The Singing Captives

E.B.C. Jones

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THE SINGING CAPTIVES

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THE SINGING CAPTIVES

BY E. B. C. JONES
(*Mrs. F. L. Lucas*)

"We think caged birds sing, when indeed they cry."
WEBSTER: *The White Devil.*

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TO MY MOTHER

PART ONE

I.

"Roden, dear, you're so perverse."

"Roden is so perverse."

"Of course, when Roden's in one of his perverse moods! . . . "

When Lady Peel rang the changes thus upon her favourite word of the moment not only her eldest son, Roden, but her husband, Sir Harold, her nephew, Evelyn Cashel, and her daughters, Caroline and Stella, sat in a silence which was neither alert nor embarrassed nor partisan, but merely profoundly indifferent.

Last autumn her word had been "highbrow"; shortly before that, "snobby"; earlier yet, "precious." Whatever it was, Lady Peel worked it to death, and long before it died it ceased to make the faintest impression on her auditors, whether they were involved in the indictment or merely spectators.

The speaker was a small, brown, restless, simian woman with a young, wrinkled face and eyes whose pathos was perhaps misleading. She fidgeted continually with knives and forks and

glasses; flicked her diamond earrings with a forefinger; shifted a heavy chain of variegated stones that seemed to chafe her neck. She was not brilliant in her restlessness; in spite of the luminous dark eyes there was a dimness about her face. Nor was her voice arresting; in spite of its odd sudden drops into a murmur, its gusty increase of volume, which bore no relation to the purport of the words, its effect was monotonous. The whole impression was one of rather meaningless and empty commotion. Yet Lady Peel was not wholly insignificant.

None of the company assembled at dinner was altogether negligible, to judge by a first appearance. How much of their distinction was due to their juxtaposition and to their rich, dark, gilded puce-and-umber background, it is hard to say; they certainly presented a picture of pleasing symmetry; and the London dining-room enclosed their composite personality as it were an essence. Upon its brightly-lit sombreness, their faces, necks, shirtfronts and hands detached themselves with a sort of gay, careless emphasis, at once theatrical and intimate. They scarcely spoke; only Lady Peel's complaints dribbled

and clicked like billiard balls knocked about in an idle moment with monotonous vivacity.

At her left hand, her elder son, Roden, glowered and lowered more openly than is usual in polite society. His indifference to his mother's opinion of him was profound; but to be baited in public is always odious. He was remarkably pale, with a large, arrogant, sensitive nose, whose nostrils were nearly vertical, and opaque brown eyes. He had a child-like look, due partly to his sulky mouth and wavy brown hair; and this look took the mind back further than adolescence, further than grubby schooldays and the schoolboy's frown, into the remoter period of infancy—the period of splendid projects, undiluted romance, unimagined obstacles, vast despairs; the period, too, of absolute faith. His face, to the sister who watched him covertly, was the type and symbol of a childhood lost but not regretted; it was Roden's strength and singularity that he had never quite grown up; he never looked back; his face was set always, childlike, to the future. He was childlike both in his sulky silences, as now, and in his loquacity, as when alone with Caroline. He lacked moderation, the fruit of self-consciousness, self-criticism;

he had not the intelligent adult's fear of being a bore; he was anecdotal; he related his dreams.

Yet Caroline, the self-conscious and self-critical, was aware of something beyond and above his moodiness and triviality, or perhaps a part of it—a promise and a power. He was unhampered by the diffidence, the humour, the ironical self-suspicion which shackles the introspective and the analytical. His sister pinned half her faith to him; she saw him as a potential conqueror. Lady Peel, Stella, her cousin, Evelyn Cashel, she herself, might torment him like mosquitoes; if there were a noble beast in her home, it was not her large blond, handsome father, but the mute, pale, lowering Roden. She gave him her unspoken support; the glance she dropped upon her mother was scornful in its cool indifference; Lady Peel was not worthy of her hostility.

There was none there, save Roden, in Caroline's opinion, worthy of any sharp or profound emotion. Her mother, her sister, her cousin, she frankly despised; her calm, fair father, the embodiment of a Frenchman's idea of an English lord, she regarded with mild affection: at least he kept quiet. Lady Peel's

and Stella's restlessness were irksome; the latter's femininity insistent; it addressed itself both to Sir Harold and to Evelyn Cashel, drawing them into a little circle of intimate allusiveness. Caroline wondered if Evelyn relished his position; for he was fastidious in many ways. Caroline's fastidiousness revolted against the situation which his presence created; a rivalry between mother and daughter. She did, on this account, spare him a morsel of admiration: his manner was perfect —not insolent, nor proprietary, nor humble. Judging by his ease, and an occasional sidelong smile, he enjoyed his rôle; at which judgment, Caroline's scorn over-rode her admiration.

Evelyn Cashel was a slender, fair, carefully-groomed young man, who sat with his smooth head and aquiline profile gracefully tilted, his hand curled round his wine glass. In middle age he would be dried up, bird-like; but at thirty he retained his clear complexion, elasticity and bloom. He spoke slowly with a slight lisp, and with considerable emphasis, and avoided with consummate skill any serious aspect of whatever topic was under discussion. So perfect, consistent and invulnerable was

his insincerity that Caroline often wondered if indeed he did dissemble anything; if indeed the highly-finished exterior were not the whole man.

A footman handed fruit.

"Can't we have canary bananas, Mother?" Stella asked. "I do hate these great yellow Zeppelins."

"You should go and live in the Canary Islands, my dear," said Evelyn, "and wear a grass skirt, and behave like the young person in Rupert Brooke's later poems and Gauguin's pictures—with a beautiful, innocent licence."

"Cabs is more in that line," Sir Harold remarked, glancing at his elder daughter's slender brownness.

"Ah, but the point of my idea, Hal," his nephew protested, "is that Stella would be so delightfully . . . perverse . . . in those circumstances—like Ninon de l'Enclos wrecked on a desert island at the age of sixteen."

Stella, small and fair, with a pointed equivocal face of wavering outline, laughed; and Lady Peel cried, jangling her bracelets: "What ideas you do get hold of, Evelyn! It's as bad as a French novel."

"You know, Aunt Leila, I believe you'd like

me to *be* rather wicked and loose for the sake of the vicarious thrill: sin at second hand."

"I know nothing of the sort, you ridiculous boy," his aunt retorted. "It's quite loose-sounding enough for you to be mixed up with aniline dyes. . . . By the way, Hal, Mr. Crackham—or is it Packham?—called to-day . . . Evelyn, he said you were an ornament to the firm."

"He must have a sense of humour," said Caroline softly.

There passed then between her and her cousin a long look, neither hostile nor amicable—one of cool, amused, mutual measurement and comprehension.

"I'm glad you realise how decorative I am," he replied at last, smiling faintly.

"Of course," said Caroline gravely, dipping her fingers into a bowl of water.

"Hal!" Stella suddenly exclaimed, "it's April, and I must have a new hat. I owe ten pounds."

After a pause her father inquired: "And what about Cabs?"

"Oh, Cabs is never in debt! It's Evelyn and I who are extravagant."

"I disclaim this fellowship of vice."

"You! Who daren't go down Savile Row for fear of duns?"

"I'll pay for a new hat," Sir Harold announced, "in exchange for a sight of your accounts."

"Hal, you're a mean pig! Cabs, be a dear and lend me your accounts to show Hal."

"Certainly," said Caroline.

"You see," Stella informed them, "I'm lunching at the Carlton to-morrow, with Geoffrey. . . . Can't we go upstairs, now? I've something to show you, Evelyn."

In the vast drawing-room, rose-coloured curtains hid the blue night, crystal drops shrouded the lights, and the walls were covered, incongruously, with seascapes. The ocean in paint was Lady Peel's one constant artistic passion, although she declared that the sea in reality gave her a sick headache at a distance of five miles.

Released from the dining-room, the group's composite personality evaporated. Contrasts between them seemed less sharp, and at the same time each individual was more himself. As though to symbolise this independence Sir Harold prepared, almost at once, to leave the

house. His younger daughter, following him from the room, returned after an interval, holding two cheques, one of which she gave to Caroline.

They were grouped round the hearth, Roden at Caroline's feet, Evelyn in a deep chair on whose arm Stella perched herself. She showed the young man a pill-box, bidding him guess the contents.

"Cocaine?"

"No. Patches. Are they made of sticking plaster?" Together they examined the contents of the box. Then, glancing provocatively at her mother and sister, the girl held a patch to her cheek, and said "Where shall I wear it?"

Caroline watched her, coolly critical. Lady Peel seemed not to have heard or seen; but suddenly she spoke: "One gets so sick of 'em! They're all right for a day or two."

"Oh, mother, how you do take the gilt off the gingerbread! They'll suit me, won't they, Evelyn?"

"Yes, my dear." He surveyed her, while she leaned away from him, her odd little face, not modern, yet bespeaking an infinite self-assurance, tilted daintily. "Come here," Evelyn

finally resumed; "one here; and another there, when you wear your pink *faille* frock."

"According to mother, there'll only be one occasion."

"One can do a lot in that time," said Caroline.

Roden handed her his cigarette case, and she took one, bending towards him her sloping shoulders, her long neck, her fine, light-boned head, capped with dense brown hair. Her brows were darkly marked, like Roden's; but her eyes, unlike his, were hazel, lucent, lucid, scrutinising everyone and everything; more often critical than soft. From her brow her hair sprang away in a definite curve, though art had flattened it over her ears; and from her teeth her upper lip sprang away with a similar movement, while her under lip came up, it seemed with deliberation, to cover them. She smoked very slowly, husbanding the ash on the cigarette-end, and finally flicking it off with a sure, quick gesture. She had these sudden, yet certain, movements, which might have been taken for signs of impulsiveness, but which could be seen germinating in her mind, in her poise. That, too, was how she spoke—unhesitating, sudden, soft and sure and clear.

"Do you remember, Evelyn," Lady Peel asked, "the Victorian Ball in 1914?"

"Of course I do."

"You and Stella were in Paris, then, weren't you, Cabs? Did I ever tell you about it?"

"No; the war intervened," the girl answered.

"Roden, you went with us, didn't you?"

Her son grunted: "Yes. That Victorian coat was tight in the arm-holes."

"We went in the Vesey's box," his mother resumed. "In those days there was a motion that Roden and Babs were . . . "

"Liés," Evelyn supplied.

"I thought it was you, Evelyn, who was so devoted to Babs Vesey!" cried Stella.

"Yes indeed, *now;* but not then," her cousin retorted.

There was a pause while the various interpretations of which this answer was capable hovered in the air. Evelyn Cashel's voice was peculiarly suited to innuendo; nor did he shirk the silences which follow remarks full of implication—indeed, he seemed to savour them. He sat in perfect ease, while two thin streams of smoke issued from his nostrils; and finally, went on: "Babs in those days was impossibly

ingenuous. Now-a-days, there's nothing she doesn't know, which makes conversation not only possible but pleasant."

Caroline smiled at the fire.

"All girls know everything now," said Lady Peel, "but it doesn't seem to give 'em any satisfaction. They are so glum and solemn—"

"I'm not," Stella protested.

"And so are the young men," her mother added.

"I'm not," said Evelyn.

"Roden is. Cabs and Roden are a very typically modern pair, in my opinion," their mother pursued, kicking away a footstool which hit the fender and caused the fire-irons to fall with a clatter. When the din had subsided she completed her sentence: "You do and say all you want, and still you aren't pleased."

"It was rather hard to feel pleased during war," Caroline remarked.

"But that's over now. Why can't you enjoy life? You have everything you want, haven't you?"

"It's hard, I suppose, to shed things just like that," the girl replied slowly, marvelling yet again at her mother's crudity. Were three years to be counted an age, during which even

the loss of one's betrothed must be forgotten? Lady Peel's crudity amounted in her next speech to cruelty—the trivial, unconscious cruelty of a child tearing a flower to pieces.

"To shed things," she echoed, moving her chin quickly from side to side, while she loosened her jewelled chain. "To shed what? What do you mean, I wonder? You young things are solemn and mysterious to a pitch! . . ."

"To shed the war."

"Oh, Cabs," cried Stella irritably, "*don't* go on repeating 'the war' over and over again. We've all been in it."

"My dear Stella, I'm not proprietary about it."

"Yes. Evelyn and Stella were in it, too, especially Evelyn; and Francis was, just as much as any one who didn't fight. *He* isn't gloomy," said Lady Peel.

Francis was her absent schoolboy son.

"Francis and Stella are younger than Roden and I," Caroline answered. "They can begin again. It's hard for us, nearer thirty than twenty, to begin again." She spoke coolly, reasonably, in the way Stella hated: she felt her sister hating her now.

"What about Evelyn?" the latter asked with hostility.

"Evelyn's the complete epicure. As long as good food and hot water are available he retains his equanimity."

"I hope you feel crushed," said Stella to her cousin.

"But I admire her, while she dissects me," he answered.

"Dissect! Dissect! That's exactly what they do now-a-days. Evelyn has the word," cried Lady Peel.

"Now, Aunt Leila, don't you appropriate it. It's my copyright; you've got quite enough words already."

"I don't mind your teasing me, Evelyn, because at least you're gay."

"I'm gay, I'm gay, too," gurgled her younger daughter, swinging one leg violently, while she supported herself with a hand on the young man's shoulder. "I want a smoke."

Her cousin opened his case; it was empty.

"Oh dear! Roden, give me a cigarette," she commanded.

Her brother handed her his case in silence.

"Old glum-face, why don't you speak?"

"Because I've no words to waste," said Roden gruffiy.

"Oh, oh, oh, the ogre! Oh, the sage, the philosopher!" cried Stella, still swinging her leg. Her brother made no answer; and presently, her cigarette alight between her fingers, she sat still and mute regarding him. His silence, his remoteness piqued and puzzled her, when she noticed him; and this occurred more frequently than, to judge by the number of times she addressed him, one would have thought likely. He was indocile to the process of capture by femininity, quite unsusceptible. The thought of him, further, was indocile to Stella's particular method of dealing with ideas that failed to fit in her scheme of existence. The queer, the mysterious, the alien, the intractable, the incomprehensible, were simply, by her, put by. The thought of Roden would not be put by; it continually cropped up; she could not finally dismiss him from her mind. She even sometimes missed him from the dinner-table. She liked to feel the gaze of his opaque eyes fixed on her, on the rare occasions when he noticed her; she liked to elicit from him a response, however grudging. She longed now to prick him into consciousness of her.

His oblivion as he stared at the fire seemed a challenge. Then Evelyn touched her hand, and her thoughts slid away to him, to herself adorned with a beauty-spot, to a vision of herself in a pink *faille* frock, walking into a restaurant in front of Evelyn. . . .

Caroline, unaware of Stella's interest in their brother, although she compared her sister's attacks on his reserve to Lady Peel's, marvelled at the strange house-fellows which blood and convention make. She herself felt separated from her family by a gulf; but how much further even than she was Roden spiritually removed. She had bracketed him with herself in speech just now; but were he and she, in fact, any closer than she and Stella? "Roden *can* begin again; just like Stella and Francis can," she said to herself. "He's not too old at twenty-seven, too war-worn, too heart-broken. He'll live and grow intensely. He's like a tree; one feels the sap strong inside the bark; it'll break out in leaves and fruit. Is it only I that feel half-dead, empty, and purposeless?"

She glanced down at Roden, as she put herself the question, and saw his head drop forward with a jerk, then raise itself; his whole

body swayed back towards her, and his head came to rest, warm and solid, against her knee. She bent with a protective movement over him and found that he had fallen asleep.

II.

In 1917, Caroline's *fiancé*, Gerald Sexton, had been killed in Mesopotamia. Introduced to the Peels by Roden, whom he knew at Cambridge, Gerald the gay, the gallant, the candid and chivalrous, had conquered the whole family; he was, to them, a hero before he put on khaki, before he was decorated, before he lost his life in battle.

The Caroline Peel of those days was a different person from the Caroline Peel of 1920. Her family's united affection for Gerald had positively recommended him to her; not that her feeling for the young man was in the least spurious; it was, on both sides, a genuine passion. It flowered slowly from seeds sown in pre-war days; it was to have been crowned in the autumn of the year in which Gerald was killed. In the shock of that event, Caroline, disorientated, amazed, with the world crumbling about her, the earth trembling under her feet, life crouching like an assassin scarcely less hideous than death, had closed the gates

of herself against existence, had prepared for a long siege, determined to eat her heart out rather than surrender. There was no one in those days to help her, to persuade her to keep open one postern, one wicket, so that communication with life should not be utterly prevented. Her family, in pity and awe, had stood away from her; had, in their phrase, "respected her grief." Her girl friends were too young, or too much occupied with their own affairs, to take an intimate interest in hers. She faced tragedy alone. She looked at life, saw that it was evil, and swore herself its enemy. Her own loss brought about her first sharp intense realisation of the war—a general realisation of which her class, her family, her upbringing, made extraordinarily difficult. Not till Gerald's death did she come to visualise—however inadequately—the meaning of war; and when she did, it overwhelmed her. She looked at her surroundings and searched the faces of her family and friends for some answering recognition of the immensity of the catastrophe in which they were involved; she perceived trivial excitement, boredom, self-satisfaction, and sometimes the ravages of grief; but never the message of comprehension

which would have called out the answering dignity in her. She did not even know her own plight, bewildered by longing, sickness and woe. She hugged for comfort the catchwords concerning England, the patriot's death, the struggle for liberty, the eternal glory of the noble dead, and found that she was treasuring pinchbeck jewels. No one in whom these phrases were a faith turned them for her into fine gold; and so she began to suspect that the fine gold did not exist.

Nor had she any help from the knowledge that Gerald had died for a faith. She knew that he had been unselfish and courageous; hitherto, this had been enough; they had never discussed the ethics of patriotism; Gerald was not an introspective or even a thoughtful person. The instinctive quality of his response to a national need began to trouble her; she could not even leave her lover's nobility unquestioned. She became a walking den of unformulated suspicions and uneasy speculations, tinged with a hatred of herself for her disloyalty. This sudden quick growth and development of character affected her as with a malady. The family doctor treated her for anæmia.

After several months of such a state, Caroline had the good fortune to find herself placed in close relation to Gerald's brother, Hugh, returned from France, where gas had incapacitated him.

Hugh Sexton had also been at Cambridge with Roden, whose contemporary he was, but owing to his brother's attractive personality he had been rather overlooked by the Peels. In her new state of mind Caroline, from her fortress, scanned the faces of all comers for a reflection of her own dismay and disillusion. She had not yet quite given up hope, for the very reason that her hope was not formulated. She perceived in Hugh something which differentiated him from her surroundings; she found that he was willing to talk, and that he was capable of expressing for her much that had seethed unspoken in her mind. Tentatively, he touched on Gerald's death, boldly on the war, bitterly on the attitude towards it of persons such as Lady Peel. She found that Hugh had no spring of patriotism, only a dislike of letting others suffer for him; and yet she could not think him quite ignoble; he left on her an impression of fineness and sincerity.

Could it then be that there was nobility and self-sacrifice without that inspiration?

For three years now, Hugh's and Caroline's friendship had endured and grown. To him only was she fully articulate, perfectly candid. In his presence, the reserve which appeared so complete in the midst of her family, melted, and she exposed herself without fear, without after-thought, almost without restraint.

Her silence at home was largely due to an irritable expectation amounting to certainty that she would be misunderstood; or have to repeat her words; and to a complacent conviction that most of what she had to say was too interesting to be of interest to such persons as her parents, Stella, Francis, Evelyn. The latter could, she knew, if he so desired, perfectly comprehend any utterance of hers; but he shrank and shielded himself consistently from anything dark, deep or intricate, preferring the polished subleties and obscurities of Henry James' novels to the sombre intricacies of actual experience. Caroline, as a graceful, silent, occasionally ironical presence, he appreciated; but in moments of expansion, she reminded him too sharply of "horrid realities" which he preferred to forget.

Roden, for very different reasons, condemned his sister no less straitly than did Evelyn to a role of auditor. He had been dismayed, once, at her taking up the cudgels for him against Lady Peel, using in his defence the weapons he most distrusted: pointed fluency, light-handed wit—what he mentally condemned, without using the word, as facile. But this was not all. Even alone with him he feared Caroline's tongue. He valued her as a listener, occasionally even as a confidante and critic; but as a party to discussion he almost hated her; she was tainted with the passion for analysis and wit-sharpening which he regarded as inimical to action and creation. Several times after his return from France he had gruffly silenced her and she had not resumed her efforts at self-expression.

In the circles where the propensities condemned by Roden would have found full play Caroline was scarcely more talkative; though for a different reason. If at home, she felt or imagined her own intellectual and spiritual superiority; among her literary acquaintances she was correspondingly conscious of theirs. Her family's conventionality, superficiality and obtuseness compared with her, set, as it were,

the measure of her own compared with her clever, queer, critical and creative friends. She was cautious about exposing herself before them; yet even here she nursed an especial complacency—suspecting these persons no less than her family of coldness, of an absence of the deepest, wildest, most far-reaching emotions. How they would probe, finger, handle the most intimate topics, with never a tremor, it seemed, of sentiment or modesty, never a moment of awe! And yet, at least, they could hate. They were languid, perhaps, over their loves, their joys; their malice was a little weary; but hatred of tyranny, hypocrisy, mawkishness, cruelty, woke them to bitter alertness; and this hatred seemed a less ignoble, personal and petty thing than the emotions of Stella and Lady Peel.

It was Roden, oddly enough, who had introduced her to this circle of men and women from which he had since quite removed himself. Shortly before the war he had published a book of poems, and these had brought him into prominence, though not into popularity, with those who watch for young talent and foster it. It had not taken him very long to become disgusted with his patrons, whom he

regarded as the most anæmic of dilettantes, the flimsiest of "intellectuals." Their ideals were repellent to him; and on the outbreak of the war he had definitely quarrelled with some members of the group. Affection for one particular woman, had, however, drawn him back into the hated circle whenever he returned to London on leave; and on one of these occasions Caroline, recently emerged from the first agonised period of grief, had accompanied him thither. Since then, she had gone without Roden; and doubtless the frank, cynical disillusionment from which the members of the group suffered played its part in her reaction to her loss; but so conscious was she of poverty of brain, culture, education and experience in comparison with these companions that she made no advances, and received none; remaining thus unfriended, although in friendly relation, just where she was most likely to find understanding, if not sympathy.

