SOMEBODY MUST

Alice Grant Rosman

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ALICE GRANT ROSMAN

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING KAY FLETE

1

KAY FLETE rang the bell of the Fieldings' flat for the third time, feeling faintly apprehensive. The party would begin in half an hour, so Rosamond must certainly be at home and dressed by this time ... or perhaps she was not quite ready and there was no one else to open the door.

Kay knew little of her sister's domestic arrangements but quite enough of her character to be sure that if she were dressing Rosamond would open the door when she found it convenient, and not before.

"But I must get in and change before people come," thought the girl in a panic, "and after all she's expecting me."

She looked up the long, tunnel-like corridor with its procession of closed doors, resisting an impulse to seize her suitcase and run. The flats behind the doors were as secret and silent as so many prison cells. Kay would have liked to wake the echoes with a wild tattoo on Rosamond's door, but she did not try the experiment or feel any particular surprise at being kept waiting, this not from meekness of disposition, but a fatalistic belief that people always did and would wait for Rosamond.

Kay would have given much to be as beautiful, unhurried and calm, but she knew that she was none of these things, and now the happy anticipation which had upheld her for days began to fade away and she felt anxious about the forthcoming festivity instead.

It had seemed marvelous of Rosamond to give a party the very evening of the day she was to come down from Oxford for the Easter vacation, and to remember that and ask her to it, and she had spent most of her dwindling allowance to do honor to the occasion, but would Rosamond really be satisfied with the result? Kay sighed, thinking it doubtful. She could not blame her sister. It must be difficult for Rosey, who just naturally grew shining and lovely, to realize the effort and expense involved for less fortunate beings, or to remember how hard up one was certain to be at the end of the term.

Last night in her room she had had a dress rehearsal, parading for the benefit of her intimates in her best dance frock, just back from the cleaners. A stitch had been put in here and there by friendly hands, the new flower spray fixed on the shoulder, and samples of Dolly Chester's best artistry with lipstick and rouge tried with much laughter and some lurid effects. At last they had assured her that she would pass in a crowd, and she had believed them happily. Today, under the hairdresser's hands, she had felt even more confident of looking her best, so why, she asked herself with sudden spirit, should she be doubtful now?

A little glow, half mirth and half defiance, lit up her face, giving her, had she but known it, an individuality which needed no adorning.

She rang the bell again, this time with decision, and determined to go on ringing until somebody let her in.

Rosamond came at last, her burnished head gold under the light in the little hall, her appearance shimmering, her smile gay, but the gayety changed to consternation at the sight of Kay and her suitcase, and she exclaimed:

"Kay! Don't tell me you aren't dressed?"

"But Rosey, how could I? It will only take me five minutes to slip into my frock."

That was so like Kay, thought her sister. She would dress in five minutes and look like nothing on earth in consequence. The fact that Kay could hardly have come all the way from Oxford ready for the party was no mitigation in Rosamond's eyes, for Kay should have made some arrangement about dressing elsewhere in town, and should have had more *savoir faire*.

"You know we have nowhere for visitors to dress," she said. "Dick's in my bedroom, so what am I to do with you? ... You'd better change in the lounge, but for heaven's sake be quick. The waiter will be up from the restaurant in a few minutes."

Kay, who had been ten minutes waiting for admission, carried her suitcase to the lounge, too much flurried to suggest that the waiter also should be kept ringing until she was ready. Indeed such a riposte would not have occurred to her. The two girls, four years apart, had little in common, but the younger, accustomed all her life to Rosamond's ways, took them for granted with uncritical affection, though with an occasional half humorous sigh for her own obvious inferiority.

Dick and Rosamond Fielding had one of the newest of London's service flats with a lounge, a bedroom, bathroom and a kitchenette. Rosamond desired no housekeeping worries, and this, she said, was the only civilized way to live. To Kay, who had lived most of the last ten years the communal life of school and college, and liked space about her, it seemed small and, being hospitably inclined, she thought it must be hard for her sister to have not even a spare room in which to entertain a friend. Such an idea, needless to say, had not occurred to Rosamond, who was one of the receivers rather than the givers of this world.

As Kay slipped off her suit and lifted out the evening frock from its tissue wrappings she looked about her mechanically for a mirror, but the long room

offered her none. Rosamond was perhaps too confident of her own appearance to need to be reassured about it perpetually, and the walls of the lounge were bare except for two bright harsh landscapes in the modern manner and a mask concealing the radio switch. Even the wireless, like the hot water, in this luxury flat was supplied from some communal main below, so that the tenants should have no trouble with valves, no expensive repairs, no twiddling of knobs in search of foreign stations, in fact no responsibility and no effort.

Kay had already slipped into her frock and packed her suitcase when her sister looked in to hurry her out of the way.

"Rosey, I simply must wash. Can I get into the bathroom?"

"Of course. Go along," said her sister, and then as she looked her over, "pity you are such a giant or I could have lent you a frock."

"Oh! Isn't it all right then?" Kay turned herself round anxiously for Rosamond to see, and the elder smiled with an air of resignation, less at Kay's appearance than her mentality. Not to be certain on such an important point seemed to her almost incredibly childish.

"It will pass when you've done your hair, which is all on end. You'd better stow your suitcase in the bathroom out of the way. Quick!"

The bell rang and Rosamond, having taken the wind out of her young sister's sails, went off to admit the waiter, and thought no more of her.

Her criticism of Kay was constitutional rather than ill-natured, however. She had not expected her to be a dazzling guest, and had invited her to the party at her mother's suggestion because they had agreed that it was high time Kay grew up.

Having done so much, what more could reasonably be expected of an elder sister with a roomful of guests to entertain? Kay was left to fend for herself, which meant that she was soon standing on the outskirts of a cheerful and noisy crowd, trying vainly to look unconscious of her isolation.

Her brother-in-law, dispensing cocktails, found her eventually and did his best for her, introducing her to every one within reach; but this group was soon absorbed by newcomers, with the exception of one young man who came and leant against the wall beside her, saying in an exhausted manner:

"Whew! Rosamond's guests are all so terribly brilliant, don't you think?"

"I don't know many of them," admitted Kay.

"But you have ears in your head. Just listen to 'em."

The room was now practically full, every one talking and the noise considerable, but his superior tone was not to be mistaken and Kay looked at him incredulously.

"Rosamond happens to be my sister and your hostess," she flashed.

"Oh, *touché*! Of course you know French?"

"Just the elements," retorted Kay, and walked past him into the crowd.

She went valiantly enough but she was far more discomfited than the adversary, wondering why she could not have crushed him with a smiling and witty phrase as she was convinced Rosamond would have done, instead of making a scene. She imagined that she must have shouted aloud and certainly behaved like a fool, and her one desire was to get away and never set eyes on the wretched young man again.

Rosamond was the center of a throng, laughing and lovely as usual, and Kay paused on the edge of it and laughed too and tried to look as though she belonged there; but nobody noticed and after a moment she slipped across to the small table and took a sausage and a sandwich.

"It is being hungry," she said to herself. "I'll feel better when I've had something to eat: I wish Rosey's sandwiches didn't taste so funny."

Somebody rushed over, seized a funny sandwich and shouted above the din:

"Aren't they divine? I've had quite seventeen."

"There," thought Kay disconsolately, "I can't even *taste* like anybody else."

Over the heads of the crowd she suddenly saw the man again. He had seized a tray of cocktails from Dick and for the next twenty minutes Kay was uneasily aware of him and yet afraid to look his way and meet a superior glance.

Now and then some one paused and spoke to her, once she was actually absorbed into a group but, a newcomer arriving, the group melted noisily to form another, and she was left on the outskirts forgotten and forlorn.

Dick Fielding came by, caught her arm kindly and exclaimed:

"Hullo, Kay, having a good time? What about another drink? ... Here, where's that fellow Milton?"

"No, Dick, please ... because I shall have to be going," exclaimed Kay, seeing the enemy heading in their direction.

“What, already? Oh, I say, you have to catch a dam’ train, don’t you?” said her brother-in-law sympathetically.

“I’ll just slip away ... I can manage,” breathed Kay and escaped to the door.

Dick Fielding passed on the news to his wife in due course, and Rosamond said carelessly:

“Oh, well, I suppose she’s thinking of the dark road from the station.”

“But if it’s only that, couldn’t we put her up for the night?” protested Dick. “I could turn out and sleep on the couch.”

“Rubbish! It would be no end of trouble, and Kay doesn’t expect to stay. If you must do something,” said Rosamond, looking round to see whom she could spare, “ask Andy Milton to get a taxi and drive her to Waterloo. She’ll love that.”

Rosamond, from the vantage of twenty-three, was recalling her own fondness for taxis and escorts at nineteen, and even Dick thought it an excellent arrangement, but Kay, presently confronted by her adversary in the lift, was merely horrified.

In Rosamond’s room, getting ready to go, she had counted her money and found that by taking a ’bus to Waterloo she would be able to afford coffee and a bun at the station. Both prospects delighted her, for her last meal was by this time seven hours away, and London from a ’bus-top at night would surely be enchanting. And now this wretched man was going to spoil it all.

It was not only that the thought of their recent encounter embarrassed her. She was concerned with monetary calculations, for what did a taxi cost to Waterloo and would there be enough money for her train fare afterwards? She would have to offer to pay for the taxi and, for all she knew to the contrary, he might consent. She would have had no doubt in her own group, where men and girls alike were liable to be hard up and frank about it, but what did she know of the technique of Rosamond’s world and superior creatures like this?

“Of course you are not going to take me to the station,” she exclaimed. “I never heard such nonsense.”

He merely smiled, taking no notice of her protests and, as the lift door opened, picked up her suitcase and guided her through the vestibule to the street. The porter was nowhere to be seen, the taxi-rank for the moment empty, and Kay’s heart rejoiced at both these happy accidents.

“I am going by ’bus, thank you, so please go back to the party,” she commanded.

He shook his head.

“I wouldn’t dare. Rosamond said I was to call a taxi and take you to Waterloo. If I don’t do it she won’t ask me again.”

“Would you care?” flashed Kay.

“No.”

“Then why do you go to her parties?”

“I go because I’m fond of studying humanity,” returned the young man loftily.

This statement was too much for Kay. She gave him a suspicious glance, found he was sublimely serious, and a ’bus arriving opportunely at the moment, seized her suitcase and ran up the stairs.

The student of humanity, taken aback by this ruse, was left gazing blankly after her, and as the ’bus raced off down Baker Street she waved a derisive hand and felt better about the party.

Finding a seat in front where she could see the shining road and pale beauty of budding trees under the light, Kay, the natural every-day, come back from the far country of Rosamond’s world, threw off her mood of dissatisfaction and squared her shoulders happily, looking almost debonair now there was nobody to see.

2

The Fletes lived up the river, and Kay, as she left the train at Crediton station an hour later, deposited her suitcase to be collected next day and set out to walk. She whistled softly to hearten herself as she turned out of the village street, not, however, because of the dark road ahead. Whatever Kay’s fears they were not of the night.

At twelve years old she had seen her best friend summoned suddenly from school to tragedy and loss. The matter was hushed up, of course; the juniors were simply told that Kitty had gone home for a time, but a day-girl brought the story and whispered it. To most of the children it was exciting, unreal and soon forgotten, but young Kay Flete had spent a half-term holiday at Kitty’s home, knew the scene and the actors in it, and suffered the horror with her friend. For a long time she had nightmares from which she would start awake in terror, and the sight of a telegram or even the girls’ letters in a mistress’s hand filled her with suspense. She told nobody of this. Rosamond, aloof and

important to junior eyes, was in another house where sometimes she could ask a young sister up to tea, but there was a technique for these occasions.

"Hullo, Kay, how are things?"

"Oh, all right."

"You'll find some chocolates up there. Better have a couple. They're a present, so you're in luck."

"Thanks awfully. You get a lot of presents, don't you, Rosey?"

"I can do with 'em, but they're pretty good ones. Dora's people are simply rolling. They have five cars."

"Have they really."

"Well, let's go down, it's about time for the tea bell. I say, you are leggy, aren't you?"

"I've grown another inch, Rosey. It isn't my fault."

"I know it isn't, you silly rabbit."

Then tea, the embarrassing legs tucked out of sight, a word or two from Rosamond's admirers now and again, and presently the much more comfortable walk back with other young sisters who had been similarly entertained.

No room here for the recounting of nightmares, even if Rosamond had been a likely recipient for the confidences of her off-hand young relative; and when holidays came the unchanging familiarity of home was comforting and Kay's fears slept again.

If Kitty's particular tragedy was not repeated in the years that followed, the underlying reason for it remained, increasing and multiplying, for financial chaos was creeping over the world. The school was a large one, the fees high, and the times were necessarily reflected here as elsewhere to some extent. At seventeen Rosamond went gayly home, oblivious of anything but the fun of being grown-up, as the Rosamonds will, but upon young Kay the changing atmosphere had its due effect. Quite often now girls left suddenly to help with younger ones at home, or stayed on with the aid of bursaries which made hard work an obligation; old girls, once rich in pocket-money and pretty clothes, came back to minor posts on the staff, and tales were told of this family or that moving into a smaller house. At half-term there were fewer expensive cars in the town and parents talked about giving up music and riding and solemnly discussed careers. Gradually it became the accepted thing

for a girl to have some sort of training towards a livelihood later on, in case of need.

Kay began to work with the rest, not from any excess of virtue, certainly not because of pressure from home, but youth is naturally conforming, and uncertainty was in the air she breathed. She had never quite lost her fear of letters and telegrams and was always nervous as holidays approached, but apart from that she enjoyed her school life, had her own meed of popularity, for she was good fun, and finally won a scholarship to Oxford to her own complete surprise.

That had been over three years ago; when next she came down it would be for the last time, and in essence it had been school again, but wider, freer and more intensified. None of the friends she had made there had come to Oxford for fun, few had rich parents or money to throw about; and foolish or wise, talented or hardworking, with ideals or with none, they all had one thing in common—no sense of security whatever.

Swinging along the road she saw the moon rising over Crediton Woods far ahead and was glad to see the trees were still safe from the procession of villas and bungalows. Crediton had been a country village not so long ago, but now it was a town with 'buses and Green Line coaches linking it to London, and it was growing suburbs of its own. The old residents, however, still kept the river frontage, and the woods were their ramparts against the invading army. A new arterial road running a quarter of a mile away absorbed most of the traffic nowadays, and this older highway with its turns and twists and high, obscuring garden walls was as quiet this evening as a country lane and sweet with the scents of spring. For some distance chestnut trees marched with the girl, already uncurling their young green fingers against the sky, and then at a turn they were gone, and the Major's orchard climbed a slope patterning the road with a drift of white.

It was always known as the Major's orchard, but Mrs. Ashe was the virtual owner, and every season sold the produce in defiance of her family.

"My wife's a miser," said the Major to every one. "She counts every apple and every cherry night and morning."

But Kay, in company with Derek Ashe, had disproved this story by poaching the orchard each summer for years.

She felt at home now as she looked at this friendly place and wondered if there would be daffodils still running under the trees or whether it was too late.

Perhaps the Major would have beaten her mother at golf at last, and she pictured her, looking absurdly young, telling the story of that triumph and turning it into a farce. She would come hurrying out as the hall door opened, perhaps exclaiming:

"Kay *darling*, at last. I was beginning to think the wolves had eaten you. In another moment I should have rung up the police."

And John's lazy voice behind her would protest:

"Mother, what a liar you are! You had forgotten you had another daughter."

Kay laughed softly as she reached the gates of home and passed through. She saw the rhododendrons lifting their faces to her in a rosy mass, the long lawn stretching away under the moon to the silver blade of the Thames, and before her the house, comfortable, familiar, dear, where they would be waiting for her.

She peered through one of the drawing-room windows and knocked on the glass, but the room seemed dim; they must be in the library at the back, so she hammered the knocker and pealed the bell importantly, to startle them out of their wits. Footsteps came running and a maid looked out in astonishment at sight of Kay's smiling face.

"Oh, Miss Kay, but we thought you couldn't get here for hours yet. The mistress said you were going to Miss Rosamond's party."

"Yes, I know, Beatrice, so I did. It was a cocktail party."

"Yes, and then your mother said you'd be sure to go on to dinner somewhere and very likely to dance, afterwards. She and Mr. John won't be in, not before midnight, I don't expect. They will be surprised."

"They're out then?" said Kay. "Is—is father out too?"

"No, the master's busy in the library with that thin gentleman—I forget his name—from the firm, miss, and told me if any one telephoned he was not to be disturbed."

"Oh! ... Do you think you could get me anything to eat, Beatrice? I don't mind what it is ... on a tray."

"Why, of course. And I'll make you a nice cup of tea. You go in to the fire, Miss Kay."

Beatrice hurried away, but Kay did not go to the fire at once. She stood in the hall taking off her coat and gazing at the library door where her father and the man from the firm were not to be disturbed. That old fright had come back

and was clutching at her heart. Was anything wrong? Oh, surely nothing was wrong!

"But of course not, you idiot," she said to herself, "or mother and John would not be out. Do have a little sense."

But would he tell them even if there were...?

Kay walked slowly into the drawing-room and thought of her father, curiously and impersonally, as she had never thought before—the father whom, rather embarrassed, she kissed when she came home, to whom even more embarrassed still, she answered questions about how she was getting on, from time to time; the father to whom whenever they wanted anything, one and all sent their mother as intermediary, expecting he would refuse.

"No, no, certainly not." Their mother would give a comic imitation of the tyrant to mitigate their disappointment; or when, as sometimes, they were in luck—"*Oh*, very well!"

Kay, poking the fire into a blaze, stared at it with unseeing eyes and said to herself:

"It must be funny to be father."

He was responsible for all this, for the house, and the lawn going down to the river, for the rhododendrons at the gate, and her mother, looking divine in an evening frock going out with John; for Beatrice making a nice cup of tea; for young Pell upstairs in bed and nearly old enough now to be sent to school; for herself coming home for the Easter vacation, and for the thin man and all the other men, fat and thin, in the firm.

It seemed a good deal of responsibility, with the world in a mess, and she wondered whether it weighed upon him at all.

Suddenly Kay realized that she knew very little about her father, that silent, somewhat dour-looking head of the house and obstructor of plans. He was not a man who talked things over. He simply said this must be done or that must not ... a dictator, and, like all dictators, to be evaded when possible.

"Better leave your father to me, darling. I'll see if I can manage him," she could hear her mother saying, and sometimes she had managed him and sometimes failed. The worst occasion had been when John at eighteen had had a chance to go to the winter sports with a party of fellows from his school. John, the eldest, had had a legacy from his grandfather and the small cost could have come out of that. His indignation and Rosamond's and Kay's in sympathy had colored the whole of the Christmas holidays, and they had almost hated their father.

John was free of all that now though still living at home. He was finishing his articles in a solicitor's office and the legacy was to buy him a junior partnership in the firm. Rosamond, married four years ago, was free of it too, but Kay still had something to ask. And suddenly she saw that she must do it herself and not put the responsibility upon her mother.

"He can't eat me," she thought, "and it's not fair. If he wants to refuse he can tell me why like a reasonable being. Tyranny is medieval and we should not encourage it."

Beatrice arrived with the tray and Kay, who had not after all waited for coffee and a bun at the station, began her meal with a healthy appetite, saying gratefully: "You have done me well, Beatrice."

She had gone away from the party too soon, she supposed, behaving like an idiot as usual. It hadn't occurred to her that they would be going on to dinner somewhere, though now she came to consider it, that seemed likely. But Rosamond had not said anything about dinner, and of course she and Dick could not afford to pay for every one. Very likely the party, or some of it, would just join forces at a restaurant where you could dance.

Kay pictured the scene ... music playing softly somewhere, women in jewels and pretty frocks, taxis running up in the dusk with yellow eyes, and famous people trailing in ... gayety and laughter everywhere and witty talk. But in her heart, miming all this, Kay knew it for an illusion, for though she could admire and envy her elder at a distance, every meeting between them made her feel patronized and young. She would not really have been happy going on to dinner with Rosamond's party, and wistfully she looked at Happiness and wondered what it was. She was happy enough at Oxford with her work and her friends, but that was for the moment only and would not last. Soon they would all scatter and be gone, Dolly to the job she must somehow find against the poverty at home; Derek Ashe to the Bar; Gwen to write books, and her cousin George to the Foreign Office; Joyce to be a hospital almoner; Edith, if her luck held, to a Commonwealth scholarship in America. Some of them would marry perhaps, but nobody counted on it. Marriage, even to those who did not argue that it was unnecessary nowadays, was looked upon as economically difficult. And how could any one be sure that happiness lay that way? Rosamond seemed happy, but she was a beauty and Dick devoted. And her mother, who was a beauty too, even now, looking younger and gayer every day—was she happy? You could not call father devoted certainly.

That marriage now she came to look at it seemed to Kay an amazing thing, for the spoilt only child she knew her mother to have been, even in the

different rather fantastic days of a quarter of a century ago. “Perhaps the strong silent man was the fashion, and of course girls were romantic then,” she thought, with the amused toleration of every generation of her sex for this quality in the one before.

And now her mother simply made the best of things and enjoyed life in spite of him, saying it was a mercy that she had John to take her out and prevent her becoming fossilized.... But anything less like a fossil ...

Kay smiled, thinking of her mother rushing about like a whirlwind, or chattering at meals, entertaining, vigorous, dramatic, while John played up to her and Rosamond too when she was there, and her father read his newspaper or just sat, saying nothing.

“But after all,” she said to herself, “so do I say nothing most of the time.”

James Flete opened the hall door and walked with Bridges, his assistant, as far as the gate. Returning, he noticed lights in the drawing-room and wondered impatiently why the servants could not be trained to exercise a little care and common-sense. He put his hand to the switch as he reached the drawing-room door, then, hearing a movement, went in.

“Why, Kay, I had no idea you had come home.”

“No,” said Kay, obscurely defensive. “I stole a march on every one.”

“Oh, I see.... Well, they are looking after you, I suppose.”

“Yes, rather, thanks.”

Kay put down her napkin and stood up feeling for coat pockets which were not there, and the two looked at each other awkwardly as though not quite knowing what to say next, two strangers taken by surprise.

James Flete was vexed that he had not been told—or else had forgotten—that the girl was coming home tonight. It was a bleak sort of welcome, he felt, this silent house, but apparently they didn’t mind, these young people, with their abrupt speech and independent ways. And no doubt Kay had heard from her mother ... Winifred would have left orders with the servants....

“I thought the room was empty and was just going to put out the lights,” he explained. “These girls are all alike, wasteful and careless.”

“My fault,” returned Kay, “I always did like an illumination,” and put out her hand to turn some of it off.

“No, no! There’s no reason for you to sit in the gloom. Bad for your eyes,” protested her father. “Well, I’ll leave you to get on with your supper and go to bed, I think. Nothing you want, is there ... nothing I can do for you?”

“No, thanks, father,” said Kay, wanting desperately to say yes, but unable to do it. How could you possibly ask your father if everything was all right with the firm when you had never even mentioned the subject to him in your life before? It would sound so odd. And how could you say: “May I go to the Sorbonne when I’ve finished with Oxford?” just suddenly like that, the very moment you had come home?

“Then good-night, my dear.”

James Flete was tired after a long and harassing day, but he forgot these distresses for a moment as he went upstairs, thinking of his daughter. Standing there in the firelit room her young grace had surprised him as something seen for the first time, and he had noticed the quality of her voice.

“A quiet child,” he thought. “She comes and goes. You don’t hear much of her.”

And then he remembered the lights in the library and turned back with a sigh, his mind absorbed in the problems on which he and Bridges had been working all the evening. Kay was forgotten.

CHAPTER TWO

UP THE RIVER

1

ON the last Saturday of their vacation Kay and her friend Dolly Chester sauntered in to breakfast, when the master of the house was already halfway to the station, and the mistress of it folding her table napkin. Even John had gone and he invariably dawdled over the meal, for strategic reasons, to avoid a tête-à-tête journey with his father.

"Late as usual," said Dolly in laconic apology. "Sluggards, aren't we?"

Winifred Flete smiled charmingly at her daughter's guest, for she was a perfect parent in such matters. In fact, John liked to forecast a newspaper interview with her at the age of ninety, in which she attributed her youthful figure and schoolgirl complexion to the fact that she had never tried to be a mother to her children.

"It is rather clever of you to be late this morning," she assured the girl. "Men are all bears at breakfast, and my particular bear has been growling round the house since dawn. He has just given the gardener a month's wages and sent him off."

"Really? Has he been caught selling the vegetables or something?"

"Selling them?" exclaimed Mrs. Flete with eloquence. "He wouldn't even condescend to grow them, the brute, and my bills were horrifying. As for the flowers, I had to creep out at dead of night to steal a few for the house; but his brightest effort was to put up a notice, 'Keep Off The Grass.' I said to him: 'My poor Richards, you must be suffering from dementia. Do see a doctor, for really, you know, you are not the curator of a botanical garden dealing with slum picnic parties.' After that, of course, it was war to the knife between us."

Winifred acted the little scene deliciously, and the two girls smiled appreciation, Dolly showing her teeth between parted scarlet lips, Kay with a sudden gleam in her eyes, so that for a moment her face was alight. Hers were good eyes, frank and deeply blue, and at moments like these they gave a quality to her face rather lacking in repose.

When people spoke, as they frequently did, of the good-looking Fletes, they meant Winifred, John and Rosamond. All three had the same fair charm, the same carefree brilliance which set them immediately in the center of any stage they chose to occupy. Then nature, as though tired of the pattern, had produced Kay, who was like nobody in particular, and now, at twenty, stood three inches taller than her mother and sister and almost shoulder to shoulder with John, a dark-haired, inconspicuous Kay, in spite of her inches, all too liable to fade out in that bright company. Pell, the youngest Flete, had his mother's coloring but was still at the variable, childish stage when it was difficult to say which side of the family he would the more resemble.

Winifred, having gained her meed of applause, became practical. “Well, darling, what are your plans for today?” she asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Kay.

That was so like Kay, thought her mother with a faint sigh. Rosamond would have had a dozen important plans even without a guest to consider; she always knew what she wanted, but Kay, poor darling, seemed to have no initiative, and surely Oxford should have altered that! That scholarship years ago had astonished Winifred but she had been quite obliging about it, Rosamond’s marriage notwithstanding. She was not one of those old-fashioned mothers who want their daughters at home; she expected her children to live their own lives and let her live hers, and Oxford surely ought to bring Kay out of her shell, or what was it for? Now the girl had only one more term to go and Oxford, as far as one could see, had failed in its duty by her.

However, Winifred’s day was fully planned, so after consideration she suggested:

“Suppose I tell Cook to pack you a luncheon basket, and you can take the punt up the reach? It is beautifully mild—I shall have to be out, and you don’t want a dull lunch alone with your father. He swears he is coming home to work in the garden, and you know what that means.”

This picture of the head of the house proposing to make a fool of himself was indulgently presented with a confiding smile at the guest as much as to say: “Men are all alike, aren’t they?” but it was the manner rather than the matter of Winifred’s discourse, as usual, that won her audience.

Dolly said lunch up the river sounded a pretty ripe scheme to her; Kay made one or two suggestions about food and Winifred went away relieved. She was really sorry that she could not provide a more hilarious outing, but her bank account was overdrawn and James so fidgety over the least expense, so perhaps it was as well darling Kay was still child enough to be satisfied with simple pleasures. Oxford went up in Winifred’s estimation after all.

Childishness, simplicity and Oxford of course had little to do with the matter. The two familiars understood each other and smiled briefly behind her departing back.

“A pet, isn’t she?” said Dolly in admiration.

Kay nodded. She was not surprised that Dolly had fallen beneath her mother’s glamour. She herself felt it afresh every time she came home, envied

the same quality in John and Rosamond, searched for it in young Pell, and wondered why it always made her feel tongue-tied and a fool.

"No point in ringing Derek," she observed casually after a silence, "because Mrs. Ashe is more or less certain to answer the telephone."

"What, apron-strings?" from Dolly in horror.

"Oh Lord, no, but she'll bite my head off. '*If you girls want Derek why the devil can't you come and look for him? Do you think I keep him in my pocket?*' "

"Sounds a perfect gentleman to me," said the guest, delighted. "And why not? I mean, let's go and look for him if it comes to that."

Kay considered her friend, a little anxious and trying to see her with the eyes of Derek's mother. This might be important, or wasn't it? It was so difficult to be sure.

Dolly, with her geranium lips and scarlet fingernails, still somehow contriving to look trim and up-to-the-minute in a jumper suit she had worn for two winters at least, looked just the young worldling Mrs. Ashe might most dislike. Still, they would have to meet sometime, Kay was sure. Better perhaps to get it over.

"All right. There'll be lots of lunch," she said, having given her mother hints as to quantity, with Derek in mind.

He had spent Easter on the Norfolk Broads with some other men and had sent Kay snapshots of the party. Kay, translating this attention, had replied on a postcard: "Your mother's tulips are a sight and I think I'll take Dolly over. She is coming on Friday." She felt pretty sure that he would have found it convenient to rush home, but she said carelessly to Dolly:

"Of course Derek may still be away for all I know, but I suppose we might as well find out."

Later in the morning, therefore, the pair sauntered along the road to the rather beautiful wrought-iron gates which were the only finery, the Major said, his wife condescended to possess. They gave her an excellent view of her precious orchard across the way, or she would certainly have sold them for nine-pence before now.

Pushing them open and going in, the visitors caught sight of the lady herself, a gaunt figure in shabby tweeds, working knee-deep in flowers.

Then, at the bend of the drive a young woman wheeling a bicycle came into view, and a jovial, slightly metallic voice exclaimed:

“Hullo ... but how nice ... the very damsel I wanted to see. Can you come along this afternoon for tennis ... and your friend too, of course?”

Given no alternative, Kay introduced Dolly Chester, but continued hastily:

“Thanks awfully, Dora, but I’m afraid we’re fixed up.”

“Oh *no*! But look here, can’t you slip out of it?” said the young woman, breezily roguish. “Because it’s really a littery party, and I can’t promise, of course, but your friend *may* see Aunt Pussie—well, she’ll certainly see her, but I mean meet her, be introduced. ... I’ll fix it somehow.”

“I’m afraid we can’t—” began Kay, but was interrupted.

“Look here, we’ll leave it open. Try your best and we’ll expect you if we see you ... because it’s such a chance ... and bring your tennis racquets, won’t you? ... Toodle-oo.”

She was gone and Kay with a whispered “Tell you later,” hurried her guest on towards Mrs. Ashe, who had turned and was now watching them grimly through her horn-rimmed spectacles.

“Hullo, Mrs. Ashe,” called Kay. “This is Dolly Chester. I’ve brought her over to see your tulips.”

Mrs. Ashe lifted her chin and nodded briefly to the two girls. Her face was tanned by the weather and deeply lined, her long, aristocratic hands stained with hard work, her appearance fantastic, but the arrival of all the strangers in the world would not have disconcerted her on that account.

“Hm!” she remarked dryly. “Well, the particular tulip you mean—though it’s a new name for him—is messing about in the boat-house, I believe.”

Kay gave a shout of laughter.

“He’s come home then?”

“Don’t feign innocent surprise with me, Kay,” said Mrs. Ashe. “It won’t wash. The system of telepathy in this district is bordering on the miraculous. The Johnstones have been after him already, to say nothing of various other dam’ fools whose telephone calls I rang off.”

“Oh, I say, the beastly Johnstones haven’t snaffled him for tennis, have they?” exclaimed Kay.

“Snaffled? First a tulip and now a horse! Go and ask him, my good child, go and ask him. How do I know? And don’t you girls carry him off this morning either. He has to do an errand for me in the village.”

The two friends took their dismissal cheerfully and ran down to the river-edge, where the son of the house was discovered in the bowels of a disreputable motor-boat.

"I thought if I could coax Harold into a good mood we might get as far as Richmond," he remarked, greeting them without surprise.

Dolly sat down on one of Harold's blistered sides, and Kay balanced herself on the other.

"You are a tulip," proclaimed Dolly to its occupant joyfully. "Your mother says so."

"What ... without qualifying adjectives?" inquired the young man, taking his pipe out of his mouth. "She must be off her form this morning."

"And you have to do an errand in the village."

"I know, because the Stores are run by dam' fools who don't understand plain English," Derek finished the quotation. "I don't mind laying a bet it was very plain English too."

"And," contributed Kay, affecting carelessness, "the blinking Johnstones have been after you already."

"Who are these Johnstones?" Dolly wanted to know.

"What? You mean to say you haven't met our literary family?" exclaimed the young man. "And Kay calls herself a hostess? Didn't you know we lived in the sainted shadow of the great Dale Johnstone, whose books were thought so daring our grandmother hid 'em under their mattresses, and are now judged so pure no Sunday-school library would be without them?"

"But she must be centuries old, why she was pre-Corelli, Derek."

"Centuries?—not a bit of it. 'Aunt Pussie' they call her. She's immortal, I grant you—or will be when young Puss has finished the great Life."

"Yes, when," interposed Kay; "but she's been writing it for the last five years, ever since they came to live here."

"Well, it's been a long life. Don't be censorious," said Derek austerely.

"I know she's writing it," he went on, "because she carries a notebook and jots it down as she goes. Oh, young Puss is a very literary bird, belongs to all the writing clubs and calls the nobs of the profession by their Christian names—to us at least. 'Billy was simply marvelous at the Garbage Club dinner the other night. He said Mary's new book was born and not made!' Derek Ashe, much intrigued: 'And was he the father?' "

“The question is,” said Kay, unable to contain her anxiety any longer, “have you said you’ll go to their beastly party?”

“Oh no, I’m very ill and have to be kept quiet. The doctor says—”

“Heart trouble,” suggested Dolly.

“I know. I have it frequently, and it’s very sad, especially as this is a ‘Littery’ party. Darling Dora is all het up about it. It seems the young Realists are having a go-as-you-please ramble—as I said to her, it sounds jolly Littery to me, and she said, ‘Yes, I know.’ It’s really a littery pilgrimage,—they have them every Saturday, and of course when young Puss said she might be able to manage for them to see Dale Johnstone, they were *thrilled*. But Dora is determined to have tennis too, because we can’t neglect athletics, can we?—and besides the pilgrims won’t be terribly early as they mean to take in Stoke Poges on the way.”

“Oh no, Derek, come off it.”

“Yes, Darling Dora’s own words—I swear it. I said I hoped the young Realists would see the lowing kine wend slowly o’er the lea, it would be so nice for them, but she rather dismissed that idea and said, ‘You know there’s an obelisk or something.’ Much more real, I suppose.”

“But what I want to know,” interposed Kay, “is how they got wind of your coming home.”

“Ah, that was Our Guide, that was. She was on the train, been to a Rally and hadn’t done her good deed for the day, I suppose, little brute. I hate her fat legs.”

Kay looked at her friend’s slim ankles with content and began to whistle, dismissing the blighted Johnstones happily.

“What about getting your mother’s errand done, Derek, and leaving Harold’s tummy?” she said. “We’re taking lunch out in the punt and I’ve asked for lots of food.”

Derek consulted his watch.

“I could just about do it. Which way are you going ... downstream? You get on when you’re ready then and I’ll follow as soon as I can. Harold’s hale enough, the old blighter. I’ve just been washing his ears.”

They strolled up from the boat-house together and Derek went indoors, the two girls pausing to say good-by to Mrs. Ashe.

“What! You are still here?” she inquired.

“Yes, but we’ve sent him off to do your errand,” Kay assured her. “He’s getting ready now.”

“Nice of you. This unexampled altruism takes my breath away,” retorted the lady dryly.

“Bit of a terror, I gather,” said Dolly when they were out of earshot. “I suppose she won’t find some other job for him and dish the whole thing?”

“Oh no.” Kay looked secretly and with a faint frown of anxiety at her friend.

“If mother asked John to do an errand in the village, he’d throw a fit,” she remarked after a moment, “but Derek hasn’t that sort of silly pride. He doesn’t even mind that Mrs. Ashe looks a freak and swears at the tradesmen, and you know there is something about her ...”

“Yes, I know,” nodded Dolly, “... a sort of grandeur—no, not that either ... distinction more. Derek has it too. Doesn’t matter what he wears or what he does.”

“Yes,” agreed Kay eagerly. “And of course she has a lot to do, and the Major’s no use, but she doesn’t really put upon old Derek. I quite like her, Dolly.”

Miss Chester nodded amiably, scenting no guile in all this praise of Derek’s mother, for she was not suspiciously inclined, neither was self-consciousness one of her limitations. The day was lovely, this part of the river new to her, these two her friends, and it was good before term began to have a few days to loaf about with them, eating nice food and not having to think of the cost. Dolly, in the old Sussex manor where she had been born and bred—a much more splendid place architecturally than these modest houses on the Thames—had known lean times in the last few years; necessity had made her practical.

Kay meanwhile was thinking of Derek Ashe and trying to see him with Dolly’s eyes. This was an interesting experiment for she had known Derek all her life, was more intimate with him than with her brother John or even Rosamond, understood him by instinct and long habit, and it had never occurred to her, therefore, to consider his looks. Now, in the light of his obvious fancy for Dolly, everything about him became important; his rather ugly face with the square, obstinate chin and keen dark eyes under straight brows; his quick, clipped speech and habit of saying the most damning or the most enthusiastic things without the slightest change of expression, to the confusion of people who did not know him. In build he was like his father who, though a virtual invalid since the war, and irritable to the verge of

peevishness, still carried himself well; but now in the light of Dolly's words, Kay thought she too saw some quality of his mother's in Derek, and she was pleased at her friend's penetration. They had not had an easy time, those two, but neither ever gave the slightest hint of that or seemed aware of it. In that certainly they were alike, and in their sublime disregard of public opinion. Kay did not realize how much she herself had caught their tone in this particular, but she knew that it was rare.

2

April had been exceptionally mild and as the two girls got the punt out all the reach lay sweetly before them under a cloudless sky, framed in the pale green of the budding trees.

The garden from which the all too botanical Richards had departed, stretched above them sleepily, the house was abandoned to Beatrice and cook. Pell, the one child in this adult household, had had measles recently and had been sent to the sea with old nurse, commandeered for the occasion. Kay therefore had not seen him since the Christmas vacation, but Winifred had seen him altogether too much and had engineered this convalescence by way of respite. It was true that Pell, strictly speaking, no longer needed a nurse, but the woman had been useful, and Winifred was furious when James, three months since, had insisted that she must go. There would have to be some one, she argued, to look after the child, to take him to and from the small school he attended and see to his clothes, but these tasks seemed to the head of the house mere recreations which any mother should enjoy, and no protests had been able to move him. Though fond of her young son, Winifred did not really like children in the raw, and it seemed to her that in the new régime the little boy was always under her feet. Pell took good care that he was nothing of the kind, but it made no difference. The knowledge that he was now solely her responsibility filled her with a sense of having no leisure for anything and, even more, with a sense of grievance against James.

