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OUT OF THE WEST LAND

By the Same Author—

THE GREEN LEAF

THE HALF-BREED

STORY OF GREY OWL

OUT OF THE WEST LAND

BY
LOVAT DICKSON

*The winds out of the west land blow'
My friends have breathed them there;
Warm with the blood of lads I know
Comes east the sighing air . . .*

A. E. HOUSMAN

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1945

To
CANADA
FOR HER GIFTS

*. . . Deare Countrey ! O I how deareley deare
Ought thy rembraunce and perpetual! bond
Be to thy foster Cbilde, that from thy hand
Did commun breath and nouriture receave.
How brutish is it not to understand
How much to her we owe, that all us gave ;
That gave unto us all what ever good we have,*

EDMUND SPENCER

CHAPTER ONE

i

THE track they were following, made by the skiers that afternoon, led down a steep hill, and the heavy sleigh tilted and swung sideways at one point where the road sloped steeply. Charlie Donaldson, his diminutive figure in a coon coat and cap seeming unfamiliarly bulky outlined against the clear night sky, rose to his feet, pulling on the reins, and shouted hoarsely but affectionately at the three great farm horses labouring fetlock-deep in the snow.

"Hi-yah, Belle. Hi-yah, Tom. Come up, ye bastards. Come, Nellie, girl.';

The creaking of harness, the shrill scream of runners on the snow, were no louder than the deep, straining breath and the sound of cracking muscles as the horses struggled to regain the path and to offset the sideways pull of the low heavy sleigh. With a last mighty heave they did it. When they reached more level ground, the sleigh rode easily behind the team, and the twenty young bodies that had tumbled on each other as the sleigh lurched off the path, disentangled themselves and scrambled amongst the straw for their own places again.

Charlie Donaldson raised his voice to the stars in song:

She came over the mountain, my bonny,
Came over the mountain to me.
Oh, my dear darling Annie McGonnie,
She is worth the whole world to me.

The horses, pulling now along a level valley bottom, were breasting the harness and delighting in their easy burden, tossing their great heads and heavy manes while their breath rose in clouds above them. Though Charlie addressed them with affectionate profanity, and constantly levelled at them the most insulting accusations regarding their origins, he never laid an angry hand on his horses. After work, when they stood in their stalls, he hissed and hopped about them like an affectionate gadfly, watered, fed and bedded them, and smote their flanks

lovingly before he left them for the night. Not Annie McGonnie herself, that mountain-bestridding Valkyrie who flamed in Charlie's imagination from time to time, drawing from him bursts of adoring song, could have felt as Tom and Belle and Nellie did about the little Nova Scotian. So that between tosses of their heads and gargantuan snorts as they expelled breath from their labouring lungs into the frosty air, they laid their ears back, and listened with respect to the voice of their god in communion with his beloved.

But in the body of the sleigh a different view was taken. The talk and laughter that arose from the dark, box-like depth knee-deep in straw had gone on without interruption since at seven o'clock, as the moon was rising, they had set off from the McPherson farm for the sixteen-mile drive to Acadia.

"Hi-yah, Annie, come up, girl." "Where's that buzzard that stole Annie?" "Come on, Charlie, next verse."

Charlie grinned into the darkness.

"The young devils," he thought affectionately. "I've known them all since they were knee-high to a grasshopper, and now, just because the boys wear long pants and the girls put their hair up, they think ..."

"Miss Elaine," said Charlie, "you certainly have got a lot of roughneck friends, and I'm surprised you clutter up my sleigh with them. Tom and Belle and Nellie here certainly wouldn't lower themselves to make fun of a man's sacred feelings."

Douglas Smith, lifting himself on one elbow, emerged from the darkness at the bottom of the sleigh, his face pale and earnest as always.

"I wasn't laughing at you, Charlie. I guess I know how you feel all right."

A chorus of laughter rose from the floor of the sleigh. Douglas scrambled to his feet.

"Can I come up on the buckboard there with you, Charlie?"

"Why, sure, son, but it's kinda freezin' cold up here. Down there you got hilarious company and warm straw, and maybe a pretty girl to hold your hand. You'll feel isolated up here."

"I'd rather be with you, Charlie. Honest, I would. I ... I like looking at the horses," confessed Douglas shyly.

"You come right along, son."

Charlie slung his leg back over the buckboard and faced the trail again and Douglas scrambled over the seat and sat beside

him. Belle and Tom, with old Nellie on the lead, swung their mighty weights forward, a ton and a half of beautifully co-ordinated muscle and tendon breasting against the heavy harness.

Old Nell was a character. Where there was work to do, she bent her great head, and her tremendous shoulders swelled to take the load. But when there was no need for her effort, and she felt the traces slacken, she allowed herself to indulge in little mannerisms and behaviours of her own. She turned her head to the left or to the right, she exhaled terrific and thunderous snorts through her nostrils, she laid her ears back, shut her eyes, and shook the bit in her great bared teeth.

So they moved forward across the white, silent earth. A quarter-moon hung on the horizon offering pale light in the lower sky. But above that the huge arc curved like an immense polished blue marble bowl, illuminated by the stars, twinkling frantically in that upper atmosphere so that they seemed like small lamps upheld by invisible hands to show off the deep sapphire magnificence beyond.

Now the sleigh seemed to drag itself as it mounted some small incline, now seemed to sweep ahead as it rode down some declivity. All sound in this white, silent world was muted, and seemed to be a distant echo from the blue immensity above, or the white fields of snow flowing away into the distance. Thus softened and unreal were the grunts of the labouring horses, the snapping of the leather traces or the occasional jingle of a harness buckle.

2

Twenty-three years before, that lighted warmth in the darkness towards which they were driving, Acadia, was only beginning to take shape. The 2400 acres which MacTaviot had bought was marked out only by surveyors* pegs and the family lived in a rough log cabin that had been hastily erected to house them that first winter they had come from Nova Scotia to Western Canada. The cold of that winter—it was 1913—had been intense. For weeks the thermometer had stood at 30⁰ below zero, and the sloping fields that stretched as far as the eye could see away from the log cabin had been wrapped in swirling, deep heavy snowdrifts. Occasionally MacTaviot and Charlie had had to go by snowshoe to Edmonton, eight miles away, to fetch

supplies. Neither of them had been expert then on snowshoes. They had arrived in town with ankles bruised by the heavy leather thongs, with numb feet and with the calves of their legs aching from the effort.

"Different from Nova Scotia, Charlie? Are you sorry that you came?" Andrew MacTaviot smiled at his frozen-looking companion, and at the first saloon they reached took him by the arm and led him through the door.

"I wouldn't be anywhere else, chief," responded Charlie loyally, and meant it. .

They clinked, their glasses. "The future," said Andrew MacTaviot, "and may God save Alberta—and us."

Then they threw back their parkas, drew off the one mitten not already disengaged to deal with the drink, and unwound one or two of the scarves from about their necks. From somewhere far inside they extricated pipes and canvas sacks of tobacco. Filling the pipes was a slow and painful process while the hands were still cold. But finally it was done. Then with pipes aglow, and drinks before them, warmed by the heat of the raging Quebec stove, they settled back for a chat.

Andrew MacTaviot had been twenty-three, Charlie three years older, when MacTaviot led the exodus of his wife and two retainers from Pictou County out to Alberta. The fifth son of a family of eleven sons and two daughters, he had had the chance at twenty-two of farming 250 acres cut off from his father's rich farm of 2000 acres as his portion, and 25 steers, 6 head of horses, a selection of farm implements and \$2000 capital. His four older brothers had done this, had married the daughters of other farmers, and as a result of several fruitful years, with the help of their father's advice, had established themselves comfortably, so that the name MacTaviot in that part of the country increased in importance year by year.