In Hugh Sexton, however, she found both. He had the advantage over her other acquaintances of being Gerald's brother, and of having witnessed from its conception her's and Gerald's love. He had known it, he remembered it, in all its stages. She had scarcely noticed

him, but he had noticed her; and she was astonished and touched to find how carefully he had followed her emotional history. They both wondered, she with deep gratitude, he with proud humility, what would have become of her sanity had the young man remained in France instead of being invalided out of the army a few months after his brother's death. He had given her untiring companionship, never obtruding his own very real grief on her. He had acted as the young seldom do, with complete selflessness. It was no wonder that she admired, loved, trusted him. He was all that Roden was not; he gave, he did not take.

Only rarely did he make demands on her. Once he had come distraught to Kensington soon after breakfast. It was the day after the signing of the Armistice. Roden being still in France, she took Hugh up to her brother's room, where there was a gas-fire. She lit it, and crouched before it, while he sheltered his ravaged face in his hands, leaning on the mantel-piece.

"You haven't slept, Hugh."

"Oh, Cabs, how could I? Ever since London went mad yesterday I've been thinking how

typically damnable it was of fate to kill Gerald and to leave me. If he'd been merely gassed you and he would have lived happily ever after. It seemed to me last night that I could never face you again. Then, when it got light, I couldn't rest till I'd seen you. It seemed to me as if it was, in some fiendish way, my fault."

Caroline heard the wave of nervous emotion climbing the steep breakwater of his control. She began quickly to speak. "You'll see by noon how foolish you've been. Even in Londoners there's something which knows what time it is. Something in me knows when it's noon and when it's midnight, although I myself don't. When you wake feeling low and cold and deserted in the night it's almost certain to be two or three o'clock. One's often a little mad in the night. At noon one is matter-of-fact."

She paused, and the young man shifted his position and faced her, his shoulders characteristically a little hunched, his mouth crinkled at the corners with the effort of restraint, the mauve stains of insomnia under his slow-moving eyes—grey meditative eyes in a fair, keen Danish face.

She looked at him compassionately; and

under her scrutiny he smiled, and brought out: "'*Poéte, prends ton luth.*' Go on; you're not eloquent, yet you're poetical . . . Cabs, is living worth all this trouble? What care and energy we waste on the effort to earn our livings and not to cry in public!" He felt for his pipe.

But Caroline pursued her theme: "Haven't you often made the most wonderful plans in the night, which make you blush in the morning, for their idiocy, or—what is it?—grandiloquence?"

"Oh, yes."

"That's what makes Roden different from us, you know. He *doesn't* blush in the morning; they seem just as good as they did in bed . . . Your feelings last night, Hugh—I quite understand them. They were simply distorted."

"So Roden, then, is perpetually distorted?"

"No, no. He has the horrors sometimes, of course. I can't explain him. But those very conceited ideas of oneself and one's ability that you and I only have at night and in solitude aren't destroyed for Roden by daylight and the world."

Although she had led the talk round to her

brother, Caroline had not dismissed from her mind Hugh's first fantastic speech. It continued to occupy her long after he had left her. It raised, not for the first time, the question of how Gerald's and her life would have fallen out had they been married. This speculation, fruitless and idle as it was, inevitably employed her at times; but for some reason unknown to herself, she never spoke of it to Hugh except in passing—not from any fear of disloyalty, nor from a sense of the sacredness of the topic, for she intuitively knew that what has never been, and can never be, cannot be held sacred. This was her one reserve from Hugh; and not till much later did she break the silence.

III.

It was past ten o'clock of a fine April morning, but still Roden Peel lay in bed, tossing from side to side and groaning: "O God, O God! There's no use in trying to have friends."

This was a favourite, an attractive, a tormenting topic: it occupied a great deal of Roden's time. To the question of what he called Caroline and Ann Davies and Joe Tucker if not friends, Roden had no answer, save that one of his most outstanding and constant sensations was that of friendlessness.

He had returned from the war full of hopes and projects. Nothing seemed too simple, too splendid, too humble, too difficult for him to do. He pictured a gay, crowded, childlike, active existence in the midst of an appreciative family and a circle of kind, enthusiastic, hard-working friends. He would have no dealings with the super-subtle, the hypercritical, the chattering, back-boneless persons who had tried to "take him up" after the publication of his

poems. Cleverness he did not demand in people; all that he had to express was comprehensible to the least intellectual of minds. All the large, the real, the fundamental things were capable of comprehension by anybody, if lucidly expressed. He, Roden, would write—the real democrat—for everyone.

Concerning his own part in these schemes, he had not been disappointed; soon after his return to England he had begun to write, and had completed "Swedenborg: A Drama." It was the desired friends of whose existence he began to doubt. To begin with, his family hardly seemed to notice him. Stella, newly grown-up, looked at him as at a curious animal; his father, after a few mild vain efforts at setting up a current of sympathy, ignored him; and Lady Peel, whose period of enthusiasm about the stage happened to coincide with the completion of Roden's play, showed one brief flare of interest only. Roden recalled the conversation:—

"Mother, I've finished my play."

"Roden, how wonderful! Is it typed? If it's typed I'll show it to Miss What's-her-name—she's a power in the S. S. S. What is it about?"

"Swedenborg."

"Oh . . . Is it like Ibsen? Of course, Roden, dear, I know that Norway and Sweden are very tragic and interesting and advanced; but I don't *think* they're very popular just now. Couldn't it take place in—in the Potteries, say? Look how Arnold Bennett goes down."

Since Roden's failure to respond adequately to this suggestion, Lady Peel had seemed unable to focus her gaze on him. Besides, her passion for the stage had soon subsided.

Sir Harold, after one attempt to interest his son in a commercial opening which would have provided him with a salary and later a partnership, had let the young man alone. The vacancy was filled by Evelyn Cashel. When announcing to his family that aniline dyes had absorbed their cousin's daily energy, Sir Harold had thrown out one question to Roden: "What do you think of doing?"

"I shall write," was the reply, received in silence.

His family, then, with the exception of the fond though critical Caroline, did not provide the nucleus of sympathy which Roden needed. Caroline herself was sure that he would find the necessary friends, in spite of difficulties at

the outset. Roden, tossing in bed, remembered fragments of conversation with her:

"You don't try to make people like you—not even Hal and mother and Stella."

"If I do try, they don't. They must take me as I am, or leave me."

"Well, don't grouse if they leave you; and anyway, *I* take you."

"You're no good. You're a pessimist. I want some one who'll love life as I do, and do all the things there are to be done."

"Such as?"

"For instance, I enjoy everyday, ordinary things and people. You only like them in books."

"That's art, isn't it? I like them transubstantiated."

"Damn long words! We shall never understand each other."

"Well, Roden, at least we shall always care for each other."

"Shall we? I'm not so sure."

"Why? Do you sometimes hate me?"

"I've been pretty near it, Cabs, when you sneer. You despise every one—you despise life, I believe."

He remembered vividly her long thoughtful

look, fixed on him, yet in reality seaching her own mind for the truth. He remembered her accent as she replied: "I don't despise life, I fear it. It's stronger and cunninger than I— it comes along behind me and tries to push me under motor-buses."

"Turn on it, and you'll find it's on your side. It's good to be part of life . . . Oh, you'll never agree, so we can't be friends."

"But we are friends. I have you here." She had touched her breast-bone. "You and I are like Cathy and Heathcliffe: Cathy is half Stella, half me."

It had not occurred to Roden that this was an odd speech for a sister to make to a brother. Instead he had answered quickly: "Your Brontës weren't afraid of melodrama—as you call it—nor of ordinaries. Nothing's wasted, or to be despised—nothing and nobody. Every one is of equal value and interest."

"Ah, no."

"The only people I despise," the young man had added in sudden anger, "are pessimists, because pessimism is a denial of life: it's negative. They are on the down-grade."

"Am I?"

"Yes. It's *they* who fail," he had re-

affirmed, his thoughts passing from her to include the hated *intelligentsia.*

Caroline, with one of her moments of intuition, had followed his thoughts. He remembered her accusing him of being taken in by the talk of cultured people, of believing them to be ineffectual because they were fluent; and his reply:

"It's enough for me that they are snobs. They despise me because I don't speak their beastly jargon."

His sister, in spite of these differences, had done her best to bring him into contact with sympathetic acquaintances. Roden went over in memory his first encounter with Ann Davies, a gay, robust, blue-eyed young woman with whom Caroline left him to deal alone. Roden's first question: "What do you do?" elicited from Ann that she did anything, or rather nothing.

"Isn't London enough?—except when one's in the country, and that's better still."

"Yes, indeed. Let's go," he had cried impulsively, "to the Grafton Galleries. No, it's dark, damn it. Let's go to a cinema."

With eyes closed, lying in bed, he recalled how Ann had written on the back of an en-

velope: "We've gone to a cinema," which message was propped against his mother's drawing-room clock for Caroline to find on her return.

But the promise of this meeting had been too hopeful. He read Ann Davies "Swedenborg: A Drama," and, calling Caroline into his room in the evening, he had broken out: "Damn that girl, Cabs! She doesn't know when to hold her tongue."

"Who does?"

"Don't enrage me with philosophy—I'm nearly off my head as it is. What a family! I thought Ann was sane and kind; but now I've lost her."

"What exactly did she say?"

"'Exactly!' She said a damned sight too much. Either my play's worthless, or she's a fool."

He remembered his anger—the anger of almost a year ago; it burned in him again at the thought of Ann's careless, bruising words, and of Caroline's silence. Her silence seemed accusatory.

"Say it's my play, say it: you think it!" he had stormed. "I know you don't care, but I thought she did."

He knew now, even as he tossed in his fevered mood of retrospect, that both these girls cared for him—Ann gaily, light-heartedly, and Caroline in her divided, baffled, critical, constant manner.

She was sanguine on his behalf; it was, she said, only a matter of time. She knew that he would co-ordinate his dream with reality; she swore to that ability in him, which was not in her. Her own dream had gone by the board; it would not mingle with life. It was a guarantee for him that he was so essentially different from her.

Meanwhile, it was hard for him. Almost every day his mother indirectly attacked what she considered his idleness, and by implication praised Evelyn Cashel for his industry. Sir Harold was amiable, but made no advances. Stella looked at him curiously. Evelyn mildly, subtly echoed Lady Peel's unanswerable questions—not for the purpose of annoying Roden, not even solely for the purpose of pleasing his aunt; his motives were seldom so simple, as Roden intuitively and Caroline analytically knew. Evelyn's apparent criticism of his cousin, couched in a cunningly transformed version of Lady Peel's jerky

speech, was at once a criticism of the speech and a flattery to the speaker. Evelyn knew, none better, which side his bread was buttered; and it was his pastime and pride to act on this knowledge while giving rein to his taste for satire. Such obliquity infuriated Roden, rousing all that was puritan in him. The very thought of Evelyn made him scowl.

It was the thought of Evelyn that to-day made him roll himself over in bed, and mutter "Damn! Damnation!" as his elder sister entered the room. "Go away!" he adjured her. Nevertheless, she sat down by the window, and said:

"I'm lunching with Ann at Simpson's today. Will you come?"

"No. I'm sick of Ann. Of everybody, including you. Why don't you go away?"

"I will, for you. But I thought it was on my account you told me to go."

"It was." He lay staring at her.

"Have you had any breakfast?"

"No. Give me a drink of water."

As he drank, he glanced at her, and then said: "You are fond of me, Cabs. I wonder why you stand my tempers?"

" 'Beareth all things'," the girl answered

with a slight grimace, holding out her hand for the empty glass.

Roden banged it on his bed-table so that it broke. "There! Damn you, Caroline, go into an asylum; don't try to be a flesh-and-blood person. You can't be. You'd cut up Christ's own body with phrases——"

"Saint Paul's, you mean."

"Oh, hell! Your passion for tags is inhuman—it's indecent."

"Oh, no—a lust, like another."

"Lust, then. But gross words are only a fashion. It's all a fashion. You're a spiritual dandy."

Still standing, her eyes on his dark face, Caroline wondered, as often before, at its potential tragedy, which not even his present mood of childish fury obliterated. In spite of five years of war, the tragedy was still only potentially, not actually, there. She feared for him, on that account, at the same time as she confidently hoped. And yet it might fade, melt into a simple ability to enjoy. There was in him a power and a strength, which might turn to misery or to serenity. At present, it was a dark, driving force; but she thought that, used and treated aright, it might turn to a force for

happiness. For she knew that behind his tormented moods, his discouragements and sense of frustration, burned a faith in life, a confidence in himself, which were the profoundest things in him. This faith had survived the huge despairs of childhood, the black moods of adolescence, the drawn-out ordeal of war, the death of his comrades, the coldness of his family; and so it would survive the disillusionments of peace and of maturity. So strong was her sense of it in him, of it being the mainspring of his character, that she did not resent the blunt, even cruel indictment of her own pessimism which sprang from it. She recognised his revolt against her view of life as the revolt of the affirmative against the negative temperament.

What puzzled her was the inability of his face to express his confidence in existence; the opacity of his features disconcerted her. Only his nose, large, arrogant, sensitive, though not finely cut, seemed to scent life out as if he were the hunter, it the prey—seemed to challenge life, as though he met it as an equal, instead of suffering its abuses like a captive. Caroline had once or twice, laughing at her own sentimentality, kissed her brother's nose; feeling

herself thus in some way indentified with his capacity and courage; as women, who in old days embroidered and embraced the standard, felt, when it was carried into battle, that the glory and splendour of the struggle were not wholly denied them. She kissed it now, despite his motion of repulse, before she left the room.

IV.

AT noon Roden roused himself, and sat up, tousled-headed, to stare out of the window and round the room.

His room was full of himself and evidences of his activity. On a large deal table by the window lay a stack of papers—the first draft of "Harriet Brown: A Melodrama." "Swedenborg" was in the hands of an agent. The table further bore paints, pencils, a drawing-board and a pot of murky water. Above the fireplace was a pastel portrait of the Deity. surrounded by somewhat homosexual angels with bobbed hair; this work of art, as well as Satan, who, dressed in American clothes with side whiskers and cloth-topped boots, leered in the shadow of the wardrobe, was of Roden's own execution.

By the gas-fire was one shelf of books, supported by a chair. It contained: "Robinson Crusoe"; "Dr. Syntax's Tour," illustrated by Rowlandson; "War and Peace"; a Chaucer; a Swedish "Bædeker"; and Nietzsche's "Thus

Spake Zarathustra," on which once-treasured but now unloved volume Roden had experimented with his notions of bookbinding.

In Roden's nebulous cloud of angry thoughts one became clearer than the rest: hatred of his frescoes. He would colour-wash them over to-morrow,—disgusting things. Nevertheless, he remarked for the hundreth time the skill, if not the inspiration, with which he had grouped the heavenly attendants; one in particular was masterfully drawn.

He dressed quickly, in dark grey clothes; and, without definite intention, with only the feeblest impulse, went out and turned eastwards. It was a beautiful day. The streets were already emptying for the lunch hour. In Knightsbridge, he stopped to gaze in the shop windows, for he took a deep interest in women's dress.

He had not yet, however, thrown off his troubled mood. In the bright clamour of the streets there still clung to his brain, his hands, his heart, a drab fog, a sensation of muffled, haunted irritability. As though flying from it, he started resolutely for Green Park.

When he entered it, it seemed quite empty. After a few paces he noticed a girl sitting on

a seat, eating out of a paper packet. There was something so familiar in her attitude that he slackened his pace to watch her. She was dainty, squirrel-like, alert. He could not clearly see her face, but he was sure that she kept a wary, bright eye open for strangers and disturbances. Approaching, Roden became aware of what she reminded him; not only of a squirrel, but also of the slightly squirreline Stella. This girl belonged to the same type of woman as his sister and his mother—the type which suggests the smaller animals: cat, rabbit, monkey, rodent. She was not simian, as was Lady Peel; she was too neatly finished; her outline was too definite, her poise too alert. Now that she knew that a young man was watching her the natural daintiness of her actions was accentuated—became an affectation.

Roden sat down beside her. After one quick, sharp look at him, she turned a trifle more away.

"It's lovely," Roden calmly remarked, as to the air. "D'you know, I can smell the hyacinths in Hyde Park—right across the tar and the petrol? Sometimes, I think I shall be ill with London's smells."

After a moment an answer came primly: "They say the smells one doesn't smell are the worst."

"As for the din!" the young man pursued, not noticing her, "of course I used to think it ruddy. I used to think my ear-drums would split, before I went to France. Now I can stand anything—from the trump of doom downwards."

"I suppose you can," said the girl. "I must say I used to think my ears would split when first I went to Gay's. Of course, as soon as you start making a noise yourself, you don't notice the others."

"On the other hand, I seem to have developed my nose in France," Roden went on, "you wouldn't think there could be so many smells, all bad ones."

"No, you wouldn't, would you?" She had been turning herself gradually towards him, and her profile was now square to his. "Smells!" she echoed reminiscently; and added: "But the cloak-room at Gay's beats all."

"What's Gay's?"

"It's where I work—Gay's Pantechnicon Corner . . . I'm second for speed now. I be-

gan as office girl in 1917, and then I learnt my shorthand."

"You're a typist."

"Yes; but my shorthand's better than my typing, Mr. Leslie—that's my boss—says. 'Miss Draper,' he says, 'you'll never learn, not ever, where to begin a new paragraph, not unless I tell you.' But I'm second for speed now, so I don't mind what Mr. Leslie says."

Roden who, without apparently listening, had taken in all the essentials of this speech, announced that he wrote plays. Miss Draper was suitably awed; and, at her silence, he at last turned his face to her, and said: "Would you like to type a play for me?"

"I haven't a machine of my own."

"You could hire one—if I paid."

"Oh yes." She offered him a bag: "Have an acid drop?" and then, reassembling her errant formality, added primly: "If you'll excuse me."

"No, thanks. I'll smoke. Have one?"

"I don't smoke, thank you. Lots of the girls smoke; in fact almost all of them do; but I don't see the good of it. It runs away with money. How is one to put by for a rainy day if one's for ever buying cigarettes?"

"Did you say your name was Draper?"

She hesitated. Rita's moving story of an innocent girl led astray by a licentious artist came to her mind; these writers were just the same as artists, "sort of Bohemian." However, when the young man said:

"My name is Roden Peel," her good sense made her reply:

"Mine is Grace Draper."

"As I came along," said Roden, "I thought you looked like a squirrel eating nuts."

A return of gentility made her voice artificial as she answered:

"I bring my lunch out whenever it's fine. The air's good for one. How's a girl to keep herself fit and her complexion good, if she's for ever cooped up in a typing-room?" At the end of her little speech, her garrulity having banished primness, she looked with open interest at her companion, who gravely agreed.

His worries had mysteriously vanished; the drab fog had lifted from his brain, had melted from his hands and heart. The smells of hyacinths and Piccadilly, the sounds of London and this girl's voice had banished care. He rose and produced a card, saying: "Here's my

address. I'll send you the play—or could you meet me here to-morrow?"

"I shan't have got the machine by to-morrow."

There was a pause. Roden's thoughts had flown away on the word "machine". Puzzled, she rose from the seat, and stood watching him side-long. Then, reminding herself that no girl gets on who is too nervous, she decided to be "foward," and added: "I might call for your play. Is it far? Of course, if it was Putney or Cricklewood. . . ."

"T'other side of the Albert Hall."

"Oh, is that all? Well, I like a stroll in my lunch hour, so I'll call for it on Tuesday—if that suits you."

"Thank you awfully. Ask for me."

He raised his hat, nodded and turned away.

She stopped him with an exclamation, and he turned back.

"Mr. Peel, I don't know what they'll charge for the machine."

"That doesn't matter."

"I shall have to charge you a shilling a thousand words—the usual charge."

"That's all right."

"I thought I'd better tell you. It's best to be businesslike, isn't it?"

"Of course. Good-bye."

At lunch Roden was, as usual, silent; but as they moved from table and lit their cigarettes Caroline and Stella fell into laughter over some private joke. Under cover of this, their brother, succumbing to an expansive impulse, told Lady Peel that he had lately finished the first draft of his second play.

His mother fixed on him her luminous dark eyes, while she ineffectually scraped a match on its box. "I hope," she mumbled through her cigarette, "you aren't counting on me, dear boy. You know I've severed all connection with the S.S.S. That officious Miss Thingamabob made my position simply impossible. . . . "

Roden was at sea for a moment. Then he recollected her past offer of help, and returned: "Oh, it's not ready to be seen yet. And when it is, I shall send it to my agent. He's already got old Swedenborg."

"Can't we see it?" Stella cried suddenly, coming to his side.

"No. Well, I might read it to you when—when it's typed." His face was inscrutable;

and yet Stella perceived some clue in it, or in his tone, for she cried maliciously:

"Roden's in love with a typist!"

He acknowledged the accuracy of the guess: "I picked one up in the park to-day." There was a sudden gust of laughter from Sir Harold and the girls. Lady Peel jangled her bracelets and said: "What does he mean?"

"I say I picked one up in the park," her son repeated doggedly. Even this scene could not drive away his equanimity.

"A typewriter?" Lady Peel asked.

Stella laughed again. They were all grouped round him, where he stood by the littered dining-table.

"No. A girl."

"But why?"

"For some one to talk to."

"Haven't you anyone else to talk to?" said Stella.

Caroline shrank away. There was something odious to her in scenes of family life neither gay, intimate nor kind. Stella and her mother might have been urchins teasing a bear, while Sir Harold, the bland policeman, looked on impartially. As Caroline moved towards the window Lady Peel remarked with unusual

directness, but without severity—almost as if automatically:

"You wouldn't need to talk between breakfast and lunch if you had some work to do—real work."

Instead of answering angrily, instead of turning away in silent wrath, Roden replied mildly: "Well, I'll see."

Caroline was surprised. She glanced at the assembled faces—Lady Peel's already twitching dreamily with preoccupation; Stella's half-attentive, her mockery dying into boredom; Sir Harold's stolid and calm; Roden's own, mutely unresponsive. She wondered what his words implied, and what her father made of them.

For Roden, in his new mood of equanimity, the silence was filled with a complacent, genteel, but clear and pleasant voice which said: "I don't see how one's to get on if one doesn't have some work to do. A girl must put by for a rainy day. You never know with the future. It's no use trusting to luck. A girl has to be sensible; if she doesn't look out for herself, nobody else will. One must do something, musn't one? There's no harm in trying." And these amiable platitudes were so applicable to his own case that they seemed oracular, even inspiring. No intellectual jargon here! . . .