Kay had heard echoes of this disturbance during her fortnight at home and, as usual, sided with Winifred, from whom no reasonable person, she thought, could expect the dull domestic virtues. And if some change were necessary for the sake of economy why could not her father tell them all so frankly, and talk it over, instead of meanly taking it out of her mother and young Pell?

Kay's valiant determination to put the problem of her own future to him had paled before this new situation, and now she knew that she would probably return to college without saying anything at all. When her own relief at this decision first suggested that it was sheer cowardice she had made up

her mind to sound him at least, but it was no use. Directly an opportunity presented itself the words would not come.

At least there were no other signs of economy that she could see, the house was comfortable and well-run and, from the river as she turned the punt downstream, it looked far more trim than its neighbors, she thought contentedly.

There was comparatively little traffic on this part of the Thames until later in the year and they had the reach to themselves. Everywhere the rich growth of the season was breaking into beauty, willows dipping their long arms into the water were feathered with young green, rose-arches in passing gardens, wreathed with budding leaves. The soft swish of the punt-pole disturbed a swan among the reeds, and he defied the intruders with an angry flapping of wings. Crediton Woods swept near, the old trees climbing a slope as they had climbed it for changing centuries, themselves unchanged except as the seasons clothed them or stripped them bare. Under their branches now in the amber twilight which by summer would be almost the dusk of night, bluebells were spreading a magic carpet.

Kay made for a backwater beyond the woods and as she turned the punt saw Derek's motor-boat just shooting into sight. She tied up at the entrance and waited for him.

"Depth's all right for Harold, I think," she called, "but won't it be rather chilly further in?"

"Stay where you are," advised Derek, "I'll go along here and hop ashore."

There were traces of a landing-stage and a riot of brambles and rhododendrons screened what had once been a narrow strip of garden.

"There used to be a house-boat moored here when mother was first married," said Kay, "with bright green awnings and window-boxes all along the upper deck. The land goes up to the high road but no one ever comes here, I think, yet somebody must own it."

"I suppose it was terribly dashing to have a house-boat once," said Dolly as one considering prehistoric times. "Personally I prefer Harold."

"We thank you for these kind words," remarked Derek, climbing on board the punt and pouring packets of cigarettes and sweets into her lap from his blazer pockets. "Come along, Kay, change over and let me do the butling."

"No, I'm butler myself today," said Kay firmly. She was delighted that Dolly preferred Harold and had been rewarded, and she refused to be moved from her purpose, so that they should sit together and continue the good work.

The one drawback was that she had to be there, making a third, to spoil their form, but that was unavoidable, so by way of mitigation as soon as lunch was over she started the gramophone which she had brought for the purpose.

"Oh, hang it, Kay. Can't you mute the beastly thing?" was Derek's only response to this maneuver.

"Yes, if you like."

Kay put on something softer, a dreamy waltz-tune this time, and lay back with her eyes closed as though entranced. The conversation that reached her, however, did not sound exactly romantic.

"I believe you bite your nails," said Derek's voice accusingly.

"I do nothing of the kind."

"Well, there must be something wrong with them, or why that bloody shade? They look exactly as though you'd dipped them in gore."

"Every one likes a new dress now and then," said Dolly reasonably, "and this is the only kind of one you can buy at Woolworth's so far. I can't afford any other."

"Poor little dear, and she can't even afford a cake of soap. But here's a perfectly good river, so don't cry. I'll wash them for you."

He seized her nearest hand and plunged it into the water, but Dolly was strong and wrenched it away. Forgetting where she was, she swung round and jumped up to take her revenge and then catastrophe overtook her. The punt tipped crazily with a clatter of china and gramophone records, Derek threw his weight over to right it, and Dolly slipped and lost her balance. The next moment she was sitting on the river-bed with water nearly up to her neck, shaking her wet head like a terrier.

"It's all very well for you two to sit there and laugh," she observed indignantly, "but what am I going to do if my only suit is ruined? I wonder if Woolworth's do tattooing?"

The water was cold and by the time she had decided to stop fooling and stand up, her teeth had begun to chatter. It was decided that Derek had better run her home to change at once while Kay cleared up the remains of the picnic and followed with the punt.

She saw them go with a secret smile and did not hurry. Dolly was a good sport and Derek would be sure to appreciate that and like her more than ever; so even the spoiling of the suit might be worth it in the end, she thought.

The breakages in the punt were not as bad as they might have been. Two records and a plate were smashed, and she leant over the side and carefully buried them beneath the rhododendrons. As she did so she heard a rustle among the bushes but she could see nothing, and supposed she had disturbed some creature nesting there.

The old swan with the cunning born of experience had followed them up the reach and had been circling about, hoping for largesse. Kay threw him a crust and he darted in and bolted it greedily.

"Oh well," she said to him, opening the luncheon basket and taking out a sandwich, "if you're as hungry as all that—"

"*Don't!*" said a voice suddenly behind her.

The girl jumped and gazing about her in bewilderment discovered a man standing among the rhododendrons in the waste garden.

"I'm sorry if I frightened you," said the stranger, "but the swan doesn't need your sandwiches ... and I do rather badly."

He attempted a smile, and something about his eyes and the tone of his voice sent Kay diving hastily into her basket.

"I'd be rather glad to get rid of all this as a matter of fact," she remarked, "because it's a bad scheme to take home too much food after a picnic, or next time they don't give you enough.... Do you think you can get through the bushes a bit, and I'll hand it up to you."

The man rather clumsily obeyed and then, as though feeling that some explanation of his presence there was due to her, said in an embarrassed voice:

"I have been walking since dawn and I came down here to have a clean-up and wash out a couple of handkerchiefs in the stream. While they were drying I must have fallen asleep and your music woke me. I couldn't get away very well without being seen, and I might have been trespassing for all I knew."

"Oh well, I don't suppose it would matter," returned Kay. "Look here, if you don't mind drinking it now, there's a cup of coffee left. After a walk like that you may be glad of it.... Sugar?"

"Please ... it's very good of you."

"Oh, that's all right." Kay handed up the coffee, and went on packing the food in a roll of paper napkins so that he could drink without her eyes upon him. Her manner was at its most casual.

"Perhaps you could take this fruit in your pockets, or would it bulge too much?" she said. "Because if you have much further to walk it may come in

handy."

The man stooped down and washed out the cup, taking the fruit and package in exchange. He did not answer her directly but said after a moment:

"Yes, I have still some distance to go. As you have probably guessed, I'm looking for work. Still, walking is no hardship in this weather and there's always the chance of an odd job on the way. I suppose this would not be a likely neighborhood for anything of that kind, would it?"

Kay looked out at the sunny river, a faint frown between her eyes.

"I don't know if they'd have any odd jobs at Redgates," she said. "It's a house down the old road to your left, with rhododendrons. There might be some little thing ... in the garden perhaps, because their man's just gone. If you think it's worth trying, ask to see Mr. Flete."

She untied the punt, then smiled gayly and nodded as he helped her to push off, saying:

"Indeed it's worth trying, and thank you."

"Well, good luck anyway."

She was off, a blithe and friendly-looking young creature, her rose-colored sweater a gay splash of color in the surrounding green.

Blithe, however, did not any longer describe her state of mind. Kay felt shaken and rather sick. Where a deliberate assault upon her compassion would have failed by its very obviousness, this stranger's had succeeded because she knew that it had been involuntary and that then he had tried to cover it and hide it away. Though she had never in her life before come face to face with hunger she was sure that he had been starving, probably slowly starving for a long time, and what was there that she had been able to do about it? Nothing ... nothing at all. Giving to a beggar was easy, but this had been different and horrible and now what had she done? Sent him to her father and to almost certain disappointment. At the time, in her anxiety to persuade him that she had noticed nothing and thought him just what he was pretending to be, an ordinary laborer, temporarily out of a job, the suggestion had seemed a good idea, but she had not dreamt that he would take her at her word. Yet he intended to go, it was as desperate as that, and what would her father do? Refuse him almost certainly: he would see at a glance this was no gardener and send him curtly about his business. It seemed to Kay that she had let him in for this to save her own embarrassment, and she felt so depressed that it was not until she saw the motor-boat at the Redgates landing-stage and Derek waiting for her that she remembered Dolly.

He helped her ashore and took the luncheon basket and gramophone up to the house.

“Is Dolly dry yet?”

“I hope so ... I said I’d wait out here for you,” said Derek. “Look here, Kay, it was all my fault. Do you think her dress is really ruined?”

“I’ll go and see,” promised Kay. “Don’t look so funereal, I expect it can be cleaned or something.”

“Well, you were looking a bit pipped yourself,” said Derek, “and I naturally thought you had it in for me.”

Kay laughed. “I had completely forgotten you both and was thinking of something else.”

“Oh, cheers! Then suppose I telephone for seats for a show and we all go up and have dinner in town?”

“Derek, you sound terribly rich all of a sudden. Have you come into a fortune and kept it dark?”

“No, worse luck. But after all, it’s up to me to do something after ruining your picnic.”

“Oh, is that all? Then we’ll go to the pictures, idiot,” said Kay firmly. “I shan’t encourage reckless extravagance.”

She ran upstairs and found Beatrice and Dolly dealing with the sodden frock before a fire lit for the purpose in the schoolroom. Beatrice considered that it would be as good as new when she had done with it, and her tone was convincing, so all was well.

“Is father in the garden, Beatrice?” Kay asked her on a sudden impulse.

“No, miss, he rang up to say he was going to have lunch in town and come down by a later train,” said the maid.

So there was nothing to be done about that? Kay determined to put the matter out of her mind and turn her attention to her guest.

CHAPTER THREE

PELL

1

ON a July morning James and Winifred Flete and their younger son sat at breakfast all silent and busy with their thoughts. James was thinking about business, Winifred indignantly about James, and Pell about his food. He wished some one would make a law that you must eat porridge out of the end of your spoon instead of the side; he wondered why you could never have strawberry jam for breakfast, but only marmalade. The marmalade looked very gold and almost like honey in its crystal bowl, but Pell knew it for a sham to his sorrow. It tasted bitter as medicine and what was the good of that? He hoped he would be able to reach his second slice of toast before John came down and took it. This was not greed because his mother would ring for more for John, but Pell would be told to eat bread, generally with the exclamation, "Really, Pell, haven't you finished *yet*?" Pell, eating with a child's slowness, never had quite finished when the end of the meal came and he was hustled away.

He began his first slice of toast in a hurry, one eye on his mother, who would be certain to notice if he crunched.

This morning, however, Winifred was not thinking of Pell but of Pell's father sitting stolidly at the head of the table as though quite unaware of her exasperation.

He had refused to go to Scotland for August. He had given various reasons certainly, but Winifred had not troubled to listen to most of them; she was not at any time an accomplished listener, her quick mind leaping ahead of any conversation towards the moment when she could launch a phrase or cap an argument. And this time the tone of her husband's voice had told her nothing she could say or do would move him. He had decided.

She looked at him across the breakfast-table impatiently. He was reading *The Times*, turning the pages in an irritating way he had, shaking out the whole paper so that the edges came neatly together. If he would only be human enough to drop it sometimes or even fling it down in a rage, it would be less unbearable, she thought.

"But an earthquake wouldn't change him," she said to herself, "or a flood. I never knew such a man!"

In this moment all his familiar habits trooped before her mind, the hunch of one shoulder as he dropped into a chair—James could not even sit as other people did,—his method of closing a door carefully as if it were a treasure that would break at a touch, the way he stirred his coffee from right to left, round and round—an old trick this, of which she had tried to break him long ago, or so she believed. Actually she had laughed at it, but she had forgotten how all his oddnesses had charmed her once and made him all the more endearing.

James was fifty, but Winifred still felt a girl and she hid her years away and would not look at them. It annoyed her to see him already middle-aged and dull, with deep lines about his mouth and all his movements heavy and difficult, as though the spring had gone out of him. And so unnoticing! Winifred was not going to deny that her vanity was implicated even while she made a joke of his blindness. Her children noticed everything, responded immediately to her gayety and wit, admired her clothes and made much of her, while James, whose province this should be, neither saw nor heard. Outsiders too ... Winifred was well aware that she was generally considered the most decorative and entertaining person in the neighborhood and the most envied. Even funny Mrs. Ashe found her amusing, and the Major could be beguiled by her at his sourest and most miserable. The Johnstones beamed at her with open admiration, and the Peebles women, who had long noses, apparently so that they could look down them, copied her clothes and guarded their poor old father like dragons as though she might run off with him.

Winifred was always very sweet to Mr. Peebles to bait his frosty daughters, but really she thought he was rather foolish, for how furious he always looked when he saw her from over the dividing hedge playing tennis with Andrew Milton.

Recalling Andrew, she recalled her grievance again in full force. The young man had come to Crediton in May as assistant to old Dr. Rose for six months, with a view to a partnership if the arrangement proved satisfactory. Winifred, requested to be kind to him by Rosamond and Dick, had made him free of the house in his spare time, discovering thereby that he was a cousin of the Fergusons, with whom she and James had been out of touch for years, in spite of an old friendship. The Fergusons were now living permanently in Scotland, the acquaintance had been renewed by letter and this invitation for August was the result.

Winifred was furious with James for his obstinate determination to refuse it. Particularly now, when he was constantly preaching economy and cutting down expenses, it would do them both a world of good, she felt, to get away for a lazy golfing holiday with these old friends. In fact she had made her plans within ten minutes of receiving Molly Ferguson’s letter yesterday, and at the bridge-club later had told every one they were going up to Scotland for August.

The news had made an immediate impression, she had been envied by every one, and the Fletes had gone up in importance, for none of the other members could hope to do anything as completely right this summer. Winifred was human enough to feel it was too much to have to recant her announcement just because James could not be dragged from his rut. For of

course it was preposterous to say he could not leave town, they must stay at home this summer and why not, with the river at its best? The river indeed! Winifred looked out the window at it but saw it this morning with blind eyes: the river was always there and suddenly became a symbol of her days, monotonous and dull, an endless round of domestic cares.

2

John came strolling in, nodded to his father, ruffled Pell's hair and admired his mother, according to custom.

"You're looking very smart this morning. New frock?"

"New indeed!" said Winifred, grimacing and inexact. "I have had it for years. However, what are new frocks to me if I can never go anywhere?"

"Good heavens! Has the bridge-club been disbanded by the police?"

"Even that would be exciting," declared his mother, "and it is all very well for you to laugh, but you're a man, not a kind of superior domestic chattel."

John laughed and chaffed her, and Pell said chattel, chattel to himself, practicing it. He wondered what a chattel was, but it was no use asking for they would only say, "Look in the dictionary." However, it was a new word and exciting, though not as good as Pernambuco, which he had discovered yesterday, so he stored it away.

"I suppose the next thing, I shall be expected to sit by the fire like a grandmother and knit socks," said Winifred, acting the character with great spirit for John's delight.

"Well, knit 'em for me, won't you?" he suggested. "Not for this young centipede on my right."

He reached out a long arm and caught Pell by the ear, and their father, looking up testily at a sudden squeal, ordered the small boy from the room.

He departed himself a moment later and Winifred had John to herself.

"It really is too bad," she said, having recounted her grievance. "Your father always has been obstinate and you'll admit, John, I make the best of things and don't often complain, but this is beyond everything. He won't realize how tied I have been all the year with Pell. Of course I love the darling but he wears me out."

"But you shouldn't let the little blighter wear you out," protested John with the easy calm of the male where such matters are concerned.

Away all day in town and often enough week-ending with friends, he saw little of Pell and supposed that, free of his father's subduing influence, he was an imp, and small blame to him if his mother did not use proper control.

"Is the kid the obstacle then?" he said. "Surely you could get Nannie back for a month if it's only that."

"Of course it isn't Pell. Nannie's gone to a new place, but Kay will be at home and can perfectly well look after the child. She's had a fortnight with Dolly Chester already since they came down. I wonder I haven't heard from her. And that was another excuse your father made. Kay would be coming home and having her friends here, and there would have to be some one in charge of the household!"

The master of the house had certainly put that argument badly, and John grinned. He had presented Winifred with a picture of herself as dragon to a grown-up daughter which she did not like at all, and from that moment she was off.

"Does he imagine Kay or any of your generation would submit to being chaperoned?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Are we living in the Middle Ages? It's no good, John. He shall go to Scotland. So there!"

She gazed at him round-eyed and ridiculous as an angry cherub and he laughed.

"Go it," said John, "stick to your guns. I'm with you every time."

He kissed her lightly, went into the hall for his hat and stick and set out, casting an idly appreciative eye on the garden as he went. Like a thousand others in England at the moment, it was a rather lovely sight, better he thought than any summer he could remember. Larkspurs, slender and delicate, bent in the morning breeze, delphiniums lifted stately spines and powdered the grass with blue. In the herbaceous border sweet-peas in mass formation and stocks of every color were honey-sweet in the warm air, and nasturtiums ran along the beds like a flame. As for the roses, they were blooming in such beauty and profusion that half the river-craft slowed down in passing to admire them, and boatmen plying for hire below the lock made trips to Redgates at so much a head.

"Like their dam' cheek!" thought John easily and without heat. The success of the garden, he supposed, was due to Elliott, the gardener who had succeeded the curating Richards, a quiet, gray-headed fellow, who did not mix with the other servants but lived above the boat-house, providing his own meals. Winifred, who liked a handy man about the place to do her bidding, was facetious on the subject of Elliott, because James had given orders that he

was not to be called from his work on any pretext whatever. John, going out the gate, wondered if marriages always came to that, and being an optimist and almost on the verge of trying the experiment, decided not.

3

Pell, sent from the breakfast-table, did not waste time bemoaning that rank injustice. The grown-up world was always an arbitrary one in his experience, but there was nothing to be done about it, as far as he knew.

A tall, thin little boy with wide-set gray eyes and too often a scowl, Pell at this time was suffering all the disabilities and none of the privileges of an only child. He had been an attractive infant to summon down from the nursery not so very long ago, nicely washed and brushed, to see visitors, but now under his mother's inexperienced hands shyness and uncertainty made him gruff of speech and robbed him of any graces of behavior. Like any other small boy he acquired dirty hands and torn clothes as though by magic, and Winifred, herself always fastidiously clad, constantly told him that he was a little grub and she could not bear the sight of him. Then in some moment of exhilaration she would try to charm him into laughter, overwhelming him with demonstrations of affection.

To Pell, embarrassed and resisting, she would exclaim in mock reproach: "You don't love me a bit, Pell."

It was true. Pell's loves were still untried.

Racing down the garden, the little boy turned to the right where a mass of rhododendron bushes screened him from the house, and lying flat on his stomach, burrowed his way into the middle of them. This was an excellent lair, as useful as a cloak of darkness, from which he could view house, garden and river, himself unseen. It was a smuggler's cave, a beleaguered castle, a jungle, a king-hole and a treasure-house in turn. Under an old piece of waterproof, useful for roofing if it came on to rain, Pell kept a secret hoard of valuables—a rusty penknife found in the garden and splendid for hacking your way through dense forests; a pair of binoculars from which the lenses had gone, but no worse, in Pell's estimation, for that, and a whistle which blew a blast as unearthly as any siren. With this he imitated an oncoming river steamer, and when some unsuspecting small craft pulled hastily out of the fairway, his day was made.

"Chattle," sang Pell to himself as he set his house in order. "Chattle, chattle, won the battle."

This effort naturally induced a military turn and, seizing his binoculars, Captain Pell, leader of a forlorn hope against tremendous odds, squirmed through the bushes to find a place where he and his handful of trusty followers could ford the stream and take the enemy unawares.

The water was like silver glass, no ripple anywhere, and Pell saw himself strolling across it nonchalantly, to the gratifying astonishment of the onlookers. Feats of this kind were common to him in his private world. He never, for instance, had to come downstairs of a morning, but walked out of his bedroom window and descended in a leisurely manner through the air. As no one else in his world was endowed with this particular faculty, it naturally gave Pell an immense advantage,—which was quite right, or why have a private world?

He now conceived a masterly move. He would leave his followers in safety and stroll out on this shining highway to reconnoiter. True, the enemy might shoot from the opposite bank, but Captain Pell was careless of danger and knew the value of surprise. Much more likely the enemy would be demoralized by such an amazing sight and flee for its life.

He cast a wary look about him, saw no one and emerged cautiously at the river-edge. The shining roadway, alas, was several feet below him and even by sitting on the bank, an undignified proceeding, he could not hope to reach it. He would have to go down to the landing-stage. There was no other way.

"Now then, you young fool, what are you doing?"

Pell, with a foot actually touching the surface of the water, was rudely recalled from his imaginary journey by Elliott's voice.

"I'm not doing anything," he muttered.

"Well, come away from there! I have no time to fish you out of the river. And look at your shoes—a pretty mess they're in. Off with you," ordered Elliott.

His tone was peremptory but Pell felt no surprise at that. Vaguely he supposed it to be a matter of size. People were always chivvying you about and it wasn't fair. Just wait till he grew up!

Pell meant to be at least nine feet high, taller than his father, taller even than John, that rather splendid creature, who was liable to give you a cuff or a gift at any moment.

"And just you keep clear of the rhododendrons, young man, or you'll hear something from your father," continued Elliott, unfortunately catching sight of the broken leaves and twigs marking the egress of Captain Pell. "If you must

damage something go over to the backwater and don't let me catch you here again. Clear out now."

Pell went reluctantly and with a bad grace, singing, "Chattle, Chattle won the battle," to hearten his spirits.

Elliott heard the word and supposed it was impudence.

"What's that you said?" he inquired sternly.

"I was only singing."

"Hm, a funny song."

"Yes, I know." Pell had thought it rather a funny song himself, and he was so surprised at Elliott's appreciation that he almost smiled.

"What *is* a chattle?" he asked confidentially.

"Why, let me see. Something that belongs to you. Something you own, I should say."

"Oh!" On the whole Pell found this disappointing. Vaguely he had pictured it as something with horns or at least a tail.

"Would a dog be one?" he asked suddenly.

"Well, hardly. A chair perhaps or—well, shall we say a football? You haven't a dog, surely? I've not seen one about the place."

"Oh no, we haven't *anything*," disclaimed Pell. "But I know a dog."

He made this statement not importantly, but as one returning confidence for confidence, then seemed to regret the impulse and sped off.

"Now don't forget what I told you about the rhododendrons," ordered the gardener, turning away with a faint smile. So far he had seen little of Pell, who kept out of his way, but now the summer holidays were approaching and no doubt the young scamp would be all over the place. Elliott, unaware that Pell's taste for solitude was as great as his own, supposed he would have to take a firm hand with the child or the garden would be a pretty mess, and went off for his broom to clear up the twigs and rubbish.

Pell made for the backwater, not because the gardener had ordered him there, but because it was necessary to keep an eye on the rhododendrons and await a favorable moment to remove his treasures. The enemy was on his track, was he? Very well then, Captain Pell would establish his headquarters elsewhere.

Not here, however, he was determined about that. Beside the backwater was a wilderness of brambles and bracken shadowed by tall trees from the Ashes' garden, which also cut off effectually the view up the river. Why, you could not see the fairway, or even the lock lifting up the steamers on its shoulders and then pouring a cataract of water out of its mouth with a triumphant roar. You could not watch the punts going by and annoy the occupants. You could, in fact, see and do nothing interesting whatever.

Pell, to prove it, lay down flat and squirmed his way through the underbrush to the edge of the water, sniffing the scent of damp earth and crushed leaves with surprise. Rather decent it smelt, and the bracken was cool and pleasant against his knees. Not so the blackberry trails, which bit and scratched so that he sighed for his trusty blade to hack them away.

He was through at last, however, just as two swans, very white and magnificent, sailed grandly in from the reach, followed at a respectful distance by a cygnet whose gray fluff was beginning to grow into little feathers.

Pell, who was on hissing terms with all the swans on the river, hailed the party, and the foremost swan, expecting food, darted forward, then snapped indignantly at being offered only a blackberry leaf.

The cygnet rushed in too, and pecked the leaf, but was immediately set upon by his elders so that he fled in dismay. They had brought him up from birth and were now determined to be rid of him. He would have to fend for himself henceforth, but he was slow to understand this harsh decree and followed them wistfully, submitting to their blows with bewildered surprise.

Pell watched this domestic drama with intense partisan sympathy but no astonishment. The cygnet hadn't done a thing and there they were chivvying and chivvying him!

"Never you mind, Pernambuco," he said. "They're pigs."

CHAPTER FOUR

A DOMESTIC CRISIS

1

THREE people, Kay, John, and the eldest and worst Miss Peebles, contributed t the crisis about Scotland, two at least of them being innocent in intention.

Kay, whose luggage had been sent on from Oxford while she went to Sussex with Dolly Chester for a week or two, suddenly wrote to Winifred that she would not be at Redgates until the beginning of August as she had undertaken to pilot two schoolgirls home to Vienna.

She had seen the advertisement in *The Times* and answered it out of devilry, Dolly contributing an effusive testimonial on her mother's best stationery.

No doubt because the address looked imposing and above suspicion, she got the job, much to her astonishment and delight, but she did not say anything of this to her mother.

She wrote: "I shall earn enough for a new frock out of it, and by the time this reaches you I shall be on the way, so *you* can't be held responsible. I thought if I wrote and consulted you first father might raise objections."

'Funny old Kay,' thought Winifred. 'Well, I suppose she will find it amusing, and as long as she gets home by the beginning of August I don't mind.' She was astonished at the girl's blunt reference to her father. It just went to show, she thought, how unreasonable he had grown if Kay, so seldom at home, had noticed it. And with a vague idea of shielding Kay she said nothing to James of the Vienna trip at the time.

John's contribution to the crisis hit Winifred in a more vulnerable spot, for he came home one evening after a week-end visit, announcing that he was engaged to be married.

Evelyn Fortescue was the daughter of his chief, so from the material point of view there was nothing to be said against the match. Not that these considerations had influenced John, who was very much in love. Winifred saw that at a glance. There had been girls on his horizon several times before, but these he had brought to the house, talked about with enthusiasm, taken out continually, and then ceased to see, after the manner of his kind. His very silence about Evelyn until now told his mother that this time it was serious, and she was filled with dismay. It was not merely that in a year—for they were not to be married before—John, her favorite, would be lost to her. Winifred was no fool and had always known that day must come. It was the present loss as well. From now on he would be absorbed in the girl, it was only natural; he as companion, audience, escort when she needed one, and even his small car which she had fallen into the habit of using all the week, would no longer be at her service.

“You’ll come up to town tomorrow and meet her, won’t you?” begged John. “I thought we’d have a lunch to celebrate—just the three of us. Later I’ll bring her down to meet the family, but naturally she’s scared to death and the first impression is so important. Once she has seen you it will be all right.”

“Don’t you be so sure,” said Winifred. “I may turn into the traditional mother-in-law before your eyes.”

She acted the part on the spot to entertain him and perhaps to cheer herself a little and then said:

“You had better stop fooling and go and tell your father, hadn’t you?”

“Oh, I say, must I? ... I mean, couldn’t you drop him a hint or something?” exclaimed John.

“Certainly not. It isn’t my wedding, you great donkey ... or his. What is there to be afraid of?”

“No—of course not. All right, perhaps I had better get it over,” agreed John with a sigh. All this aftermath of breaking the news was such tommyrot, he thought. In a sane world people would marry first and tell afterwards.

He was not afraid of telling his father, from whom he needed nothing luckily, being independent in a modest way; he was merely embarrassed, but Winifred took his reluctance for dread, and saw in that another evidence of James’s domineering ways. First Kay, now John!

She had not by any means given in to him about Scotland, but had written Molly Ferguson that James was not quite certain when he could get away. Mrs. Ferguson had replied: “Come when you can then, but the sooner the better. Just send a wire so that we can meet the train.” Winifred did not really despair of bringing James round if she waited for a favorable moment. Once she would have been certain, but of late, since John had been old enough and available to take her out, she had come to depend less and less upon her husband for companionship, giving in far too easily, she decided, to his absorption in business and dislike of social occasions. This had been a great mistake, but now that John was to be taken from her, James would have to turn over a new leaf and think of her a little more.

‘I’m still a young woman,’ she thought, ‘and other people find me attractive. I’ve always considered him and now it’s time he considered me.’

With the news of the engagement filling their minds it seemed useless to reopen the question that evening, however, and next morning there was no opportunity. In due course she went up to town wearing her prettiest frock,

met and charmed Evelyn Fortescue, as her son expected, and later carried the girl off to her club for an hour or two, where she could talk about John.

Throughout the day she was at her gayest and best, but for once it was at a price, and she returned home tired and out of spirits.

'I must be run down,' she thought, 'I'm never like this. I must talk to James about Scotland tonight and get the matter settled.'

John, who was taking Evelyn to a dance, had arranged to spend the night in town and for once she was relieved, as it would give her a good opportunity to talk to his father.

Unfortunately, the eldest Miss Peebles, meeting James as he got out of the train and walking home with him, talked first, and at dinner, immediately after Beatrice had left the room, he began:

"Upon my soul, Winifred, the women of this community seem to have very little to do. I should have thought in these times they could find some useful work instead of gossiping about their neighbors."

"My poor lamb, do you think the times have anything to do with it?" said Winifred pityingly. She felt nearer to her James this evening than she had felt for a long time, and she spoke with a smile. "There'll be gossips of both sexes at the Day of Judgment. They'll criticize the hang of the haloes and say it's scandalous So-and-So wasn't sent to Hell."

"Yes, that's all very amusing, I dare say," said James impatiently, "but in the meantime I wish they'd mind their own business instead of ours. Miss Peebles walked with me from the train and said it was all over the place that we were off to Scotland. I told her that she had been misinformed and that she could say I said so."

Winifred stared at him.

"You told her *what*?"

"That she had been misinformed."

"In other words," exclaimed Winifred, dangerously quiet, "that your wife was a liar."

"Oh, come now, Winifred, that's nonsense. When Miss Peebles explained that you had said so at the bridge-club, I said no doubt you had when the plan was first mooted, but since then you had talked it over with me and I had told you it was out of the question this summer. There's nothing in that."

"Nothing? Nothing that that spiteful old woman should go round saying in her insinuating voice: 'Oh, you can't believe that flighty Mrs. Flete. No doubt

she wanted to go to Scotland, but her husband put his foot down like a sensible man. He told me so himself.' Do you call that nothing?" exclaimed Winifred, beside herself with indignation. "I can tell you this, James, if you don't come to Scotland this August after that I shall never forgive you."

"But, my dear girl, I have already told you it was quite impossible."

"Oh yes, you've told me, just as you've told me it was impossible to go out in the evening or to take me to a theater occasionally." Winifred, naturally an even-tempered person, was more angry than she had been for years. Coming on top of the nervous fatigue of the day this seemed more than she could bear, and the insensibility of James and the triumph of Miss Peebles were magnified out of all proportion. "All my life I've considered you and your comfort and made the best of things, and this is what I get for it," she said. "For six months I've been little better than a nursemaid to Pell, for instance, and now when I'm worn out and have the chance of a change and rest, you raise all sorts of senseless obstacles. The fact is, I've given in to you too much and you've become a perfect bully. Why, even the children feel it. There's Kay going off to Vienna without a word because she was sure if she mentioned it you'd raise objections. And John last night—almost afraid to come and tell you he's engaged to be married—"

"What's that you say about Kay?" interrupted James.

"I said she'd gone to Vienna. Here has the child been working hard at Oxford for years, at no expense to you either since she had her scholarship, and surely she might expect a little trip abroad if she wanted it—from any reasonable father ..."

"Yes, yes, yes, but suppose you leave my shortcomings out of it for a moment and answer my question. Why has Kay gone to Vienna? What is the meaning of it? With whom has she gone?" thundered James.

His wife stared at him.

"With whom? How should I know? Two children whom she has been engaged to take home to their parents. Do you imagine she has gone off with some man? Really, James, you grow positively Victorian."

"Then why should Kay imagine I would prevent her taking this journey if there's no harm in it? I don't understand."

"Because that's the kind of father you seem to your children, I suppose," retorted his wife. "I hadn't intended to tell you about Kay, but you made me so angry ... and that's the kind of man you seem to me too. If Kay has noticed your unreasonable ways when she is only at home a few weeks in the year,

how do you suppose it seems to me who have to endure it all the time? But no longer, James. There has got to be a change, and first and foremost I tell you plainly I will not be humiliated before that scandalmongering old woman. You must make it convenient to take me to Scotland."

"It is utterly out of the question."

"Very well then." Winifred threw down her napkin and got up from the table, her eyes ablaze, "you can take the consequences. Don't say I didn't warn you, and we'll see what your dear friend Miss Peebles has to say to that."

2

James Flete, left alone, looked at his food with distaste and presently rang the bell. He was unused to scenes and felt embarrassed and rather helpless, but at least there was no reason to let the servants know.

"Your mistress is not very well, Beatrice, and has gone to lie down. It was too hot for her in town today," he said by way of explanation.

Beatrice cleared away and served the courses, and he made a pretense of eating but it was nothing more than a pretense. He was like a man who has been living in a fool's paradise, suddenly awake at last and unable to adjust himself to reality. He had believed himself fortunate as men go, with a comfortable and happy home and contented, well-conducted children. He thought of Bridges losing his only son six months ago, and then the child's mother, unbalanced by grief, running up fantastic bills which the poor chap could not hope to pay.

Bridges had come to him utterly broken, ruin staring him in the face, a young family to think of and his wife threatened with mental collapse. James Flete had found the money for him at a sacrifice, the bills had been met, specialists consulted, and Bridges had been given three months' leave and sent off with his wife to the country. How could he have done less for a man who had served him faithfully for twenty years? Bridges, moreover, was a valuable man, trustworthy and shrewd. His absence at a time when all business was precarious made it absolutely necessary for James himself to be on the spot.

It was not his habit to discuss the firm with his wife, and it had not occurred to him to explain all this to Winifred and enlist her sympathy for Bridges. He did not know that during the last years of struggle against bad times he had almost ceased to notice his wife as an individual other than as

part of the family for whose comfort and well-being he was responsible, and now he was bewildered by her stormy outburst and her amazing accusations.

This—after twenty-five years of happy marriage—for surely it had been happy? For a moment he almost recaptured the old humility, the old anxious ardor of those early days when her loveliness had seemed almost too great a prize for his clumsy hands to hold, but the moment passed. Why, there was hardly a quarrel to remember in all those years. Once when Pell was coming she had been angry, had stormed and said it was too much, but that was her state of health and understandable. She had never had, thank God, the modern attitude to children as something to be avoided, not out of prudence, which was sane enough, but as spoilers of fun.

He thought of the interview last night with his son—what was it Winifred had said?—the boy was almost afraid to tell him. Rubbish! John had been as composed as an old man of the world. James had endeavored to talk to him about the responsibility he was taking on. "It isn't only now, you know, John, but later, when children come."

"Oh, we shan't have children at present," John had returned calmly. "Evelyn and I are agreed about that absolutely. In ten years perhaps, but first I want her to have a little fun."

There they were, talking it over the moment they were engaged if not indeed before, and if their lack of reticence were merely a phase and unimportant, what of the selfishness?

Rosamond too—four years married.

"And that's what we work for," thought James Flete.

He left the table and went moodily down the garden, trying to see with a dispassionate eye this home he had made by so many years of arduous work. It was the still hour before twilight and the sun had fallen behind the woods. The brilliant colors of the day were muted to a kindlier harmony, and trees and grass looked darkly green. The many-windowed, rambling house had been much smaller once, but he had built on to it from time to time and he remembered those occasions now, the anxious planning to fit in extra bathrooms and bedrooms for the children, to make the servants' quarters more attractive because maids were hard to keep in this quiet place, the matching of the stone and the careful training of the Virginia creepers so that the contour of the house should not be spoiled. Now it had grown into a friendly whole and the extra ground for kitchen garden and tennis court which was a later acquisition gave it a spacious setting. Surely as pleasant a home as any family

could desire, nor had he denied them anything in reason, and yet they thought him a bully, were almost, their mother said, afraid of him.

He thought of his children whom he had believed fortunate beyond the common run of young people in these days—John already settled in his profession; pretty Rosamond, full of high spirits and married to a decent if not brilliant lad; Kay working away at college, and little Pell. Only the last had caused him anxious thought, so changing and uncertain was the future world for which he must be prepared. But Kay—going off to Vienna secretly because she believed he would object? Winifred's involuntary betrayal had stung and bewildered James more than all the rest, for he had been surprised and pleased at the winning of that scholarship years ago by this least-known of his children. Because it had been accomplished quietly and without pressure from any one it had given him a sense of stability in the girl. Some vague and recent picture of Kay came back to him which he could not place at once. Then he remembered. That night poor Bridges had come down to talk over his troubles ... he had gone with him to the gate and, walking back, had seen the blaze of lights in the empty drawing-room, which had not after all been empty. Kay standing in the firelight and saying jauntily about the lights: "My fault. I always like an illumination."

"Not much dread about that young woman," thought her father, frowning. "Defiance possibly—insolence for all I know. But dread? Rubbish! Winifred's dreaming.... She's not well. It's nothing more than that."

When a woman speaks her mind to a man he usually finds balm in this outworn conclusion sooner or later.

James went indoors to his books, convinced that she would be better in the morning.

3

Winifred did not appear at breakfast, however; as he went downstairs he met Beatrice carrying a tray to her room. Later he knocked at the door, but receiving no answer, went off to his train with a shrug. Nevertheless, the scene of the night before returned at intervals to trouble him all day. He was sorry to disappoint her about Scotland but tonight he would suggest a compromise. As soon as Bridges was back in harness they would go off somewhere ... to Paris perhaps. All women liked Paris and he was a fool not to have thought of this suggestion before. Winifred was naturally sweet-tempered, she was not a woman who harbored a grievance fortunately, and no doubt this engagement had upset her a little. Mother and son ... it was natural enough, and there had always been a special bond between those two.

James went home at last in a mood of anxious propitiation and found a silent house.

“Is your mistress out?” he asked Beatrice.

“Oh, she’s gone, sir.”

“Gone? What do you mean—gone where?” His tone was sharp.

“She’s gone to Scotland, sir.”

“But this is very sudden surely.” James became aware of the girl’s face, interested but discreet. “Your mistress did not intend to go until next week, I understood, but no doubt she had a letter this morning and changed her plans. Did she leave any word for me?”

“No, sir. She said we were to take our orders from you and that Miss Kay would be home in a day or two.”

“Ah! Then no doubt she rang me at my office when she got up to town,” said her master as an inspiration. “Most annoying that I should have been away at a meeting. Very well, Beatrice, I shall hear in the morning certainly. She’s very wise to have taken advantage of the fine weather and the change will do her good.”

“Yes, sir,” said Beatrice with an impassive face and, at a nod of dismissal, departed.

James sat down heavily and tried to face this new and altogether amazing development. He was angry and completely wretched. She had gone off like this without a word, putting him into an odious position, humiliating him before the children and before the servants.

Some echo of familiarity in this phrase stirred his mind and he sought for the context confusedly ... something Winifred had said last night. Yes, yes, of course: “I will not be humiliated before that scandalmongering old woman...” As if he had dreamt of such a thing or intended it! And then: “You can take the consequences, we’ll see what your friend Miss Peebles will make of that.”

