harry were even mentioned, though their presence in such a seminary would have been, to say the least of it, unusual.

The Fentons had thought themselves extremely fortunate to dispose of their estate in such a way, and the doctor knew it, but he also knew Mrs. Somerville. He found an opportunity to speak to Susan's grandfather.

A few days afterwards the rector dropped in on his way from taking a confirmation class at the Beeches. He spoke warmly of the school and its head, who had very carefully preserved the character and beauty of the old mansion, while adapting it to its new purpose, he said. She had been somewhat troubled by applications from people in some of the new houses in the district who wished her to take their daughters as day scholars, but had set her face against this innovation, feeling it undesirable for various reasons.

Mrs. Somerville, disapproving of the new houses on principle, said she was perfectly right. It would never do. And that admission had proved the opening for at least the thin end of the wedge. She would not part with Sue and set her face against rough games, as she termed them, but the dancing

might be a convenience and do the child good. Every young lady should learn to dance, and the governess was supposed to impart this and every other form of instruction, but the present holder of the office was an ungraceful person certainly, and it was not surprising perhaps that her lessons were hardly a success.

Mrs. Somerville, hearing further praise of the head-mistress from her friend Mrs. Linton, at length called at Crofton Beeches to see for herself, and it was presently arranged that Sue should attend the dancing lessons.

Mrs. Somerville had condescended, the head-mistress had made a concession and both were therefore satisfied. Not so Sue. She was in a state to be upset by almost anything and the ordeal ahead of her had seemed too much. She worked herself up into a state of excitement and rebellion until her grandfather stepped in and told her sharply that she would do as she was told.

It was all his doing, Sue had thought bitterly, and she was right though she did not guess that only a deep concern for her had moved him. She hated her grandfather. Uncertain in these days about almost every one else, she was certain of this. He was a tyrant and responsible for every prohibition. He had ordered Aunt Alison out of the house, Maggie said so, Ella said so—as well as granny. Ella with her own eyes had seen him go straight down from granny's room to do it. And although Sue was still doubtful of Aunt Alison, enough of the color and pain of that brief interlude remained to make her feel this infamous.

She had never allowed him to find her in the library again, though defiantly she looted it for books to hide and read secretly, under the cedar or in bed at night. It was strange fare for Charlotte Somerville's granddaughter, more often than not, but if she read too much and with the limited understanding of her years and experience, the cadences of splendid prose began to sing in her mind and whole worlds to awaken suddenly before her in the beauty of a line.

3

"*Sue? Good heavens!*"

Ella had clutched her just in time, straying head up and eyes starry in the middle of the road, and dragged her clear as a car came round the bend, missing her almost by inches.

"You frightened my life out," protested Sue.

“You wouldn’t have had any life to frighten in another moment,” said Ella, who was shaking with terror at the danger escaped.

“My deliverer!” cried the unfeeling child dramatically, and then the driver of the car was upon them, full of apologies and concern—a young man with a pleasant ugly face and dressed in rather shabby tweeds.

“I say, are you all right? I’m frightfully sorry,” he exclaimed.

“My fault,” returned Sue.

“Yes, I suppose it was. But that wouldn’t have been much of a consolation, you know. Look here ... may I ... can’t I give you a lift as far as you are going? It is the least I can do.”

He was looking at Ella and, finding her voice at last, she replied:

“Oh, please don’t bother.... We are only going to Crofter’s End.... You do feel all right, Sue, don’t you?”

She admitted it, but not without a glance at the car.

“I’m afraid there’s some junk in the back, and my dog,” said the driver, “but if you wouldn’t mind that....”

The mention of the dog clinched the matter, for Sue was immediately off to make friends with him through the window, and Ella, beginning to waver, admitted:

“She *is* rather tired, if you are sure it will be no trouble and can pack us in.”

Sue, oblivious of the junk, rode in the back seat with her friend the dog, who put a paw on her knee to seal their relationship. Ella, in the front, gave and received information during the short run.

She asked the young man to put them down at the lodge gates to save Mrs. Somerville alarm, and had then to explain that she was not Miss Somerville but a companion and that he had luckily missed running over the granddaughter of the house.

He was visibly impressed for, he said, Mr. Somerville was a magistrate of course, and he himself just come to live in the neighborhood—to try fruit-farming. He didn’t want to begin badly by slaughtering the inhabitants.

“Particularly,” he added, “such a jolly one,” and sent a little smile to Sue, busy with his dog in the back seat.

When presently she had to say good-by to the beast who for some mysterious reason was called Parrot, it was with evident reluctance, and Parrot's owner remarked:

"He's a mongrel, I'm afraid, but he has his feelings, so I hope you'll consider him at least a humble acquaintance and not cut him if you chance to meet."

"We'll look out for him," promised Sue with enthusiasm, and shook hands with both owner and dog.

"I don't think you ought to have said that," protested Ella confidentially as soon as they were out of earshot. "What he really meant was might *he* speak to us if we meet."

"Well, why didn't he say so then?" Sue regarded Miss Winch mischievously. "He's in love with you, I shouldn't wonder."

"Don't be so idiotic—a complete stranger, and your granny would probably be horrified that we let him drive us home even. Only you *were* tired ... and after such a shock...."

Sue laughed.

"He's a funny sort of farmer, Ella ... not like any of the others down here."

"Well, people do all sorts of things nowadays," said Miss Winch vaguely. "Lots of young men go in for farming. I don't think we'd better tell your granny though. What do you say?"

"About the running-over? No," said Sue. "Except that you certainly saved my life, old Winch. At peril to your own."

"But it would give her such a fright, and she would never be easy in her mind."

Susan knew that was true and sighed, relinquishing her fine idea of proclaiming Ella's valor from the housetops.

During these years her relations with Miss Winch had changed to a kind of alliance, unexpressed on both sides. They still quarreled, but comfortably and without rancor, and Sue was no longer jealous when Mrs. Somerville preferred Ella's company to her own. Indeed these occasions were very often a relief, for the growing girl had become conscious of the boredom of visits to elderly ladies and of being always responsive to granny's smiles.

She was beginning to acquire opinions of her own in direct contradiction to many of her grandmother's which of old she had taken for gospel, to be impatient, embarrassed and troublesome, despising her governess and defying her with ease.

"She is at a difficult age," was Mrs. Somerville's complacent verdict when the unfortunate instructor complained of the pupil. "*I* can always manage her," and then she would try baby-talk with Sue, who listened scowling.

"Beastly tell-tale," was her description of the governess.

"Serves you right," Ella would retort.

"Well, but she's so fat, Ella, and she doesn't know anything."

"And you know everything in the world, I suppose?"

Sue could be sure of Ella.

The governess had taken offense at the dancing-class and felt it beneath her dignity to accompany Susan to school, so feigned indisposition as often as possible on Tuesdays. This time it was a cold which Sue, preferring Ella's company, hoped would last forever, or at least till the end of term. In the summer the classes were always suspended, but whether that would be a relief or a disappointment she could not decide.

Ella Winch had now been ten years at Crofter's End and she was thirty-two, ten years in which her duties had increased and multiplied, until there was no moment of the day or year which she could really call her own.

It did not occur to Mrs. Somerville that this was hard on Ella, and if the girl had asked for regular leisure she would have thought it very odd of her —like a servant.

Once a year at great inconvenience she allowed Ella to go home to see her family because this was a duty and we must not be selfish, she said. The young Winches had left school now, far better equipped than their elder sister, yet envious of her.

They thought of her as settled for life at Crofter's End and never failed to tell her what a soft job she had. Ella knew what they meant. She lived in a beautiful old country house, where meals appeared as from some invisible region at stated hours, and it was no concern of hers what they cost, if the roof leaked or the maids gave notice. She had not to compete in an overcrowded market for work or live in terror of losing it, or worry about rent and rates unpaid, and clothes wearing out.

Yes, Ella knew she was lucky, though she would have liked to do some of the things they were able to do—meet people of her own age sometimes, make friends, be admired for natural silly reasons, instead of because she was so useful to Mrs. Somerville.

When therefore on an errand to the rectory one morning she was introduced to Parrot's owner, whose name proved to be Donald Rich, there seemed no possible reason why she should not acknowledge his acquaintance with an easy mind. Indeed not to do so would have been indefensible.

After that she often ran across him, and when Sue was not with her, sometimes stopped for a chat.

Just before Easter she had gone shopping to Amersham for Mrs. Somerville and was caught in a sudden downpour of rain, with an hour to wait for her bus. Sheltering in a doorway, bored and rather cold, she saw Donald Rich approaching, and they met with the surprised enthusiasm of fellow villagers in an alien land.

He too was held up, it turned out, by some repairs to his car, and he suggested that they should have a cup of coffee together to kill time.

Ella agreed happily and in a little while was hearing about the orchard he had bought and what he hoped to make of it. It was an old ambition of his, made possible by a legacy to his mother, for whose support hitherto he had been partly responsible. It wasn't, he said, as though he had given up a good job in these bad times to take such a chance, because by going he had made way for a younger brother who was more cut out for office work than he, so everything had worked in. The brother had won scholarships and taken a good degree and then, like so many other fellows, searched for a post in vain for two years. As for him, it would be a struggle at first and no luxury, but he would be his own master. What were her views about that?

Ella declared firmly that she agreed with him every time, and went back to Crofter's End looking ten years younger for this stimulating conversation. He had quite earnestly asked her advice and she began to feel almost a sense of responsibility in the success of his undertaking. After that it seemed only kind to inquire when they met how he was getting on, and by some queer accident they were always meeting. This was none of Ella's doing and she was incredulous when the idea first suggested itself that he might be responsible, incredulous, amused and yet hopeful. He was only an acquaintance but he lent excitement to her days which had been devoid of it so long.

She did not talk to Sue about him and when once or twice out walking they met him with Parrot at his heels, she permitted only the briefest word with the dog and hardly a smile for his master.

"You will hurt his feelings," protested Susan.

Ella knew better.

"Mrs. Somerville is very conservative and old-fashioned," she had explained to Donald Rich, but what she really dreaded perhaps were the sharp eyes of Susan which might see more than was really there.

Ella's movements being at all times unpredictable even by herself, there was no possibility of the cunning in these casual meetings which they were afterwards to assume in the eyes of Mrs. Somerville at least. Even among her friends there were some who saw that two people in the thirties might be supposed to have a perfect right to meet as and when they chose.

It was the irony of the situation that while the affair was no more than a pleasant friendship between two lonely people, nobody reported having seen them; yet when at the end of the summer a quite unforeseen train journey together gave Donald Rich his opportunity to ask for something more, the whole neighborhood suddenly began to comment on the acquaintance.

Ella was happy beyond expression. Hard necessity had made her self-effacing, but now she was first in some one's sight, desired and beloved, with a life of her own ahead of her, when there had seemed no longer any hope of that.

Maintaining outward cheerfulness she had had her darker hours and seen the gray and frightening future of such women as she.

But even in the midst of her gratitude for this miracle which had overtaken her she was uncomfortably aware of a certain awkwardness in the immediate situation.

Donald naturally wanted to see more of her, and she would have to ask for something which she had never demanded before—at least occasional leisure. And how was she to explain it, for she knew well that she could not present her engagement as a *fait accompli* to a woman of Mrs. Somerville's views, when she had never hitherto mentioned her acquaintance with Donald Rich.

It was her own concern and she was of an age surely to do as she chose, as he had argued, but she had been treated with kindness at Crofter's End and could not take a high hand, she had had no practice at it. She knew that

the subject must be approached with care and gradually. She was sure Mrs. Somerville would be glad of her happiness in the end.

Ella was mistaken. Mrs. Somerville was quite pleased to distribute happiness herself when it suited her, but had no faith in other people's ability to do so, perhaps. Unfortunately, before the girl had brought her courage to the point of mentioning Donald, Mrs. Somerville heard of him, while calling in the neighborhood.

Some one had seen them getting out of the London train together, Ella positively glowing and the young man most absorbed. Who was he? Ella's employer was asked.

She discounted the story with dignity, but other evidence was then forthcoming. Miss Winch had been seen walking with a young man on the road beyond Crofton Beeches, and standing in conversation with him outside the church one morning, young Susan also being of the party! Could it be the same man? They hoped dear Mrs. Somerville was not going to lose her nice companion.

Dear Mrs. Somerville returned home in a magisterial frame of mind. All this talk of young men on roads she considered very vulgar and unpleasant and she could not believe that Ella was capable of such low behavior. Ella was devoted to her and would never dream of repaying years of kindness with such deceit.

She had become so sure of her slave that she had ceased to question her about whom she had met when she came in, though at one time this had seemed a manifest duty to a young girl in her care. A past-mistress in the art of self-deception, she saw Ella not as an employee with rights and liberties, but a dependent whom she had taken under her motherly wing from motives of pure philanthropy.

When therefore Miss Winch, taxed with these amazing accusations, admitted the truth of them frankly, Mrs. Somerville could hardly believe her ears, particularly when she learned the identity of the young man. A fruit farmer? Had Ella lost her reason? Had she no sense of what was due to herself, if not to Crofter's End? It was incredible. Mrs. Somerville was deeply shocked and Ella would drop this undesirable acquaintance immediately. Mr. Somerville would see to it that the young man was sharply rebuked for his presumption.

"But please, you mustn't.... I couldn't have it," cried Ella. "You don't understand.... He is not a mere yokel. He is quite as good as I am, indeed,

much better."

"Nonsense, my dear. You don't know what you are saying. Your behavior has been most indiscreet, to say the least of it, and the whole place is gossiping about you. I am astounded at you, Ella, and the thing must stop. I won't have it. Do you understand? *I won't have it!*"

Ella blurted: "I—I am going to marry him."

"You are *what*?"

"I didn't mean to tell you so suddenly," pleaded the girl, "but it only happened yesterday, and I have been trying to—to find a way of breaking it to you."

Mrs. Somerville was almost speechless for a moment.

"You propose to marry this person—this chance acquaintance? You are certainly mad, Ella. The man is obviously a scoundrel who has obtained some extraordinary influence over you. Mr. Somerville shall deal with him," she exclaimed at last. "I absolutely forbid you to go on with this preposterous notion."

"I am thirty-two," said Ella steadily, "and this is my private affair. I am sorry if you disapprove, but I can't help it."

"And this is the way you repay my years of kindness. You grossly deceive me. You defy my express commands!"

"You have been kind to me always," admitted Ella brokenly, "but I've worked very hard too, and tried to please you."

"Indeed? Of course if we are to put the years of care and affection lavished upon you in my house on a commercial basis I can only say I am astonished," said the old lady, deeply offended. "As for trying to please me, do you imagine it pleases me that you have had the insolence to involve my granddaughter in this vulgar intrigue?"

"That isn't true."

"Don't trouble to lie to me. Susan was seen with you and this man. I have chapter and verse for what I say, and I am beginning to see that you are evidently a far from suitable companion for Susan. It is no wonder that her governess complains of her behavior, poor little soul. And there is one thing very certain. Either you break off this unfortunate entanglement immediately —or you leave my house and leave it now."

Ella walked to the door opened it and went out. She was past speech.

Sue, hearing a great noise in Ella's room, went in and found her packing and in tears.

Ten minutes later she was racing in search of her grandmother. It was all a mistake, she was sure. Granny had been in a temper but she would get over it as she always did. Sue's head was full of the surprising things Ella had told her—of all her years of work on a tiny salary, and the home where they could not possibly afford to have her, and Donald Rich and his orchard and Ella's love for him.

"Granny," cried Sue, bursting into the drawing-room, "you are not really sending Ella away, are you? She thinks you mean it.... Granny, you can't, because you don't realize.... Oh, do listen a moment. It is all my fault she ever met him.... Yes, yes, but you are not *listening*. Ella saved my life!"

Poor Sue, her great announcement, the one certainty in her mind why Ella could not possibly be sent away, was worse than useless.

Mrs. Somerville had no desire to lose the useful Miss Winch, and until that moment had not believed that the girl would dream of deserting Crofter's End for this obscure young man and his orchard. With no eyes for any world but the narrow one over which she presided, she really believed a life in such surroundings impossible for a gently bred woman. Ella had temporarily lost her senses and when she regained them Mrs. Somerville was prepared to forgive her after a suitable period of reserve and displeasure.

But the revelation that, far from repenting her behavior, the criminal had enlisted Susan's sympathies against her was too much. Her dignity was assailed, her authority undermined and she herself held up to the criticism of a child. And so the life-saving incident, instead of mending the situation, marred it, for why, asked Mrs. Somerville, had this disgraceful matter been withheld from her so slyly all these months? How had Ella dared to permit Susan to stray into the road before oncoming traffic, she would be glad to know?

"But I am not a baby to be held by the hand, granny. And she wasn't sly, only we thought it would worry you. Ella was very brave, and she might have been killed herself."

"Be silent, Susan, and don't presume to use that tone to me. You have been corrupted by Ella Winch, that is plain to see, and if I had known of all this before she should have been sent packing immediately."

There was no moving Mrs. Somerville now.

Sent from the room, told to go to the schoo-room and not to speak to Miss Winch on pain of severe punishment, Sue, very white and angry, defied all these instructions. She returned to Ella, helped her pack, offered her everything she possessed, which was little enough, she found, and then said she would herself go with a note to the orchard if Ella cared to write it. She could easily slip away.

“No, no, darling. I’ll go myself. I must, for I haven’t even money for my fare and I can’t ask her for it. And if he hasn’t any to lend me I shall have to stay there. Then they’ll have something to talk about,” concluded Ella bitterly.

She was not to be put to this necessity however, for when she went downstairs, accompanied by Sue looking like a young avenging angel, she was called into the library by Mr. Somerville. Half an hour passed, Sue walked up and down, determined to stand her ground, defiance of every one her only comfort.

At last her grandfather came out with Ella, and she faced him fiercely.

“You can’t send her away. You can’t,” she cried. “She’s served you faithfully and she hasn’t any money to live on and she saved my life.”

It was a forlorn hope for she expected no justice here, and Jonathan Somerville, who had had enough of scenes after a long session with his wife, caught her by the shoulder.

“Control yourself, Susan,” he said sternly. “Say good-by to Ella and go upstairs.”

“It’s all right, Sue darling, it is really,” declared Ella, kissing her. “I have money and everything. Don’t worry.”

The car came round and with despairing eyes she saw Ella disappear inside it, followed by her grandfather. She had gone forever, never to come back again. They had sent her away.

Sue was bitterly ashamed of her house.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GRANDFATHER

1

A long time afterwards, in the gathering dusk, Sue from the schoolroom window saw the returning car turn into the drive, and in much the same mood as once on a winter night she had watched it drive away.

A certain likeness in the two occasions suddenly focussed them in her mind so that she drew back into the middle of the room, her eyes round, her heart thumping.

Aunt Alison and the things granny had said about her! They hadn't been true then? She knew that she had never quite believed them; she had never been sure.

Yet if granny had done this to Ella, of whom she had pretended to think so highly all these years, what wouldn't she do to Aunt Alison whom she had called as yellow as mustard?

And she wasn't yellow, nor any of the things that granny had said. She was beautiful and kind.

"I wish I hadn't burnt her letter," thought Sue, trying forlornly to remember it.

In this moment, bereft even of Ella of whom at least she had been sure, her sense of justice outraged and her faith in her grandmother broken, she clutched at the memory of that other Somerville who had so instantly won her heart, as though blindly seeking some standard in a world awry.

She had never heard of her great-aunt since that momentous visit, and supposed she had returned to her savages, but it made no difference.

Love and admiration for her were back in Sue's heart, and with them self-reproach for half believing what she had never quite believed. The Sue

who had clung to the older loyalty from a child's blind, self-protective instinct for the near and present comfort, and the Sue of to-day, fiercely intolerant of her grandmother and exalting her aunt, were not perhaps very far apart in wisdom, yet in these last hours she had grown a little. At war with all her immediate world, she was no longer at war with herself. She had become an individual.

Very quietly she went out and peered over the banisters. There was not a sound anywhere and nobody in sight. Creeping down to the landing and then to the hall she looked at the Somerville portraits, one after another, making friends with them, as her aunt had put it, as though at least in this she could make amends.

2

Jonathan Somerville returned home that evening worn out and in heavy spirits. On his shoulders as usual rested the burden and cost of the affair, for it had been clear to him after five minutes' discussion with his wife that argument was useless, and indeed a disservice to Ella, who had always given more care than she had received.

It had been a humiliating discovery to a man scrupulously just and awake to his responsibilities and it was not to be tolerated that her faithful service, as Sue had put it, should be so basely rewarded. While he guessed that the phrase had been derived from Ella herself, and he would have thought better of her if she had left Susan out of it, he could make allowances for her very human indignation. He could also sympathize with her financial difficulties, the other matter raised by his granddaughter, though this was something Charlotte would never do, as he was all too well aware; and, as usual, when some incident brought her curious inaccessibility to any understanding of this pressing problem of money before him, he was filled with forebodings for the future, when he would be gone and she and this child left with Crofter's End or what it would fetch, in a market already glutted with such estates.

He had had a long talk with Ella, given her ready money and a check for a year's salary, then after a trunk call from the rectory to London, had sent her to Alison for the time being.

From the train he had driven to Rich's orchard and explained the situation briefly—his wife's old-fashioned views, the gossiping ways of country villages and his natural desire after her long years of service to his family to see that Ella's future was assured.

He had liked Rich from the first, and not merely because the young man had frankly taken the blame for the whole commotion.

He ought to have foreseen it, he admitted, but he had been carried off his feet yesterday by the chance of finding himself alone with Ella during the journey to London. They had so few opportunities for meeting, and though this had been in his mind, he had not meant to speak until the house was in better order. He had seen he was asking a great deal of her—to give up the luxury of Crofter's End for this, quite apart from everything else.

Jonathan had smiled at the word luxury, knowing it to have been at best a luxury in chains.

"It's no life for a girl, Rich," he had said. "She has looked after other people's comfort long enough, and perhaps far too much. She is unselfish."