V.

After spending Easter at Brighton with her family, Caroline felt in need—was it of soothing or stimulation? She found a holiday with them at once hectic and dull; it affected her like a mediocre game of auction bridge involving bitter recriminations. At all events, she very much wanted to see Hugh; she therefore telephoned to him immediately on her return and arranged to dine at his rooms in the Temple on the following evening.

Hugh Sexton was one of those restful people who never prepare surprises, verbal or otherwise; he had not that itch to provoke astonishment which makes some hosts, in other ways delightful, greet their guests with a cracker in the form of a startling piece of gossip, an intriguing ancedote, an unexpected rearrangement of the furniture or an innovation in the order of the courses at dinner. His whole conduct was of a piece with his address—quiet without shyness, gentle without suavity, characteristic without eccentricity. His fair, clean-

shaven face was keen without being aquiline; though long, and though fine in detail, its corners were squarely turned; the thin mouth, finely squared, crinkled at the corners with emotion or laughter, but never curled; the eyes, meditative and grey, opened widely to amusement only, were never cold. He had rather high shoulders, a very deep, gentle voice, and walked slowly since he had been gassed. He did, however, surprise Caroline, though certainly without intention, by his first remark after their greetings: "How is Francis these days?"

"His holidays begin very soon. Why do you ask?"

He wondered for a moment. "Because you none of you ever speak of him."

"Oh, he's quite mentionable; the perfectly conventional public-school boy, as like his fellows as possible. . . . Mamma, as a matter of fact, adores him, when she remembers him, and when he's there. He combines the qualities of baby-boy, slave, and decorative male appendage."

"I like him," said Hugh. "I prefer him to the rest of your family."

"I quite understand that. You know by now

that I don't hold a Peel brief! . . . Francis, d'you know, adores Hal; I suppose because he's all that a public-school-boy's father ought to be: rich, distinguished, quietly, but perfectly dressed, with a beard. . . . I say, Hugh, you've not asked me about Brighton."

"What shall I ask? How is Brighton?"

"Very well, thanks, with a strong wind. It was dreadful."

"What on earth made you go?"

"Oh, you know my moments of extraordinary adaptability? I hadn't invented anywhere else to go."

"Is that your definition of adaptability?"

"One of my definitions. We ate vast meals four times a day, with snacks in between; and the others played bridge."

"Did Cashel go?"

"Need you ask? What would Mamma and Stella have done without their little Evelyn? I was cast for the part of devoted daughter to the distinguished English papa; we made what the senile love to call a 'striking couple.' Don't you agree that Hal ought to have been a contemporary of Du Maurier's? I wish he'd grow whiskers. And he would look wonderful in an ulster, wouldn't he, Hugh? . . . I must

tell Evelyn that, it will amuse him."

"You do sometimes speak to Cashel, then? Never in my presence."

"I never speak at all at home. But Evelyn and I converse occasionally in silence. To go on about Hal: in spite of his solidity, he has no more—inside reality, internal 'me'—what shall I call it?"

"Subjective existence."

"Yes—than a type of English aristocracy according to Madame Tussaud. He doesn't wonder or worry; he hardly ever works. He eats and smokes and plays bridge and goes to the club and directs companies; and they pay twelve per cent. I've never seen him really minding or getting even mildly excited about anything. It would be better to be like mother! Her activity of course is all gas in a teacup; but at least she gets a few thrills out of buzzing round. She and Stella are really quite unreal; their life is one long game of dolls' tea party —only the dolls must have trousers."

Hugh smiled, and Caroline's face reflected his smile; but there was in hers more scorn than amusement. At once, however, a different expression came into her face, and she began

to look ashamed of herself, saying in a lower voice: "Am I odious?"

"You're certainly unsparing. I wonder if you're right?"

"Do you think I underrate or misunderstand them?"

Hugh waited as if considering the point; but finally evaded it. "You *are* infernally superior about them, Cabs."

"I know I am. I often hate myself just as much as I despise them."

"Why do you so utterly despise them?" he asked, not admonishingly but without interest. "Of course I know why: because of what they are, as you've just described. But *is* that despicable? I mean, what's your standard?"

It was her turn to wonder. "I don't think I know quite what you mean. One thing I know: that I think it's despicable not to feel. I can't help thinking I'm somehow a more real person because I've——" she broke off, embarrassed.

"Been unhappy? I know the feeling: the aristocracy of grief."

Without resentment, indeed with keener interest, she looked at him and nodded.

"But aren't you," the young man went on,

"almost certainly mistaken about their lack of feeling? After all, your parents have presumably loved even if they haven't lost? And Roden——"

"I don't include Roden. *He* feels. It's the others—those four, Hal and mother and Stella and Francis. Hal sits like a 'blooming idol' and chews the cud; mother and Stella chatter and ogle, and Francis takes a manly interest in cricket and socks."

"Whereas you are a serious person."

"Yes. If you deny it, it's merely to be, as Mamma would say, perverse."

"Ah, but I don't deny it. Nor will you, I imagine, deny that you're a smug, self-satisfied young member of the *Intelligentsia.*" He looked at her with gentle mockery as he spoke, and the mockery brought a cry from her:

"Oh Hugh, I'm not really like that, surely you know. I'm dissatisfied with myself inside. It's not only conceit. I know that I'm incapable of anything but pulling to bits. I'm just as much of a monkey or parrot as Stella and Mamma. I can't make anything out of life. I don't see how anyone can if they have feelings. Life has it both ways; if you're sensitive, it hurts you, and if you're insensitive, you're

worthless, and you don't enjoy the things most worth enjoying. Roden of course despises me —he's 'master of his fate' and all that. And that makes me wonder—even about him: can he feel much? Why doesn't he pay more for what he gets? How does he deal with misery and poverty and cruelty and death? Perhaps he carries his creativeness into himself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, perhaps he creates his emotions and destroys them at will. But then they wouldn't be real. I don't know! . . . He's queer. . . . Mother complains of Roden because he's self-centred and sulky and unsociable; but it's really me she ought to nag at. Roden's sulkiness hides all kinds of splendid things—plans and ideas and imagination and hope and courage and the conviction that, somehow, all is for the best. Whereas my ladylike reserve hides nothing but—what is it? Not despair, not even exactly disillusion—just hopelessness."

Hugh, half-way through Caroline's tirade, had been inclined to smile at a tendency to dramatise which he sometimes suspected in her; but so reasonable and calm were her manner and voice that the inclination was only

momentary, and gave way to grave attention. He watched her throughout, sitting alert, coloured but not vivid, not moving her hands nor tossing her head, her tones as controlled as her poise. He found her far more convincing about herself than about her family. She did not often talk at such length except about her family; her seriousness was always tinged with scorn; he often thought her, then, unfair. Her emotion now was too deep for scorn. She arraigned life and herself in one indictment, without irony or complacency or anger. He waited while the room absorbed her words into its silence. Finally, he asked her, "Would you, then, prefer not to live?"

She considered this question with her eyes on her plate, honestly trying to focus the nebulous problem evoked. "I would prefer," she then brought out, "never to have been born. I'd never kill myself: it's too difficult, I'm too cowardly." She raised her eyes to his face. "Tell me, Hugh, doesn't everybody think something deeply about life?—even Stella and mother and Hal? Yet, if they did, ever, for a moment even, wouldn't one know it by something in their looks?"

"Ask Roden—ask Francis," Hugh replied,

"they could tell you more about the others than you know or I can guess."

"But you yourself—what do you think? Can't you tell me? With them it would be a feeling only, I suppose; with you, it would be partly a thought, like mine."

There was a long pause. The young man lowered the apple he was peeling and looked past his companion at the dim wall beyond. The lamp on the table, masked with paper, was the only light, and the shadowed remainder of the room, dark with masses of books, and faintly jewelled in one corner with the aqueous, indecisive gleam of a mirror, seemed to wait to absorb his answer as it had absorbed her words. At last his eyes came back to the small lit circle of the table, and his intent companion; he rested them on her clear, grave, expressive face, and said slowly: "The same as you; yes, the same." Then something impeded his voice, and he went on with difficulty: "I wanted—I hoped to get done in at the front."

Perceiving his loss of composure, Caroline looked away from him, and he went on:

"I used to feel then, constantly, and I often have since, as though I were beating against bars I couldn't see. . . . (That's what I think

deeply as you say. But it's scarcely a thought.) . . . Thousands of men got through the bars in the war; they got killed. But I didn't. . . . Of course, it's all due to bad health—I used not to be like this at Cambridge. It dates from the time I had pneumonia in camp."

Caroline exclaimed with quiet anger: "They never should have sent you out! That's part of the cage, that's part of the trap, that's one way life has of scoring off us."

"But I enjoy myself all the same. The great thing is, Cabs," he pursued with a very slight change of tone from reminiscence to exhortation, "not to fly too wide, not to ask too much, not to be agitated into fluttering; then the cage seems big enough. . . . Lord! what a dismal pair of ravens we are!"

"Yes. But would we rather be canaries who don't know they're in a cage? Or if they do know it, they are quite contented. In fact, they like it."

"Ah, but do they?" Hugh wondered.

They rose from the table; the young man moved the lamp to the mantel-piece, and lit two candles upon a shelf near the window. Here, with the curtains drawn back, they sat looking out into the quiet Temple court, filled with the

dove-grey evening, and brooded over by gently stirring planes. The servant came in with coffee, and to clear. After that, there was deep silence until Caroline shivered.

"Shall I close the window?" Hugh asked, "or light the fire?"

"No. Give me my fur, that's all. No, don't shut it, I like it."

"There's nothing wrong, is there?" he wondered aloud, after he had put the fur stole round her shoulders.

She didn't answer at once, and when she did it was indirectly: "You didn't think me odd, did you, after I'd told you about my feeling for Ann?"

"Odd? Of course not."

"But it must have seemed odd to you sometimes—if you've ever thought about it—that I haven't had a single love-affair. It's three years since Gerald's death."

"I have wondered; but you know you told me—it must have been last autumn—how you still felt about it, about him. Why, is it wearing off?—as it's bound to."

"No; oh no. Of course it will . . . But in another way I'm changed; or rather it is that I've realised something. It's rather dreadful:

I've begun lately to think that I've grown out of Gerald—not only out of his memory. I mean that, if he were alive, I should by now have grown out of him. Not out of love; I'm so much still in love with him that if he were here and we weren't already married I'd be his mistress."

Hugh fastened on the essential: "But you wouldn't marry him?"

She nodded slowly; her hazel eyes fixed on him in the candle-light, troubled but still clear.

"Well, and if so?" said her companion, his keen fair face dropped a little between hunched shoulders, his elbows resting on the arms of his chair.

Caroline, her body in one series of sloping lines, her head raised, her palms pressed on the seat of her chair, hesitated how to frame her answer. There was no impatience in Hugh's voice or look; he gave her unlimited time. Only the fear of saying nothing because silence was easiest forced her to clothe her thought, however inadequately: "But loyalty?"

"My dear, my dear!" he exclaimed in his deep voice, "don't torment yourself on such a chimerical account. Gerald's dead; if he'd lived you'd have developed differently—per-

haps less, certainly in a different way; and he'd have developed too. You'd have been another Cabs, and he wouldn't have been the same Gerald, after three years. Don't conjure disloyalties from the grave of impossibility. Gerald would have trusted you; and you must trust the Gerald that would have been."

She said nothing, nor moved her eyes from his face. Rising, he went to the hearth, and returning with his pipe, and leaning back on the window-frame while he filled it, and went on: "If you still feel this physical tie to Gerald, which makes other men unattractive to you, then *that's* to be taken into account; it's a fact, and as far as it goes, it constitutes a relation to him. But you, as you are in 1920, can't be guilty of disloyalty to a man who died in 1917, if the disloyalty consists in an imaginary situation—a situation pre-supposing that he is still alive. The only disloyalty possible would be for you to say: 'I never loved Gerald, he never loved me, it wasn't real.' . . . It seems best to me neither to deny the past nor to be sentimental about it; but of the two, I prefer sentimentality. However, that's beside the point."

Caroline was glad that he had not ceased speaking on the climax. His last two sen-

tences let her down a gradual slope to a more normal level of discussion.

"You agree, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, I do really; but you know how bogeys rise up and put one into states of mind."

"I do, indeed. . . . You know, Cabs, I can't help wanting you to fall in love again, to get over this physical obsession with Gerald and exercise your normal inclinations."

"I want to, too. And so I shall some day, soon perhaps . . . If only I could forget how he looked! Oh, Hugh, it's still agonising to remember the feel of his hands, and his smell. Oh, Hugh, it's so long ago, why can't I forget?"

"My poor Cabs." He stood over her, while she looked piteously, darkly up at him, with faith abiding somewhere dimly in her that this, her greatest friend, could free her from the old cherished, sacred, formidable fetters. He only, however, repeated "My poor Cabs," and then added: "You will forget—no, you won't forget. Something else will break in on you, and sweep your memories away."

"Don't say that; you frighten me. Almost anything that can happen can hurt one so. Perhaps I'm better as I am, for Gerald can't

die again, or desert me, or turn out to be a—canary. Yes, that's what I'm afraid of—that he would have been like my family, and perhaps have made me like that, too. I won't be contented with a swinging perch and gilt bars; I'd rather ten times over croak myself into a bitter and virgin old age!" Her tone had passed from apprehension, through the intensity of expressing something that had before eluded her, into her usual tones of mockery. As she finished, she put out her hand to him for a cigarette, which he gave her. They sat silent for a long time. At last Hugh said: "To return to Francis, what's going to become of him?"

"The youngest canary is going, in due course, to Cambridge—unless he muffs Littlego."

"And Roden?"

"Roden is going to write. He has written two plays. Fortunately, Hal can afford such little luxuries as a literary son."

"Yes, it is nice for both of them," the young man remarked, smiling. "Now let's play chess."

VI.

THE next morning Caroline, going into the drawing-room, found Roden crouching before the unlighted fire, writing slowly and meticulously.

"I say," she said as he looked up, "can I talk?"

He laid down his pen, and she went on: "Do you ever wonder about the family?"

"I don't wonder, I know," her brother answered. But it was not to discuss the family that he had interrupted his writing. "Look here, Cabs, you must come out to lunch with me, for two reasons. I've had a story accepted by *Land and Water*, so I've money to spend; and I want you to meet a girl called Grace Draper."

"Right . . . I am glad. Do they pay well? . . . But what a name! Supposing you were called Roden Bones. Parents are idiots!"

"We have to lunch at half-past twelve, because she gets out from work then."

Stella came in, dressed from neck to foot in

mole-colour, her fair hair pulled low over her ears under a hat of brilliant barbaric colours.

"Hello, Stell," her sister cried, "you're got up to the nines. I like your hat."

"Oh, Cabs, it's lovely to have a new hat. Nothing in the world matters; I don't care what happens until my hat palls." She took some dancing steps. "Mother and I are going to the Berkeley to meet Evelyn's American friends."

"Is your hat aniline?"

"Woad, woad of course!" the younger girl exclaimed fantastically. "There's twelve striking—I must fly. I have to see that mother's nose is powdered properly." She vanished, and Caroline said to Roden:

"It's time we went, too."

As they walked to the bus she cross-questioned him about Miss Draper.

"She's a typist at Gay's."

"Gay's Pantechnicon Corner? You *do* love your love with an A. What is her age and her taste? Does she play games and live in Maida Vale?"

Roden's temper was good that day, and he replied with equanimity: "She's got grit, she's

ambitious, she'll get on. She's not all talk and cleverness.—"

"Like some young women we know," his sister broke in. "Well, you don't have to go to the suburbs to find girls with ambition and grit. Are you prepared to be a step-ladder?"

"Oh, rot—she doesn't require me, I can tell you. It's I who require her."

"Roden, tell me, seriously; do you feel misunderstood ? "

He looked at her, suspicious of mockery, for which her words allowed; but her eyes were merely enquiring, her mouth quite grave. "Don't ask!" he almost begged her. "Well, if you must know, No. . . But you want to know too much. That's what's wrong with people like you and Sexton, you can't let anything be. Now, with this girl you're going to see, she goes ahead with her job, and let's me go ahead with mine, and we have fine talks when we're together."

"But you must talk about something?"

"About heaps of things, of course. But we don't chop straws, and question and doubt about everything. You don't seem able to feel sympathy only."

"It's not worth any less because one is critical. However, you do talk——"

"Yes, but not in the way you mean. Can't you be friends with some one and know them well without putting everything into terms?"

"Yes, when I have once got to know them well; but the process entails words. Except in love: then sometimes one does seem to know by intuition."

"I always know that way."

"Yes, I believe you do," Caroline agreed. There was no grudging admission in her tone, but a little sadness; because Roden, who found her friendship so little use, was inspired by this unknown and perhaps not negligible and yet surely ill-educated girl. Was he then so simple to understand and to deal with—this moody, rather historic, passionate, imaginative young man with a hunger for life?

When they reached the Soho restaurant she saw outside it a small neat figure, vaguely reminiscent of some one she knew. Before she had decided of whom, they were close on the stranger, who was holding out her hand primly, and obviously hesitating between her "gentleman friend" and her "gentleman friend's sister", (*ladies first*).

"This is my sister," said Roden.

"I'm very glad to meet you," said Caroline. As they entered she asked her brother: "Did you order a table?"

"No, it's not full. I ordered lunch because Grace has to be back by half-past one."

"Yes, isn't it a shame?" Miss Draper exclaimed. "I can't get an extra ten minutes even by asking—not ever so seldom."

"You're valuable," smiled the other girl; and was immediately aware that Grace had perceived the artificiality of this reply, and that the speaker was thereby put at a disadvantage. Controlling a tendency to blush for herself, Caroline sat silent, covertly scrutinising her new acquaintance. The girl was certainly rather pretty, with a remarkably clear complexion, rose-leaf cheeks, sharp bright eyes and sharply cut features.

"You do like *hors d'oeuvres,* don't you?" Roden asked, unconscious of the subtleties which beset his sister. "And steak? I remembered you liked chip potatoes, and so does Cabs."

"I should think I did!" Miss Draper exclaimed with genteel enthusiasm. "This is a great treat for me, you know, Miss Peel."

"You like Soho?" Caroline murmured tentatively, wondering if the other's mincing speech was habitial, or accentuated by shyness.

"I think it's too quaint. I love to see different parts of London. Different districts are so—well, so different, aren't they? The top of a bus is as good as a carriage to me."

"We must go to the Tower one Saturday," said Roden, "you've never been there, Grace, have you? Cabs, do you remember the dear little houses just by the Tower?"

"Yes, darling old cottages."

"I do love a piece of old architecture. It's our misfortune, Miss Peel, to live in a new villa; I often say to mother, How I wish we could have a ducky little old-world cottage instead."

"Those dear little cottages are the very devil, if you only knew," said Caroline, throwing caution completely away, for it was obvious that if she and this girl were to come to any point of sympathy it could only be through naturalness; and of this, the onus must rest on her, if only because she was the elder. She saw that her language had surprised without shocking Miss Draper, and she went on: "Personally, I'd rather live in a

hideous pink object with a bow window and hot and cold water than in an insanitary cottage, however old-world. To begin with, I can't bear what's called 'outside sanitation.' " She ceased abruptly, realising that in speaking as she would have spoken to her own friends she had perhaps offended the other girl; but although a rather scared gleam of amusement shone for a moment in Miss Draper's eyes, she was not too shocked to reply with arch composure:

" Perhaps you have lived in a cottage, Miss Peel. Now I never have. One always wants to do what one hasn't done, doesn't one ? "

Caroline, who found the number of units in the foregoing sentence rather paralysing, said nothing. The movements of Grace's head and hands again reminded her of some one, and after pondering for a few moments, she asked Roden : " Who *is* Miss Draper like ? "

"Mother and Stella."

"That's it. You're right. Only mother's like a monkey . . . Excuse me ; it's awfully rude to talk like this—but you aren't. Stella's like some little graceful indeterminate animal, one doesn't quite know what. You're like

something quite definite, but I don't know what. Yes I do—it's a squirrel!"

"That's what your brother said the first time I saw him, Miss Peel; and I must say, I take it as a compliment. Mr. Peel took me to Regent's Park on Good Friday and we saw lots of the dear little grey ones, and oh, they are quaint!"

"Are you fond of animals?"

"I'm very fond of dogs. Yes, I like a dear little dog. But not cats—oh no, cats are creepy things. Don't you think so, Miss Peel? My mother can't bear one in the room. Of course, that's silly. Still, I do think they're creepy."

"I like all animals moderately, except humans, and them I either love or hate. Except my family, and I like them moderately."

"You only despise us," said Roden.

Caroline realised then that she had been sententious—she put it down to the strain produced by Miss Draper's gentility. Was it impossible to be quite at ease in her presence? "I'm talking rot," she added. "I'm sorry."

"Oh no, Miss Peel!" Grace politely protested. "I was most interested in what you said. I always like to hear what people think. And sometimes their ideas are too quaint."

" It's so hard to get people to tell one the truth."

"They do to me," said Roden.

"The Lord knows," his sister went on, " it's hard enough to be truthful. I find myself preparing startling views so as to surprise stodgy people. It's awfully hard to accentuate aspects of oneself according to what the other person is like."

Miss Draper looked bewildered, and after a moment said with a pretty puzzled air : "Mr. Peel, your sister is too clever for me."

"It's only her jargon," he answered gruffly.

Caroline wondered if he noticed the taking manner. She wished for their sakes as well as her own that she were away. " I'm sorry," she repeated, genuinely regretful for her obscurity, "I only meant I found it hard to be honest and accurate. It's so easy to invent opinions."

" Oh . . . yes, I've never had time to—to cultivate my mind," said the other girl

"I haven't had the energy. I do nothing. I fritter my time away. It takes Satan all his spare time to keep me occupied."

Roden offered cigarettes. Grace shook her head saying archly : "Your brother does his

best to tempt me, Miss Peel, but I won't give in. I think it's waste of good money, and I'm not ashamed to say so."