Coming home from Dalhousie University in 1908, Andrew was consumed by one great doubt and one great certainty. The doubt was whether three years' work on his father's farm, and the remainder of his life on a small holding nearby, really represented the future that he wanted to follow. The certainty was his determination to marry as soon as he could obtain his father's approval. This last promised to be no easy task. Mr. MacTaviot's passion was his land, and to this all other ideas, whether held by himself or his family, over whom he kept the

strictest control, were subjected. He had made it plain that the parcel of land which was to be handed out to each son when he reached twenty-two was a parental blessing, to be earned by following a certain course of conduct. He expected them to marry and, as he had done, to have a family. But as any stock that he added to his farm was carefully scrutinised for its pedigree, so Mr. MacTaviot made it plain that the wives of his sons must be more than merely decorative. A pretty face would not do. That meant that a woman spent too much time gazing into a mirror, or worrying about her figure if babies came too often. She must be trained to farm work, for as the wife of one of his sons she would have to work until he with her help had established himself. No girl from a town or city could be expected to do that. And so, although he sent each of his sons to Dalhousie—for he had the old-fashioned Presbyterian respect for education—he strictly warned them in advance, and continually admonished them by letter while they were there, to form no entangling alliances with young women of the town.

The four older boys had obeyed, but Andrew, as he had done all his life, gave trouble. Mr. MacTaviot said that he had expected it, that he would not put up with it, that he would cut the boy off. Mrs. MacTaviot listened patiently but not as fearfully as might have been expected, considering that the fate of her favourite son was at stake. She comforted herself by remembering that Andrew had always managed to get around similar threats and interdicts in the past, when there was a sufficiently compelling reason, and Mrs. MacTaviot, reading Andrew's letter, written just before he left Dalhousie, to announce that he wanted to marry Judge Black's daughter, recognised the depth of Andrew's passion revealed in the letter, and though the voice of the elder MacTaviot was raised in anger, thought that Andrew would be bound to find some way out.

Andrew himself followed up his letter within a few days, Mrs. MacTaviot's maternal heart flooded again with joy as she clasped him in her arms. All the MacTaviot men were fine-looking, but what set Andrew apart from his brothers was that he was gentle-looking, as well as handsome. He was not as big as the others, though his frame was broad and his muscles well-knit. Softness was given to his face by his large open brown eyes, an oddity in a family that had the sea-blue eyes of most

Nova Scotians. The elder MacTaviot fumed against the unpredictable behaviour of his son, but sometimes privately felt a little rush of pride that he had fathered so interesting an offspring.

But in the matter of matrimony he was adamant. Judge Black's daughter would never do. Andrew pleaded, argued, used mild threats. These failing, he tried flattery and cajolery. Old MacTaviot would have none of it. Andrew fell into deep gloom, not averse to conveying the impression that unless his desire were gratified suicide was the alternative. Old MacTaviot appeared unyielding, but though he did not give his consent, onlookers in the family sympathetic to Andrew's plea were encouraged to observe that his gaze rested on the erring Andrew regretfully and sadly as though he wished this subject had never come up, and that he might be enjoying the geniality and happy humour of his favourite son, instead of suffering martyrdom to uphold his own principles.

Then Mrs. MacTaviot took a daring step. Without telling her husband what she was doing, she wrote to Elspeth Black and asked her to come and spend a week at Braeside. Andrew drove in to meet Elspeth at the station. On the way back to the farm, he broke the news to her that his father did not know that she was coming, that he had been unable to get his approval to their marriage, that she had been brought here to help them, by her beauty and charm of manner, to mount a final assault against the old man's obduracy. Judge Black's daughter, who might have married any one at Dalhousie, and whose father thought she was throwing herself away on a farmer, met this news unperturbed, having already convinced herself that Andrew was worth anything in the world. She was therefore quite prepared to play her part.

Old MacTaviot was at first frozen and severe, and immensely angry, though only in private, with his wife for having led him into this trap. Elspeth played her part well, helping Mrs. MacTaviot in the house, charming the old man with all her power, keeping herself tirelessly and constantly exhibited before his eyes as a young lady of common sense and domestic virtues. By the end of the week old MacTaviot had capitulated. A great family dinner was held to celebrate the announcement of the engagement; and so relieved was MacTaviot [to be](#) on terms again with his son, and so impressed was he with the

qualities he had discovered in Elspeth during that week, that he made quite a speech on that occasion, adjuring the wives of the others in stern, head-of-the-clan tones to look after the little lassie, and give her a helping hand until she found her feet among their rough, wild ways or living.

So Andrew and Elspeth were married. They settled down on their 250 acres, their two thousand dollar patrimony, and the little farm waxed and flourished, and Andrew's small bank account swelled. But he saw a limit to the possibilities of expansion here, hemmed in as he was by his family and four older brothers. For a long time he toyed with the thought of going West, where he could have a large holding of land for a relatively small investment of capital. It would be hard work, and a rough pioneer life, but Elspeth was as enthusiastic as he was, and by the spring of 1913 they were ready for the move.

Old MacTaviot, from whom they had expected opposition, applauded the plan. It was in his Scots blood to pioneer. He had left Scotland for the same reason that Andrew was now leaving Nova Scotia; the younger son going further afield so that the older sons' heritage might not have to be too subdivided. He advanced a further sum of capital, and added as well to the party Silas Winchell, his sub-bailiff, called Uncle Silas by Andrew and his brothers and sisters because when they were young he had added to his duties as a farm-worker those of tutor, governess and nurserymaid to some part of the MacTaviot brood. Silas was a good farmer, and he was single and had no ties. Consulted, Silas jumped at the chance. Andrew had always been his favourite among the children, and at forty-seven he yearned for adventure, which had always been missing from his quiet life at Braeside.

Andrew and Elspeth took with them, too, their own two house-servants, a man and wife called Thomas and Norah Barnecroft. There wouldn't be much for them to do as house-servants in the West. They were to help them to break the land.

From that log-cabin in 1913 the great house at Acadia had grown. Andrew now farmed 2400 acres and was the wealthiest farmer in the Edmonton district.

He had gone overseas to the war in October, 1916. He was in France in May, 1917, when a cable reached him to say that Elspeth had borne a daughter. The child was christened

Elaine, and he had to feed his imagination and his happiness on snapshots and letters until January, 1919, when he got back to Canada and was demobilised.

3

While the sleigh party was approaching Acadia from the north-east, Silas Winchell was making his way northwards from town with the aid of the horse, Betty. The moon had risen nearly an hour before, and as he left the outlying houses of Edmonton and followed the winding road that led to Acadia, he and Betty seemed the only two living things in an immobile, frozen world. Now and then Uncle Silas raised his eyes from the view afforded him by the space between Betty's forward-set ears. He took in the bright expanse the clear wintry sky offered, and mumbled a little to himself before his head sank once more upon his breast.

The air was damnably cold. His nostrils seemed to Uncle Silas to be little channels of aching pain, but to breathe through his mouth made his gums ache, and that he couldn't abide. His thin old face was puckered with irritation as Betty plodded along the snow-covered road. He was irritated, because the cold deterred him from a certain necessary action. This, in spite of the cold, could no longer be supported, when Betty herself paused to answer the call of nature. Uncle Silas slid his long shanks down Betty's side, and mumbled imprecations against the night, the cold, and the fallibility of what he always called his water-works, as he stood with one hand on the pommel of the saddle and relieved himself. As he mounted again, stiffly and painfully, Betty swung her head round to make sure that everything was aboard, then without instructions or encouragement from her master took up her way again.