The young man had assented happily, and it had been clear that he saw his own good fortune in the catastrophe, though he deferred to Jonathan's advice, giving him an account of his position and his hopes for the place.

His keenness here had touched a common chord and the two had parted with mutual good feeling, Jonathan promising to see Ella next day and arrange with Mrs. Loftus when Rich might call upon her in town.

So far things were better than could have been hoped, but Jonathan was oppressed by the larger problems behind: he had had too many of them and the need for action had become imperative.

"May I write to Sue—or would you rather not?" Ella had asked.

"Better not for the moment," he had replied. "These scenes are very bad for her, Ella, and she can't be permitted to go against her grandmother's wishes. I should leave it for the present."

"Well, you'll be kind to her, won't you? Don't let her be blamed for standing up for me. She's a very loyal friend and she always hits straight from the shoulder."

If that was Ella's only reproach he saw that it was an unconscious one, and gave her the assurance she asked for, not having been blind to the fact that, however ungracefully, his young granddaughter had shown the spirit of her race and shared his own humiliation.

And it was she who was at the heart of his problem—and in the forefront of it. From the bright eyes of Isabel's daughter, Jonathan Somerville had received a challenge.

It was not the first either. He remembered that other occasion, and how, because of the disastrous conclusion to Alison's visit, he had let his concern for the child go by default in the press of other matters. But now she was no longer a child, she was a growing girl with the right to know at least something of the age in which she had been born and the way to live in it, and with precious little likelihood of acquiring such information from her grandmother.

He had few delusions about his wife; her outward rectitude was matched by a complete spiritual insensibility and an egotism which must insist upon being always in the right.

For his own part, he had long ceased to combat a situation which he could not change, but to offer Susan as a sacrifice to his fatigue was too cynical a subterfuge.

Jonathan therefore prepared himself for battle.

Charlotte, amazed that he should have taken Ella to the train and deeply offended by his delay in returning home, had gone to bed with the air of a martyr, assisted by one of the maids. Miss Winch, she said, had been called suddenly home on a family matter. It was most unfortunate but could not be helped.

Once in bed, she had sent the maid for Miss Susan, who had accepted the message and ignored the summons. By the time Jonathan came in, Charlotte was ready to be very ill indeed, but for once this was to avail her nothing.

"Where have you been?" she exclaimed fretfully.

"I have been attending to urgent and most unpleasant business and writing checks which I cannot afford," retorted the head of the house.

"Well, if you have given that wicked, ungrateful creature money, you are a fool."

"Very likely. But there are still decencies which are going to be observed while I live, Charlotte. No one who has served my family devotedly for years shall be turned away at a moment's notice without at least some material compensation. You may consider yourself fortunate that Ella Winch is not the type of woman to sue you for slander and wrongful dismissal, for she would be quite within her rights."

"Rights indeed! Have I no rights then?" she exclaimed indignantly.

"Not over the lives of other people, though you seem to think so. Good God, Charlotte, what malignant strain has got into you that you can't see two young people seek the union for which nature intended them, without interfering. First Isabel and now this poor child."

"How dare you class them together," cried Charlotte, bursting into tears. "My poor girl and that—I won't mention the creature. I never want to hear her name again."

"I am thankful for that. And you can take it from me that if I hear any word from you or through you about her or this young man Rich, I'll sell up this place for what it will fetch and leave the district. I will not be involved in trouble and acrimony with my neighbors."

"You don't think of my poor Sue, nearly run down and killed through that girl's carelessness," wept Charlotte.

"Yes, that's another thing. If you had done as the doctor advised and I urged you to do, and sent the child to school, none of this would have occurred. What sort of a girl is she at fourteen years old if she can't be trusted to walk down a quiet country road in safety? What business was it of Ella's in any event? What is her governess here for? You have spoiled Susan ever since she came into the house, had her living in your pocket and allowing her to be involved in these perpetual scenes, with maids, governesses, even with my sister Alison, and now with Ella Winch. Is that the way to bring up a little girl? I tell you I'll have no more of it, Charlotte. To-morrow I shall go to Christie's and arrange for the sale of some of the portraits. They'll have to go. And I shall send Susan to Crofton Beeches as a boarder at the end of the holidays. The governess will have to be compensated—another expense, and there have been far too many with your craze for choosing young women and then finding them totally unsuitable. And if I hear a protest from you or from the child, I'll send her to a convent in France and keep her there till she is eighteen."

He waited for no answer to this but walked out of the room and very wearily downstairs.

Something moved in the hall below and he caught a glimpse of a light frock vanishing into the drawing-room.

"Susan!"

She came back reluctantly, chin up, defiance or perhaps bravado in her glance.

“It may relieve you to know that I have sent Ella to friends with whom she will stay until her marriage probably,” said her grandfather; “and given her a check in some recognition of her faithful services, of which you were good enough to remind me. Not that it is my practice, Susan, as you seem to suppose, to neglect such duties.”

Sue, suspecting sarcasm, said nothing.

“Well?”

“Well, it was all my fault really because I was nearly run over, or she never would have met him.”

“And she saved your life? Quite. That unfortunately is something beyond my power to reward, and in order that you shall not involve any one else in the dangerous practice of snatching you from under the traffic, you will go to boarding-school after the holidays. They may be able to teach you the rules of the road at least. Do you understand?”

“Yes, thank you,” said Susan with great dignity, retreating up the stairs.

Her grandfather watched her go with a faint sigh. That was impudence, he supposed, but what else could be expected? He rather thought there was good stuff in the child in spite of it.

He was wrong about the impudence however. Sue’s thanks had been genuine though almost immediately repented. Whatever he might have done for Ella, her belief in his tyranny was unshaken and rather reinforced than otherwise by this conversation. She was convinced that if she showed any pleasure in the prospect of school, he would promptly change his mind.

CHAPTER NINE

SEEKING MALCOLM DUBENNY

1

The desire of Mrs. Loftus to find and do something for the boy Malcolm had so far gone by default, for she had soon been reluctantly persuaded that to seek him openly would certainly embroil her further with Charlotte, to Jonathan's discomfort, and perhaps affront the hostile Dubenny relatives, doing the cause of both children little good and simply making herself the center of a family feud.

This view was strengthened by the partial success of Robert Lord's researches on her behalf, for in course of time he did actually get in touch with a brother officer of Paul's who was able to throw some light on the matter, incidentally illuminating Charlotte's precious tale of squalor.

This man explained that in the December after the Armistice he had gone to look up Dubenny at the small private hotel or glorified boarding-house in Bayswater to which he had moved his family after a too-expensive few weeks of junketing in celebration of his return from France, and found chaos.

Both parents had gone down with influenza, there were the two small children to be looked after, and the house was under-staffed. The owner of the place had—rather tardily, he suspected—called in a doctor, who with considerable difficulty had found a nurse, but the condition of both patients was critical and the woman frantic at the probability of a death in her house, which would be bad for business, and wanting to know who was to pay for all this, and the address of the relatives. The visitor had given her what assurance he could and endeavored to find the whereabouts of Dubenny's half-brother—a Major Lowell; had at length got in touch with Mrs. Lowell, and left her in charge of the situation. He had then had to go North and he

had not come across the Lowells since, nor did he know anything about them.

While Mrs. Loftus saw that it would be possible no doubt to trace this Major Lowell, she saw also that Charlotte's story and her own anxiety for the boy were both, in all probability, equally groundless. Jonathan's view had been the sound one after all. A Major Lowell seemed at least a reassuring guardian for Malcolm and a quite likely person to feel no love for Isabel's family. Since he had refused to give up the boy to his grandparents he might be expected to resent any advances from her.

"I should have thought a maternal grandfather had a greater claim than a paternal step-uncle, all the same," she said, in telling the story to Jonathan.

"Probably," he agreed dryly, "but after this lapse of time, that is not an issue we can fairly raise, Alison."

"Nor safely," she thought but did not say. If Charlotte had withheld information from him for her own ends, only a great deal of unpleasant notoriety would attend litigation about the guardianship of the boy. And as Jonathan had pointed out before, what kind of advantages could be offered him, even should it prove successful, while Charlotte ruled at Crofter's End?

The Malcolm Dubenny Preservation Society, as Robert and Irene called it, had lost its uses, but Mrs. Loftus still hoped that chance might bring either the Lowells or Malcolm himself within her ken, a view which the Admiral thought optimistic.

"Let sleeping dogs lie, my dear," was his advice. "Now you have no reason to suppose the lad is blacking boots for a living, or consigned to some institution, why worry further about him? You will get no thanks from either party, you may be sure of that. When these two young people are grown up, they will be quite capable of seeking news of each other if they want it, and you ought to know by this time that the determination of their elders to keep them apart will undoubtedly provoke them to try. Then when there is trouble all round, we shall be able to view the conflict as benevolent neutrals, a most comfortable position."

"Have you ever been a neutral, Admiral?" inquired Irene.

"Never, my dear. It is my one remaining ambition."

2

And then, having given up any idea of ever coming across any news of Malcolm Dubenny, Irene herself heard his name.

She was staying with friends in the country and a young nephew of the house had come to them for half-term from his school some miles away.

Out in the garden on Sunday morning with the children and half a dozen dogs, she heard the small boy holding forth to his cousins:

"And then Dubenny said ..."

Irene pounced upon him.

"Is Dubenny at your school? Is his name Malcolm Dubenny, Jack?"

Jack didn't know and evidently thought it would be almost *lèse majesté* to inquire. Dubenny was head of Fletcher's house and an awfully big pot, he said.

This impressive statement was naturally fuel to Mrs. Lord's fire. How pleased Mrs. Loftus would be if she could produce her lost nephew and in such a satisfactory guise. She enlisted the interest of her host and hostess, who promised to drive her over to a cricket match at the school, a scheme viewed by the boy Jack with considerable reserve. He gave it as his opinion that he couldn't introduce anybody to anybody. It would be frightful cheek.

Nevertheless the visit was made, the Dubenny proved to be none other than Malcolm, and the headmaster affably summoned him for presentation to Mrs. Lord, while he was waiting to bat.

She found herself facing a tall, fair, sunburned young man, reassuringly normal to her own world, and said to him eagerly:

"You are Isabel Dubenny's son, aren't you?"

"Yes, that was my mother's name," agreed Malcolm, looking faintly astonished.

"Oh, good. Because I used to know your mother and father and the name is very uncommon. Naturally I felt I should like to meet you."

"Thanks, very much. I don't of course altogether remember them." Malcolm, reminded of something Hugh had told him, brightened. "But perhaps ... were you by any chance a Miss Willard?" he asked.

"No, Clifton. I was engaged to your mother's cousin, Nigel Loftus, who was killed in the War. Nigel's mother has been anxious to know what became of you, Mr. Dubenny, and will like to hear I've seen you. Are you ever in London, because perhaps you would care to come along and meet her in the holidays. She is your great-aunt, of course."

“I’m afraid I never heard of her,” said Malcolm, evasively.

“I daresay not. She has been abroad for years and therefore didn’t know your whereabouts, but she’s charming and I’m sure you’d like her. Couldn’t we arrange a date to suit you now?”

“As a matter of fact I expect to go into camp with the O.T.C., and the rest of the summer I shall have to be with my people,” hedged Malcolm, now anxious to escape, and wishing Mrs. Lord in Jericho.

“Then any time you like to fix.”

Irene was not easily to be put off, in spite of the Admiral’s talk of letting sleeping dogs lie, for why shouldn’t Mrs. Loftus see this nice boy in whom she was interested? The intermediary was proud of her find.

The ‘find’ however, said firmly:

“I’m sorry.”

“Now what does that mean? Not that you won’t come?” She looked at him with hurt astonishment.

“If you don’t mind.... Well, the fact is,” blurted Malcolm, “I have no use for the Somerville side of the family.”

“Oh, dear!” Irene stared at him in dismay, then she laughed, provoking a reluctant smile from the boy. “I do seem to have put my foot into it. I am disappointed, but I suppose if you feel like that, there’s nothing more to be said, is there?”

“No.... It’s jolly kind of you, all the same.”

“ ‘Kind,’ ” wailed Irene, recounting the story to Mrs. Loftus later. “I could have shaken him, for really, he was rather a dear. I hope I haven’t made matters worse by rushing in, but I was planning such a nice surprise for you, or so I thought. At least you know where he is now. Couldn’t you go down to the school and beard the lion in his den?”

“More likely a young cub,” put in the Admiral, “overcome by his own importance. After all, this bears out what we know. His guardians are hostile and he takes his tone quite properly from them. And he is clearly in need of no help from us, Alison.”

She agreed, yet on later reflection she saw that however much he might have been instructed in the fancied crimes of the Somervilles by his father’s people, Malcolm was growing to an age to judge these matters for himself. She therefore wrote a brief note and sent it to him at the school:

"Dear Malcolm,

"I am sorry to hear you dislike the Somervilles, but if you should change your mind on this point, or there is anything one of them can do for you, perhaps you will come and see

"Your affectionate great-aunt
"ALISON LOFTUS."

Malcolm did not answer this letter but sent it to Hugh Lowell with an account of his meeting with Mrs. Lord, and the scornful comment:

"Perhaps they would like to change my name too. That tale about wanting to know my whereabouts is pretty thin—trying to get at me behind your back, I suppose—after the insulting correspondence you had from the family long ago. May I see it some time, by the way?..."

Lorna was convinced that his mother's relatives, finding him presentable, now wanted to claim his acquaintance.

Hugh, however, wrote to Malcolm:

"I think you were an ass to hold forth to Mrs. Lord as you did, and it would be courteous to acknowledge your great-aunt's letter, however briefly. After all, these two ladies have done you no harm, and if Mrs. Loftus is well-disposed to you, hasn't it occurred to you that she may be the means of putting you into touch with your sister by-and-by? I believe even in Corsica vendettas are going out of fashion, but even if you don't care to be up to date, can't you realize that hatred is a compliment to the enemy, anti-social and a gross self-indulgence? Yes, you can see the correspondence if you insist, you damned young fool."

Malcolm made no direct reply to this letter, and when he came home from camp in excellent spirits, brought with him a tentative suggestion that he should join Tim for a couple of weeks tramping along the Rhine. The financier Tim had worked out the cost to an amazingly low figure, and the Lowells agreed to the expedition at once.

The night before he left Malcolm remarked casually to his uncle:

"Oh, by the way, I wrote to that Mrs. Loftus—only a line, though."

As for the Somerville correspondence, he never referred to it again.

The line which ‘that Mrs. Loftus’ received one summer morning, amused her greatly.

“Dear Madam,

“Thank you very much.

“Yours truly,
MALCOLM DUBENNY.”

It was dated from an address in Kew on printed stationery in impeccable taste, and she supposed the matter had been canvassed at home and the young man ordered to be courteous.

This was only true in part. Malcolm was determined that his manners should make no reflection upon his uncle and aunt in the eyes of these haughty Somervilles, and thought their address on Lorna’s notepaper compared most favorably with that of his great-aunt on hers. He was pleased to show it off and give her no further excuse for pretending there was any mystery about his whereabouts.

‘A big pot’ though he might be in the eyes of his juniors, he was still very young in some ways.

Alison Loftus, as she made a note of the address, sighed a little over the imbecility of people who cherished family grievances. Had she alone been concerned she would have been tempted to call on these Lowells and have it out, but that was impossible and she saw that she must let the matter rest for the present at least. Her mind went back to Crofter’s End and the little girl who still, she supposed, knew nothing of her brother’s existence or her own name, wondering what the outcome of Charlotte’s folly would be.

And then to Ella Winch, sitting sewing at the window, she found herself saying:

“Did you ever hear of Malcolm Dubenny, Ella?”

“No, Mrs. Loftus,” replied the girl, “I have never heard the name that I remember.”

“Oh, I daresay not. He is a young relative of mine I had lost sight of. That is one of the penalties of a wandering life. People scatter so, in these days. Some of my young friends have managed to track him down for me. You will probably hear frivolous reference to the Dubenny Preservation Society, as they are pleased to call it.”

Ella smiled responsively and went on with her sewing. It was evident that she knew nothing of Susan's parentage, and since she was to live in the neighborhood of Crofter's End, it seemed better not to enlighten her.

Ella had now been a week with Admiral and Mrs. Loftus, and felt she had been bodily transported to at least a minor heaven, which was not surprising, for coming to them with every kind of doubt and trepidation, she had been received as a friend, and her immediate troubles smoothed away.

Alison Loftus, bringing her own sanity to bear on the commotion with Charlotte, had been sorry for the girl, and having inherited quite as strongly as her brother the Somerville tradition of fair dealing, had felt constrained to look after her. This was proving no hardship either; she and Michael enjoyed making a fuss over the girl and giving her a little pleasure. Donald Rich had already lunched at the flat and it had been arranged that while he put the house in order against their marriage Ella should remain where she was. There was her trousseau to consider and besides, said Mrs. Loftus mischievously, she ought to have at least two months at a comparative distance from him after such a very close association.

The trousseau was already under way, as Ella's industry this morning proclaimed, and her trunk, sent up by Jonathan for collection from the railway station so that no one should be any the wiser, was gradually filling with articles which Mrs. Loftus found she had no place for but which might be useful in the new home.

"Ella, this blotter worries me. It simply screams at everything in the room. I bought it in one of my senseless moments, so do put it away in your trunk, there's a good girl," she remarked.

Ella, who had started up from the long habit of making herself useful, sat firmly down again.

"It looks beautiful in the room," she declared, "and you mustn't really ... I can't cope with you."

Alison Loftus laughed, carried the blotter to the windowseat and put it down at Ella's side.

"Nobody can cope with me, I take care of that," she said gayly. "So don't try. You are having a holiday."

"I should think I am, and being terribly spoiled. I knew that in the first twelve hours. It was years since I had had breakfast in bed, and I lay there remembering how but for you and Mr. Somerville I should have probably

spent the night in a railway waiting-room. That's what I had intended to do if Donald could lend me the fare to Devon."

"I can think of more amusing places to spend the night certainly," said her hostess. "As to breakfast in bed, you must be very unenterprising, my dear. I disapprove of deceit of course, but I am a great upholder of guile when occasion requires."

"My wife is an upholder of all the vices, so you be warned, Ella," remarked the Admiral, who had strolled into the room.

"Go away, Michael. If you must undermine the Government do it outside and not in the home. Go and help ruin the country, darling. It is such a popular sport, you'll like it."

"Oh, I'm in the way, am I? A nice thing at my time of life."

He took himself off, shaking his head, and Mrs. Loftus followed to see him to the lift. Ella heard them laughing companionably together. Though not unused to graciousness, she had never before met the kind of grace, worldly yet simple, which these two people diffused, and the atmosphere of their home was a very pleasant one, she thought. Even Mr. Somerville, when he had come up the day after her arrival, looking worried and wretched, had changed and become human under his sister's touch.

Ella was appalled to remember how aloof and almost sour she had thought him all these years, and now she owed him so much—including this.

The flat was high up in a block of mansions overlooking Hyde Park and through the wide-open windows where a breeze stirred the long curtains, she could see an almost familiar vista of trees and grass, with a deliciously unfamiliar London behind it—an outline of roofs and spires, majestic against the summer sky.

The London she had known; bewildering traffic, crowded shops and dismal railway stations, had melted into a city of enchantment, because now she moved in it without haste or responsibility, and in secret moments she was beginning to see that even in the small world of her own home this new freedom would still be hers. It was a dazzling thought and not yet entirely credible that she would soon be sharing Donald's life and not merely hoping to meet him by chance or exchange a smile as he passed in his car.

Mrs. Loftus returned to her desk and began to set it in order, chatting as she worked. Her movements were quick and she had long slender hands.

“Like Sue’s,” thought Ella, and at that other resemblances between the two came to her mind, the sudden lift of chin and directness of speech—for the bluntness of the child had been disciplined in the elder into a most attractive quality, rather than sharpened to acrimony as Ella had once expected to see in the Susan of the future.

She knew Sue better now and believing that Mrs. Loftus had disliked her, wondered if she might venture a word in the little girl’s defense.

“*I* wish Sue could know what a marvelous time I am having,” she began cautiously. “I know you thought her rather ill-mannered, Mrs. Loftus, but that is all on the surface, really.”

“I thought her ill-mannered?” Alison Loftus turned round in her chair and regarded the girl in astonishment. “Why, my dear, I only saw her for about half an hour and was far too well entertained to think of her manners. Besides, I should rather dislike worldly polish at that age.”

Ella exclaimed in some confusion, “I suppose I must have imagined you did because I was so critical of her myself just then.... But I understand her better now. She is very straight out and the most loyal creature.”

The other nodded thoughtfully. She was quite quick-witted enough to guess the root of Ella’s supposition. Charlotte had said that of course; she would have had to invent some story to explain her guest’s departure to Miss Winch.

Had Sue been given the same impression? It was impossible to ask Ella without embarking on a discussion of her sister-in-law, and being quite unaware of the impression she had created upon the child, Mrs. Loftus let it go. After a moment, however, she asked a casual question:

“By the way, do you happen to know if Sue ever received my little gift last Christmas or the one before? I never heard, but I know how children will dodge the boredom of writing letters of acknowledgment if some one doesn’t keep them up to mark.”

Ella said, startled: “I’m perfectly sure she didn’t. I should have known and Sue would have written.”

“Oh well, I packed them insecurely I daresay. Parcels at Christmas do go astray, and they were of no value.”

“I wish Sue could know, all the same. Wouldn’t you ... couldn’t Mr. Somerville ask her?”

“Better not, I think. It is so dull at that age to be told about presents you have never received.”

“We decided—Mr. Somerville said—that I had better not write to her, because naturally she can’t be encouraged to defy her granny,” explained Ella. “I’m afraid I’ve got her into trouble already.” Her old distress returned and she went on: “I’ve had nothing but kindness at Crofter’s End and brought trouble to everybody. You don’t know how guilty I feel, even though I know I am not.”

“Yes, I understand that feeling. You must be firm with yourself,” said Mrs. Loftus. “Modesty may be overdone like everything else. As for Sue, don’t worry about her. She is going to school, and will have friends of her own age. And when you are living in the neighborhood you are sure to come across her. These loyal people are often very headstrong.”