So she had done it deliberately, taking a mean and unjustifiable revenge for something which he had never intended to do. James cared nothing for Miss Peebles or any of the other gossiping women, the blow Winifred had dealt was nearer home, and he was bitterly hurt. The children of course would be in her confidence—John, Rosamond—Kay too, as soon as she came home. No doubt they talked him over. Hearing John come in some time later, he flung open the door and beckoned him into the library.

“I suppose you know all about this latest caprice of your mother’s!” he said sharply.

His son stared at him in evident indignation.

“I didn’t know she was given to caprices. I should think that it is the last word any one would use to describe mother,” he said dryly.

“Don’t cavil,” snapped his father, “and don’t use that tone to me. I won’t have it.”

“What on earth is the matter!”

“Matter enough. I come home this evening and find your mother has gone to Scotland without so much as a word to me. Are you or are you not aware of this?”

“Gone to Scotland today? But there must be some reason.... She wouldn’t suddenly go off like that.... She didn’t say anything to me, though I knew she was keen about accepting the Fergusons’ invitation. Perhaps she’s had a wire or something and rushed off, but there’ll be a note somewhere. Certain to be. Have you looked?”

“The girl said there was no message,” said his father heavily.

“Well, let me have a look.”

John departed, but presently returned with empty hands.

“Can’t find a trace of one. We’d better call Beatrice and see if she had a telegram. There must be some explanation.”

“No, no.” James Flete turned from the window out which he had been gazing and faced his son, looking acutely embarrassed. “Don’t let us bring the servants into it,” he said. “Your mother is unjustifiably annoyed with me because I was quite unable to accept the Fergusons’ invitation. I have Bridges away with a sick wife.”

“Oh, really? Awkward for you,” said John.

“Very. I’ve had to give him three months’ leave, but women naturally don’t understand that a business cannot be left at will, particularly in times like these. Things are bad enough,” said his father with a bleak smile, “goodness knows.... In short, we had words on the subject last night. Your mother was upset and I suppose I was not as tactful as I might have been, and she has taken this way of showing her displeasure. I am left with the household on my hands as well as the business—to say nothing of Pell. When’s your sister coming home? Perhaps you can tell me that, as there

seems to be a general conspiracy to keep me in the dark about the movements of my family."

"Kay? I have no idea ... any day now, I believe."

At this moment the telephone rang and, after a glance at his father, John went to answer it.

Winifred's voice greeted him over the wire.

"John darling, I tried to get you at the office but you had gone."

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Just off to Scotland. I'm at the station."

"Sudden, aren't you?"

"I know. I love being sudden," said Winifred gayly. "I only wanted to tell you I think your Evelyn's a peach. You may tell her so from me. By-bye, darling, I must fly."

John hung up the receiver and turned back to his father who had come halfway to the library door.

"It was mother ringing from the station."

"What did she say?"

"Only that she was off to Scotland—and that she thought Evelyn charming. She sounded very cheerful."

If this was offered in consolation it was not successful.

"Hm," said his father bitterly, and turned away upstairs.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOMEBODY MUST

1

JOHN, though he was amused at Winifred's tactics, could not help feeling a certain male sympathy with his father and some private discomfort at the situation.

After all, the household and Pell were his mother's province; the servants must sense that something was up, and next thing no doubt the whole neighborhood would be gossiping. Pell was the real problem. If she had taken Pell to Scotland, or if Nannie had been still with them, or Kay at home, there would be nothing in it, from outside at least ... or if Rosamond could be persuaded to come down for a day or two.

John went round to see his sister next day, but Rosamond neither could or would do anything.

"If father has been beastly to mother I'm dashed if I'll help him out," declared Rosamond righteously. "Serve him right."

"Yes, but we don't want the whole place talking, Rosey."

"But what can I do? We're going to a show tonight, and tomorrow people are coming to dinner, and Dick and I go off to Devonshire next week for his holidays."

"Couldn't you have Pell till you go then, or until Kay turns up?"

"My poor lamb, getting engaged has turned your brain," said Rosamond pityingly. "What could I do with Pell? I've nowhere to put him even, and besides I have to think of Dick. Nice he'd feel to come home from his day's toil and find the flat turned into an orphanage."

John gave it up. He could not ask Evelyn to have the child; to involve her in a family squabble at the very moment of their engagement was out of the question. The Fortescues were going off this week to their bungalow on the coast, and he was to join them for week-ends and for his holiday from the office later in the month.

He had arranged to take Evelyn out that evening, so his hands, more legitimately than Rosamond's he felt, were tied. For what after all was there that he could do?

It was a considerable relief to John next morning, turning over his mother's letters on the hall table, to find a postcard in Kay's handwriting. It was dated from Paris and said: "Home on Thursday, probably by the early train. Love. Kay."

He wondered whether his father knew this. At breakfast the head of the house had sat in gloomy silence behind his *Times*. He would not of course discuss the situation before young Pell, even if he proposed to discuss it any

further at all, and John thought he was the kind of man to leave his wife's letters undisturbed all the more scrupulously because of this break between them.

He managed to overtake his father on the way to the train, and remarked casually:

"I see there's a card from Kay saying she gets in this afternoon."

"Oh, she does?" James Flete looked uneasily at his son. "I suppose somebody ought to meet the train then. There'll be luggage, won't there?" he said. They would talk him over, of course, he couldn't prevent it. Kay's coming, though a relief in one sense, was an embarrassment in another.

"Shall I run down to Victoria?" suggested John. There was no real need to meet the train, but they could hardly let Kay walk into the situation blind, he supposed. "I imagine you don't want to be bothered, do you? ... and besides it might give her a bit of a fright."

This was an unfortunate phrase in the circumstances.

"Indeed? This sudden terror of me on the part of my children is interesting, if incomprehensible," said James Flete at his driest.

"I didn't mean fright in that sense," said John easily. "But if you turned up at the train she'd think something was wrong—well, somebody was ill perhaps."

"Oh, yes, perhaps you are right," said his father bitterly. "Then go by all means and reassure your sister."

Kay, unused to such brotherly attentions, merely wondered when she saw John some hours later what he was doing on Victoria station.

"Hullo, are you meeting some one?" she asked gayly.

"You, dear one. Who else?"

"Really? But what an honor! I am overwhelmed," returned Kay, bowing hand on heart. "No use looking round for my suitcase because I registered it."

"Done yourself well all round, in fact," said John. "You've had a good time apparently."

Kay had. Her young charges had been so full of praise for their unusually human cicerone that she had been invited to stay on in Vienna for a month, or even the whole summer, and her kindly hosts had not guessed that they had confided their offspring to the care of a minx who had never before crossed the English Channel.

“For why distress them?” said Kay to John; “and besides I couldn’t give Dolly away. Her testimonial was so eloquent about my knowledge of European travel. I gave myself three days in Paris on the way back for educational purposes.”

“Stayed at the Ritz, no doubt,” suggested John with satire.

“No, at the Y.W.C.A.,” returned Kay in the same spirit.

John, as she strode blithely beside him down the platform, saw her for a moment almost with a stranger’s eyes and a stranger’s dispassionate interest, and it amused him to realize that that completely ordinary being, one’s sister, was probably something more than a likeable enough young woman, cut on the recognized pattern of the moment, that she had her own secret purposes, even perhaps her own dismays and hesitations, which she confided to none. The expedition to Vienna had sent Kay up in John’s estimation, because she had found this job and carried it through off her own bat. She had earned the expenses of the trip and probably something more, and that at the end of her last term at college, which would have been pretty grueling if he knew anything about it. Now she had come back probably with all sorts of plans for the holiday she deserved, and here they were depending upon her to give up all that in order to look after Pell and ease the situation at home. It seemed a little too bad.

“We’d better get your luggage and then go and have tea somewhere,” he said with a frown.

“Oh no, you don’t,” returned Kay, grinning. “I’ll tackle the Customs myself, thank you, when you’ve gone. You may cramp my style.”

“Young criminal. A spot of smuggling, I suppose. What do I get out of the loot? If you want my silence, woman, I don’t mind telling you it comes pretty high.”

“I’ve brought you a birthday present to give me,” she retorted, “beach-pajamas,—awfully sporty and fast.”

“Well, of all the dam’ cheek! You won’t have a birthday for another seven months.”

“Ah, but I have them twice a year now. It’s the new fashion, haven’t you heard? The first one puts on a year and the second takes it off again. That’s what you call the Higher Mathematics.”

They had come through the gates and Kay paused and looked at her brother.

“Well, this is where I leave you, I suppose,” she remarked. “Thanks awfully for coming down and all that.”

She was turning away and John caught her arm.

“No, hold on, Kay. We’ll go into the refreshment room for some tea, if you don’t mind. There’s something I want to tell you before you go home. As a matter of fact ... mother’s gone away.”

“What!” exclaimed the girl, her face suddenly white.

“Gone where? What do you mean?”

“She’s gone up to Scotland. It’s all right ... nothing to be alarmed about. I seem to have given you a fright.”

She nodded.

“It was your being here to meet me ... I thought something awful had happened, and you were trying to break it gently,” she said with a rather poor attempt at a smile.

“Oh, lord, no.” John with compunction led the way to the restaurant and pushed open the door. “Mother is as right as rain, but as a matter of fact, there is a bit of an upset, and that’s what I wanted to tell you.”

He explained the position briefly, adding: “It’s only a storm in a teacup and will soon blow over, but in the meantime.... Well, I know it’s a bit thick when you may have all sorts of plans of your own, but we are more or less depending on you to be at home and look after young Pell.”

“Oh,” said Kay, staring at her plate. “Yes, of course.... Somebody must.”

Then she sat up suddenly and beckoned a waitress.

“Bring us two cups of cold poison, will you?” she said.

2

When John had left her Kay retrieved her suitcase from the Customs, took the Tube to Waterloo and then the train for Crediton, but she did all these things mechanically. For eight years she had never until now approached a home-coming without misgiving, but this time as though that old fright had died out of her at last, she had had no thought of trouble, and this gave her a confused sense of guilt, as though her fear had been an insurance against disaster, and she had forgotten to pay the fee. Where John and Rosamond, true children of their mother, took her departure lightly, sure she would soon return, Kay had no such certainty and it seemed to her that the bottom had

fallen out of her world. John had said it was a storm in a teacup and would blow over, but how did he know and what did he really think? She had not been able to ask him that, John and she were at once too near and too far.

Kay had never shared the easy understanding which existed between John and Rosamond. The youngest, she was naturally the odd one of the trio, removed from them not only by age but by temperament, and the questions she had wanted to ask her brother this afternoon had been quite impossible for her to compass.

Suppose it was not after all a storm in a teacup, what would happen then? Suppose her mother, having gone away, refused to come back, and there was a separation, or even a divorce? Kay saw with horrified eyes the home broken up, the family divided—no, not that exactly, for they would side with their mother naturally ... all except Pell, who would have no say. Perhaps their father would take Pell because he was a boy ... wasn't there some rule about that? But it would be monstrous, for whatever had happened must have been her father's fault. Her mother was the most sweet-tempered person in the world, she would never have run off like that for nothing at all, and her father always had been difficult and obstinate.

Besides, they only had his version of what had happened; her mother had not said a word.

"And I have to go home and be civil to him," thought Kay, indignation getting the better of her misery.

She did not dispute the necessity, however. At least until they heard from her mother somebody must look after Pell, but she felt herself already a buffer between contending forces, and knew that all her inclination and all her loyalty lay on one side.

She had meant to walk from the station, leaving her suitcase to be sent on, but her knees were shaking so much that she took a taxi instead. It would be something to get home before her father and change her frock and compose her mind.

It seemed strange to her that the house should look just as of old, and that Beatrice should open the door with her usual smile and her invariable greeting:

"It's nice to see you back, miss."

"We've been that quiet the past few days with the mistress away," proceeded Beatrice, carrying her suitcase upstairs, "you wouldn't hardly think it was the same place."

“And of course it isn’t,” thought Kay with a catch at her heart, while at every step familiar things called to her like friends to disprove it—the glow of late afternoon coming in through the open landing window, the short gold curtains stirring in the breeze, the old carved chair, which even today held a tennis racquet as though some one had just thrown it down to take it up again in a moment.

“The mistress said you’d be home any day now, miss, so your room’s all ready. And it’s for good this time, isn’t it?” said Beatrice, putting down the suitcase and speaking in a tone of congratulation.

“Yes,” said Kay, and somehow summoned a smile.

On the landing above presently the clatter of china suggested that Pell must be having his supper in the schoolroom, and she threw off her hat and ran upstairs to see.

“Hullo, Pell!”

Pell, who was busy with a plate of pears and custard, returned her greeting with more caution than enthusiasm, his spoon in mid-air.

“I’ve come home to look after you until mother comes back.”

Pell had heard this before and did not think much of the news. People were always looking after him, and privately he preferred the vigilance of Beatrice, if he had to have any at all, because it did not run to too many petty details about table manners and the perpetual washing of hands.

With one eye on his visitor he filled his spoon and put it into his mouth end on, watching her experimentally.

“Looks rather good,” remarked Kay.

At this moment Beatrice came in to see how her charge was progressing and to bring him his glass of milk.

“He’s that thin since his measles, miss,” explained Beatrice, “and so tall. You’ll be surprised.”

“They weren’t *my* measles,” said Pell darkly to that.

“Never mind, you tell your sister about the fine sail you had this afternoon in Mr. Ashe’s boat, Master Pell.”

“Really?” Kay looked surprised and pleased.

“Well, he invited me,” said the little boy in quick defense of the probable question: “Now, Pell, I hope you didn’t ask.”

“Derek invited me. He said: ‘Hullo, Pell, what about a turn up to the lock and back?’ ”

“I dare say he wanted somebody to steer for him,” suggested Kay.

“I did steer too. I steered ... and steered ... and steered,” said Pell nonchalantly, punctuating each word with an ear-splitting scrape of the spoon on his plate. And suddenly the two youngest Fletes were gazing at each other, an impish grin on one face and a delighted smile on the other.

“How perfectly ridiculous,” thought Kay. “*I* used to do that.”

The incident went no further, however, for when Pell quickly withdrew himself into his glass of milk as though conscious of having been more affable than he had intended, they were at least sufficiently alike for Kay to stroll off and leave him with a casual nod of good-by.

She went back to her room and slowly began to unpack her suitcase. She had a present for Pell and she took it out, examining it a little anxiously for the first time. Would he think it too childish and receive it with secret scorn? Probably he had done with mechanical cars, but this one had amused her because it had a real Klaxon and electric headlights to switch off and on. She had given the Customs officer at Victoria a demonstration, after which he had ignored the beach-pajamas politely, asking just for the look of the thing a few questions about silk stockings which were not new, and scent, of which she had none.

Suddenly, as she stood smiling at this recollection, Kay heard voices in the hall below and ran to her door, then closed it in a hurry. Her father had come home, he was walking upstairs, and the gong below sounded its usual warning —dinner in half an hour.

The girl began to dress with a heavy heart. The beach-pajamas lying on her bed no longer pleased her, except for a moment when she felt inclined to put them on and go down in them defiantly to annoy her father. She had not the spirit for this, however, so put on a frock instead and then stood waiting miserably until she heard him pass her door and descend the stairs. John had offered to get home for dinner to support her if she really wanted him, but Kay had said it didn’t matter, not from any noble impulse of unselfishness, though she had been told of his engagement, but because nothing mattered just then so much as that she should be alone. Now she regretted it. John’s presence, anybody’s presence, would have been a relief. On the last note of the second gong she slowly left her room, then, seeing Beatrice in the hall below, ran back as though she had forgotten something, banging the door and beginning the journey again, quickly this time, like any other daughter just returned from

travel going down to greet her father. Pretending she was eager to see him ... that was what it was going to be now, pretending all the time, because of the servants, because of outsiders, because it might really be only a storm in a teacup, and how was she to know?

3

James Flete, waiting in the dining-room with an air of impatience, was perhaps pretending too, though he would not have admitted it so readily even to himself.

Bitterly throughout the day he had pictured the meeting of his children at Victoria Station, John and Kay, and their sister Rosamond too, no doubt, discussing the situation in the manner of their generation with slangy, indignant phrases, upholding their mother and abusing him of whom they chose to stand in such unjustified alarm. Very well then, he decided, if that was how they saw him, he would live up to their expectations. He would meet them in future coldly and sternly, or better still, with sarcasm. It was quite enough that Winifred had put him in this odious position, without any insolence from them. As for the girl and her trip to Vienna, of which she had not chosen that he should be informed, he would ignore her expedition, since that was how she felt about it, and simply tell her that now she had condescended to come home, he expected her to take charge of her little brother and order the house.

Yet as Kay opened the door and came in at last something about the thin young body in an almost shabby frock, and the pale, still rather immature face under short dark hair, defeated this purpose and obscured the hurt she had unwittingly dealt him. This one of his children had asked little of him and had given much. She had done well at Oxford and he had been proud of that, but obscurely he realized that perhaps he had not made this clear. And now she had returned from a tiring journey to discomfort and embarrassment. Whatever she thought of him, it must be that.

“Well, Kay,” he found himself saying with an awkward attempt at a smile, “you’ve got back from your travels safely?”

“Yes,” said Kay, sitting down quickly in her chair, and trying to look as though this were the natural way to greet your father after an absence of three months.

If he noticed this he gave no sign, however, and as Beatrice came in to serve the meal, he remarked:

"You must tell me about Vienna by and by when you've got over your journey. Dear me, it must be twenty years or more since I was there."

Kay looked at her father in surprise. He was murmuring the names of this *strasse* and the other, recalling them as one to whom German had once been a familiar tongue.

"I didn't know you had ever been there," she said.

"Long ago," he replied. "As a young man I had twelve months in Vienna and six in Paris and Berlin. The firm had a branch in Austria, but that was before the War, in your grandfather's lifetime. Why, don't you remember Lisabetta, Kay? But no, you would have been too young. She was an Austrian nursery governess we had ... we meant you children to learn French and German as you learned English—naturally you see—but the War stopped all that."

"Really? I remember Mademoiselle, of course," said Kay.

"Ah, yes. Not quite a success, was she? That finished the experiment once and for all. But Lisabetta was long before Mademoiselle. She was with us, poor child, at the outbreak of war."

"Then I suppose you had to send her away?"

"Your grandfather went to the Austrian Ambassador, who agreed to take her home with his party. ... We saw her off, I remember, your mother and I. She wasn't much more than a child."

James Flete was back in the cavern-like semi-darkness of Paddington Station at midnight of a Sunday in August nineteen years before. That picture—the long train which was being dispatched to some port unspecified, the anxious, friendly faces of the travelers who had been turned into enemies overnight, but departed with tears and laughter and protestations of affection, the cheers of their "foes" as the train drew out, gave him at this distance an almost sharper sense than any other memory of the peculiar idiocy of war.

He found himself describing the scene to Kay, describing the girl of another country and another generation, yet not so different for all that, reluctant to leave her English friends, yet full of excitement—at the pillow and rug brought to her by a smiling porter—at the presents she was taking to her family from Winifred and the children—at the fact that she was traveling in such state, in a destroyer it was rumored, and then perhaps through Italy which she had never seen.

"Yes," said Kay, "that *must* have been a thrill."

So they were started, these two, hostile to each other a moment ago, on an unfamiliar road which perhaps some unsuspected likeness between them made easier than they could have foreseen. Kay had never heard her father talk before. At home he was habitually a silent man, but against the bright background of their vivacious family, she was not so talkative herself.

The thing that surprised her was what his talk revealed.

She had thought of him simply as an ordinary Englishman of his class, going daily to his office in town, and well enough off to have a comfortable home and educate his family, probably insular in his views and knowing no country but his own.

Yet he had lived in Paris, Berlin and Vienna, had known Europe, the old, lavish, splendid Europe, whose poor shadow it had so much excited her to see for a few brief days. To Kay, born on the eve of its disintegration, the period of which he spoke seemed infinitely far away, and almost as glowing and faintly ridiculous as a medieval pageant. The grandfather she could not remember, head of a firm with connections even as far as St. Petersburg—a name already lost in the mists of time—became suddenly a romantic figure, one of the old merchant princes of the past, such as Dutch Masters loved to paint.

There had been Fletes in the City of London for more than a hundred years. James Flete's father had guided the business to its zenith and lived to predict its end. During his last illness, writing of his will to his son fighting in France he had said: "After due provision for your mother, what I possess goes to you and yours, but this War will go on, in spite of the optimists who prate otherwise. By the time the world is on the road to sanity again, the Fletes as a firm will be done. It is because I foresee this so clearly that I have set aside a certain sum for John, who will have to find another way of life than that which we had hoped and planned."

The prediction to a great extent proved just, but not in its entirety. The far-seeing old man had missed, as such men will, the nearer view. Tenacity had made the Fletes, vision had merely brought their fortunes to fruition. James Flete came home from war to build on the ruins of their house through arduous years a newer and more modest "Flete's," with interests nearer home. John in due course used his legacy to take up law, and his father said no word against it. This evening, talking of the old Europe to Kay, and hearing from her a little of the new, it is probable he did not even guess what his old father would have seen at a glance, that Fate had dealt hardly with him in making her a girl.

The meal was over. Kay, with a sigh of relief as at a danger passed, went off in search of Pell. He had gone to bed, or at least begun this lengthy process. Even on these summer evenings, much to his disgust, people of superior size and strength drove him upstairs, but Pell had resources of his own when he got there to fill at least an hour before he could be reasonably called ready for the night.

Kay, with the little car under her arm, knocked at his door but received no answer, except the sound of a good deal of ostentatious splashing in the bathroom beyond. Going in on tiptoe, she left her gift in the middle of his bedroom floor with its headlights turned on, then fled noiselessly downstairs.

Without glancing at the library, but conscious of her father's presence there, she ran out into the garden and down towards the river. Though the subject of her mother's absence had been avoided so far, it still hung between them to embarrass and oppress her, and the strain of so many confusing emotions at the end of a long day had made her more tired than she could have believed. As she went a sudden thought occurred to her which made her pause with a whistle of surprise.

"I could have asked him about the Sorbonne safely after all then."

But in the face of what had happened she saw that it would have been impossible for her to go, and she walked on slowly with a sigh.

"What about a turn to the lock and back?" inquired a familiar voice.

Harold was tied up at the Redgates landing-stage, and his owner was stretched out on board, smoking an after-dinner pipe. Kay did not know how he came to be there and she did not stop to ask but ran down the steps and jumped on board.

"Oh, I'd love it," she said.

To be with Derek at that moment was like waking from a nightmare into a normal world. She had not seen him for a month, but his casual greeting and her reply and the silence after that as he started the engine were perfectly in place.

On the lawn next door old Mr. Peebles was sitting in a basket chair, his daughters hemming him in protectingly. All three were dressed in an amorphous type of garment which they called semi-evening, a useful term for any dress no longer quite modish enough to be worn outside the home. They were always careful to embellish these survivals with a lace scarf, an artificial

flower, or at least some jewelry, for though their income was now greatly reduced they felt it necessary to keep up a show of state for the sake of their aunt at the Palace. This old lady, widow of a long dead Colonial Governor, had one of the Royal suites at Hampton Court, and since she never appeared at Crediton was probably unaware of the influence she exerted upon her relatives. The ribald suspected that she bullied and made use of them, for one or other of the sisters was always hurrying off to the Palace, and no invitation could be accepted without the provision: "Unless of course my aunt should need me. You do understand, don't you? Since His Excellency's death she has not enjoyed very good health."

The last phrase was used by the sisters as an exclusive family possession. Other people they described as "ailing," "looking poorly," or "wearing well." They and theirs alone enjoyed or did not enjoy good health. It was a popular game among their neighbors to lay traps for them in order to break the habit, and Major Ashe in one of his jovial moments had even offered a prize to the successful candidate who induced a Miss Peebles to admit that she was simply well or ill, but it had never been won.

As the little motor-boat left the Fletes' landing-stage all three sisters bent forward to peer short-sightedly at the occupants, their scarves and laces fluttering about them.

Derek Ashe grinned at his passenger.

"The Furies, as your mother calls them! I told her it was flattery. More like the three blind mice."

Kay could not rise to interest in the Peebles just then and merely nodded.

"Mother's away," she remarked.

"Oh! I knew that before you."

"I dare say you did," said Kay quickly.

"But you don't ask me why. I drove her to the station on Tuesday."

"Really, Derek, whatever for?"

"The village was en fête, weddings, funerals, and I don't know what. All the taxis were out in disguise, and Jenkins at the garage was so inflated by prosperity that he couldn't promise anything, so I risked being scragged by John and drove her over in his car and brought it back again. She was in great form ... said she'd be talking broad Scots by the time she came home and entertained me with samples all the way."

Kay laughed and for a moment her heart was light again for if her mother had talked of coming home ... but that might have been merely a blind to deceive the neighbors. She sighed and wished it were morning and the postman coming up the drive. Winifred was not a great correspondent, but at a time like this surely she would write—to John if to nobody else.

"I meant to have Dolly down," said the girl presently in obscure apology, "but now I suppose I shall have to put her off a bit ... with mother away and Pell on my hands."

"I shouldn't think that lad would be much on anybody's hands," said Derek. "I saw him cutting about this afternoon and took him out for a bit."

"I know.... And he steered and steered and steered. A pretty marvelous performance."

"Oh, he told you, did he? Funny young beggar, pretty bright, I should think, but not one of the conversational sort. Like you."

"Wouldn't you call me conversational?" inquired Kay, rather astonished.

"Lord no, thank heaven," returned the young man, throwing her a packet of cigarettes and some matches.

Kay lit one thoughtfully.

"You know, Derek," she said at last, "I was hoping Dolly would have asked you down to Sussex too. I threw out as many hints as I could but I suppose she wasn't able to rise."

"Really? Frightfully decent of you," said Derek, not troubling to conceal his pleasure. "You had a pretty good time, I suppose?"

The girl nodded. She described a few of the high lights of the visit for his entertainment, in all of which Dolly figured at her brightest, told him of her friend's hand in the Viennese adventure and then, because a wind had blown up and she had no coat, reluctantly decided it was time to go in.

The twilight was beginning to fade into dusk and here and there a light gleamed. The Peebles' lawn was deserted as Derek set her ashore, and she was therefore startled to hear her name called from the dividing hedge between the two gardens when she was halfway to the house.

Miss Maud Peebles, the second sister, beckoned to her mysteriously, turning her head in an anxious way from time to time as though to see that she was not observed. She was the least unattractive of the sisters and, as though aware of it, used rouge in a discreet and ladylike manner, but being short-sighted she often chose the wrong color, and tonight the bloom on her cheeks

was of that peculiar shade of violet which only a peach-like complexion can successfully sustain. She wore a necklace of amethysts, beautiful of their kind in the right setting, but hopelessly wrong with her brown ninon dress.

"Good evening, dear. So you are back from your studies at last," said Miss Maud. "How nice, and now we shall all have to look to our laurels, I am sure. You must let me talk to you sometimes, for I have always been the intellectual one of our family. My sisters think it so strange of me to admire all these advanced writers like Bernard Shaw, but you see they *interest* me. So does jazz music. Now don't you agree with me that jazz is quite unlike ordinary music? It's so intelligent, I always think."

"Oh, I don't know," said Kay, embarrassed. "It's all right."

"Yes, right. You've put it exactly and how clever of you. But dear me, I mustn't keep you here discussing metaphysics, must I?" said the intellectual Miss Peebles brightly. "I wanted to ask you ... I hope your dear mother is not indisposed. We have not seen her for days."

She had lowered her voice and looked behind her as she spoke, and Kay felt her ears grow hot.

"Oh no, mother's gone up to Scotland," she returned as casually as she knew how.

"What really? She has gone then?" Miss Peebles looked genuinely distressed. "Oh, dear, we shall miss her.... And when do you think she will be back?" This question was asked in a semi-whisper and the girl, with a quick glance at the house, began to back away.

"I don't know exactly. You see I've only just come home. I'm sorry, Miss Maud, but I think my father's looking for me.... Good-night."

It was true that her father had come into view providentially at the moment, but Kay was not sure that Providence had had a hand in this when she found that he was waiting for her and looking rather glum.

"What was that woman saying to you?" he demanded with a frown.

"She asked me where mother was," said Kay, shooting her thunderbolt.

"Good God! These infernal, gossiping fools," exclaimed James Flete. "Why can't they mind their own business?"

"Well, I only told her she had gone to Scotland. They can't go far on that," flashed the girl, looking stormy because she was longing to cry, and ran ahead of him into the house.

Her father went back to his library heavily and sat in the semi-darkness with a sense of defeat. Kay's footsteps had died away upstairs and silence wrapped the house, a silence for which he often longed, but cold and comfortless tonight and laden with disquiet.

These women!

He had the helplessness of the man involved in the idle, senseless jealousies and dislikes of a petty feminine world, of the existence of which he had hardly been aware. If his wife disliked the Peebles with or without reason she had never troubled to inform him of the fact, and while this might have seemed a virtue in Winifred to him in a normal frame of mind, he was still too sore at her treatment of him to take that more reasonable point of view. For that unfortunate walk from the station with the eldest Miss Peebles had been the basis of the whole trouble. If his remarks to her about the proposed visit to Scotland had been ill-advised they had at least been perfectly natural and innocent in intention. So they were able to get away for this delightful holiday? Miss Peebles was quite envious; it was so nice with all this misery and unemployment everywhere, that there were still some among them at least who did not feel the pinch, she had said. Dear Mrs. Flete was such a lucky woman and so on and so forth.

This picture presented by the eldest Miss Peebles of the entire neighborhood looking upon him and his as irresponsible and fortunate, had filled him with justifiable irritation, and he had proceeded to put her right in the matter of Scotland. And how was he to know that she had been mischievously inclined to his wife, since Winifred had given him no hint of ill-feeling in that quarter? But it was quite clear that Kay knew. Her anger of a moment ago left him in no doubt ... unless indeed she had already had the whole story of the dispute from Winifred through her brother and sister.

If that was the explanation and his wife had written her version of the affair to Rosamond and John, enlisting the sympathy of her children against their father, there was nothing that he could do. Women had no sense of ethics in such matters, but he could not bring himself to plead his case with his children. The notion shocked his sense of decency, and it bewildered him to think that he and Winifred had come to this. James Flete loved his wife, even though in the stress and strain of the last few years he had become no longer aware of her in the old passionate sense. If he realized this at all it was as something natural and inevitable to two people with a family already grown. He had never since his marriage looked at another woman or desired one, and he was sufficiently sure of his wife's integrity not to grudge her the admiration of other men. A break between them on such grounds, though infinitely more serious, would at least have been due to some fault of decent loyalty in one or

other of them instead of this petty dispute. It humiliated him that they should behave like a pair of undisciplined fools and exhibit their folly to the children.

He turned on the lights wearily and looked for his morning paper in which there was an article on Central Europe he had intended to study. No use going over and over this thing, he must try to put it out of his mind. The paper, however, was nowhere to be found and he supposed he must have left it in his room. Going up to search for it he heard a sound of scuttling on the floor above where Pell had his quarters, and he paused with a frown. The upper corridor was in darkness, but a gleam of light shone under the door of the old nursery, now the little boy's bedroom. The young scamp was taking advantage of his mother's absence and the consequent lack of control, that was to be expected, but he ought to be sound asleep by this time and must be called to order. Unless indeed he was ill?

On this thought the master of the house hastily mounted the stairs, seeing as he did so the gleam of light disappear discreetly.

With a faint smile he opened the child's door and turned the switch.

"Now then, young man, what's the meaning of this?" he said to the apprehensive figure gazing at him from the pillows. Pell had tumbled into bed in a hurry and half the bed-clothes were on the floor. "What had you the lights on for at this hour of the night?"

"I didn't have 'em turned on," denied Pell.

"Don't lie to me, Pell," said his father sternly. "Do you suppose I'm blind? Lying is stupid as well as cowardly."

He approached the bed with a clumsy idea of smoothing the tumbled bed-clothes, and in doing so, nearly fell over Kay's gift, which he picked up with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Haven't you sense enough at your age not to leave your toys lying about the floor?" he said, examining the little car and discovering as he did so that the globes were hot. So that was the explanation. Headlights, eh? He turned them on curiously and, quite unconscious of Pell's eyes, half-agonized, half-enchanted, watching him. Extraordinary how real they made these things nowadays, he thought as he put it down and arranged the bed-clothes in place.

"You should have been asleep an hour ago," he admonished his son, "and you have all day long to play with your toys without bringing them to bed. As you evidently can't be trusted I shall take this away out of reach."

He carried the car downstairs and put it on his dressing-chest, amused both at the toy and that young rascal, his son.

Pell, needless to say, did not feel in the least amused. After a gorgeous half-hour with his new possession he had gone virtuously if reluctantly to bed, parking his car beside the dressing-table. He had even attempted to sleep, but the darkness was so long in coming that at last he sat up at the foot of his bed beside the window to watch for it. Sudden gleams of red on passing boats told him it was lighting-up time, and he thought of his car. The police would be after him if he left it dark of course. Pell knew this was the law and in the world of his imagination already saw a motor-cycle and a policeman approaching at great speed. With a leap he was out of bed, had turned on his lights and was standing beside it as the officer with a courteous salute, swept past.

Then his father had to come and accuse him of lying which he hadn't done at all, and carry away the car that wasn't his to take, after the unjust and idiotic manner of grown-up people.

Stealing, that's what it was, in Pell's opinion, and presently there was comfort because excitement in his thought.

His car had been stolen by a motor bandit, just because he hadn't locked it, as John always locked the Singer to prevent this particular outrage.

Pell fell asleep planning how to get on the track of the ruffian tomorrow.

CHAPTER SIX

ELLIOTT

1

KAY not unnaturally supposed that the mysterious questions of Miss Maud Peebles could only mean that already the neighborhood knew of the trouble at Redgates, or suspected it. Waking at intervals through a restless night, she thought of ways to combat their suspicions, and finally decided that her best plan was to go out as much as possible looking her gayest and most light-hearted.

She still hoped that a letter might come from her mother in the morning, but when she went downstairs there were only circulars on the table and a letter for John in an unfamiliar hand. A faint suspicion that this might be a ruse of her mother's proved unfounded. John told her, when their father had gone and she could ask him that he had had no word.

"You know she never writes letters if she can help it," he said. "No need to worry. I'll ring Rosamond if you like, in case she has heard, but I don't expect it. Did father say anything to you last night?"

"No, not a word, we just talked about Vienna."

"He didn't pitch into you for not telling him about your trip then?" said John. "He seemed rather peeved about it yesterday morning, I thought—hurt and all that."

"I didn't mean to hurt his feelings," exclaimed the girl. "But I thought he might refuse to let me go.... Because he wouldn't let you go to the winter sports that time when you wanted to."

"But that was years ago," said John. "In fact, I'd completely forgotten it."

John was amused now he looked back at that incident of his youth, thinking it odd that Kay, who had been a bit of a kid at the time, should have taken his disappointment so seriously. Now he could make a fair guess that his father had probably had very little to do with the matter. It was much more likely that his mother had been afraid he would break his neck, and put the onus of refusal on the head of the family. This being merely conjecture he did not mention it to Kay, but told her not to worry about things, and gave her his address for the week-end.

"You are not likely to need me, but I'll come back in a moment if you do," he said reassuringly. "You'll only have to give me a ring."

Kay nodded but she knew that she would not send for him. It had been decent of him to offer to come, but John could not give her any reassurance because, whatever happened, he was not really implicated ... or Rosamond either. As she watched him off, swinging out into the summer morning, carefree and happy and good-looking, she envied him that easy grace and unruffled calm as though he owned the world.

Pell crossed his path as she watched and was seized by the collar and swung round with one jerk of his brother's arm.

"What's this?" shouted the elder in astonishment. "Sixpence roosting in your ear. Little pig."

"I'm not," protested Pell indignantly, feeling his ears. "I washed them like anything."

"Well, there you are, making 'em into a silk purse. What did I tell you?" said John. "Here, take your filthy lucre and no spending it on beer, mind, because this is Friday."

Pell sped off with his treasure, much elated, and Kay thought of her own gift with renewed misgivings, wishing she had John's happy touch. Turning, she supposed she must go indoors and see cook, and wondered whether she would get through the interview without showing how little she knew about this task which had been thrust upon her.

The departure of the men of the house had been a relief, yet now they were gone she felt adrift, and she looked about her wistfully, aware for the first time of the profusion and beauty of the flowers. The summer had been mild and there were roses still, and early asters of all shades set in a round bed like a piece of embroidery on the velvet of the grass. Below her the river reflected a sky serenely blue, and was so still that the massed green of the opposite bank stood out in the bright air almost as though suspended in space.

To Kay, who had grown up here, knowing it therefore beyond surprise, the scene was not of today only, but a hundred summer mornings, and she felt a sharp stab of pain at the thought that all this too was involved with the secret bewildering trouble of her home. Were they to lose it then, to be divided, go away?

She could not, would not believe it, and with one of those quick changes of spirit characteristic of her, ran in with an air of command, to see the cook.

Though Beatrice, romantically inclined, might deplore the quiet of the house with the mistress away, cook, who received no gifts of dresses and hats for valeting Winifred like her companion, was enjoying her freedom from supervision thoroughly, and looked with indulgence therefore upon the young lady in charge, whom she had known as a schoolgirl, as one to be managed easily enough. She had suggestions for a nice little dinner and a nice little lunch, and a nice little supper for Master Pell all ready, and if these would give her a minimum of trouble Kay was none the wiser. Cook's keyword in the conversation was economy which made a good if dull impression.

“And that reminds me, we’re out of vegetables, if you’d speak a word to Mr. Elliott,” finished cook, cunningly saving herself this trouble.

“Is he the vegetable man?” asked Kay doubtfully.

“Lor, no, miss, the gardener, and a woman’ater, if you ast me. Don’t come near the kitchen if ’e can ’elp it, and then looks fair ready to run for ’is life,” said cook. “As for me I like a man as is a man and will crack a joke now and then.”

“And won’t he? What a shame,” said Kay. “I’ll go and find him then.”

The gardener who would not crack a joke was at work near the boat-house, and the girl strolled down the lawn towards him.

“Elliott, could we have some vegetables for the house, do you think?” she began, as he straightened up and faced her, and then stared in confused astonishment, recognizing him at once.

“You see, I took your advice,” said her friend of the Easter vacation with a faint smile.

“I didn’t know,” exclaimed the girl, flushing.

“Didn’t you? And I had no idea you were a daughter of the house ... the daughter who was expected home from college, am I right? Otherwise I should at least have had the grace to remember the vegetables. Would you care to come along and make a choice?” said Elliott, leading the way.

“I have thought of you very often, all the same,” he continued as they went, “and hoped I might some day have a chance to thank you.”

“I didn’t do anything,” disclaimed Kay hastily. “I didn’t even speak to father.”