Uncle Silas buried his chin in his collar, screwed his eyes shut, for the cold air made them water, and relapsed into a dream. In his dream, it was breakfast-time at Acadia, on a fresh, frosty morning in late autumn. Uncle Silas, very natty in a light grey suit, looked at his watch, shook his head, tut-tutted, smiled and said to Andrew that he guessed it was time he was going. They all came to the door to see him off, Andrew and Elspeth, and little Elaine. He felt rather a fool getting into the back seat of the open touring car by himself—well, actually,

not a fool, but rather sorry in a way that his good fortune was so blatantly being paraded before the others. His grey bowler hat had been carefully brushed, and in that moment's pause before the car pulled out he fingered his cravat and felt the pearl stick-pin that sheltered in it.

The train journey to California was pleasant. He had excellent meals, and in the observation car fell into conversation with a rich widow, very dark of eye, very rosy of cheek. By damn, he'd have fallen for her if his resolution had not been sustained by the rapturous images of the sun-tanned beauty that awaited him in the sunny glades and along the sandy beaches of California.

Christmas, the warmth! It melted the stiff joints in his knees, his wrists and his blamed neck. Then it suffused his old body until it settled so firmly that it seemed like the source itself around about his midriff, and he felt like a spring lamb, ready and able to throw his legs into the air, and frisk, by damn, yes, frisk!

And then, as it always did, the dream faded. It was as though, confronted with the spectacle of such freedom of conduct, such all-pervasive warmth, such glades, such girls, Uncle Silas's imagination boggled, and trembling with cold and excitement he returned to the reality of the winter Alberta world about him. He knew then that it could never be. The time for frisking had passed. He was only a scrawny, thin old man, troubled with his prostrate, and dependent on Andrew's bounty for food and shelter. He had made a mess of his life. Nothing had ever come of what he had planned. All his dreams and ambitions had become dust, only his misfortunes had survived parturition, and had lived on to accompany him into his old age. He snivelled bleakly, overcome with self-pity, and Betty flicked her old ears in the moonlight as though she agreed.

He was passing now the fenced boundary of Acadia. Beyond the fence the fields sloped gently upwards. Half a mile away the house stood, hidden by a thick copse of birch. He had to ride parallel to the boundary for another mile before he could reach the iron gate that gave entrance to the MacTaviot property. Recognising the outlines of the estate, Betty had broken into a laboured trot, and Uncle Silas jogged heavily in the saddle. Betty was badly winded, and although Uncle Silas was a light load for her weight, she breathed heavily as she ambled along

the road. Uncle Silas thought to himself: We're both done for, the old girl and me. They give her to me because she's safe and old. And, by God, I bet if these horses could talk, the others would say they give you to old Uncle Silas because *he's* safe and old. If we was to stop here and freeze to death, the two of us, they would never worry. Maybe Charlie would say as he shut up the stables at night, "Where the hell's that old beezzer and Betty?" And maybe Elspeth would say, "Uncle Silas isn't in yet, Andrew. Leave the door unlocked for the old nuisance." And next day they'd come out and find us spread across the road. "Send out the float to carry these two old carcasses away," would say Andrew. And, by God, they'd put us both on a float and drag us down beyond the stable to bury us, with Elspeth saying, probably, "Well, thank heaven, I don't have to tidy up after Silas again," and Charlie saying, "Well, boss, now we ain't got Betty any more to occupy stable-room, there's a young foal I'd like to break and put in her box."

Occupied by these funereal thoughts, Uncle Silas had not noticed the sleigh drawn up inside the boundary gate. Charlie had seen him, and had suggested that they wait there until the old gentleman reached them. "Maybe one of you young gents will ride Betty up to the stables, and we'll take Mr. Silas aboard with us. He'll be cold, and it's a danged sight warmer in this sleigh than it is astride Betty," said Charlie. He did not add that he knew the old man would love this sign of attention, and it would "brisk him up," as Charlie thought, to have a bit of fun with the youngsters.

So that when he arrived at the gate, there was Douglas holding it open for him, and cries of "Come on, Uncle Silas," and "Jump aboard, Uncle Silas" ringing across the snow towards him.

Uncle Silas woke to new life. He swung one leg over the saddle and slid down Betty's flank with every appearance of youthfulness. Then clapping his gloved hands together to restore the circulation, he came with a large smile across his thin old face towards the sleigh.

"Douglas says he'll ride Betty home. He has taken my old lady. I'll take his young one. Which is she?"

"It's me, Uncle Silas. It was, rather." She laughed nervously. "Doug has been sitting up with Charlie," said Phyllis Trevor.

"Well, young lady," responded Uncle Silas, clambering over

the buckboard with the aid of several pairs of hands. "Well," he said, settling stiffly down, "if it isn't my beautiful young Phyllis. Give me your hand, my darling."

Phyllis blushed in embarrassment, while the others laughed. She knew that Uncle Silas was teasing her, but she was afraid that the others might think he meant it, and might make fun—they would make fun of anything, was always Phyllis's sad comment—out of the contrast afforded by Douglas's indifference and the old man's verbal ardour.

Uncle Silas took her hand in his. The moon riding now in a clear patch of sky lit up the sleigh and he could make out the features of every person in it.

"Uncle Si, sing us a song," called Pete, as Charlie started up the team, and the sleigh moved off on the half-mile gentle climb to the house.

"Son, it's too cold. I'd freeze my windpipe."

"Come on, Uncle Silas," begged the others. "There'll be something at the house to drive the icicles out, I bet. Bugs has his mouth-organ."

Bugs, to encourage the artist, whipped off his glove and blew a chord on the instrument.

"What tune will it be, Uncle Si?" he paused to ask.

"Well, son, pipe up 'From His Canadian Home'; that'll do."

Uncle Si cleared his throat. He remembered that it hurt him even to breathe half an hour ago, and that devil of irritation down below had been nagging him unmercifully. Whether it was the prospect of a drink near at hand, or the breath and presence of youth that had driven off both cold and pain, he did not know and did not pause to worry over. As Bugs started to play, he began to sing in a thin, charming, plaintive voice, gazing past the broad back of Charlie at the clear still sky beyond:

From his Canadian home,
Banished a wanderer came,
And full of tears would roam
Countries that strangers claim,
And full of tears would roam
Countries that strangers claim.

They knew the song. It was an old favourite of Uncle Silas's, one they had sung with him many times. Most of them

remembered it from their childhood. When Uncle Si finished the second verse, they joined, as they always did, in the verses that followed. Even Charlie's hoarse voice took up the tune, and when they entered the drive, the ladies in the drawing-room at the front of the house could hear their strong young voices even through the heavy double windows.

C H A P T E R T W O

i

THE company at Acadia had divided after dinner. Andrew MacTaviot had taken the men into the library, and Elspeth had taken the women to the drawing-room. There was no point in settling down to bridge, for the sleigh-drive party would arrive by nine o'clock, and every one had agreed when the point was put at the end of dinner, that there was nothing more fatal to the peace necessary for a rubber than to have a sleigh-load of healthy, hungry children breaking into the middle of it. "I'll take the men into the library for a chat," said Andrew MacTaviot to his wife, "and since it's the festive season I'll have Comma bring us in a bowl of rum punch."

Andrew led Professor Bryden, Dr. Smith and Gordon Vyland into the room he loved best in the house. There a log fire was burning in a stone fireplace, and when they entered the room its flames lit up the comfortable leather chairs and sofa, the book-cases, and the old mahogany desk at which Andrew dealt with the farm accounts and his correspondence. He lit the two reading-lamps that stood, one on the desk and the other over the largest chair by the fireplace, and the orange light softened and warmed the room. Gordon Vyland lit a cigar; the others pulled out pipes, and with the contented sigh of the well-fed and the justifiably weary sat down and stretched their legs towards the fire.