"I should think not," was all that Caroline found to murmur. The Peels as a family took their means too much for granted either to be snobbish about them or concerned with the subject in general; it had no resonance for them, no overtones, for they were, except Caroline, indifferent to social problems. To invest in war-loan was their nearest approach (except in the case of Roden, the soldier) to acting or thinking as citizens. Caroline's interest in people and problems had inevitably brought her up against the fundamental evil of poverty; but her long training of ease and ignorance still made a barrier between her and an acute realisation of poverty, so that for her it was less an actual condition of persons she knew than a general condition of a vague, vast mass of the population. The defiance in Grace Draper's tone meant nothing to her; she classed it with archness, primness, and a too-frequent repetition of proper names; it did not convey to her the girl's sharp consciousness of an essential difference in their circumstances, and her determination not to be too

much impressed by the Peel's wealth, security, leisure, and refinement. It had never occurred to Caroline that Grace saw the Peels in such terms. Caroline had not even vaguely computed the yearly income of people who live in little red villas on the weekly earnings of a stenographer at Gay's; she had never set out to imagine what it would be like to lunch every day at an A.B.C. for a shilling or to go without cigarettes so as to buy a new pair of shoes.

The defiance in Grace's voice, however, caused her to reflect that the lunch party was not being a success. It was, from her point of view, a failure, because she had missed the opportunity of setting up a *rapport* with Roden's friend, and thereby of pleasing him, of gaining his confidence. At worst Grace would depart antagonistic, at best puzzled by, and indifferent to her "gentleman friend's" sister.

When, however, Roden sought her out on his return from conducting Miss Draper to Gay's, his cheerfulness was obvious. "Well, did you like her?" he asked.

"She's pretty. She's not stupid, either. But, Roden—I can't be natural with people like that."

"What do you mean? You were just as you

always are. I thought you were being very nice, and so did Grace."

"Did she?" Caroline was astonished.

"How queer you are, Cabs. She thought you were very kind and friendly."

"I felt friendly enough."

"Well, that's all that matters."

"Yes, if she felt all right. . . . How odd. . . . Tell me, Roden, do you like her very much?"

"Awfully. Better than any of your intellectuals. Better than any girl I know. Joe Tucker is the only person I like better."

"What's become of your play?"

"The agent is touting it round." He paused, and then added abruptly: "I think I'm going into a motor firm as artist."

"Roden! How thrilling. Is it a sign of grace?" It was out before she knew what she was saying, and she could have bitten her tongue off to unsay the jibe.

Without replying, her brother shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm odious. Forgive me. I think I'm bewitched—like the girl who spat toads when she talked. I don't mean to be horrible; I do care for you, Roden."

"It's all right."

"Are you going to draw lovely pictures for coloured advertisements, like the ones in *Vogue?*"

"I suppose so. I'm going to see the man about it to-morrow."

"Who is he?"

"Blake; a chap in the regiment." He refused, characteristically, to say more.

"Francis arrives to-morrow," Caroline presently remarked. Then, as the young man moved to the door, she remembered Hugh's advice; to ask her brothers their opinion of their family. "Don't go," she said.

"I must. I've got to finish my play before I take on this new job. You know," he went on, pausing with his hand on the latch, "Grace has more cards than she puts on the table."

Caroline nodded, and he pursued:

"She and I understand each other without talking. Her point of view and mine are the same. She's got life in her, she's serious, and yet not heavy."

"Buoyant," his sister suggested, but he wouldn't accept a word from her.

"Not a dead weight, like so many people are since the war." He went out abruptly.

"Like me," said Caroline to herself as the door closed; but speaking as though for him rather than for herself. She had no sensation of heaviness; her health was good, and the dreadfulness of life did not obsess her to the exclusion of all pleasure. She enjoyed every ironical contingency, every interesting facet, every lovely aspect of existence that she could perceive. Her sensation was that of being involved in an insoluble and probably meaningless conundrum—a riddle of marvellous complexity, savour, beauty, but whose beauty was darkened with a dreadful shadow inherent in life's structure, and whose savour was for her spoiled and flattened so that it's taste was often stale upon her tongue.

VII.

When Caroline saw Francis the next day she wondered how Hugh could like him at all; his jaunty whistling composure repelled her even while his upright, fresh-coloured slimness attracted her. Her speculative eye perceived in him a younger Caroline, graceful and complacent. But there was something in this youth a little underbred. She had noticed the same thing in Roden, under quite a different form. Francis, like his sisters, had the social polish, the tact, the ease, the charm which Roden remarkably lacked; if anything, he had them to excess. Was it in this that his inferiority consisted? And if he were so like her superficially, might the resemblance not go deeper? Was she, then, second-rate in that particular, indefinable way? Arrived at this point, Caroline pressed no further. There are some faults against the conviction of which the nature revolts. A man can admit to being jealous, vindictive, morbid, prejudiced; even to being mean and without a sense of humour;

but can he, if he understood the term, plead guilty to insensitiveness—to a coarseness in the fabric of his soul?

That Francis was sensitive in the more ordinary sense—that he had a vulnerable vanity—none looking at him would doubt. The cock of his head was complacent; but his eyes were watchful for criticism. He had Caroline's clear hazel eyes, short upper lip, brown hair, long legs, but there was an extreme shallowness in the modelling of his face which made the whole resemblance superficial, unless the shallowness were due merely to youth. Caroline, after her scrutiny of him, had the curiosity to seek out a photograph of herself in her teens. The camera had by chance caught her in a characteristic pose—head tilted a little downwards, the gaze a little sideways and upwards, very solemn. She compared it with her face in the mirror; yes, even at seventeen, there were those shadows, those lines, that lurking ambiguity. The chief difference was the transformation of that dominant seriousness into an expression of faintly ironic gravity. Even at seventeen, she thought without vanity, her expression must have demanded a second look; but in Francis's face there was nothing equi-

vocal, nothing held back; it told as much and as little as the sleekness of his hair and the crease of his trousers.

Whether or not because he was aware of Caroline's sentiments concerning him, Francis evidently preferred, in the absence of Sir Harold, to be with Stella. This was natural; there were only four years between them, whereas to meet his elder sister he had to bridge a decade. Like most families of four, this had always split into couples. Roden and Caroline, perhaps because they were so different, had grudgingly admired each other from earliest childhood, and they still did. The alliance of Stella and Francis, though superficially more comprehensible, was in reality no more founded on mutual sympathy than was the elder pair's, and it endured a shorter time.

For three years, now, ever since she left the schoolroom, Stella had paid little attention to her schoolboy brother, except to make use of him. Caroline, wondering at the readiness with which Francis allowed himself to be made use of, had a short time since come to the conclusion that it was due to the credit which his complaisance obtained him with their father. Sir Harold liked, and showed that he liked, to

see Stella's caprices served; he wished his sons to betray consideration and fondness for their sisters; one of the things that, Caroline was sure, alienated Roden from his affections, was the young man's self-centredness and unsociability. If, as often occurred, Stella and Sir Harold planned a diversion in holiday-time, Francis was almost always included.

Evelyn Cashel was rarely a party to these festivities; Stella reserved him for the more frequent occasions when her father was otherwise occupied. In Stella's absence, Evelyn was usually to be found in the company of his exacting Aunt Leila; but when the girl wanted him he was almost always at hand. Caroline, a disdainful spectator of these combinations, marvelled at her cousin's skill in handling the rather delicate situation of rivalry which existed between the mother and the younger daughter. In all these manœuvres Francis was a useful pawn.

But during the Christmas vacation, Caroline had thought to detect in the schoolboy a crescent unwillingness to be used by Evelyn. To please Stella, and thereby to please his father, Francis would do much; but he grew restive when this involved close or prolonged

intimacy with Evelyn. Caroline had seen him sheer off—had even known him take refuge with herself; but the topic of his relations with his family was never touched on between them.

Those holidays, Francis was voluble and jubilant at the prospect of going to Cambridge in the autumn. The coming term was his last at school. Whenever possible he led the conversation round to the absorbing subjects of his enfranchisement and the university, trying in vain to elicit from Roden reminiscences of the magic city by leading questions, which Evelyn, an Oxford man, answered with elaborate sarcasm.

"You'll discover, my dear Francis, at Cambridge, that it is not only bad manners—for that would positively recommend it there—but bad taste, and almost an indecency, to speak unless you have something *worth saying* to say. And if you want, without being unduly conspicuous, to keep your head (not to speak of your tongue) smooth, you'll have to consort solely with Kingsmen. King's is Cambridge's attempt—a superb, admirable and very-nearly-successful attempt—at civilisation. The other colleges are—woad, as Stella would say."

At the moment of this speech the Peels were

waiting to go down to Sunday supper; waiting for Sir Harold, Roden and Hugh Sexton. It was customary for friends of the children to be invited to this meal; contemporaries of the parents were tacitly excluded. Evelyn Cashel came regularly; indeed, so often in the week was he to be found eating at his aunt's table that one might have imagined him to be living in the house. As a matter of fact, he had rooms near by in Kensington, and his office hours were only from ten to five, with an undefined lunch-interval.

In spite of the absentees, Lady Peel rose when the gong sounded; but Caroline said: "Let's wait for Hugh, Mamma."

"Oh no, let's go down," cried Stella. "Evelyn and I are famishing."

In compliance with this imperious demand Lady Peel drifted to the door, and Caroline followed without rancour. For some reason to-night her thoughts were out in the country, where the hay-deep fields were shadowy between the hedges of white may. Soon the moonlight would transform the countryside into a marvel. She wandered down imaginary or half-remembered lanes, and heard the nightingales. Imagination had indeed more to do

with such waking dreams than memory, for her contact with the country had been, all her life, but fragmentary and incomplete. Her childhood's holidays had been spent with governesses by the sea—not the blue and green sea where the corn and the woods and the flowers grow down to the cliff's edge, and rich low hills and heathery moors rise close behind, but the grey eastern sea of hard shingle beaches, barren salt marshes, dreary fields, breakwaters and monotonous horizons. True, since maturity she had been released from this recurrent summer-bondage. For ten years now Lady Peel had kept her children with her for the holidays. As has been said, Lady Peel detested the seaside. A country house was hired for three summer months, usually in the north, for Sir Harold came from Yorkshire and had a sentiment about that country. It was indeed a land of great beauty; but it was of the south that Caroline dreamed; it was about the south and west country that she liked to wander in fancy. Staying with Ann Davies, with the Veseys, with one or two other London friends, she had yearly caught glimpses of its intimate and tender loveliness, had snatched a few of its moods and contours, sounds and odours;

and these fragments, woven on the web of her conception of the south country's nature—a conception strengthened by literature—had gradually come to form a refuge from the tediousness of daily life. It was curious that, in all this time, she had never taken the course so simply open to her—had never gone away alone, or with a friend, to a remote spot and stayed there, steeped in the atmosphere she loved to conjure with. This course, so obvious and natural to persons of a less conventional upbringing, of a less worldly and wealthy class, had never in truth occurred to her. Her independence of mind had so far been directed to purely emotional and spiritual problems; it did not spread out over the whole field of her life; she remained in many respects what she was born and reared to be—a cultivated, conventional, hidebound London woman of the upper middle-classes, as much removed from the "fast," pseudo-intellectual, wildly gay section of the aristocracy as from the "loose" artistic and literary sets of Chelsea, Hampstead and Bloomsbury. Caroline had always taken, physically and in exterior daily life, the line of least resistance; her unorthodoxy was contained

in the secret, spiritual sphere; it was unsuspected by her family.

They sat down to table, Caroline as usual at the right of Sir Harold's place, Lady Peel with a blank seat on either side of her, waiting for Hugh and Roden. She began to complain of the latter's perversity in being unpunctual.

"Isn't Hugh's unpunctuality perverse, too?" Caroline inquired mildly; but all the time there was moving in her head, and between her spoken words slipping on her tongue a poem about Shropshire:

"Far in a Western brookland
That bred me long ago,
The poplars stand and tremble
By pools I used to know.

* * * *

There, by the starlit fences,
The wanderer halts and hears
My soul that lingers sighing
About the glimmering weirs."

She did not hear her mother's reply, which was anyway interrupted by the brisk opening of the door, and the appearance of a knot of persons, which sorted itself out into Sir Harold, Roden, Hugh Sexton, and Grace Draper.

Caroline rose quickly and went towards the

stranger. "I'm so glad you've come. Mother this is Miss Draper, a friend of mine and Roden's. . . . Has Roden introduced my father to you? He never remembers about introductions! Father, let's put Miss Draper between us."

While she piloted the girl to her place, Caroline was aware that the momentary confusion of the room had subsided, and turning, she saw Hugh making a friendly signal to her diagonally across the long table, and she returned the unsmiling look which is for intimate friends only. She had been drawn forcibly from her rural wanderings back into urban actuality; she had the sensation, in that exchange of glances with Hugh, that she closed a door on a secret way of escape, and that he perceived and knew the purport of the gesture.

She glanced at Roden, who appeared oblivious of everyone and everything, and especially of his responsibility for introducing a strange young woman into the bosom of his family. Caroline felt momentarily angry; Roden had such a blind, wholesale way of ignoring what it did not suit him to recognise; he had the self-protective instinct that is common to the creative artist and the egotist. Her

anger passed quickly, however, for she knew that he was, essentially, no shirker, he did not, over things that mattered, imitate the ostrich.

By this time Miss Draper had punctiliously shaken hands all round the table, and returned to the seat by Caroline, who inquired whether they had all met on the doorstep.

"Yes, wasn't it funny, Miss Peel? I hope I haven't put you out by coming unexpected like this?"

"Of course not, we like it."

"We were very late, I'm afraid."

"Somebody always is; it doesn't matter at all."

"We went to Kew," said her brother abruptly.

"Oh, Miss Peel, it was lovely! The bluebells are a perfect picture. And the cherry-blossom —you never saw anything like it!"

Caroline, pleased with this genuine enthusiasm, answered: "It's a lovely place. And yet I never go there—I'm an idiot. Did you see any poplars?" she added, the tune of the poem still running in her head.

"N—o; I don't think so. . . . You should go there, Miss Peel, indeed you should."

"Yes. Why is one so lazy?"

"One is rather a stay-at-home, isn't one?" Miss Draper agreed, with one of her sudden accesses of primness.

"Caroline is a stay-at-home," said Sir Harold, bending towards the guest with a dignity which justified his supposed likeness to a Du Maurier aristocrat.

"Is she? Oh, but I'm sure Miss Peel's been to ever so many places," Grace exclaimed, a little flustered by his gallant, serious air, sending a bright glance sidelong at the girl.

"Have you ever been to Cambridge, Miss Draper?" Evelyn inquired with intention. There was a ripple of laughter round the table, while Grace, visibly discomforted, answered that she had not.

"We weren't laughing at you, though we *are* so rude," said Caroline. "My brother—not Roden—is going to College this autumn; and we always rot him about Cambridge."

"Poor France!" sighed Lady Peel. "How they tease you."

"Don't pity me, Mother; pity Evelyn. I'm going to disinter (good word, what?) a secret from his murky past, and dangle it above his head."

"You'd better look out, Cashel," said Hugh; "come to me in case of blackmail."

"You shall be my counsel," the exquisite young man returned imperturbably, "if it comes to litigation."

" 'Tears of gratitude flowed down the face of the briefless barrister,' " Hugh exclaimed with mock emotion.

"Aren't they silly?" cried Stella, addressing Miss Draper for the first time.

"Young men always must have jokes, musn't they?" the guest replied genteelly. This universal truth silenced all but Sir Harold who, leaning his great, bearded head once more her way with respectful gaiety, remarked:

"And so must young ladies."

"But men and girls are so different, aren't they?" Grace pursued, encouraged.

There was a prolonged pause. Miss Draper's contemporaries were too kind to utter the flippant rejoinders which leapt to their lips; the speaker's face was so serious, though lit with conversational attention.

Her host, however, was quite equal to the occasion.

"I see," he said, with smiling, solid gravity, "that you are a very observant young lady."

"But she didn't notice the poplars," Caroline remarked to herself, crossly. "How could one go among trees and look for those green towers, so stable and yet so living, so mutable, their foliage so rich, and yet so delicate in shape and music? *'The poplars stand and tremble—'* they are scarce in Derbyshire. I must go to Shropshire one day."

"Well, it's not surprising," Stella was saying, rather peevishly, "considering that I've been up late every night this week, three of them dancing."

"Oh, Stella, darling, you must have learnt some new steps, surely!" her mother cried excitedly, knocking her bread off the table with an awkward movement of her arm. "You must show me afterwards. They say there's a new hen-scratch, and a new heel-waggle, and a new tango-walk."

"Leila, you've gone back into the twenties," said Sir Harold.

"Why shouldn't I dance? I'm light, aren't I, Evelyn?"

"Aunt Leila, you are light."

"You say it as though it were an improper joke, you absurd boy. Francis, I can dance as well as the flappers, can't I?"

"Well, Mother . . . yes."

"But you prefer dancing with flappers?" Evelyn suggested. "Oh, Francis, you must put these childish things away now——"

"Stop giving Francis bad advice, and pass on the claret," said Stella.

"Roden, why don't you dance?" Lady Peel lamented. "It's so unnecessary, so perverse, to be young and not to like dancing. Stella, couldn't you teach him?"

"I?" said Stella sulkily. "Me teach Roden to dance? My dear mother, I can't teach Roden anything—I don't want to. I've quite enough to do. If you could see my engagement-book! It's crammed." She cocked her head, monkey-like, though so pale and fair, and sipped her wine. On her face an elusive, mixed expression of invitation and uneasy vanity wavered. Her glance rested finally on her elder brother; Caroline saw the expression change and crystallise, there was no vanity in it now; the invitation, the restlessness, seemed almost a hunger, almost a demand. It blotted out the dreams, the rhythms from Caroline's mind; she watched her sister all the evening.

As the girls and Francis trooped up to bed, the latter had a mild tussle with Stella over

which there was some spontaneous laughter. But when the boy had disappeared into his room, the girl, lingering on her threshold, quoted with a return of bad temper:

"'Young men must have their jokes.'"

Caroline, little knowing how like her own voice of scorn was Stella's, stood in silence, puzzled, waiting, but betraying nothing by her expression. Stella went quickly on:

"If Miss Draper's a pal of yours, Cabs, you'd better tell her Hal's name before she comes again. What a lot of times she might have said, 'Oh, Sir Harold,' 'Yes, Sir Harold,' 'One does, doesn't one, Sir Harold'."

"Don't be snobbish, Stell."

"I'm only saying what everybody was thinking. Where did he pick her up?"

Caroline turned towards her room. "You'd better ask him," she answered.

"Is she a tobacconist's young lady? . . . Well, Roden may be a bear with a sore head, but he needn't have picked up *that!*"

As Caroline opened her door, expecting then to close the episode, Stella came forward and, to her surprise, followed her in.

"You're very serious about it," the elder girl remarked, in her clear, neutral voice. "You

haven't fretted much about Roden up till now."

"One doesn't fret till things begin to hum. It must be fairly serious if he brings her to supper. Such prunes and prisms! And Roden is such woad."

There was a pause while Caroline took off her dress. Her tones muffled as she hung it in the cupboard, she asked: "Do you mind so much what friends Roden has?"

"Of course I mind. I'm not quite without feelings."

Caroline hesitated; but then; "Why be timid?" she asked herself, and remarked aloud, evenly, coolly: "Well, I thought you scarcely tolerated him, you and mother."

"Mother?"

That, then had been a false step. Stella would shelter behind that. Yes, for she went on: "I don't know what mother thinks for two minutes running—nobody does." The girl rose from her chair and seemed to swallow. Caroline, facing the mirror, heard the inarticulate sound, and turned, to receive a passionate exclamation; "I can't—I can't tolerate him taking up with that common little creature!" and to see Stella's small, plastic face moulded by a totally uncontrolled emotion into a mask of primitive resentment.

PART TWO

VIII.

In the garden of a house perched on an exceedingly steep hillside in Derbyshire the Peels were holding a conclave. They were at tea; and while eating and talking, their eyes, passing lightly from each other's faces, rested on the wide view, drenched in sunlight; the view of a large, long valley, holding one visible and more hidden villages, and a river; and of further hills, bastioned by ramparts of limestone, and topped by moors on which the heather was just in bloom. Stella and Francis, in tacit competition, and seated at the extreme edge of the terraced garden, continually threw pebbles out into the still air; for pebbles, accurately directed from this shelf, fell on to the roofs of houses below.

Every one except Roden was present, including Evelyn Cashel, whom Sir Harold, after a night in town, had brought back with him for the week-end. Apparently exhausted by the journey, the young man lay in graceful languor, and with no detail of his person disordered,

in a deck chair, sipping from a delicately tilted cup, and eyeing the family with a little less than his usual attention. He was beginning to find the subdued jangling of the Peel discords a little tiring, almost a little vulgar. A serene presence, lately come into his life, was modifying his standards; and the lack of repose which he had previously tolerated amusedly, and not quite disinterestedly, and had affected to watch as a characteristically modern symptom, seemed now not only jarring in itself, but also old-fashioned when regarded as a spectacle; it recalled war-work and uniformed women and the hectic days of leave from France. Sir Harold, of course, and Caroline, were exempt from his disapproval; they had always been eminently serene. Caroline, indeed, was akin in type to his new friend; only there was something sharp in her flavour; he preferred the other's mellower, sunnier atmosphere. He had had enough sharpness, restlessness, oddness from the combined feminine section of the Peels to last him a lifetime. He watched his aunt's parasol dip dangerously towards Sir Harold's head as the holder poured out tea with her free hand.

"It really is too much," she repeated for the

third time, setting down the milk jug with a crash. "Roden's really too crude for words!"

"Young men frequently are crude, Leila," her husband pointed out with his usual air of judiciousness. It happened that three of his listeners scanned his face at this remark—Francis swiftly, before he hurled a pebble; Evelyn casually, as he lit a cigarette; Caroline steadily, as she formulated silently an impression received an hour ago when her father and her cousin arrived from the station. He looked, Sir Harold, different; he looked, more precisely, fatigued and worried. Was it a new look, or was it that she had noticed it for the first time? Was it the beginning of old age? Was it not a fact that she had thought of him as unalterable, immortal, immovable, not subject to worry or fatigue or even emotion—as a monument rather than a man? He was so Olympian, so dignified, so unshakable and reasonable and solid; he so much suggested durability, moderation, worth, safety and success, that it was not difficult—it was in fact quite easy—for one of the younger generation to look on him as a symbol, a type, an institution. And here was the institution getting pronouncedly weatherbeaten, wrinkled round the eyes and

grizzled on the temples and in the beard! Caroline experienced a sudden unprecedented interest in her father's inner life. What did *he* "think deeply" about existence, if he thought about it at all?