They exchanged a secret smile and Ella immediately felt better.

4

The next time Jonathan came to the flat he was looking so depressed that any lingering idea his sister may have had of speaking of Charlotte’s mischief-making and the presents which had so clearly been kept back from Susan, vanished. She did however say a word to him on a matter of more urgent importance.

“Jon, though it is none of my business, I do hope you will see that Sue is at least told her father’s name before she goes off to school,” she said. “Making a mystery of it is most unfair to the child.”

“You know my views. It has always seemed foolish to me,” he answered wearily. “I’ll do what I can, but you must let me take my bridges one by one.”

He knew too little of children to be as moved as she was by the urgency of this question, and Charlotte had seen to it that his patience was at a low ebb. Finding him implacable about the school, she had reduced herself to the verge of a breakdown with her tears and lamentations over parting from Sue, a state not improved by the victim’s calm. Sue for the first time was not to be wooed by granny’s coaxing, and was openly embarrassed by her caresses and came reluctantly when summoned to the invalid’s room.

Granny was shamming and Sue knew it, terrified that she would win the day, and the fat governess return after all.

The doctor came in and out, and presently through Mrs. Linton's kind offices Miss Pender appeared. She had had some nursing experience and would be such a bright companion every one said.

Miss Pender, unlike Ella Winch, knew a soft job when she saw it and was no infant in guile. Flattery, more healing to the patient than a dozen doctors, did its work and by the time Sue, clad in the Lincoln green uniform of this new world into which she was going, came in, rather nervous now, to say good-by, granny was fairly calm.

After all, the child had been corrupted by that wicked woman, Ella Winch, and would learn the value of her devoted grandmother when she could see her no longer. Mrs. Somerville was convinced the old Sue would return with the holidays and in the meantime Miss Pender thought the world of one, a dear girl!

Jonathan, however, was not to be quickly forgiven. She was on the point of collapse whenever he appeared in her room, so the bridge was not crossed.

It was as Susan Somerville still that his granddaughter went to school.

CHAPTER TEN

AN OPENING DOOR

1

Susan was in a foreign land among hundreds of clamoring natives whose language she barely understood. Having believed herself proficient in it, she was bewildered, but determined not to give her ignorance away, she kept her wits about her, endeavoring to say yes and no in the right places.

It had not been so confusing in the drawing-room where her grandfather had left her with Miss Wisdon. She liked the long, beautifully proportioned room and felt at home there, and the head-mistress, her eyes crinkling in a smile behind horn-rimmed spectacles, had not alarmed her.

"Well, Susan, you will feel strange I daresay, but there is no need to feel too strange during your first week. So if it seems unbearable you may come and tell me so. We try to be reasonable."

Sue, suspecting no sophistry, said that she would. She rather enjoyed being addressed in this one-woman-to-another fashion by Miss Wisdon, and did not know that the word 'reasonable' would in turn drive her to frenzy, provoke her to satire, win applause for her impudence when she introduced it in debate, and at last be accepted almost affectionately as one of Wissy's kinks.

Reason was the ruling principle at Crofton Beeches, though not perhaps quite to the extent that its head-mistress supposed.

Ringing a bell she had summoned one of the more sophisticated natives to show the young foreigner the way to go. Angela, she called her in introduction, but Angela, full of more urgent personal affairs, was a perfunctory guide.

"I say, come on. You're Hawthorn Lodge, aren't you?" said the native, who might have been talking Choctaw for all the sense Sue derived from the

question.

She found herself pushed through a green baize door and lo, the country house with its majestic staircase and paneled hall had vanished. Here were all the bewildering rooms and corridors where she had longed to walk with the conference of the initiated when she came to the dancing classes.

Initiation, however, was certainly not in Angela's mind. Through groups of chattering and indifferent elders, Sue was firmly launched into the garden and away at express speed.

"I mean," remarked Angela, "you'd better see your dorm and all that. Frocks for supper in case I'm not about."

Susan, making nothing whatever of this, looked over her shoulder at the widespread friendly old house, mellow with years.

"Don't I live there then?" she asked cautiously.

The native stared.

"*You?*" she questioned. "You haven't a hope. Even you. However old are you, for goodness' sake?"

"Fourteen."

"I say, giraffes aren't in it, are they? Here you are, look—there's Hawthorn, and you can take it from me you were pretty lucky to get in. If you were at Holly or Chestnut you'd starve to death very likely from having to dash from breakfast to be in time for prayers. They're miles away."

Hawthorn Lodge was now in sight, a squarish structure up which Virginia creeper was beginning to climb. Clipped may-trees gave it the name presumably, and its wide windows were all curtained in the warm pink of may-bloom in spring. Lawns went up to its walls, and trees and shrubs and winding paths surrounded it pleasantly. From the wide-open front door a babel of tongues and the tramp of an army resounded as the little dears within took full advantage of this first day of term, and to Sue's unaccustomed ears it seemed that there must be hundreds of them.

Angela opened a door on the right, put her head in and drew it forth again.

"Brigit's got 'em six deep," she observed laconically and leaped for the stairs.

"Here you are."

They were in a room containing four beds with rose-colored eiderdowns and four small wardrobes and dressing-chests. Curtains, drawn back at present, would convert the place into cubicles later on; and in sign of occupation one bed already contained a tiger, his stomach bulging with night-gear, his countenance wreathed in a promise of snarls.

Sue, who had not expected to sleep with other people, secretly liked the beast, yet had a horrible thought that she had been put into a nursery.

"I'd snatch the bed near the window if I were you," advised Angela, "because the other new one may be a fug." She pulled open drawers, lifted Sue's immediate luggage to the bed and seemed to feel her work was done. "They'll unpack your other stuff, and now I must rush. As soon as you're straight, you'd better nip down and see Brigit."

"B-but who is she?"

"Miss Bridge, of course. Didn't Wizzy tell you *anything*? House-mistress, door I looked in. Well. ... I say.... I'll see you later then."

Angela was gone. Sue, abandoned to her fate in this very, very foreign land, looked round her, wondering where people went in it if they wanted to be quiet and alone.

There was the garden of course. Going to the window, glad now of Angela's sage advice, she looked down a slope to the orchard and kitchen gardens and a lovely distant view of outspread fields, gold under the September sun. The view was unfamiliar to her, it was like a new country, and this house suddenly appearing in the grounds of Crofton Beeches when she had never guessed it was there, was as exciting as a dream.

And the others too, where you starved to death—miles away, Angela had said, because of rushing to prayers. This seemed a mysterious and illogical reason. Couldn't you say your prayers when you liked then?

Fortunately she did not know that she had come upon the heart of the matter, and that from now on there were few things that she would do where and when she liked, but would move, breathe, eat and sleep in the rhythm of a community.

2

Miss Bridge, pleasant but in a hurry, asking for her money and sweets and various other things in the way of contraband she might have brought with her; telling her she must see matron and be weighed in the morning

(but why? and where did you go? Sue wondered), saying with the curious cheerfulness of these foreigners:

"And now I think you know everything, Susan."

A bell and a scuttling upstairs while Sue, already changed for supper and hungry, walked forlornly downstairs; another bell and the thunder of feet, and then the dining-room and a multitude of figures, forgetting to pass things to the mute stranger, in the excitement of exchanging news.

It was a bewildering world and Sue, having at last escaped from the scrimmage in the bathrooms to her own curtained space, felt exhausted and ready for bed. Two occupants of the room were chattering and laughing with the happy abandon of seasoned residents. From the fourth cubicle belonging to "the other new one" Sue heard muffled sobs.

"I say, Biddy, the heiress didn't bring her maid after all then?"

"That was her lady-in-waiting, you ass."

Laughter.

"I quite thought Wizzy would have stretched a point and taken her in, didn't you? I mean it would have been only reasonable."

Mutters and shrieks of mirth.

Sue did not know what they meant and was not even curious, because of the uncomfortable sounds from the next cubicle.

She peered through the curtain and said cautiously to the creature huddled on the bed:

"What's the matter? Why are you crying?"

A face was lifted.

"Because I'm new of course."

"Well, so am I."

"Really? Was your last school too frightful?"

"I've never been to one before," admitted Sue.

The other new one seemed stunned by this information.

"Golly!" she ejaculated, and then remembering her own affairs, went on: "Anyway I always cry the first night," and proceeded to do so industriously.

Sue sat down on the edge of her own bed, supposing that even here she had failed to do the proper thing, but not in the least anxious to conform. School was certainly a queer place, much queerer than she could ever have imagined.

A young under-matron opened the door.

"Now you girls, no more talking, please. Biddy, Vera, do you hear me?" she said crisply.

Silence from the older inhabitants and loud sobs from the fourth cubicle, very loud sobs. The mistress consulted a list she carried. That new girl, Susan Somerville, of course, the pampered grandchild of one of the big houses in the neighborhood! She pulled aside the curtain.

"Is this Susan? I shouldn't cry if I were you."

The weeper indignantly denied the name. She was Molly, she said, and sat up to have her pillows shaken and her sheets smoothed, and to receive all the consolation which she considered her due.

There was silence from the cubicle by the window. The pampered one was asleep perhaps. The mistress went softly over and looked in at her. From the pillow a pair of bright eyes gave her an unmistakable grin. Unmistakably she returned it, then switched off the lights and went away.

Downstairs somebody grumbled: "The old grind begins, and I suppose the new ones are all duds as usual."

The girl who had taken lights out did not contradict the speaker but she smiled internally.

"No use queering the poor kid's pitch at the start," she thought, "duds are made, not born—by some people. Good-looking child that ... something about her."

3

Yesterday, last week, last month became as a thousand years away, a prehistoric period in which she had got up slowly in the morning, lingered over her bath and strolled to breakfast, planning how to fill the hours ahead.

If it was all too strange, Sue never found time to accept Miss Wisdon's challenge and tell her so. Life was one long bewildering rush which swept her along, so that at night, above and beyond her mental fatigue, there was the delicious physical weariness due to regular and unaccustomed exercise to lull her swiftly to sleep. The thinness and languor which had afflicted her

ever since last winter's colds were presently gone and her cheeks glowed like a pale rose in the lovely autumn air. She had no leisure in this period to dwell upon the disadvantages of the new life, the magnitude of the things she was expected to know and did not, her distressing ignorance in some subjects, the absence of privacy and quiet; but gradually the scene was coming into focus.

Only the seniors lived in the old manor house, curt, important personages and privileged beyond belief. They went there crowned with years and honors like Royal pensioners to a palace. They dressed for dinner every night, owned study bedrooms, edited the school magazine, ran the debating society and the dramatic club, issued orders and owned the earth. There was indeed no end to their might.

In the other houses they had their understudies, their imitators and detractors too, and the same applied to the staff. Some were priceless, others frightful by popular consent; a few were neither here nor there, as their charges expressed it.

Susan walked the once alien corridors with confidence now, knew the strange tongue of her contemporaries, and the surprising values they attached to inconsequential things. And the confusion of a vast multitude became sorted into individual faces, pretty or plain, interesting or fatuous, amusing or simply dull.

But she did not know that the school, with varying feelings, suspected her of a romantic importance, far from the facts. Because Miss Wisdon had waived a strict rule and permitted her to attend the dancing classes, the legend grew that these Somervilles were disgustingly rich, highly connected and people of consequence. One faction therefore was determined that it would put up with no airs from this young Susan, and treated her to satiric humor; another secretly hoped to win her favor and be invited to Crofter's End. Sue received both satire and flattery with the same half-puzzled cordiality. It did not enter her head that covert references to the fourth footman, her grace the Duchess and other illusionary persons were aimed at her, nor that the sycophants expected her to produce evidence of vast wealth at any moment.

"Isn't your father the heir, Sue?" one of them asked her curiously at last.

"How do you mean?... My father's dead," returned Sue.

"Well, wasn't he your grandfather's eldest son though and—you know—heir to the estate and all that?"

"He hasn't any sons."

"But he must have had one or you wouldn't be here."

"Well, I can't help that. I tell you my father and mother are dead," declared Sue suddenly so fierce that the questioner hastened to apologize.

She saw a natural-born reserve and hauteur where were only fright and an old perplexity reborn, and was more than ever convinced that here was a person to cultivate, but Sue left her for a noisy group nearby and began to join their discussion with great animation.

A door had been opened in her mind, but not until she was in bed that night did she dare to look inside it. Then she discovered what she would have seen before this, but for the solitude and isolation of her existence at Crofter's End. Her mother "my poor Isabel," having been granny's daughter, it must follow that her father's name had not been Somerville but something else.

"Then I am not really Susan Somerville?" she thought, with a faintly bewildered feeling that this was a matter which she had gone into before.

She remembered her old fruitless questions about her parents to her grandmother and others, and how they had seemed to be cleared up all in a moment by her Aunt Alison's declaration that she was a Somerville from head to foot; yet now she was old enough to realize that her aunt had been referring to something independent of name which still prevailed.

Inevitably before long other incidents recurred to her, hints dropped by Ella Winch, and then her adventure with the boy Malcolm.

He had said she was not Sue Somerville, though she had never seen him before or since. He was a stranger; probably staying somewhere in the neighborhood, or how could he have heard even that her name was Sue?

That adventure seemed very odd to her now, but the fact remained that he had known what she did not know. It followed that somebody must have told him, somebody knew her name—perhaps everybody but herself.

The natural assumption that there must be some horrible reason to make her grandparents conceal this information from her, was not long in coming and Sue, lying very wide awake and staring into the darkness, found much to prove it in the past—her grandmother's evasions and tearful references to "your poor mother"; the nods and glances of other old ladies when she had been taken visiting; the goodness for which she was expected to be grateful

and virtuous beyond belief; and last, that warning, familiar ever since she could remember: “Your grandfather does not like children.”

She did not doubt that his antipathy was particular rather than general, and here she found a reason for it—some mysterious disgrace connected with her parents. It had made him stern and forbidding, detesting the sight of her. Sue had read of elderly gentlemen thus affected in Victorian works of fiction piled away at the top of the schoolroom shelves, and had little doubt that here was a living example. Some frightful family secret was invariably at the back of it.

In the course of time as her knowledge increased she was to imagine many solutions to the mystery; her father had cheated at cards and been disowned by decent men; he had committed a murder, forged a check or been shot as a spy; or he had not really married her mother properly at all because he had a mad wife concealed in the attic like Mr. Rochester.

To-night, however, she was too muddled as well as too inexperienced for these interesting theories, and at first was only conscious of a cold and sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach; but some strain of fortitude and hardihood within her presently came to her aid; for she saw that there was nothing she could do about it, whatever it was.

She could not even hope to be told—unless somehow or other she could manage to see Ella.

It had been a blow to Sue that no word had ever reached her from Miss Winch. For weeks she had watched the post every day, desolately hoping against hope for a letter, or at least a postcard to tell her that she was not forgotten, until the excitement of preparing for school had engulfed all other matters. She could not tell whether Ella might be married already and living quite near, but before she slept that night she determined to watch whenever she was out with the crocodile for a sight of Donald Rich’s car and perhaps his wife. Somehow she must contrive to see Ella and question her.

4

And one day in November she was actually on her way. By chance two days before on a search for specimens with the botany class she had seen the car turning into an orchard down in the hollow beyond the school grounds, had identified Parrot, his master and his new mistress.

It had taken some self-control to prevent her from racing after them before the eyes of the botany mistress and the whole party, for at that moment she was homesick for the first time, not desiring Crofter’s End so

much as the comfort and support of what was familiar and dependable. The discovery she had made about herself had set a check upon her confidence; a faint, nagging restlessness was like a pain which she could not wholly stifle or forget.

She had found few specimens that day for her attention had wandered all the time to the orchard and the landmarks surrounding it; and afterwards she had begun to plan, slipping away to explore the garden at every opportunity. On Sunday morning she had found a part of the grounds well away from observation where she could get out. It was in the general direction of the orchard which was not, as far as she had been able to discover, visible from the windows of the school.

On Monday, excused from games on the score of toothache, she had seized her chance and here she was, hurrying through a drift of fallen leaves on the wooded slope below Hawthorn Lodge, her eyes bright and her cheeks glowing with the satisfaction of achievement.

It was a cold, clear afternoon of lambent sunshine and all the trees were aflame, the brambles russet, and berries glowing in the deep green of holly and rowan. She breathed in the crisp, sweet air as she raced along, laughing with pleasure when a hare, ears up, stared at her for a moment, then leaped into the underbrush, or a robin cocked his head at her before hopping away. A cart-track ran at the foot of the slope, but further on there were two open fields to cross, and then she was conscious of her school uniform and the danger of being seen. She took off her blazer and carried it over her arm, and her hat, which she tucked beneath the blazer, hoping to look like some free and ordinary individual, but always feeling that behind her eyes were watching, though the landscape was empty except for two infinitesimal figures in a distant field.

Walking swiftly, close to the hedge, head down and heart thumping, she was half-way to the orchard before the dreadful thought struck her that Ella might not be there. Suppose they were all out, away somewhere in the car? And she would have taken this risk for nothing? Suppose they had already missed her at the school or that some other form, out on a specimen hunt, caught sight of her and told Miss Wisdon?

She began to run, madly, as though pursued, climbing at last into Donald Rich's orchard, and hardly able to believe her eyes when she saw an open window and the dog Parrot lying at rest in the sun.

"Ella, oh, Ella!"

The dog's excited barking had brought out his mistress, and Sue, the usually undemonstrative, was hugging her in the wildness of relief, not yet aware that this was a different Ella from the old enemy and friend of ten intimate years.

"You didn't write to me—not even a postcard," she cried reproachfully.

"But Sue, dear, I couldn't. Your grandfather forbade it ... he said it wouldn't do. I hadn't forgotten you for a single moment, but how did you come?" exclaimed Ella, looking round incredulously in search of some explanation for her presence here at the back of the house.

"I slipped out.... I simply had to see you.... I came over the fields and ran most of the way. I was so terrified you might not be at home."

"Oh, Sue, but this is awful. Come inside quickly. I must get you straight back! Have you no sense—to break bounds like that," cried Ella distractedly. "No school would stand for it; if you are missed there will be no end of a row. I'll get my hat."

Ella was different, free, but authoritative, her responsibilities shifted and become personal and dear. She saw at once how this might involve her, and through her strike at Donald—wishing to live at peace with his neighbors, whether great or small.

Mrs. Somerville, inimical already, would be only too glad to implicate her in this escapade; Mr. Somerville, to whom she owed so much, would be furious too. If Sue had come in the holidays from home, it would have been another matter, a risk not to be openly encouraged of course, yet not a mad and desperate risk like this. Schools have a thousand eyes, strict timetables and cast-iron rules.

So thought Ella, hurriedly slipping into her coat and hat, pushing her visitor out the door and saying anxiously:

"If I'm with you, it will not look so noticeable if we should meet any one."

Sue moved away from her touch, eyes dark, and walked with dignity back through the orchard to the field, unnoticing even Parrot, who followed at their heels.

She was not welcome here then? She had believed that Ella would be so glad to see her and show her the little house; she had expected to hear everything—all her adventure since that summer evening when she had been

snatched away. And now this! Ella was changed, only anxious to get her off quickly before any one found out.

Sue strode on, saying nothing, unheeding Ella's anxious protests, not hearing half she said, bewildered, angry and hurt.

"It isn't that I don't want to see you, Sue. I've always hoped to, and of course school is strange to you still, and you don't realize the risk. Your granny is so much against me already and I have to think of Donald. You do understand, don't you?... They might even expel you for all I can tell. Schools have to be so careful ... and no one would believe we hadn't encouraged you to come.... You do look nice in the uniform and you have the loveliest color.... You are happy at school, aren't you? It wasn't that, was it?"

"Oh, no, thanks."

"Well, that's all right then. I'd like to hear all about it some time ... when it isn't term," said Ella hastily. "It must be thrilling rather ... to have so many friends of your own age."

Sue strode on, not caring in the least who saw her now, across the second field and turned.

"You needn't come really. I am practically there."

"No, but I'd like to see you into the grounds. I wish we could have had a talk, Sue. It was very sweet of you to want to come...."

The girl rejected that.

"I wanted to ask you something," she said. "I wanted to know about my parents."

"But, darling, I don't know a thing, except that they died of influenza within a few days of each other when you were a baby. It was such a shock to your granny that she could never bear to speak of it."

"Well, what's my real name, though?"

"I haven't the least idea, Sue, really.... I wouldn't have dreamed of asking. Naturally it wasn't any business of mine."

"Then why were you always throwing off at me?" cried Susan, turning upon her. "Because you used to, so you can't deny it, Ella. You said I wouldn't have had a friend in the world if it hadn't been for granny ... things like that. What did you *mean*?"

Ella exclaimed with real distress:

“I know I was often beastly to you in the old days. You used to get my back up and irritate me somehow, but I was always sorry after and felt a pig. It didn’t mean anything at all but that. Your grandmother often said she couldn’t afford things because of you—having to think of your future and all that, as you had no one but her to depend upon. I suppose that was what I meant at the time, though I don’t remember.... I never dreamed you took the least notice when I was disagreeable ... we were always scrapping, you and I, but I was very fond of you underneath. You know I was.... And now we are quarreling again, just like old times, the very moment we meet.”

Ella was smiling now, trying desperately to recall the Sue she had known in place of this hostile counterpart, but without success. There came no answering smile, for what was the use now everything was changed?

“I’m nearly there. You’d better go back or you may be seen.”

Sue shot out the words, then took to her heels, running up the slope between the trees. Ella, at first attempting to follow, soon gave it up and stood watching, helpless, troubled and upset. She did not know that this was the end of a friendship; up to the last she believed that Sue would turn, however curtly, and wave before she was out of sight. When no such signal came and the slope was empty, she turned and went slowly home.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DAUGHTER OF A SCOUNDREL

1

Nobody had missed the fugitive and at tea-time when the occupants of Hawthorn Lodge came trooping in from games she descended from her room looking listless enough for toothache or any other ill.

“Better, Susan?”

“Oh, yes, thanks.”