“No? ... You gave me a very good lunch, however.”

“Which nobody wanted. You can’t pretend there was any generosity in that.”

Elliott looked at her with a smile.

“There are ways of giving, Miss Flete. When you are as old as I am you will know that there are moments when a comparatively little thing becomes enormously important. You might have been alarmed or indignant that day, and instead of that you treated me as you would have treated a friend. Yours were the first kind or courteous words I had had for months.... Your father’s were the second.”

“Really? Then you ... don’t mind being with us?” asked the girl eagerly.

“Mind? ... I’ve had the most peaceful three months I’ve known for years.”

“Oh—I daresay it’s peaceful,” she agreed doubtfully.

“That seems dull when you’re young, doesn’t it?” nodded the gardener. “Well, that’s fair enough, or who would get anything done?”

“The garden doesn’t look as if you did nothing,” retorted Kay with an air of congratulation.

“Oh, that’s luck more than good management, I’m afraid. I have a great deal yet to learn, but you wished me luck, remember. I don’t go much by omens as a rule, but I’m afraid we must hold you responsible for the garden.”

“Well, I hope there won’t be a drought, then.”

Elliott laughed and they made their way into the kitchen garden, already friends.

“I suppose you haven’t seen my young brother Pell anywhere,” said Kay when this task was completed.

“I could give a guess where he is, and I think if you turned your back on the shrubbery and called rather loudly he might make his appearance from another direction,” answered the gardener. “Secrecy must be observed at all costs, I fancy.”

“I see you are allies.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that. I know my place,” said Elliott with a twinkle in his eye. “He’ll be glad to have you at home, I’m sure. It’s lonely for the only child about a place.”

“I don’t suppose I shall be much good,” returned Kay doubtfully, “I’m too large.”

“I wonder you don’t get him a dog ... or perhaps that wouldn’t meet with your parents’ approval?”

“We had one when I was Pell’s age,” considered the girl, “so I can’t see why not.... I wish you’d put it up to father. Couldn’t you say the place needed protection?”

“From tramps?” he questioned with a touch of humor. “On the whole, don’t you think the suggestion would come better from you? I am willing to come up in support with a hint or two about water-rats, if you like.”

“Yes, that’s a good idea.” The two conspirators smiled broadly at each other. “As soon as you can,” said Kay, “to prepare the ground.”

"Which is part of my job after all."

Kay, as she left him, remembered her own embarrassment at the moment of recognition with surprise. Elliott had won her completely by taking his position as a matter of course, and even poking sly fun at himself with his mention of tramps. His worn face and twinkling eyes were kind, and it had been easy to talk to him. She had never dreamed that her father would take him on, and yet he had, treating him, Elliott had told her, with courtesy. For the second time since her troubled return James Flete scored in his daughter's eyes, though the scales were still weighted against him.

Remembering Elliott's suggestion, she turned her back to the shrubbery and called Pell, who presently appeared from nowhere. His hands were in his breeches pockets and he sauntered towards her, looking nonchalant. She might be going to ask where her present was for all he knew, for that's what people did, as if they hadn't given it to you, or it wasn't really yours. "*You haven't broken your nice new car already, have you, Pell?*" Pell's idea of heaven was a place where the things you owned really were your own, to be broken or not as seemed most convenient.

"Hullo," said Kay. "Feel like a walk this morning?"

Pell considered this, trying to find a catch in it.

"Where?" he asked with caution.

"I have to take some magazines over to Major Ashe and then I'm going on to the village. But don't come if you'd rather not," said Kay handsomely.

The sixpence began to burn a hole in Pell's pocket, but he was not yet convinced.

"Will you be buying things?"

"Yes, and I expect you would find it a bit boring."

"Oh, well, I might as well come," decided Pell to that crafty suggestion, and sped upstairs to get his blazer and cap.

Tracking down his motor bandit as soon as the coast was clear this morning, he had found the villain's lair, but suspecting an ambush had not ventured to enter it without support. He was hoping for reënforcements and it did not occur to him that Kay could be pressed into his service in this capacity.

As she had suspected, her size was against her and she was judged accordingly—one of a race of eccentrics with fanatical views about truth and no sense of fair play. Certainly she had given him the car ... who else could

have put it on his floor, but Pell knew that this made the position more delicate.

On the way to the Ashes', therefore, he strode along beside his sister, whistling loudly as a bar to possible conversation, but Kay seemed quite content and even assured him confidentially as they reached the gate: "We won't stay more than a minute or two." Pell hoped she would prove to be a woman of her word.

2

Mrs. Ashe was doing accounts in the lounge, a comfortable, shabby room occupying the entire width of the house, with long windows looking on the river. In his own specially constructed chair with a high back and wide arm-rests, sat the Major with a portable wireless set beside him.

"Visibility good," said a voice suddenly and loudly out of the air.

"Queen Anne's dead," retorted the Major dryly, and then saw the two young Fletes. "What, Kay, so you've come back to us, have you, and as usual I've not heard of it. Might as well be dead. Nobody breathes a word."

"I only came last night, Major. They didn't know," returned the girl. "And I found they had forgotten to send over your magazines ... because mother's away."

"Yes, and that's a nice thing, upon my word ... makes an engagement to play golf with me this afternoon, and then goes off like that. What's the meaning of it?"

"Winds moderate," remarked the voice noncommittally and was turned off by Mrs. Ashe with an air of determination.

"You would not have been able to play golf with your leg in that condition, so why abuse Winifred?" she remarked.

"Abuse? Winifred's about the only person with an ounce of brains in the community and my very good friend. I ask a question and you call it abuse. As for my leg, if I could see this fellow young Milton mentioned, we should see all about that."

Major Ashe had a new grievance, for Andrew Milton, called to him in the absence of old Dr. Rose, had begun by talking of X-Rays and a man in Harley Street, who might even now be able to set right the injured leg. New broom, the patient's wife had judged him shortly. The best surgeons in Europe had already seen the Major and done what little could be done years since, and

with infinite pain to the sufferer and cost to his wife. If Mrs. Ashe never spoke of that long agony which had sapped her youth and swallowed most of her private fortune, she was not the woman to see it begin all over again to please some young whipper-snapper hardly yet in practice.

The Major accused her of parsimony and told all comers, but she did not turn a hair. Since she could do so little for him she would not grudge him his grievances, and she had her son to consider. Long ago she had chosen her path and she pursued it grimly, strong against the chatter or abuse like all people with a single heart.

Not that she was in any sense the conventionally devoted mother. She was as sharp with Derek as with the rest of the world, and if she had worked and contrived and denied herself on his account she made no merit of it. To a neighbor who was complaining of the ingratitude of her children, she had once retorted: “Why the devil should you expect gratitude? Gratitude for what? You brought ’em into the world to please yourself, didn’t you?” The poor lady thus cornered had consoled herself, as such people will, with the reflection that Mrs. Ashe was really rather coarse, but this would not have troubled Mrs. Ashe. By hard work and judicious investments she had succeeded in putting aside enough money to let Derek study for the Bar and give him a start. His tastes lay in that direction and a definite profession was a young man’s only chance in these days. Law, she thought, was as good as any other, for while there are fools in the world there will always be litigation.

Mrs. Ashe paid scant attention to her neighbors, though nowadays when for weeks at a time the Major was comparatively well, they came in and out. To Kay, however, this privilege had never been denied since as a small and silent child she had made friends with young Derek, grown too subdued, because it was impossible in those days to let him be natural and noisy in the house.

As the girl had come in, in her fresh washing frock and shady hat, the older woman had looked at her sharply, but without the impatience she felt for most visitors.

‘The girl’s too quiet ... wants waking up. Where’s her friend with the lipstick these days, I wonder? There was a brat if I ever saw one ... dam’ good for Kay ... dam’ good for both of them,’ thought Mrs. Ashe, not however including Dolly in this obscure benefit.

Now she left the Major to air his tale of the specialist he was not to be permitted to consult and marched Pell out of the room. She knew boys ... they were all young ostriches, and the apples were good this season.

Pell saw with gratified amazement that she looked out the largest and reddest from the basket of newly gathered fruit in the hall, and then a smaller one to stuff in his pocket. The fierce expression behind her glasses meant nothing to him in the face of this, and he said to her, confidentially:

"Why is Visability good do you think?"

"Damned if I know," said his hostess as she might have spoken to her son.

And Pell, left to enjoy his apple in the garden where he could crunch in comfort, felt himself a man.

When Mrs. Ashe returned to the lounge, Kay had managed to escape from the vexed subject of the specialist and was saying:

"But I didn't know you had a wireless. That's quite new, isn't it, Major?"

"Ah, I owe that to the boy," returned her host with a malevolent glance at his wife, which she did not even see. She was watching Kay's face, awake at last, pleasure in every line of it.

"So now, thanks to Derek, I can at least hear what these fools think of the world they are making in such a precious mess from time to time," proceeded the Major, "and answer 'em back too, by Jove. If they can't hear me, what matter, since they were born deaf for the most part? As for the English language, what it's coming to, God knows! Most of these fellows need an interpreter. Upon my soul, can't they get any one who can speak without mincing? 'Oxford and Kembridge,' " mimicked the Major scornfully. "No good, I can't do 'em justice. We need your mother here. What does she mean by running off from us, hey?"

"Because she needs a holiday like anybody else," interrupted his wife, seeing the sudden shadow on the young face of her guest, and Kay, smiling awkwardly, looked at her watch, exclaiming she must go.

"I'm sorry mother forgot the golf engagement," she said to Mrs. Ashe as they left the lounge.

"Stuff and nonsense," returned her hostess. "Everard enjoys grumbling and you know it. Now where's that boy?"

"I hope you didn't mind my bringing him, Mrs. Ashe?"

"What, Pell? Not in the least. But no teaching him to rob my orchard, mind."

Kay laughed in her face.

The Major, sitting by his window and now bereft of an audience, heard her and grunted impatiently. Yes, they could laugh out there and be gay enough, but the girl couldn't be left in peace for half an hour to amuse him. Oh no, that would be too much to ask. Not that she was a patch on her mother! No sparkle about her and thin as a rake ... too little to say. Winifred now would have stayed half the morning and brought a bit of life into the place. All the snapping in the world would never send her scuttling off like a frightened rabbit. "Go away, Helen," she'd say, "and leave him to me. I'll manage him." Pretty good that ... damned subtle. And off *she'd* go, the scarecrow, managed herself but without the wit to see it, but glad enough to be rid of him of course and get on with her scraping and saving.

The door opened and the 'scarecrow' came in, seating herself at the desk again, without so much as a word or a glance.

"Might not be in the same room ... might as well be dead," mused the man at the window indignantly. "Hard as nails! Gad! You've only to look at her."

"Couldn't you have let Kay alone ... chasing her off the moment she enters the house? Can't let me speak to a pretty girl for five minutes, I suppose? That'll be the next thing. Jealous, eh? Pretty good, I must say."

His wife was adding a column of figures and continued to add, having long ago learned to detach her mind. She used her fingers to do it and her husband scowled with nervous irritation at this childish habit, unable to see it for what it was, the sign of a task naturally difficult to her, which she had overcome because she must, but none the easier for that.

"Are you deaf, dam' it?" he shouted, and she scribbled her total on the blotting-pad and looked round.

"What is the matter?"

She had not heard his taunt and he did not repeat it.

Jealous? Not she. He knew that even this poor comfort was denied him.

"Can't you go and count on your fingers in some other room instead of under my nose, if you must do it? God bless my soul, didn't they teach you to add in the schoolroom that you can't keep 'em still?" he exclaimed fretfully.

Half an hour ago he had called her in to ask if he was to be condemned to sit alone the entire morning. Now she gathered up her books without surprise and glanced at the clock. It was well after eleven and she had a hundred things to do, but perhaps the wireless would keep him amused. She walked round his chair, switched it on and when only a faint hum responded, looked at him inquiringly, to meet a sardonic glance.

“Well, what good do you think that’s going to do at this hour of the day? The thing’s not a gramophone or a barrel-organ. Leave it alone, can’t you.... Oh, that’s right, turn it off. Don’t let us waste a farthing’s worth of electricity, whatever we do,” he said bitterly.

Mrs. Ashe drew up the small table on which Kay had left the *National Geographical* and a couple of reviews which the Fletes passed on to him every month.

“*Must* you wear that infernally unbecoming color?” he inquired, gazing with dislike at her serviceable linen dress, which had once perhaps been blue.

And his wife was so much astonished to hear this particular complaint, that she answered dryly:

“Yes, I must. It is rather late in life for me to strut about like a peacock, isn’t it?”

“Peacock be damned! No woman has a right to let herself go.”

“Quite so, but occasionally she has no choice. A chiffon gown and a permanent wave would not improve my face, Everard, or cure your pain.”

“Lot you know about pain. Never been ill in your life.”

She shrugged and went off with her books. In one sense it was true enough. She suffered at intervals from neuralgia, indigestion, insomnia, troublesome corns from wearing cheap shoes and wearing them too long, twinges of rheumatism, and all the other common ills for which the impecunious cannot afford to call a doctor, but in the course of years some ache or other had become so natural to her that it would not have occurred to her to call it pain or to admit that she was ill. It was as inevitable as her husband’s complaints, and she was armored against both. Helen Ashe was not given to gestures. She was just, and necessity had made her strong, and when she thought of his aversion at all it was as something alien to them both and beyond his control. Yet it was so long since he had made any comment on her personal appearance, that she did pause for a moment before going on with her accounts, to consider whether there was anything in her wardrobe that would please him better.

It was unlikely. Her clothes were bought when she could no longer do without them, too often by post for lack of leisure. Yet Everard Ashe had married an elegant young woman, and now no doubt felt himself defrauded.

The scarecrow looked back at that earlier Helen with an ironic smile.

“Dam’ silly world,” she thought. “Poor Everard.”

Kay had not identified the Milton mentioned by Major Ashe as her acquaintance of Rosamond's party, and when therefore the young man accosted her in Crediton High Street she did not recognize him at once. It was characteristic of the Fletes to write hurried and sketchy letters if they wrote at all, and Kay when she came home was always catching up with local news which they had forgotten to mention to her.

"You don't remember me," said Andrew incredulously. "And here I've been waiting to make my peace. You quarreled with me and then ran away down Baker Street on top of the 'bus."

"I know.... You'd been studying humanity," exclaimed Kay. "Is that what you are doing down here?"

"Well, isn't it my job? I'm with old Rose. Hasn't anybody told you? Your mother has taken pity on me and lets me come along for tennis when I can get away and as a matter of fact I hoped I might beg a game tomorrow afternoon."

"Of course," agreed Kay mechanically. "Mother's gone up to Scotland though."

Andrew laughed. "Yes, to my cousins, the Fergusons. I had an amusing letter from Molly this morning. Suppose we go in here and have an ice."

Kay, longing to refuse, caught a glimpse of Pell's face and agreed, wishing she knew how and why Mrs. Ferguson's letter had proved amusing. Suddenly a way of keeping the subject open occurred to her and she said to the young man:

"Do you happen to have your cousin's address, because I ought to let mother know this morning I've come home. I forgot to ask before the family went off to town."

"Why, of course."

He wrote the address and passed it over, but did not mention the Fergusons again, and she was glad when the ices were finished and she could take leave of him.

The tennis next day would be rather a bore, she thought, but since he was evidently accustomed to come she had not liked to refuse him.

"Can he play, Pell?" she inquired as they turned home together.

Pell, recalled from an important interview with Visability, who was a detective, good at tracing desperate bandits, looked up vaguely, and she

repeated the question.

"Damned if I know," said Pell to himself with an eye watching his sister's face. But she was frowning at nothing in particular, so it was useless, he saw, to try to raise the wind.

"He talks too much," he reported. "Mother told him so."

"Really? ... Everybody talks too much, if you ask me."

Pell considered that, found himself in complete agreement with it, but made one exception.

"Mrs. Ashe doesn't."

Kay turned her head at last and smiled at him.

"I know ... marvelous, isn't she?"

She thought of the marvel of Mrs. Ashe, seeing it consciously for the first time. Living year in and year out with the Major and his grievances, never snapping his head off, as she did other people's, even Derek's now and then. And all the time she had known about their larks and thieving expeditions in her orchard and never said a word!

That the rest of the world about her had not this gift for silence troubled, though it did not surprise, the girl. And what were they saying? There was Major Ashe with his: "Where's your mother, hey? What's the meaning of it?" and Andrew Milton grinning broadly at Mrs. Ferguson's amusing letter. And Miss Maud Peebles last night, whispering over the fence! And her father blazing up about gossiping fools.

Kay could not doubt that all these things were somehow connected, and a reflection on her mother. When she reached home she took out the address, determined to write to Winifred, but this proved difficult. Since her mother had not even chosen to tell John what was wrong when she telephoned to him from the station, how could she, Kay, expect to be told? It was even within the bounds of possibility that she did not wish them to know, and bad as that supposition was, the girl knew that she could not force her mother's hand.

Finally she wrote a casual line or two, making Dolly's visit the excuse for asking information.

"Dear Mother,

"I got home last night and found you gone. What a horrid sell, but I hope you are having a good time. I had asked Dolly for next week, but now I think I'd better put her off until you return. When

do you expect to come? *Please* answer this because after staying so long with the Chesters I must give Dolly a date. Love from Kay.

"P.S. The Major's wailing because you forgot his golf."

4

James Flete came home that evening to find Pell's car still on his dressing-table, and with an exclamation of compunction at his own forgetfulness, carried it downstairs.

To Kay whom he met in the hall, he explained the situation.

"I found that young scamp playing with this thing at ten o'clock last night, and took it away as a lesson to him, but I didn't intend to deprive him of it altogether. He's quite old enough to know he shouldn't take toys into his bedroom."

"It was a new toy," protested Kay. "He'd hardly had it half an hour, and he's only human after all."

"Hm, well, if that's how you feel about it, I wonder you didn't give it back to him," said her father dryly.

"I had no idea you had taken it away. Pell didn't say a word. I suppose he was afraid to."

"Indeed! I seem to strike terror into the lot of you all of a sudden.... Or perhaps it is not so sudden. Would you have been afraid of me at that age?"

His tone was sharp and Kay looked him in the eye.

"Oh, not particularly that I know of," she retorted.

Pell at that moment appeared at the top of the stairs, and his father called him down and held out the little car.

"Here you are, my boy. Take your Rolls Royce or whatever you choose to call it. And remember what I told you about taking your playthings to bed, there's a good chap."

His tone was propitiatory, but Pell took the car with obvious reluctance and fled.

"Ungracious little beggar! It's quite time he had a lesson in manners.... Well, what's the matter now?" exclaimed James Flete, at sight of his daughter's stormy face.

“Oh, father, you haven’t any tact. If you had to rub it in, why couldn’t you wait till you caught him alone instead of doing it before me? He’s embarrassed naturally. Do you think he hasn’t any pride?”

Kay turned abruptly and ran upstairs, in much the same mood that she had left Andrew Milton at Rosamond’s party months before. Her temper was quick and always disconcerted her, but to James Flete, unaccustomed to such open rebukes from his children, she seemed merely a young cub, as ill-mannered as her brother, and he felt the helplessness of a man left with two unruly children on his hands. At Kay’s age he would never have ventured to speak to his father in such a tone—or later for the matter of that, but nowadays the young seemed to think themselves on top of the world, striding it. Everything was made too easy for them. You worked and toiled to keep a roof over their heads and give them a chance in life, while they came and went as they chose and did not even trouble to treat you with common courtesy.

James Flete was out of touch with the younger generation; the disastrous times and the long struggle to set his business on a sound footing with all the odds against him had immersed him too completely, and yet that distant, more disciplined childhood of his own was not so far away that he could not see, as his anger cooled, some justice in Kay’s accusation. He had perhaps been tactless and clumsy too.

At dinner therefore he said to her:

“I am sorry if I spoiled your gift to Pell, my dear. I didn’t of course realize it was something you had brought back for him. An ingenious affair too.”

“I thought it rather jolly,” agreed Kay, “but it’s so difficult to know what they’ll really like ... because Pell may think it a bit childish....”

“I don’t think you need worry on that account. He was having high jinks with it in his room last night, turning his precious headlights on and off. They won’t last long at that rate.”

“Oh, well,” said the girl, “it doesn’t matter. Nothing lasts.”

“Hmph! A poor sort of philosophy for a girl of your age,” commented her father, frowning. “If that’s what going to college has taught you, I’m sorry to hear it.”

They were at odds again. Kay, innocent in intention and finding herself thus directly attacked, flushed to the roots of her hair, then went on with her dinner in silence.

James Flete walked down to the boat-house in search of Elliott after dinner, carrying the latest number of the *Contemporary*, which it had occurred to him the gardener might like to see. Awkward though he might be with his children, he understood men, and already there had sprung up between him and this man of his own class, whom he had befriended, a mutual liking strong enough to over-rule any embarrassment due to the act of benevolence from which it had sprung.

In engaging Elliott he had known that he was taking certain risks, but he did that in his business a dozen times in a year, and this time sheer humanity had swayed his hand. Elliott was a civil engineer with a decent record, thrown out of employment only by the failure of the firm for which he had worked in England and the East since demobilization, a dozen years before. For some time his headquarters had been at Singapore but the climate had undermined his wife's health and he had been obliged to send her home. The long illness before her death had swallowed a large part of his savings; the remainder had gone in two years of fruitless searching for a job, first in one country and then in another, all of them filled by too many men in circumstances similar to his own.

James Flete, a scrupulous man, had told this story to no one; to the household Elliott was a gardener, engaged like any other, but the fact that he was forced by circumstances to do manual work, however temporarily, seemed to his employer no reason why he should be cut off from the interests of any educated and intelligent man. He lent him books, magazines and papers, smoked a pipe with him most evenings of the week and presently thought of him as a friend.

The subject of their initial interview had never since been mentioned between the two men, but this evening Elliott spoke of it.

"The chrysanthemums are looking well," remarked James Flete as they strolled round the garden chatting amicably.

"Yes ... as long as the water-rats don't find them too succulent. In some ways we could do with a dog."

Elliott, with an inward smile at his own expense, glanced at his employer who, however, merely nodded absently. The girl, it was evident, had not yet approached her father about a dog.

"By the way, I made a discovery this morning," continued Elliott presently. "The young lady of the punt, you remember, who sent me along to

see you....”

“You’ve met her again then? In this neighborhood?”

“Yes, it was your daughter.”

“Kay! God bless my soul. Well, she did me a good turn, though she has not thought fit to say a word to me about the encounter.”

“No, so I gathered. She was as surprised as I was this morning and not at all willing to be thanked, which I thought very nice of her.”

“I’m glad she had so much perception,” said Kay’s father. “I confess I find myself bewildered by these young people of the present day, Elliott.”

“Oh, well, isn’t that inevitable up to a point?” suggested the other man.

“They seem to me curt to the verge of insolence and independent out of all reason. Were we like that? ... nonsense! Things are made too easy for the young nowadays. We’d have had our heads knocked off.”

“I know. If a lad smoked before he was eighteen, he was going to the dogs; if a girl smoked at all, she had gone. Books were hidden away from us and we read ’em under the rose. But isn’t it the age and not the young who are changed? I have a theory that every epoch molds a people to its need. We were sheltered because we were prosperous and a little smug. That isn’t possible any more and if nowadays things are made easy for the young, in other ways, there’s a sort of justice in it. They have not been born into an easy world, God-knows-what’s-going-to-happen is the motto of the day, and isn’t even their curtness perhaps a consequence of that and a sign of their courage to meet what comes? I rather like the young blighters,” finished Elliott.

“So it seems. I like them too as far as that goes, but I suppose I’ve been too absorbed in other matters, and have become a kind of fogey in their eyes. You work to clothe and educate your children, Elliott, but you never really know them. Isn’t that the way of it? And after all, a paternal Government would have done as much.”

“But wouldn’t have got nearly the same fun out of it, after all,” was Elliott’s comment.

An hour later James Flete, on his way back to the house, met Kay coming in from a swim. In her gay-colored toweling robe and rubber cap, her cheeks bright from the bathe, she looked charming, and her father forgot for a moment his irritation and smiled at her.

“I’ve been down having a chat with Elliott,” he explained.

“Have you?” Kay looked interested. “Did he say anything about the water-rats?”

“He certainly mentioned one water-rat of my acquaintance, though he was too polite to call her that.”

The girl laughed and taking off her cap, shook out her dark hair.

“He’s nice,” she observed.

“It seems to be a mutual attraction from what I can gather,” retorted her father. “You were evidently kinder to Elliott than you were to me, Kay.”

“Ah, but then he didn’t snap my head off,” said Kay cheerfully.

“Upon my soul, you young baggage! When I was your age that was considered a father’s privilege.”

“Oh, well, I don’t suppose you liked it any the better for that,” returned Kay, unimpressed.

She had him there. He had disliked it heartily, and he found himself thinking, not without wistfulness, of what Elliott had said. Perhaps after all there was no great difference between the boy he had been and this girl of his, for all her open hits and casual ways.

“You must tell me how to retrieve my character,” he said with a smile at last.

“All right.” In this mood Kay found she could talk to her father and it was rather a lark. “For one thing you can get Pell a dog,” she said.

A dog ... of course Elliott had mentioned the subject ... so the young devil had prompted that, no doubt? She seemed to be a quick worker.

“Does the boy want a dog?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t dare ask him in case you might object and he would be disappointed, but he’s so much alone and a dog would at least be something. *We* had a dog and there were three of us.”

“Yes, he is at a disadvantage,” agreed her father thoughtfully. “Young as he is, I had intended to send him off to school this year, but as things have turned out it won’t be possible at present.”

“Won’t it?”

Something about the girl’s voice, suddenly husky and troubled, made her father look at her quickly.

“It’s perfectly all right, child. Don’t look so concerned. There’s nothing for you to worry about.”

“Father, are you sure?” she demanded, searching his face.

“Quite sure—as far as we can be sure of anything in an uncertain world. Things crop up. We can’t always foresee them, and I have responsibilities of a business kind—to the men who work for me.”

“Yes, of course. I remember thinking that,” said Kay soberly.

“Did you?” He was surprised and touched and put his arm round her shoulder, feeling as he did so the damp suit beneath her coat. “You must run in and change those wet things before you catch a cold,” he exclaimed. “As for the dog, I think we can run to that.”

“Oh, father, that’s nice of you.”

“I’ll consult your friend Elliott,” he promised with an innocent air but a twinkle in his eye.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CAT AND DOG AND CROCODILE

1

PELL, having watched the tennis between Kay and Dr. Milton and retrieved balls with great energy, had grown tired of this pastime, owing to the incredible bouts of conversation with which the man who talked too much persisted in interrupting the game. He would walk up to the net on the smallest pretext and hold forth, and this sort of thing was no use to Pell.

Retrieving his car from its hiding place, he had driven off in it, metaphorically speaking, to Pencilvania, a country which John, who knew a man there, had had an invitation to visit. Inquiries of John had elicited the fact that pencils certainly grew there and you simply went out and picked them off the tree. His friend, John said, had plantations of them, and when Pell looked dubious, he drew a pencil out of his pocket and showed him the man's initials on it, B.B. Bunny Baxter. No getting away from that.

Pell, with his incurable taste for words, liked the sound of Pencilvania quite apart from this attractive peculiarity of the place, and now he had a car why not go there? The best road clearly was away from the tennis court, for no man starting on a journey cares to be called back to find balls. Before the players had noticed his desertion he was well out of sight behind the shrubs on the other side of the garden and had parked his car to inquire the way.

It was then that his plans were changed by a new and exciting diversion. Before him was the hedge which divided the Peebles' garden from Redgates. The laurels were old and portly and all the better for that, as Pell had long ago discovered. You could, with care, work your way into the center of them and obtain a view of both territories without any one in either being aware that you were there. As a rule this was not a profitable amusement, but today as Pell strode in looking for signposts or a friendly sentry to direct him to Pencilvania, he saw something so interesting that he sat down and forgot his travels.

Out of the next house, on tiptoe, came old Mr. Peebles, who was surely too ancient to be a villain, but looked very like one as he crept between the garden beds. Suddenly a door flew open and his daughter ran out, the longest-nosed one, wearing a dressing-gown, which Pell thought hardly nice on a Saturday afternoon. Unless of course she was going to bathe. Miss Peebles, however, was not going to bathe. She ran after her father and took his arm, which he shook free indignantly, muttering things which unfortunately Pell was too far away to hear.

At that moment a pleasure-boat laden with trippers went past with a good deal of noisy talk and laughter, and the lady, with a horrified glance to right and left for cover, made for the house, her dressing-gown flapping as she ran. Immediately she was replaced by another sister, more decorously clad, who

also took old Mr. Peebles by the arm, and was repulsed. Then a strange perambulation began, both combatants walking in single file first this way and then that, round the garden beds and up and down the pathways. Wherever her father turned the second Miss Peebles followed behind, scolding him as she went.

At length, as though he could bear no more of it, the old gentleman threw up his hands and stalked back to the house, followed by Miss Bertha, shaking her head.

Pell, who had been watching this strange drama with breathless interest, was disappointed at so tame an end. He waited a moment in the hope of a sequel, and was just about to go when, to his great delight, he saw the old gentleman creep round the back of the house and make for the shrubbery further up the garden and adjoining Redgates. There, he had done it; he was safe. Pell's sympathies were all with Mr. Peebles, who was clearly the underdog, and when the door opened and one of the sisters looked out suspiciously, he said "Hush!" to the approaching footsteps of the runaway. However, the door closed again, and the old man came on undiscovered, pausing a few yards from his young supporter to stand on tiptoe and peer over the hedge.

"Emily," called Mr. Peebles in a cautious voice. "What have they done with you, Emily?"

"Is it a cat?" inquired Pell, unable to restrain his sympathy any longer, and poked his face encouragingly through the hedge.

"What's that? Where are you? ... Speak up."

Mr. Peebles gazed round him, bewildered, and Pell shouted encouragingly:

"I'm in the hedge."

"Dear me, so you are. How very extraordinary. And who may you be, my dear?"

"I'm Pell," returned the owner of the name, who had supposed everybody knew that.

"Pell—yes, yes, Pell," returned Mr. Peebles, brightening, "and how are you today, and how is your dear mother?" But having made these polite inquiries he did not wait for an answer, and once more began to peer anxiously over the hedge.

Pell, down on his hands and knees among the bushes, strained his neck to watch.

“Here, boy, your eyes are younger than mine, tell me who that is playing tennis yonder,” exclaimed the old man with sudden excitement.

“That’s Kay and Dr. Milton, Mr. Peebles.”

“Doctor ... doctor ... there, I knew it! ... Emily’s ill and they’re keeping me away.”

“Now, father!” The eldest Miss Peebles, very red in the face, had descended upon the engrossed pair, and seizing the old man once more firmly by the arm to lead him indoors, her gaze fell upon the interested and sympathetic face of the little boy.

“Go away, you rude, naughty child!” cried Miss Peebles in a tone of thunder. “How dare you stare and spy into other people’s gardens? Don’t you know better than that? Go away this instant—I shall complain to your father.”

Pell, greatly abashed, withdrew his head and sped out of his hiding place to the other side of the garden.

2

Kay, meanwhile, was finding her afternoon of tennis with Andrew Milton heavy going, and greatly wished that Derek had been there to support her. She had put the idea up to him that morning, but he had begun to give Harold a much needed coat of paint and said, since her afternoon was disposed of, perhaps he had better get on with it.

“Because I thought we might run Harold up to the Regatta next Saturday. How does that strike you?”

“Oh, lovely.” Kay felt sure her mention of Dolly’s possible visit had inspired this noble effort on Derek’s part, and her heart sank at the thought that she might have to disappoint him. How could she have Dolly there with all this upset and uncertainty? If only her mother would answer her letter and tell her the worst she thought it would be easier to bear.

“As a matter of fact, if I hadn’t been a dam’ fool I’d have done this job while you were away,” Derek had continued.

“Never mind. Harold will be all the smarter. I’ll have to take on Dr. Milton alone, but I thought if you came it would be better fun for him.”

“Don’t be an ass. If the man’s such a sawney as that he ought to be drowned.”

Kay, who liked her tennis to be tennis and not spasmodic interludes between conversation, thought of this remark with approval many times that afternoon.

Andrew Milton was still an observer of the human kind, but having come to this country parish, he was anxiously trying to cultivate that breezy personality which he felt to be essential to a medical man. He arrived with the air of one already *persona grata* in the household, greeted Beatrice by name and remarked as he hung up his hat:

"You'll let me know if there's a telephone call, won't you? Patients seem to choose Saturday afternoons."

No one obliged, however, and Kay thought this rather a pity, not only for her own sake, but because he would have so much enjoyed the importance of being rushed away.

Now that she saw him in her own normal surroundings, he no longer seemed the superior being he had appeared to her at Rosamond's party. He was much younger than she had supposed, for one thing, and very anxious to impress, at the same time talking with the eagerness of one who cannot help it and rarely has a chance. Though his conversation seemed to her slightly mad, it was at least a relief to her that it did not run to gossip, and this time he mentioned neither her mother nor the Fergusons.

"You'd play a much better game if you talked less," she told him bluntly during one of his senseless interruptions of a set.

"I know. I'm not putting up a good show this afternoon, am I? Sorry, but one goes off at a tangent sometimes, and I was interested in your reaction to what I was saying."

"My reaction will be to hit you over the head with my racquet next time," she retorted, running back to the service line with determination.

Beatrice brought tea to them in the garden, reporting that the master had gone out and Master Pell was having his meal indoors.

"I say, but how jolly," exclaimed the guest, but whether in reference to their solitude *à deux* or the laden tea-table Kay did not know.

After tea she took him on again, wondering whether the man intended to stay the night, and at last, when he made no move to go, she looked at her watch and said she was afraid it was time to knock off.

"But you'll let me come again, won't you?" he begged. "I'll be in better form next time, and I can often get away after dinner unless it's panel night. Pity to waste these light evenings."

Kay thought so too, but not in the same connection.

"All right ... if you like to take the risk of not finding me in," she agreed, partly because he seemed lonely, and partly for a reason of her own. If by any chance she could have Dolly down, a fourth, however boring, would be useful. Somehow or other she was determined to give Derek and her friend their chance.

As they returned to the house her father was just going in, and she had barely seen Andrew Milton off before he came out of the library with an air of fury, brandishing a letter.

"Just read that. I go out to see about a dog for that young devil and this is what greets my return. A nice thing! Dog indeed, he'll get no dog."

"Dear Mr. Flete," the eldest Miss Peebles had written,

> "I greatly regret to trouble you with complaints but I really have no alternative. Your little boy, no doubt taking advantage of the lack of proper control in the absence from home of his mother, has been breaking through the hedge this afternoon. Quite apart from the damage to the laurels, the child's appearance greatly alarmed and upset my dear father, who does not enjoy such good health as we could wish, and I am sure you will see that I cannot risk a recurrence of this annoyance.
>
> "Yours sincerely,
>
> "P. Peebles."

"I don't believe it," exclaimed Kay indignantly.

"Don't talk nonsense," snapped her father. "Do you think the woman would dare to write to me in that strain without some reason? The thing's intolerable."

"I should have been looking after him better. It's my fault," said the girl pleadingly.

"Rubbish! Pell is quite old enough to know better than to destroy the plants and annoy the neighbors, and if he isn't he will be in about ten minutes. He's in need of a good thrashing. Beatrice—" as the maid appeared on the way to set the schoolroom supper—"tell Master Pell to come to me in the library and quick about it."

Kay followed her father anxiously.

“You know they’re awfully odd, father. Won’t you let me see Pell first and get out of him what really happened?”

“Will you mind your own business!” demanded her father furiously. “Pell needs discipline and you needn’t remind me that he is only human either. A lot of sentimental women ... Kindly leave the room.”

The girl obeyed and went into the drawing-room so as not to witness the arrival of the criminal and make his sentence worse, but not at all sure that she would not interfere at the moment of execution.

It was not really the matter of Pell who had broken part of the hedge, she was sure. Her father’s fury had been out of all proportion to the offence, and what was the use of his telling her, therefore, to mind her own business? Since last night she had felt reassured, but now all her doubts and fears were back again, and the division in her home was certainly her business, and Pell’s even more. She had undertaken to look after the little boy and hadn’t done it, or he would not have gone through the hedge, and she was not going to stand by and let her father vent his rage on Pell because he had quarreled with her mother.

“I’ll tell him so if necessary,” she thought, “and then we’ll know where we stand.”

3

To Pell, who had never in his life before been summoned to his father’s presence like this, it seemed as though the end of the world had come. Often enough threatened with it, since he was in and out of scrapes like any other small boy, it had come to be the supreme penalty, too awful to be believed, and now that from a clear sky the bolt had fallen, he felt cold and very sick. His own innocence in the afternoon’s adventure was little consolation to Pell, experience having taught him already that innocence is too often a point of view. He had never been so terrified in his life, but he was not without gallantry as he opened the library door and went in.

His father, however, was far too angry to notice that or to remember the real seat of his anger, the reference to his wife’s absence, the phrase about lack of control and the fact that Miss Peebles, however unknowingly, had been responsible for the undignified quarrel with Winifred. The scales were weighted against Pell at that moment and his father shouted at him sternly:

“What do you mean by this disgraceful behavior, sir? Here I have a complaint from Miss Peebles that you have been breaking down the hedge

and intruding on their property, to say nothing of alarming her father. How dare you do such a thing?"

Pell was so astounded at this accusation that he even attempted a defense.

"I didn't break it.... I didn't break anything," he stammered.

"Don't lie to me," ordered his father. "We'll soon see whether you broke it or not, and if you are lying I'll give you a thrashing you won't forget. You'll admit you went through the hedge, I suppose?"

"I looked through," admitted Pell.

"And do you call that a decent and gentlemanly thing to do? Spying on other people and annoying them. You are quite old enough to know better than that and if you don't know better you've got to learn. Alarming an elderly gentleman in his own garden! You should be ashamed of yourself."

"He wasn't a bit angry," said Pell. "He said, 'How are you, Pell? How's your mother?' "

"Hm, well, that's not the story I have from Miss Peebles, and whether he was angry or not, I am, so you may make up your mind to that. Haven't you all the garden to play in, haven't you toys without number that you get into mischief directly your sister's back is turned? Are you such a baby that you want a nursemaid? You'll keep away from Mr. Peebles' property in future, and if I catch you within ten yards of it you will be sorry. Do you understand?"

"Yes," whispered Pell.

"Is that the way to speak to me?" thundered his father. "Yes, what?"

And the little boy, by this time bewildered by the storm of words and the desperate effort to hold back his tears, said involuntarily:

"Yes, please."

James Flete stared at his son. Was this impudence or imbecility? Then, seeing the horror of comprehension dawn in the child's face, he turned his back to hide a smile, and his rage melted. A troublesome little devil, no doubt, but manly for all that, he thought, pulling up a chair and sitting down.

"Come here," he commanded in a milder tone.

Pell rather blindly obeyed, but stumbled on the rug and was caught by his father's arm.