"In the early twenties—well and good," Lady Peel was saying. "Although some of them are never crude—look at Evelyn. You must be fagged out after that odious journey, you poor boy. I wanted Hal to have the car to meet you at Sheffield, but he seems to like that disgusting tunnel. . . . What was I saying? Oh, yes—crude at twenty; but need they be at twenty-seven? Of course not! Roden's behaving like a young man in a book."

"Ah, but what book?" Evenly inquired. "It would be delightful to behave like a Henry James young man."

"Not that kind, you may be sure. You remember that dreadful supper?—and that young woman called Caper or Taper? It's too absurd—Roden wants us to have her here for a week in September when he comes for his holiday." As she spoke Lady Peel flicked at a wasp with her handkerchief, shut her parasol, dropped it, and leant down to fumble with a footstool.

"The children always do have their friends here," Sir Harold remarked.

"Yes, what about dear Geoffrey?" cried Francis, making a face at Stella, who looked angrily back, at a loss for a retort. "And dear Ann Davies and Hugh Sexton and Babs Vesey?" he added, glancing at his father as though to ask, or perhaps to render, support.

"That's not the point, my dear child," his mother answered; "the point is this—and it's no use evading it, for it may be now or never; it usually is with people like Roden who have the artistic temperament"—she paused to regain her central thread, while Caroline murmured, "And are perverse and crude."

"The point is, Aunt Leila——" Evelyn suggested.

"That it's high time we drew the line at this Caper-Taper-Paper affair. She's not like the other children's friends, and it's no use shirking the fact; she's simply a little typewriter Roden picked up, heaven only knows why, in the park. He said so—he admitted it! Well, where is it to end, if we positively encourage it by asking her here? Isn't that giving our blessing?"

"Does he want a blessing?" said Caroline.

"I mean, doesn't he simply want ordinary recognition of ordinary facts?"

"Cabs thinks blessings old-fashioned, and so they are," Stella put in.

Having paused in vain for Sir Harold to speak (an unconscious tribute of respect), Evelyn began: "Isn't the essential point this: whether, by asking the Draper girl here you precipitate or prevent the fruition of Roden's honourable intentions? Always supposing," he added drawing in smoke and smiling subtly at his auditors as it crept from his lips, "that his intentions are as perverse and crude as to be honourable."

Stella laughed—not her usual care-free, high, almost hoot-like chuckle, but an abrupt, brief, unresonant laugh of two notes. It had a theatrical, an artificial sound, and yet it had come quickly, spontaneously on top of Evelyn's words.

Caroline looked at her sister; but not at once —an inexplicable modesty had prevented a quick turn of her head, as though she feared to learn too much from Stella's attitude or expression. The girl was now composed enough, arranging rose-petals in patterns on the gravel path. "Have I theatricality on the brain?"

Caroline wondered. As though to test an eye suspected of jaundice she turned hers deliberately away from the group and sat confronting the landscape; a view all distant, owing to the position of the house, and with no foreground; but all brilliant and with colours intensified by the lens of the strong air. Did this beauty convict her of distorted senses? Had constant, close companionship with artificiality, and too conscious a revolt against it, given her mind a twist, so that she perceived insincerity, sham, affection, where none was? And her revolt—was that also proved fictitious by the equanimity with which she sat here, listening to her mother's silly chatter, to Evelyn's elegant mock-pomposity, to Stella's meaningless laughter, when the discussion concerned the future of Roden, for whom she cared? The coldness, the superficiality of their tone did indeed revolt her; but how was she to combat it? What could she say that they would understand? . . . And yet, wasn't she too lacking in a sense of proportion? Weren't they all in hue and cry after a snail? Was she not implicated in her family's triviality because she had not protested even inwardly against their regarding Roden's proposal as

an enormity? Of course it was no enormity, his straightforward request; it was not a mountain; but was it a molehill? Could a symptom of true love be a molehill?

The trouble was she thought after a moment, that her family had only one method of dealing with molehills and mountains; only one pitch, only one focus, which belittled the serious and swelled the unimportant with equal inevitability. They lived, morally, all on one plane; they had no spiritual fourth dimension. Of course, they were canaries! Well, one had to meet canaries on their own ground. Her distaste for the whole discussion sounded in her voice as she said:

"Mayn't you be miscalculating rather? I mean, mayn't Roden be asking your blessing on something already settled? It may be too late for all this talk."

Lady Peel was silenced only for a moment. "Well, that's far, far worse, isn't it? You talk glibly enough, my darling Cabs, but *do* you realise what you're saying? By the way, hasn't he taken you into his confidence?"

"If he had I wouldn't be discussing it," her daughter sharply yet calmly retorted.

"You know that girl better than any of the

rest of us do, anyway," said Stella; and this gave Caroline her cue.

"Which is exactly what Roden's trying to remedy," she answered.

"Whether or not anything . . . irrevocable has taken place?" Evelyn suggested.

"Yes. . . . That seems reasonable," said Caroline. "He wants us to know her properly."

"But how are we to know," Stella cried, almost with anger, "how far it's gone?"

"You're evading the real question, Cabs," Lady Peel began again, "which is: Why, why, why in heaven's name that perverse boy should have taken up with a shorthand-typist?" She pronounced the penultimate syllable in a tone suggesting that the variety of typist in question surpassed other varieties in virulence.

Caroline summoned her vocabulary, for now was the moment. "Thank goodness," she thought, "I've inherited mother's fluency; otherwise I'd be nowhere." Fortunately no one seemed disposed to answer Lady Peel's rhetorical question save her elder daughter. "*Is* that what matters?" the latter brought out so as to gain time; and then, in a rush, yet lucidly and calmly: "It seems to me quite superfluous to wonder about whys and hows. As

he *has* taken up with her, and as you've nothing against her—nothing morally, I mean," she hastily amended in response to an outraged yelp from her mother, "surely what you've got to decide is whether it wouldn't be better all round, for everybody concerned, to make the best of it and have her here."

"Caroline, you're an opportunist," said Evelyn. "You ask, not what is right, but what is politic and expedient. Unfortunately, it's very hard to know, being in the dark, whether your actions will affect the issue, or whether it's all gone too far."

"It can't have gone too far unless they're actually secretly married," said Stella.

Lady Peel rolled her luminous dark eyes helplessly, and stirred her tea with violence. Then she seemed to be struck by a thought.

"We seem to be going round in a circle," Sir Harold remarked with some weariness, rising and moving a few paces away from the group. He stood looking towards the Hope Valley, and Caroline's eyes followed his.

Lady Peel whose silence had been ominous, enquired softly: "Why do you say 'you,' Cabs? Why not 'we'? Hasn't he confided in you?"

Caroline turned towards the speaker a face lit with recognition of her misplaced cleverness. "No, honestly, he hasn't," she answered. She pursued after a pause: "I think Evelyn was . . . right when he talked of precipitating events. Don't you think, if you refuse to ask Miss Draper here, Roden may go elsewhere for his holiday?"

"With her?" asked Stella.

Sir Harold came back to them at that. "Do you think he has an alternative plan in his mind?" he enquired of his elder daughter as though controlling himself so as not to alarm her.

"I haven't an idea, Hal. Do believe me when I say I know no more than you. But I care about Roden—I don't want you to have a row with him." She stopped; and then, in reply to a speechless question in her father's face, added: "She's a perfectly straight girl; you must have seen that!" They confronted each other silently for an instant.

Stella created a diversion by jumping up and exclaiming: "Well, I'm sick of this. Does anyone object to having the gramophone on?" She stopped, and then added with a great air of worldly wisdom: "I don't see why you

don't just say there's no room for her, mother."

To everyone's astonishment, before Lady Peel could bring out a word, Sir Harold had uttered an unmistakably decided "No!"

Stella, halfway through the French window of the drawing room, stopped to stare at her father, who stood in profile to her, his eyes still fixed on the view. "Hal!" she said, and then, her tone rising to irritation, and from irritation to an anger which was tinged, it seemed to Caroline, with hysteria; "You don't *want* that girl to come here, do you? You don't *want* Roden to be in love with her? Think if he marries her. . . Oh, Hal, think! . . . " she broke off, stammering; and then, with a rush of tears to her eyes and colour to her cheeks, she turned precipitately into the room and disappeared.

Evelyn, his eyebrows a trifle raised, rose languidly, and strolled down the steep path leading to a lower terrace.

"Cabs and Francis, do you mind taking yourselves off, too?" their father mildly enquired. "I want to talk to your mother."

"Come up the hill," the boy murmured; so Caroline went off with him in the opposite

direction to their cousin. As they moved off they heard the gramophone begin to sing.

"I pity Hal having to talk against Caruso," said the girl.

"Well, he's used to talking against mother," Francis replied; and Caroline thought his tone a little grim. The next moment, however, the impression was wiped from her mind by a flow of remarks about county cricket, a subject second only in importance to Cambridge in her brother's mind. She abstracted herself. A beech-wood received them.

IX.

The gramophone was Lady Peel's latest fad. She had but recently discovered, what had always been the fact, that it was a superlatively good machine. She had spent nearly a week and quite ten pounds on hearing and buying records at Harrod's, a pastime into which her children and friends were pressed. Her previous passion for dancing did not suffer the usual swift eclipse of the superseded craze: the old love and the new flourished together in amity. The house in Kensington Gore resounded for hours to dance tunes, as well as comic songs, fragments of operas, orchestral pieces, violin solos and drawing-room ballads.

The obstacles to transporting the unwieldy cabinet to Derbyshire were, fortunately for Lady Peel, of the kind that money can overcome. A box of brand-new records accompanied it, as well as a large selection of old ones; for so many turned out to be, when the time for packing came, favourites from whom some member of the family could not bear to be

parted. Even Sir Harold and Caroline had their favourites, rather grudgingly admitted.

To-night, after dinner, Stella moved towards the gramophone. Caroline, without thought, clearly, authoritatively said: "Not a rag, Stella. Put on *O Moon of my Delight* or *Bredon.*"

Stella, with unusual amiability, complied; and as Caroline settled down to enjoy the song, she heard her mother ask Sir Harold if he were going by the early train. She was surprised, for it was unprecedented for him to go to town on a Saturday. He nodded, and, when the maid brought coffee, gave directions about breakfast and the car.

"Are you going into Sheffield, Hal?" the girl asked, during the final bars of the music, "because I'd like to go in with you, and do some shopping before the shops shut."

"Very well, dear."

"That's a rotten thing," said Francis. "Put on *El Relicario,* and mater can practice the hen-scratch."

"No, no," Lady Peel protested peevishly. "I'm going to have a nice peaceful evening. Let's have Tosti's *Good-bye.*"

There was a burst of laughter, for the per-

former in the record referred to had a peculiarly strident tenor.

"You do a little work for a change, France," said Stella, wandering to the window. "I'm going out. Is anyone coming?"

There was a pause; everyone expected Evelyn to rise. Then Lady Peel suggested a hand of bridge.

"Not for me," Caroline hastened to say, and followed Stella out into the garden.

It was not often that the sisters walked alone together; there was something for the elder strange and new and pleasing in the experience. She did not court solitude here as she would have in the south. The sense of space, the sense of moors and dales, was too present to be marred by this companionship; one could walk for miles and see nothing living but grouse and perhaps a hawk.

"What's wrong with mother? She's off dancing, and she kissed me before dinner." Stella wondered aloud, in a tone suggesting that such an action was symptom of a fell disease.

"What's the matter with Evelyn if it comes to that?"

"Oh, he'll perk up to-morrow. I expect town's horribly hot."

"Well, what's the matter with father, then? He's going to town to-morrow."

"Is he? For the week-end? Did he say so?"

"I didn't ask for how long; I suppose only for the day. I'm going into Sheffield with him."

Stella broke off humming: "What's the matter with father?—He's all right" to exclaim with a gleam of mischief: "What the matter with Roden? There's something wrong with everyone."

"Except me."

"You're all right, are you, Cabs?"

"Quite, thanks."

"I wish there weren't these dust-ups."

"I thought you liked excitements," Caroline remarked.

"Do I? I suppose so. But I know I hate, I simply *hate* things to go wrong like that."

"Are you talking about Roden's affair?"

They were climbing the steep path leading from the garden to the summit of the hill—the path Francis and Caroline had climbed earlier in the evening; halfway up it entered a hang-

ing beechwood. Stella did not answer.

"I don't know that things are going wrong from his point of view," said Caroline.

"My good Cabs! You must be off your head—and Hal too, by the calm way he takes it. . . . He might as well marry the cook."

"I don't believe you have any idea what Roden's really like, Stella. He isn't like us—like ordinary people; he never will be. It would probably dish Francis to marry beneath him; but it won't dish Roden. He's—in a sort of way, somehow, he's outside conventions and civilisation."

"Outside? . . I don't know what you mean. I know he's different and queer. Mother said to-day she almost wished it was an illegitimate offspring of Roden's that had to be dealt with instead of what Evelyn calls the worst honourable intentions."

"I dare say she does. That could be settled with money. It's where money's no earthly use that mother is completely at sea. I have been expecting her to suggest 'buying' Grace Draper off; only Hal's got too much sense to allow her to try to do anything so idiotic."

"Well, I don't think it's such a bad idea."

"O Stella, you're impossible, you and mo-

ther! Don't you know what Grace Draper's like from having seen her? She might very likely be impressed if you asked her to renounce Roden for the sake of his family or his career; but if you insulted her, she'd merely glue on all the tighter, and quite right too."

"Do you mean you think she's in love with him?"

"Probably. Or she may love him. There are so many different kinds. . . ."

"You think, anyway, that she minds about him, about his future and all that?"

"I'm sure she does, as far as she visualises it. I'm certain she isn't a selfish little pig, nor even on the make at all; though I daresay she's flattered at some one in a class above her being keen on her."

"I dare say so, too," said Stella sardonically.

"And so would you be, if a duke happened to fall in love with you."

"Oh, I expect so," the younger girl admitted. "It's a sad life that Geoffrey's only a blooming honourable."

"Can't you make shift with that?" Caroline asked, smiling,—but smiling at the dusky, silent beauty of the wood where they walked care-

fully and close together on the rough path, rather than at the picture her words suggested.

"I imagine I could if I could put up with Geoffrey's appearance, for he's not a bad old sort when you get to know him. But O Lord, he's so podgy."

"It's annoying that all the slim young men who like you are penniless."

"I don't so much mind about slimness if they look interesting," Stella answered unexpectedly, "Geoffrey's just as ordinary as he looks. . . . But if it's Evelyn you're thinking of, I don't want Evelyn any more than he wants me."

They emerged on to the plateau crowning the long ridge into the diffused, soft, miraculously clear starlight. The heat of the day, rising from the bracken, the heather, the thymy sods, tempered the cold of the strong moorland air, so that they could stand in their thin, low cut dresses without being chilled.

"Who do you think Roden would marry if he didn't marry this girl?" Stella presently inquired, sucking a grass. "I mean, what sort of a person?"

Caroline stared at the starlit landscape. "Perhaps nobody. How *can* one say? He's

awfully self-controlled, and I don't think he'd let a passion run away with him unless he thought the woman was really the sort of wife he wanted."

"D'you mean to tell me he thinks that this girl will suit him?"

"Yes. I know it's queer. I can hardly believe he won't grow out of her; and yet I trust Roden. Anyway, nobody knows better than he does, and I doubt if they know as well."

"Good Lord, what a notion! I thought it must be an infatuation—she is rather pretty."

"Everybody calls love affairs they disapprove of infatuations," Caroline retorted sententiously.

After a pause Stella remarked, "I don't agree with mother that it would have been better if he'd just . . . carried on with her. Then we should probably never have known about it."

"Then you'd rather know the worst?"

"Yes, I think I would. Should you be shocked if you knew that Roden had carried on with a girl?"

"No!"

Something in Caroline's voice reminded Stella vividly of her father's tone as he said

"No!" to her suggestion, made at the end of the conclave, that Lady Peel should settle the dilemma with a white lie.

"Don't make me cry again, for heaven's sake, Cabs," she exclaimed. "There's something wrong with me, as well as with the rest of them."

"There is," her sister gravely agreed. "What is it?"

"I don't know. I suppose it's the heat."

"There have only been about three warm days since Whitsun," Caroline replied.

"Oh, well, I don't know. I wish things would settle down again, and go on as they used to."

"Things never do. . . . What's your ideal existence, Stella?"

"I've always been quite happy since I've been grown up—since the war stopped. I don't want things to alter. I like plenty to do and plenty of friends."

"Friends" was an odd word, Caroline thought, for Stella's series of boon companions: girls in whom she confided one week and verbally tore to shreds the next; young men with whom she danced and supped and flirted until either they or she tired utterly of the affair and behaved as though it had never been.

"We're none of us much good at friendship," she remarked; "I've only got Ann, and Hugh, and Roden, out of all the dozens of people I know."

"Roden!" her sister echoed. "You don't surely count the family as friends. One takes them for granted."

"I don't," answered Caroline.

They did not speak as they descended the hill. The elder girl, glancing at her junior's face, saw that she was plunged in thought—a very rare occurrence.

When they returned to the drawing-room the others were still playing bridge. At the end of a rubber the usual argument broke out —the inevitable post-mortem. Caroline, lighting a cigarette, glanced sidelong, with suppressed scorn, at the flushed, irritable faces of Lady Peel and Francis, the half-bored, half-amused face of Evelyn, the unmoved, bearded face, faintly shadowed with weariness, of her father. What a fuss about what was supposed to be a pleasure! What thought and concentration her mother bestowed on this game—far more than she expended even on the more exacting of her crazes! Surely the brains needed for auction bridge would carry Francis

through Little-go. And why did Evelyn play if it bored him? Out of politeness? . . . Their supercilious glances met for a moment.

Turning from her cousin's oblique smile, the girl's eyes rested on her sister, who, with her back to the company, was occupied somehow at Lady Peel's writing-table.

"Come on, Stella," cried Francis, jumping up. "Let's have one ramp round before bed. Here, I'll put on *My House is Haunted.* Pull up your socks, mater, I'm going to take you on. This is a preparation for May-week next year." He pushed back the chairs, and, the card-players having risen, began to move the table to the wall.

"No, I don't want to dance, Francis, darling. I don't mind watching you, though."

"You are an old slacker."

"Now, Francis, leave Aunt Leila alone," said Evelyn. "Think of the intellectual strain we've just been through, not to mention the strain of controlling our tempers." As he spoke the young man glanced covertly at his uncle; but Francis must have perceived the look, for, turning to Sir Harold, he asked:

"Do you mind if we perform, Hal?"

"Not a bit, my dear boy. As a matter of

fact, I'm going to bed. I suppose you'll have breakfast with me, Cabs?"

His daughter nodded. "Are you coming back to-morrow night?" she asked.

"Yes. But I can come from Sheffield by train, if you meant to use the car late."

That had not been the reason for her question; and at this proof of Sir Harold's care for their pleasure a rush of affection filled her. That stolid, Saxon, unemotional man was not so wholly lacking in imagination as she was apt to consider him.

"We might go to Monsal Dale for tea," said Stella. "I suppose you won't be back much before lunch, will you, Cabs?"

"Not much." Her slow answer was drowned by the opening bars of the ragtime.

Francis and Stella began to gyrate. Soon their mother jumped up.

"I can't resist it, Evelyn," she cried. "I *must* practise my tango-walk: it's too delightfully quaint for words. Put it just a shade slower, will you, Caroline darling. What a tune! What a floor! I feel as though I were a girl of twenty again."

X.

"You look as though you'd slept badly, Hal," said Caroline at their early breakfast.

He answered heavily, but without any trace of self-pity: "I did rather."

The hieroglyphics of fatigue were indeed scrawled more plainly on his face than yesterday; and his daughter had an unpleasant, half-suppressed notion that his mouth might be trembling or grimacing under its moustache.

"Must you go?" she presently enquired.

"It's absolutely necessary, I'm sorry to say."

"Well, I hope you'll be able to take the whole of next week off—you haven't had one quite clear week this summer."

"Next week?" he echoed slowly, looking at her, and speaking, it seemed to her super-sensitive early-morning ears, with a careful but not successful counterfeit of his usual suave deliberation: "I don't know about next week."

This brief colloquy left the girl with an uncomfortable sensation, which, however, she at-

tributed to having herself lain wakeful for several hours of the night. She had thought a great deal about Roden and Grace Draper, without coming to any more decided conclusion than her previous one: that Roden's instinct was probably more trustworthy than other people's opinion of what was good for him, and that Grace Draper was as likely to make him happy as anyone. She had wondered, too, about Stella, but without arriving at any theory which would account for the girl's recent outbursts. Nerves? This vague term might cover almost anything, and was therefore all the more unsatisfactory as an explanation.

Caroline's night-thoughts had come, of course, in time to herself, and so to Hugh Sexton. Perhaps he was right: perhaps she had hitherto dismissed her relations too facilely under the category of puppets, thus herself betraying a superficiality equal to that of which she accused them. Hugh had seen further, perhaps, or made a lucky shot. And yet habit of mind made it hard to think of Lady Peel, of Stella, of Francis, of Sir Harold, as subjects worthy of study; it was far, far more probable that Stella was suffering from a disordered

liver, or from the effects of too exciting a season, than from anything more interesting. She had betrayed no yearnings, no aspirations, not the slightest sickness of soul, when asked what sort of life she coveted; indeed, her answer implied contentment. And could Lady Peel's successive passions for knitting sweaters, the drama, infant welfare, spiritualism, dancing, the gramophone, possibly be regarded as stages in a quest for the ideal, a crying for the moon, a search for the good or the true or the beautiful? Caroline was sure that they could not. When the monkey dresses up in its owner's finery, when the jackdaw steals and hoards fragments of glass and metal, must one recognise proofs of a soul making shift with substitutes because the absolute, dimly conceived, is unattainable? Caroline thought not. The real test to which she mentally put her mother and sister and brother was their capacity for affection; and none of them stood the test, except, perhaps, Francis. At least, he was fond of his father, in his jaunty, featherheaded way. But Lady Peel, although she called her children and her friends "Darling," and often professed exceeding love for them, and although Caroline had never seen her

deliberately unkind to anyone, had never been known by her to do anything which pointed to a sustained or profound affection. As for Stella, she was frankly fickle.