Sue sat among these friends of her own age of whom Ella had spoken, feeling strangely alone, with no friend in all the world. She had so long counted upon Ella as a fixed and dependable star in her firmament that even the parting and Ella’s silence all these months had not shaken her faith which was now broken in the dust.

Ella, who only the other day it seemed had risked her life to pull her out of the way of the oncoming car, was now so changed that she would not face the risk of allowing her to come to the house. For Donald’s sake. If that was what being in love and married did to you, Sue thought little of either state.

She, who had braved even her grandfather in defense of Ella, was experiencing for the first time the inequality of love and was bitterly indignant. Such a small risk too, for nobody had noticed her absence, in spite of all the fuss.

Ella’s talk of seeing her some time when it wasn’t term meant less than nothing to Sue, who could not see the relative danger involved in a visit from the school and from Crofter’s End. The wish had not rung true therefore, and she despised it as an empty form.

She would never now see Ella’s little house, or play with Parrot in the orchard, or hear her adventures on the night when granny had turned her out.

As for the questions about her parents, Sue saw that she had been a fool to ask, for feeling as she did, Ella would not have told her, whatever she knew.

Tea was over at last; she abandoned the plea of toothache and went to prep, shutting away the soreness of her heart. There was nobody here who could tell her what she wanted to know, nobody anywhere ... unless possibly granny.

Sue was too new to the company of her peers for the consolation of friendships among them. She had come to it too late moreover, never quite to lose a certain aloofness and singleness of outlook in her dealings with them, though this was not apparent yet.

The first effect of the scene with Ella was to drive her back a little way at least into the old alliance with her grandmother, who, whatever else she might be, was fond of her still and permanent.

Twice Mrs. Somerville had driven over on Sunday afternoons to see her granddaughter, once still semi-invalid and leaning on the arm of Miss Pender, whom Sue had detested at sight, and the second time leaving her companion in the car, where she sat back at her ease as though she owned it, and did not trouble to get out and help the old lady in, a fact noted against her by the observant Susan.

Miss Pender had a gushing manner and a nose that was long and pointed. Any conversation in her presence was quite out of the question and Sue was rather anxious to talk to her grandmother, even though in the past all her efforts in this respect had been unfruitful. She was older now and had not tried for a long time. Surely granny would see that it was reasonable.

On Sundays she wrote home because everybody else did so, even though it seemed a little odd to be writing to some one only two miles away. In her next letter therefore she said:

> "When you are well enough to come and see me alone, granny, I can show you my house and dorm and everything, but it ought to be soon before the days are too cold and dark, as we have to go through the garden and it might be too damp for you...."

Mrs. Somerville, though she could not think what a dorm might be, smiled at the word alone, understanding it perfectly. ("The puss is jealous.") She was sufficiently flattered by the invitation to accept it too and leave Miss Pender behind, and Sue, grateful for this concession, greeted her with

enthusiasm, looking, the visitor thought, very handsome and a credit to her grandmother.

Mrs. Linton, meeting Sue out with her form some days before, had noted her improved appearance and complimented her old friend on the wisdom of having sent the child to school.

"It is the regular hours and exercise, Charlotte, and the care that is taken of their health, day in and day out by women trained to do it. A quite exceptional place, of course."

"Well, my dear Mary, but for your warm recommendation, I should never have brought myself to send her," said Mrs. Somerville graciously, now quite convinced the arrangement had been of her own making.

In this spirit she was pleased to admire the school under Sue's eager guidance, satisfied to be assured that Hawthorn Lodge was far and away the best house and a bed by the window envied by every one. Granny began to feel that she had actually demanded these privileges and that Sue appreciated the fact.

It was a most successful afternoon right up till the end when quite suddenly a confidential voice inquired of her:

"Granny, I wish you would tell me something. What is my real name?"

The shock was so unexpected that Mrs. Somerville collapsed into the easy chair from which she had just risen, shaken and pale.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed faintly. "Who has dared to put such ideas into your head?... I don't know what you are talking about, child...."

"Oh, granny, it's all right really. Nobody has put any ideas into my head. Don't get so upset," begged Sue, smiling as widely as she knew how to brace her grandmother. "You forget I am going on for fifteen, and can see that if my mother was Isabel Somerville, my father's name must have been something else. I don't mind, but I should like to know."

"Somerville is at least a name to be proud of and it is the only one you shall ever bear with my consent," declared her grandmother, rallying a little and speaking with decision.

"Well, that's all right, but—but—what did he *do*, granny?" questioned Sue, now certain there was some crime to be disclosed.

"Don't ask me to talk about that scoundrel who married your poor mother, darling; he lured her away from her home and parents and we never

saw her again. I can't bear it," cried granny.

She was beginning to weep and Sue put her young arms about her awkwardly.

"Never mind," she said. "I only just wanted to know because it seems so funny not to. After all, you can understand that. Cheer up, because you can't go and be ill, you know, or grandfather won't let you come and see me again. I won't worry you any more, but couldn't you just tell me privately who my father was?"

"Some Tom, Dick or Harry, my dear." Mrs. Somerville sat up and wiped her eyes, seeing that after all she could deal with a Sue who spoke like this, and wanted her to come again. "Don't ask me to mention the name for I can't do it, and your grandfather would never hear of it. You would be none the wiser and it is not a name that you are ever likely to hear. Your wretched father has gone to his account, leaving you penniless, but your granny took you, poor friendless baby as you were, to be her daughter in your mother's place and to bear your mother's name. There, there, kiss your foolish granny who can't help being upset by all these old unhappy memories. She's lucky to have you, Sue, for she has so little now, so very little."

For the moment she was as nearly sincere as it was in her nature to be, and Sue, conscious for the first time of her own obligation, grateful for being told what she had asked, moved to pity and affection, responded, shepherding her grandmother out to the car and tucking the rug deftly round her knees.

"You see I can look after you quite as well as that old ugly companion, granny," she said and, at this further proof of what she supposed to be jealousy, granny used her eyes with great effect, saying:

"Yes, she's a plain creature, I know, but useful enough when I can't have you, my darling. Take care of yourself and grow strong now and we shall soon be together again."

2

Some Tom, Dick or Harry?

Susan was not much wiser after all, except that she knew now her own undistinguished condition for the first time, and her own friendlessness, as she believed, but for her grandmother. It seemed quite certain that her father must have done something scandalous, to be described as a scoundrel, and that granny had rescued her at the time of his death, in spite of her

grandfather, since he would not allow the name to be spoken and disliked her so much. This theory so completely fitted the picture she had formed of him, that she felt no surprise. He had forbidden Ella to write to her (but that did not matter now); he had sent her off to school, though she liked it in spite of him; he had even turned his own sister, Aunt Alison, out of the house. There was neither kindness nor justice to be had from him. He had ordered her to tell the truth yet lied to her about her name.

Thinking this all over when her grandmother had gone, she felt suddenly a different person from the Susan Somerville she had always been. She knew the worst now, and there was a kind of painful relief in that, but security was gone from her. She had no one in the world except granny, who was loving but not dependable. She was alone actually, and at that realization strength flowed into her and exaltation. It couldn't be helped, and it was all right.

Sue from that moment flung herself into the life of the school.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MEETING ON A COUNTRY ROAD

1

Hugh Lowell, in company with too many other men of business, had been going through a period of considerable anxiety. He had been since 1925 general manager of George Wilson & Co., a firm of educational publishers. The head of the house was conservative in the extreme, his methods old-fashioned, and he himself obstinately opposed to change. In consequence newer and more progressive rivals had invaded the market, sapping his profits, and Hugh saw himself working helplessly against the tide, with disaster lurking almost certainly not far away.

During Malcolm's first year at Oxford things were brought to a head by the death of Wilson. His legatees decided to get out of a concern which had been steadily declining for years, and sell the stock, and Hugh, immediately foreseeing this contingency, had a long talk with Lorna. If he did not move in the matter it would in all probability mean amalgamation with another firm and the gradual if not instant dismissal of the existing staff. Men who had spent half a life-time with Wilson's would be thrown upon the world with little hope in these bad times of finding work again; even for the young ones it would be serious enough, and Hugh himself would have to liquidate his savings and make a fresh start more likely than not. Since the departure from the gold standard investors had been nervous and backing would undoubtedly be difficult to obtain. On the other side of the picture, with the control in his own hands and certain radical changes long over-due, Hugh saw a reasonable prospect of getting Wilson's back on its old prosperous footing. The staff were with him to a man and willing to face a temporary cut in salaries; Mason, the biggest shareholder outside the Wilson family, would uphold him too. At the same time the risk was undeniable; he would need every penny he could lay hands on and it would mean rigid economy at home. What did Lorna think?

“Chance it,” declared Lorna impetuously. “Of course you must chance it, Hugh. Think of the tide in the affairs of men. I am not afraid of being hard up and besides, we have no choice. I can do some of the donkey-work for you as I used to do when we were first married, proof-reading and so on. I’ll take on the garden altogether and manage without a maid. I shan’t need any new clothes for ages either, luckily. There’s another thing, I might get some translating to do.”

Hugh laughed.

“I knew you would be with me, but I am not going to reduce you to slavery before I must, my dear. Think it over carefully. It is your future I am mortgaging in a sense and Malcolm’s.”

“Nonsense. Don’t we stand or fall together? Am I a parasite that I can’t support myself if the occasion should ever arise? Malcolm’s all right too. I feel that in my bones. I could never have provided you with such an inexpensive child.”

“It used to be one of your worries that you had provided me with this one. Own up now,” teased Hugh.

“I know. Naturally a man wants his own children.”

“So I have heard, but I’m quite satisfied with our second-hand specimen, thank you.”

He put his arm around her and she leaned back against his shoulder.

“You are unique, aren’t you?” she said.

“Don’t you think you may be prejudiced, woman?”

“Yes, I know. I should hate all the other women to share my infatuation,” declared Lorna. “No need to tell him about this, is there? Let us spring it upon him suddenly that his uncle has become head of the firm.”

“If and when,” agreed Hugh.

2

Malcolm frustrated this plan, however, for having read of Wilson’s death and seen some of its possible implications, he came home early on Saturday afternoon. In the Underground he caught sight of Tim’s father and Sylvia, now almost grown up, and having some interest in her and a score to pay, he took surreptitious note of the lady. She looked very fashionable, he thought, with disapproval. Tim’s mother invariably filled him with alarm, and he was

determined that young Sylvia must be exactly like her. Meeting her mirthful glance full upon him, he stared at an advertisement over her head until he found it to be that of a frightful young man buying an extremely spikey diamond ring for a lobster-cheeked girl with too many teeth.

Sylvia was craning her neck to look at the beastly thing, dash it. Now he would hear some cheek about that via Tim, no doubt.

Coming out of the station, Tim's father took it into his head to wait for his son's friend, who would have much preferred to hurry on, or so he was persuaded.

"Well, Malcolm, going home for the week-end, I suppose?"

"I thought I'd look them up," said Malcolm. "I shall probably go back in the morning."

"Working hard, eh? I wish you could intimate to Tim that a bit of study wouldn't incapacitate him for life. Your uncle is a lucky chap, my boy, still you owe much to his training, I know."

"Don't be morbid, daddy," exclaimed Sylvia.

Malcolm, pleased at this most apt interruption, looked at her out of the corner of one eye. Sylvia, mistress of herself on all occasions, returned the look wickedly.

"Thank you for asking me up for Eights Week," she said.

"I haven't."

"I know, but that was intelligent anticipation. I always think it saves such a lot of trouble, don't you?"

"Can you swim?" inquired Malcolm with every appearance of anxiety.

"Yes, didn't you know? They couldn't drown me at birth," she returned promptly.

"I'm glad you see the point."

Mr. Field, making nothing of this interchange, waited his turn like a well-trained parent.

"By the way, you might ask your uncle to have a round of golf with me in the morning if he can spare an hour or so, Malcolm," he observed. "I suppose he'll have a good deal on his hands at the moment. If there's any advice I can give him in a friendly way, tell him, he knows where to find me."

“Thanks awfully, sir. I’ll push him off for a game in the morning, anyway. He’s too fond of work.”

“For I daresay it will be all in the family,” put in Sylvia, looking bland.

“What’s that you say?” inquired her father.

“Nothing, daddy—I was just explaining you.”

“I shouldn’t try to do that,” said her father dryly. “You might get out of your depth, swimmer though you may be. She is a minx, Malcolm.”

“Oh, he’s trodden on me for years,” said Sylvia.

They came to the corner and parted, but not before she had had a last word.

“Emeralds for me,” she called after Malcolm.

“Little beast,” thought Malcolm, feeling that he could have dealt with her alone, and determined to do so at the first opportunity.

His uncle was at home and surrounded by papers and notes at his desk in the dining-room, when the young man sauntered in.

“What’s brought you here? Tired of your gay life?” inquired Hugh.

“Yes, rather.”

Malcolm sat on the edge of the table and surveyed the littered desk.

“Can I lend you a hand there?” he suggested.

His uncle went on with the notes he was making and did not answer immediately. Then he surveyed the visitor over his shoulder.

“Been sent down?” he inquired.

“Good lord, no. Can’t I visit my family without being suspected of foul play?” exclaimed Malcolm.

“You looked so damned innocent.”

“Oh, sorry. It shan’t occur again. Talking about foul play, if you’ve bumped off old Wilson I thought you might need a spot of help.”

“So it was that, you young fool?” Hugh was taken aback, not having imagined that Malcolm would pay any attention to Wilson’s death even if it chanced to come to his notice. “I’m much obliged, of course, but I don’t quite see what assistance you can be in this particular crisis.”

So it was a crisis, was it? Malcolm, hands in pockets, strolled to the window and looked out, then he produced his pipe and filled it.

"I'll chuck my scholarship and look for a job," he said.

"You'll *what*? Great heavens, doesn't it occur to you that the one satisfaction I have is that you are provided for, for the time being?" said his uncle. "Half the population is looking for jobs and in a few years from now things may be better, or at least you'll be better equipped ..."

"Malcolm! What brings you here?"

Lorna, hearing voices, had opened the door and was staring at him, as though in alarm.

"Talk about effusive welcomes," he exclaimed. "What do *you* think I am —the prodigal son? Here I come all this way for a glimpse of you both and you treat me with cold surprise."

"He's tired of Oxford, Lorna, and wants to chuck it," said Hugh experimentally, with a glance at Malcolm.

"Idiots," said his wife. "You are both lying. Do you think I can't see through you? He's come down to help us plot about the new firm."

"What?" Malcolm thumped his leg joyfully and, stretching out an arm, gathered her in. "Now you've done it. Tell me all," he demanded. "I had a sort of feeling you were up to mischief somehow and leaving me out."

He supported Hugh's scheme with enthusiasm, as was to be expected, and during a long debate put forward a number of suggestions, some of them sound enough to be considered later on if success permitted, some wild. He thought the firm should be expanded to include general publishing of a money-making kind, a view which Hugh had held with modifications for some time. Listening with attention, because in a few years Malcolm would be voicing the opinions of a generation to be considered, the elder man thought wistfully that it would be good to have the boy in with him on this venture, but he gave no hint. It was unfair to use the spur of affection, and this visit had shown him that the scales would be weighed in his favor for anything he might ask. The burden of his own anxieties was lifted by the knowledge, but he decided that Malcolm must be free to make his own decisions later on. Remembering the secret expeditions to Crofter's End and innumerable minor instances of the boy's instinct and ability to walk alone, he knew that this was the part of wisdom as well as justice.

The most practical outcome of their talk was the message from Mr. Field presently delivered by Malcolm, with the rider:

"The old boy may be able to lay his hands on some capital and he is jolly friendly to you. He waited for me coming out of the station to get this off his chest."

It did not occur to him that Sylvia had drawn her father's attention to his presence in the train, and held back for the simple pleasure of baiting him, or that the lawyer's offer had been influenced by the reflection that this good-looking young fellow with the firm chin was a close friend of Tim's and likely to get him into a useful set. Lowell moreover was a sound fellow and if one could lend him a hand without undue risk, it might be all to the good.

Hugh, though less credulous than Malcolm, saw that a chat with Field might certainly lead to something, and agreed to the round of golf in the morning.

As soon as he had gone, Malcolm, before returning to Oxford, said peremptorily to Lorna:

"Keep me posted now, whatever he says, because I may be able to think of something. There are various chaps whose fathers might be glad to buy them into the firm a bit later, for one thing. Anyway he needn't think I'm going to sit up there eating my head off. ... Promise not to go keeping things dark now. Come along."

Lorna nodded. "You are fond of him, aren't you?" she said impulsively.

"Aw, I think he's a loverly man, doant yew?" said Malcolm in a high falsetto—his natural resistance to this threat of feminine emotion; and when rather dashed, she saw him off, saying:

"It was nice of you to come down," he retorted:

"Don't mention it. A pleasure, I'm sure," in the same spirit, with an air of rather lofty amusement.

"What a fool I am with him," she thought, looking after him with a sigh. "I know he would give his head for Hugh, so why ask? I am not so idiotic with other people and after all these years I ought to have learned sense. I can't even show him how glad I am to see him. 'Cold surprise,' he called it yesterday, when I was so touched that I could have hugged him.... But it's no good standing here blithering."

Malcolm looked back and waved his hat to her. Seeing her with her feathers fluffed, as he had been used to put it, he said to himself:

“Poor girl’s a bit pipped and no wonder. Lucky for old Hugh she’s not like Mamma Field, who’s a regular tough, underneath, if you ask me. Well, God bless our happy home and all that. Why didn’t I ask her for my insurance money? She’d have got a kick out of it.”

3

In due course he heard from home that his uncle had pulled off the deal and obtained a controlling interest in Wilson’s, though not to such an extent it would inevitably cripple him financially for some time to come.

Another and different piece of information reached him in a letter from Tim, who wrote from Cambridge:

> “The larger beast has gone off to the Sorbonne for a year, after a hell of a row with mother, who wanted her to stay at home and be a little lady. The governor stepped in to prevent bloodshed, I am told, and talked about the Peace of the Home, which, as Sylvia pointed out to him, is a luxury, and therefore has to be paid for. He has a soft spot for her, so she got her way. She sent a message to you that it will have to be Eights Week year after next; a bit of sauce probably, so you can take it or leave it. I did intimate that I was not going to be a go-between in her low intrigues, but the fact is I was pleased with the brat for standing up to mother. It’s good for discipline....”

Malcolm approved of the brat for the same reason and began to look upon the arrangement for the year after next as a more or less comic fixture. He was not without more subtle and less disinterested feminine attention by now but he had neither time nor money for fooling about, and was poor game for sirens, though he liked girls of his own kind and certainly did not languish for want of entertainment during the vacations. The telephone rang from morning till night, and Lorna gained a large acquaintance at second-hand, chiefly confined to clipped young voices, but with an occasional face when a car-load of boys and girls picked him up at the house.

She did not know whether to be flattered or dismayed that these cool creatures seemed to regard her as so completely harmless, and did not trouble to dissemble their requirements, enlisting her aid to trace him when he could not be found or to “push him off” in good time to this place or that.

“It is their peculiar form of guile,” said Hugh. “The technique has changed since our day, which is one with Nineveh and Tyre as far as they

are concerned."

"Well, I hope there is still safety in numbers," remarked Lorna, "because I don't feel old enough to be an amateur grandmother at forty, decrepit as I may appear to the hussies."

"The economic situation has its points then. Even if his tastes inclined, he can't afford to afflict you in that particular way."

"You are so reasonable, Hugh."

"Yes, it's an infernally irritating habit, I know," he returned, "but it seems a pity for both of us to die a thousand deaths over him. If I were not a very amiable chap I should be jealous of that young blighter. You don't lose any sleep about my countless fascinations."

"You are part of myself," said his wife. "Malcolm's a stranger ... we never quite meet, he's always just around the corner somehow."

"So you mistake him for a bird of paradise instead of an ordinary sparrow?" said Hugh.

The sparrow's first serious heart attack was destined to a quick cure by a more permanent obsession. In the following long vacation he was offered through his tutor a holiday post in the country to coach a backward schoolboy, and accepted it without hesitation, unwilling to add to the expenses at home just then. The Lowells had not gone away. Hugh was unable to spare the time, he said, they would go later, but Malcolm saw through that explanation; their careful avoidance of any talk of the financial situation had made him suspicious.

The post seemed a pleasant and not in the least arduous one, with plenty of tennis and excursions in lovely country. Malcolm, who had intended to do some reading, was at first defeated in this virtuous resolve by the assumption of the daughters of the house that he was there for their entertainment. One of them was a frank rather scatter-brained youngster of sixteen, but the elder, Maida, was mature enough to conceal her years and devastatingly pretty. Her hair was auburn, her complexion cream, and set off by vivid lipstick and long gleaming earrings, of which she seemed to possess an inexhaustible supply. She treated Malcolm as a contemporary, but called him Mr. Dubenny at first and presently Max at a guess, knowing only his initial, but declaring that he looked like a Max and infusing great depth into the statement. She was often dreamily sad and quoted modern poetry to him in the moonlight; asked him what he thought of Life, and didn't he think all this talk of sex perfectly silly? As though it were everything. As though

there weren't more amusing things intellectually at least. Personally she didn't get any kick out of kissing—most people anyway.

The technique was not so new after all, and Malcolm certainly found her kisses easier than her conversation. Whether the young lady was leading him down the garden path, in the phrase of the moment, or seriously playing for him, she did at least succeed in filling his thoughts in a deliciously new and disturbing manner, until chance intervened.

The four young people, returning from a walk one morning, came upon a stationary car and a picnic party, whom the girl Molly hailed with sudden excitement. She and her brother were some yards in front and when Maida and Malcolm strolled up level with the group, she shouted introductions.

"Maida, Max, this is Biddy Cross, Sue Somerville, Mr. Cross—I don't know your other name, do I?—my sister, Mr. Dubenny."

The picnic party had scrambled up with laughter and explanations, brandishing plates and glasses, and every one was too much engaged to notice the likeness between the girl and the young man, who both stood silent, aloof from the reunion rather than a part of it.