"Got slightly mixed that time, didn't you?" said the elder. "Now suppose you try again. You are not to go near Mr. Peebles' property. Do you

understand?"

The criminal nodded dumbly.

"What! You can't do better than that? You know, Pell, when I ask you a question, you shouldn't grunt 'Yes' or 'No,' even if you are getting into a row. You should say, 'Yes, father' like a decent fellow. When I was your age, or even John's for the matter of that, I said, 'Yes, sir' to my father and said it quick, or I should have heard about it."

Pell considered this and seemed to think it rather a good joke.

"Yes, sir," he said with a sudden smile, and the day was saved.

"Where is that car of yours I stole the other night and forgot to return?" inquired his father presently.

Pell, leaning against the tyrant's shoulder, grinned.

"You were a motor bandit," he said, and in this confidence showed, had his elder but known it, the length he had traveled in his son's regard.

"Nothing of the kind. More like the constable who found a car where it had no business to be and took it to the lock-up."

"Then what happened?"

"Then he looked up the chap's record and found it was a first offense, so decided to let him off with a warning. Are you quite certain you didn't break that hedge this afternoon, on second thoughts, Pell?"

"Yes, father. I didn't break even a leaf. At least, I don't think I did. You see, there's a ..." Pell hesitated in sudden doubt.

"Yes, what is there? Out with it."

"There's a way in and then it's a forest. At least I say it is a forest, and it wouldn't be any good if you broke it in."

"So you take care? Well, you must find yourself a forest somewhere else, my boy. Not in the rhododendrons, mind. You haven't been stalking wild beasts in my rhododendrons, I hope?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Not lately I haven't," said Pell with caution.

"What's this? I have a good mind to skin you alive," said the master of the house.

"Well, Mr. Elliott said I wasn't to and chased me off."

"Ah, I'm glad to hear it. You listen to him and you won't go far wrong."

James Flete wondered who had prompted the "Mr.," but he did not ask and Pell would have been unable to tell him. It certainly was no precocious social sense but more, perhaps, tribute to Elliott's qualities as a reasonable being since one day, weeks since, he had answered a plain question instead of saying "Look in the dictionary."

Gradually Pell's solitary world was becoming populated, Mr. Elliott, Kay, Mrs. Ashe who was damned if she knew; but last and certainly most important this tyrant who had saved him the shameful embarrassment of tears.

4

"Well, have you been to console your poor little brother?" inquired James Flete of Kay at dinner.

"No, I have not," she retorted.

"Unnatural young woman!"

"Sentimentalist!"

"Look here, have you been listening at the keyhole, you chit?" demanded her father indignantly.

"Certainly not ... but I did stay round in case of need."

"You think I'm a kind of monster, don't you, Kay?"

"Well, how can I tell?" she asked in a voice half troubled, half appealing.

"No," he returned with unexpected comprehension. "We have met so recently, haven't we, you and I? But you needn't have worried. Pell is quite able to meet his responsibilities, such as they are, and that's as it should be. We mustn't spoil him."

"You needn't think I didn't see you going upstairs hand in glove," said Kay to that moral sentiment.

"Hm; well, I can't flatter myself you are jealous of Pell, so it must be of me."

"I'm not either, but ten minutes before you were almost ready to box my ears, to say nothing of Pell's ... instead of Miss Peebles'—who had really annoyed you."

"I suppose that is what you would term a hit straight from the shoulder," said her father rather sadly, and the girl looked up with surprise and said:

“No ... a shot in the dark.”

She was assailed immediately by a mixture of emotions, afraid that this might have seemed a request for information, hoping that he might give it, and yet dreading to hear. She could not know that she had relieved him of a suspicion of her mother by that denial, but this was true. He knew in a moment that Winifred had not betrayed their common dignity by enlisting the support of the children in this ridiculous affair, and something came back to him which he had lost, the sense of her, vivid as in the days of his young manhood. The bond between them was not broken, and would not break. He had not doubted that she would come back, but now he knew that he could await that moment with anticipation and without embarrassment. This absence would have done them both good, and he was just enough to admit that it had given him at least something already, forcing him out of his absorption into a knowledge of these two last children of their union, Pell and Kay, who for the first time perhaps had looked at him with friendly eyes.

“Does he get the dog?” inquired Kay out of the silence, and he turned his gaze to her with a new pleasure, amused by her habit of coming straight to the point without perambulation, though a few days ago it had seemed to him merely graceless and abrupt.

There was after all a certain disarming honesty about it, he thought, but he was not going to admit it to her, and he said:

“Don’t talk like that, even if I am merely your father. Charity should begin at home.”

“The answer is in the affirmative,” translated Kay.

“What’s that? I will not be harried, and I won’t have my comments on your manners ignored either, so now you know.”

“You’ve begun too late in life, father,” said Kay. “My manners are past recall.”

She was amused and unimpressed where an earlier generation would have been either defiant or demure, but in a moment she continued:

“If you want to criticize my care of Pell, go ahead, because perhaps I oughtn’t to have let him out of my sight.... Only it seems rather mean.”

“There’s nothing wrong with your care of the child. Do you think I want to turn you into a nursemaid directly you come home?” said her father. “I don’t think Pell did break the hedge ... the woman was exaggerating, but the question of the dog raises difficulties, Kay. First thing we’ll hear is that he has bitten one of the Peebles.”

“Oh, but how lovely,” exclaimed his daughter, charmed at the idea.

“You wouldn’t think it so lovely if we were ordered to get rid of the dog.”

“No, and a biteless dog would be so dull. You have seriously decided against it then?”

He found it hard to withstand her wistful tone.

“I must see this hedge. If there is any sign of a break we should be asking for trouble. I’m not going to have a dog that has to be chained up, that’s an abomination and ought to be forbidden by law.... No, on the whole, I have not decided against it. Will that satisfy you, Miss Persistence?”

“Yes. I think you are most satisfactory,” returned his daughter handsomely.

After dinner she went up to Pell’s room with a virtuous desire to keep a more careful eye on him. He had begun to undress for the look of the thing, and was busy at the window with affairs of his own.

“I’m *going* to bed,” he informed her pointedly.

“Sorry to intrude on a man at such a time, I’m sure,” said Kay, “but I thought you might like to take me swimming at eight o’clock tomorrow morning if you haven’t a more pressing engagement.”

Pell raced out of the room and returned, dragging a large rubber crocodile, somewhat shabby from unauthorized adventures in the bath.

“Can he come?”

“I should be charmed to include him in the invitation. What’s his name?”

“Emily,” returned the crocodile’s owner after a moment’s thought.

Kay shook hands with Emily and put her to bed on the dressing-chest, saying she was worn out, any one could see, and would need all her strength for the morning.

“Do cats have doctors?” inquired Pell suddenly.

“Yes, of course, if they need them. Why?”

“Well, Mr. Peebles was looking for his cat and then he saw the doctor and said, there, she was ill. Beatrice thinks he’s not quite right. Why isn’t he, do you think? What isn’t he quite right *about*?” inquired Pell, frowning.

“Perhaps Beatrice thinks the cat isn’t ill.”

“Oh, I see.” Pell went back to the window as a hint that he had business to attend to, and Kay opened the door.

“Well, I’ll look in again in about ten minutes,” she remarked pleasantly. “Of course if you’re still going to bed, I shall have to ring up the police, they are rather strict about things like that.”

She hoped this was being firm enough and that he would take the hint before too long. To hold forth and play the elder made her self-conscious, for she could remember vividly the peace of being let alone at that age.

Pell amused her, but she knew that it was quite probable she did not amuse him in the least and that very likely her remarks about the policeman were now being dismissed with silent scorn.

Crouched in the drawing-room before dinner, she had heard her father storming at the child and then as suddenly cease to storm, and she had run to the door. But there had been nothing more but the murmur of voices until the combatants came out, Pell scrambling upstairs, to wait for his elder, of whom he inquired eagerly: “*How* would you skin me alive?”

“That’s a metaphor and means you’ll catch it,” his father had returned. “Run along to your supper now. You mustn’t keep Beatrice waiting.”

And Beatrice, curious no doubt, had questioned Pell, and said Mr. Peebles, if you asked her, was not quite right.

Downstairs Kay sought Beatrice and made a few inquiries.

“You see, Miss, the old gentleman’s forever spying over our hedge. Your mother would tell you. Perfectly ridiculous, she said he was.”

“But why?” asked the girl, puzzled.

“Well, miss, if you ask me, some people have nothing better to do than to be nosey. His daughters are just as bad, only not so open about it ... and copying the mistress’s dresses too with faces like theirs,” said Beatrice with fine scorn. “Jealous of her, if you ask me.”

“Oh, no—not really?”

“As true as you stand there, Miss Kay. Your mother’s blue gown she bought two months ago.... One of those old frights must come out in the very same material. It would make you laugh at her age.”

Kay went away with an indignant face. She could only suppose the Peebles were deliberately trying to be unpleasant out of envy of her mother, and she felt a childish impulse to give them a run for their money. Remembering her beach-pajamas, she rushed upstairs and put them on, then sauntered into the garden, hoping all four of the enemy would soon be peering through the hedge. Instead, however, she saw her father and Elliott walking

the length of it in search of a gap, and at the same moment Derek Ashe appeared, having crossed the plank across the small breakwater between the two gardens.

"Oh, hullo, Pierrette."

"Don't say it is as feeble as that!" exclaimed the girl. "I hoped it would look really fast. Derek, how would you stage an orgy?"

The young man shouted with laughter. Though they were nearly the same age he looked and was much older than she, old enough certainly to find the question funny rather than naïve, and not to feel it necessary to pretend to a vast experience of orgies.

"The pajamas are a knock-out; but why an orgy?" he asked.

"To annoy the old Peebles."

"Sounds like wasting ammunition to me."

She told him of the letter of complaint about Pell, and Beatrice's riders to the incident, not however her own secret anxieties behind it all.

"Oh, well, perhaps she wasn't enjoying very good health this afternoon, or perhaps 'my aunt at the Palace' had upset her. You'd be crotchety with a nose like that. As for copying your mother's frock, I think that's a step in the right direction. Come along over here where you can be seen. I should love Miss Maud to come out in red and green pajamas."

Kay laughed and they sat on the grass together in full view of the magisterial group on the neighboring lawn.

"Do you think if I cling round your manly neck it would have a good effect?" she asked.

"If you do, you'll have to take the consequences, so I warn you."

"Would you repulse me?" asked Kay dramatically.

Derek considered her with a faint smile. He was tempted to invite her to try it and find out, but he knew that he would not really do anything of the kind. Instead he said:

"Why should I be slaughtered to make a Peebles holiday?" and offered her a cigarette.

"I never seem to have any, I'm always taking yours," said Kay mechanically. "I'd better owe it to you."

"That's all right.... How did the tennis go this afternoon?"

“He can’t play much and he talks nineteen to the dozen. Still, I’ve told him he can come round sometimes, because he seemed keen to,” said Kay. “I think he’s lonely. He’s rather an odd young man.”

Derek Ashe digested this information in silence and presently he inquired,

“Have you decided about the Sorbonne?”

“No.... I think I probably shan’t go after all,” said the girl slowly. “I haven’t said anything, but there are a lot of reasons.... You see, I have hardly ever been at home, and it is so difficult to know what’s fair.”

“Yes, I know.” The phrase struck an answering chord for Derek, for reasons of his own. “It’s dam’ difficult.”

From now on there would be no more long vacations for him, but hard work and the slow, upward climb in his profession. Though his mother’s brother, a King’s Counsel, had made promises of aid, this might mean little or much, but most certainly it would mean—relatives being what they are—that his deserts must be above suspicion. Derek Ashe had always known this, the circumstances of his life at home had made him responsible beyond his years, and he had no particular quarrel with the situation.

But in the meantime there was Kay. If she went to France he would miss her badly; if she did not go would she be here ... would she be satisfied with that? Could you expect it? What did she want of life?

It did not occur to him that it was strange that he, of all people, should not know this; their companionship had been of such a long and natural growth that he had never measured it, and now its possible loss filled all his mind.

“Is this fellow Milton settled here for good?” he asked.

“No idea,” returned Kay. “Oh, by the way, Pell and I are going in for a swim at eight in the morning, if you’d like to come ... with Emily.”

“Who is Emily?”

“She’s a crocodile.”

“Oh, good. I’d love to meet a crocodile called Emily,” said Derek, wondering whether it wasn’t a red herring she really meant. But that wasn’t like Kay and somehow he felt a little cheered.

The twilight began to fade and the three Miss Peebles rose up and escorted their old father indoors.

Elliott and his employer, having found the hedge intact, strolled off to the other end of the garden deep in a discussion of the European situation and the

state of the world. A fisherman went home whistling along the towing-path, and the two friends sat on, talking and falling silent. Derek lay back on the grass and saw the woods grow black against the paling sky, and Kay, hugging her knees beside him like some remembered statue come to life, which he had loved but could not name. He breathed the scent of the warm earth and felt all his senses moving within him in a rhythm of which she was a part. He would have liked the moment to go on for ever, yet felt in it a loveliness almost beyond his bearing. She was so close that he could have touched her, held her fast, her young body against his heart, but the terror that she might break away engulfed him in a wave of despair as though he already saw the moment gone and, with it, all the beauty in the world.

Somewhere a window slammed as some poor fool shut out the night, and Kay lifted her chin and said "Peebles" with a laugh. Slowly and as though from far away the common world came back, and with a sigh he thought of his father needing him presently to help him to bed, and hating his mother to do it in spite of her clever careful hands. He became aware of the dampness of the grass under his touch and remembered with dismay that Kay had been sitting on it, and he should have fetched her a cushion.

Reluctantly he scrambled to his feet.

"You'll be getting a chill ... they're thin, aren't they, those things? ... Better get up."

His voice was strange in his ears, harsh when he would have had it gentle, but she did not notice.

"Yes, lovely. I think I'll take to trousers.... Give us a hand."

He gave her one and felt the unconscious clasp of her firm fingers for a moment with a pang, because there was no answer here to his own need and desire.

"For why should you have all the advantages?" said Kay, pursuing her own line of thought as she stood up and shook out her clothes.

"All?"

"Well, trousers anyway.... Still, you can't wear scarlet ones, I have the pull on you there...."

She strolled with him to the plank over the backwater and then with a casual good-night returned slowly to the house, envying him because as a man his way was plain and hers so undecided. For the moment she was needed here, but suppose everything came right again at home, what then? She had hoped to go to the Sorbonne, but if her father could not afford the cost of

Pell's schooling this year, how could she ask? She might look for work and even find it, and that might be fun, but would it be fair in a world where thousands were in need of it more? She and her friends had argued this vexed question many times; most of them held that it was each one's job to look out for herself, but none the less rather pointedly envied Kay, who had no material need to seek a livelihood.

Kay herself was now suffering the defects of that advantage. Hitherto her course had been clear and her days full. She had had to justify her scholarship, and a natural facility for languages had made that an absorbing game for the moment, but it was hardly an aim in life. The girl possessed, for all her casual bearing, a restless and inquiring mind which, in a definite profession, might have carried her far. She was to some extent her father's daughter, but more the child of her grandfather and the generations further back, among them perhaps a woman here and there, quiescent because the period demanded that, but expending unsuspected qualities on a deepset loyalty on those they loved, whoever these might chance to be. The individualist in Kay had brought her home, alone of her parents' adult children, to be an anxious though silent participant in their affair, but it had not failed to war with that other part of her which had carried her to Vienna two weeks ago.

As she entered the house her father was just turning on the hall light, and he stared at her brilliant costume in surprise.

"You look very gay," he said, "but are you off to bed then?"

"You don't sleep in these. They're beach-pajamas," explained the girl, expecting to hear he thought them hardly nice and waiting wickedly.

"Oh, I see. Was that Derek with you on the lawn? I suppose they were put on for his admiration," suggested her father.

"No, to shock the Peebles. Derek came in unexpectedly."

Kay went off in search of a book and her father looked after her with thoughtful face. He seemed to remember a long and close alliance between these two, and wondered whether she was quite as unconcerned as she appeared to be. Once a father would have made it his business to find out, he thought, but now you were not even supposed to ask. Wasn't that the way of it? Still, she was very young, and Derek no doubt merely a string to her bow ... and that young doctor who had come to tennis this afternoon another, very likely. It was what they must expect now with a daughter at home.

James Flete, with the picture of the girl in her gay, ridiculous garments still before his eyes, hoped she had come to stay at least for a year or two.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHILDHOOD FRIEND

1

ON SUNDAY morning two things happened.

Elliott went in to the Peebles with a note from his employer, suggesting that the Redgates gardener should be permitted to examine and make good as far as possible the damage to the hedge. This was Elliott's suggestion, and he returned from the call, looking both mystified and amused.

Miss Bertha Peebles, very much fluttered, had come out to interview the visitor and refuse Mr. Flete's offer firmly. Her nature was not equal to the strain, however, and she had only succeeded in being mysterious.

The gardener must please not trouble. Their own man could see to it. At least, as Mr. Flete would probably know, they had given up a resident gardener, but still employed one when necessary, though not on Sundays of course, and perhaps it was not as serious as her sister had thought, but as her dear father did not enjoy good health they could not have little boys running in and out. Mr. Peebles was so very fond of strolling along the hedge in the sunshine. This was his favorite walk and no doubt the gardener had often seen him, but he must not think that strange because old gentlemen had their little whims and it was difficult to change them. As Miss Bertha often told her father, their neighbors might almost think he was staring into their garden.

"Whereas he is just dreaming and communing with nature," finished the lady brightly.

"Qui s'excuse, s'accuse," thought Elliott, who certainly had seen Mr. Peebles at the hedge, and his daughters also, paying considerable attention to their neighbors, particularly when Mrs. Flete and her friends were in the garden. He imagined the whole family had nothing better to do than concern themselves with other people's affairs, and had been indignant because caught in the act by young Pell.

"I imagine," he said to his employer, "they were afraid the boy would carry tales of them, so struck the first blow. It sounds childish of course, but most of us are childish in some way or other. This may be a warning to them. The poor lady seemed very much agitated."

James Flete nodded.

"So that lets Pell out?"

"And the dog in, I suppose?" suggested Elliott.

The second happening was a telephone call from Rosamond, blithely announcing that she and Dick were leaving in their car for Devonshire, and would stop at Redgates for luncheon on the way.

Rosamond had forgotten her indignation with her father, which had been a convenience rather than a conviction, and if she thought about his quarrel with her mother at all, she imagined it had blown over by now. At all events it was their funeral, and no reason why she and Dick should miss a perfectly good free lunch, and have to pay five shillings a head or more for an indifferent one at a country inn.

"Have something nice, Kay," she ordered her young sister over the wire.

"I'll do my best, but it's Sunday, Rosey."

"I know, but cook can manage. Tell her she must."

Rosamond, used to ordering restaurant meals, could see no difficulty, and rang off, putting the onus on Kay, who went slowly to the kitchen to break the news of this extra work on Cook's Sunday afternoon out.

"If Miss Rosamond and Mr. Fielding can't do with what's good enough for the master and you, miss, I'm sorry for it," said cook frostily. By the promise of an extra evening during the week she was at length placated, and the girl went off to inform her father.

"Dick and Rosamond are coming to lunch."

"Oh? ... Well, that will be nice for you," he suggested. "You haven't seen your sister for some time, or have you?"

"Not since Easter. But they won't be staying except for lunch. They're going to Devonshire for a holiday ... in the car."

"Lucky young people."

His tone was dry and Kay turned away rather depressed, unaware that her father had merely been thinking that Rosamond might bestir herself to see a little more of her young sister.

When the Fieldings' car turned into the drive ten minutes before luncheon, Kay was dismayed to see that it held three people, and almost incredulous when she discovered the third to be Dr. Milton.

"We met Andy and brought him along," said Rosamond carelessly. "I hear he's always in and out of the house, so I knew it wouldn't matter."

"Oh, how do you do," said Kay to the visitor, and then having whispered a word to Beatrice and sent the two men into the drawing-room, ran upstairs after her sister.

"Rosey, why did you bring him? He was here yesterday."

“Well, that doesn’t matter. He can give you some tennis this afternoon or something. An extra man is always handy. Don’t be such a kid,” said Rosamond, who might want a free but certainly not a domestic luncheon. She liked to carry her own atmosphere along with her, and had picked up Andrew for no other reason. “I hope you have cocktails for us.”

“I never thought of them.”

“Oh, *Kay*. But when people are coming to lunch you must have cocktails.”

“I didn’t happen to regard you and Dick as people,” returned Kay.

“Well, Andrew Milton is anyway, so don’t stand there arguing. Cut down and ask father for the key on the quiet. Get us some sherry, we’ll have to make that do.”

Kay felt the young sister again, home for the holidays to be ordered about and, like that poor creature, had a mutinous impulse to say “Do it yourself.”

Instead, she stood her ground and asked:

“Rosamond, have you heard from mother?”

“Not a line. Bless you, mother never writes letters and neither do I. Hurry up about the sherry, Kay, and push on lunch, will you, because we haven’t long to stay.”

Rosamond, busy at the mirror, did not trouble to look round, and Kay with a faint shrug departed.

She was not going to whisper to her father, however. Why should she? She strolled into the drawing-room where she could hear him with Dick and Andrew Milton, and said calmly:

“They want some sherry before lunch, father. May I have the key?”

“Why, of course. I’ll see to it, child. I should have thought of it.”

Kay followed him into the hall, and was surprised to receive an approving smile.

“You are looking very nice today.”

“Am I?”

She went to the mirror and looked in it doubtfully. Her sleeveless tennis frock had seemed so ordinary beside Rosamond’s smart suit, but now she discovered that her cheeks were bright.

“That’s temper,” she said with a friendly grin to the girl in the glass.

Rosamond devoted herself to Andrew Milton during luncheon, and held the floor. James Flete talked, when the noise allowed, to his son-in-law, and Kay exchanged an occasional grin with Pell.

"Dear me, we are entertaining you *en famille*," Rosamond had said to Andy, on seeing the little boy come in. "Well, Petsy, come and say how do you do to Dr. Milton, and kiss your big sister."

Pell had stared uncomfortably at this form of address and Andrew Milton's suggestion that he was a lucky young fellow.

"She didn't kiss me, you know," said the visitor.

Pell didn't care. The point was that she was determined to kiss him and he hated it. Submitting with a bad grace, he had betaken himself to a distance, much relieved to find he was to sit well away from the aggressor and beside Kay.

Rosamond thought Kay was really too feeble for anything to have Pell at luncheon when other people were there, and determined to tell her to hand him over to Beatrice in future. Kay gave her no opportunity, however, but let her go up for her hat alone when they had finished their coffee and were ready to depart. As Rosamond came downstairs she was saying to Andrew Milton:

"I suppose you are looking for your hat. Are they dropping you at your lodgings as they go?"

Andrew, who had followed her into the hall, meaning to rescue his racquet and shoes from the Fieldings' car, exclaimed:

"Don't say we can't have some tennis after all? I haven't a thing to do this afternoon."

"Of course you can," put in Rosamond. "Kay will give you a game. I told him you would, Kay."

"I happen to have promised a game to somebody else," said Kay coolly, "though of course I don't want to hurry Dr. Milton away," she added with an effort of politeness.

"Who is it?" asked her sister.

"Derek!"

"But, good lord, Derek doesn't matter." Rosamond laughed at Andrew Milton. "Kay's childhood friend," she mocked. "You can take the pair of kids on with one hand. Come along out and get your things."

The lack of sophistication in her younger sister filled Rosamond with worldly scorn. Kay would never get on—which in the elder's dictionary meant 'get off'—at this rate. Unless indeed Kay had suddenly produced Derek for purposes of strategy.

The one thing that did not enter Rosamond's head was that Kay really enjoyed Derek's company and was frankly bored with Andrew Milton's. Using the human race as an audience and never playing this rôle herself, Rosamond would not have understood either sentiment, and she presently drove away, entirely blind to the seething indignation of her junior.

'Dam' cheek!' thought Kay, and then saw Andrew Milton, this incubus that had been laid upon her shoulders.

"Well, what about the jolly old game, eh?" he suggested complacently.

"Oh, go away and practice your stroke until I'm ready," she exclaimed. "The world has still to go on, you know. Cooks have to have their Sundays off if people do go to Devonshire and drop in to eat in passing, and somebody has to soothe them for taking extra trouble. This isn't Utopia."

She went into the house and left him and Andrew, whistling softly, said to himself with admiration; "There's a girl!"

He liked a bit of spirit and felt thoroughly pleased with the afternoon ahead.

Kay meanwhile was thinking as she went indoors that Rosamond had hardly exchanged a dozen words with her father, and had not heard from her mother, yet did not care in the least. Was her own anxiety all nonsense then? the girl wondered, or was it merely that Rosey, now safely out of it all, was just uninterested.

'She made use of us this morning,' she thought indignantly. 'She's selfish as well as patronizing.'

It was a new and painful thought, as though she had seen her sister clearly for the first time. Rosamond in an hour had lost the admiration of years, but she would never know it nor care. The loss was the giver's, for that is the way of things.

Kay put her head round the library door and demanded of her father darkly:

"When did you play tennis last?"

He looked at her in assumed astonishment.

“You’ll be asking me my age next.... Loosely speaking, I should say it must have been somewhere about the year one.”

“Disgraceful! ... a child like you,” said his daughter, frowning. “Father, they’ve planked Dr. Milton down on me, and I’ve asked Derek for a game. Couldn’t you make a fourth?”

“I should have heart failure and so would you,” said her father. “Come now, Kay, surely you’re big enough to tackle two young men at once, or what’s the world coming to?”

“Pieces,” said Kay. “I suppose if I asked Elliott he would say he hadn’t played since 55 B.C.”

“I think it probable. By the way, that was a very nice lunch you managed to give us at such short notice.”

“I’m glad you’re pleased, but I’ve had to owe cook an extra night out, and I suppose I’ll owe Beatrice at least a hat or something.”

“So that’s how it’s done?”

“Are you shocked?”

“Not a bit. I haven’t run a business all these years for nothing.”

The two exchanged a smile, and the girl went off to administer soothing syrup in the kitchen, feeling cheered.

Half an hour later Derek Ashe arrived, to find her already at the tennis court with another man.

“Dr. Milton, this is Mr. Ashe,” said the girl, introducing them. “Rosamond brought Dr. Milton unexpectedly, Derek. I’m awfully sorry, but it was too late to try and get a fourth.”

The ‘childhood friend’ looked older than Andrew Milton had expected, but he greeted him in what he believed was the right tone:

“I suppose you are a son of Major Ashe? Your father’s a patient of mine.”

“Oh, really? But, of course, you came to see my father once when Dr. Rose was away, I believe,” returned Derek noncommittally. “How do you do.”

“Yes, a most interesting case. You see, it’s like this. The leg ...”

Kay, with a glance at Derek’s face, rushed to the rescue:

“Look here, Dr. Milton, this is a tennis court and not a lecture-room or a surgery. Derek, do you think you could take us both on?”

"Yes, of course."

For Derek, as for Kay, the afternoon was ruined. Not only was Milton's play far below the level of the other two, but the fellow preened himself like a cockatoo, being apparently under the impression that Kay had chosen to play with him for his merits rather than the contrary. He called her partner loudly and often, and constantly engaged her in chat, which held up the game and was inaudible to their opponent in the other court.

"Silly ass," said Derek to himself, and then tried to view the interloper with a dispassionate eye to discover what Kay could see in him, if anything. No doubt he was good-looking in his way, though rather short, which would account for so much bounce. Little men often seemed so damned conceited ... "and then I'm prejudiced against the man anyway," mused Derek. "All that tripe he talked to the governor."

He had been away at the time of Milton's visit to the Major, but had heard it all from the patient when he came home.

"I suppose there isn't a chance in a thousand?" he had asked his mother afterwards.

"Not in a million. The man's a fool."

"It isn't merely the matter of the cost and all that?"

"My God, Derek, do you think if I had a fortune, I'd go through it again?" she had exclaimed. "All that agony, to give your father possibly twenty-nine good days in a month instead of twenty-eight?"

And Derek, who had feared she had been thinking of him, had been abashed and now wondered, since he knew her pretty well, if that wasn't exactly what his mother had intended him to be.

Anyway Milton was a dam' tactless fool and not fit to black Kay's boots, so there was no need for him to behave as though he owned the universe and a bit over. Derek returned a feeble service from the man with a slashing stroke that left the server gaping and brought a shout of "Well played" from Kay. After that congratulation he regained his sense of humor, and bestirred himself to get what he could out of the game.

"By Jove, that's invigorating," declared Andrew Milton, flinging down his racquet beside the tea-table an hour later. "Say what you like, London has its points, but you people in the country do have a pull in being able to get some tennis."

The country mice thus addressed received this information about the great metropolis with evident astonishment.

“Tennis been abolished from Queen’s Club, Hurlingham, Ranelagh and all the London squares, then?” inquired Kay. “Or are you moaning because they won’t let you play in Piccadilly Circus?”

“Now, now, you know I mean nothing of the kind. But life is altogether too hectic,” said Milton.

“So you have retired from the social round to a country practice?” inquired Derek blandly.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that, Ashe. I shall go to Harley Street later, of course, but in the meantime I am busy writing an important medical book—or I trust it will be considered important—and need quiet.”

“Really? But if you are writing a book, you must meet the Johnstones,” declared Kay, “or do you know them already?”

“The Johnstones? No ... Who? ... Why?”

“They are our literary family,” explained Derek. “You’ll like the Johnstones. Don’t say you’ve never heard of Dale Johnstone? Oh, but I mean to say you must ... everybody has.”

He looked so shocked that Milton said hastily:

“Dale Johnstone, of course. But I didn’t know the fellow lived down here. Jolly interesting. Unfortunately, old Rose is a bit jealous about his important patients, naturally enough, so I don’t happen to have come across the Johnstones.”

Derek winked at Kay.

“Too bad,” he sympathized. “What a pity you didn’t think of ringing one of the girls to come over and make a fourth this afternoon, Kay.”

“Yes, by Jove,” agreed Milton, “or even the great Dale himself ... pretty good that for an impromptu, don’t you think? So doggish.”

To their stare of bewilderment he explained kindly:

“Great Dane, you know. Ha, ha!”

His hearers exploded with hysterical laughter which was a relief to their feelings if hardly as flattering as he believed.

“Dale Johnstone happens to be an old lady,” Kay finally managed to explain. “The girls are her nieces.”

“Well, why not get ’em over now? Plenty of daylight left,” suggested Milton eagerly.

“I’m sorry.” Kay looked at her watch. “Derek, we’ve only half an hour or we shall be late. It’s hardly worth while beginning another set, and I hate to be inhospitable, Dr. Milton, but we’re going out.”

“Harold said not a moment later than six,” improvised Derek, “but I think we’ll just do it, Kay.”

“Yes.”

On this note they hastily finished tea and speeded or attempted to speed the parting guest.

“Something of a sticker, isn’t he?” remarked Derek when at length Andrew Milton was safely out of sight, and he shot a questioning glance at Kay.

“I know, and if we had played any longer I should have been forced to ask him to supper. I suppose it is pretty dull for him, but I simply can’t inflict a guest on Beatrice when cook is out.”

“Why not introduce him to the Johnstones? They would lap him up.”

“Yes, and then we’d never see him again.”

“Good lord, do you want to?” exclaimed the young man in consternation.

“Just for a bit,” said Kay obscurely.... “Oh well, you know, Derek, if Dolly comes down, a fourth will be handy.”

“Um ... that’s so, I suppose; but do you think Dolly will care for him?”

“No, of course not. Don’t be an ass, but you must admit three is a crowd.”

“I should jolly well say it was,” beamed Derek, cheered at last. Those were his sentiments exactly, and if Kay had discovered this important truth at last, he felt that all might still be well.

“Come along and see old Harold,” he said, dismissing Milton. “Must do the thing properly. When you tell a lie, always stick to it, is my motto.”

“Oh well, I suppose we can’t risk another game, in case our limpet has stuck to the fence,” she assented regretfully.

His cunning to get her to himself away in the boat-house did not strike her. She would go with him anywhere as she had always gone, but he did not want that and yet was afraid to lose even so much. Gloom descended upon him again as they crossed the plank into the Ashes’ garden, which all her pleasure in Harold’s new war-paint could not lighten.

He had made the old boat smart for her, and even the brasses had been polished till they shone pale gold in the dim light of the shed. All that labor of his hands had been a gift, but now he was tongue-tied and could not make it.

"When I'm toiling you must exercise him for me, Kay. Don't forget," he said instead.

"Well, as long as you let me pay for his feed I will," agreed Kay.

"Look here, I'm asking a favor, not conferring one," he exclaimed savagely, and she looked round at him in mild astonishment.

"All right, but I can't see what good it's going to do old Harold for me to go out and spoil his grandeur."

"Dam' it all, that's what it's for."

"Yes, I know," she returned, not seeing the implication, "but why can't I go fifty-fifty? We always have."

There was his chance, but he saw that she was not really asking, the question had been mechanical, even a little absent, as though her mind were somewhere else, and he had a helpless feeling that they had never been more certainly apart, and nothing that he could do would bring her near.

He wanted to quarrel with her, hurt her ... no, not that ... even if he could, if any word of his would reach her in this mood.

She was leaning against the boat-house door in her primrose dress, her eyes on his gift which she did not see, and he thought miserably, "She knows me too well. I wish to God she would go away to France."

How could he win her? If he could only meet her suddenly as a stranger might, and with a stranger's chance; but all the familiar pattern of the past, their long companionship, seemed hostile to him now. His love had sprung from it unawares, yet it had built a wall between them and she was standing on the other side.

Why can't we go fifty-fifty? We always have. No, that was no question. It was almost a knell.

Yet had he but known it Kay's thoughts were not so far away, and suddenly she said:

"Rosamond was so patronizing today I could have smacked her."

"Well, what did you expect?" he said shortly. "She always has been patronizing. *I* never thought her a penny wonder, if you did."

"I know.... She called you my childhood's friend," reported Kay, imitating her sister's tone at its most languid.

"*Blast her eyes!*" exclaimed the young man, flushing furiously at this open reference to all he had been deploring, and Kay, looking round at him, threw up her head and laughed, delighted.

"Ah, I feel better after that. I shall sit," she said, and climbed into the motor-boat which was still on the slips where it had been painted.

He did not follow her, but he too felt better, for if she also had resented the reference, didn't that mean the barrier of their old association was not so impenetrable after all? And she hadn't at least been thinking of that fellow Milton, as he had feared.

"Look here, Kay," he began eagerly, but a noise from the house interrupted and she exclaimed, "Whatever's that?"

Two male voices could be heard as though in argument, and then they ceased and an orchestra began to play.

"Only father arguing with the wireless announcer probably. You've no idea what a lot of fun he gets out of that," said Derek, rather dashed.

"I heard him the other morning. It was a bright idea of yours to get him the set."

"Not on your life. Mother thought of it and paid for it, and then wished the presentation on to me. Same with that special chair years ago, and various other things. A whited sepulcher, that what I am."

The obtrusion of his own home into the conversation at that particular moment had been the last thing he had wanted, even though Kay was almost as familiar as he with the position there. He might have his own vague understanding as well as his own impatience, with both combatants, but the fact remained that it was hardly a place of domestic bliss. He began to explain it rather awkwardly, enlarging upon the matter of the gifts.

"When I was a kid and couldn't possibly have bought them, it was all very well," he said, "but I did buck this time because I dam' well might have thought of it myself and scraped up the cash too, with a bit of care. Getting the credit made me feel so cheap, and what do you think she said: 'Why the devil should I trouble about your feelings?' ... Can you beat it, Kay?"

"Really? But of course she wouldn't mean it," said the girl consolingly.

"No, I know. She always has chucked brickbats at me and I don't mind. If mother turned suddenly sweet to me I should imagine she was off her form or

something. When you come to think of it, Kay, I've always had a fairly good time as fellows go, though if I'd had a soft sort of mother it might have been pretty foul. And, as I look at it, I simply didn't come into the question of the presents, except as somebody who happened to be on the spot. My theory is that she was quite wide awake enough to see that the governor owed her too much already."

As he spoke he began to see, as though sharply illumined, the magnitude of what he longed to ask of Kay. He wanted to give her everything in the world, yet for years perhaps—some years certainly—circumstances being as they were, he would be able to give her nothing at all. He had an obscure sense of sympathy for his father, who had had to take so much from his mother that now even a mere gift turned sour at her touch, but his father's disability had come after marriage and could not have been foreseen. If his own disability was not physical, it was none the less real to him. He would be asking Kay to wait indefinite years, taking her freedom, giving nothing in return.

Kay looked thoughtfully up to the house where the orchestra was still playing tempestuously.

"Oh, but ... you wouldn't feel that if you were fond of a person," she protested. "Owing wouldn't come into it."

"Well, perhaps it oughtn't to in a way, but a fellow expects to be responsible for his wife and his home and all that, and when he gets smashed up and she has to, it must be pretty thick.... You see, Kay, you're letting a girl in for all sorts of things, very likely...."

Kay wondered if he was thinking of Dolly and said wisely:

"She may be letting you in for all sorts of things too. Don't be an ass. The girl isn't the only one who takes a chance, and she knows what she's doing as well as the man unless she's a perfect ninny."

Derek took his pipe out of his mouth and then put it back again as though he had changed his mind. Her very calm sent him flying from the opening she gave him to the safe subject of his people.

"Of course you know them nearly as well as I do," he said obscurely, "or I shouldn't be spouting like this. Remember the time we pinched the plank for a bridge over the backwater from the men who were building on to your house, and then bribed 'em with all our pocket-money and some apples to let us keep it?"

“Yes, and pinched the apples to do it too. Do you know what your mother said to me about Pell the other morning? ‘Don’t teach him to rob my orchard.’ I never dreamt she had spotted us, did you?”

“No ... well, there you are, Kay. She’s a dark horse.”

The Redgates’ gong rang and she scrambled out of the boat with an exclamation of surprise. He was so awkward that she was gone from him over the plank with a casual good-by, leaving him standing bereft, damning his own impotence. He had said nothing, made her see nothing, and to her the tranquillity of their association was unchanged.... Moodily he looked round the familiar scene, longing to get away from it, yet knowing he would not go because she was near.

He sat down in the boat-house, his eyes on the faintly moving water under the slips, but he saw instead her eyes, deeply blue, and the quick upward tilt of her chin as she said: “The girl isn’t the only one who takes a chance”—and what was the other thing?—“Owing wouldn’t come into it.” But of course it would. She might not think so, for she was generous as the sun, she would give her head away, and wasn’t that the very reason why you mustn’t let her?

But then if you didn’t some other fellow quickly would.

Derek stood up suddenly, and all his fine theories fell to pieces. He had an impulse to race after her and bring her back, but it was too late, she was already in the house and he shrugged at his own folly, his cowardice and change of heart.

Unused to such vacillations in himself, he was certain he would stand no chance against the hypothetical other man, and gloomily he began to think of Milton, so cocksure and pluming himself because Kay was commonly polite.