Sir Harold, of course, was different in this respect. He cared for them all, Caroline believed—even for Roden, with whom he had no sympathy. The trouble with Hal was that he was too successful, too stolid, too closely identified with comfortable clubs, a luxurious home respectability, blind optimism, the Church and the State. Even the war had not touched him. He was as ignorant of the struggles and dark realities of poverty, of the struggles and dark abysses of the soul, as a glossy-coated, friendly, golden-brown retriever dog; and he avoided contact with such things more successfully because less consciously than Evelyn Cashel. If at the time of Gerald's death Caroline had gone to her father in a dumb agony he would have been helpless, embarrassed, almost resentful; he certainly would have produced an atmosphere of grievance against her afterwards. If she had gone to him weeping he would have patted her, and, with tears in his own eyes, have begged her to take comfort; but Caroline thought that such an incident, far

from making their relation more close and intimate, would have made him a little afraid of her, because it would have dragged him a few steps towards the edge of a territory of whose existence his whole life was a consistent denial.

"No," she had decided, turning over preparatory to sleep. "Hugh's idea must have been a reaction against my damned superior condemnation of them. I don't think there's more in it than that. . . . But Stella certainly is different and upset."

Returning from Sheffield, she found lunch already on the table, and was informed that the start for Monsal Dale was fixed for half-past two.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it rained," she said; "it's cloudy."

"It's a south wind," Francis agreed, "but I don't think it'll rain till to-night. Let's go, anyway."

"Evelyn's been teaching me poker-patience, Cabs," cried her mother, "and it's really too entrancing. I've quite decided to start a poker-patience club. . . . Those dreadful children would have the gramophone on the whole morning. It was too distracting for words. I know your Aunt Violet plays, she tried to

teach it to me once, years ago, but I wouldn't play anything but billiards in those days. And I shall teach darling Hildegarde and you and Stella and Francis."

"Oh, no, you won't," the boy retorted.

"Francis darling, your way of answering is very crude. We'll take the cards to Monsal, anyway . . . Amy, tell cook not to spread the gentleman's relish sandwiches too thick."

When first they started off, packed into the big car, the sun was obscured by clouds, but when they arrived at the *Saracen's Head* it came out again, and everyone was in good spirits. There is no road down Monsal Dale; even the rich must walk; the railway, crossing the river on a viaduct just below the inn, goes down one arm of the L; but in the other only the voices of occasional picnickers and the rushing of the river over its weirs disturbs the silence. It is not such a flowery dale as some, although in May the lilies pierce the limestone shale of the steep sides. In early August, when the Peels were there, there was only a scattered multitude of coltsfoot, rock-rose, thyme and lady's slipper; a few clusters of big blue cranesbill, and every now and then some creamy spikes of meadow-sweet. Caroline

looked in vain for the rarer vetches, the beds of large glowing willow-herb and the tall purple campanulas that she had found the week before in Lathkill Dale. She sat down disappointed by the weir; but soon her disappointment faded into a deep content. Sunlight alternated quickly with shadow, for there was a strong southern breeze; but in this deep narrow valley there was shelter. The continuous rushing of the waterfall over its stone steps mesmerised her. A little way off Francis and Stella were playing beggar-my-neighbour on a rug. Lady Peel and Evelyn were wandering along the grassy path under the sycamores; the chauffeur, having deposited the tea-basket, had taken his way back up the steep slope to the *Saracen's Head.* No other picnickers were in sight. A sapphire dragon-fly darted past; Caroline thought of the flashing blue kingfishers who, she had read, haunted the streams in the south. What was there so wonderful about blue, setting it apart from other colours, so that somehow blue flowers, though not more beautiful than others, have a peculiar charm?—so that the halcyon bird has become a symbol of happiness, and azure butterflies seem the embodiment of early summer, and the

blue horizon synonymous with unattainable desires? There is some association in men, immemorially old, prehistoric, probably prehuman, which vibrates inexplicably at the sight of blue; perhaps it is the association of the sky.

After some time Caroline began to walk in the direction which her mother had taken, with the half-formulated intention of engaging her in conversation about Grace Draper. Nothing more had been said on the subject; she did not know if a refusal had already been sent to Roden; knowing Lady Peel's dilatoriness, she thought it improbable. Evelyn's presence would be no bar to further discussion; he would have the tact to be silent, even if directly appealed to by his aunt. The latter was the more amenable the fewer persons were present; she was slightly more capable of a reasonable mental process in *tête-à-tête* than in general conversation; it was possible to affect her a little by one's own concentration and deliberation if one had her alone.

Caroline was, however, spared even Evelyn as an audience. When she came up with Lady Peel the latter was seated alone on a knoll, smoking a cigarette.

"Evelyn insisted on climbing the hill," she

explained, "or, rather, on trying to. Of course it's absurd. I refused to exhaust myself by scrabbling on a cliff. I can't think why he wouldn't stay comfortably here with me and enjoy the view."

"I suppose he thought there'd be a better view from the top," the girl answered. "Or perhaps he just wanted to be alone for a little while."

"I dare say." Lady Peel was refreshingly free from sentimentality; she never uttered what she thought to be appropriate or telling remarks about nature, human or otherwise, solitude, art or love. When she used cant expressions it was because they fell easily off her tongue, not because she thought they sounded fine or did her credit; she was quite without self-consciousness. Her children did not fully appreciate her complete spontaneity, for they had never endured the ordeal of close or prolonged proximity with a sentimentalist, a mouther of picturesque or would-be profound phrases.

The couple sat for a few moments without speaking, while the elder woman hummed. Caroline was collecting her resources. She felt like a governess who is about to explain

to a wayward, scatter-brained child, who does not particularly want to know, why it is high tide on both sides of the earth at once. It was, however, essential to begin before her mother either opened another topic, or was distracted by the return of Evelyn, or the discovery of an ant-heap, or the notion of tea; so she asked:

"You haven't written to Roden or Miss Draper yet, have you?"

"No. I don't know what I'm going to do, and Hal doesn't seem to have any clear idea of what line to take either."

"I have," said Caroline boldly.

Lady Peel looked at her with her dark, luminous, pathetic eyes.

"For everybody's sake you must ask her here," the girl went on. "For ours, because if he means to marry her it's awfully important that we should be on good terms. If he doesn't marry her—well, no harm will have been done. It seems to me that's the only sane view."

There was a pause; then:

"Well, I only hope Roden isn't expecting Hal to shell out any capital for his motor affair," came the unexpected reply, "because if he is he'll be sadly let down."

"I don't think he is. . . . But why shouldn't Hal, as a matter of fact?" The girl spoke inattentively, for she was wondering if indeed victory was hers, or if this change of front indicated further resistance.

"Your father's awfully worried," Lady Peel answered. "In fact he's what Francis would call got the wind up. Of course I expect it's all just a scare; there've been so many, and all false alarms; I shan't begin to worry yet. But I know the effect of these scares on Hal; they make him as close as anything, just for a little while. He won't be feeling inclined to give twopence to anybody for six months or so. . . . My dear, look at that exquisite butterfly with splodges of red on it! They are the most unlikely beasts—I never get used to seeing them about."

Caroline was mute with astonishment; then after a moment she began to revise the impression conveyed by this speech. It was always very difficult to gauge the importance of any communication of her mother's, so incalculable, so disproportionate, were her gusts of irritation, interest, weariness or surprise. It was impossible to tell from her tone whether she was referring to a world-disaster or a hole

in her stocking, immortality or chip potatoes. One of the sentences she had just spoken had particularly struck her listener: "There've been so many, and all false alarms: I shan't begin to worry yet." That might signify a very great deal or nothing at all. However satisfactory the outcome of Sir Harold's periods of anxiety, however unnecessary his subsequent periods of economy, wasn't it odd that in all the ten years Caroline had been grown up she had never heard of either? It had never, in the vaguest way, occurred to her until yesterday that her father had business worries; she had always imagined him as idling away a few hours in a resplendent office, presiding at director's meetings and declaring dividends (whatever that might mean!), all with the Olympian, unruffled, complacent calm of the man whose investments bring him several thousands a year, and whose investments are as "safe as houses." But the very word "worry" spoilt this picture, somehow dimmed the image of the resplendent office, turned the sleek boards of directors into hurried, harried men, and her father into an Atlas rather than a Jupiter.

"D'you mean to say, mother, that Hal's

companies, or whatever they are, aren't doing well—aren't paying?"

"There's practically only one now that counts, from our point of view. I can't tell you why, and really I don't care—it's all too tedious for words—but Hal has lumped a vast sum into some mine or other; and he's in a funk now for fear it should turn out a bad thing."

Caroline felt the blood withdrawing from her cheeks, from her neck—withdrawing in a chill shiver down her spine. She stared in silence at her mother's face.

"My darling girl, don't look so upset! I tell you it's probably all a false alarm."

That brought Caroline back to the sentence which seemed to be a clue to some unexplained portion of her existence. "Did you say that he had often been in a funk before?"

"Not so badly; no, not nearly so badly. Poor old Hal! I think we shall have to tear ourselves away from town this winter, Cabs, and take him abroad. We might go to Cannes, and then to Switzerland after New Year. Wouldn't it be rather amusing?—and back by Paris in the spring. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"But, mother, tell me this: does Hal go in

for unsafe things? I mean, does he really . . . speculate?"

"I suppose so, darling. Why not? Everybody in the city does. We shouldn't ever have had half the money we have got if Hal hadn't speculated." There was a pause, and then Lady Peel pursued: "I wish Evelyn would come back. It must be tea-time. Come on, Cabs, I'm getting chilly. Give him a shout."

It was useless, Caroline saw, to question her further; she was already tired of the subject. She called to her cousin, and when he came, lingered behind while he went on with her gaily-chatting mother.

She was too much disturbed to be able at once to recover her equanimity. How hard and surprising her discovery, even with its edges blurred by Lady Peel's off-hand manner of telling, by her obvious taking of it for granted! It necessitated a complete revision of Caroline's view of her father, the formation of an altogether new conception of him. She was not so immediately concerned as to his present financial situation; it was impossible to judge from Lady Peel's account how bad that situation was; but his appearance, the difference she had dimly perceived in him, did not di-

minish her apprehensions. That, however, was a question not yet capable of solution; what she already felt certain of was that she had indeed utterly misjudged her father—his character, his temperament, his attitude towards existence—everything! He, the safe, the solid, the unemotional, the unimaginative, was a gambler in stocks and shares! She tried to tone down her conviction, to assure herself that she was being melodramatic and exaggerated; but the conviction persisted in its heightened tones. The very readiness of Lady Peel to admit the charge against her husband in some way contributed to the convincingness of Caroline's impression; her mother evidently took, and always had taken, his speculations, his scares and economies, his drawings in and launchings out, his swayings over the abyss of ruin and his recoveries, quite as matters of course; she probably minimised the dangers of the game because she was so used to it and because she did not enquire into the details. But to Caroline the idea of Hal engaged in this reckless sport—and as a sport she visualised it: something like mountain-climbing—was a stunning, astounding, revolutionary idea; it blotted out everything else for the moment, like one

of those headaches whose piston-throbbing dwarfs the whole universe, so that nothing else is of the slightest importance.

Tea, the packing up, the walk to the car, the drive home, passed for her in a dream. She looked, with a new interest added to her familiar scorn, at her mother, who, undeterred by the possibility of trouble, chattered and gesticulated with her customary liveliness. Now that the first shock of discovery was over, it was the practical aspect of the case which began to occupy Caroline. As they drew near home she became tormented with anxiety to hasten their progress, to learn the result of her father's visit to town, to know the worst. Anything might have happened—and here was her mother telling the chauffeur to slow down that she might exchange polite remarks with an acquaintance in the road. This fiddling was far worse than Nero's; it had not even the sublime absurdity of a megalomaniac's gesture; it placed her mother, more certainly than ever before, more irretrievably and despicably on a level with creatures not human. Caroline was filled with cold anger against her. Looking ostentatiously at her watch she broke into the small-talk, saying in clear, hard tone·

"If we go on at once we shall just have time to meet Hal at the station."

"Very well," Lady Peel agreed. "Good-bye, Mrs. Baines. Go on, Hutchinson. Go to the station. Francis, dear, you might walk up to make room for Hal."

"No," said Caroline, once more unconsciously echoing her father's tone, which fact this time seemed to pass unnoticed by Stella, "I'm going to walk up with him."

"But I expect he'll be tired, Cabs. Don't be silly, darling. Francis won't mind walking up, will you, dear boy?"

The girl made no reply; but, jumping out as soon as the car stopped, she moved quickly into the station. The train was signalled. Stella and her brother, idly following, joined her; but she ignored them until the train was actually in sight. Then, turning on them with all the command she could muster, she said: "Go back—go up in the car. *Please,* Stella. I must speak to father."

"What is it?" the boy asked quickly.

"It may be nothing. I'll tell you afterwards. Please go, Francis."

"Very well," he answered to her immense relief, his words drowned in the noise of the

approaching train; and he must have added something to Stella, for she, inquisitive and unwilling, nevertheless obeyed her sister and turned with him towards the station exit.

Caroline had ceased, at his reply, to notice her companions; all her faculties were concentrated on catching sight of her father as he descended, in deducing from his appearance whether he carried bad tidings or good. This she was, however, unable to do. He came towards her, upright, well-groomed, young in bearing and yet unhurried as always, overtopping many of the other passengers in height, and surpassing all in distinction. She had a right to be proud of his appearance: no wonder foreigners, waiters, newsboys, called him "me lord." She had thought that that was the whole man—that he was a type, a figurehead, one whose suavity and courtesy were polish upon a simple, solid, eminently reliable, because so limited, structure. She had imagined that he was hedged away not only by upbringing, tradition, and circumstances, but also by character and temperament, from all contact with danger or romance, from all extremes of thought, conduct or emotion. She knew now that she had been gulled; she could smile at

her former fatuous unhesitating judgment. Surely to play with money involves romance and danger and the possibility of any extremes; it implies a desire for them, a wooing of them, a courage, a refinement of recklessness which she admired. She was beginning to know him now, to love him. She hastened forward to meet him.

"Are you alone, Cabs?" he asked, and she thought she detected anxiety in his voice.

"Yes," she answered. "At least, I think so. The others were going up in the car. We're just back from a picnic." She wanted to add: "Mother has told me. Are you ruined?" but the phrase "Fly: all is discovered," coming to her mind, prevented her. At last, however, she screwed up her courage to say: "Have you—are you less worried? Have things gone well today?"

Sir Harold did not turn his face towards her as they walked, nor did he reply quickly; she had time to expect a snub.

"You knew I was worried?" he asked her. "My little Cabs, your stupid old father has come down badly this time."

"This time," she echoed vacantly, a little dazed.

There was a long pause.

"Are we . . . shall we have to be . . .to live in quite a different way?" Caroline presently enquired, with unprecedented timidity.

Without answering, he nodded; and his daughter, as they climbed the hill, felt for the first time for years like a very small, dependent, ignorant and bewildered child.

XI.

Dinner passed off much as usual. Caroline, still in her bewildered, helpless state of mind, scanned her mother's face in vain for some indication that the bad news had been broken to her; Lady Peel was her ordinary self—talkative, restless, fidgety; her eyes shining dark and pathetic in her young, though dim and wrinkled, face. She had put on a new tea-gown, and against its blue the yellowness of her skin was accentuated. She was to-night perhaps more than usual like a piece of bric-a-brac, at once fragile, wiry, and grotesque. She was discussing theosophy with Evelyn Cashel, praising it in her inconsequent, unconvincing way, while her nephew insinuated his languid and yet often pointed remarks—comments rather than replies.

Stella and Francis were speaking in low tones to each other, ending in a sudden burst of laughter.

"What's the joke; what is it?" their mother cried testily; but Francis would only

droop an eyelid in response, while Stella began to interest Evelyn in the clothes she meant to buy on her return to town.

Only Sir Harold and Caroline were silent; but that was customary. Nothing, nothing apparently was changed; and yet it was to the girl as though a spectre stood within the door, unheeded; as though some one had died and lay ignored upstairs; as though some infinitely complex situation with which no one there was competent to deal had arisen unknown and unenvisaged. These children, playing with buckets and spades upon the shore, were ignorant of the tidal wave which swept, house-high, towards them. It was too late to cry out, to warn them; it was already upon them, and upon her too, the watcher. She looked at her father who, with one hand at his beard, stared at the dish before him.

How would her mother take the news? With a nerve-crisis, a tear-storm, or with a bewildered, helpless silence like her own? How would she accustom herself to circumstances of poverty and discomfort after a life-time of wealth and luxury? It would need the combined forces of Caroline and Hal to impose on Lady Peel the necessary economy. And there was

Stella—and Francis. What would become of him? Would enough be saved from the wreck of their fortunes not only to keep them housed, fed and warm, but to pay Francis' Cambridge fees? And Roden, where would he come in? Already half cut adrift from them, he would certainly be no problem, and probably not a help either. But it comforted Caroline to think of him, absorbed in his work and in his art, contented with his unself-conscious little typist. It was a good thing that one member of the family at least was more or less independent, would not be involved in the crash.

By dint of thinking, however inconsecutively, of these aspects of the disaster—for Caroline, by a safeguarding instinct, assumed that her father's situation amounted to disaster—she began to emerge from her childish, helpless mood into one more normal for her years and character. She began, healthily, to be thankful on her family's behalf that she was there, young and sane and intelligent—even if uneducated and ignorant—able to grasp the implications of the event, able to think ahead, to plan, and when the time came to take action; Hal would not be without a lieutenant in the struggle with adversity. It did not occur to

her to question his capacity for leadership; a life-time habit of unconscious, unquestioning trust and dependence, even when tempered by intellectual and moral snobbishness, cannot be cast off in a day. He had been shown to her, fragmentarily by her mother, as very different from the man she had imagined him to be; and yet she still counted on him, by an unreasoning but perfectly sound instinct, to act with sense and foresight and integrity. To have gambled and to have lost does not necessarily imply knavery or even folly. And there he was, looking, except for fatigued eyes, just the same as ever, solid, calm and suave; not giving in his appearance one clue to that fatal passion, making it almost impossible to believe that he had ever thrilled to danger, uncertainty, excitement, triumph,—ever been sick with defeat. There he was, with all that he was, not only the long-familiar, but also the newly-discovered, summed up in the word "Hal."

"The moon's getting up," said Francis, as they rose from the table. "Let's take the car out for a run," he added with nonchalance; "I'll drive."

"Now don't say you're tired, Evelyn, you

lazy pig. Come and put your coat on," cried Stella. "Coming, Cabs?"

Caroline glanced at her parents; her father was drinking coffee, her mother lighting a cigarette. "Yes," she said.

It had grown finer since sunset, and of course colder. Snuggling in her fur coat beside, but not close to, Evelyn in the large back of the car, the girl reflected that this was very nearly the last pleasure drive she would ever get in it. She supposed that retrenchments in expenditure would have to be begun immediately; the house in London and the car would be sold; they would move into some poky flat or villa in Hammersmith or Hampstead or Surbiton. Who was it who had talked about living in a villa? . . . Grace Draper, of course, that day when she and Roden and Grace had lunched together.

Evelyn was leaning forward, saying something to Stella. Caroline felt, suddenly, her isolation. As usual, her subsequent thought was of Hugh. She must write to Ann and Hugh to-morrow.

"Hal and I are going to Cambridge for a week-end next term," called Stella, turning round to continue a conversation.

"I wonder if he's telling mother now," Caroline wondered.

"Let's go back," said Evelyn plaintively. "The moon's exquisite—'and with so wan a face'—but I can watch her quite well from the drawing-room, and have a whisky and soda at the same time."

"Oh, we *ought* to have gone by 'Surprise,' " Stella suddenly cried; and at that her brother slowed down, turned the car, and took them back, through their own village, up a hill, and along the moorland road which, with a sharp sudden bend between high rocky banks, brings you suddenly out on to the edge of the valley which their house overlooked, but at a point a few miles distant. The landscape lay spread out in that unearthly, remote, calm, miraculous beauty which moonlight gives; the hollows filled with mist, the woods black with shadow, the fields and roofs washed with a dim pallor.

Caroline leant forward and said "Stop." The brakes ground; they paused, all staring in silence.

"Topping!" Francis murmured, releasing the brakes again, and they slid forward down the hill.

Caroline was disturbed by the conflict in her

mind between that peaceful wonder and her troubled thoughts. Beauty had only partially entered into her; she felt cheated of its full effect. It seemed to her that on foot, alone, or with one congenial companion, she could have taken full measure of the moonlit landscape's influence; but not thus, in the car, with these three, who were, somehow, in league with luxury. As long as things went well—as long as they were yours—motors and rich clothes, large houses and good food were beautiful, not sordid nor hostile to finer, less material things; but once they became important because in danger of vanishing or difficult of attainment, they became obstructions, and were the enemies of beauty. They were, she thought, like sex, which, when it has its desired expression, is so close an ally to beauty that they are inseparable; but when thwarted becomes a burden, and the enemy of all that should be its happiest concomitants.

When they arrived home it was half-past ten. The downstairs rooms were dark. Caroline went straight upstairs; and presently she heard the others come talking down the passage, and with "Good nights" retire to their rooms. The cold rush through the air had

made her sleepy; but after settling down in the dark she found it had been a merely superficial symptom which now vanished. She lit her bed-lamp and opened a library book of which she had read more than half. It was called *The Happy Foreigner,* and at the end of the chapter was a description of moonrise in the forests of Chantilly. The flexible, natural and yet fastidious style of the writer fascinated Caroline. The last paragraph made her want to look at the moon again. She got up, still in the dreamy yet exceedingly vital state into which absorbed reading puts one, and, turning out the lamp, went to the window. "Stupid! it's on t'other side, of course," she said to herself.

Her room faced sideways on to the narrow shelf of the rose garden. She could see the paler roses on their stems. Beyond, the beech trees were grey; the sky above, the indescribable deep blue of midnight.

There was a step on the gravel path, and looking down she saw her mother walking swiftly away from the house towards the roses. "What on earth? . . ." she murmured to herself, and then, without hesitating, seized her dressing-gown, thrust her feet into slippers,

and cautiously opened the door. There was not a sound in the house. She crept along the passage, down the stairs, and then, with her thoughts moving orderly and clearly in her brain, went to the hall cupboard where overcoats hung, and took from it her own and her mother's fur coats. They were heavy, and clasping them, she forgot to raise her dressing-gown from the floor, and, moving towards the front door, stumbled against a chair.