The four men were old friends, and had come to Alberta within a year or two of one another: MacTaviot to farm, the Professor to be head of the English Department at the newly-formed University, Doc Smith to practise medicine and Gordon Vyland to practise law. Their families had drawn them

together as much as their professions and their community of taste, so that now, as the Professor said, they lived out of one another's pockets, and in one another's houses. Doc Smith attended to the ills of all the families; their legal affairs were in the hands of Gordon Vyland, and the Professor had had, or was to have, all the youngsters pass through his hands at the University. They played golf together, hunted in the Fall, and dined together so often that they felt as much at home in each other's houses as they did in their own.

Andrew pressed the bell. Almost immediately the door opened a few inches and a red face poked itself through the opening.

"Yes, chief?" it said.

"Comma, mix us up a bowl of rum punch, and see you bring it hot."

"Yes, chief. I was just going to do that very thing, for I overheard you say to Mrs. MacTaviot it was in your mind you'd have it, and Norah she's got the kettle on the boil. I'll have it here in a jiffy, chief."

The door closed as suddenly as it had opened, and the men smiled at each other.

"One precious asset possessed by Comma," said the Professor, "is that he acts as quickly as he talks. I can almost smell the rum."

"That was probably from his breath," smiled Gordon Vyland. "Perhaps it's the result of wishful thinking on Comma's part that we're being regaled on rum punch to-night. That old rascal has an awful influence on Andrew."

"No," said Andrew, "Comma's red face comes from anxiety, not from indulgence in the bottle. He takes a drink four times a year: at Christmas, on Elspeth's birthday and mine, and on the anniversary of our wedding. He does it, as he does so many things, out of a regard for form. He doesn't attempt to disguise that he finds the taste unpleasant and the effects uncomfortable. But Comma's such a stickler for convention he'd drink those toasts even on his deathbed."

"Zeal I knew he had," said the Professor, "and that it's not misplaced not your story alone, but the evidence of our eyes all through these years has proved to us. But there's still one mystery I'd like to have elucidated." The Professor chuckled comfortably, happily aware of a full stomach, a hot drink to

come, and an undisturbed hour before the fire in the company of his friends. "How in the name of Heck, to invoke the tutelary god of my students, do you manage to run this household so well and comfortably on two domestics, when my lady and myself, with a much smaller establishment, simpler tastes and a God-given meekness that makes us accept humbly any manifestation of inefficiency, cannot keep even an European immigrant in our kitchen for more than six months?"

2

They laughed. The Professor's domestic establishment was one of the standing jokes of the community. The house to which young Don Bryden brought his wife in 1910 was situated about three miles outside Edmonton, a pleasant dwelling set in a green oasis of garden but hemmed in on all sides by the forest which ran to the edge of the North Saskatchewan River. A dirt road, which came to an abrupt stop fifty yards beyond the Professor's house, offered a precarious route to town, though there were not more than three months in the year when it was recognisable as a road. In the spring and early summer it disguised itself under a shifting mass of mud. In the winter, buried deep in snow, it disclosed its identity only by the marks of the Professor's tyre-chains. No tradesmen delivered their goods as far as the Brydens' house. Only the Professor's ancient car, and the cars of his friends, used the road that led from the south bank of the river to the Little Brown House, as the Bryden dwelling was called.

The Professor was sixty, and Rose Bryden was about the same age. What they had been like when they had first come to Alberta twenty-six years before this time, only a few of the older inhabitants remembered. They were young, newly-married, and very anxious to establish the well of English undefiled in this Albertan desert.

The Professor had been a lecturer at Harvard, and Rose Bryden a teacher at Radcliffe. They had met at the house of one of the older professors in Boston, and had found a common interest in their teaching and research work. Rose Bryden was working on Chaucer, and was immensely serious over certain threads of evidence about the poet's life which a close examination of his allegorical pieces and their relation to the events of

the time seemed to offer. She was small, pale, and dark with an ivory skin. Her black hair was parted in the centre and drawn back over each ear to form a bun at the back of her head. Her ears were small and as perfect as coral shells. Her voice was deep and had an attractive huskiness. What chiefly aroused the ardour of Don Bryden was her demure attitude, and why that made him feel no end of a fellow, he could never say. But when she stood or sat beside him at Faculty parties, with her hands folded in her lap, her dark eyes downcast, and spoke to him in her deep warm voice, the thoughts of the young lecturer from Harvard sometimes wandered from the subject of Dan Chaucer and fell to musing upon the coral-pink tips of those ears, and the delight there would be in touching them.

The attraction they had for each other might never have flowered had not Don Bryden's frailness at the end of a hard winter term capitulated before an attack of pneumonia. He survived that, but seemed, as he said to Rose, "an unconscionable time getting better." In the weeks he spent convalescing in hospital Rose came often to see him, and something in Bryden's helplessness and weakness aroused in her for the first time in her life a little emotional flutter, which was betrayed by the sympathy that flooded her dark eyes as she smiled down at him, and by the occasional light touch of her fingers against his forehead. Her slight body seemed to hold itself taut against the surrender of her spirit that showed its eagerness to escape its bonds in these faint but deeply-felt signs of her feelings. Weak though he was, he grasped with all his strength at the evidence of her feeling for him, until with gestures of protest that did not hide her agitation, Rose found herself as intoxicated with her feelings as any of the giggling sophomores of her Radcliffe classes whose amorous flutters she was always condemning.

The weeks passed, and still Don Bryden did not recover. Instead, he seemed to grow thinner and more pale, and more uninterested in life than a convalescent should be. He began to suffer from violent pains in his neck. For some time he kept this a secret from Rose, but not from his doctor, to whom he cursed and swore at the fate that had beset him.

One afternoon, his round face red with irritation, the doctor found Rose waiting outside Don's room while the nurse prepared him for the visitor. On impulse he turned to her, and

asked her to come along to his office. He seated her in a chair across from his desk, unhooked his stethoscope from about his neck, and looked at her in silence for a moment. Then drumming his fingers impatiently on the table, he began:

"We're going to lose that boy unless something can be done to take him out of himself."

Rose said nothing in reply, but he was relieved to see a little frown pucker the smooth skin of her forehead. That gave him encouragement to plunge further.

"Listen, you're as fond of the boy as I am, aren't you? I'm sorry, it's probably an embarrassing question to put to you and you're right in thinking it's none of my business what your feelings are. But what Don feels is my business. If there's something worrying him it's as important for me to discover what it is, and try to put it to rights, as it would be if I suspected that the treatment I was giving him was wrong. Don't think I'm one of these psychological cranks, trying to cure the body through the mind. I'm just a straightforward doctor, dealing with the mechanics of the body just as a motor mechanic deals with an internal combustion engine.

"What's wrong with this boy—" he banged the desk with his fist and glared at Rose—"is that he just doesn't want to live."

Her pale still expression gave no indication of the feelings his brusque words had aroused in her. She looked at him, and spoke in her quiet steady voice.

"What can I do, Doctor?"

He got up, came round the desk, and stood beside her, looking down at the back of her head.

"I've done some strange things in my hospital experience," he laughed, "but I've never before acted as a matrimonial agent. Would you marry my patient, Miss Hammond?"

At Rose's startled look he smiled, and patted her shoulder paternally.

"That's a question Don should have asked you, not me. But you see, he won't; he would die first, and that's no mistake. He has got a tubercular gland. He thinks T.B.'s marked him down for life, condemned him to celibacy. That's nonsense, but only you can persuade him of that. I mean, if there's any proposing to be done, you have to do it."

He looked down at her, and smiled again.

"Won't you help an old fool doctor to save a life, Miss Hammond?"

Two years later Don Bryden returned from Arizona, bronzed by the sun at high altitudes, as springy of step as he had ever been, and with but one mark of the disease upon him. When he was abstracted his head shook a little from side to side as though he deprecated what he looked on. But the appearance of disapproval was denied by the kindly look in his eyes, and by the gentle smile that nearly always played about his lips. It gave him the air of quietly enjoying a good joke; it made him seem always tolerant, understanding, sympathetic and cheerful. When he came with Rose Bryden to Edmonton in 1910, to become Professor of English at the newly-formed University, it made him one of the most popular of the city's inhabitants.