He loathed the man with his driveling talk of important patients and interesting cases. He’d have to take a few lessons in holding his tongue if he hoped to succeed as a doctor. Derek made up his mind to drop a few words to that effect to his father as soon as an opportunity arose. There was a certain balm in this, for why, he asked himself, should they have the little blighter’s talk of specialists continually flung in their teeth?

With this project in mind he presently strolled in through one of the lounge windows to the accompaniment of howls from the wireless, through which one station was treading on the heels of another as the Major impatiently turned the switch.

“These gibbering foreigners,” he said indignantly, turning it off with a snort.

“Shall I get it for you?” offered his son.

“No, no, let ’em jabber. Wasn’t that Kay I saw? Why didn’t you bring her in?”

“She only came for a sec to see the boat, and to lose that fellow Milton, who foisted himself on us for tennis. You know I think he’s a bit of an ass.”

“What, my young doctor friend? So he was there, was he? Dam’ clever fellow. Your mother has prejudiced you.”

“She has barely mentioned his name, but he boasted to me that you were a patient of his, and then later informed us that old Dr. Rose kept all the important residents to himself. That puts you in your place, governor.”

At that moment the door opened and Mrs. Ashe looked in. She had run up to town the day before and bought a new dress, with a sigh for the necessity, but with more care than usual, none the less. It was severe in line for she could not tolerate frills and furbelows, but the material was fresh and almost gay with its pattern of yellow and green and rose, and her men-folk gazed at her in surprise.

“Oh, you are there, Derek. Good.”

She retreated and he called:

“Can I do anything?”

“No, stay where you are. I came to call you in. Supper in a few moments.”

“So your mother’s been titivating, has she?” growled the Major sarcastically. “A good joke that, I must say.”

Suddenly Derek’s recent cogitations on his family bore definite fruit.

“Go on, governor, you know you like it,” he said.

“Well, I’m damned! And what makes you imagine yourself a judge on my likes and dislikes?” inquired his father, evidently taken aback.

“You say yourself we are much alike, so why not?” returned his son.

“Hm! You’ve been giving your mother a hint about her clothes, eh?” said the Major slowly.

Derek grinned.

“Not on your life. She’d knock my head off.”

“Yes, I suppose so.... She’s embittered, my boy.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” returned Derek easily. “All put on, don’t you think? ... You know, making out she’s a holy terror, to get her own way.... And of course it works.”

“So that’s your view, is it?” His father sighed. “She was a damned handsome girl in her day, your mother. You wouldn’t believe that, I daresay. I must show you a photograph of her some time.... I have one, I think, though God knows where.”

The gong rang and Derek got up to give his father a hand, but he waved him off.

“I can manage. The leg’s rather better, thank heaven. No need to be more of a crock than I must.”

He followed his son into the dining-room which was at the moment empty. The one maid of the household, a staunch Presbyterian, had gone to church.

Mrs. Ashe herself brought in the meal, which had been left prepared. He did not look at her but said to his son:

“Yes, if I keep on at this rate I’ll give you a round of golf in a day or two. Must get up my game.”

“Is Winifred expected home so soon then?” inquired Mrs. Ashe, vaguely hearing some mention of golf.

“Not that I’m aware of,” he retorted in his usual testy manner. “I’m not dependent on Winifred if I do enjoy her conversation.”

Mrs. Ashe said nothing further but left the conversation to the two men. His reply had been too familiar to touch her to anger or surprise, and her mind was immediately busy on a dozen matters concerned with this improvement in his condition. She must somehow contrive to see that there was money in his pocketbook now that he would be able to get about again for a space. They had a joint account at the bank into which his pension was regularly paid, but it was part of his obstinacy that he would never draw upon it or associate himself in any way with their financial affairs. This had begun long ago in the bad days when it had been necessary to keep various money difficulties from his knowledge. He had misconstrued her motives, as the sick will, and now he could not change. He would have gone penniless rather than ask her for money, and she had to anticipate his needs as best she could, supplying them by subterfuge. Having him out of the house would give her an opportunity to go through his clothes, about which he had always been fastidious. Winifred’s absence was unfortunate because she would have driven him over to golf and kept him amused; he could have given her lunch. And now there were

probably few of his friends available. Weren't the Shepleys away, or was it in September they were going? And old Mr. Douglas? Mrs. Ashe went through the list in her mind, aware that his game at most times was something of a myth, but he liked to go over when he could and make the attempt. Derek might take him on one morning, it was true, but she could not have the boy's time monopolized. He was putting in some hard reading every day and the remainder of this last vacation should be his own.

She glanced shrewdly at her son, in outward form so like his father sometimes, but possessing qualities within at which she could only guess. He was as fond of amusement as any other young man and he had plenty of friends, but except for a week last month and a couple of long week-ends, he had not been away, and a casual question yesterday had elicited the fact that he had no particular plans but would probably knock about on the river. Which meant as usual that Kay was at home and that old allegiance still took precedence of any other. Derek was beyond the age to be held by a mere schoolboy friendship with a girl, and that there had been no cooling off could mean, she supposed, only one thing. In many ways it would have been better for him to find an attraction at a distance, but you couldn't regulate these things, and his restlessness of late was in itself suspicious. Yet there was the girl herself, who might have other plans.

Mrs. Ashe considered the affair almost mechanically, as though all the tides of affection in her had long ago been engulfed in the narrow, necessary business of living. This was their own affair, but at least for practical reasons she might wish it was clear once and for all. Derek could not much longer go mooning about. Work was before him and if he loved the girl and was to be disappointed, it would be well for him to receive that blow and be done with it as quickly as possible.

After supper as he helped her to stack the dishes in the kitchen, she said to him suddenly:

"What's Kay doing with her summer? Isn't she having her friends down? Where's the lipstick young woman, for instance?"

"Dolly Chester? Kay's expecting her, I think, but I don't know when."

"Humph! Dam' good thing."

"Why particularly?" inquired Derek, amused.

"Wake the girl up.... Competition is good for everybody," returned his mother briefly, and on that departed.

He looked after her with a faint smile. Her penetration was amazing; he had always known that in a general way, but he had never, since he had reached young manhood, known her to refer, even as obliquely as this, to a matter which so nearly touched his private affairs.

And wasn't it probable that she had hit the nail upon the head? Kay was not perhaps awake. She was less sexually aware than most girls of her age, and still liable to view such flirtations as offered in a comic spirit. As for competition, however, the shoe might very easily be on the other foot ... that fellow Milton. But no, it was incredible. Not Kay, he could not believe it of her. Besides, it was on Dolly's account that she was putting up with him; hadn't she said so?

'If I know anything of Dolly,' thought Derek, 'some of the bounce will be forcibly extracted from the chap. She'll make him into mince-meat in about two-twos.'

CHAPTER NINE

JAMES THE SECOND

1

ON MONDAY morning Kay went down to breakfast to find a postcard from her mother.

"Of course ask Dolly down, my dear, or any one else you like, and have a good time. Weather lovely here. Just off to golf. Love. W.F."

Not a word about coming home, though Kay had particularly asked for that, and now all her fears were back again. She looked quickly at her father's letters, but there was nothing for him from Scotland, and as she heard his footsteps on the stairs she put her card on the table hastily and came to a decision. She would show it to him as though that was the natural thing to do. She could not go on like this ... worrying and not being sure.

It was astonishing how difficult she found it to rise to this, however. Her father came in, greeted her and said a word to Pell, who slipped into his chair with an upward grin. There was grape-fruit this morning and without its skin, which Pell approved of in the dining-room where, unfortunately, it was considered a crime to splash, and he fell to eagerly.

"Like it?" inquired Kay, the housekeeper.

Pell said "Umm—" with a nod of enthusiasm.

"Is it all right for you, father? It seemed so hot for porridge this morning."

"What's that?" inquired her father absently as he turned over his letters. "Grape-fruit—yes, delicious. The glass is rising, I notice."

"I don't know a thing about what you like to eat," apologized the girl, and then, gathering her courage together: "Oh, by the way, there's a postcard from mother."

She handed it to him and went on with her breakfast assiduously, a fact which her father noted. He sat for a moment with the card in his hand, and then held it away from him to read his wife's somewhat erratic writing.

"But of course you must have your friends down. Why not? Dolly Somebody—is it? Do I know her?" he asked at last.

"She was here at Easter, and I was staying with her last month," said the girl. "I had arranged for her to come this week because she may be getting a job any moment. And then I thought perhaps it would be better to wait until mother came home, so I wrote to see."

"Oh, there's no need to do that, is there? You must return her hospitality and it will amuse you," said her father to that. "If it is a certain young man you are thinking of, I think we can keep an eye on him between us, and there

will be a new member of the household to engage his attention remember—this evening probably."

"Really?" Kay was delighted. "No I wasn't thinking of P—— ... of James the Second," she said with a twinkle in her eye. "Only I thought it might be rather a nuisance to you."

"Not at all, as long as she doesn't want me to play tennis with her or hold her hand. I've forgotten all my accomplishments."

James Flete turned to his letters and his breakfast and said no more, but when he had finished and was leaving for the train, he called Kay into the hall.

She went with her heart in her mouth, to find him taking some notes out of his pocketbook.

"You'll need a little extra money for entertainment purposes, I expect, won't you?" he asked her awkwardly, because he usually left this sort of thing to his wife, and was vague as to what was expected of him.

"Oh, well, you know I had my allowance last week," said Kay with hesitation.

"Wealthy young woman, but I rather think entertaining should be put down as overhead expenses. Here you are. And by the way, do you know whether the household books were paid up last month ... or whatever the expression is?"

"Yes, they were. I did find that out," said Kay. "I was going to ask you what I had to do."

"Don't do anything ... that's all right then. You are managing very well."

"I may be rather extravagant," she warned him. "Cook thinks so. She said it was very extravagant to give Pell an egg every morning, but he's so hungry. You always are at that age, and I didn't see why we should economize on Pell. Cook's idea is to fill him up with lumps of porridge. So wholesome," said Kay with a grimace.

"Werry filling at the price, eh? But I suppose your generation doesn't know its Dickens. Ah, well, I daresay Pell's eggs won't ruin us, though they filled me up with lumps of porridge too at that age."

"And now you can't play tennis or hold hands. That just shows you," said his daughter sternly. "Thank you for the money, father. We *shall* have a bust."

She kissed him suddenly and departed. It was no good. She had been completely on her mother's side, believing him unreasonable, a bully and various other things which he was disproving day by day. All her ideas of him

had been quite wrong and, in spite of herself, they were friends. And her mother had not said a word about coming back, and he had made no comment. There was nothing to be done except to have Dolly down and behave as though everything were as usual, and try to believe it.

And at least they were to get the dog.

It seemed to Kay that the dog was a good sign. There was something permanent about it. You would not, for instance, if your home were going to be shattered at any moment, go out and buy a dog. It would be the last thing.

Suddenly Pell interrupted her thoughts to say:

"Who is James the Second?"

"He was a King."

It was a fortunate if not a candid answer, for the glamour of crowns and scepters immediately diverted Pell's mind from the context which had nothing to do with kings.

"Was he a nice King?"

Kay, for want of any clear impression to the contrary, said:

"Yes, I think you would have liked him very much."

Pell, with a sigh of satisfaction, finished his second slice of toast and went off with his friend the King.

2

The morning was still and already very hot, but Pell cared nothing for that. Beatrice, in consultation with Kay, had decided that shoes were quite enough on any fellow's feet in such weather, and a thin shirt and knickers besides all that the most captious critic could demand. Pell was particularly glad to be rid of his socks, for he and the King were bound for a place where even shoes were superfluous. This was the plank across the backwater where you could sit and cool your toes undisturbed, virtuously aware that you were well away from the forbidden territory inhabited by the Peebles. The King who was young, but of course had to wear his crown even when paddling, had left the Court in secret to discuss military matters with his trusted chief of staff, General Pell, recently promoted to this high office. They were hardly seated on the plank and about to begin their discussion, when Elliott came by and saw at least one of them. Luckily, James the Second was hidden behind his general and deep in thought at the moment, so the general was able to put a little difficulty to his friend Elliott.

“What would you call a King if you had to talk to him?” he asked in a confidential tone.

“Dear me, I’ve never had that privilege,” returned Elliott. “Let me think now. I believe ‘Sir’ would be considered the proper thing.... You’ve chosen a nice cool spot, but be careful now and don’t fall in.”

Elliott passed on, leaving Pell very much surprised, for Sir had been what his father had had to call *his* father. Then perhaps he also was a King? Certainly no one had ever said so, but then nobody told you anything ... except a few people like Kay and Elliott and father, when you happened to ask.

“My father’s father was a king too, James the Second,” said Pell, thinking it good enough to take a chance anyway, but at this moment something happened so exciting that royalty was forgotten. A fish, a real fish, swam under his toes. It was a small one, certainly, but so close that Pell felt he could almost have caught it in his hand. With great care he spread himself out along the plank and waited, watching for another.

The plank was cool—he could feel the coolness right through to his stomach and all along his bare legs, and it rocked a little under his weight. It was lovely. He laid his cheek on it and, peering over, met half his own face peering back from the water below. It looked so funny that he put out his tongue at it experimentally, and the boy in the water returned the compliment. After that they waved first an arm and then a leg, and then with great enthusiasm both arms and both legs, which effectually finished the operation, for the Pell on top, unaccustomed to balancing on his middle, slipped, clutched wildly and fell with a resounding splash on top of the Pell below.

The water stung him sharply and the stones on the bottom grazed his legs, but he hardly noticed that in his dismay as he scrambled out and up the bank, shaking himself and squeezing the water from his shirt and knickers. It was lucky, he thought, that he had no socks on and had taken off his shoes. He proceeded to put these on with some vague idea that they might save the situation, and then he found a sunny place, thinking it was lucky the day was hot because he would soon get dry. Perhaps nobody would notice.

Elliott, however, had heard the splash and now came running.

“Pell, here, young man, what are you up to?”

“Nothing,” said Pell.

Elliott caught him by the shoulder and turned him round.

“I got a bit wet,” admitted Pell, “but it’ll dry in a minute.”

“I should say you did get a bit wet. What did I tell you about being careful? Now run along up and change at once.”

“I’m nearly dry already. Truly I am,” pleaded Pell.

“Yes, I daresay you think you are, but no fellow with a grain of sense sits in wet clothes. So cut along and explain the accident to your sister like a sensible chap.”

Put like that it did not sound so terrible and Pell went, having no choice, but he chose the sunniest way and walked rather slowly, hoping for the best.

Kay, coming out of the house, and seeing the disreputable little figure, stopped with a horrified exclamation:

“Oh, Pell, what have you done to yourself?”

“I had an accident, but I’m very nearly dry.”

“You fell in?”

“Yes, but only a little way and it wasn’t deep. My head didn’t and my shoes didn’t, Kay,” said Pell eagerly.

Kay examined the shoes, but being a practical young woman made further inquiries.

“I don’t see how only the middle of you could have fallen in, you know. How do you account for it?”

“Well, you see I had taken them off luckily,” Pell was forced to admit.

“That *was* lucky, but what about your nice clean shirt? Now poor old Beatrice will have to wash and iron it all over again, and I thought she was a friend of yours. Come along and let me see if I can find you some dry things.”

Kay led a somewhat subdued general upstairs and into the bathroom to shed his wet clothes. Here she saw his bathing-suit hanging up and seized it thoughtfully.

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t put that on. But here’s a towel; rub yourself thoroughly dry first,” she commanded.

Pell looked at the bathing-suit dubiously as he wrapped the towel round him and squirmed himself against it. Somewhere in the past he could remember a terrible threat: “I’ll put you into petticoats,” and his horror in case they should really do it. And bathing-suits were for bathing in. You couldn’t have lunch in them, could you? Not comfortably, with everybody wondering why.

"I've *never* fallen in before, Kay," he assured his executioner earnestly.

"You haven't? Well, that's a good thing. Because of course the first time it's an accident, but the second time it's a crime," said Kay, and she wasn't an executioner after all. "Hurry up, old sport. You'll be beautifully cool in this, and you can lark about without having to remember clean shirts. I've a good mind to get into one too.... No, I know, I'll put on my beach-pajamas."

Kay went off to do it, and Pell joyfully squirmed out of his towel and into his bathing-suit. How lucky the first time was an accident. Of course that was what Elliott had called it too, so there couldn't be any doubt. It was a pity about Beatrice and his clean shirt, but he had threepence and perhaps he could buy her a present as she was a friend of his.

3

It proved a wonderful day after all. For one thing Kay, looking very funny all in red and green, brought out pen and paper and sat in the punt to write a letter, which made it possible for Pell also to sit in the punt. Hitherto this attractive craft, bumping against the landing-stage all the summer through, had been a total loss to Pell. Terrible penalties had been threatened if he ever went into it alone, and it was far too open to the public eye for him to venture to test the truth of these. His mother never used the punt, and when John did there was always a strange girl among the cushions, and what was the good of that?

Pell, fishing with a long string and a piece of meat borrowed from cook, regarded the other occupant of the punt with a hopeful eye.

"I've never been out in a punt," he chanted, but she was so busy writing that she thought it was just a song he was singing and took no notice.

He watched the pen crawling down the white page, and wished he could do it like that, but when she was ready to turn over he saw his chance and remarked:

"I don't think the fish like to come in as far as this, do you, Kay?"

"Um? ... Oh, well, I don't blame them," returned Kay, and her pen simply raced down the next page.

"No, neither do I," agreed the fisherman wistfully.

Writing letters was one of the habits of the human race with which Pell had very little sympathy, because if you breathed a word during the process you were generally chased off and with great fury. It was a strain on his virtue

to wait till Kay came to the end, but he managed this somehow, and at last as she folded the pages together, he said with a sigh:

"Is it very nice to go out in a punt?"

"Well, what do you think?" inquired his sister. "You must have been out often enough."

"No, I haven't, Kay, not ever ... not once in all my life I haven't," he assured her eagerly.

"Well!"

She gazed at him as if she could hardly believe her ears, and then looked up the long hot stretch of the reach and back to the anxious face of the little boy.

"All right then, quick! Come here among the cushions and sit right down and don't move."

She was up in a moment, had lifted the punt-hole and released the rope, and almost before Pell could believe his good fortune, they were off and he was riding like a lord.

They did not go to the lock and back, where Derek had taken him, but downstream towards the woods through a narrow margin of shade. It was a new world and marvelous, so marvelous that Pell did not know which way to look first.

Tall houses in their gardens loomed above him, quite different now that he saw them from the river, so that he didn't know which was which. One had a large bird standing on its leg in the middle of the lawn, and Kay, appealed to, said it was an Iron-bird, which was an entirely new creature to Pell. He wished it would fly away, but she said it wouldn't, which was a pity, and before he could ask her why, there was another garden and a lady and gentleman sitting in deck chairs at the water's edge.

"Why, dear me, it's one of Winifred's girls," exclaimed the lady. "Good morning, my dear, you are very energetic on a hot day."

Kay, leaning on her punt-hole, said good morning, Mrs. Shepley, and yes she was.

"You don't want a passenger, I suppose?" suggested the gentleman, looking through his glasses.

"Go along with you, William," exclaimed the lady. "So your mother has gone to Scotland after all, Miss Peebles tells me?"

“Yes,” said Kay, and began to move off again quickly, saying good-by.

Pell, who had been afraid the gentleman would go along, and thought this would have been very rude when he was not invited, breathed a sigh of relief. But almost at once there was a new excitement, for a river steamer came bustling downstream and the punt rocked beautifully in its wash, and Pell among his cushions saw people leaning over the rail and gazing at him with evident envy and astonishment. He was sorry when the rocking ceased, but it didn’t really matter because they came to the woods which were the finest forest he had ever seen, and went up and up for miles probably over the hill. Would there be lions in them, he wondered, or only wolves and bears? Another punt was moored near the backwater, and it had a frame such as Pell had often seen on punts before, drifting past Redgates. Canvas curtains were rolled along it because, said Kay, it was a camping punt, and at night or when it rained you let down the curtains and lived inside as in a tent.

The campers were schoolboys, all in their bathing-suits like Pell, but very much larger than he. They had made a fire on the bank to boil their kettle for lunch, and the flames were shooting up with a pleasant crackle of leaves and twigs. Kay went slowly here, watching the operation as intently as her passenger.

“I say, you’ll be sure to put it out when you’ve done, won’t you?” she said to them. And the boys turned round and one of them exclaimed:

“Well, I’m dashed.”

“Because,” added Kay, “this is my river, and I’m rather particular about that.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” returned the schoolboy, grinning, and at this all his friends seized him bodily and offered in the fiercest manner to chuck him in if she said the word.

Kay laughed, assured them it didn’t matter and went on, waving her hand in farewell.

“Is it your river?” inquired the passenger doubtfully.

“Of course it is,” said Kay, “and yours too. Don’t we live on it?”

Pell was charmed with this information and stored it up for future use. The next time people in boats came by and called out to him, he’d tell them, and he hoped they’d feel pretty small.

Kay turned the punt out into the fairway and, red and green in the water, her reflection turned too, lengthening out for a moment until it was nearly as tall as a house. Pell liked this, it was so pretty, and the trees, too, far away and

the bird flying overhead, which was not, however, the Iron-bird, unfortunately. They were round the bend and going home when the barge came into view, and because they were now on the side of the towing-path, they would pass it quite close, which he had never been able to do before. The man who lived on the barge was called Bargy, Beatrice said, and there was Mrs. Bargy hanging out the children's washing on a line.

"If they call out to us, we just won't take any notice," remarked Kay in warning. But none of them did, they merely lounged about and peered indifferently with rather dirty faces. Pell, who had often thought he would like to be a member of Mr. Bargy's family, now changed his mind. Because after all, if you owned the river and could ride in a punt ...

Kay meanwhile, unaware of the enchantment of her passenger, was hot enough to repent the rash impulse which had brought her out on such a day. It would have been so simple to have waited until it was cooler, or to have taken him some other time, but at the moment she had rushed into it with a half-comic, half-serious notion of making up to him immediately for the scandalous neglect of his family, herself included. 'I can't think why we haven't taken you, funny-face,' she had thought, watching the thin, long-legged figure among the cushions, his eyes large with anticipation.

There was a sufficient likeness between them to make her approaches to him both brief and natural, but if her home-coming this summer was to have an important influence upon the youngest Flete, she was quite unconscious of it.

Pell, pitchforked out of the nursery into his mother's unwilling and spasmodic care, had been growing during the past six months into a bewildered and rather hostile little savage, certain of nothing but the unreasonable might of the adult world. Then Kay, a stranger to all this, had arrived to take charge, inexperienced, shy of her task and anxious about it, but self-dependent and pleasant in a silent debonair way. Hitherto, hardly noticeable during her brief holidays in the noisy, whirlwind atmosphere of her home, she now appeared as an individual at last, and the household responded. The servants liked her because she came to them for help and advice, was amused at her own ignorance and did not "put upon them," and this in itself reacted to Pell's advantage.

Beatrice, a harassed if admiring slave, when Winifred was at home, now had leisure to answer his occasional questions as she gave him his supper or helped him to dress; and cook, though she talked of extravagance and wholesome food in a virtuous tone, for the look of the thing, was willing to vary his meals from the eternal porridge in the mornings and fruit and custard

at night. The hitherto silent Elliott, having his own bond with Kay, was already a more approachable person, but the greatest change of all was in the head of the house.... James Flete, wrenched from his absorption in business by the quarrel with his wife, had met his young daughter's return with embarrassment, a sense of injury, with flashes of disapproval, and yet with relief which turned very soon to pleasure and pride. She crossed lances with him where his other children had gone their own way, but she did it as one reasonable being challenges another, and he was vulnerable to her touch, so that Pell found a friend in the threatened ogre one momentous evening, and already had ceased to eat his breakfast with a dubious eye on the tyrant behind a newspaper, who might pounce out at any moment and send him away.

Kay knew nothing of these changes naturally, and Pell was too young to reason them out, but he no longer retreated into himself at the least advance, seeing enemies on every hand. He slept deeply and talked more. A cautious confidence in Kay had already begun to bud within him, and by the end of the trip up the reach it had come to full flower. If she had waited a cooler and more convenient moment it would not, perhaps, have been so rich a bloom, for never before had any one done what Pell wanted just instantly like that.

4

He had not been told of the greater joy to come, and that evening before supper he was in the garden, when a taxi turned in at the gates. Pell gave it no attention because he was concerned with something else. Elliott had turned on the sprinkler to water the grass, and a row of sparrows had immediately spread themselves under it for a shower. Pell wished he was a sparrow; in fancy he became one and felt the cool water pouring over his hot little body. Then a more practical idea occurred to him and he slipped off his shoes and went near enough to feel it on his legs. Some of the sparrows fluttered away, those at the further side merely looked at him perkily and went on with their bath. The water was lovely and Pell sat on the grass and put his knees under and then both arms and his face, closing his eyes fast and letting it trickle down his nose. It was at this sublime moment that he heard Kay calling and had to scramble up, very damp and slightly guilty, to slip into his shoes. Hastily rubbing his hands and arms on his bathing-suit, and drying his wet nose by the simple expedient of burying it momentarily in his shoulder, he began to run in answer to the summons, and then as suddenly stopped dead. Kay and his father and Elliott had come round the corner of the house, and Elliott was leading a dog. To be more exact, the dog was leading Elliott, straining forward on his straight white legs, his long nose patched with black pointed excitedly and his stump of tail quivering with pleasure.

As Elliott unfastened the lead he shot straight for the astounded Pell, swerved past him, and then came trotting back to sniff his shoes and bite them waggishly.

Pell gave a squeak of joy and flung himself on the grass, clutching this treasure which had descended upon him, and in a moment boy and dog were rolling together in a state of mutual excitement.

The terrier, bred among children, was ripe for a game after his journey, and as the two young things raced off James Flete said to his daughter:

"It seems to have been a good guess, Kay."

She nodded.

"When he knows it's his own dog he'll probably burst," she said.

"Well, in that case I think I'll leave you to break the news to him." He was about to turn back, but she clutched his arm.

"Of all the cowards," she exclaimed; "you'll do no such thing! You'll come and make the presentation in a proper manner."

Elliott, an amused spectator, whistled to the little dog, who pricked up his ears and, with a glance at his playmate, came running, Pell, needless to say, at his heels.

"Just for the moment we'll put this on again, I think," said Elliott, fastening the lead. "We must get him used to the place."

"Is he your dog?" asked Pell, all eyes.

"Oh, no. I'm just his attendant for the moment."

"Oh!"

Pell, quite unequal to further questions on the subject, went down on all fours and gazed at his new friend from every angle.

"Have a look at the plate on his collar, Pell," advised Kay, since her father, hands in pockets, merely looked on and said nothing.

Pell knelt up and spelt J. P. Flete and the familiar address.

"Is he ours?"

"Would you like him, Pell?" inquired his father at last.

Pell nodded violently.

And Kay, looking from these two awkward men of her family to the understanding Elliott, grimaced.

“Father’s *giving* him to you, idiot. Who else is J. P. Flete, if it isn’t you?” she said.

5

James Flete, walking back to the house with Kay, thought of all the things he should have said to the owner of a dog, things which most certainly would have been said to him long ago, with moral embellishments about responsibility ... with threats of penalties from his father, and a line or two of Scripture from his mother, who had so zealously mishandled that great piece of literature all his youth, that to this day he could not hear it quoted without irritation.

He could smile at the remembrance, but the fact remained that Pell must be taught that he had duties to the dog, not however in the presence of that minx, his sister, who had probably, thought her father, been waiting gleefully to hear him hold forth.

“I suppose we are storing up trouble for ourselves,” he remarked, in order to draw the minx.

“Of course,” she agreed at once. “The dog will bite the tradesmen, ruin the plants and howl all night long. Always look on the bright side.”

“That’s all very nice, but will you tell me how that young fellow Derek manages to haunt this garden with such mysterious ease? He doesn’t leap the backwater, I imagine?”

“Aren’t you behind the times,” said Kay. “We’ve had a plank bridge since the Dark Ages. We stole it from the men who were building the new bathrooms, if you would like the exact date. When Derek goes away he stores it out of sight, but lately he’s put it back again.... Of course the dog may spot it, so perhaps we’ll have to take it up.”

“Hm! You can’t take up the backwater, however, and I don’t think that will be a serious obstacle to the dog. Remember he is only human.”

Kay laughed at the hit.

“I must talk to Derek,” she said.

“Oh, I’ve no doubt you can square Derek,” returned her father dryly, “but who is going to square Mrs. Ashe?”

“That’s your job,” said his daughter, seizing the opening thus rashly presented to her with an inward chuckle. “I don’t say I couldn’t do it myself, but it would come better from you. Remember your duty to your neighbor.”

“Good God!” exclaimed James Flete, watching her leaping up the stairs to catch Beatrice and tell her about the dog.

“A live dog, Beatrice, a beauty, and Pell will never eat any supper if we drag him in. Couldn’t he have it on a tray in the garden just for once?”

The head of the house took cover in the library, throwing up his hands. Pandemonium, of course, but he wasn’t going to protest and risk defeat in the presence of the maid. And in a sense she was right no doubt. The remembrance of Pell’s round eyes and shriek of delight as the little dog rushed upon him, left no doubt in his mind that she had been right about the gift. He felt a sudden pride in his young son, who had not moved or been afraid, for he had forgotten that a child’s fears are rarely physical, and that there was no great virtue in that.

6

The conviction that she was also right about Mrs. Ashe occurred to him uncomfortably once or twice during dinner, and later he did not follow the girl into the garden where Pell and his treasure were still at large, but looked round the library absently, revolving the matter in his mind.

The Ashes were old friends, but of late years, leaving the social activities to his wife, he had seen little of them, except for a brief greeting as he passed the house to Helen, busy in her garden. She was no more of a visitor than he was, but her garden was a matter of importance to her, and if it was to be invaded by the dog, it was only fair to give her a warning and an apology in advance.

With Winifred away perhaps it was only civil too to go over for a moment with the magazines for Ashe.

He could not find these, however, and presently set off without them, his appearance surprising Mrs. Ashe so much that her thoughts flew to Kay and Derek, mooning somewhere together no doubt at this very moment.

James Flete was a queer stick, but if that was the basis of his errand he was more behind the times than she had supposed.

“Well,” she said, “so you haven’t quite retired from the world?”

“Have you much chance with young people about?” said James. “They jolt you back.”

“Do you good,” she retorted with a sharp glance. “How’s Winifred?”

“She’s very fit, I think, thanks,” returned the visitor awkwardly. “Kay had a card from her this morning....

“As a matter of fact,” he went on, “that young person is really responsible for this call. She has run me into buying a dog for Pell, and I thought you ought to have a word of warning.”

“A dog?” echoed Mrs. Ashe with a glint almost of mirth behind her glasses. “What! Is the brute savage, do you mean?”

“No, no, certainly not. He’s a terrier and I’ve realized rather after the event, I’m afraid, that the backwater will be no barrier to him and that, for all our care, he may invade your territory.”

“Hm! If he destroys my plants I’ll scrag the beast and prosecute you. So now all’s plain and we know where we are,” said the lady.

“Quite,” answered James Flete. “I have all sorts of guarantees that the dog is house-trained and garden-trained certainly, but if there’s any scragging to be done, I rather think my man Elliott will get in first.”

“What, that gardener you’ve got? I don’t mind telling you, James, I hate the fellow. Look at your garden this summer—an example to the lot of us, and who wants examples?” Mrs. Ashe stared at her visitor belligerently. “He’s got a couple of things over there I want a slip of, by the way.”

“But by all means. I’ll ask Elliott to come in and see you.... Interesting chap.”

“A dam’ sight too interesting! No, don’t trouble to send him. I’ll have a word with him when he’s working this side one morning. Those two young fools have their foot-bridge down, I notice, and I can step across.”

“Yes, I have just learned of the foot-bridge—about ten years late, I am led to understand. I’ve seen Derek appearing with great ease and regularity, and chipped Kay about it, but I failed to draw blood.”

“More fool you,” retorted Helen Ashe. “They are blind ... and we are blind if we have any sense. Come along down to the water and have a word with Everard now you’ve got so far. We might as well get what air there is.”

He walked meditatively beside her, and presently remarked:

“Ah well, since they’re so open about it, both of them ... eh?”

“Open? Pooh! Openness may be their particular form of concealment. However, we may rest assured they won’t consult us, thank heaven.”

“But why the thanks?”

“My poor James! If they don’t know their own minds about a thing like that, do you think we know ’em?” she asked him scornfully.

James Flete laughed and, to his own surprise, remained in the Ashes’ garden chatting till after ten.

Kay, who had been out for a swim with Derek, returned home just after him and delivered the latest tidings of the dog.

“Pell has decided to call him James the Second, but I won’t deceive you. The compliment was unintentional.”

“This is some of your devilry,” declared her father.

“Not at all. His favorite king.”

“But the little beast has a name already.... Pip, or something of the kind.”

“Father, what bathos! Would you let some one else christen your child? Besides, it’s done,” said Kay.

“Is the boy in bed, or would that be too much to ask?”

“It was rather, but he is. James the Second is to sleep in Elliott’s room at present, and Pell was allowed to go up and inspect his quarters. He thinks ours are much inferior.”

“But, my dear, we can’t have Elliott’s privacy invaded by the child, you know,” exclaimed her father.

“Oh, that’s all right. It was an invitation. Derek and I went too,” said Kay. “Elliott had quite a party. It’s rather jolly up there, but he needs a few cushions and he’s going to have them—out of some of that loot I got from you this morning. We’ll put it to him that James the Second likes his home comforts.”

“Since he’s your find, I suppose you must have your way about the cushions, but don’t marry him, will you?” begged her father.

“That’s an idea! I must think about it,” she exclaimed, delighted.

CHAPTER TEN

EMILY

1

By the train that brought Dolly Chester to Crediton, the three Johnstone girls, Puss, Dora and Daisy, all very bronzed and breezy, returned from their annual visit to the sea. The Johnstones did not live on the river, but further back, in a house which they called The Dale, out of compliment to the old great-aunt whose legend they were so busy preserving. Like their dwelling, they stood somewhere between the river residents and the town-folk, the latter taking them more seriously, perhaps because they had no choice. The girls were energetic and civically inclined. Daisy, the youngest, ran the local troop of Girl Guides—"Our Guide" her mother called her fondly to visitors. As a family they were given to affectionate labels. Darling Dora was the vicar's right hand and taught in Sunday-school, while Puss had organized a Crediton Literary and Debating Society, at which from time to time she sometimes persuaded some aspiring novelist of no particular importance to give an address. The less public-spirited river people gave them every credit for these activities, subscribed to them when they could not get out of it, and felt their duty to the Johnstones done. To them Crediton was still the village, they had their own interests; the young among them were at school or college or pursuing careers elsewhere, and only occasionally came home. Unattached young men were the natural quarry of the three girls, but they were scarce in the community and inclined to shy off. The Johnstones were a little too overwhelming in their hospitality, a little too much on the bright side. That they had not yet engulfed Andrew Milton was due to a combination of circumstances. At the time of his arrival they had all three been confined to the house with a mild form of influenza and, knowing nothing of the new doctor, had economically and quite efficiently nursed themselves. When they were about again Dr. Rose had gone for his holidays and Andrew had his hands full, and by the time they left for the sea the meeting had not been engineered. Now they were ready and eager for it; he was their constant topic of conversation, their latest family joke. Our Guide, who had seen him twice at a distance, was chaffed about "having a pash" on him already, and the others pretended to have noticed that at the sea she had been critical and indifferent to all the young men.

When therefore as their train drew in to Crediton station, and Daisy recognized Andrew Milton in company with Kay Flete on the platform, the trio saw their chance at once and took it joyfully.

Kay had met Andrew by accident, and he had volunteered to come along and be useful about the expected visitor's luggage. They had barely reached Dolly before the Johnstones descended upon Kay in a hearty phalanx, and by sheer weight of numbers defeated her impulse to avoid them. Moreover, Dora, one of those uncomfortable people who never forget a face, seized Dolly by the hand, much to her astonishment, exclaiming:

“But we’ve met before, haven’t we? How jolly! You are Kay’s friend from Oxford, aren’t you?”

“Naughty Oxford,” interposed Puss roguishly. “I always say naughty Oxford because I’m Cambridge myself.”

“You’re Girton, I suppose?” said Andrew Milton, to prove himself quite at ease.

“Oh no, not Girton ... not this child,” said Puss, as though highly amused, as well she might be, having once spent an afternoon in Cambridge with a sight-seeing expedition. “You’re our new doctor, aren’t you? We haven’t quite met, but very nearly. My name’s Johnstone—how do you do.”

Kay having no alternative, introduced them, and Puss hospitably waved her hand in the direction of the waiting car, and invited everybody to hop in and have a lift.

“Oh no, thanks,” said Kay. “I have to do something in the village.”

“What about you, Dr. Milton? I’m sure you must have a patient somewhere. You’ve only to say the word and we’ll whisk you there in two-twos.”

“Well, as a matter of fact I did promise to look in on old Mrs. Dean this morning,” said Andrew, looking at his watch, “and it would be rather convenient as you’re so kind. Sure you can manage?” he asked Kay kindly.

“Of course.”

Kay’s tone was short and as he drove away and she put Dolly into the taxi she said indignantly:

“Well, they’ve got him now.”

“Does it matter?” inquired Miss Chester with interest.

“Only because they are certain to snatch him on Saturday and we are probably going to a regatta, and a fourth would have come in handy. Anyway, I hate being done.”

“Say the word, and I’ll be ill and need him professionally this afternoon,” said Dolly, always equal to the occasion.

“Oh, you won’t need to. I’ve told him he can come round.”

“Well, shall I make a dead set at him for you?”

“No,” said Kay with unexpected firmness, thinking of Derek’s feelings, and Dolly cocked an eyebrow, which was one of her cherished

accomplishments, and decided that this attitude was all very new and needed looking into.

In the meantime she had interesting news of her own to relate. She was well in the running for a job as secretary to a woman Member of Parliament, and might be called up to town any day for an interview.

A friend of Dolly's, one Cedric Rowe, was a nephew of the Member in question, and had more or less guaranteed to work it. Cedric was in the Navy and doing a special course at Portsmouth just now. Dolly's sailor brother had brought him over once or twice, and said he was well in with the aunt.

"I shouldn't take much notice of that," said Dolly sagely, "if I hadn't had a letter from her. Quite nice, she was."

"You'd be in London, wouldn't you?" inquired Kay with anxiety, and being assured by Dolly that she would, gave her blessing to the affair.

For in London they could see each other, Derek and Dolly. Secretaries must have some free time, evenings perhaps or for lunch. Kay, at that reflection, looked into her own blank and indefinite future when her two friends should be absorbed in their work and each other, but she shut that thought away as quickly as she could, determined that this week she must give them their chance.

With this end in view when Derek sauntered over that afternoon, and they decided it was too hot for tennis, she established them in deck chairs, excusing herself from time to time to see cook or Beatrice, or to look after Pell.