She paused motionless to listen; but nothing ensued. A clock struck the half-hour as she unbolted the door. It was a laborious business, but safer than going out through the drawing-room windows, which were directly under her father's and mother's, and the creak of which would possibly wake Hal. She had no wish to be followed, following her mother; her sense of humour, usually, like everyone's, keen at wakeful midnight, repudiated the idea of a comic family encounter.

She stole across the path and on to the turf The wind had dropped to a little breeze; the moon was setting. Lady Peel was no longer visible; she might have passed into the vegetable garden, a tapering triangle beyond the rose hedge, or she might be sitting under the

rambler arbour. As she approached the latter, the girl called "mother!" softly. There was no response and she saw a moment after that it was an empty, dark, fragrant shell.

The wicket gate into the vegetable patch creaked as she opened it; and emerging, she saw Lady Peel facing her along an alley of scarlet runners. She advanced, not hurrying, between the bean hedges, and said calmly: "Put this on, mother, dear; it's cold." She saw that her companion was in her nightdress and a woollen sweater.

"How did you know I was here, Cabs?"

"I looked out and saw you."

The elder woman turned away. "I was going up the hill when I heard the gate squeak," she said, indicating a rough little track which climbed the slope and higher up joined the beechwood path. Caroline followed, clutching her skirts, and they climbed in silence until they were under the trees.

"Let's sit down," said Lady Peel. "Put on your coat, darling. Are you warm?"

"Quite warm." Their matter-of-factness was complete. The girl perceived that her mother, was in one of her rare, preoccupied, thoughtful moods. They sat down on the rough

twig and nut-strewn path. It was very dark and sheltered under the trees, and they could see only each other's faces, and those indistinctly.

"How bad is it?" Caroline wondered aloud.

"It's as bad as can be," her companion answered dreamily. "Of course, Hal will get a job with a fairly big salary; but it's bound to be rather miserable for us. What do people who are badly off do to pass the time?"

"I suppose they see friends, and do things in their houses, and read and sew."

"That's what I don't know—how we shall pass the time," said Lady Peel softly, as though her daughter had not spoken. "Of course Stella will probably marry soon," she added after a pause.

"She doesn't seem to care for anyone specially, though, does she? She told me yesterday she didn't want to marry Geoffrey Lakenbridge."

"People are different. I don't know how like me Stella is."

Caroline was at a loss. Evidently her mother was embarked on some characteristically wandering train of thought; it might be pertinent or not; how could her daughter arrive at it?

What could one think about in such circumstances?—one's youth, surely, the years of plenty now so suddenly brought to an end, and their beginning. What had her mother been like as a girl—Sir Harold as a young man? It seemed that they must always have been what they were now; people did not alter fundamentally. It must be odd, and yet quite ordinary, to have spent years and years in such a close relation as husband and wife. She had often during her engagement, pictured the long time ahead in which she would have grown closer and closer to Gerald. In connection with no one else would this prospect have been tolerable; would it ever be tolerable again? It could be a perfect relation or an odious one. But it seemed that her parents was half-way between the two. It was hard to know; she would never again feel able with absolute certainty to deduce facts from appearances; her misjudgment of Hal had taught her how easy it is to make mistakes.

"I don't think Stella's ever been in love," said Lady Peel. "She's twenty-one, isn't she?"

"Yes. I hadn't been in love till I was with Gerald, and I was twenty-two."

"I fell in love when I was nineteen. And I

was married on the day I came of age." The speaker managed to convey by her tone that the two facts existed independently of each other in her mind.

"Were you engaged long?" Caroline asked; it was the first time she had ever talked to her mother of the days preceding her own birth.

"I was engaged for a month. Hal brought me a present every day; sometimes jewellery, often flowers. . . . Can you smell the roses, Cabs? I believe I can distinguish that old-fashioned tea."

"You're like Roden—I mean, he gets his sense of smell from you." It was useless trying to prevent digressions.

"Yes, I've got a very good sense of smell. Sometimes it's been a pest."

Caroline was startled. "And to me, too," she said quickly, "though I haven't a specially keen one." She thought what anguish the memory of an odour—could that be only a memory which seemed actually to touch her nostrils?—had caused her.

"I could always win at that game they used to have at children's parties—different things in pots that one smelt, and had to say the name of. . . . I wonder what time it is? I don't

think I could sleep yet. Aren't you sleepy, Cabs?"

"Not a bit? Is Hal asleep?"

"Yes. I waited till he was. He needs rest; it's been a perfectly dreadful week for him. . . . I wonder what that awfully bright star is—there, between those branches. Can you see ? I used to be awfully keen on astronomy once—before I was married."

"Was it a great shock, when father told you?"

Perhaps Lady Peel had to drag her mind from the past into the present; at all events, it was not till after a pause that she replied: "I don't think it was a shock. Perhaps I'd got used to the idea because of all the times Hal's been worried before. But of course I didn't ever think it would really happen. It's horrible; it's a dreadful worry. It's beastly for you poor children. Hal says Francis won't be able to go to the 'Varsity after all . . . poor boy, he will be upset. We must wire to Roden to-morrow, I suppose. It doesn't really matter now whether he marries that girl or not. We shan't have any position to keep up."

"But wasn't it important anyway for him

to marry the person he wanted to?" the girl said with a sudden return of irritation.

"Yes, oh quite, if he was really in love with her. But I don't believe he is. It would be like him to want that sort of wife out of perversity. Oh no," Lady Peel exclaimed, as though reassuring herself against a doubt, "I don't believe for a minute he really cares awfully about this Draper girl."

"Don't you? I do."

"Do you really, Cabs?" her mother asked with an access of her customary animation replacing the dreamy, introspective tone; "Well, in that case I've been wrong all along. Not that he won't marry, anyway, if he wants to, of course. If it's true love, nobody ought to come between them."

So that was the line to have taken! Not to have pleaded policy, expediency, but the cause of true love! Unaccountable woman! she must have a sentimental side as yet unbetrayed to her children.

"I think I shall try and see more of Mrs. Leverson." She was off on quite a different track now. "I think a religion like Theosophy might be so helpful and calming. Besides, one must do something; and that won't cost money,

as most things do. . . . Have you a cigarette case on you, darling?"

"No; shall I fetch it?"

"Never mind. . . I shall go in soon. I mustn't keep you up all night gossiping about my past." She began to make movements preparatory to rising.

"You've hardly said anything about your past, mother; you only said you fell in love with Hal when you were nineteen, and married him on your twenty-first birthday."

Lady Peel got to her feet, and, moving her hands, answered sharply yet softly, "I said 'fell in love.' " There was a brief pause while Caroline peered up at her indistinguishable face. "I fell in love with one man, and I married another."

"D'you mean that you didn't love Hal?"

"I liked him, and he was awfully in love with me, goodness only knows why . . . I was a plainish little object."

"What happened to the other man?"

"He went back to the West Coast of Africa, where his work was. Of course, if I'd had the determination, I could have married him and gone too. But it's a deadly climate; he hadn't any private means, and my people were dead

set against it." And a moment she added: "Come on, darling, let's go back now."

Caroline rose unwillingly, and stood above her mother in the dark of the beech trees. "Have you ever regretted it—what you did?" she asked, trying to read her companion's face; but the latter turned to go down the path, answering:

"Yes, yes, of course I've regretted it. Hal's a dear; we've got on awfully well; but every one knows it's not the same thing. I'm too faithful—it's stupid—I'm too constant. It took me years to get over Maurice; and all the time I had to keep myself busy with something: you children, and the blind, and dress, hunting and yachting, and care committees. I've always had something interesting on hand, thank heaven. That's what worries me about our being poor. It costs such a lot to do amusing things—even gramophone records cost money."

Never before had Caroline become aware of any definite heritage passed by her mother to her, except her dark hair and her gift of the gab. In the foregoing speech one sentence struck her specially: *"It took me years to get over Maurice."* That was where it came from

—her tenacious love, her hard-dying passion, the fidelity which kept her Gerald's long after his death. And just as unfortunate love had driven her into the fortress of herself, from which she looked out, at once fearful and supercilious, at life, so unfortunate love had driven Leila Cashel, become Leila Peel, into the midst of trivial and absorbing occupations, seeking distraction feverishly here and there, casting off the worn-out fad, and taking on the new, in the absolute necessity of somehow passing the time.

She saw, now, how in truth she was her mother's child. The calm she had inherited from Hal had seemed to divide her, in the past, from her mother, just as other differences divide them in the present. Physical bonds meant nothing to Caroline, she had no sense of blood being thicker than water; but this discovered heritage, this dissatisfaction with life manifested in such contrary ways, was a bond whose strength she recognised.

In silence they regained the sleep-wrapped house.

XII.

It was late on Monday evening when Roden arrived in Derbyshire. There was no one to meet him; he had not informed the family of his advent. Caroline in a brief letter had told him almost more than he had wanted to know; his imagination could well supply the details, the attendant circumstances, and how the different Peels would face, or avoid facing, the crisis. He was in a sombre rage, but on a quite different account. He felt, as Caroline had suspected, aloof from this unexpected and yet not, after all, surprising event; he was already, and had always been, so separate from his family; and now that he was earning a modest living, the separation was merely more complete. He could dispense with the allowance made him by his father, he could dispense with their company. Of course, if they needed him, he was ready to help. And there was Caroline; he did care deeply, though irritably, for her. He felt something of the Cathy-Heathcliffe quality in their affection, leaving out most of

what was sexual in that classic and romantic love. He sometimes hated Caroline, he even sometimes feared her for what she might do or say to sap his energy, faith, and confidence; he came near to morally condemning her; and yet he knew that always, whether repressed, ignored and neglected, or cherished, their affection would survive most other loves, and remain until he died one of the most real emotions in his life.

He found his mother and his sisters sitting together in the drawing-room. Lady Peel was writing letters; Caroline was reading, Stella was wandering uneasily about the room. As he opened the door she turned towards him and stood, startled for a moment into silence.

"Well, my dear boy, I'm glad you've come," said his mother, holding out her left hand to him. "Your father's staying to-night in town —did you see him, by the way?"

"No. He hasn't been to the house to-day." He sat down far from any of them.

"Did you have dinner on the train?" Caroline asked.

"Yes." It was characteristic of Roden that he asked no questions; that he suffered unwillingly the questions of others. Some people

make statements which are really questions; Roden's questions were almost always statements. He unconsciously hated to betray ignorance of any kind; and it was true that he did know a great many things by some other agency than verbal information.

"I suppose we've got this house till September," he presently remarked.

"Yes. Hal will be in town, though, most of the time. We're sending Amy away at once. You'll come for your holiday, won't you, Roden?" said Lady Peel.

Instead of answering, the young man asked, "Where's Francis?"

Stella, still moving about, replied, "Nobody's seen him since lunch time yesterday."

Roden accepted this news unmoved, and Lady Peel broke in: "Poor boy, he was awfully upset when Hal told him he couldn't go to Cambridge. I'm feeling very worried about him, but what can we do?"

"I expect he'll turn up to-morrow," said her elder son gruffly, and she resumed her writing.

Caroline, feeling unable to read any more, and disliking the quality of the silence, began to talk in her clear, even tones: "Hal is seeing about selling the house and part of the furni-

ture at once; you see, in a small house we shan't need anything like so much. He's going to try and find a quite tiny house or a large flat in some cheap part of London, or in one of the least horrible suburbs."

"That reminds me, Roden, darling; shall you want a room in our new establishment, or do you think you'd rather be on your own?"

"I'll think it over and tell you, mother," he replied. "I suppose there's no immediate need to decide. If I take rooms I might have some of the furniture."

"The car is going to be sold," said Stella suddenly, almost viciously; it was clear that she knew, by observation or intuition, how some of the happiest moments of Roden's peace-time existence had been spent in driving the car. He made no answer, staring sombrely past her, as though deliberately ignoring her presence. Caroline, quivering to the atmosphere, hoped that she would not be fated to live at close quarters with both Stella and Roden; the latter provoked all the former's latent hysteria and malice; and he could not ordinarily be considered, on his own account, a gay companion.

"How's work?" she asked him.

"Work's all right. It's interesting. There's plenty to do. Oh, I say, Cabs, I met Sexton to-day in Piccadilly—and he's coming down on Wednesday for a night."

"Oh, good!" she breathed, and the tension of the atmosphere seemed to be a little relieved by the news. Stella still moved about the room.

"Stella, do for heaven's sake sit down, or at least stand still!" Lady Peel cried in exasperation. But she herself rose after a little while and began wandering about to collect her book and tortoise-shell spectacles preparatory to going to bed.

"She's very calm," her son remarked when at last she had gone.

"She has been all the time," his elder sister answered. "It's extraordinary." Glancing at Roden as she spoke she saw his opaque dark eyes fix themselves on their companion who stood by the fireless hearth, looking at herself in the mirror over it. Caroline saw that he was about to say something of importance, and waited in suspense. His words were:

"I wish you'd mind your own business, Stella, and not make such a damned little fool of yourself."

He spoke deliberately, controlling his cold

anger, scarcely admitting that it was anger he felt. The girl was just as he had remembered her: his mental picture was in every detail correct; she was insignificant and yet not quite harmless, an insect with a sting: a pretty insect with irridescent wings. She was perfectly all right if only she'd let one alone. O God, these girls who meddled!

Stella had faced him; they both saw that she was pale. "I haven't," she said slowly.

"You have indeed. What's the good of trying to mess up things between Grace and me? You can't do it and it only makes me angry."

Stella turned towards Caroline, as though she were judge. "I only tried to appeal to her better feelings!" she exclaimed. "You know, Cabs, you said you thought she'd give him up if it was for his good. Well, it is for his good, isn't it?"

Before Caroline could answer, Roden retorted: "Who knows except me what's for my good? Don't try and drag Cabs in. It's over now. I won't say any more, only for God's sake in future keep your fingers out of *my* pie." He found that his anger had melted away. Stella looked forlorn, a rather pitiful little insect.

"Roden, you're horrid, you're cruel!" she exclaimed, turning away. "And I wasn't trying to drag Cabs into it—only she's fair. You don't care for anybody. Oh, you're horrible to me." She began to cry, leaning her head on one supporting hand.

He got up and patted her shoulder. "Don't cry. It's all over: it's forgotten . . . I'm sorry if I was brutal . . . you silly little thing."

The scorn in his voice, finally superseding the kindness, stung her. She swept round to her sister: "Isn't he horrible to me? I did it because I mind what happens to him. You both think I care for nobody but myself—I know you do. He hates me."

"What *did* you do?" Caroline mildly enquired.

"Where is the letter—have you got it?" Stella cried. "Give it to me, I'll burn the stupid thing."

"Grace tore it up to-day, after she'd shown it to me," said Roden.

"O, I wish I'd never written it—I wish I'd never seen her at all. Then perhaps it wouldn't be so bad; I wouldn't picture it all so." Stella began to walk up and down the room with short steps, the tears drying on her small face, while

her companions watched her uneasily. "I can't think of anything else—not even now we've lost our money. Roden, why do you hate me so?"

"I don't hate you."

"Yes, you do. You don't care what becomes of me." There was half a question in her tone, the dawning of a question in the eyes she fixed on him, standing before him with her back to Caroline. Caroline could hear the inflexion but could not see the expression; she could only see Roden's pale, dogged face, his opaque unrevealing eyes, as he replied:

"My dear Stella, you know what I'm like to all the family, to everyone—it's not only to you. I'm unsociable and crude and all the things mother says. Cabs will tell you how I treat her—how I swear at her when we're alone. Don't I, Cabs? But of course, I mind what happens to you all. Don't I, Cabs?"

"Yes," she agreed softly.

Stella stood mute and motionless, her eyes fastened on her brother's face. Then she said, as though she had scarcely heard his words: "Yes, that's it. It's Cabs you like, next to Grace Draper . . . Mother says if you love Grace of course you must marry her. Well, do

. . . I don't care! I shall be married myself, soon, shan't I, Cabs?" She turned, with the defiance in her voice translated into her movement, and looked at her sister, who replied coolly yet pitifully:

"Shall you, Stella?"

Roden, feeling that perhaps he had been rather unnecessarily unkind at the opening of the interview, put out a hand to touch the younger girl's shoulder. She withdrew sharply.

"Don't touch me!" she exclaimed. "It would make me cry again. Leave me alone—I wanted to look at Caroline."

"Here I am," the latter remarked.

"*You're* not happy, any fool can see that," said Stella thoughtfully, as though a whole world of implications and realisations was newly opened to her eyes. "And I'm not happy, and I suppose Hal can't be. Perhaps Roden and Grace will be." She turned yet again to the young man. "Well, I hope I'll never *see* you being happy, that's all. I think I might forget all about you if I never saw you—you and your Grace. I'd rather not have you at all than in little bits, like Cabs does—much rather—" she paused, then adding: "I'm

going to bed," she went straight out, and left the pair staring at each other.

"She's hysterical," Caroline said presently, "she's had several outbreaks about you lately and I couldn't make it out at all. What was in the letter?"

"It was what you'd call high-falutin'," Roden answered.

Presently Caroline pursued: "I think she must be rather in love with you, though it seems a dreadful thing to say. Poor Stella—not happy either . . . Did you know, Roden, that mother was in love with some one else when she married Hal?"

"Oh, was she?"

"That's why she always rushed about so. She loved him for a long time, like I do Gerald."

"One can love hundreds of people in hundreds of different ways. Has mother really come round to my marrying Grace?"

"Yes, more or less. Are you doing well, Roden?"

"Fairly well. I like the work—I'm general bottle-washer as well as artist. I interviewed a man to-day who knew ten times as much about the inside of a car as I do, and by the

time he left I'd learnt as much as he knew. He thought I was a brightish young fellow." He grinned.

"When shall you get married?"

"About Christmas, I think, if we can find some rooms. Grace wants to go on working. She has to dispose of her old hag of a mother, first; I won't take *her* on," said the young man with calm ruthlessness.

"You'll do well," said Caroline presently, with a familiar feeling of vicarious pride and certainty of success.

"So would you, if you'd settle down to it," said Roden.

"Settle down to what?"

"Anything—marriage, enjoying yourself, work, love—ordinary life, in fact. Don't stand aside and be so critical."

"That's life to me; just as much as the use of my five senses is. To be critical is as inevitable as to see and hear. You wouldn't by choice lose one of your senses."

"It's my turn to quote scripture this time," the young man said almost gaily; " 'If thy eye offend thee.' Poverty may do the trick, Cabs."

"You mean adversity may bring out my finer nature," she returned with irony. "I'm

more likely simply to get red hands from washing up or a rough forefinger from sewing. Roden, I shall have to darn! Mother never will. And if Stella does get married I shall be alone with Francis and mother and Hal. What *will* it be like?" In spite of her dismay at the image thus conjured up, she, too, was almost gay. Roden, when he did not depress her, often made her gay, communicating to her temporarily some of his relish for existence.

"There are so many things to do," he said; "it won't be like anything else. You can make it quite different from anything else that ever happened. Don't you see that the fund of possibilities is huge?"

"I see the possibility of becoming domestic," she answered. "It's all very well to joke, but it *is,* it *must* be, horrible to be poor."

"I wasn't joking. You'll have enough to eat and a bed to sleep in and—if there isn't a coal strike—warmth. On that basis one can rear an immense erection. O Cabs, our life is only just beginning."

"Don't say that, Roden—Oh, don't! I comfort myself that I've got through twenty-seven years."

"Oh, you're abnormal."

"So I thought. But all I can say is, Hugh and Stella and mother must be abnormal too. And what about Hal?—his games with money may have been a distraction, just like mother's. As mother says, one must do something to pass the time."

Roden growled. "We're beginning again. Same old song! Let's go to bed."

She took his arm as they left the room, conscious of his affection for her, despite their differences; content, unlike Stella, to "have him in litle bits." He would never go farther from her than he now was, his place in her was fixed; and she felt the same security in him. She thought: Some of the best things are unalterable, too.

XIII.

Before lunch on Tuesday—a warm, sunless day—Francis returned. Caroline, sitting in the garden with a book, saw him come up the steep drive with his usual jaunty step; but when he drew nearer she saw that he did not look well.

"Where's everybody?" he asked, as though to forestall her questions.

"Stella's playing tennis at the Grange; mother's gone over to lunch with the Leversons. Where have you been?"

"Where's Hal?" was all he said.

"In town, of course, seeing about selling the house and getting a job."

"Getting a job?" Francis echoed.

"Well, you didn't suppose he was going to sit still and do nothing, did you? What have you been doing?—we've been worried about you."

"I'm sorry," he answered, but that was all; yet his tone was not casual. He stood uncertainly at his impatient sister's side, his chin raised as ever. His glance went to the house,

to the view, everywhere but to her face. She was moved by his look of weariness and by his hesitating pose, and yet, as usual, vaguely repelled. She repeated sharply: "Tell me what you've been doing."

"Walking, mostly." He moved indeterminately towards the house.

"You're very secretive," said Caroline.

"You're very inquisitive," he retorted.

She began to be sorry, then, she had not controlled her impatience. She had the impression, too late, that, as the first person to encounter him on his return, she had held the key to something it was important to know. And besides this vague, unformulated feeling was the reproach of common sense; for to antagonise one of the people with whom she was to share close quarters and poor circumstances was short-sighted.

"Interest does verge on inquisitiveness," she remarked, "but in this case I think it really is interest."

Standing half turned away from her, the boy replied: "You'll only sneer if I tell you: you're so damned superior."

"Sneer"—what a horrible word, what a degrading suggestion it carried! Was this how

she appeared to her young brother? Was this the total effect of her conscious ironic aloofness, her critical fastidious attitude—the effect of a sneer? What was the use of her experience, her analysis, her introspection her vaunted sensitiveness if she was simply a person who sneered at others, and so forfeited their confidence? As at her mother's careless words in Monsal Dale, she felt the blood withdrawing from her cheeks, from her neck—withdrawing in a chill shiver down her spine. For an instant she had seen herself from the outside; and the vision was exceedingly unpleasant. She spoke, not impulsively but deliberately:

"I won't, Francis; I promise I won't. I know I'm odious and supercilious—yes, 'damned superior'; but I'll try not to be as bad in future. And I'm not feeling like that now. It's not even curiosity; it's just that I have a natural interest in why you left here without a word and stayed away two nights. But if you don't want to tell me, don't. I don't deserve to to be told things if I sneer."

Perhaps the sincerity of her speech struck him; at all events, Francis took off his hat and sat down on the grass with his arms round his knees. "This is what I actually did," he said.