They built the Little Brown House the first summer they were there, and when the first frosts of autumn were colouring with red and gold the wooded promontories of this harsh land, their friends came out to call on them. The wives of Edmonton had seen little of Rose Bryden; they had heard of her only through their husbands, who had gone back occasionally on late summer afternoons to drink a glass of whisky with the Professor. They knew that she was very intellectual, cleverer than her husband, the men-folk had said. They were a little afraid of that, but comforted themselves with the thought that if she spent as much time reading and writing as she was reported to do, her housekeeping must suffer, and they rather hoped that the house would show signs of neglect and the food be not up to their own high standard.

They found the house spotless, which was a little disappointing, and the food unsubstantial. That was all they could say of it. It wasn't bad, but it was odd. For supper they were offered a flaky omelette, some home-made cheese, and a wine Rose herself had made from berries gathered along the banks of the Athabasca. In their own homes there would have been soup, chicken, and a pie, and the guest who did not take two large helpings of everything but the soup would have been uncomfortably conscious of his hostess's disapproval. There was no question of second helpings at the Brydens'. They weren't offered, but even had they been no one could have eaten them without attracting considerable attention. For, oddly enough, neither Don Bryden nor his wife seemed interested in the food.

If a new dish was put before them, they did not break off the conversation, or postpone it until the dish was disposed of. They kept on with what they were saying until the dish was cold and uneatable.

The ladies did not like it. Rose Bryden was calmly unaware of their feelings. The Professor knew what they were thinking, and though his head shook a little more violently, the quizzical smile in his grey eyes deepened. He took a malicious delight in waiting until one of the ladies was about to take a mouthful of food, then, turning to her with a sudden comment or question which would attract the attention of the whole table, force her for politeness' sake to put down her fork. A meal at the Brydens' became agony. But not to the guests alone. The succession of servants employed at the Little Brown House, immigrants from Scandinavia mostly, muttered against the irregularity and tardiness of the meals, and took as a criticism of their cooking the platefuls of uneaten food that came out of the dining-room at dinner parties.

The Professor laughed gently each time Rose came to tell him that the latest Norwegian or Swede to be taken into the kitchen had delivered her notice and was to go.

"My dear Rose," the Professor would say, "they are but birds of passage, and who are we that we should stay their flight? Confess, my dear girl, that you have been as tortured as I by the sound of this woman's heavy feet thumping about in the kitchen. Thank God we are to be free of her. When does she go?"

3

Comma had brought in the rum punch. Its fragrance filled the room, blending with the firelight, the scent of pipe tobacco, setting a comfortable spell on the lazy conversation of the men.

Gordon Vyland smacked his lips over the bouquet. "There is something about rum," he said, "that seems to touch a remoter cockle in a man's heart than any other liquor can. And it's best of all drunk in a room with cedar walls like this. I envy you this room, Andrew. The cold painted walls of my drawing-room are fit only to drink cocktails in. They're as hard and shiny as a dry martini. But these"—he pointed about the library—"are mellow and tawny, like good tobacco smoke or like liquor that has aged in the wood."

Doc's eyes smiled above his fat cheeks as he looked from Gordon to the others, and back to Gordon again. He sat a little forward in his chair, one arm tucked under the other, one leg crossed over the other, a large, stout and benign figure, poised as a sack of coal is poised on the edge of a cart before it is tipped over.

"Taking it all in all, we're damned comfortable folk in this part of the world," continued Gordon Vyland. "There was a time when Marjorie and I thought of nothing but the day when I could sell my practice here and retire. We spent our honeymoon in England. We rented a thatched sixteenth-century cottage in the Weald of Kent, a little white-washed place with thick walls and lattice windows, with a garden all round it that on warm summer nights was heady with the scent of flowers. We had lived all our young lives in this country, and we had known only the long white winter months and the hot, dry burning summer that follows them. Yes, we had had gardens, but nothing that smelt like this one did. We had spent our childhood in well-built, centrally-heated, comfortable houses, as soulless and perfect as this year's car. The inconveniences of that Tudor gem were beyond mortal reckoning, and in winter it must have been as cold and damp as a charnel-house. But to sit in it on a June night and hear a nightingale outside, or to walk out in the moonlight and lean over the gate and watch the sloping fields rising to meet the sky, was an experience worth all the discomfort of living three hundred years behind the times. For years we talked about it, and I suppose the place took on a thousand charms in our imagination. We swore that we would go back there to live out our old age, and die there, and be buried in the old yew-shaded graveyard that lies behind the little church.

"As Doc knows, for he was in the same show, my hopes of a green grave in that old churchyard were almost extinguished on Vimy Ridge. When I was convalescing I spent a leave going back to the little village. Marjorie, of course, was not with me but the echo of the war still was. The little village seemed more than ever a haven of peace, and I could have wept over the quiet serene beauty in such a troubled world.

"I wrote Marjorie about my visit there, and when I got back home I told her about it. We longed for it more and more. It was a sort of secret dreamland that was shared together, for we

never told the children anything about it. Their future must be built in this country; we could not say anything that might make them discontented with that. The wrench of parting with them was the only thing that we dreaded; dreaded for ourselves, not for them, for we knew that we should not go before they were well started in the world and had homes and perhaps families of their own.

"And then, a few years ago, the vision began to fade. That was the extraordinary thing. The nearer we came to its fulfilment the more uncertain and intangible it became. We wondered about it at first, and even felt a little ashamed of our lack of loyalty, and we tried to recapture the blessed image by talking hard about the little cottage and by reminding each other of the sense of boundless peace that would wrap us about in that quiet and evergreen vale. But it didn't work, and suddenly we knew why. The peace had gone. Without going back there to see, we knew that the peace had gone. Yes, the silence of that little place had been shocked and dispelled by the clang of men taking up arms in Europe. I suppose the nightingale still sings there on a summer's night, and the scent of that lovely garden hangs like a mist about the little house. But it is not thirty miles from the Continent, and not a couple of hundred from Germany. The French, they say, are spending themselves into bankruptcy arming for the next war. England is a slow starter, but she'll be in it up to the hilt when the time comes, and then, I suppose, that little village that has stood there undisturbed since Saxon days, will on just one of those moonlight nights when the nightingale is singing and flowers are in the full glory, sink into dust beneath a bomb dropped by a heedless German youth."

"So better an old age and the wheatfields of Alberta than the nightingale and the abyss of Europe therewith," said the Professor, as Gordon Vylard took a long drink from his glass. "I think you are right, Gordon. I have no children. I even have a certain personal inclination for adventure and excitement. But I imagine if ever another war comes to Europe it will not be like the last, localised though enormous on one or two fronts, but will spread over the whole continent, destroying cities and razing the countryside, bringing idiocy where there was peace. There is no quarrel worth that. Yet we almost did it once, between 1914 and 1918, and it was only the limitations of

machinery, not the instincts of gentleness and humanity bred into us by centuries of civilisation, that prevented us then."

"Somebody, some nation, has to start a modern war," said Andrew, thumbing a fresh load of tobacco into his pipe. "War is more horrible than it used to be, and all sensible men realise that there's nothing to be gained by it. The possibility of large-scale conquest ended with the machine age; it hasn't opened up with it, in spite of the general view. The last European despot was Napoleon. There will never be another. I don't mean to imply that the Germans won't attempt it. I am sure they will. But they won't succeed, even for the limited time that Napoleon did. Machinery will get Hitler down, for in the world to-day none can have a monopoly of machinery, and monopoly is necessary if you are to hold down every one else."