Sue, after nodding to the wholesale introduction, had stared curiously at Malcolm; now her amused glance moved from one face to another and he could look at her, though the blood thudded in his temples with the shock of this encounter.

In her sleeveless blue silk washing frock and shady hat she might have been as old as he was, quite grown up, and he was taken aback, having pictured her during these years when he thought of her at all, as still a child.

For a moment he was almost inclined to haul her out of the group to a safe distance and tell her who he was and who she was, but the thought of the possible sensation this would create among the rest of the party, and the secret fear that she really knew her name by now and had discarded it and him, prevented. And he saw how far removed he was from her still, for all his fine ambitions, just an undergraduate, tutoring a schoolboy, because things were rather in a bad way at home.

Malcolm withdrew his gaze from his sister and moved back a little, and Maida immediately moved too, saying they must be off or lunch would be kept waiting. Molly tore herself away from her friends with evident regret, and the incident was over.

The three left behind returned to the grass and their interrupted meal.

“What did they say the man’s name was?” asked Biddy, watching the retreating quartet. “Max something, didn’t they? Sue, he’s awfully like you, somehow.”

“Thanks for the compliment,” returned Miss Somerville. “I thought he looked too superior for words and must be the local duke.”

The supposed nobleman meanwhile had abandoned Maida to walk with her younger sister, much to that young lady’s flattered surprise.

“Topping girl, your friend,” he remarked cunningly.

“Yes, isn’t she? Biddy’s a lamb, and I like Sue too. She’s the other one. We used to share a dorm once, but they’re both in senior house now among the nobs.”

“I suppose they live down here?” said Malcolm.

“Oh no. They’ve driven from Hampshire this morning in Bill’s car at a frightful pace. His name was Bill I found out. Sue is staying with them, and that’s an enormous compliment because the Somervilles are so exclusive that she’s hardly allowed to go anywhere. Didn’t you hear Bill say they were going to have ‘By Royal Appointment’ on their notepaper? He’s a scream.”

“Dear me, you shouldn’t have introduced me to this haughty lass, you know. I’m only a poor working man.”

“Oh, Max, don’t be silly.”

“Yes, truly, without a bean, toiling for my daily crust, living in the vulgar suburbs.”

“Well, I’ll tell you something. My grandfather made his money in fish,” confessed Molly, not to be outdone.

Malcolm shook hands with her effusively, in token that they belonged to the same world.

But somehow the Maida episode was over. He liked the rest of the family immensely, but both her talk and her style became meretricious as he thought of Sue, who had not spoken a word, and for all he knew had no style at all. He was thrown back into the old furious indignation against the Somervilles, humiliated that he, once so much her superior in years and sense, had been afraid to speak to his young sister and shake her into at least the recognition of his existence; angry with himself for ever having given

her a thought, yet held by some older pain from the days when she had been his anxious care and responsibility.

“Dam’ it all,” he thought, “she’s probably a loathsome little snob, brought up like that,” but he knew that he had been proud of her standing there on the grass in her blue dress, that they were alike, whatever these people had made of her, and that whether young sisters were a nuisance in fact or otherwise, no one had a shadow of right to deprive him of his. He was impatient to be independent and in a position to say so, and that night he began to read, untroubled by creamy skin and auburn hair. He supposed if Maida wanted kisses he’d have to kiss her, but he would dodge it if he could. It struck him for the first time that she was too experienced, and was probably stringing him on. Well, that was all right then.

Though he did not entirely enjoy it, Malcolm learned something of strategy that summer. He set out to bore the lovely Maida stiff, as he put it to himself and, a more adroit male visitor arriving in the neighborhood, she began to tell him he was a mere boy, etc., etc. They parted amiably but without regret.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SET APART

1

If Susan had had any natural inclination to snobbery, which she had not, that interview with Mrs. Somerville on the subject of her father in her first term at school, would have provided a useful check to it.

Convinced of some crime so scandalous that she could not hope at present to be told its nature, she imagined many fantastic solutions to the mystery, none of them exactly conducive to family pride.

Among other children at last, hearing about their homes, their plans, their families, seeing the friends who came to take them out, the isolation of her own position was darkly illuminated. All her days seemed doomed to be a reversal of their experience. Holidays which they approached with excitement filled her with dread. At home she was sick for Crofton Beeches as any new girl on her first night at school. She loved the place with a fine frenzy and when it was closed, haunted it like a wistful ghost.

This devotion was safer than any human love to one grown uncertain of all her world. Though she had friends enough, she had no confidantes, and so ironically the legend of her importance grew, though she never knew it, nature having made her oblivious equally of deference or condescension.

It was Miss Wisdon who had actually contrived the visit to Biddy Cross, finding occasion to say a word to her grandfather. That astute woman had taken granny's measure by this time, and she liked the girl who fought her own battles, kept her own counsel and went her own way, yet was in the thick of every movement fostered by the school, so that no day seemed long enough for her unbridled energy.

There was to be no question of a career for her; she would go home and into such society as was available. Miss Wisdon wondered how long that

would last, unless some effort were made to break down the selfish and cloying affection of her grandmother, who so persistently refused to countenance visits to other girls on the grounds that she wanted her at home.

"Susan really should have a complete change occasionally and meet other people, Mr. Somerville, and I know the family well," said Miss Wisdon. "There are several sons, by the way. You may be surprised at such a sentiment from a woman in my position, but I am convinced that girls growing up should not be too cloistered. That is the way to lose them."

Jonathan, with the example of Susan's mother in mind, agreed and promised to mention the matter to his wife. He did so to such purpose that when Sue, without any real hope, spoke of Biddy's invitation, she was astounded and grateful to receive her grandmother's affable consent. No credit as usual was given where credit was due, and Susan did not know of her grandfather's intervention.

She flung herself into the holiday much as she had flung herself into the life at Crofton Beeches, and the difference of her own lot was emphasized anew. Her hosts were not rich and sons and daughters were being educated to earn their own living. Bill, driver of the picnic car, which was an old one and no beauty, had bought it from a friend for £5, repainted it and resuscitated its interior, having a talent that way, and was therefore delighted to show off its paces.

Susan, as he raced them along the country roads, down to the sea to bathe, or in search of a reasonably up-to-date cinema, remembered the little cars full of just such parties which her grandmother had been used to condemn.

"Fast," she had called them, and Sue was tickled to recall how attractive this peculiar and mysterious quality had seemed to her, savoring every moment of these expeditions as though they were something she might never enjoy again. Yet in all its aspects this month with Biddy showed her that not only she but Crofter's End itself was cut off from common experience, and the suspicion came to her that her grandparents lived shut away as the result of her father's disgrace. She was sorry for them then and doubly tied. Alone she felt she would have defied this shadow and cast it off. But how could she ever desert them when they had rescued her?—her grandmother certainly, and no doubt doing it in spite of her grandfather.

Charlotte's offended vanity and self-deception in fact were rapidly bringing about the result she desired, but which she was certainly not clever

enough to have planned step by step. The girl was prepared for self-immolation, though neither happy at the prospect nor resigned.

The nearest she ever came to speech about her own condition was on that day when Molly, Maida and their party had gone on. Bill liked to bait her about her supposed importance because this subject never failed to raise a spark in her eyes; he was intrigued because she was so difficult to reach and yet, he thought, yards ahead of most of his sister's friends in looks and something else not so easy to explain.

Lying in the grass he watched her curiously.

"Drink, Lady Susan?"

"No, thanks."

"She wants champagne, Biddy. We ought to have thought of that."

"I've never tasted it and I probably never shall," protested Sue, suddenly roused. "You don't seem to realize that I haven't a penny."

Bill produced one and tossed it to her.

"With all my worldly goods I thee endow," he recited.

"Bless you, my children," put in Biddy, raising pious hands and then waving them hastily at a choir of wasps. "As far as that goes, Sue, none of us has a penny, but what are parents and guardians for? You have your grandparents."

"Yes, but ... it's rather different.... My mother ran away with my father, I think," said Sue in a rush.

"Hooray!" Bill rolled over, delighted. "Girl of spirit, and these things are always hereditary. When you feel the attack coming on, Sue, just send me a wire and the little old bus will be moored under the garden wall."

She laughed, almost for a moment seeing with their eyes, her mother slipping away to some one like Bill, a picture far nearer the truth than the melodramatic imaginings induced by her grandmother. Impossible in the midst of this peaceful summer scene and light-hearted company to dream of putting into words what she believed, or to tell them that even her name was a sham. With one of her quick changes of mood, she flung these distresses behind her, and decided to think of them no more during this heaven-sent holiday.

When she was in her last term at school Susan saw her Aunt Alison again. She had gone up with other seniors to one of those loan exhibitions at Burlington House which people attend in vast multitudes in the earnest if sheep-like desire to do what everybody else is doing. Very few of them see the pictures or want to see them; they discuss the newest things in hats or the peccadilloes of their friends and domestics, well supplied with adjectives to scatter afterwards about the masterpieces they have passed unseeing by.

(My dear, they were too marvellous. I could have spent hours, etc., etc.)

Sue and her companions had not reached this stage of emancipation, however.

They were expected to look at the pictures actually and be able to discuss them with some degree of intelligence afterwards. It is to be feared that when that moment came Sue did not surpass herself, for having caught sight of her Aunt Alison, she saw little else.

She knew her at once, though it was now more than six years since their meeting at Crofter's End, so deep had been the impression made upon her. Mrs. Loftus had changed little and as she approached through the throng, the girl's heart seemed to turn over with mingled fright and expectation.

At gatherings of this kind and in theaters and restaurants Mrs. Loftus often looked with interest at the young men, searching, not without secret amusement, for one who might chance to look like a Somerville though he disclaimed the family. She still hoped one day to meet Malcolm Dubenny and have the matter out with him, even if it came to no more than crossing of verbal swords. She had no thought however of meeting Malcolm's young sister, and coming face to face with her, would have passed on, had not some slight movement on the girl's part, almost a sensitive withdrawal of her glance, made her pause and look again. And Sue's eyes were alight with recognition and excitement.

"Aunt Alison!"

"It *can't* be Sue. Why, darling, but you have grown up, you are as tall as I am!"

"You've come back," said the girl simply.

"Back?" echoed Mrs. Loftus. "Since I saw you I have never moved from London except for a week or two, and hope I never shall again. And you remembered me? That's really wonderful of you."

“Oh, no ... of course I did ... but I thought you were abroad.” Sue’s mind was in confusion. Hadn’t they said she had gone back to her savages? but what did it matter since she was here. “I was sure you had gone,” she said eagerly, and then the smile faded as she remembered the lies, now proved at last, and the note she had burned.

“Then you didn’t get the little Christmas gifts I sent you?” said her aunt. “I guessed as much.”

“No, oh, no!”

“They were just trifles—very silly ones, my dear, and I must have packed them insecurely. They went astray in the post, no doubt.”

“I don’t believe it,” Sue found herself saying indignantly.

The throng was close about them, carrying them along. Mrs. Loftus, with an arm around the girl’s shoulder, laughed and said in her ear:

“Neither do I, but we must give people the benefit of the doubt, I suppose.”

“I’ll give that to the postman,” said the girl, yet laughed too in delighted communion with Aunt Alison, the old spell renewed and doubled by the very folly which had thrust them apart.

And then hands seized her, and the process was repeated in a different fashion. The school party was going down to tea and must not be separated. As a prefect Sue had a part in this responsibility, and she went to it from a habit so much nearer to her than any personal joy, mechanically therefore, with a last quick smile, not able to assess her loss or all she had wanted to say, until the crowd divided them.

Throughout the rest of the afternoon, though she searched and searched, she did not see her aunt again.

3

“That,” said Mrs. Loftus to Robert and Irene Lord who had been following close behind, “was Malcolm Dubenny’s sister.”

“No, really? She’s a comely lass too,” said Robert. “Where does she stand in the list of the condemned? You know I am rather sorry I took up the blighter’s case, he is too exclusive for the likes of me. I thought more of him when he was a homeless myth in danger of starvation. There was some drama in that.”

“Can myths starve?” inquired Irene.

“Certainly. It is a material age, so of course they starve, but don’t interrupt the witness.”

“I am not even sure if he remembers he has a sister,” said Mrs. Loftus.

“Then why not write and remind the fellow? I am all for the higher education, and if he has let this trifling matter slip his mind, something ought to be done about it.”

“He would probably be more interested in other people’s sisters,” objected Irene. “But do you seriously mean he may not know or she either?”

“How can one tell what they may know or think, brought up at opposite ends of a ridiculous family feud?” said Mrs. Loftus. “Poor children! Oh, you may smile, Robert, but I have reached the age when I may be sentimental if I choose. At sixty-two one is considered an imbecile in any case, so why struggle against it? One may still dance and wear a well-kept face, but be cynical at one’s peril.”

“I should love you to be cynical in a well-kept face and dance with me. With my well-known beauty we should create a sensation,” said Robert. “Circe and the swine, for instance.”

“Or Perseus and Medusa perhaps,” suggested Mrs. Loftus gently.

“You have never told us what this famous feud was actually about,” put in Irene at this point.

“Like most feuds, nothing at all and everything in the world, my dear. Isabel ran off and married Paul, and her mother was furious, and then no doubt his family was furious at her fury, and so it has gone on.”

“The old firm of Pelion and Ossa, in fact,” said Robert. “Let us be classical even if we don’t look at the pictures. I wonder why people always mistake Burlington House for a Mothers’ Meeting? I wonder why people have feuds ... but no, looking at the human race in bulk like this, I can believe anything.”

“That little girl seemed very thrilled to see you,” went on Irene. “How badly things are arranged. Why couldn’t these two orphans have been left to you? Nature is supposed to abhor waste, and look at the errors of judgment she makes.”

Mrs. Loftus laughed, but sighed a little too, feeling how ineffectual she was to do anything for the orphans, as Irene called them, for always opposed

to her interest in them was the barrier of her affection for Jonathan and the fear of making further trouble.

Yet the encounter with Susan had revived that interest naturally enough. The girl's evident pleasure, and that exclamation "You've come back," as though they were two friends who had been long parted—these things from a child only once briefly met—were more than flattering, they were almost an appeal.

Those other declarations too, "I don't believe it" and "I'll give that to the postman," did not suggest much confidence in her immediate world. Alison, half sorry she had mentioned the gifts, withdrew the thought, instinct telling her that Susan had been glad to know. And that in itself was revealing, for a girl with a normal home would not have cared two pins, she thought.

She had not seen Jonathan for several months but when next he came to the flat, she told him of the brief meeting with Sue.

"You haven't, I imagine, mentioned my whereabouts to her, as she supposed I was abroad?"

"I shouldn't have expected her to remember your existence," said her brother, "and Charlotte's attitude to you being what it is, we don't discuss you. She knows my views on her behavior to you, she goes her way and I go mine, and if she imagines you are at the other end of the world, so much the better. We can rest in peace. That is all that matters to me."

"Yes, of course, you can't have perpetual scenes whenever you want to come to town.... Sue would have heard of me, I suppose, from Ella, but they never meet. She tells me Sue looks the other way when they do chance to see her."

"That is just as well, I suppose.... Charlotte's doing, of course."

"I am not so sure, Jon. You remember what I told you about her breaking bounds and going there when she was first at school? You can't expect a child of fourteen to understand all the trouble that might have involved. Ella probably hurt her feelings and made her think she wasn't wanted."

"Possibly. Still, Ella behaved with great discretion."

"Oh, I know. But what I sometimes wonder is, if we weren't all of us behaving with too much discretion for our own ends—our own comfort at least," said Alison Loftus impulsively. "Susan is nearly grown up and how much does she know of her history? What exactly has Charlotte told her?"

“Her own version of it. What else? but she assured me at the time that the child was quite sensible about it, and understood her desire to call her by her mother’s name. I see no reason to doubt it, Alison. The girl’s manner is curt and, to my mind, unattractive, but I understand that is the fashion of the day and merely superficial perhaps. She writes to Charlotte every week, and there is nothing wrong with the tone of her letters—ordinary, affectionate little notes. They seem to be on excellent terms.”

“And she still doesn’t yet know of her brother’s existence, I suppose?” inquired his sister. “You will enlighten her eventually, Jonathan?”

“The future must decide. Charlotte of course will be tooth and nail against it, but when she is twenty-one, yes—. At the moment what would be the point? The boy has been taught to detest the Somervilles, from Irene Lord’s account. He is now grown up and if he desires to get into touch with his sister, he must know he can probably reach her through you. He has made no move, so why precipitate trouble?”

That was true enough. Alison, in spite of her deep distrust of Charlotte, had to admit that Malcolm’s attitude was a corroboration of her story.

“If he knows he has a sister,” she said.

“But, my dear, a boy of six years old is not a baby. Of course he knows.”

There was nothing more to be said or done about the children then? Mrs. Loftus gave it up, seeing that in all directions her hands were tied—by Charlotte, by the Lowells presumably, by Malcolm himself, by Jonathan.

And Susan? What had she to go upon with regard to Susan but that quick smile of greeting and a few words which may have meant nothing at all?

“I was flattered,” thought Alison Loftus. “What interest can an old woman of my age have for a girl of eighteen?”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SYLVIA AND MALCOLM

1

"I am afraid the only emeralds you'll ever get from me will be Woolworth's," remarked Malcolm Dubenny, to the girl in a green sleeveless frock at the other end of the punt.

"How you treasure my lightest words," returned Sylvia with an air of assumed admiration.

"Well, I don't get a proposal every day of the week, if you do."

"I have them night and morning, dear one. So good for the health. Little lover pills," she explained promptly. "As for you, you must buck up. You are getting to be a big boy now and I like competition, snaky rivals and all that kind of thing. You'll tell me next that you have never been kissed."

"Nasty, insanitary habit," said Malcolm primly, and ducked to avoid a handful of water. "Of course if you want to begin my education, you've only to say so. I suppose you took a course in it at the Sorbonne. I always wondered why you went there."

"Safe distance from mother," announced the lady. "Not that I wish to be harsh with the parent, but she has always been too much occupied for our acquaintance. I can't think how she ever came to be so careless as to acquire a family. Must have been sheer absence of mind."

"What are you going to do now you're back?" asked Malcolm, interested.

"Start all the other courses I can lay my hands on, one after another, until I wear her out; School of Economics, Slade School, Journalistic Course, Secretarial, Dramatic Art, Hair-dressing, Midwifery, Architecture, Crooning, Medicine, and the Bar."

“You’ve left out Navigation and Astronomy. What have they done? And how does your mother come into this orgy?... Sorry to seem so dull.”

“Why, it leaves me no time for bridge and golf and the rest of the world’s work, of course. I want a little gayety while I’m young,” said Sylvia in a reasonable voice. “I think it’s terrible how we have to fight for our rights, don’t you?”

Malcolm laughed. He had never seen a more carefree looking young woman in his life, and the early suspicion that she might be like her mother had proved unfounded. Sylvia wore her hair very short, had rather odd green eyes and a pointed chin, and he found himself more and more examining these attractive attributes as though they were something quite new in human experience.

“It’s easy for you to laugh,” she continued. “You and Tim only have to waltz into the family firms and become partners on the spot. As you are going to be a publisher perhaps I’ll change my mind and write my autobiography. That’ll sell.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised, but who said I was going to be a publisher?” inquired Malcolm, startled.

“Well, why have a firm if you’re not going to use it?” returned Miss Field practically. “Keep the money in the family, also the brain, if any. I thought it stood to reason.... But what’s the grand idea? If you aren’t going to be a publisher I have a good mind to give back your ring.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that before you get it,” said Malcolm, grinning. “It would look so odd and fourth-dimensional. I don’t even know whether there’s room for me in the firm, for one thing.”

“Bless his modest little heart. What do you expect to be then—Prime Minister?”

“No, I’m not as modest as all that, I give you my word,” said Malcolm grimly. “You didn’t know I had a sister, did you?”

“A sister? Where ... why? and what has she got to do with it?”

“Oh, nothing.... She’s down in a damned country house with a couple of snobby grandparents, who think I am too obscure to know.”

He hardly knew how it was that all at once he was telling Sylvia a story which he had never mentioned, even to Tim, or indeed why all these years he had been so secretive about it. Partly perhaps it was this talk of his future which once he had hoped to make resounding, and partly a desire to see how

the tale would look to a girl not herself very much older than Sue, a girl, moreover, with sense, as he was beginning to suspect. As he talked he saw for the first time how those grandiloquent ambitions to impress the Somervilles had been submerged by the hard work and good fun of these years at Oxford. He no longer expected to set the Thames on fire. In company with most of his friends, while fiercely intolerant of this or that faction in public life and ready to argue about it by the hour, he was bound by the necessity of landing a job as soon as possible when he went down, and alive to the difficulties. His bent was towards politics but on the invisible side rather than otherwise. He would have liked a post in the Foreign Office, but with little hope of reaching that particular goal, dreamed of political journalism, though his more immediate fate might well be clerking or school-mastering.

"She's all right no doubt," he finished the story of Sue. "Having no end of a rosy time, and not likely to care two hoots whether she has a brother or not. That's not the point though. I don't say I could conveniently do with a sister on my hands either, but at the time I was so furious that I was filled with very large ideas, I can tell you. Meant to be almost a millionaire by the time I was twentyish just to show them. And here I am without a bean, not even able to buy a small emerald, in fact."

"Small? It will have to be a large one or nothing," declared Sylvia indignantly. "But as far as that goes, I was only practicing," said she coyly. "I don't say that sisters are any great catch, and the girl may be a thorough blight, but it's the cheek of the thing. I mean you ought at least to have some say."

"That's exactly what I have always felt," agreed Malcolm eagerly; "it got my back up."

"I don't believe people can change a person's name for them either, legally," went on Sylvia. "I'll put it up to father without mentioning names and let you know."

"Thanks awfully. As a matter of fact, I have never told any one before."

"Not even Tim?"

"No—so who's practicing now?"

She considered the matter and him.

"I don't see that it's such a bad lay," she said. "It's handy to have a semi-fiancée, to keep parents off and all that. I won't come expensive to you because we'll go fifty-fifty. I'm not one of the canoodling sort either."