"I went to Castleton on Sunday, and prowled about there all evening. It's a topping place, Cabs!—the spookiest hole you've ever struck. I explored Cavedale and Pindale and all about. Of course there were a good many people, it being Sunday. I slept that night at the pub there. Then, yesterday, I walked to Edale. It was rippingly desolate and lonely up there. I slept last night at a pub, and caught a very early train here."

"That's what you 'actually did,' " quoted his sister thoughtfully, not looking at him.

The boy glanced at her quickly, and exclaimed: "I will say you have something to be cocky about; for you are clever, Cabs."

Caroline smiled with real pleasure at this artless tribute, and waited. There was a long silence. Francis lit a cigarette and changed his position several times. Presently he glanced at his watch and said: "Thank the Lord it's nearly one. Will Stella be in to feed?"

"I don't think so. No, I know she won't."

But even this assurance of prolonged privacy produced no further revelation. The girl perceived that she would have to "pump" him. She began to talk at random of their plans—the sort of house that Hal was going to look

for; Stella's expressed intention of marrying soon ("I suppose that means Lakenbridge; I like him, he's a sport," was Francis' comment); their mother's predominant anxiety that she wouldn't have sufficient occupation; her new craze, inaugurated by to-day's visit to an "occultist" friend, for theosophy; and their father's hopes for the post of secretary to one of the companies of which he had been a director.

"I suppose," said Francis, gazing past her at the view, "Hal will wangle me a stamp-licking job in the city."

"I expect that's what he means to do—why, didn't he say anything about it to you on Sunday?"

"Yes. He did." There was some hesitation in the reply.

"Is there anything you fancy more? I'm sure Hal will agree to anything sensible. He's not a bit unreasonable, ever."

"It would be stupid not to make the most of having a parent in the business line. I can't say I want to farm, and I'm not good enough to become a professional cricketer."

"Are those the only alternatives?"

"Well, there isn't much choice for a chap

with no particular education and no training at all, is there? The university is supposed to fit one for lots of things, but I never heard that a public school did."

It might have been Caroline herself speaking, so cool and sceptical were the tones, so nonchalantly fluent the words; but she was too closely occupied in trying to penetrate her brother's mind to perceive his likeness to herself. "Yes," she said, "if you can bear the idea of an office, that is the obvious thing to do, with Hal on the spot and knowing all about the city. You're passable at maths, aren't you?"

"Moderate." There was a defiance in his utterance of the word out of all proportion to its import, and the girl glanced at him in surprise. She did not know, probably he himself did not know, that it was a defiance thrown at the dejection which he had set himself to ignore, and which the image of himself on an office stool brought to life again. With some dim inkling of this, Caroline exclaimed softly:

"Poor Francis."

"Don't pity me, for heaven's sake, Cabs! It's no worse for me than for you or anyone. It's hardest on poor old Hal. Only I do damn well wish I'd grown up five years earlier—I

don't mean so as to avoid this crash, but so as to have been in the war. I do envy that blighter Roden."

"I know you do. But you needn't resent pity, Francis. There's nothing despicable in people who care for you being sorry for you—they can't help it, in fact. You're sorry for Hal."

"Yes, but I wouldn't let him see it. And look here, Cabs, for the Lord's sake don't let on to Hal—or to mother, if it comes to that—that I've been grousing."

"You haven't been grousing. But I won't talk to them about you at all."

"Oh, you can, just about what you think," he answered. "Hal may ask your advice about me—I shouldn't be surprised."

"I should."

"Well, surely one of the things which makes you look down on the family is because you've got your head screwed on tight. Hal knows that, trust him. By the way, where's the *Mail?* I must see how Essex is doing."

Caroline groaned inwardly at this intervention of country cricket in the course of such a promising conversation.

"When will Hal be back here?" Francis

asked when he had assured himself that his faith in the Essex team was not proved a mistaken one.

"I don't know if he'll come back at all. We have the house till September 15th. He hopes, by then, to have got his future more or less settled, and a new house found."

"What about Roden?"

"He came down for the night yesterday: he had to go back early this morning. He's probably going to be married at Christmas."

"To the girl mother calls alternately Paper, Caper, and Taper?" His smile showed revived spirits. "Any news from Evelyn?"

"Yes, mother had a letter this morning; she'd written to him on Sunday, and he seems to have seen Hal yesterday. It was a very nice letter, but very non-committal."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean he didn't offer to share his last crust with us. I have a feeling, as a matter of fact, that Evelyn had already had a womanly intuition several weeks ago that he'd better prepare a cosy little raft for himself. He's been distinctly off-handish, though quite polite, of course, to both mother and Stella, the week-ends he's been down here."

"Oh, I hadn't noticed. There's the gong."

It was an apparently quite normal Francis who sat down to lunch at Caroline's right hand, in spite of the traces of fatigue in his face. His sister could not, however, quite put aside her idea that there was something vital he had kept from her in speaking of his flight from home. The phrase "this is what I actually did" had struck her, with its implication of information withheld. She had spoken the truth in saying that it was interest as opposed to curiosity that made her enquire into his actions; and as far as these two emotions can be separated, they were separated in Caroline Peel. She was not an inquisitive person; she had not that maddening, and yet so human, supposedly feminine, defect. But she was not too supercilious nor too self-centred to be interested in anything people voluntarily told her; and in this particular case, the events of the week-end had combined to put her in a state of unusual watchfulness. She was on the look-out for revelations; she expected to be surprised; her attitude to her whole family had undergone a very radical change. She was, moreover, piqued by Francis's reserve. He was, after all, merely a schoolboy, even if not

quite such a dense one as she had supposed; she had gone as far as to apologise to him for part of her conduct in the past, and to solicit his willing confidence; who was he, her junior by ten years, to be stubborn in face of these conciliatory gestures? He evidently did not realise his advantage in having her for a sister! Her pity for him began to melt away before a recurrence of familiar irritation.

"Do you think I'd better go to town in case Hal wants me?" the boy asked her when the maid had left the room. "I might be useful; besides, he might want me to interview some one."

"I don't think that's very likely, in August," she answered. "But I dare say you could make yourself quite useful, and help in house-hunting." It came to her, all of a sudden, that it was unkind to have let her father go all alone to London, to tired, dusty, empty Kensington, when he was in trouble and about to undertake the distasteful and arduous task of dealing with the practical side of their situation. "I might come too," she added impulsively; "we could look at houses together, and discard the hopeless ones. Then Hal and mother can inspect the residue. What a good idea! And

there'll be a fearful lot of turning out of things to do at the house, and packing up. Hal meant us to do it in September; but it would be much better to start at once. It might be quite fun. Roden's still there, you see." Francis not replying, a new thought occurred to her, and she went on: "Or did you like the idea of being alone there with Hal, without any females at all?"

He looked, for a moment, embarrassed, at his plate, but finally met her glance, and said: "I had some sort of an idea like that."

"I'm glad you told me. Well, I won't butt in." She could not, however, altogether hide the fact that she was crestfallen.

"I don't mean to be nasty, Cabs."

"I know you don't, and it's not nasty. I'd much rather you said. I'll keep to the original plan. But do go up yourself."

"D'you think it would annoy Hal to have me buzzing round?"

"Of course not. Why should it? On the contrary, he'll be pleased."

Caroline was beginning to perceive that Francis attached some special significance to this plan. "Had you ever had any idea," she presently asked him, "that . . . things might

go wrong—I mean that our fortunes weren't secure?"

"*Good Lord!* no; not the slightest."

"Mother had, of course. There've often been scares, she says. I suppose Hal's hung over the brink of ruin several times, and always just recovered."

"It never occurred to me," said Francis, flushing a little, "that he wasn't as safe as—as the Bank of England."

"Nor to me. Yes, that's exactly what he *did* seem: a sort of monument of safety and respectability."

"But you don't suppose—you don't mean ——?" the boy broke off, with a dark flush suffusing his shallow, small-featured face, fixing on his sister a startled and rather shamed gaze. "I say," he added, looking away again, "it's beastly to talk like this! I feel like a criminal."

Here, thought Caroline, is some schoolboy taboo I'm not familiar with. "There's nothing disloyal discussing what's a fact," she pointed out, conscious of sententiousness.

"Disloyal! That's it!" he echoed. "That's what I've been. And you seemed just now to be trying to say that Hal had got something to

be ashamed of."

"Did I? No, I didn't. What do you mean? There's nothing dishonourable in losing your money that I know of."

"Well, you said he'd *seemed* to be a monument of respectability and something or other."

"Oh, goodness! I didn't mean anything by that, except that I'd looked on him as solid and he turned out—or rather that I looked on him as hardly human, and he's turned out to be very human indeed."

"Oh, was that all? Still, I don't much care for talking about him behind his back. You see, I feel I've behaved . . . disloyally already in running away like that, as though I couldn't face the music. Exactly as if it wasn't twenty times worse for *him* than for anyone else."

"Not one of us had the slightest idea why you'd gone, so nobody thought badly of you. We were just worried."

"But it was an idiotic way to behave, if not caddish. Oh, I don't suppose Hal noticed if I was there or not; but still, I *ought* to have been there, if you see what I mean."

Caroline nodded.

"I felt as if I'd been knocked silly," Francis went on, staring about in the effort to find

words. "As if the bottom had been knocked out of everything."

"Yes," said his sister, "we'd always all depended on Hal so utterly without knowing it."

"Yes, It didn't seem as if things could go on. And then Cambridge being biffed—that, on top of the surprise, seemed too perfectly beastly to stick. I imagined myself cooped up in an office from year's end to year's end, doing frightfully monotonous work, and never seeing life or having any sort of a time at all, and getting a wizened old clerk. Well, it *is* a pretty foul outlook," the boy ended, with a fresh access of dejection. Before Caroline could think of any obvious consolations to offer, he pursued: "Still, there it is. One's got to make the best of a beastly bad job. 'Sno use grousing. I was a perfect young ass on Sunday—I didn't know I could be such an idiot, or have the blue devils so badly. After I'd tramped about in Castleton for a bit I bucked up. A squint over some of those cliffs settled me. I didn't fancy coming home, even then, so I went on to Edale. However, going to sea seemed the only alternative, so I came back."

"Do you mean you chose Castleton because you knew there were precipices?"

"Don't get the wind up, Cabs; it's all over now. You've no idea what I felt like: all the worst moments in my life lumped together. I didn't know one *could* have such blues. I couldn't see a single thing that made life worth living—the sort of life stamp-lickers lead. And yet I don't believe I'd have minded anything like so much if the crash had come through some one else."

"Through mother, for instance?" Caroline suggested. "I understand that. It was Hal letting you down that made it so bad. But there he still is, and he needs you more than ever."

"Yes," Francis agreed, "that did occur to me—rather late, it's true . . . By Jove, Cabs, this Wensleydale is a first-class cheese. Here, I'll carve you off a bit."

XIV.

Hugh Sexton was walking along Piccadilly, unconscious of decisive events in the lives of some of his friends, not having yet received Caroline's letter, when he saw Roden Peel advancing with his odd, attractive walk and his self-absorbed look, slightly dispelled to-day, perhaps, by the rich summer beauty of the town. Instead of passing blindly by, as Hugh expected, Roden stopped and said: "I suppose you've heard the news?"

"No. Your news?"

"The family's. Hal's gone smash—at last."

Through his groping, but not astounded, consternation, Hugh discerned in the other's final words a tone of relief. He made no answer at once; to ask "Are you sure?" would be impertinent; yet this was his impulse, for rumours of ruin circle continually round the names of well-known members of the Stock Exchange as birds encircle the head of Angus, the Celtic god; and, further, he knew Roden's taste for dramatic occurrences and clearly de-

fined situations. "Do they all—do Lady Peel and Caroline know?" he enquired.

"Yes. I got a letter from Cabs this morning —that's how I know. I'm going down there this afternoon to see how things stand."

There was silence. Roden stared up at the roofs, dazzling as metal in sunshine, and Hugh watched him, conscious as usual of the atmosphere of power which Caroline's brother bore about with him, indefinable and hard to trace to its source.

"How did she sound?"

"Oh," Roden answered, resting his eyes for a moment on Hugh's face, "I couldn't tell you. She only said that the whole cat was out of the bag. Well, Hugh, I must get along. Couldn't you come down there with me?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't possibly get away till the day after to-morrow. Tell Cabs I'll come on Wednesday, if that's convenient."

"Right. What a mess! Good bye."

Hugh, deflected by the news from his course towards a tailor, climbed on an eastward-going omnibus for purposes of meditation. On top of Caroline Peel's emotional bankruptcy came this disaster; her material life was now in ruins. If only he loved her! For if he had

loved her, however vainly, with her affection and trust, and their candid intimacy to help, he might have shown her the way to a new existence, into a life that was not half death. But they were too much alike to love: stricken as they were with the same disease. Not that he believed himself, because life-sick, incapable of emotion: it was merely that Caroline was not steel to his tinder. Between two children of such a tired civilisation only friendship was possible. To smite or to draw him into passion a woman would have to combine Caroline's delicacy of touch and fineness of perception with courage, enthusiasm, and a bolder outlook.

That this fact constituted for him perhaps a permanent misfortune, admiring and knowing her as he did, he was fully aware; but for her temporarily it constituted a misfortune too, because sudden crises seem to demand prompt action and definite solutions. For Sir Harold and Lady Peel, drabness might supervene, a disagreeable, even a pathetic fate; but for such a fate to submerge a young, attractive, and intelligent woman was not less than tragic in the eyes of a young man, even a young man with no closer tie than affection. He knew all the

Peels too well to have an indistinct vision of Caroline's future; without deliberately conjuring up the actualities of poverty, he reflected that an attitude of supercilious toleration of one's family,—an attitude maintainable in a large house, on large means, without much unpleasantness,—tends in straitened circumstances and at close quarters to be transformed into a direct emotion of dislike, even of hatred. Hugh foresaw with repulsion the increased sharpness of tongues and shortness of tempers, the differences of opinion quickly degenerating into bickering—foresaw the hostile bitter women that Caroline and Stella and Lady Peel would become in restricted space and with restricted activities. Sir Harold and Francis would escape; Stella would probably escape; and some escape must also be devised for Caroline. It was not, after all, improbable that she would come in contact with a man able to give her back a taste for life, a belief in the possibility of happiness; but if this event delayed too long the chance would have passed by. "I think," said Hugh grimly to himself "I shall have to set up a Sexton's Matrimonial Agency."

He received her letter next morning; it told

him nothing except that she had a great deal to tell him; that more had occurred than mere financial ruin—he smiled a little at the proud, characteristic "mere"—that she hoped he would come that week to visit them. Hugh was a little surprised at her reserve.

She met him, on Wednesday, at Sheffield; and together they drove across the high misty moors, whose austerity was enriched but not diminished by the wine-glow of the heather. It was a wet day, and having, without encountering the rest of the family, ensconced themselves in a small sitting-room with a fire, they drew close to the hearth, as though by common consent refusing to glance at the grey, rain-spattered window. Hugh, with his customary unlugubrious gravity, kept his eyes on Caroline's face as she related in detail the story of the week-end. He leaned by the mantel-piece, his back to the light which fell pallidly on his companion's countenance, and as he filled his pipe he put to her first one and then another question, and yet a third, drawing from her mind a lantern beam upon the obscurer aspects of her narrative, the obscurer passages of the conversations which she had reproduced for him. He had spoken no word, he had felt

scarcely a pang of pity during her narrative, so closely did he share her angle of vision, so absorbed was he in her revelations and her comments, so united with her in her quiet astonishment and curious pleasure. There was pleasure for Caroline of an odd, rarefied and subtle kind, in weighing, examining and computing, for their value, the secrets which the crisis had brought to light; the secrets were a treasure, rich and simple and complex as only human secrets can be. And he experienced, while listening and speaking, a satisfaction that was almost a relief from pain, in perceiving how much these discoveries meant to her, and what they would mean in time to come. Of course, much of their charm would wear thin with familiarity and fade with time; that was where art had the grin of life,—because life can keep the lustre of its jewels, the perfect poise and contour of its grouped figures, only in memory. But, passing into her memory, these discoveries would pass, too, into Caroline's inmost existence, and become there an inseparable part of that conception of life which is life's finest product. That he was able to share with her, so soon after the events, her review of them was part of the privilege of being her

friend; it bestowed on him also the power of recalling her to a sense of their importance when and if, in future she showed signs of belittling it; he would, in some sort, stand guardian to the faith she now, by implication, professed; the faith that, given that we seem to ourselves to exist, how we exist is of supreme importance. He did not mean to touch at once on this, the more transcendental aspect of the situation; there would be time and opportunity for that when they returned to it, a little way hence. At last he sat down opposite her, and said: "Does the future appal you?"

"Curiously enough, not more than it ever did," she answered. "Sometimes I think it will be dreadful being cooped up with the others; but I don't believe that, as long as we've actually got enough to live on, I shall mind much. It isn't as if I'd so frightfully enjoyed life up till now. I want to try and get work; I can't imagine what sort for I'm not competent to do anything; but as there won't be any margin for amusements, it will be rather grizzly having nothing special to do."

"But you haven't ever amused yourself very hilariously," the young man pointed out. "Not that I don't applaud your desire to work; but

you'll still know all the same people; you'll still want to see them."

"It's rather difficult. Of course there are one or two—Ann for instance—that I shall be on just the same terms with. But there aren't very many people that one can see without giving any sort of return. Of course the 'intellectuals,'" she added with a smile, "don't expect to be asked to dinners and dances, and I suppose I can go to their parties still. But all the ordinary friends that I have in common with Stella and mother—of course they aren't friends really—are the sort of people who assume that one has money. They expect one to play bridge for money, and go to Albert Hall balls and race meetings, and to have a car; or anyway they entail taxis. And besides, I expect a lot of them will drop us like hot coals when they hear."

"A good many, surely, will ask you to their parties for the pleasure of seeing you."

"I doubt it. . . . You know I regard myself as fairly unsociable compared with Stella and mother; but do you know, Hugh, I was looking at my engagement book—the early part of this year's—last night, and it's amazing how much I went about. It seems to have slipped off me

like water off a duck's back; I don't *feel* as if I'd had a giddy season; and yet there were at least two engagements booked every day, and often more. Well, that will inevitably stop. Even if people ask me out because they like me, I simply shan't have the clothes to go in."

"Do you know at all accurately what your income will be?"

"No. I don't know what salaries secretaries of companies get."

"About £800 or £1,000. And you've none of your own left?"

"Mother has two hundred a year. So far, she's used that all on dressing. Stella and I have never had fixed allowances, but we must have spent quite that much each on clothes and going about. Roden has had an allowance of £150 ever since he left school. We must have lived at an awfully high rate; what with the car, and the house, and holidays and entertaining. We have six servants, besides the chauffeur. . . . Oh, there's no end to what we've taken perfectly for granted!"

There was a long silence while Caroline contemplated the extravagances of herself and her family. Presently Hugh asked: "Do you

think Stella will marry Geoffrey Lakenbridge?"

"She had a wire from him this morning from Berwick to say he was coming down to-morrow if we can find him a room at the pub. Of course he'll come here. I don't know what she said to him in her letter; but from that I suppose she revived his hopes."

"And you think the famous interview with Roden brought her to that?"

"I think it had occurred to her, naturally, as a way out, when she realised how bad the crash was; but I can't help feeling, though it may all be rot, that she put off the decision with some sort of an idea of getting hold of Roden—of making him notice her and be fond of her; and that when she found it was no good she simply took the plunge and wrote to Geoffrey."

"Not that she wouldn't have done it in the end, anyway," said Hugh. "After all, no amount of affection from Roden would have made a very restricted and uninteresting life tolerable to her."

"I don't know—people are queer. I think she might have stood it for quite a long time. But anyway, Roden's too much taken up with Grace and his work—Stella doesn't come into

it at all. I hardly do, although he and I are so fond of one another."

"But you aren't upset about him and Grace Draper, are you?"

"No. I feel he belongs to me whoever he marries, and I to him whoever I marry. It goes far deeper than that. I don't mean that his love for Grace isn't real; it's probably greater than his love for me, because they're congenial, and pash comes into it, too; but our affection is independent of other emotions, and of circumstances."

"I think I understand," said Hugh.

Caroline looked at him with unsmiling satisfaction: "I know you do: that's why we're friends. I could never talk to Roden as I do to you; he'd get impatient, or irritated to my point of view; or else he'd be too taken up by his own affairs. . . . You are good to me, Hugh; and I don't do anything in return."

"One doesn't measure obligations like that," the young man answered. "Friendship just is."

"There's five striking; they must be having tea. What a time we've been talking." She did not, however, rise; and presently Hugh said:

"I can't help thinking how at home Gerald would have been in this affair—saying all the right things, and making your mother feel gay and interested about it."

"He would have made losing one's money seem somehow a kind of adventure," Caroline agreed. "He *did* enjoy life. So did I in those days; but only because I hadn't the faintest idea what things were really like."

"Gerald would have gone on thinking it splendid and amusing."

"Yes," Caroline agreed; "I believe his happiness was real, because it was inside him; not, like mother's and Stella's, made up of exterior things. They aren't happy—I don't think they ever will be. About Hal I'm still not sure. Oh, Hugh, I forgot to tell you of a conversation I had with mother yesterday. I was asking her about money, and about whether she'd ever had to economise, and if so, why we'd never been told. I suppose I showed that I didn't see *why* Hal had been, need have been, so rash and risked almost everything in one venture; because she suddenly said: 'Don't you know, Cabs darling, men must have a hobby—and most of them have a vice—women or drink or betting or golf, or something; well, Hal's was

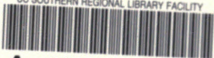
speculation.' It's her same idea again: 'One must pass the time somehow.' "

"Part of me is shocked and revolted by that idea," said Hugh, "and yet I suppose that's what I do, by means of work, six days out of seven, or—if you like—three hundred and sixty-four out of the year; but on the remaining day comes something that's good in itself."

Caroline remembered the blue dragon fly by the river in Monsal Dale. "Don't go to-morrow," she commanded suddenly, "let your people wait another day. I'd like to go for a drive in the car with you, even if it's wet. We shan't have the car in a few weeks. Do you remember going down the hairpin bend on the way to Longnor last year?"

Hugh nodded at her, and in the contemplation of a day in the past, and of to-morrow, they shared a moment's happiness.

THE END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