"You fellows," said Doc, crossing his legs, "always talking of war. Sure it'll come all right, and sure it will be hell. But, my God, it's no good twittering ourselves into a state of fright in advance. There's something else just as inevitable as war, and that's ordinary, everyday death, just the sick-bed or accident kind that we're all going to meet up with one day. But we don't sit and talk about it every time we get a glass of drink in front of us.

"Even the kids are the same," went on Doc, his red face perplexed with the problem. "That young fool kid of mine, Douglas, wants to go off to a flying school at Calgary at the end of next term. Damn it, he should be starting the really serious part of his medical studies now he's got through these pre-requisite Arts courses Don Bryden insists on. But he's broken the news to me there's going to be a war and he wants to learn to fly. I nearly took a strap to him, man-size though he is. Instead I told him if he didn't give up the fool idea and get on with his work, I'd turn him out of the house."

"I can see his mother agreeing with that edict," said Gordon Vyland, softly. The others laughed, even Doc. Mrs. Smith's assion for her only son, and her ability to manage her huge usband in his more truculent moods, were legend in the community.

Don Bryden smiled a little sadly, looking into the blazing fire. "I don't dispute your attitude, Doc," he said, "but what a splendid thing it must be to have a son like that. When he pines for this flying school think of those lines of Masfield and you

will understand what it is that's aflame in Douglas's young heart:

Man with his burning soul
Has but an hour of breath
To build a ship of truth
In which his soul may sail—
Sail on the sea of death,
For death takes toll
Of beauty, courage, youth,
Of all but truth. . ."

And while they sat for a moment, silently staring at the fire, each of them busy with his own thoughts, Comma put his red face through the opening of the door.

"Here they come, chief, them kids, and they got Uncle Silas with them. I hope he ain't pickled drunk. Young Douglas Smith has rode his horse up to the house, says they met up with him down at the gate, and gave him a ride because he was cold. Cold!" Comma laughed sardonically, and remembering his duties as butler, advanced into the room to remove the glasses. "Ain't ever heard that spirits freeze even in the coldest weather, and I'll be blame well surprised if he ain't got a load. Come along, chief," he added impatiently, "Missis says you gents better join the ladies. We're bringing some coffee and cake to the playroom, and I guess you'll all be dancing before you're much older."

Comma put his shoulder to the door and swung himself through with his tray of glasses.

"Well," said Andrew, "you all know this house well enough to know that we can't disobey Comma. Let's go."

4

A rush of cold air met them as they came into the hall, and the din of young voices smote them with extra force after the silence of the library. The cold air condensed on the electric lights, dimming their glow, and thick steam arose from wet gloves and coats that were being tossed to Comma and Norah.

The children knew Norah as well as they knew Comma and Charlie, and although she was likely now and then to turn a

sour face on their boisterous spirits, she generally accepted them, as they did her, as part of the order of things at Acadia.

Elspeth caught Andrew's eye, and smiled at him, raising her hands slightly in a comic little gesture of helplessness that was an old signal between them, and one much loved by him. She pointed to the stairs leading down to the playroom. He nodded at his friends and led them toward it, and on the way put his arm round Silas.

"All right, old fellow?" he asked.

Silas was stamping his feet to restore the circulation, and looking with bright eyes on the laughing, chattering group that had come in with him.

"Absolutely right, Andrew, but I could do with a drink."

"Come on, then," said Andrew.

Downstairs the large room lit by candles was warmed by a great log fire. Elspeth and Elaine, Andrew knew, had spent the day before decorating the room, and it smelt now of pine needles and resin and woodsmoke, and gleamed green and red in the light of the candles. Behind them like a tidal wave came the rush of the young people. The men moved towards the fireplace where a table was laid, in the centre of which a great Christmas cake, made by Norah, towered above the coffee-urns, dwarfing the smaller cakes and cookies that stood heaped on china plates and silver trays around the table.

Elspeth came to where the men stood around the fireplace. Comma and Norah were lighting the spirit-lamps under the coffee-urns, and Mrs. Vyland and Mrs. Smith, even Rose Bryden, had gathered about the table to help serve the twenty youngsters who would soon descend on it. She knew that she had a moment or two of freedom, and she had learnt in the course of her busy life to savour the pleasure of standing aside for a moment from these domestic scenes which she so much loved, and observing them. The children were gathered around the radio looking for a station that would give them the dance music that they seemed to love as a background to everything they did. She could see Elaine leaning over the back of a chair, a part of the excited group, and her heart felt a little thrill of pride, which she quickly tried to quench, at the beauty of her daughter in comparison with the others. Beside Elaine, Doug Smith was standing, his pale, peaked face the most serious among the group. He is such a forlorn-looking boy, she

thought, but there's some immense seriousness of purpose about him. He is not to be pitied, for he is so self-sufficient.

But all the same, instead of moving to her husband's side as she always instinctively did in a crowded room, she turned to Doc, who was standing beside her, and slipping her arm through his, gave it a little squeeze.

"Your Douglas grows more clever-looking every day, Doc," she said, smiling at him. "He'll make a great doctor."

Doc smiled grimly. "Seems he is set on becoming a pilot, Elspeth. These fool kids of ours!" He shook himself so impatiently that her arm inside his huge one was vigorously stirred. "They've got a sort of suicide complex. It's damned funny, Elspeth, isn't it? I've sweated blood to keep that kid alive, and now, when the job's almost finished, and I ought to be able to relax, he's got a notion in his head that Spain is the battle-ground of liberty, and he wants to learn to fly a plane and go off there and fight. For God's sake! What chance would a puny kid like him have, anyway? He'd die of the frost or a flea-bite before he had a chance to be shot out of his plane. 'And who the hell,' I asked him, 'invited you to be a champion of liberty, even allowing that what those two sets of thugs are fighting each other for is liberty?' But you know that sort of **set** look the kid can get on his face.

"We were talking of this in the library after dinner," he went on in a lower tone, "and Don Bryden recited some fine lines about youth having only an hour to find the ship of truth. But they've got to think of something else, Elspeth, these kids of ours. They've got to think of us, and about leaving us behind them. We've had Douglas for nearly twenty years now. He can't walk out like that, and just die. My God," said Doc, rubbing his hand over his moutri, "it would kill his mother."

"And you too, Doc," said Elspeth warmly. "You're an old tyrant, but I know you love Douglas just as fiercely as Edith does. I must go and help them at the table." She gave his arm a parting affectionate squeeze. "Don't worry. It will come out all right in the end."

As she hurried forward to **the** table, she thought to herself, **Doc** is right, and I am silly to offer such banal advice as 'don't **worry**.' There is **a** sense or doom on these children, even on my **sweet** Elaine who can't conceivably be touched. Doug is merely

the first one to strike out; Doc the first parent amongst us to feel the anguish.

She had a moment's vision of the hell that every one had prophesied the next war would be. It flashed across her mind as a panorama of sight and sound, of flame and seared bodies, of crashing buildings, and the screams of the dying and those mourning the dead. The vision passed in a moment, but to restore her equanimity she had to bend down swiftly as she passed Elaine, and kiss her dark head.

"Happy, child?" she asked, as Elaine looked up.

"Very happy, mother."

And here was dear old Uncle Silas at the head of the table, catching her eye and looking like a guilty boy. She knew that he would be quickly enumerating his probable sins of omission and commission, and summoning his ragged defences to resist any attack. She nodded at him gaily, to reassure him. It was bad for him to eat chocolate cake and drink coffee at midnight. He had been to town and might be sitting there with wet feet. There were a score of heads on which Uncle Silas ought, for his own comfort on the morrow, to be called to account. But she knew that to do it in front of the children would make him unhappy, and she could not bear to-night to bring the least shade of unhappiness across this fire-lit, candle-lit scene.