Pell, at least, little needed her attention. The possession of James the Second had made a new man of him and his days were full. When the pair of them were not following Elliott like two faithful shadows, they were racing or exploring, throwing and retrieving sticks respectively, or lying exhausted on the grass in happy conversation.

"You are my dog," said Pell confidentially and often to his companion, and James the Second, wagging his stump and grinning the best dog grin he knew, accepted the statement as gospel. Countless balls unearthed from the toy cupboard had served their glorious hour and gone to the dustbin, but one, being solid right through, had survived James's teeth, and this was forever being lost and found again and dropped at Pell's feet invitingly.

Pell superintended his food like an anxious father, filled his water bowl afresh a dozen times a day, was sure he would starve to death on the diet advised by the kennels, and felt no meal complete that did not provide something he could offer to James.

Human beings whom he had never noticed before were earnestly informed: “This is my dog.” The postman now knew it; the butcher and baker had been told. Dolly had gravely shaken hands with James the Second and then his master, and immediately been identified as a some one who wouldn’t kiss you and therefore to be tolerated. Moreover, she had said at lunch that James the Second was laughing at Pell round the door, and this was perfectly true. Pell knew his dog could laugh. When they were alone they both laughed like anything.

Kay’s excuse of looking after Pell was thin in the extreme, but she hoped it would serve, and that Derek and Dolly would be too much engrossed to notice.

“Kay seems to have the jumps,” remarked Dolly on one of these occasions. “Can’t sit still for a moment. By the way, sorry I didn’t ask you down with her, but I couldn’t fix it just then, and besides, I thought a spot of absence might make the heart grow fonder.”

“Yours or mine?” inquired Derek moodily.

“Neither, darling.... Did it?”

“Dashed if I know,” returned the young man.

Dolly considered this answer, weighed the tone of it and finally told him of the meeting with Andrew Milton.

“What’s the idea, Derek?”

“I can’t make out. Wish the little brute was at the bottom of the sea.... However,” he went on, remembering Kay’s explanation. “I daresay she was only thinking of your visit ... the more the merrier and all that.”

Dolly, being quick of wit, chuckled for reasons best known to herself.

“Don’t worry, my poor lamb,” she said, “if he haunts the place I’ll tell him the sad story of my life in serial installments, and exhibit all my complexes, he’s sure to be hot on those. Good lord, here he comes! Where’s my lipstick?”

“I was told to join you,” remarked the newcomer. “Shall I take a pew? I fancy cold drinks will follow immediately. Pretty good news that.”

He flung his hat on the grass and stretched himself out in Kay’s seat with a sigh of content, and Derek, giving him a scornful glance, got up and said he would give Kay a hand then, and bring another chair.

“Good!” said the visitor kindly.

Dolly looked at him with an air of plaintive surprise.

“I thought you had vanished for ever and taken an instant dislike to me, by the way you rushed off this morning,” she said.

Andrew’s heart warmed to the poor child. He was charmed to have made an impression.

“No, really you mustn’t think that,” he said. “But the chance of a lift to my patient’s house was rather a godsend. I must get a car as soon as I decide to stay at Crediton. You see, my time is not my own.”

“It belongs to suffering humanity,” suggested Miss Chester admiringly, and wondered whether it would be safe to add a few embellishments, such as noble.

“In a sense I suppose that’s true,” said Andrew who, though a poser socially because he was not quite sure of himself, had never gone as far as this and felt faintly uncomfortable. “At least that’s how we ought to look at it.”

“You hold life and death in your hands,” went on Miss Chester with awe. “But how wonderful. You must tell me all about it.”

At this moment Derek returned to fling a deck chair down beside them with unnecessary emphasis, and then run back to take the tray of glasses from Kay’s hands.

“Ah, that sounds good, clinking good, eh?” said Andrew, wondered whether he must get up or if it would not be expected of him, and finally did so reluctantly. As he turned from Miss Chester she gave a dexterous tweak to his chair, which fell down flat.

‘I’ll make you do *some* work, my lad,’ she thought, winking at Derek as she took the ice-filled glass he offered. “It isn’t intoxicating, is it?” she inquired loudly.

“My God, I hope so,” said Derek with quite unusual fervor.

“Dr. Milton has been telling me why he ran away from us this morning, Kay,” proceeded Dolly. “He had a very serious case.”

“Oh, well, not exactly serious,” said Milton, “but needing care. Thanks, by the way, for introducing me to the Johnstones. Great girls, aren’t they? Such a fine philosophy of life.”

“Did you find out all that in one little ride?” inquired Dolly. “You are a fast worker.”

The tone of admiration in which she spoke was a little too much. Kay threw her a warning glance, but meeting Miss Chester’s eye, buried her nose hastily in her glass. Derek, however, watched the victim with scornful

pleasure. What were the silly ass's feelings to him?—and ten to one he'd lap it up.

Milton merely smiled at Dolly and said:

"It wasn't one little ride exactly. They very kindly waited for me and dropped me at home, though it was out of their way, and they've asked me over to tennis on Saturday."

"They would," said Kay. "And if you hadn't been in such a hurry to rush off this morning you would have been invited up the river to a Regatta, which would have been a good deal more fun. So now!"

"Really?" inquired the visitor, pathetically pleased to find himself in such demand. "Are you going then? Must you? Why not put it off, because from what they said, it will be a biggish affair and you are sure to be asked. I'll give them a hint in fact, if you like."

Three pairs of eyes gazed at the speaker.

"Thanks," returned Kay shortly, "but I'm afraid the attraction is not as glittering as all that, and, besides, our day is fixed."

"Too bad! Look here, I can't very well back out of it now I've promised," apologized Milton.

"You couldn't possibly," Derek assured him with fervor.

"I'll give you all my other free time with pleasure ... and I daresay I could get along on Saturday evening too."

"No, don't do that because we shan't be back till all hours," said Kay. "In fact we are pretty full up. I'll ring you when we have any free time. Come along, everybody, let's have a game."

She marshaled them off, sending Derek to partner Dolly, and refusing any suggestion of change, though she and Andrew were handsomely beaten.

Andrew did not enjoy the set. With three of them to prevent it, he could not chat, and he thought it rather inhospitable of Kay not to let him play with the visitor who had been so charming to him. He considered she was inclined to be too possessive and although this was flattering, he could not be expected to submit to it indefinitely. Yet when he left them at last he felt that the day had been a good one. He was becoming popular, he was in demand; he had met the Johnstones in a social way and been invited to their house, which would be a feather in his cap with old Rose.

It is cold work being an aloof observer after all, when you are young and not too gifted, and have had to work without any financial help to get into a

profession. Andrew Milton's faults were due in great part to inexperience, his conceit to the obstacles he had overcome.

Meanwhile the more fortunate trio at Redgates saw him go with relief, to which they gave no outward expression for reasons of their own. Derek and Dolly could not make Kay out. It seemed incredible that she could like the fellow, and yet it was clear that she was annoyed about Saturday. Derek wished fiercely that Milton had never been born, and Dolly wondered whether old Kay had suddenly lost her sense of humor. Kay, who had been coolly proposing to make use of Andrew Milton on their behalf, naturally could not tell them that, and now was furious with herself for having managed so badly. She racked her brains to think of some other fourth without success, and then Dolly came to the rescue with an idea of her own.

"Why worry about an extra man when you have one on the premises?" she said. "I refuse to go to any old Regatta unless Pell will take me—and James the Second."

"Bright idea," applauded Derek. "I second the motion."

With the old lad in the party Kay would be easy in her mind about him. Bright of Dolly to think of it.

"Wouldn't you mind?" asked Kay doubtfully, but remembering the punt excursion earlier in the week. It was a way out, for she would be able to devote her time to looking after Pell and the dog, and of course he would be off his head with delight.

"Mind? I insist upon it. Hi, Pell, come here a minute."

Pell, lying on the lawn with James the Second's fore-paws across his stomach, got up and the pair came running.

"I'm wanting a man to steer the motor-boat on Saturday," said Derek. "What about it?"

"Oh!" Pell's eyes gleamed, and then he looked at James.

"And of course a dog too," added Derek tactfully.

"Really? Can he come? I don't think he'd like me to go without him. You see he might get lost if I wasn't there, Derek."

"Oh, we can't risk that. It will be a long trip, though, through the lock; in fact through several."

"Oo—oo!" Pell could hardly believe it, and looked pleadingly at Kay. "Can we go, Kay?"

She nodded. “We’ll all go, and as it’s sure to be hot, let’s go early and take lunch and I’ll provide it.”

From the argument which followed Pell and his dog departed in a high state of excitement. What cared they for lunch or who gave it? They had never been through a lock in their lives before. Pell hadn’t, so of course it followed that James the Second hadn’t either. This was wonderful and unparalleled, and they had to tell Elliott about it. On Saturday they were going through a lock, through several locks, in fact, for all they knew, completely round the world.

2

John Flete came home that evening to dinner, made himself pleasant to his sister’s guest, and agreed to go bathing with the three friends later in the evening.

He had returned from his visit to Evelyn earlier in the week with a mildly uneasy conscience for having left Kay to face the strained atmosphere alone and, with a man’s natural dislike for domestic friction, had been much relieved to find everything smooth and even his father amiable.

Young Kay had managed very well, he thought, and looked none the worse for it; his presence this evening was a tribute to the fact, and at the end of dinner, to which Derek had been invited, he went still further.

“By the way, Derek, you can drive the Singer, can’t you?” he remarked. “If so, you three can have the use of it for the rest of the week.”

“Oh, John, that’s marvelous,” exclaimed Kay, too much astounded by the magnificence of this gesture from her brother to reflect that it cost him nothing.

The car would make up for Andrew Milton’s defection to some extent, for Dolly would sit in the front with Derek as a matter of course. Kay began to plan various errands upon which she could send them at a distance in the morning while she was detained at home.

James Flete watched the four young people stream out of doors with a sense of pleasure. The girls in their long chiffon frocks looked charming against the background of grass and trees, and it came to his mind that in a mild form he had been assisting at that most detested of all social occasions, a party, and that it had spoiled neither his temper nor his appetite.

Certainly he had heard no word of any party beforehand. That young minx, his daughter, had managed it all very neatly, laying out his dinner-jacket in readiness as a gentle hint. He smiled, unconscious that he was giving Kay

credit for a cunning which had not occurred to her. She avoided fuss because that was her nature, and she had produced this small festivity out of materials at hand in the same blithe and sudden spirit with which she had engineered the mild sprees of her student days.

Something white shot round the house and stopped at sight of the man, frisking joyfully. Pell followed and also stopped with a broad smile.

"What, you are not in bed at this hour of the night?" exclaimed his father.

"Well, you see we had an extra bit," explained Pell, who now spoke in the plural as a matter of course, "because it was hot and there was a party."

"Hm! Nobody consulted me about that, which was fortunate for you, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was," returned his son cheerfully. "Father, my dog can swim."

"You don't mean that?"

The accomplishments of James the Second were astounding. He could open doors, or very nearly, and when boats came by too near our landing-stage, he knew it was ours and barked to warn them. He also barked at footsteps he didn't know, but if you said,

"It's all right, James the Second," then he didn't bark.

From Pell this was quite a discourse, and James the Second flopped on the ground and laid his head on one of his owner's feet, yawning widely. Pell, watching him with pride, stifled a little yawn of his own and turned it into a blissful sigh.

Beatrice came out to say: "Now, Master Pell—" in a suggestive tone.

"Oh!"

Pell wriggled his foot and laughed at James, who got up expectantly.

"We're just finishing.... We go round and stop at Mr. Elliott's house, and then he goes to bed," cried Pell, running off with his dog.

"Only five minutes then," warned Beatrice, picking up a soiled handkerchief he had left in his wake, and going indoors again sedately under the master's eye.

James Flete watched her go into the quiet house, but impersonally, seeing her as part of the order of his home. A bowl of flowers on a polished table glowed in the hall; the grandfather's clock, with its old square face, gave a hoarse gurgle and proceeded in a dignified manner to strike the hour; through

the open drawing-room door he saw a long gold curtain stirring at a window in response to the first cooling breeze of the day.

In town it had been more than usually oppressive, the heat made worse by the August ritual of uprooting the streets of London. An electric drill had screamed outside his office windows so that for hours what little air there was had had to be shut out to moderate the din.

In contrast this was peace and harmony and what a man needed at the end of the day, the green of trees and open country, his home and his children about him.

Somewhere on the other side of the garden James the Second barked in a friendly way; down at the water-edge there was laughter, and a cushion shot into the air and fell, a patch of bright orange, on the grass. Strolling to the front of the house, he saw Pell coming up the slope on all fours, on the way to bed, deeply absorbed in this occupation, and no doubt emulating that new wonder, his dog.

The little boy stood up as he reached the top and cast a confidential smile at his father, then ran for the house without dreaming of a more formal good-night, but the smile had been enough, and something deeply domestic stirred within James Flete at the sight of him, and of those other youngsters below, into whose ‘party’ he had been drawn unawares.

He had not known his children of late years. Winifred was quite right, he supposed. He had allowed himself to grow into something of a fogey from sheer fatigue of mind, but he must wake up and change his ways. Tonight he saw that by cutting himself off he had missed a great deal.

3

For some days past the heat presumably had kept Mr. Peebles and his daughters in the house, for nothing had been seen of them, but this evening they were on their lawn in mass formation, and Dolly Chester, leaning back in her canvas chair, was soon watching them with a fascinated gaze.

As usual the old gentleman was supported on each side by a guardian daughter, while the third sat before him, her back to the river, and her arms in long wing sleeves spread out along the rests of her chair.

“Don’t tell me,” begged Dolly. “Let me guess. It’s a new sect for the Worship of Man.... No? ... Oh, dear, I thought I’d got it. Wait a bit, though, there’s something familiar about them. I’ve seen them in the National Gallery or somewhere.... Saint Somebody or other, supported by his female relations,

sees an angel in a vision—early fifteenth century ... but where's the angel's nice long trumpet? The thing's not properly done."

"Those are the Peebles," said Kay in a lazy voice.

"Not *peebles*?" pleaded Dolly. "What are peebles?"

"They have an aunt at the Palace," contributed Derek impressively.

"What? Buckingham or the picture one...? Oh, I say, we're all wrong...."

Mr. Peebles had suddenly jumped to his feet to peer over into the Fletes' garden, but all three daughters rose and closed in upon him, immediately forcing him into his chair again.

"Now that was a simple one, a child in arms could guess it—Jack-in-the-Box. They must be playing dumb charades," said Miss Chester.

"Eyes front, Dolly, and don't vamp the poor old gentleman. You see what lipstick does to the rustic mind," Derek reproved her, and she had just turned round to deal with this impertinence, when all four were startled by a shout of:

"Emily!"

They looked round involuntarily, but all the Peebles seemed to be deep in conversation, and there was no one else about.

"Who is Emily?" Dolly wanted to know.

"A crocodile," said Derek. "Don't show your ignorance."

"How stupid of me. Naturally Emily would be a crocodile."

"You don't believe me?" Derek got up with great dignity, went to the boat-house where they had stabled the rubber beast the day before after a swim, and returned with it in his arms.

Dolly, offered an embrace from Emily, warded it off dramatically, and the crocodile slid to the grass with a realistic quiver. They all began to fool with it, and at last Dolly caught it up and said it was dying with thirst and needed a drink. She carried it down to the landing-stage to remedy this scandalous state of affairs, but the slippery Emily, once in the water, was not easy to hold, and floated buoyantly away.

"Oh quick, Emily's gone!" shouted Dolly. "She's ungrateful. She simply leapt out of my arms."

The other three ran down, to find the crocodile well away, and Dolly, convulsed with laughter at the figure it cut, poking it ineffectually with the punt-pole.

“Oh, I say, Derek, it’s Pell’s,” said Kay.

“All right, I’ll get poor Emily.”

He took the pole from Dolly, lifted her out of the way and got into the punt. Miss Chester gathered up her chiffon skirts and followed him promptly.

“You’ll get your clothes in a mess, Dolly,” expostulated John. “Better let me ... what’s up?”

Kay had given him a nudge and now called to Derek, who was pushing off:

“Take her up the reach while you’re about it, why don’t you?”

“Oh ... I think I see your point,” murmured John, and then turned his head, aware of a strange uproar in the rear. “Good lord, Kay, what can be the matter with the Peebles?”

An amazing spectacle was presented by the family in the next garden. It is probable, since the evening was still, that Dolly’s shout of “Emily’s gone!” had reached the old man, for in some manner he had broken away from his encircling daughters and was now at bay, pursued by all three but holding them off and shouting indignantly. His years and the slippery grass were against him, and suddenly the two young people saw him go down and his daughters rush towards him. Their agitated voices mingled with ever louder shouts from the old man brought James Flete hastening down to his stupefied family.

“What on earth’s all this pandemonium, John?”

They told him briefly what they had seen.

“Looks as if the old gentleman’s had a touch of the sun,” said John. “Do you think we’d better go over? They may need help.”

“Yes, yes, I suppose so,” said his father reluctantly, and the two men made their way round the base of the hedge with considerable difficulty into the Peebles’ garden.

4

Kay’s supposition that the curious behavior of the family for weeks past had been due to a malicious envy of her mother, was of course mistaken. Envy and chatter about her they did, for in their view she was too pretty and irresponsible not to be also pleasantly shocking as the mother of grown-up

children, according to their somewhat acid code. Their excitement at the moment, however, was a private and painful one.

Though their oddities of speech and little poses might be food for mirth among their neighbors, the three elderly women and their old father had been part of the little community for years, every one accepted them and until a few months ago they had taken such part in the mild social life of the place as their income and their years permitted. Recently, however, it was understood that dear father was not enjoying good health, and his daughters did not care to leave him except for a necessary hour or so, and never more than one at a time. Friends dropping in to inquire were informed that their dear father was resting and were not encouraged to stay.

The explanation was simple. Mr. Peebles, as very old people occasionally may, had begun to suffer from lapses of memory which, though naturally painful to his family, were made far more terrible by the outlook of the poor ladies. For hours at a time he would live completely in the past, and a past so remote that they could not follow him. Had he referred to their late mother the Misses Peebles could have borne it better, but he inquired perpetually and fretfully for one Emily, a female of whom his daughters had never heard, and of whom the eldest at least believed the worst. Miss Maud, the ‘intellectual’ sister, may perhaps have felt more indulgent on this head, but all three were agreed on one point. The peculiarity must be kept secret at all costs lest a censorious world should imagine dear father was not right in his mind.

Winifred Flete came into the drama, though unconsciously, when she appeared one afternoon in her garden wearing a blue dress which somehow vividly recalled his Emily to Mr. Peebles. Had his daughters like sensible women called upon Winifred’s aid to disperse the illusion, all would probably have been well, but in their terror of public opinion, they proceeded instead to guard and hunt the old gentleman, to his infinite discomfort and their own. Maud purchased some blue material like Winifred’s in a pathetic attempt to impersonate the unknown lady, but this ruse proved futile, since her father was quite able to recognize his daughter. Winifred’s departure for Scotland was at first a relief to the three sisters, but their father’s lapses still continued, and their agitated excitement whenever he approached the dividing hedge so confused and enraged him that he grew cunning and convinced that they were plotting to hide Emily away. Then they could only wish that Winifred would come back as quickly as possible. Mr. Peebles, in fact, was the victim of his daughters who, with the fatally easy human habit of believing in the purity of our own motives, really thought themselves both self-sacrificing and devoted.

This evening, as he sat defying them on the grass, old Mr. Peebles was certainly mad, but it was the natural madness of a man harried beyond

bearing, and he was sane enough to recognize James Flete and his son, and to turn to these rescuing fellow-men from the senseless hubbub of a pack of women. His eldest daughter would have resisted the entrance of the visitors into the affair even now, but Miss Bertha, the weakest sister, burst into tears, crying that her father was mad, and that they would all soon be mad too, and she could bear no more of it.

"Be silent, Bertha!" admonished the elder sharply, and James Flete broke in:

"Hush, hush, ladies. Your father is no doubt upset by the heat, and no wonder. John and I heard him fall, and thought we had better help you to get him to the house. Let me give you an arm, Mr. Peebles. The grass is inclined to be slippery. It has brought me down before now."

"Thank you, Flete, most kind of you," said the old gentleman. "I'm not as young as I was, but I keep my senses, thank God, which is more than can be said for some people. Lot of Tom fools!"

With this thrust at his indignant handmaidens, he attempted to rise with the aid of the two Fletes, but he had twisted his foot in falling, and dropped back with a groan. Eventually a chair was fetched and they carried him to his room where, with a great deal of fuss, a little brandy was administered, at James Flete's suggestion, and hot water prepared. "I've told John to run home and telephone for Dr. Rose," he said, following Miss Peebles into the passage.

"We need no doctor, Mr. Flete," retorted the lady sharply. "Please be good enough to leave the matter to me. We are accustomed to care for my father, a mere sprain is nothing."

"Yes, we do, yes, we do. He's not right, I tell you," sobbed Miss Bertha. "Calling 'Emily, Emily,' over your hedge, you must have seen he was quite mad and I cannot bear it. Send for the doctor."

"Will you be silent, you fool! ... My dear father's eyesight is not all we could wish, Mr. Flete, and at a distance he mistook Mrs. Flete for a—for a relative, his niece Emily ... perfectly natural mistake. My poor sister is overwrought," lied the elder.

James Flete was in for it between them. He had only the vaguest idea of what it was all about, but the notion of leaving the old man to the care of these hysterical women after such a fall was not to be entertained. At his age there was no knowing what damage might have been done, and Mr. Peebles' vindictive glances at his hovering daughters had told him that they were the last people to soothe him in his present state.

“You must be guided by me, Miss Peebles,” he said firmly. “Rose will give your father a sedative, and make sure of the injury to his foot. John, telephone to the doctor and say that you do it on my responsibility. I will wait here till he comes.”

The masterful male was a new experience to Miss Peebles and she capitulated helplessly. John, with a sigh of relief, made his escape and having got through to the doctor, reported the situation briefly to Kay.

“From what I can see, they are all a little potty, except the poor old boy,” he said, “but I’m afraid you’ll have to change your crocodile’s title, Kay. Emily seems to be a Peebles family name.”

“Really? Pell chose it. I can’t think why, but of course we must change it then, or they’ll think it personal and begin writing letters to father about that.”

She gave him a short outline of their recent encounter with the family and they agreed with the easy condescension of youth that the Miss Peebles were evidently a little mental, poor things, an ironic touch, considering the fears of the three ladies. Of Mr. Peebles, however, they entertained no such suspicion, and having no clew to Pell’s name for his crocodile, they did not realize that the rubber Emily had done her part in releasing the old gentleman from his tormentors into a nursing-home, where he could at least recall the original Emily in peace.

When their father returned he told them that Dr. Rose had discovered something more than a sprain and had advised the patient’s removal tomorrow so that the injury could have expert attention. He dismissed the outbursts of Miss Maud as hysteria, and thought the doctor well advised to get the old man into a more peaceful atmosphere.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

1

DEREK and Dolly, pursuing Emily's green form in the punt, had missed the excitement in the Peebles' garden, and when they came drifting back none of the Fletes was to be seen, so they considered the idea of proceeding to the lock and back.

"I feel a fool cavorting about the river in these clothes," said Derek, "and you look just as silly, if it comes to that."

Fortunately Kay was not within hearing of this scarcely lover-like speech, and Dolly retorted with calm:

"You look exactly like St. George and the Dragon standing there with Emily at your feet, and I feel perfect and look even nicer. You're prejudiced."

He laughed.

"So would you be if you'd been doing the work. Gosh, Dolly, I'm hot. I think I'll tie you up to our steps and run in and change into my bathing-suit right away, if you don't mind. Then if they are still invisible, we can take another turn. Rum sort of hosts we've got, I must say."

Kay, craftily watching from the house, saw them move on out of sight and was pleased, and later she ran down and peered round the edge of the boat-house after them, to discover the punt beside the Ashes' garden, and Dolly deep in conversation with the Major, who was standing above.

This was excellent, for Dolly had never looked better in her life, and she was good fun. The Major would be certain to like her.

Kay felt that the uproar next door had been almost lucky, for now she could say she must wait about for her father and John in case anything was needed from the house.

With this excuse ready if her friends came in search of her, she returned indoors, and wandered from room to room like a lost soul.

Waiting for other people is, at any time, a tiresome occupation, and Kay found to her dismay that it was none the easier for the good cause involved. Derek and Dolly were having their chance as she had planned, but the house was hot at this hour of the evening, the half-light indoors depressing. When she looked out the window and saw the darkening river running by and thought of the long cool stretch of the reach, she envied her friends, though she would not have gone with them for the world. Blankly she felt that she wanted something and did not quite know what.

"I am restless," she decided. "It's being so uncertain about what I'm going to do ... naturally. It's nothing more than that.... I wish I did know.... I think I'll talk to father and ask his advice." She could talk to him; she knew that now,

though a few months ago the very idea had filled her with embarrassment and a sense of its futility.

For the first time she looked at her father in the full as she had learned to know him in the past few weeks, and compared him with the man she had believed him to be; and she did not know that the qualities she most liked in him had been hidden away, and that she, more than any other, had brought them to light; she merely supposed that she had been a blind and cocksure fool, doing him a great injustice, and now her heart warmed to him all the more. She would like to ask him a great many things, about the firm for one. It was a pity she had not been born a boy, for she might have gone into that. She remembered how his talk that first evening at dinner had fired her interest and imagination, and believed that she would have liked the firm. John had refused the chance and chosen law instead, and she wondered whether this had been a disappointment to her father.

"But there's still Pell," she thought, "and perhaps he will. He's rather like me."

In the meantime while Pell was going to school and growing up it was even possible that her father could find some use for her, unpaid if necessary, and at least until times were better and she could fairly look for a job elsewhere. This seemed to her a marvelous plan. It would be experience and she would be earning her keep, not just sitting at home doing nothing at all.

Kay felt better; to put this before her father was at least something and a step in the right direction, and she would do it as soon as they were alone again together, as soon as Dolly had gone home.

She glanced out the window once more, but could see nothing of the punt so hoped that all was going well with the two out there. Even now they might be fixing things up, and she wondered if they would tell her at once or just leave her to guess. She felt that it would be rather a relief to know and have it off her mind, and she was still considering the situation a little anxiously when she saw John coming back from next door.

2

If Miss Chester had anything private and important to relate when she came in at last, in search of Kay, she gave no hint of it, though as usual she was in excellent spirits.

As they went upstairs to get ready for their swim she said:

“Derek is all undressed up and waiting. While he changed I got off with the Major.”

“Really, Dolly? Did you see Mrs. Ashe?”

“Didn’t I just! She strode down the garden, looked at me suspiciously and snorted, ‘Where’s Kay?’ She thought I was a wolf in sheep’s clothing stealing her lamb. You could see it in her eyes.”

“Of course she didn’t ... she probably hoped you were,” said Kay, coming nearer to the delicate subject than she had ever ventured before, for in her view you could chaff no end about ordinary affairs, but when it came to the real thing, you kept off the grass.

Dolly cast her a comical glance.

“Well, anyway,” she went on, “I explained that Derek and I were thrown on our own resources by the sudden, unexplained and rather rude disappearance of our hosts, and the old scream said in that priceless way of hers: ‘Perhaps they had a sudden call to family prayers.’ Then Derek appeared, looking medieval in his bathing-suit, so we acted St. George and the Dragon up and down the Thames, Emily being the dragon and I the wilting maiden in distress. You missed something when you didn’t see me wilt, Kay, I can tell you I’m a nob at it.”

Beyond the obscure reference to Derek as St. George, there was nothing in all this for the anxious onlooker to seize upon as evidence, but neither was it altogether discouraging. Kay, swimming with Derek a little later, explained why she had had to leave them, suggesting in a wistful tone put on for the occasion that it must have been decent out in the punt.

“Dunno about decent,” said the erstwhile St. George, “I know it was dam’ hot.”

Which of course might be construed as evasion if that was the way your views inclined.

However, the water was refreshing and the company congenial, so Kay banished her problems for the rest of the evening and enjoyed herself. Clad in pajamas they lay out on the grass afterwards, counting the stars for a pool of sixpences, until John was caught stealing one of Dolly’s private stars, or so she said. The Court, consisting of Kay and Derek, then fined him half-a-crown, at which he declared himself a bankrupt, and was set upon for showing off his legal knowledge and taking an unfair advantage of the laity.

Some time later, growing hungry, they raided the larder, and James Flete, hearing a commotion, came out of the library inquiringly. He met a motley

trousered procession carrying a bottle of olives, a tin of cheese straws and another of sardines, a bunch of bananas, and four glasses of shandy-gaff.

Invited to join the feast, he shuddered and asked if they expected to live through the night, then went back to his reading, amusement struggling with a rather scandalized astonishment. Amusement won, for the invitation, if safe enough, had been unanimous and friendly, and the fogey in him retreated before that subtle compliment. The scene about the poor old man next door, moreover, perhaps inclined his sympathies to a younger generation this evening. Those three women might be oddities now, but the type had been common enough when he was young. He could remember a forbidding aunt, a procession of remote cousins—'maiden-ladies,' wasn't that the popular term?—snubbed, patronized, pitied, made use of, supernumeraries in the family, and supported by its male members grudgingly more often than not. It was a comfort to reflect that the young women of today, whatever they came to, would not come to that. They had grown up in a new and incomparably more difficult world, a world from which some shams and many faiths had gone, but a complexity of troubles entered in. Suddenly he saw that if they went their own way, these young people, it was perhaps because they had no other course. It was not they but the generation before which had broken away or been torn from its moorings to face the stormy seas of post-war life; from selfishness or from fatigue or sheer economic necessity, parents had ceased to guide and guard their children, it was enough to support them, get them educated as best they could. What for instance had *he* ever done?

James Flete, facing that truth, wondered if it were a mere specious self-comfort that made him think it might in the long run turn out to be no bad thing. He thought of his daughter's gay young guest, coming from a background which had been stable for centuries, and was now unstable like every other. In different times she would have been going through all the fuss and finery of a 'season' with chaperons in attendance and marriage round the corner. She would have been pretty and polished and elegant and respectful to her elders, though no doubt with her tongue in her cheek. Tonight she had sat at his dinner table talking of her possible job with this Member of Parliament, "a nice old thing, fortyish and probably a slave-driver," but that wouldn't matter, for the pay was good; and now at midnight she was sitting in pajamas with a mixed company eating sardines out of a tin! And all this was no fine and dashing gesture. She was poor and faced it. She must work. All four had been hot and hungry, and that too they had remedied as a matter of course. And why not?

Kay, when later they came in to bed, saw the light under the library door and went in.

“Hullo, father, what hours you keep,” she remonstrated. “If you were thinking of your bolts and bars, we could have locked up. In fact, John’s doing it now.”

“What—you have all survived the banquet? I was waiting to carry in the corpses,” said her father mildly.

“The Peebles melodrama has given you a taste for horrors,” said Kay. “I hate to disappoint you, but we are all still alive.”

She smiled at him and came in and sat down on the arm of a chair.

“You know, you are not in the least like the kind of person I thought you were,” she remarked.

“We none of us are, my dear.”

“No ... but even apart from that.”

“In what way have I failed to come up to your expectations?” inquired her father, an amused eye on her serious face.

“I thought you were—well, much more a king of the castle.”

“No, only the poor scullion, Kay.”

“Are we poor?” she asked at once, but such direct attacks were still too new to him, and he parried it with a question nearer to his own understanding.

“What is it you want, eh?”

“Oh, I want to know a million things,” said the girl at once. “Not at this hour of the night of course, but some time soon.... I want to know where we stand ... and about the firm.... Father, do you mean to take Pell into it some day?”

“Pell?”

Normally he would have said, “God knows where we shall all be when Pell grows up,” but in his astonishment he did not think of that, and asked instead:

“What has put Pell into your head? Of course I always have that faint hope ... if his tastes incline to it.”

Kay nodded understandingly.

“You know I think they may,” she said, “because mine would have done, and he’s rather like me in some things.”

“Yes,” said her father, seeing that clearly for the first time, “I believe he is. You are both Fletes, you two.”

“We three,” corrected his daughter, “and the other three ... well, it’s a fair division. I think you managed rather well.”

He hardly noticed her congratulation, for he was looking at her in relation to something she had said and seeing, perhaps, the son she might have been.

“So you would have liked the firm if you had been a boy, would you, Kay?”

“Oh, rather!” She spoke without the smallest hesitation, calmly: “And the point is, I’ve come to the end of things for the moment and want to decide what next.... I could go out and look for a job like Dolly, and I will if it’s necessary, but if it isn’t do you think I would be justified just now? ... Is that sentimental, or is it just plain sense? I’ve known lots of girls like Dolly who simply must get work, and then even more there are the men ... men like Elliott.... I wish I knew ... it seems rather like snatching to me,” finished Kay with a frown, “and then quite likely I wouldn’t get one anyway.”

“You wouldn’t be content just to stay at home?” asked her father wistfully. “There is no need for you to snatch.”

“Oh, father, limpets have gone out.... I could go on studying, but that costs money, and you have Pell to think of,” said the girl. “Well, here I am, sound in wind and limb, can’t you make use of me?”

“Haven’t I been doing just that these weeks past?”

“Yes, but that’s only temporary ... isn’t it?” she asked, a troubled color in her cheek.

“Of course it is,” he assured her gently.

“Well then?...” Kay hunted for the right words. “Couldn’t you take me into the firm for a bit? I know languages and I’d like to know about economics too, quite a lot. I know nothing whatever about business, and I don’t even want to be paid and put somebody else out. Couldn’t you take me in as a sort of apprentice to learn the whole thing and give me a start? I’m not a fool and I’d do anything I was told. And then when times are better you could push me out. You see, at least I’d have had some experience.”

Her father did not reply at once. He was considering the girl sitting there in her startling green and scarlet suit, her young face alight with the cause she

was pleading. She made a pleasant picture in the book-lined room, would be, he knew, a moving presence in his daily work, though the thing she suggested had taken him unawares and was, moreover, against his sober and considered judgment. A wise man does not employ his family, though he may hope to be partnered and at length succeeded by his son. Yet so much that she had said was just, and because she had had the eyes to see and the mind to reason it all out, wasn't this a challenge he should be proud to meet? There comes a moment when a rule may and should be broken and a conviction pushed aside.

"I'll have to think this over, Kay," he said at last. "It's a poser to present to your old father at this hour of the night ... or morning. You must give me a little time."

Kay jumped up. He had not refused her and her heart was high.

"Of course. There's no great hurry, and I didn't really mean to spring it on you tonight, but you just happened to be there.... That's what you get for sitting up to chaperon your family."

"Chaperon indeed! Little chance you give me," retorted her father. He looked her up and down, amused. "You wouldn't expect to use those things in my office, I hope."

"Certainly not. I shall be most sober and dignified. These are strictly for home consumption, so to speak."

"Ah, well, as long as your mother doesn't take to them too...."

"I may give them to her if you're not careful," returned his daughter gayly.

She went away happy, remembering that for the first time since her return he had mentioned her mother's name.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THREE IS A CROWD

1

Kay, sending her two friends off in the Singer on unnecessary errands, or to pla tennis because she had, she declared, some letters to write, thought that they both seemed a little silent, and translated this as a sign that they were certainly in love. Free of her presence they were also abstracted, had she but known it, and neither noticed this quality in the other, though both suspected it in Kay.

Since Sunday Derek had made no further attempt to scale the wall which he felt between them, for on Monday the arrival of James the Second had intervened, and thereafter Dolly's forthcoming arrival had filled Kay's mind and conversation. Now he looked back on it that was unnatural too, for why the excitement?

"Kay said anything more to you about Milton?" he asked during one of their journeys in the car.

"Um?" said Dolly vaguely.

"Well, what's the matter with you? You don't seem to be bursting with wit this morning, I must say."

"Sorry! I must have been half asleep or something. What did you say?"

"Oh, it wasn't important," grunted the young man sourly.

"Why wake me then?" retorted Dolly, relapsing into dreams again.

Derek had been instructed to drive back by way of Windsor for Dolly's benefit and though it was far out of his route, he did so doggedly, pulling up beneath the Castle battlements to say:

"Well, there you are! Be a good sightseer and take a squint at the place."

"Oh, Windsor?" said Dolly intelligently.

"Yes, really. I was told to drag you here, and I've done it by the sweat of my brow. Can't you work up a bit more excitement than that?"

"I'll sing 'Rule Britannia,' if you like," offered Miss Chester. "But what's Kay's idea?"

"How do I know?" returned the young man with gloom.

"Seems as if she wanted to get rid of us, but if so, why ask me down?"

"I know."

"Tell you what, Derek, we'll oblige her. Ring up and say we've had a puncture and are staying here for lunch while it's mended."

"That won't work. We've got the spare wheel."

“Well, they can both have punctures, can’t they?” argued Dolly. “Of course if you don’t want to have lunch with me, say so.”

Derek laughed. He liked Dolly, and whatever her object might be, the scheme had one virtue ... if as his mother had suggested, competition would wake Kay up. He did not take Dolly into his confidence, however, mistrusting her taste for comedy. She would play up, he knew, but to such an extent as to ruin the whole effect.

“I’m pining to lunch with you at Windsor,” he assured her, “and you shall feast royally. Let’s pull up here and you can telephone while I order the spread.”

“That’s right! Leave the dirty work to the woman,” said Miss Chester, grinning, and jumped out to comply. “The road to Windsor must have been strewn with nails, I’ll say.”

“Draw it mild now.”

“*Mild?*” said Miss Chester with scorn. “How like a man! Have you no sense of strategy?”

Her own was made quite apparent on the telephone, for she told such a rambling story in so innocent a tone that a child would hardly have been deceived, much less Kay who knew her too well. She was at first both astonished and indignant at this casual treatment from her guest, and then she remembered what she believed to be Dolly’s state of mind, and Derek’s, and felt excited. Surely this time it would all be fixed up.

She took a book into the garden and tried to read it, but for some reason it did not hold her attention. It was called *Red Selvedge*, and at the end of the first page she found she had to begin all over again; at the end of the second she decided that Laura—or was it Nora?—who had been deserted by George, made her sick, and talked like an imbecile. She turned idly to the last page and found that Nora—or Laura—had vanished and been replaced by Sybil, who was decidedly never to see Philip again. She looked back a little way in search of Noralaura, and then into the middle, but couldn’t find her, so supposed she was dead or divorced, and serve her right.

She flung the book away on the grass, and something white shot out of nowhere and rolled over, growling joyfully,—James the Second, trying to gather it into his mouth.

“Hi, you little devil, give it up!” shouted Kay, but the terrier knew that game and thought it a good one. He pulled and Kay pulled, and the victory was to the strongest. She rescued the wretched volume belonging to Mr.

Mudie's library, except for two half-pages, which James the Second with wistful astonishment discovered in his mouth.

"Oo!" said Pell, who had come running to the rescue, with a horrified look at his sister's face.