“But suppose I am?” questioned Malcolm.

“Well, you’ve shown no signs. Were you afraid of my maidenly virtue, or don’t I come up to expectations?”

“You surpass my wildest dreams,” Malcolm assured her pleasantly, “what about moving up a bit?”

She moved and as he reached her, dipped her hand in the water and sprinkled some of the Thames over his head.

“Keep cool, dear one,” she said, “I wasn’t blaming you.”

2

And then to spoil this light-hearted interlude came Lorna’s telegram:

> “HUGH HAD RATHER SERIOUS FALL CAN YOU POSSIBLY COME?”

Malcolm, going back to his rooms to change, found it waiting for him and already six hours old.

Half an hour later, looking stunned and wretched, he was at Sylvia’s hotel, pushing the message into her hand.

“I’m terribly sorry, but I have sent around to Jack Braithwaite and he’ll look after you till I can get back—if I do. He’s an awfully good chap ... you’ll like him.”

“Don’t worry about me. When does your train go?” said Sylvia practically.

“Ten minutes. I’ll just about do it.... You see, it was sent off this morning,” said Malcolm. “I’m dreadfully sorry, Sylvia.”

“Taxi—get me a taxi,” Sylvia was saying to the porter, then going out to the door, almost pushing Malcolm before her: “I’ll telephone Mrs. Lowell and say you are on the train, and then father and tell him to go round. There may be something he can do. Have some dinner on the train now, and don’t worry. I’m sure it’s all right. She only says ‘rather serious.’ ”

He nodded, looking again at the telegram.

“She always calls him Hugh,” he said in a surprised kind of way. “Never ‘your uncle’ or anything like that. Funny, isn’t it? But you see it must have happened this morning.”

Sylvia, her dance frock trailing on the pavement unheeded, had an arm around him protectively.

"Yes, I know, and she'd have wired again if he were worse. Buck up, partner. I'll race in and telephone at once."

Then, heedless of porter, taxi-driver and passersby, she kissed him, pushed him into the cab and waved him away.

Hugh had slipped on the stairs, no one knew how, and fallen heavily to the bottom, striking his head on the newel-post. He had concussion and leg injuries and was still unconscious when Malcolm reached home after what seemed to him the longest and most ghastly journey he had ever taken.

The shock of Lorna's telegram had shown him for the first time all that he owed to Hugh and the rare perfection of a relationship now perhaps to be lost, and those hours while the message waited and he had been fooling about and enjoying himself, seemed in his frantic anxiety exactly typical of his own selfishness. He could find nothing that he had ever said or done to show this best of friends how much he thought of him, and an irrational self-reproach for neglecting something which he never could have done and which needed no doing completed his distress.

Fortunately it was necessary to pull himself together for Lorna's sake, for her courage was at a low ebb after all she had been through, and the relief of seeing him at last was too much. She broke down.

Malcolm let her cry, patting her shoulder awkwardly, and at last picked her up and tucked her on the chesterfield while he poured her out a whiskey and soda. The nurse was with Hugh and there was nothing they could do for the present. The doctor took a hopeful view, she said, but at the best it would be a long business, he had hinted, and quiet and freedom from worry most essential.

"And you see, Malcolm, there's the firm. I blame myself now for letting him take it over. He's not fit for the strain of a long illness, and how shall we be able to persuade him not to worry? I am so thankful you have come. That will be the best comfort for him when he regains consciousness."

"We simply mustn't allow him to worry," said Malcolm, simulating a firmness he was far from feeling. "I'd better go in as soon as I can be safely spared and see the chaps at the office and find out how best we can carry on. How about money—checks and all that? Are you all right?"

"Yes, Mr. Field is going to see me through if necessary. It was sweet of Sylvia to send him round and he was a great help. I am sorry to have upset

your fun, dear."

"Now, look here," said Malcolm, "if you mention the word fun to me I'll scrag you. Do you think I'm not kicking myself for all those hours when I didn't get your wire? God, I've been having a fine time and Uncle Hugh working himself to death, and you never let on. Hadn't you the sense to see I might have taken some of it off him in the vac. if I'd known, or at least hauled him away somewhere for a bit of change? What on earth were you thinking of?"

He was scowling at her, as much to relieve his feelings, as for any other reason, and Lorna, completely spent by her long agony of mind for Hugh, could only say weakly:

"It wouldn't have been fair to worry you, when you were working so hard...."

"What the devil does my work matter?" cried Malcolm, furious because he had permitted it to matter so much. "It can wait anyway. Of course it was just like him not to let on, but that is no excuse for you. I never heard anything so preposterous."

He jumped to his feet, then, as though remembering her old complaint of the noise he made on the stairs coming in late at night, he hastily took off his shoes, saying gruffly:

"I'm going up ... you stay quiet...."

She had moved, longing to go too, suddenly terrified to be left and of what he might hear up there which perhaps she had not been told; but with an effort that was almost heroic she lay back again and let him go, as though to give him that privilege was the least she could do. The old conviction that she could never reach him was a familiar ache behind the nearer and more desperate pain of a threatened desolation. She strained her ears but could not hear his quiet tread on the stairs for the thudding of her heart, nor any sound up there. He must have reached the door ... he must.

She tried to get up, but her knees were shaking, and she sat there on the edge of the couch, clenching and unclenching her hands, observing as if from another world all the things in the room, tracing their shapes one after another carefully as though this were somehow important.

A picture was a little crooked and it worried her, but she felt incapable of putting it straight. Malcolm's hat was flung down on a chair and his shoes, their laces trailing, left on the floor where he had stepped out of them. She remembered inconsequently the first pairs of trees she had bought him ...

because Hugh had called him to order for never looking decently shod ... out of the housekeeping money on the quiet, and gone into his room each morning and put the shoes he was not wearing on them ... fishing them from under his dressing-chest, where they lay in a huddle, trees and shoes together ... untidy little wretch. But you didn't want a boy to be tidy somehow. He hadn't noticed, but Hugh had been pleased because his feet had looked neater.

And again her love for Hugh and the terror of losing him swept over her, so that she did not hear the opening door which brought Malcolm back, but sat staring at him speechlessly as at a ghost.

"I say, look here, it's all right," he cried, sitting down beside her and shaking her gently. "She seems a capable woman, the nurse, and she is satisfied. It's perfectly normal, she said, after a fall like this that he shouldn't come round for a bit. You're all in, poor girl. The whole dam' business has been flung on you, and now you are going off to bed.... Yes, you are ... no arguments, because our job is to be full of beans when he comes to. If you went in to him looking like this, you'd give the chap the fright of his life. I'll park myself in an easy chair in your room and report progress, when necessary, if you like. The doctor will be along she says, and I'll see to him. We'll leave the hall door open and the light on, and I'll tell Minnie to get her beauty sleep. Up you get, lady."

He had taken the reins, and quite intended to hold them.

3

Hugh regained consciousness about six in the morning, saw a familiar figure in a lurid dressing-gown grinning at him from the end of the bed, and closed his eyes. The nurse with a hand on his pulse nodded reassuringly to Malcolm and sent him tip-toeing away to give the good news to Lorna.

Over morning tea a little later, refusing to let her get up, he proceeded to cross-question her about the firm and what best they could do if all went well with the patient, to ease his mind on the subject.

Hugh, she finally confessed, had put every penny he could raise into Wilson's, and after a period of great anxiety and hard work, had begun to see daylight. The times had been steadily improving for one thing, and several of the innovations he had long advised had proved productive. The raising the school-leaving age had stimulated the educational trade, and the firm was expecting a good year. Hugh, though the virtual owner, had been drawing only his old salary while carrying the whole burden of

responsibility on his shoulders. Lorna did not know whether he had any one capable of taking over, or whether some one would have to be engaged temporarily. Her chief anxiety was the effect upon Hugh, tied at home possibly for months with the injury to his leg, even supposing there were no other and worse complications.

Malcolm as he listened, was seeing again Sylvia in the punt saying, "Why have a firm in the family if you don't use it?" and this very natural inquiry seemed to him inspired. Wasn't that indeed exactly how he himself should have looked at it, if he hadn't been a blind, conceited fool, dreaming of the moon? If his uncle were as overworked as Lorna said, there would have to be help for him and an experienced assistant would cost money, not to be spared. Keep the money in the family, eh? That was sense. He wouldn't have expected it somehow from a bit of a girl.

"Now listen to me," said Malcolm firmly to his aunt. "I shall go in, just as soon as the doctor thinks I shan't be needed for a couple of hours, and get these queries straightened out. Though I know nothing about the work, I can use my head as well as the next man. I'll stay down and lend them a hand.... Now don't interrupt.... Can't you see this is a first-class scheme? Directly he is out of danger I can then bring him any really vital points for his decision, be a kind of liaison officer, which will persuade him he is still in charge. It would be enough to kill him to be cut off from the dam' place entirely, doctor or no doctor, when he has risked his shirt on it."

"I know, but you can't be allowed to risk your degree either, Malcolm."

"Who told you? Whose degree is it, mine or yours? And what sort of a mess do you suppose I'll make of the finals with this anxiety on my mind? Do you want me to come home with a fifth-rate pass and no job? Have a heart. I can sit later and look at the chance this gives me. If I don't make too great a hash of it the boss may consider taking me in with him," said Malcolm with an excitement not entirely simulated.

"My dear! But do you want him to? Would you like that?"

Lorna was sitting up and staring at him.

"Why the look of astonishment? What do you suppose I wanted to do—sell matches?" inquired the young man.

"But of course he'll love to have you in the firm, only he wouldn't suggest it naturally ... you had to be free," cried Lorna with enthusiasm.

"Free of what? Upon my word, Aunt Lorna, you really do talk tosh. Why haven't you given me a hint if he had such a bee in his bonnet, instead of

letting him work himself to death?"

Once more Malcolm, furious at his own blindness, was turning his wrath upon her, and she said apologetically:

"I hadn't any right to interfere."

"Good heavens, who has then? What a pricelessly mediaeval attitude, and from you of all people! Come off it, Aunt Lorna, and don't try the prim touch with me, for it doesn't work. Besides, you shoved me into the family in the first place."

"But that's just why, my poor dear," she exclaimed.

"I'm hanged if I'm your poor dear. I'm not in need of any pity that I know of. What are you havering about?"

He stood up, towering above her, and she looked at him helplessly, unable to explain her meaning, awkward and distressed.

Malcolm began to smile.

"Feathers all fluffed as usual," he said, "and I suppose it's no wonder. All this has gone to your head. Now you tuck down and get a rest and stop worrying about anything. I'm in charge now and high time too.... She's grinning, that's better, the first one I've seen since I came down, if a shade on the sarcastic side. And don't you begin adding up the cost of these doctors and nurses either," he went on from the door, "you always were too good at multiplication."

There was no fault to be found with her smile this time, and he tip-toed away, rather touched.

"Quite let herself go," he thought. "Come over all emotional."

He was used to Lorna in a hardier mood, though that too would have surprised her.

4

So circumstances and necessity stepped in to decide the career of Malcolm Dubenny for the present and, in spite of some drudgery, he was satisfied during the slow progress of Hugh's illness to be at work for him, and coming home each evening with fabulous tales of the prosperity of the firm. Before long he was interested and curious, prowling into all departments and asking questions, and the suspicions of the old hands melted away before his hilarious amusement at his own mistakes. Wilson's

liked him because he was willing to do anything and be taught by anybody; and in this respect the accident of his coming there was fortunate. With a brilliant degree and his uncle behind him, he would have learned less and perhaps missed popularity, to say nothing of the mixing which was very good for him.

Norris, Hugh's second-in-command, gave him a small salary on his own initiative, pointing out that they would have had to engage somebody, and with all the anxiety at home, he should not have to draw upon his people for current expenses.

"But the point is," said Malcolm doubtfully, "are you sure it is all right? Can we afford it ... that is to say, can the firm?"

The old man smiled at both pronoun and correction.

"We, by all means, I hope," he said kindly. "Yes, we can and shall afford it."

Malcolm, thus adopted, began to put his mind to work, jotting down a multitude of ideas for his uncle's perusal later on. Hugh, given hints of this growing volume, hid his pride in the young master of the situation under a caustic exterior quite new to him, which Malcolm supposed was due to the pain and irritation of his illness. Actually it was the turn of the tide. The invalid began to pick up under the stimulant of this answer to an old dream, which he had never expected to realize.

Sylvia meanwhile had taken possession of Lorna's affairs, much to that lady's bewilderment, calling every day for orders for the stores, books to change or flowers to do, strolling through the house as though she owned it, exchanging confidences with Minnie, and generally making herself at home.

"It is very good of you, Sylvia, but I don't know why you should," protested Lorna in the beginning.

"That's all right, I'm just practicing," she was informed. "Little girl guide, you know, officious of course, but with droves of nurses to cope with, you can't do everything. And besides, I've nothing on hand and Mr. Lowell is a friend of mine."

"Really?"

"Oh, rather. I've been telling daddy for ages he's the kind of acquaintance I like to cultivate. He knows the respect due to one of my years."

Lorna supposed this was some of Malcolm's doing, but she was mistaken. Thanks to her care and competence, he took the average fortunate young man's view—that the house more or less ran itself. What she innocently failed to suspect was that he nevertheless was the key to the situation. Sylvia was acquiring what might be called a squatter's right to her semi-fiancée's home.

"Daddy's buying me a car and I have begun driving lessons," she announced to Lorna one morning, "so as soon as the patient is well enough for a little air, we'll be able to get him out."

Some weeks later she drew up at the Lowells' gate in this chariot, bearing a large L to prove, she explained, that as a learner she was exempt from blame if corpses piled up beneath her wheels. Fortunately no such slaughter was reported, and in due course she received her driving license, having passed, she modestly announced, with first-class honors, to the admiration of all beholders.

"The bus is yet young and we don't exceed the twenty-five miles an hour for the sake of its health, but if you don't mind crawling, I'll drop round after dinner and take you for a breather, Mrs. Lowell. It will do you good," she offered.

"I don't think I can very well leave my patient, Sylvia, but won't you take Malcolm?" suggested Lorna. "It must be hard on him working all day in this heat."

"Anything to oblige," agreed the young motorist, as though this idea had never before occurred to her. "If you think he'd care for it. I'll appear as though by accident, shall I? I mean, no need to tell him he's second choice."

"She's rather a lamb in aunt's clothes, if you ask me," she observed to Malcolm that evening, turning the car towards Richmond Park. "Did you notice, she didn't even beg me to be careful with her darling?"

Malcolm snarled.

"Darling be damned! She's not that sort, thank heaven," he declared with vigor. "As matter-of-fact as you make 'em, except where Uncle Hugh's concerned."

"Mushy at their age?" asked Sylvia, shocked.

"Of course not. People can be fond of each other without that, can't they?"

“Search me,” said Miss Field mildly. “What do you think of the little bus? Not too bad as a bribe, is she?”

“She’s a beauty, but why a bribe?”

“From daddy, precious, to keep me at home. I took it, naturally.”

“Then you’re not going in for crooning, midwifery and the Bar after all?”

“No, because there’s my spicy autobiography to write for you. After all, if you know a publisher, why not use him?”

“Keep the money in the family, I suppose?” inquired Mr. Dubenny.

“You’re getting brighter,” she said with congratulation. “What a pity we have to keep the pace down, Malcolm. I could have run you out to Crofter’s End.”

“Dam’ place! You don’t suppose I want to see it again.”

“Not even to sniff at?” she asked, turning a thoughtful eye upon him. Then guiding the car through the park gates, she drove across the grass to a spot looking down on the river and pulled up. “How’s that?”

He agreed that it was pretty good, and they lit cigarettes and lay back at their ease, watching the silver ribbon of water running between its banks of green, in a sudden companionable silence.

All the craft in the world seemed to be out, and voices and laughter and the thin strains of distant music drifted up to them. The twilight began to fade and a little cool wind blew. Malcolm put an arm around the girl, saying reasonably:

“You’ll be cold.” Then, as though rejecting that excuse, he kissed her.

“Don’t be obvious,” objected Miss Field.

“I’m not,” he said. “It was just in return for the one you gave me at Oxford. I didn’t find it for about half an hour, I was in such a state.”

“Well, that was why you got it, not for any other reason. There was absolutely no obligation to buy.”

“But I’d like to order a hundred or so. Sylvia, you’re lovely ... would you wait for a fellow, even if it’s years?”

“Of course it will be years,” returned the girl soothingly. “As for waiting, I might, with a spot of practice, if we don’t change ... well, people do,

Malcolm, look about you."

"Some fools, I dare say."

"And there's your haughty sister. What would she think of me?"

"Hang it all, this has nothing to do with her," exclaimed Malcolm indignantly.

"No, but I was just wondering." She gave him a wise look and touched his cheek, then she said as the car was so young and parents what they were, it was time to move on before a search party was sent out for them.

Seeing that talk of Crofter's End and Sue disturbed him, she spoke of them no more, for scatter-brained though she chose to appear, some instinct, due perhaps to her years and his, instructed her. If she had begun the pursuit of him in a spirit of impish investigation, she felt now a tenderness for him which might be love, though she was not sure.

Of one thing however she was convinced. The question of his sister could not be left indefinitely in midair. Something ought to be done about it.

"Curses on her," thought Miss Field without heat. "I've a jolly good mind...."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ENTER SUSAN DUBENNY

1

Susan had left school and gone home to fill the rôle of Miss Somerville of Crofter's End. That it was an empty rôle and meaningless was hard upon her, for she would have played it to the best of her ability, urged by a sense of obligation. If her father had brought disgrace upon them all, it seemed the least she could do.

It soon became clear that her grandmother's much vaunted need of her had become a mere convention however, thanks to Miss Pender. The companion had made herself very necessary, cosseting her employer into a semi-invalid state, from which Sue was too inexperienced to rouse her, although she tried.

Miss Pender was indispensable, she was devoted to granny, she did everything, even to ordering the servants, writing the letters, arranging the flowers and monopolizing the conversation at meals.

Sue, whose dislike of her had been cemented during a long-ago holiday, could not and would not compete with her bright chatter, and sat at the table mute unless actually addressed, inwardly raging at the patronizing smile with which the companion regarded her.

"And what does Sue think about it?" inquired granny on one occasion, actually noticing her silence.

"Oh, I don't know," returned the girl, who had no desire to take part in any discussion begun by Miss Pender.

"She has lost her tongue, left it at school, I daresay," said the companion, laughing at her own wit. "But of course the younger generation has no powers of expression, they say. We are losing all the graces of your day, dear Mrs. Somerville. As I was saying only yesterday to the rector, it is quite an

education to hear you talk. Though no doubt now she is to be *Miss Somerville*, Sue will have to try to overcome her shyness ... or whatever it is."

Miss Pender laughed again, in order to disclaim the insolence of this speech, but for once not with entire success.

"May I ask why?" suavely inquired the head of the house. "Your emphasis seems to me misplaced, Miss Pender. My granddaughter's position has not been suddenly enhanced that I am aware of."

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Somerville, you misunderstand me. I merely meant it is such an important position now she is growing up."

"Liar," thought Sue, looking contemptuous, but what was the use of saying so? Her grandfather seemed to believe the woman, and in all probability, decided the girl bitterly, he had told her the story himself.

Somebody had, it was certain. Years ago in a temper Miss Pender had sneered at Sue's pretensions to the name, and then tried to cover her knowledge just as she was doing now. And a man who would turn his own sister out of the house and confiscate her Christmas gifts to his granddaughter, would do anything, thought Sue.

As soon as possible she left the table, and presently granny sighed and said she would lie down. Miss Pender rose officiously to guide her out, as though she were incapable of walking alone, but Jonathan Somerville called her back.

"One moment, Miss Pender, if you please."

"Oh—er—can you manage, darling? ... Yes, certainly, Mr. Somerville."

He waited until she had walked back into the dining-room and then crossed over and closed the door.

"As the question of Miss Somerville's name has arisen and you have been good enough to remind me that she is now growing up, I think it would be more suitable if you were to use her formal title in future, Miss Pender," he said. "And without emphasis, if you please."

"Well, really," said the companion, affecting a laugh. "Why should you imagine I would emphasize it, Mr. Somerville? I am quite at a loss."

"I think not, Miss Pender. After Mrs. Somerville, my granddaughter is in authority here. Is that quite clear?"

"Yes, of course, if you say so."

“I do say so. And be good enough to treat her as such,” said the old man sternly.

This incident never came to Susan’s ears, and Miss Pender took her revenge as might have been expected, calling her “Miss Somerville” with such frequency and ostentation, except in her grandfather’s presence, that the girl began to avoid any part of the house where she might be met.

She was furious at the treachery of her grandparents, helpless and without a friend. The holidays of the past had at least held the prospect of a new term ahead, but now there was nothing but a frightening succession of empty days, months and years.

When she did succeed in finding her grandmother alone she begged to be allowed to go to town to classes, and fit herself for some kind of a career, but was told it would be most unsuitable, her grandfather would never hear of it, and granny needed her at home to be the daughter of the house.

“But I’m not, and you never do seem to need me, you only need Miss Pender,” cried the girl, at which granny smiled complacently and said:

“Silly child,” believing as usual what she wished to believe.

“Well, if I can’t do anything else I shall go up to town to-morrow and look at shops,” declared Sue.

“If poor Pender doesn’t mind going with you in this hot weather, I see no objection,” agreed granny.

“I can go alone,” protested Susan at once.

But this also, it seemed, was unsuitable, and her grandfather would not dream of permitting it, so Sue gave it up and with it, in despair, the faint hope of finding her Aunt Alison. Useless to seek her address in directories here and write to her, for people who withheld her gifts would take her letters too.

She thought often in these days of her mother who had been “lured away,” and was not surprised at it, though it seemed curious that she could ever have had a mother as innocent as all that. Sue no longer believed in mad wives conveniently hidden in attics, and was convinced that if she met a gangster, the only kind of villain who lured in these days, as far as she could discover, she would know him for what he was at a glance.