What had disturbed her; the brief talk with Doc, the sight of young Douglas's pale face? She realised as quickly as she asked herself the question that these things had only formulated something that had been as a dark shadow on her mind for some time.

She passed around the table to Silas, and felt suddenly impelled to ask him the same question that she had put to Elaine. With one hand on the old man's shoulder, she bent down, and smiling at him, asked, "Happy, my dear?"

Uncle Silas shot a suspicious glance at her, then allowed a smile to widen his mouth. "Say, I'm havin* a damn' good time, Elspeth," he confided: then elated by his clear crime-sheet he scraped back his chair as soon as Elspeth had passed. "Come on, you kids," he shouted, "let's dance."

Elspeth, Elaine and Andrew stood on the steps of Acadia and watched the sleighs, their lamps winking on the snow, and the

cars with their headlights, pull over the hill and away towards town. They had fur coats on, for the night was cold, and the clear, starlit sky promised weather well below zero before morning. Elaine, standing between her parents, put an arm round each of them and gave them a little squeeze.

"You are such nice parents, you two," she said, "and Acadia's such a lovely place. I wish everything would just stand still as it is to-night, or as it has been this year. I hate all to-morrows."

"Those are queer sentiments for a child your age/" said Andrew MacTaviot. "I thought all young ladies lookea forward to meeting the man they are to marry. You don't want to be an old maid, do you?"

"I don't know," she answered, "but I've got a strong feeling that I don't want anything to change, but an equally strong and unhappy feeling that it is going to. It's silly, I suppose. But I can't help it."

"You can help it by going to bed, darling," said Elspeth. "That feeling comes or over-tiredness and too much rich food."

"Oh, Mummy, you have a cure for everything in rest and castor-oil."

"Well, Mummy's had experience of feelings for twenty-odd years longer than you have done, puss. So in you go," said Andrew.

He stood for a moment, watching his wife and daughter walk upstairs. Then he shut the storm door and the inside door and all the double windows, and turning out the lights left the downstairs room of Acadia sleeping in the frosty moonlight.

CHAPTER THREE

i

A MISCHIEVOUS ill-fortune had pursued the Danby family for some thirty years, and Gordon Danby, the head of the family, often confessed himself tired of it.

It was mischevious because it was not persistent; it teased

rather than dourly threatened, and offered little buffets instead of blows, and often winked affably, as it were, just as it dealt its most devastating tap. Gordon Danby and his family never felt more cheerful and hopeful about their prospects, in fact, than when these were on the point of vanishing.

The steady attrition of his fortune, once appreciable, had now reduced Gordon and Julia Danby to a modest, inconvenient, and ugly Victorian house half an hour's journey from London, and an income of such inconsiderable proportions that Gordon Danby groaned aloud every time he thought of the figure. On this despised income the Danbys had educated their three children; not quite on this, Gordon had always to force himself to remember when reckoning up his accounts—the less there was to reckon the more he devoted himself to this pursuit—for in the process he had built up a considerable overdraft about which he was now constantly bullied by his bank manager. Gordon was wont to relieve his harried feelings by dramatic outcries delivered to his family from the hearth-rug before the fire.

"Education/' he would cry, "unsay the word. What I have given my children is not education, but a mere board-school smattering of vulgar knowledge. The grocer's boy knows as much. And it is all my fault, all due to my senseless lack of provision, my heedlessness of the future."

He would ouch his thin, pink handsome face in his hands, and Julia would rise with a little cry and come and comfort him, and the children would protest and say that they were adequately educated, as in fact they were; and Richard, who loved his father more than any of them, would feel a burning inclination, expressed with a frown, to knock the grocer's boy's head off, for intruding his horrid competitive personality into this scene.

At the age of twenty-two, Gordon Danby had inherited a comfortable fortune from his father. All would have been well had he not been possessed by the notion that he could increase his fortune by a series of wise speculations. With all the portentous care of an amateur handling high explosives, he gave to the consideration of each investment an immense amount of study and forethought, arriving at a set of conclusions which because they had been painstakingly achieved he thought must be correct. Propelled by this strange logic, he had plunged into this and that, emerging from each header the

poorer by some thousands of pounds, but not the wiser for his experience. For it was never Gordon's fault. Some "damned swine" of a business man, some intolerable quirk of climate (if it was a gold mine in New Guinea or a tobacco farm in Basutoland), some war (he had invested heavily in Turkish oil stocks just before Turkey became our enemy in the last war) had impinged on the otherwise sound policy which Gordon **had** followed in making that particular investment. Thousands would be gone, and Gordon would be facing with passionate outcry what he always called, in the first shock of encounter with it, *black ruin*. But his moans would cease when Julia would comfort him. "You couldn't possibly have foreseen, dear. Please don't blame yourself. We will get along all right."

"But the children, darling. How are we going to give them an education and start them out in life after this ruinous blow?"

These discussions were always conducted in front of the children. No Danby hid anything from another Danby. "We'll be all right, Gov.," Richard or Rene would say. "Don't worry about us. We'll get along."

Gordon would smile, as it were, through his tears, and lift his eyes towards the ceiling. One arm at this stage would be round Julia's waist. The other he would use to pat the head or the shoulder of the child that had offered him this comfort. "God has been good to me in my children; I think even in these present hard circumstances facing us, we may call ourselves blessed."

Practically all that was left of the Danby fortune disappeared in the 1929 New York Stock Exchange crash. For a year or more it had looked as though at last Gordon had found a way of dodging the attentions of the unwelcome fate that always descended on his investments, defeating the wisdom and forethought he put to their architecture. But the pigeon was to be plucked in the end. September, 1929, provided a shocking plow for the Danby family. So severe was the loss that it effectively and for all time barred Gordon from the world of speculation. He was left with just enough to complete his children's schooling and to provide himself and his wife with a modest income for the rest of their lives.

In 1956 Rene, who was a secretary in an office in London, was twenty, Richard nineteen, and the youngest boy, Gavin, sixteen and still at school. Richard was just finishing his last

term at school and his future was being fiercely debated in the family circle. That summer Gordon had met at his club in London the premier of one of the Western Canadian provinces. Always eager on his children's behalf, Gordon had plagued the great man for information about his prairie province, hoping that Richard might be attracted to farming there. The great man, proud of his native institutions, had told Gordon of the University of Alberta, extolled its educational attainments, and on Gordon's mentioning the matter of expense, had practically said that there was no such thing. Boys worked their way through there; made men of them, said the great man. Better than lah-de-dahs from Oxford and Cambridge. This was the world for a young man. He was as garrulous about its possibilities as a travel circular. Gordon was very much impressed, and returned home full of the idea. The Danby house buzzed with the proposal. It was debated at every meal and until late at night. Richard enjoyed being the centre of discussion, and since it was he who would have to make the journey, and face the loneliness, and encounter this strange new world, his advice and reaction to every phase of the discussion were eagerly sought by the rest of the family. During those few weeks Richard was much petted and kissed and wept over by his mother, gazed at fondly and mistily by the old Gov., who made many a fine oration about this son of his going out into the world, and looked up to with admiration by his sister and brother.

Mr. Blackstone, the great man from Alberta, was invited to dinner to vet Richard, and gave it as his opinion to the parents, when the children had been cleared out of the drawing-room later in the evening, that he was just the type to succeed *in* the West. Julia, with that tendency to gentle muddle that always characterised her mental processes, thought Mr. Blackstone charming up to the moment when he gave a stamp of approval to Richard as fit to inhabit his western paradise. But when Mr. Blackstone went on to extol the magnificence of Alberta's scenery, its potential wealth, its natural resources, its immensity, Julia thought him tedious and something of a vulgarian. Blackstone, chief administrator of an enormous province, had something better to do with his evenings than to make this journey out of town to impress a couple of people he hardly knew that Canada could suitably be chosen as a haven

for their eighteen-year-old son. That would have been the great Blackstone's choleric retort if he could for a moment have glimpsed what was going on in the minds of his host and hostess as the evening wore on. But he did not guess, and until the last train was leaving for London he boomed forth and expatiated on the wonders to which Richard would be introduced. He ended by giving Gordon the address to which to write to enter Richard for the University, and urging them to command Richard to get into touch with him at the Parliament Buildings as soon as he set foot in Edmonton. "I'll see he gets fixed up O.K.," boomed Blackstone at the Danbys. "Terribly good of you . . . so nice of you to come all this way and reassure . . . terribly grateful for your interest" . . . twittered the Danbys, holding the door open, putting him into his coat, and peering into the darkness to see if his taxi were there.