"That," said Kay sternly, "will cost you seven-and-sixpence, Mr. J. P. Flete and dog."

"He didn't tear it, did he, Kay?" begged Pell, and then proceeded to extract the missing pieces from between the terrier's jaws by some method best known to himself. They came away somewhat wet and chewed, but he knelt on the grass and rubbed them dry with his handkerchief. "You can still read them nearly," he assured her.

"I'm very angry," said Kay. "He's a bad dog. Come here, sir."

She growled this command, and James the Second wagged his tail in a doubtful manner, then consulted his owner with a glance.

Pell put a hand on his dog protectively.

"You see, if any one throws a thing, he thinks he's meant to get it," he explained in great distress.

The justice of this plea was not to be denied, and Kay relented.

"Well, of course if you can prove that," she said. "Run and get me another book, quick."

Pell fled indoors, pursued by his dog, and presently came anxiously back with another volume. Kay accepted it gravely, sat down and began to read. At last she yawned, closed the pages and laid it down on the grass at her feet. Nothing happened.

"Saved!" she said, and Pell heaved a sigh of relief and fatherly pride.

"He's very good really, isn't he?"

"He's a wonder, and he can owe me the seven-and-six until he's a rich dog."

Kay picked up the half-eaten pages of *Red Selvedge*, and looked idly for Sybil or Philip or the other fool, but found instead slices of self-analysis by Jane, who appeared to be on the verge of running off with Charles. They seemed a changeable lot of people, and she sighed, wondering where Derek and Dolly were now, and whether they were having a marvelous time. It was no good trying to read the other book, because it was a telephone directory.

Pell had taken no chances and brought something too ponderous to tempt his dog, and she had found it difficult to keep a straight face.

"I wonder if I'm spoiling him terribly," she thought as she watched him go off full of conversation with James the Second; and then in sudden revolt: "Well, I don't care if I am. Serve 'em right."

The restlessness of the night before was upon her again, and this defiance of the world at large was due to a dissatisfaction which she could not name.

She carried the books indoors and sat down to write a note of explanation to the library, telling them to charge for necessary repairs on the bill. The title of the novel struck her for the first time—one of those trying-to-be-clever titles meant to intrigue a world of half-wits, and meaning nothing. The author, according to the first page, had written another called *Raw Meat*, which might of course be a cookery book, but a quoted press notice called it "This stark narrative"—or was it Sark? No, it was stark all right and there it stopped. Another catch to trap the reader. Kay began filling in the sentence. "This stark narrative should be thrown in the dustbin...." "This stark narrative is funny without being vulgar," because if it had been a flattering notice they wouldn't have been so coy, she thought. She flicked over the pages of *Raw Meat's* successor, looking for starkness, and discovered George loathing his wife Phyllis and craving for Isabel. But how many more of them? Was the man a Mormon? Why on earth, she wondered, did people in books always go on like this? ... marrying the wrong person and leaving him or her for somebody else, and then tiring of that and having another shot?

Kay had an orderly mind and she wanted to know how George had time to earn the money for all these expensive adventures, unless he was an idle millionaire, which was ridiculous in these days. As *Red Selvedge* was not entertaining she supposed it was meant to be realism, but really it was plain bosh. The real George would have had to think of his work and his income tax, and school-bills for the children and so many other things, there wouldn't be much time left for all this craving.

Kay sighed and went to the window, listening for a car, but there was no sound, and before her only the sun and shadow of the garden, and a world outside it full of people with things to do while she just waited, kicking her heels. She wished she could close her eyes and wake up and find these days had passed and she was working with her father in the firm. And Dolly and Derek, of course, all set. Now she felt empty and forlorn, but that was from having nothing to do for the first time in her life. She was sure it could be nothing more than that.

Her father's offices were in the City; she had gone there once when she was small to sit at the window and see the Lord Mayor's Show go by. She remembered the long, narrow, winding street, from which somewhere a tree looked out surprisingly, its leaves dropping in the misty November day, and the crowds and flags and the strange procession, centuries old. She thought of Vienna, beautiful and strange, and wished she had stayed there for the summer.

And then Pell came in with a cautious expression to ask her whether a brush for James the Second would cost more than sixpence, because he ought to look smart to go through the locks tomorrow, and Mr. Elliott didn't think Pell's hair-brush would do. He ought to have a brush, Mr. Elliott said, and it was very important. Pell hadn't exactly got sixpence yet, but would have threepence tomorrow.

Kay agreed with Mr. Elliott emphatically, and said perhaps James the Second's toilet articles could come out of the housekeeping money. In the meantime she would look for an extra brush.

"It ought to be a bristly one," Pell quoted, earnestly assisting in the search, and sure enough Kay had a bristly one which, though a little gone at the edges, had a rubber bed for the bristles to spring from, and was therefore a most superior article.

Kay was not only willing to part with this treasure, but even went so far as to write "James II" on the back of it most elegantly with a pin, filling in the name moreover with red ink so that there could be no mistake about it.

Pell, thus presented with the necessary tool to make his dog the most perfectly groomed on the river, felt that bliss could go no further, and went off to get on with the important operation at once.

If there was one person James the Second liked, it was Kay. Even better than Mr. Elliott he liked her, and that was saying a good deal. Pell and his dog agreed that they would buy something for Kay with tomorrow's threepence.

Elliott was painting the inside of the boat-house, an occupation which had proved so fascinating to Pell that he and James the Second were in constant danger of being variegated, and Elliott had at length driven them out with threats. He had pictured a horrible scene in which the dog would be left behind tomorrow and possibly his owner too, because they were streaked with brown paint and unfit for exhibition in public. The further suggestion that the dog should be properly groomed for the journey had proved instantly effective, and he had watched the pair off to the house with a sigh of relief.

The arrival of the dog had certainly complicated Elliott's existence, but not unpleasantly. He was fond of beasts and his firm hand with the little terrier was one which James the Second, having plenty of intelligence, understood. The fact that discipline must be maintained Pell accepted for himself with fatalism, having no choice, but not so easily when it came to his dog, and Elliott had been faced with some straight questions from the once rather taciturn owner of James.

How did he know that dogs didn't really mind being whacked? And did Mr. Elliott ever have a dog?

A friendly mongrel of his days in Singapore had been recalled and credited with fabulous virtues for the occasion, Elliott admitting, however, that in birth, breeding and beauty he fell far below James the Second, who would certainly surpass him in cleverness with care and training.

A standard thus being set, Pell accepted Elliott's mentorship with almost embarrassing fervor, and having extorted the information that this remarkable man had actually met a tiger in the jungle and very nearly shot it too, the bond between them was doubly signed and sealed.

Singapore was more exciting even than Pencilvania, that was clear. Pell saw it simply bristling with jungles, wherein tigers lurked behind every tree. He was sorry to learn from Elliott that they were unlikely to go there in the motor-boat tomorrow, because Singapore was not in England or even Europe, but several weeks' journey away. England, in fact, was completely lacking in jungles, a short-sighted policy which Pell found it hard to forgive. If he were in charge he would certainly see to it that there were jungles everywhere, but as there was no possibility of this he decided to go to Singapore at the first opportunity, taking James the Second who by that time would be clever enough to face a herd of tigers.

Returning from his search for a brush, Pell paused at the entrance to the boat-house, waving his trophy triumphantly.

"Kay had one," he said.

"Oh, she had, had she?"

"Yes, she has *everything* ... or very nearly." Pell who, not many weeks ago, had denied that his family had anything, proclaimed this fact with pride but without astonishment, being at an age, Elliott supposed, when anything might reasonably be expected to happen, even tigers on the Thames.

"She's given you a brush and put your name on it," Pell murmured to his dog, sitting on the grass and holding him round the middle. "The II is written

like that because kings do it to show they're important."

James the Second, perhaps taking this compliment to himself, sat down imperiously, and Pell fell over with a flash of arms and legs and a chuckle of delight. He forgot his day's toilet and lay on his back, thinking of inconsequent things. A sparrow hopped from branch to branch of the willow beyond the boat-house, and he thought it would be nice if he could do that. It was a pity he was forbidden to climb this particular tree ... because of breaking it, and because of falling in. The sparrow was too small to break the tree, but perhaps it would fall into the river if it wasn't careful. Pell waited hopefully for this catastrophe, but the sparrow was very careful, and he wondered what it thought of him and James the Second. "I expect it thinks you're an elephant," Pell said to his dog, and then, evidently alarmed at the enormous beast which might be an elephant, the sparrow flew away into the sky and a cloud got it.... Unless it was just walking about up there. It was a long cloud and went for miles—but suddenly James the Second heard something of interest to a dog, and shot off into the bushes, and Pell turned over, got up and raced after him.

Whatever it was, they didn't get it.

2

The mid-day post had brought a letter for Dolly, and when at last she came strolling in and found it waiting on the hall table, she seized it so eagerly that she almost forgot her tale of the punctures and nails on the road to Windsor.

"Where's Derek?" Kay inquired, looking out the hall door inquiringly.

"He's gone home for a bath and change, and I think I will have one too, Kay. You can't believe how grubby we are ... changing wheels and all that," said Dolly, her appearance spotless, and quite forgetting this incriminating evidence.

"You look all right."

"Do I? Oh, of course we had a wash at Windsor, but underneath I'm black. We haven't really hurt the car though.... People ought to be slain for strewing nails on the road," declared Dolly with indignation, and ran up to her room.

Kay saw another period of waiting ahead of her, but this time it was astonishingly brief. Dolly, hatless but otherwise unchanged, was down in five minutes, cheeks glowing and eyes alight.

"Kay, that letter!—what do you think? It's the appointment with my member. Cedric has fixed it for Sunday, because he'll be up in town, and we

can lunch with his aunt and talk it over."

"Oh Dolly, how marvelous! But Sunday? You'll come back, won't you?" said Kay anxiously.

"Rather! Unless of course she wants me at once, which she won't. Isn't it a thrill? I can hardly believe it.... Let's come down to the water and wait for Derek, shall we? The garden looks so cool."

They went forthwith, Dolly full of plans and speculations and saying little about the drive, Kay silent but watching her friend's face and the change in it, which surely must be due to Derek.

"What have you been doing?" asked the guest suddenly. "Not entertaining your little friend in our absence, I hope?"

"What friend?"

"Dr. Thingamy! Kay, if you fall for him I'll come and poison him some dark night."

"Andrew Milton? You must be mad," said Kay with scorn.

"Well, I thought you seemed to be in love or something," remarked Miss Chester.

"Don't judge other people by yourself. I suppose you think it's catching."

"Heavens! Does it stick out as much as that?" inquired Dolly, taken aback.

"I should think it did."

"Oh, well, I won't deceive you. I have got it pretty badly this time, old sport, but mum's the word.... Hullo, Derek, my lad, have you soaked the royal dust off? I was lazy and didn't."

Derek sat on the grass beside Kay while Dolly expounded about her Member of Parliament, and Kay, watching them anxiously, could find nothing wrong with his congratulations, except that he unaccountably failed to ask Dolly if she would be coming back.

"It will only be for lunch," she assured him, "and if John doesn't take the car away tomorrow you can drive her to the train on Sunday morning."

"Oh, rather, yes.... We must send her off in style because we may need a word in the Prime Minister's ear one of these days. Sorry we were so delayed at Windsor, Kay. I can't think how we got those punctures."

"Nails," prompted Dolly. "I've told Kay about all the nails."

“Yes, I’ve heard about all the nails,” said Kay, grinning, and suddenly all three were shouting with laughter.

This for some reason seemed to clear the air, and the easy good fellowship of earlier days came back.

Derek had returned from the drive feeling bored and glum, thinking of Kay alone and waiting, convinced the strategy had been useless anyway, and strongly inclined to refuse point-blank next time she tried to shove Dolly on his hands, and see how she liked that. Now because she had seen through the tale of the punctures and thought it a joke, his heart was light again. After all, he supposed, she had the household to think of and perhaps, being inexperienced, she let it weigh on her mind a bit. When the guest had gone she would be her own carefree self again.

By and by Kay told them of her proposal to go into her father’s firm and his reception of it, and it was agreed that when they were toiling and Dolly could break away from her Member of Parliament, they should lunch together in town sometimes, also stay up and dine and do a show. Kay, having already planned these diversions in her own mind for the other two, was charmed to find herself included in them. Now that their loitering drive and Dolly’s confession had assured her that the matter was virtually settled between them, she felt no need to make excuses to rush away and leave them alone, deciding that they knew her quite well enough to go off by themselves if they wished. She did suggest that Derek had not shown Dolly the motor-boat in all its grandeur, but nothing came of this. Derek said he was too comfortable where he was, and Dolly felt that to move two yards would be more than she could bear.

Then Kay was called in to the telephone.

“I don’t think we need worry about the Milton bird, Derek,” said Miss Chester. “In fact, I tackled Kay and she snorted.”

“Well, I should think so.... I mean the thing’s absurd ... anyway I’m glad you did,” returned Derek, a little vague, but obviously pleased.

Kay’s return seemed to confirm the matter, for she announced that Handy-Andy had rung up to invite himself round after dinner!

“I simply couldn’t bear it,” she finished, “so I said we were going out.”

The cheers that greeted this statement were so hearty that Pell and his dog came running to see if there was a procession.

Elliott, glancing out of the boat-house by and by, found that the grooming had begun and went back to his work, aware that he would have to do the dog's coat himself later on, but in the meanwhile hoping that this would keep the pair occupied. For ten minutes all was quiet, then an agonized shout from Pell brought him out again to find the owner of James the Second plunging through the bushes beside the breakwater after a vanished dog.

The terrier had tired of Pell's prentice hand and when Elliott, catching up his lead and following with a wry face, reached the plank, Pell was crawling across it, while James the Second shook the water out of his coat and then rolled in the dust to complete the ruin of his toilet.

Elliott followed the boy across, whistled the dog to heel and fastened the lead, while Pell, torn between indignation and distress, patted his muddy coat ineffectually.

"They'll *never* let you go like that," he apostrophized the sinner in a hollow voice.

"Now don't make yourself in a mess too," commanded Elliott. "Walk him on the lead in the sun for a bit. He's got to learn not to trespass."

James the Second barked suddenly and they turned, to discover Mrs. Ashe marching down the garden.

"Run along now, I'll explain to the lady." Elliott helped the pair over the plank with a careful hand on the little boy's shoulder, and turned back to confront Mrs. Ashe, who was watching him through her glasses, chin tilted, and at first sight a frosty and forbidding figure.

"I am sorry, madam ... we came after the dog, but no harm is done, I believe."

"Harm? I should hope not."

Helen Ashe, seeing them from the house, had come down for a word with Elliott about the plants she needed. She had not encountered the man at close quarters before, and knew nothing about him, and both his voice and his manner took her by surprise.

"You are Mr. Flete's gardener, I presume?" she asked him.... "What have you done to the place? How do you account for it? Are your methods scientific or what?"

Elliott, taken aback both by her sharp manner and the rain of questions, said that he was afraid science had had little to do with it.

“Ha! Well, thank God for that. If it’s plain sense and a way with plants, I can talk to you.”

Mrs. Ashe spoke this time as one gardener to another. “You’ve several things I want slips and seeds of later on. I gather from Mr. Flete there’ll be no difficulty about that, and if there’s anything you’d like from me, you have only to say so.... By the way, perhaps you’d take a look at this tree and advise me what’s to be done, now you’re here. With that boy and his dog running round the place, I suppose I shall have to have it seen to. Don’t want to kill the pair of ’em.”

The tree hung over the backwater, and the long dead bough had had Elliott’s attention for some time.

“I’ve warned the boy to keep away from there,” he assured Mrs. Ashe as he found a foothold with difficulty and examined the breakage, which was high up.

“Oh, you can warn them, but what’s the use of that? It’s merely an invitation to the little devils.... Take care there! I don’t want your death on my hands either.”

Elliott returned looking amused.

“There is no immediate danger, but it certainly should come down. If you will allow me I’ll come over and see to it in the morning,” he said. “I do happen to understand trees.”

“I should be obliged. If you do it, however, it must be a business arrangement,” returned Mrs. Ashe briskly.

“Perhaps you’d discuss that with Mr. Flete.... I rather think as it’s a matter of mutual safety....”

“Just as you like.” She nodded and did not argue, and went on to tell him of the plants she coveted briefly and dryly. Elliott made a note of them, apologizing for the state of his hands.

“I was in the middle of painting the inside of the boat-house when I came after the boy,” he explained.

“God bless the man, why didn’t you say so before, instead of letting me keep you here chattering?” she protested at once.... “You’ve chosen a warm day for it, I must say.”

“Oh, well, I had an hour or two to spare. It’s to preserve the timber more than anything. I’ll see to the tree in the morning then.”

“Thanks.”

She nodded and went back to the house, wondering about him, but only momentarily.

"Man's own business," she thought. "Been through it, I suppose, poor beggar. Queer stick, James Flete. Never breathes a word.... Quite right too."

That his employer had not breathed a word had been evident to Elliott for some time, but it had surprised him none the less that Mrs. Ashe clearly knew nothing of his accidental establishment at Redgates. She had supposed him a professional gardener—one with "notions" probably, he thought with a smile. Yet young Ashe had been a member of that fateful picnic party months ago, and had been in and out of the house ever since the daughter of it came home.

That Kay had kept her own counsel out of consideration for his feelings touched and pleased him, even though his feelings were not really implicated. He was accustomed to an outdoor life, had quickly grown interested in the garden, and his health had picked up amazingly. For a solitary man past his best years and without ties this was an ideal job, he thought, so why not admit it?

He found Pell solemnly walking his dog, now perfectly dry, and rather dashed at such treatment.

"He doesn't look so very bad, does he?" asked the young owner anxiously.

Elliott released the culprit and suggested that the grooming should be left for the morning after all.

"I'll give you a hand with it," he promised, and in response to Pell's joyful thanks, went off, wondering whether it was his fancy that the little boy had improved in looks and physique during the past few weeks.

"Holidays, perhaps, and the summer weather and having young people about the place," he thought. "Or possibly that you grow fond of the little devils when they're constantly under your feet."

It did not occur to him that he himself had been drawn out of his isolation during the absence of his employer's wife. Winifred treated him with a faintly mocking ceremony which Elliott found embarrassing, but he knew nothing of her as a human being and equally, of course, nothing of her impetuous departure for Scotland, and therefore did not connect her absence with the change in Pell.

In this he was not alone. Kay believed it entirely due to James the Second, and therefore indirectly to Elliott, who had suggested a dog; James Flete, as far as he was aware of a change, imagined it to be in himself. Pell was far too busy with more exciting matters to think about it; and Winifred, when she

returned, would be blind to it for the same reason. She would take all the credit for the change in her James, though had any one pursued the question to its source, the eldest Miss Peebles should have had that.

John, however, somewhat surprisingly, since he was his mother's son, was always to harbor a suspicion that Kay had more to do with both changes than anybody. She had made a friend in the rather self-centered young man that day at Victoria Station.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A SEA-FARING MAN

1

PELL, seeing his dog, when he got up very early on Saturday morning, found that he had become more beautiful than ever in the night, but this did not seem surprising in James the Second—who just grew like that. In fact, every time Pell turned round he discovered some new wonder about him, so he did not suspect that Elliott had assisted nature on this occasion, less from philanthropy than to save himself the dubious assistance of Pell in the grooming operations during the busy hours of the morning.

Other people, Pell was glad to notice, admired James the Second's appearance. When he walked into the dining-room at breakfast to make sure that Pell was really there, the head of the house exclaimed:

"That beast is looking very fine this morning."

"James the First, you shouldn't call your grandson a beast," protested Kay.

"Is that the way you talk to your unfortunate father, too, Dolly?" inquired her host in a scandalized voice.

"Oh, mostly we call him George except when he plays up," returned Miss Chester, "then we say 'dear papa' to make him cringe."

Pell gave forth a loud and prolonged chuckle, and his father said in almost his old fierce voice:

"And what may you be laughing at, eh?"

"James the Second is tickling my knees with his nose," gurgled Pell, and to his delight found that every one else thought this a pretty good joke and chuckled too.

"Useful dog that," said his father, and at this further compliment Pell felt that he was on top of the world.

"As a red herring I should say he was superb," added Dolly, a remark that was not entirely clear, and the owner of James inquired a little anxiously:

"Is a red herring nice?"

"A poser for you, Dolly. You're on the witness-stand, remember."

"It's not only nice, it is practically indispensable in this world," Dolly assured him.

"Oh!"

"She means we couldn't do without James the Second," translated Kay kindly, and Pell sighed with satisfaction and said:

"No, we couldn't, could we?"

Altogether it was a pretty marvelous world, and the only perceptible flaw in it was that everybody said to each other: “I believe there will be rain before the day’s out.”

Pell went anxiously into the garden each time this happened and felt how warm and fine it was, and told James the Second so, and wished they wouldn’t keep on saying that, because suppose it did and they couldn’t go through the locks after all?

When Derek came over during the morning Pell hovered at his heels and was overjoyed to hear him say to Kay:

“What time do we start?”

“About twelvish, do you think? ... or a little later?” suggested Kay, and Pell jumped for joy.

“Good. Shouldn’t wonder if it rains,” remarked Derek, and did not even hear an indignant kicking of the grass behind him, accompanied by a sigh of sheer exasperation.

But Kay, that sensible person, merely said: “I know. I must hunt out the mackintoshes.”

The day was saved. Let it rain!

Pell tore to the house and up the stairs to his room. He opened the cupboard and climbed in, with James the Second nosing after him, and brought down his mackintosh and the hat that went with it—a sou’-wester it was called, and he had had it after his measles, at the sea. It was a long time ago, Pell had been quite young then; he looked back upon his pre-James era with lofty scorn, and though the sou’-wester had once been a proud possession, now it was just an old coat to keep out the rain.

Dolly, however, when he ran downstairs with it, viewed it with admiration and helped him into it to have a look.

“You’re a sea-faring man,” she said. “No wonder I like you,” and then she folded her arms and crossed her feet and danced, much to the astonishment and pleasure of James the Second, who danced too. It was hot in the sou’-wester, so she peeled it off for him and they went out into the garden and lay on the grass. Here somewhat later Kay found them singing “Every nice girl loves a sailor, every nice girl loves a tar,” which Dolly had taught Pell, with James between them and Miss Chester’s arm around James.

“Well, as soon as we’ve washed a few hands and faces, I shouldn’t wonder if we’ll be nearly ready to go,” said Kay at the end of the song, “I think I can hear Harold beginning to puff.”

There was a general scramble to the house, and in a rush that was wholly delightful to at least one of the travelers, the great journey began.

2

The prophets were right about rain. While the little boat ran between bank and towing-path where not a leaf stirred in the sultry air, it came suddenly in great drops, hitting the water like a hail of bullets. But by that time Pell had sailed at least round part of the world and through numerous enchanting locks where the walls rose up out of the water before his eyes and men rode on top of them without turning a hair. He had sailed under bridges and castle walls and lunched on as good a desert island as you would be likely to find for miles, the company assured him.

The rain, after all, proved merely a new excitement to Pell who, with James the Second, lay along the seat of the shabby little cabin, watching less fortunate people in punts and rowing boats scuttle for shelter.

The elders meanwhile decided that the regatta was off as far as they were concerned, and since John had not taken the car they might as well get home and go off somewhere to tea and dance. One thing was as good as another, and the rain was cooling the air deliciously, so why worry?

Dolly was in excellent spirits, dropping into nautical language at intervals, but Kay did not see the significance of this at the time, though later she was to wonder at her own blindness. Watching her friend and Derek, she thought in her heart that the rain after all was a blessing in disguise. Derek was naturally too much occupied with his duties as skipper on the little boat, and to go and dance somewhere would be better for both of them.

When, however, she began to produce excuses why she would be unable to go with them, there was such an outcry from both that she had to give in.

That tale, said Dolly, was too thin. If Kay was so bored with her company she would pack up her things and depart.

“Either you come or I go,” finished the guest indignantly.

“If I am the difficulty, you’ve only to say so,” added Derek with gloom. “I mean perhaps you’d rather have Dolly to yourself for a bit.”

“Of all the argumentative idiots!” exclaimed Kay. “You’re positively quarreling with me. I’ve a good mind to jump overboard and swim home.”

She ran to the side of the boat as though to carry this threat into execution, and Derek seized her round the waist and held her fast, swearing furiously as

he shook the rain out of his eyes. Harold took an erratic course in consequence and was duly brought to reason by Miss Chester, grinning to herself at this exhibition, in the background.

"That's right, Derek, give it to her hot. When the crew mutinies it should be put in irons and shoved below."

"I'll go quietly," said Kay, but when she attempted to dive into the cabin with Pell she was hauled back.

"I like my prisoners under observation," said the skipper of the ship.

"I expect she's thinking of her little Andy lying drowned in the Johnstones' tennis court with literary corpses draped about him," said Dolly. "I say—what a lark if it rained."

This charitable sentiment united the trio in laughter and Kay made no further efforts to break away.

Derek Ashe, however, though he drove them and danced with them and gave them tea, refused Kay's invitation to come home to dinner afterwards, saying he had some reading to do and thought he had better make it a day.

He felt gloomy and out of spirits, having no clew to Kay's strange behavior, and could only suppose he was taking too much for granted in hanging about with her as he had always done and sharing her days. It had been all very well in the past, but now no doubt she had other views and he had no chance. Or perhaps she suspected his keenness and was trying gently to shove him off.

You couldn't blame her, thought the young man savagely, for why on earth should he have a dog's chance with a girl like Kay? She knew lots of other fellows and might have fallen for one of them for all he knew to the contrary. There was that brother of Dolly's for one—the sailor chap, about whom Kay had spoken precious little now he came to think of it. And what was all young Dolly's chat about the sea and sailors today if not a little subtle chaff at Kay's expense? Derek thought he saw daylight, and before the evening was out had married Kay off to the sailor and suffered a thousand miseries in anticipation.

The rain dripped outside his window stealthily, and downstairs the Major's wireless crooned until he could have smashed it with fury. Reading was an impossibility and he would have liked to fling his law books into the river.

He slept badly and rose with a headache in the morning, but later, according to promise, went over to Redgates to drive Dolly to the train. When Kay put her guest in front beside him and took the back seat herself, he

translated even this natural politeness according to his mood and drove doggedly, answering Dolly's chat in monosyllables.

"You look as though you had been moaning at the Bar," said Miss Chester at last.

"What's that?" asked Derek vaguely.

"I believe you went and had a bust last night ... the morning after the night before ... jaundiced eye and all that," explained Dolly, "if you want it in simple language for the young."

"No such luck ... wish to God I had ... sorry I'm so dull, but I have a head, as a matter of fact."

"Poor lamb," Dolly leaned back and called to Kay: "Derek has a head."

"Oh, Derek, why did you bother to come then? I am sorry."

"Good lord, what on earth's the fuss about?" exclaimed the young man. "A headache's nothing ... the air will do it good."

Kay supposed he was hating to part from Dolly, fearing she might get her appointment immediately and not come back, but that was most unlikely, Dolly had said. She was to telephone the result of the interview and her return train so that she could be met.

Watching the pair, she wondered why, as seemed almost certain, Derek had not yet come to the point with Dolly. His moodiness of the past few days was so unlike him that she could not doubt that he was in love, and perhaps, she thought, he was unsure of his chance and afraid to try his luck.

An anxious tenderness filled her and she longed to give him a hint that it was all right and perfectly safe for him to go ahead. But when Dolly had gone and they were driving back together she found it quite impossible to do this.

"It will be splendid if she gets the job, won't it?" she said awkwardly.

"Eh?— Oh yes, rather— Dolly's one of the best," returned the young man.

"Yes, I know ... and besides she'll be in town. Sussex is such a distance ... we'll be able to see her sometimes."

"Still, I suppose that's a pretty fine place they have in Sussex, all the same, isn't it?" inquired Derek, thinking of the sailor brother.

"It has been ... but of course they're so hard up," said Kay eagerly, wondering whether Derek was thinking Dolly too grand to marry, or some madness like that.

“Yes. Still, if they’ve got professions they ought to be all right,” Derek pointed out. “After all, everybody is more or less hard up in these days.”

So they talked at cross purposes, endeavoring to reassure each other, quite unnecessarily, and saying nothing of any consequence to either of them.

Derek put the car away and said he must get back and do a couple of hours’ reading as he had been letting it slide.

“Give me a ring as soon as you know Dolly’s train and I’ll drive you to meet her,” he said.

Kay nodded.

“Ought you to read with a head like that, Derek?”

“Oh, that’s all right, in fact it’s better.... What are *you* fussing about, for heaven’s sake. You never used to fuss.”

“Age and responsibility,” she told him, grinning, because this was more like the old Derek.

He frowned.

“When’s your mother coming home?”

“I don’t know,” she said, rather startled.... “Some old time ... she never writes ... I was only joking anyway.”

“Oh, I see.” Derek smiled rather bleakly, hesitated and then went off, and she watched him go with a rueful face, because he looked so down and she longed to cheer him and hadn’t done it.

3

It was four o’clock when Dolly telephoned to explain why she could not return to Redgates and this, considering all that she had gone through in the meantime, was an early hour and a sign of her devotion to Kay. Kay, however, was not at the moment grateful. She felt that she hated Miss Chester with a deadly hate.

For Dolly had not even seen her member and the job she had taken was a permanent one, or that was her belief. Cedric had learned that he was to be sent to Malta with the Fleet in a month and Dolly had consented to marry him and go to Malta too. Now he was driving her down to Sussex to tell the family and Kay of course was to be bridesmaid and could refuse if she dared.

What Kay answered she did not know and certainly Dolly was too blissfully happy to note. Having told her great news in a rush and promised to

come down for her luggage in a day or so, she returned to her Cedric, and Kay at the other end hung up the receiver listlessly and then fled to her room and stamped up and down it in a tempest of misery and indignation.

To treat Derek like that ... Derek of all people in the world, who was worth a thousand Cedrics.

“And I have to tell him,” whispered Kay to herself with horror. “My poor dear!”

She went to the window and leant against it, staring out. The rain of yesterday had cleared away and the familiar place where every corner, every blade of grass recalled to her loving heart some thought of Derek, smiled with a freshened, grateful beauty, and she could not bear it. She shut her eyes, terrified that she might see him coming across the backwater; sat down at her desk thinking she might write the dreadful news and get Beatrice to take the letter over, got up again finding this was impossible and finally flung herself on her bed in despair.

Derek, having waited until nearly five and hearing nothing, supposed he was not wanted after all and thought with indignant gloom that Kay need not have been afraid to tell him so. Finally he snatched up the telephone and asked for her.

“Look here, do you want me to drive you to the train or don’t you, Kay?” he demanded.

“She’s not coming back,” a toneless voice answered.

“Oh, really? She’s got the job then?”

“No,” said Kay miserably, and then with fury, “and I hope I never set eyes on her again.”

“Good lord, old thing, whatever’s the matter?” exclaimed Derek, forgetting his own woes in his concern for Kay.

“Well, you’ve got to hear it,” said the girl. “She’s ... she’s going to marry that beastly Cedric!”

“But don’t you like the chap then? I didn’t know you’d met him,” said Derek, puzzled.

“Neither I have.”

“Well, cheer up. Young Dolly has her head screwed on all right. She isn’t likely to choose a rotter, and if she does, you can’t do anything about it. What are you worrying for?”

"*Derek!* ..." Kay could hardly believe her ears and looked at the telephone suspiciously. "Don't ... don't you mind?" she faltered.

"Mind? ... me? ... Of course not. What on earth is it to do with me?"

"I thought you were keen.... I thought ... why on earth did you suppose I'd been sending you out and making myself scarce?" exclaimed the girl.

"*What?* ... Oh, look here, Kay, this telephone is no use to me. Nip down to the backwater and I'll meet you. We've got to have this out."

Kay hung up the receiver in a state of excitement and relief, and ran down the garden, but quick as she was Derek had arrived before her.

A good spot this, as they had discovered long ago, for private confabulations, sufficiently far from both houses and shut in by the trees on one side and the shrubs on the other. The chestnut bough, which Elliott had duly cut down the day before, lay, stripped neatly of its twigs and little branches, on the Ashes' side of the backwater under the parent tree, and when Kay arrived, Derek beckoned her over the plank and sat her down on it in a masterful manner.

"Now then, what do you mean by these aspersions on my character?" he demanded.

"I was certain you liked her," said Kay. "I've thought you were keen for months. You've said over and over again you liked her."

"So I do, and anyway she's a friend of yours. Is that so dam' strange?"

Kay laughed.

"I'm so relieved I could cry," she said ... "because ... I had to tell you ... and I didn't know how.... I made sure you were in love and I knew Dolly was, and of course I supposed it was with you. She's often said there was nobody like you."

"That was to do me a good turn and try to make you believe it, Kay."

"I knew it first," said Kay calmly.

"What's that?" Derek's arm was round her in a moment, holding her fast. "And you'd go and marry me to some other girl!"

"If you wanted her I would."

"My darling, do you think there's any other girl in the whole world I'd want even to look at when I could look at you?" he cried, and Kay said tremulously:

“How could I know? You’ve always been first with me but I never dreamt you felt like that ... anyway, I thought you knew me too well.”

“Good lord, that was what was worrying me about you.”

“Oh, Derek, you are an ass!”

“Shut up,” said Derek peremptorily, “I’m going to kiss you.”

4

“It will be a long wait, Kay darling. Can you bear it? That has worried me too, because it is so unfair to you and yet it can’t be helped.”

“Of course I can wait,” said Kay, looking round with starry eyes on the little backwater and the river running past and the garden and the distant woods, from which in her darker moments she had seen Derek gone. “We shall both be working and the time will soon pass. I’m glad I’m going to work, I know father will take me in ... now.”

“He’ll think it like my dam’ cheek.”

“Oh, no, he won’t. He was a little on the old-fashioned side, but I’ve been bringing him up to date,” said Kay. “We are friends.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

1

WINIFRED, with an aptness which would have delighted her if she had known it, and with a calm peculiarly her own, arrived at the front door just as Kay came up from her enchanted hour to get ready for dinner.

The girl stared at the advancing taxi in mild astonishment, and then, catching sight of its occupant, began to run, arriving breathless just as the driver was opening the door.

Winifred descended looking as smart and cool as though she had left the house an hour ago for a leisurely drive in her car. She was also gay as a lark, which seemed to her daughter incredible.

Kay wondered with embarrassment where her father was and whether it would be possible to get away before he appeared. It would be too dreadful to see them meet.

"But, mother, where is your luggage?" she exclaimed. "Haven't you even a bag?"

"All in Scotland," said Winifred as she paid the driver and sent him off. "I came just as I was—all in a moment. I flew, darling, but they'll send it on tomorrow or the next day."

Flew? Had she run away from the Fergusons now, as she had run from home? Kay was horrified. Whatever had come over her mother?

"But mother, why?"

Then James Flete, who had seen the taxi from his room, came hurrying out and there was no escape for Kay.

"Good heavens, Winifred," he exclaimed in pleased astonishment, "wherever have you come from at this hour?"

"Dropped from the clouds," returned his wife. "Literally as well as metaphorically. A nice man was flying to London and offered me a lift in his 'plane, so of course I came, it was such a chance. And besides, so economical! Oh, I've grown verra Scotch."

"I don't like it," said James, shaking his head at her. "You might have been killed."

"I know, darling, and I might have eloped with a Highlander or been eaten by lions. Life's full of risks."

Winifred laughed and took his arm and Kay fled away upstairs, murmuring something about telling Pell, but outside the schoolroom where the little boy was having supper, she leant against the wall to still her excitement and her beating heart.

Her mother had come back, just coolly like that and there they were, both of them, behaving as though nothing whatever had happened. Kay could laugh at her own fears now: she had been a fool, and yet hadn't her father been troubled too, and even John, talking about storms in a teacup, though not sure of it and begging her to go home? ... for the look of the thing? And to take care of Pell ... because somebody must. And people talking ... Miss Peebles, and Mrs. Shepley. That day she took Pell out in the punt, and the Fergusons up in Scotland laughing at her mother ... and her father flying into a rage about dam' gossiping women. Kay remembered it all, relieved that they had met so calmly, and there had been no scene and yet incredulous and indignant. There must have been something, but her mother wouldn't care, and she thought: "I could never treat Derek like that"—and presently with troubled wisdom: "But I suppose once they would have said that too."

Did love always fade then and grow stale? Her heart denied it as young hearts will.

"They're different," she said to herself, "at least mother's different."

2

Pell was eating his supper and talking to James the Second, stretched virtuously at his feet.

Laws against feeding the dog at meals had been duly laid down, but Pell, obeying them on the whole pretty well, was always apologetic about it.

"You wouldn't like this," he assured the terrier earnestly, "but I do because I'm not a dog."

As Kay opened the door James started up and his owner looked round and then went on:

"It's all right. That's Kay ... you see, he always thinks it may be a burglar," he added to the intruder with a hopeful smile.

"No, I'm not a burglar, James the Second. Hurry up and finish your supper, Pell. What do you think? mother's come home."

"Oh?" said Pell with no marked interest. "Kay, isn't it lucky dogs don't like fruit salad?"

"Yes, but be quick, old boy, because she's longing to see you," said, Kay, feeling a hypocrite. "And besides you have to show her the new member of the family."

This inducement proved effective in a moment.

“Yes, so I do,” said the little boy, brightening visibly. He looked down with pride at his dog, then finished his supper as fast as he could.

Kay straightened his tie for him.

“You must look smart or she’ll think I haven’t been taking care of you,” she explained.

Pell knitted his brows.

“Will you be going away now?” he asked rather gruffly.

“Of course not. Do you want me to go away?” asked Kay, taken aback.

“No, we don’t,” denied Pell eagerly. “We don’t want you to go, not ever.”

“Then here I stay,” said Kay, much touched at this tribute but troubled too. She patted his shoulder as she pushed him before her out of the door and downstairs.

They had not yet come up, they were in the drawing-room and because she felt nervous she entered jauntily, exclaiming:

“Mother, you have a grandson and here he is.”

“What?” exclaimed Winifred in a startled voice, and then saw James the Second and perhaps in sheer relief said the perfect thing:

“Oh, but he’s an angel!”

Under that touch Pell blossomed as nothing else could have made him, and even his mother was amazed.

“Pell! Why, come here and let me look at you. You are positively enormous. What have they done to you?”

If in that moment Winifred realized that one son was lost to her, but here was another, she made the discovery too late, though very likely she would never know it. Pell, rosy and tanned with the summer sun, considered her question literally and answered it with the justice of his years and out of his new love:

“Kay gave me eggs,” he said.

3

Out in the garden for a final run, Pell turned a cart-wheel and laughed at James the Second.

His mother had called his dog an angel and this was a compliment, though Pell knew James was even better than that.

And she had said he was enormous.

Pell felt enormous. He discovered with pleased astonishment that she was perfectly right, and sitting down on the grass he put a measuring arm round his dog.

“We’re enormous,” he said.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book name has been added to the original book cover. The resulting cover is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Somebody Must* by Alice Grant Rosman]