“Why do you keep me here if you hate me so?” she fiercely asked her grandfather in imaginary conversations. “Whatever my father did, it isn’t my fault.”

It would come to that at last. She would walk into the library and close the door and stand against it. She would have it out with him, but on these summer days he was never there; he was off shooting or about the estate, or strolling over after dinner to the rectory or the Lintons', or sitting in the garden with granny and such friends as came in.

It would be easier when the evenings were dark and the weather stormy. Sue waited for tempests to sweep away her languor and brace her for the fight. She had always loved stormy weather and it would be easier then.

And so August went by on leaden feet, while all outdoors called to her youth. From early morning cars sped down the country roads, with suitcases or picnic hampers strapped behind; all night through the hot, wakeful hours, she heard them racing homewards, sadly reminded of Bill Cross taking some merry cargo back from the sea, of lucky Biddy who would begin her medical course in October, and a world full of such as they, happy while she lay sleepless and desolate.

She grew pale and nervous, and in a frantic effort to deal with herself, began to take long walks in spite of the heat. She went mechanically by one road after another, keeping her eyes on the ground when cars approached and then, feeling that this was weak, staring at them, to conquer her envy.

2

It was a September afternoon and pleasantly cool when the small blue car passed her at a slow pace and drew up some way ahead close to the woods of Crofter's End.

Sue fancied she had seen it before in the neighborhood; it was driven by a girl alone and looked very smart and new. As she approached she saw that the driver had dismounted and was doing things to the car, in a knowing manner, kneeling on the running-board, careless of her yellow washing frock, one slim foot on the ground and the other bent beneath her. Now she was standing up, hatless, and looking to right and left.

"Do you happen to know anything about cars?" inquired the stranger hopefully of Sue, rumpling her short hair and then smoothing it down again and heaving a sigh.

"No." Sue's interested glance went from the car to the entrancingly pretty face of the driver. "Won't it go?" she asked.

"It indeed? Then you certainly don't ... cars are shes," corrected the owner, "though I'm blessed if I know why. Like the moon. No, she won't

go, the tiresome little cat, and I can't think what I've done to her. I wonder if you could spare a moment to joggle the throttle for me, when I say go?"

"Of course!" Sue leaped to instruction in this mysterious art, while the other girl lifted the hood and peered quite unnecessarily at the engine.

"There is a garage in the village—I expect they could tell you what's wrong," offered the assistant.

"I know, but you see I'm newish at it and have probably forgotten to turn something off or on, and I should look such a fool.... I'll tell you what, if you'll hop in and guide her for me, I'll push into the shade beneath these woods and have my tea. I may be brighter then, and some one's sure to come along if I'm not."

So Susan hopped in and took the wheel, her envious eyes on all the attractive knobs and gadgets and the dark green upholstery.

"She is a beauty," she exclaimed, dismounting again.

"Not half bad. I'm awfully obliged and all that. ... What about sharing my picnic and damning ceremony, since you've been so helpful? I have plenty for two," suggested the stranger.

"Thanks very much, but they will be expecting me at home," said Sue regretfully, and then with a rush, "I wish I could."

"Oh, you *live* in this neighborhood?" exclaimed the other in apparent astonishment. "I simply come out from town looking for quiet roads to practice a bit ... not wanting to be run in for murder.... Then if you live about here I wonder if you know a girl named Dubenny—Susan Dubenny?"

"No, I've never heard of her. I know most people though."

"Perhaps I'm in the wrong spot. Place called Crofter's End. She lives with some frightfully snobby grandparents called Somerville. I was curious about her because her brother is a friend of mine. I've known him all my life."

"Oh," said Sue with a faint gasp. "No, I've never heard of him."

"You wouldn't know Malcolm," explained the stranger. "He doesn't live here, and these Somervilles don't acknowledge his existence ... or his beastly young sister either."

"Why?" The question came faintly, but the girl in the yellow frock did not seem to notice that.

“Because they are all snobs together, I imagine. They hated his father for marrying their daughter, and vent it on him. Well, I ask you—the poor old lad wasn’t even born. Nice people ... want boiling in oil and all that.... Good thing they are not friends of yours as I’m being so polite about ’em.... What’s up? ... you haven’t got a touch of the sun, have you? ... Sit down here,” she exclaimed suddenly, seeing Sue’s white face, and drawing her on to the dashboard of the car. “Faint, are you?”

Slowly the color came back.

“You know me,” blurted Sue.

Sylvia nodded.

3

Sue, breathless and at white heat, rushed into the house in search of the arch-enemy, her grandfather. Indoors or out she was ready to face him now, while the whole world looked on, if need be; but he was nowhere to be found, tea-time still nearly an hour away and the old house quiet, as though deserted.

What she had to say could not wait however, so she stumbled upstairs and knocked at her grandmother’s door.

“I’m afraid you can’t come in at present, Miss Somerville. We are just getting up,” said the smirking Pender.

Susan pushed her aside and walked in, saying curtly, “Leave us, please.”

“Oh dear, no, I can’t do that.”

“Go *OUT*!”

Miss Pender, never having met this peremptory young woman before, looked appealing at the bed, but receiving no encouragement, went.

Susan shut and locked the door.

“Poor Pender,” said granny with wicked enjoyment of this latest exhibition of her darling’s jealousy. A near-sighted woman in both senses, she received no warning from the young face at the door.

“My name is Susan Dubenny. I have a brother and my father was not a scoundrel,” said a firm and defiant voice, and granny’s smile was wiped from her face.

“Sue, Sue!” she gasped, her old hands clutching the bedclothes.

“It’s no good, granny. All my life when I wanted to know the truth, you have said it made you ill, but I don’t believe you any more. I’ve had too many lies in this house.”

“Susan, how dare you?” Mrs. Somerville actually sat up beneath this attack, her eyes blazing. “You insolent, ungrateful girl, after all the love and care that have been lavished on you.... Ring the bell ... call Pender.... I shall summon your grandfather.”

“Do you call it love and care to let me believe my father was a criminal all these years and never even to tell me I had a brother?” cried the girl, not moving from the door. “And not to let me know my own name, and yet tell every stranger that comes into the house, like that beastly woman Pender, so that she can sneer at me and talk about my low origin?”

“Pender dare to speak to you like that?” exclaimed granny, readily outraged by any shortcoming but her own. “Send for her immediately and let me deal with her.... Why wasn’t I told at once? You know I won’t put up with such insolence for a moment, child.”

“She doesn’t matter,” said the girl. “Oh, granny, can’t you see that it’s no good trying to put me off? I don’t want to be unfair or ungrateful either, if you have had some good reason for what you did. But why was I never even told I had a brother—and allowed to suppose my father was a criminal?”

“Criminal? Who said so? Upon my word, Susan, have you lost your senses that you stand there accusing me of such statements? Oh, this is too much. ... I can bear no more.”

Granny collapsed upon the pillows, gasping faintly, but the girl had seen too many of these attacks, and was not to be impressed.

“You said he was a scoundrel,” she said coldly.

“And so he was a scoundrel. Is it nothing that he lured your poor dear mother from her home and parents and reduced her to beggary?”

Tears were pouring down her cheeks and she fumbled vainly for a handkerchief. Sue left the door and handed her one, but with no softening of her hard young face. She was fighting in earnest now, too unsure of her own endurance to risk a breakdown.

“Poverty is no crime,” she said indignantly. “And whatever he did, why wasn’t I told about my brother? And never even allowed to see him? ... But I shall, I tell you, plainly, so you may as well make up your mind to that.... I am not going to turn my back upon him if you are, and I am quite old

enough to please myself.... Why did you and grandfather take me and cast him off? Can't you see, granny, that I want to understand? ... It isn't reasonable ... it isn't even sense. He's your own grandson."

"Your wretched father's people took the boy. They were within their rights, your grandfather said, so we'll leave it at that...."

Mrs. Somerville broke off and with an immense effort sat up again.

"Has that fellow been here? Has he dared to approach you? Answer me instantly, Susan?"

The girl backed away again.

"Nobody has been here and nobody has approached me.... I wish he had.... I ..."

Her hand closed over the door-handle, holding it fast, as she saw, what throughout all the confusion and excitement of the talk with Sylvia she had not been able to see, except as some memory that eluded her—the beech wood and the boy who had never come back ... Malcolm.

"I should hope not indeed. Then who has talked to you? Who has presumed? This young man can be nothing to you, my dear, brother or no brother, brought up by such people as that. If we have not told you about him it was for a very good reason. You are a young, inexperienced girl, accustomed to the company of gentle-folk. These people who took your brother are of an entirely different order; it would be quite out of the question to permit you to meet them.... Riff-raff, I am sadly afraid," said granny with an air of satisfaction. "Why, you can have no conception of the kind of place in which they were living when I sent to fetch you away ... a squalid room in a back street, child, with dirty window-curtains, and you, poor baby, without clean clothes to put on.... And your brother, a great rough boy, fighting and screaming like some hoodlum from the slums."

"*Granny!*"

"Yes, darling, and now do you wonder we told you nothing of this disgraceful affair to sadden you? Are you surprised we desire you to use your dear mother's name and forget this unfortunate connection?" went on the virtuous voice in a confidential undertone.

"*Granny!* You left him there ... in a place like that ... your own grandson and my brother?"

"These people took the boy, child. They were within their rights. Your grandfather said so."

“I don’t care what he said,” cried Susan violently. “You were rich and powerful ... and you left him there! ... And he came to see me when I was quite little ... perhaps wanting help, and I didn’t know. ... Oh granny, what have you done ... what have you done?”

She had turned, fighting blindly to wrench open the door; and finding the key at last she rushed from the room, nearly upsetting Pender who stood outside.

“Well, really, Miss Somerville!”

The girl did not even hear, nor would that alias ever trouble her ears again.

Down the wide staircase five minutes later ran Susan Dubenny, who had discarded it forever.

The bygone Somervilles in their tarnished frames were the only witnesses of her departure, and perhaps they would not have stayed her if they could, having known the world.

Here went one, who might deny them, yet carried in her blood, however diversified, their blood. Now the turf which they had trod was under her hurrying feet, daisies like stars still spread upon it, to fade and come up another year as they had faded and their children grown.

The old stone urns were bright with flowers, and her friend the cedar, stately and beautiful, still kept her secret house within its arms, which lay like dark velvet on the grass. But all this beauty in this place would never reach her eyes or heart again. Only the beech-wood as she turned into it, had a message for her, speeding her to find the boy who had never come back.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FACE TO FACE

1

Charlotte's winning card had been a bad one after all and lost her the game.

Susan, less than an hour ago desolate and friendless, had been so much excited by the revelation of her brother's existence and the misconception about her father under which she had labored for four troubled years, that at first sheer delight and relief had outstripped the resentment which she would feel later. Her languor gone, she had raced in with colors flying to confront her grandparents and demand her rights. There must be some explanation and she was willing to hear it, but whatever they said or desired, she was determined of one thing. She was going to acknowledge her own brother, write to him immediately and see him as soon as possible, with or without their permission.

But out of her own natural confusion and astonishment, and Sylvia's lack of detailed knowledge of the affair, she had not reached the heart of it yet, and even the enchanting stranger's talk of snobby grandparents had not prepared her for Charlotte's winning card—squalid room, dirty window-curtains and all the rest of it, which showed her, not merely her brother abandoned to this, but their very different fortunes and her childish denial of him long ago.

She was revolted, furious and ashamed, and Sylvia's phrase, all snobs together, returned to her now as Malcolm's inevitable view to be corrected without delay. She had no other purpose as she sped down the stairs and away from Crofter's End, to the girl in the car who might take her to him. These people were her enemies as well as his, and she was going to proclaim it.

The shame she had felt long ago for the treatment of Ella Winch had been nothing to this, though that old incident, had she waited to think, would have provided at least a pointer to the guilty party.

Either to wait or think, however, would have argued too much cool wisdom in this moment of revulsion from the shams which had been imposed upon her! Though her departure was as unsuspected as her mother's before her, it was far more precipitate and quite unplanned, due to no lover's persuasion and with no conscious finality about it.

She simply snatched up her hand-bag and coat and ran, leaving no letter and taking no farewells, an inadvertent flight, foreseen by nobody.

Certainly Sylvia, who had set it in motion, had expected no such whirlwind adventure. Prowling about the neighborhood on such days as she had nothing better to do, curious for a glimpse of Malcolm's sister, she had learned her identity one morning by casual inquiries at a cottage where she had pulled up, ostensibly to buy flowers.

She was skeptical of Susan's ignorance of her brother's existence, but noting the absurd likeness to Malcolm, had been spurred to further investigations. She would hang about and try to meet the girl and give her a jolt. Then if the blighted young sister had any decency, thought Miss Field, she would write to the old lad and somehow manage a meeting with him, in spite of the grandparents.

She had sensed Malcolm's preoccupation with this subject from the fact that he had kept it so dark. A complex it was, she thought, and the sooner the cause of it was removed the better. Besides, it was damned unfair.

But, if it was no part of Sylvia's plan to thrust a sister into the daily life of her semi-fiancée, as she called him still, she was sufficiently sporting to take the consequences of what she had done and leap to young Susan's aid when she came running down through the wood. It was certainly a lark, moreover, to seat her in the bottom of the car, fling a rug over her and make a bolt for it.

The girl wanted to see Malcolm and she should not be disappointed. Late as it was—after 4:30 by the clock on the dashboard—it would be quite possible to deliver her back here soon after dark.

Sylvia, racing along and showing none of her supposed uncertainty in the handling of the car, planned how it could be done—a telephone call to Malcolm's office, a meeting for dinner at Richmond, to avoid the London traffic, an hour for the pair of them, during which she would somehow

contrive to make herself scarce, and then the return of the prodigal, she and Malcolm driving home afterwards, his company not merely a pleasing prospect but a good answer to any parental protests for her late return.

It was a fool-proof plan but, like the perfect murder, lacking in one important particular. The author of it forgot to allow for the temperament and point of view of the other actors in the drama.

2

Malcolm on the telephone: “Frightfully sorry, Sylvia, but I’ve promised to go out with Tim.... But what has happened, what do you mean by urgent? If this is some game, Tim will wring your neck.... Oh well, of course, if you are in a hole, we’ll be there ... but I wish you’d tell me....”

Tim to Malcolm: “She’s run over some one, the careless little devil, and wants us to bury the corpse in the garden, or run into a police-trap and got the wind up. Who would have sisters? They are the world’s great pest.”

Sylvia to Malcolm at the restaurant door: “I want a word with Tim. Go in and pinch us a corner table, will you?”

It was too early for regular diners, and the little room was empty, except for a girl in blue who rose up at his approach. Malcolm glanced at her casually and then stopped dead. Brother and sister faced each other, not with hauteur on one side and a blaze of worldly success on the other, as once he had pictured the meeting; not with the indifference and indignation of that summer morning on a country road. She had made a quick step forward.

“Sue!” exclaimed Malcolm.

“Yes ... Sue Dubenny,” she said in eager explanation. “I didn’t know. Malcolm, I didn’t know.”

3

Under the stars in Richmond Park the four held a Council of State. There was no question any longer of taking her home to Crofter’s End. Malcolm was quite firm on that point, saying when he had heard even a little of what there was to tell, a houseful of raving lunatics was no fit place for her. If they were not lunatics they were worse, which settled the matter. He was of age and her nearest relative and proper guardian therefore. Though shouts of

derision greeted this last statement, the audience was entirely with him in spirit. There would of course be a frenzied pursuit by the raging grandparents, and high jinks all round, and Sylvia was all for taking her home and hiding her at the Fields' until the storm had passed.

"Mother will never drop to it," she said. "I'll just remark 'Here's Susan, mother,' and she'll say, 'Oh, of course, dear, how nice to see you again.' "

Sue, lying on the rug, watched Malcolm's profile and listened to his voice, fearful that this was a dream from which she would awake. She was a little light-headed after the day's excitement, but happier than she could ever remember to have been. Here was her brother, who had dropped like a meteor in her path, but with no diminution of his light. She thought him quite as wonderful as he had once planned to be, a delightful state of affairs which could never have been attained but for a foolish woman's determination to keep them apart. Charlotte indeed deserved well of them for this, though it is unlikely either she or they would ever know it.

Sue, listening to their plans for her, said eagerly: "I don't want to be a nuisance to anybody. I have an aunt in London, if I can find her to-morrow, and I'm pretty sure she'll help me, until I can find a job. Grandfather turned her out of the house, so she can have no love for them."

"What, more lunacy?" exclaimed Tim. "A pleasant family. I only wonder you two Dubennys seem fairly sane."

Two Dubennys! Malcolm looked down at Sue and smiled.

"You needn't worry about any aunts," he said. "I have a first-class specimen of my own if it comes to that. Aunt Lorna, she's the person for this emergency and you'll come home with me to-night. I'm not going to have you hiding like a criminal. We'll face these people and have it out."

"Won't your Aunt Lorna object?" asked Sue doubtfully, though eager to do what he desired.

"She's your Aunt Lorna, she isn't only mine. Uncle Hugh too ... you'll find no lunatics in our family. Besides, she's seen you, by Jove, long ago, before they took you away."

"Really?"

("Riff-raff," said the echo of granny's voice, "in a squalid room in a back street, with dirty window-curtains.")

Sue didn't care in the least.

And Charlotte? She, who had believed Barker's picture of that long-ago event and embroidered it for her own comfort, her impregnable defense for refusing the scoundrel Paul Dubenny's son not merely a home but his sister's acquaintance, knew nothing of her loss or of the truth which would soon be told.

Miss Pender had to pay on this occasion for Charlotte's discomfiture, and in the course of a stormy scene, learned a great deal more of Susan's parentage than she had heard before, under the old lady's firm conviction that she and no other must have enlightened the girl.

It was useless to deny it, though Pender did so, finally shutting herself in her bedroom and refusing to come out, on the grounds that she had never been so insulted in her life.

Charlotte some time later rang for a maid to help her to dress, leaving Pender to get over it and apologize in due course. She had reprimanded the woman severely and Sue would be pleased at that, and find that granny did love and consider her after all. She even mounted the stairs herself to the girl's room to report the battle and explain a few further reasons why she must forget her uncouth brother, but Sue was not there, nor anywhere in the house, it seemed.

Jonathan had not come in for tea either, but that was not unusual and perhaps just as well. Charlotte saw no reason to trouble him with this domestic commotion, a view which might have seemed to her a little strange had it been her nature to look her own motives in the face. She sat in the drawing-room where she would see Sue come in from the garden or her walk, supposing the lovely weather had tempted her out.

Pender was a useful creature but if she were going to be troublesome and insolent she would have to go. Charlotte sighed. The scenes and unaccustomed exertion had fatigued her and she stifled a yawn. "A plain woman too, very plain, perhaps some one younger and more amusing would do one good. It would please the child if Pender were sent away.... When Sue comes in...."

Charlotte slept.

At eight o'clock when the booming of the gong roused her from a confused and uneasy dream, Jonathan was already reading a mysterious telegram:

“MY SISTER IS WITH ME—MALCOLM DUBENNY.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

WHERE LOVE IS

1

Lorna Lowell sat up in bed and sipped her morning tea. Minnie had pulled the curtains and let in the September day, flawless and lovely at this hour, and Lorna sighed happily, thinking of Hugh so much better, and of her fine show of asters in the garden and the bulbs she had been choosing for the spring.

A noise in the passage reached her ear, voices, subdued laughter and a shuffle of slippered feet. Malcolm was up early then, in spite of his evening with Tim in town, she thought, glad that he was in such good spirits and liking the firm. But for Hugh's physical suffering that mischance had been fortunate after all. This rest had done him the world of good and he would never have taken it of his own accord; and last night he had told her, in one of his rare moments of expansiveness, what it meant to him to have Malcolm at Wilson's and shaping so much better than could have been supposed. Norris, a cautious man, had praised the boy, and talked of new blood, young blood, during a visit to Hugh on Sunday afternoon.

"You two old salts," Malcolm, finding them together, had addressed them familiarly, and then, all three smoking furiously, they had fallen into a noisy discussion of some scheme he wanted to try out, the elders skeptical and patronizing, to lead him on, and Malcolm hooting at their conservative ways.

There was a thud on her door and the young gentleman in question opened it and put his head in.

"Can you lend me a dressing-gown?" he demanded mysteriously.

Lorna stared.

"One of mine ... for you? Are you going out in fancy-dress then?"

“Not to-day, lady. Fact is, I brought a girl home with me last night. As we were late and I didn’t want to rouse the household, I shoved her into my room, and rolled up under a couple of blankets in the spare room myself. Minnie took her in my shaving water and got the start of her life, because I overslept and was too late to warn her.”

“Is this some of Sylvia’s devilry?” asked Lorna with suspicion.

“No, it isn’t any one in the least like Sylvia.” Malcolm, enjoying himself, had opened her wardrobe and was peering inside. “Just a girl I picked up,” he said. “She had nowhere to go and naturally I couldn’t leave her to sleep in the Park.”

“Malcolm!”

“All right, I’ve got one, thanks,” cried the young man from the door, waving her best negligée, and was off, while Lorna jumped out of bed, and then stood distracted, not knowing what to do next.

She was horrified. Had he lost his senses? Had some scheming creature got hold of him by working on his sympathy? How dared he do such a thing with such an air? But not Malcolm ... they couldn’t be going to have this kind of trouble with Malcolm?

All her self-congratulation of a few moments ago came back upon her head and she felt sick with dismay. Was contentment only an invitation to disaster? She did not feel fit to deal with the situation, yet how could she bear to take this news to Hugh?

Certain at least that she must dress as quickly as possible, she caught up her towel and sponge-bag and made for the bathroom, then paused in petrifaction at the sound of voices and laughter behind Malcolm’s closed door.

It was too much. She knocked sharply and called him.

“Come along in,” he invited hospitably, opening the door.

“Certainly not. I want to speak to you at once.”

“She’s not nearly as bad as she sounds,” he assured the stranger within, and with a laugh produced her—a figure dressed in a pair of his silk pajamas which hung loosely upon her, enveloping hands and feet.

Lorna found herself gazing at two Malcolms, or so it seemed to her excited fancy, though one was a good deal softer and more ethereal than the other.

“Pull up your socks, Aunt Lorna. It’s Sue, young Sue,” said he. “She’s not a Piccadilly Prowler.”

“Sue ... my *dear*! Malcolm, how can you?” exclaimed his aunt in a breath, and the pair shouted with laughter. “I should hope she doesn’t know what you mean.”

“I can guess,” said the late Miss Somerville of Crofter’s End, speaking for the first time, and then overcome by politeness, she shook back one of the long sleeves and held out her hand saying, “How do you do.”

Lorna took it and drew her forward, looking from one to the other.

“Where *did* you get her?” she asked.

“Picked her up, as I told you. Or rather Sylvia did.... She has bolted from those infernal Somervilles, my dear, and naturally I brought her to you.”

At this Malcolm, to his complete astonishment, heard his matter-of-fact relative say, almost as though on the verge of tears:

“That is coals of fire, Malcolm, but I won’t fail you this time, if I have to barricade the house.”

“What are you dithering about?” He looked at her suspiciously. “Oh, shut up ... but still barricade is good. That’s the spirit, girl. I daresay the police and all their bloodhounds are out by this time. Wait till you hear what we have to tell you.... She’s not a bad little cuss, do you think?”

Lorna had recovered herself under this admonitory fusillade, and put an arm around the object in question.

“You’re all right, darling,” she said, “don’t worry. Just a moment while I see Hugh and then you must tell us everything.”

Malcolm, however, wished to spring a surprise upon his uncle, and gave orders accordingly. If she must tidy the poor chap up, he said, they would tour the house and return. He marched Sue off from one room to the other, disregarding the unsuitable hour for such an inspection, and firmly drew her attention to all the window-curtains!

Lorna heard their laughter as she went in to Hugh, and had considerable difficulty in keeping Malcolm’s secret. Her cheeks were glowing and it was clear to the amused eyes that watched her, that there was something in the wind. His hearing was excellent, moreover, but he asked no questions.

“You look about nineteen,” he remarked instead.

“I feel it.... There now, Malcolm wants to bring you a visitor.”

She went off to her bath while she could get it, calling them on the way. She would have liked to witness their entrance and reception, but somebody must be dressed in the house, if police were expected, she supposed. Quite ready to cope with the law and the Somervilles together, she began to consider hiding-places, in which to conceal the guest if occasion arose. As Hugh would have put it, her blood was up.

2

Malcolm, walking in upon the invalid with Sue close behind him, swung her round suddenly into view.

“What do you think of that?” he inquired, with the pleased air of one exhibiting a masterpiece.

“Good morning,” said his uncle mildly. “You’ve been doing a little quiet kidnaping, I see.”

And Sue, already instructed in some of the virtues of this unique relative of her scoundrel father, was immediately won.

When the story had been told and the girl sent off to her bath, the three left behind dropped the light tone in which the proceedings had been conducted for her sake, to consider the problem before them.

“I can’t let her go back to those unspeakable people,” declared Malcolm hotly. “I know it is a good deal to thrust her upon you, but I’ll be responsible for her keep if you’ll let her stay.”

“Don’t be a young fool,” said his uncle. “That is not the point at issue. I agree that Crofter’s End is no fit place for her and of course she shall stay, but we must know where we stand. You had better run down and telephone Field and ask him to come in before he goes to town. He will give us the legal view. There are certain things we may be able to say to convince this gentleman that his wife’s conversation as well as his actions have been injudicious.”

“Libel?” exclaimed Malcolm.

“Exactly. There is nothing in it of course, but your father’s record is perfectly clear. Though one cannot libel the dead in law, I think there is no doubt that their statements to your sister would prove to any Court that they were unsuitable guardians for her. Let us hope Mr. Somerville will be sufficiently astute to see it.”

Soon after breakfast the lawyer appeared, driven round by Sylvia, anxious to be useful, even if it meant running down the Somerville hordes in her chariot, she said. She was all for hiding Sue on a motor-boat on the river, but after mature consideration this interesting scheme was rejected by both young Dubennys, who were determined to stand their ground.

Sue indeed was anxious to draw her grandfather's attention to the window-curtains and the riff-raff who had brought up her brother. Malcolm had several things to say to him too. Both were spoiling for battle.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE TRUTH IS TOLD

1

Mrs. Loftus faced her brother and listened to his story—an account carefully doctored of course by Charlotte before presentation to him. Susan had gone because she was jealous of Pender, who had had the insolence to find out her wretched brother's whereabouts and taunt her with her low origin. But Pender should go, and when the dear child heard that, she would gladly return to her devoted granny. Jonathan must fetch her immediately.

No amount of questioning had been able to extract information from Miss Pender, however, and Jonathan did not know what to think, except that it was imperative to see this boy and take Susan home. As Alison fortunately knew his whereabouts he had come to her first of all.

"You think Sue will go?" she asked.

"My dear Alison, she must go. Is a lad in the early twenties a fit guardian for her; is he even likely to be able to support her ... or to wish to shoulder the burden? You were right, I suppose. Sue should have been told of his existence before and the attitude of his guardians. She has run off on an impulse of curiosity, natural enough no doubt in a young, romantic girl...."

"You think her romantic?" asked Mrs. Loftus.

"Aren't they all, at that age?"

"The fact is, Jonathan, you know absolutely nothing about the child," exclaimed Mrs. Loftus with heat, "and I dare swear she knows as little about you. Charlotte will have taken care of that. But in Sue's case it is excusable and in yours it is not. I'm sorry, but you and Charlotte between you are entirely responsible for this. A girl doesn't run away from a happy home for all the brothers in creation. You talk of guardians, what kind of guardian is

Charlotte, what kind of mother was she? Playing off the child's affection against this companion. It's disgusting.... Oh, I know the position has never been easy for you, but it is my opinion that you will have to reckon with your grandson and probably your granddaughter too. For heaven's sake, treat them as reasonable beings and don't present an ultimatum. The young of these days will not stand it, believe me."

Jonathan smiled faintly.

"There are laws still, you know, in spite of the young of whom we hear so much," he said. "Susan is minor."

"And how do you propose to keep her against her will? Under lock and key?" parried Mrs. Loftus.

"We have yet to learn that it would be against her will, my dear. This is all pure supposition on your part, you know," protested Jonathan.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Loftus, beginning to smile. "Well, Jon, I'll make a bargain with you. I will give you the address on condition that you take me with you to this interview. Sue has some affection for me, I believe, and so have you, in spite of my suppositions. I shall not attempt to interfere, except of course to save the life of either one of you, or in the event of a foul ... isn't that the correct term?"

"It may be correct but it is certainly not flattering," returned her brother, "but come by all means. I shall be glad of your support, Alison. I am no good with young girls."

"Fudge! They are much like old ones, but without the veneer, my dear," Mrs. Loftus assured him. "Have you told Charlotte how you propose to find the boy's address?"

Jonathan shook his head.

"Or pointed out to her that if she had not destroyed that correspondence, you would know his whereabouts? Ah, well, perhaps I am too prejudiced to be a fair judge of her," said Alison. "This may be just a piece of youthful exuberance, though I doubt it."

She brought her address-book and they agreed that as Malcolm was presumably still with the Lowells it would be more courteous to approach his uncle in the first place; wiser too perhaps in view of the unfriendly attitude of the family.

Alison put through a telephone call and a woman's voice answered it.

“May I speak to Major Lowell, or can you tell me where I may reach him?” asked Mrs. Loftus.

“This is Mrs. Lowell speaking. My husband is laid up,” returned the voice non-committally.

“Perhaps you can help us then, Mrs. Lowell, if you will be so kind. Mr. Somerville is anxious to find his granddaughter.”

“Susan is here in her brother’s care. I believe he telegraphed Mr. Somerville to that effect,” said Lorna, coldly.

Alison was afraid there was a certain amount of cool enjoyment behind this statement, but she persevered.

“Yes, but naturally her grandfather is anxious to know when she intends to go home.”

“She has no such intention.”

“I beg your pardon.”

“It is quite out of the question that my niece should return to Crofter’s End. If you and Mr. Somerville wish to know why, I am prepared to tell you in an interview, but not on the telephone.”

“Thank you,” said Alison meekly. “When will it be convenient for us to call upon you, Mrs. Lowell?”

“At any hour you please.... Now, if it suits you.”

“That,” said Alison, as she hung up the receiver, “is a very angry woman. Sue does not propose to go home and the Lowells are clearly behind her. You have Charlotte to thank for this. What did I tell you?”

“That is all very well, but histrionics do not alter the fact that Susan will do as I say,” retorted Jonathan irritably. “These people have no shadow of authority in the matter, you know.”

Mrs. Loftus sighed and went to get ready to accompany him to Kew. She was sorry for him and could see no happy outcome, but she said no more at present, though her mind was busy as they drove through Hammersmith and Chiswick, drawing up at last before a pleasant, unpretentious house in a tree-shadowed road. All the windows were open but no one was in sight. On the lawn at one side a group of canvas chairs with bright cushions caught her eye, but they were unoccupied, and perhaps, she thought, recently vacated by Susan and her brother. This quiet struck her as portentous.

The lounge into which they were shown went through the house and overlooked a small garden behind, ablaze with asters of every color. It was really a very pretty sight and the room with its chintz covers and bowls of flowers in character.

Though the house was not the surprise to her grandfather which Sue confidently expected, neither visitor was in the least prepared for the youthful appearance of its mistress, and in spite of her cool and business-like greeting, Mrs. Loftus said cordially:

"This is very good of you when you have sickness in the house. I hope Major Lowell is not seriously indisposed."

"No, thank you. My husband is a civilian, though he fought in the war like his brother and most other men," returned Lorna dryly. "Won't you sit down. You are Mrs. Somerville?"

"Oh dear, no. You must forgive me if I omitted to explain on the telephone. That was very stupid of me. I am Susan's great-aunt, Mrs. Loftus, and the only member of the family who had the good fortune to know your whereabouts." Alison at this point met her hostess's eye and almost surprised a smile, the ghost of one, at least, and her heart warmed to the adversary, assisted of course by her inclination. "I persuaded my brother to let me come, Mrs. Lowell, because I am fond of Sue and being in a sense an outsider in this unfortunate division between the two families, I may be some help."

"Neither division nor otherwise was of our making," declared Lorna with vigor.

"All this is beside the point, Alison," put in Jonathan. "I understand, Mrs. Lowell, that my granddaughter is in your house. She left home without any one's knowledge or permission yesterday afternoon, and I have come to fetch her back, if you will be good enough to tell her so."

"Susan will not go back, Mr. Somerville, and I may say that her brother, her uncle and I are entirely at one with her in that decision."

"Indeed? But she is still an infant in law, madam."

"With a brother, however, to protect her," retorted Lorna indignantly, "though you have endeavored to conceal the fact from her all these years. What sort of a man would he be to permit the child to return to such a household as yours, where she has been taught to regard her unfortunate father as a criminal, whose name is too base for her to bear? ... If a mere

concern for truth and decency didn't restrain you, what kind of monster are you to put such an infamous story before a helpless and sensitive child?"

"Stop, stop!" cried Jonathan. "One moment, Mrs. Lowell. I make every allowance for your unfriendliness towards my family and natural exaggeration in a moment of anger, but this is too much. No such incredible statement was ever made to Susan. She was called Somerville to please her grandmother, and my information is that the girl herself was perfectly aware of the reasons, her own name having painful memories for my wife."

Lorna stared at him contemptuously.

"Susan was told at fourteen years old that her father was a scoundrel, and that you would not permit her to know his name nor anything about him. Allowing for all the exaggeration in the world, what would an inexperienced child suppose from such a statement? Ask her what she supposed.... And yesterday, when by sheer chance she discovered otherwise and heard of her brother's existence, what was she told by your wife?—That her scoundrel of a father had reduced her mother to beggary and you had rescued her from the squalor of his low relations who, with her brother, belonged to a class of society with which she could not possibly associate.... No, Mr. Somerville, there is not a court in the country which would uphold your claim to Susan after hearing such a story. This time, your threat of the law is quite in vain."

"Threat? ... This time...." Jonathan was completely bewildered.

"Certainly," stormed Lorna. "I have not forgotten how when we appealed to you to let Malcolm see his little sister, you accompanied your refusal by a threat. Any further communication from your late son-in-law's family would be handed to your solicitors. I have the whole correspondence, so denial is useless."

She rose and walked to a small secretaire, and brought two sheets of notepaper to him.

"Those are copies. I gave the originals to Malcolm this morning," she said significantly.

Jonathan took them without a word and read the longer first. Then he turned to the second:

> "Mr. and Mrs. Somerville are willing to provide for their granddaughter only. The bearer of this letter may be trusted to convey the child to her mother's home."

The old man, hunched in his chair, read and re-read this final proof of Charlotte's perfidy as though unable to take it in. Alison, sensing his distress, moved her chair and looked over his shoulder, with an exclamation:

"Oh, my dear!"

"That means you actually offered them the boy, Mrs. Lowell?" she asked.

"Of course I offered him," exclaimed Lorna, torn by that old distress. "I was a girl, not long married and working in a military hospital like thousands more, not even knowing my husband's whereabouts. I knew Paul slightly but neither Isabel nor the children.... I was called in because there was no one else to do what I could for those two poor little creatures, and I was mad enough to suppose that in spite of their dislike of Isabel's marriage, her parents would want to have the children.... And even when that curt letter came, in sheer desperation I let Sue go.... Do you think I have ever forgiven myself? ... Malcolm is as dear to me as my own son ... he was six years old and not a baby ... he had to be told ... he saw me let her go and was frantic.... Do you think, now he's brought her to me again, I wouldn't fight you tooth and nail in face of what I know?"

Mrs. Loftus nodded.

"This has been a shock to us, believe me," she said. "My brother was seriously ill and knew nothing of these negotiations, little indeed of anything you have told us. He was led to believe the boy had been claimed by his father's people who were unwilling to give him up. You see?"

"There is nothing we can say, Alison, in the face of this, nothing," interrupted her brother. "Unfortunately the shock of my daughter's death and my own severe illness were too much for my dear wife, Mrs. Lowell. Let us leave it at that.... I am humiliated beyond expression that you should have been treated with such discourtesy, and my grandson with injustice. Empty words, you may say, but there it is."

He rose painfully, as though there were indeed nothing more to be said, and Lorna, looking from one face to the other of these two older Somervilles, rose too, saying impulsively:

"Please wait."

2

She had persuaded him to see Hugh for a while, unsure now of her own touch on the situation. She was sorry for Jonathan, and men, she thought,

understood each other. She had a feeling that she had lost her head and said a good deal more than she had intended to say, but Hugh, who had never shared her rage against the Somervilles, would put that balance right.

Having given Hugh a word of explanation, hardly more, and sent up whiskey and glasses, she took the visitor to his room and left the two men together, then she summoned Malcolm and Sue.

"Did you ask him to observe the window-curtains?" inquired Sue, fiercely.

"Did you make the position quite clear?" demanded Malcolm.

"Hush, both of you. We have all been mistaken in your grandfather," whispered Lorna.

"What? The man's got round you. I didn't think you were so weak."

"I won't go back. I simply love squalor. I'm going to tell him so."

"Will you behave?" Lorna opened the drawing-room door and ushered them in, saying to Mrs. Loftus, "I thought perhaps you'd help me to explain the situation to these two rebels."

"Aunt Alison," exclaimed Sue in complete amazement, and turned to Malcolm; "but she's all right," she said confidentially.

He looked not without some embarrassment at the visitor, caught her eye and laughed.

"Thank you for the recommendation, Sue, I need it. I have been seeking an introduction to him for years," said Mrs. Loftus.

"I don't think you ought to tell tales of me to my juniors," objected Malcolm.

"True ones, however, which must be such a change to you both."

She smiled but with a feeling of envy and sadness because Jonathan had lost so much. They were the victors and that was quite just. She could not doubt, having heard Mrs. Lowell's story and marked her affection for this boy, that his had been the happier destiny, and she remembered how Jonathan, in spite of all these misapprehensions, had seen that it might be so. Yet, very humanly, she would have liked to turn back the clock and see him growing up at Crofter's End, living the life of countless Somervilles before him, loving the place and caring for it. And now there was Sue, who could not be allowed to be a charge upon the Lowells in the face of everything

else. What was this going to cost Jonathan in money as well as scenes from Charlotte?

“Mrs. Lowell,” she said, making up her mind to one thing at least, “I think you will be with me. While their grandfather is away shall we seize the opportunity to tell them who has been responsible for all this and without compunction? You of course are free of any obligation in the matter, and indeed have much to forgive.... It was kind and understanding of you to take him up to Mr. Lowell.”

“I felt so sorry for him,” admitted Lorna.

“The woman’s soft. What did I tell you?” exclaimed Malcolm indignantly. “I shall leave home.”

“Yes, we’ll beg our bread,” agreed Sue.

They were exuberant, but presently quenched by their elders, though they continued to comment with more levity than the subject demanded from sheer embarrassment. It would have been more comfortable to enjoy their hate undisturbed.

But this was merely the aftermath of all the excitement of their reunion. Though the long and artificial separation had created a special if unacknowledged tenderness between them, so that they would always be the closer for it, they were still separate identities, molded by a different experience.

Sue, with happiness, freedom and friends come to her in a flash, might be dazzled beyond words, but the old habit of standing apart, due to the uncertainty of her own position, had not left her overnight. Loving their plans to keep her, Malcolm’s masterful tone and the unquestioning kindness of Lorna and Hugh, she had yet enough insight to see herself, thrust suddenly upon them, just as she stood, without money, even without clothes. And her great-aunt, whose help she had meant to seek, was after all an ally and not an enemy of her enemies.

Sue, with Malcolm perched on the arm of her chair, looked wistfully in her Aunt Alison’s direction and caught her glance and, as though some spark were lit between them, the elder chose that moment to say:

“I always wished I could have had Sue. You wouldn’t lend her to me a little later, I suppose? You may think she has had quite enough of old women, but I should expect you all to help me obviate that.”

Protests broke out, of course, but Sue's eyes had leapt to hers, and she smiled and let the matter rest. There was no need to labor it, and she had no intention of losing sight of this household, having invaded it at last.

Time could do much, if assisted by a little intelligence, and Sue and Malcolm, coming in and out of the flat, would sometimes meet the grandfather they had never known.

A step was heard on the stairs. Jonathan was coming down from his talk with Hugh.

Lorna looked quickly at Mrs. Loftus.

"May I cut you some asters to take back to your flat?" she asked. "Perhaps Mr. Somerville would rather talk to these two alone."

It was an excellent arrangement, the visitor agreed, and the flowers would be a delight. She liked the tact of the suggestion and the chance of a quiet talk with this young woman who was such a good fighter in a just cause. Leaving the pair rather taken aback at the desertion, she did not make the mistake of asking any kindness from them for their grandfather, but followed Mrs. Lowell into the hall to meet Jonathan.

3

"Here's a go," said Malcolm confidentially to Sue. "Still, he's not going to get round me with any crocodile tears, so don't you worry."

"No."

Jonathan, opening the door, found himself faced by an enemy in close formation.

"Well, Susan?" he said, in much his usual manner, but he was looking at his grandson, this other Somerville who would never, he supposed, have anything but contempt for the name.

"This is my brother," said Sue, abrupt as he had always known her.

"How do you do?" said Mr. Dubenny aloofly.

If they were absurd, the old man was not in a mood to notice; he was too bitter at the mischief which had been done, and at his own failure to see it long ago.

"You have been badly used, my boy," he said.

“Not in the least, thanks,” declared Malcolm at once, “but I can’t say as much for my sister.”

“I was referring to your sister, among other things,” returned his grandfather, with a faint smile. “Though you may find it difficult to believe it, I have never felt any doubt of your material welfare. I have even consoled myself with the reflection that your guardians were perhaps able to do more for you than I was in a position to do ... having been led to believe that they had some grudge against my family and refused to give you up.”

“They are not given to bearing grudges,” declared Malcolm.

“So I find. There have been many misconceptions due to causes which I cannot expect you to understand. However, I have talked to your uncle, and have his ready consent to the suggestion I wish to make to you,” said his grandfather. “I am not a rich man. Like many other land-holders I have had a hard struggle to keep the place that has been in my family—and yours—for two hundred years. I might still save it with your assistance, for you, if you care to make the experiment.... You know nothing of country life perhaps, and Susan will have been able to tell you little of credit to Crofter’s End.... That shall be changed. I make that promise to both of you.... Will you try it for six months?”

“I’m sorry, sir,” said Malcolm awkwardly. “It is very kind of you but my future is arranged. I am to enter my uncle’s firm.”

“You would not like time to consider the matter?”

“No, thank you.”

The old man did not show his disappointment, which perhaps he had foreseen.

“Quite right. Pay what you owe,” he said.

Sue looked from one to the other quickly, with at least a faint idea of how much this offer from her grandfather had entailed, with its promise to both of them; and in that moment she remembered Ella Winch, to whom at least he had been just. Her eyes were a little opened then.

“How can *I* pay?” she asked anxiously.

Perhaps he too saw her for the first time as he heard the question, for he said kindly:

“You have no debt, child. Stay with your brother for the present, as he desires it. That is arranged with your uncle, and the charge shall be mine. He

will explain to you by-and-by."

"I can look after her," protested Malcolm.

"I can earn my living," said Sue.

"An obligation, having been undertaken, must be discharged. When you are independent you may relieve me of it, if you wish," said their grandfather with finality. "You will want your clothes sent on to you, Susan. Is there anything else?"

"No, thank you," said Susan faintly.

"Good!"

He had taken up his hat and stick and was looking round for his sister and Mrs. Lowell. The momentous interview was over.

Standing by the window presently they watched him drive away.

"*He didn't even ask me to go back*," exclaimed Sue solemnly.

"I should hope not indeed."

"Yes.... Decent of him, all the same," said Sue.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled 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.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Truth to Tell* by Alice Grant Rosman]