In the taxi Mr. Blackstone lit his third cigar since dinner, and sat gazing at the back of the driver's neck, conscious of a glow of satisfaction over an evening nobly if not very excitingly spent. At home the Danbys in family conclave ripped into Blackstone, condemned him as "a fearful chap" and "a terrible blighter," but happily went over all the information and advice the great administrator had given them. It was decided that Gordon should take the preliminary steps, and that passage should be booked. At midnight, flushed with excitement over the plans, and as certain of a happy outcome to them as though Richard's journey was an investment which the Gov. was to make (as indeed it was) they trooped out to the kitchen arm-in-arm; and while Julia made cocoa for them all, Richard imitated Blackstone's speech on the future of Western Canada, reducing them all to helpless laughter, until the Gov. burnt his mouth with hot cocoa, and had to be comforted, and then sent them all sentimentally to bed.

2

On the voyage Richard made a number of friends, among them a substantial farmer from the Peterborough district of Ontario, whose ruddy well-being and air of joviality were immensely attractive. Jim Besterman had been in Holland attending an international agricultural congress as the representative of the Ontario Farmers' Group. Like the great

Blackstone, he was the apostle of a creed that Canada was the place for a young man, but he did not hold education in the same honour as did Blackstone. His comment on the plan that had been shaped for Richard was breezy and complete. "What the hell are you trapesing six thousand miles for to get some more education? You got plenty, son. You can read and write, can't you? Sure, if you want to be a scholar, why, lenrn all you can. Keep on cramming it in. What's the result? You'll be a school-teacher or a university professor, sealed up in a class-room all day without a chance of breathing God's clean air, with your shanks getting more spindly and your eyes more short-sighted, and your face paler every year that passes. Boy, you ought to chuck that notion," concluded Besterman in kindly fashion. "You're going out to a new country. Get to grips with it as soon as you can. It's a funny thing, we've got more doctors and lawyers and professional men in Canada than we know what to do w^Tith. And at the same time we've got more land than we know how to manage. My father and grandfathers were farmers before me, and when I was a boy every farmer's son became a farmer, unless he was sickly or just damned lazy, in which case he became a storekeeper, but didn't leave the farming community. Now, farmers' sons go off to University when they finish school, and become doctors and lawyers. The Polacks and Swedes are coming *in* and taking up the land. In a generation's time they'll have all the money, and the original honest-to-god Canadians, who might have had a genuine claim to the land, will be running round, picking up such fees for law-work and doctoring as these immigrants, who'll then be rich farmers, will give them."

On other occasions, as they walked round the deck, Besterman expanded on this theme to Richard. Day after day the ship plunged through the open meadows of the sea, and the wind, sharp with the smell of salt and flying from a broken cloud-racked sky, buffeted them roughly. Richard's body was young and unwearied, but even he could feel the quickening of bodily vigour, the sense of physical well-being that sprang from this fresh contact w^Tith the sky and the sea. Besterman's bulky frame did not suggest the classical figure of the siren, but his picture of a free and open life lured Richard on. He had not told his family, he had not broken it to the Gov., whose

valedictory utterances during the few weeks before Richard's departure had been too emotionally pitched and too high-flown to allow the intrusion of such a thought; but not even his self-assurance could quell the dread that sank into him at the thought of plunging into a new world of youths of his own age; who would be just out of school, as he was, but out of different kinds of schools, and with different ideas and voices. He envied the giant Besterman his quiet acres. Alone on deck at night, when everyone else had gone to change for dinner, and with echoes from the darloies and the fresh-running sea booming against the side of the ship, reminding him by contrast of the golden light and the friendly warmth of his own home, which would be shut in at this first hour of night with its own pleasant family mysteries, behind blinds and the heavy curtains; alone with his yearning heart and mind, he thought with apprehension of the future that had been carved for him, and of the happy freedom he would know if, instead of being bound for this prairie University, he had been going to work on that rich brown land, conjured up in his imagination by the vigorous pictures drawn by Besterman.

The immensity of Canada, and his own insignificance in comparison with it, struck Richard only after several months, when winter had descended on the land, and he came to know the unaccustomed pangs of hunger. The sense of destiny which had buoyed him up on his arrival faded as the tremendous space and greatness of Canada were impressed upon him. He knew a period of deep dejection and unhappiness until his buoyant nature, which was crushed by his first experiences, recovered something of its assertiveness. A harder, tougher Richard emerged; still youthful-looking, still giving the appearance of being very sure of himself, but inwardly chastened by the realisation that Canada was not, as he and the Gov. had imagined it, a land of backward folk to which an Englishman had right of entry by inheritance, but a hard, mighty country, with its own people, its own customs, its own ideas about its future. Englishmen, if anything, were mistrusted; Americans were regarded as friendly neighbours, not as members of the same family. like all neighbours, they were held in highest regard when they kept in their own grounds. If either Englishmen or Americans showed any signs of being patronising, Canadians were wild.

There was nothing backward about this country, nothing colonial, in the derogatory sense in which the Danbys and many other equally ignorant English families imagined it. Richard began to sense that on the morning his ship, leaving the Gulf behind it, turned its prow into the St. Lawrence River, and started the long journey up that majestic stream.

Dawn was breaking and an autumn mist that came from the land was lifting slowly from the surface of the still water. The cries of the birds flying over the ship, and the throb of the engines constantly changing speed, as the pilot guided the ship over the bars at the mouth of the river, were such unaccustomed sounds after a week of buffeting winds and slapping seas that Richard had been awakened by them. He came on deck just as the shore on the starboard side of the ship emerged from the darkness and the mist. He saw twinkling lights shining from the windows of little farmhouses, where the cows had already been milked and breakfast was being eaten by lamplight in the kitchen in preparation for a strenuous day. Green fields, damp with moisture from the night and the proximity of the Gulf, revealed themselves, and beyond them he saw, as the growing light pushed back the darkness, little hills rising up. The first rays of the sun to fall across this aqueous world touched the maple trees that covered the hillsides, and the crimson and gold leaves flashed the first bit of colour that was visible to him in this grey and misty scene.

All day the ship sailed up the river. Gradually, as evening drew on, the water narrowed, and the shore on either side seemed to reach out a grassy verge towards the ship, which greatly slackened its speed, and now and then grated its keel on the sandy bottom. Richard had been leaning over the rail throughout the day, staring at the little French-Canadian farms, and gazing with delight at what people he saw working on the banks, or at children playing in the fields, or at a boy driving a long line of cows back to some stable. When he lifted his eyes he saw rising up in the background the hills of Quebec, massive and solid-looking, and ranging peak after peak into the distance.

And all the next day, still the ship sailed up this great river. It was not until ten o'clock at night on the second day that the *Countess of Landon*, seeming now gigantic in comparison with all the river craft that fussed about her, came to a floating stop opposite the riverside lights of the city of Montreal. To sail

two days up a river in an ocean-going vessel and still to be only at what Richard thought of as an Eastern embarkation port gave him his first deep impression of the size of this vast country.

3

The Danbys had dispatched Richard to Canada with the same enthusiasm for an object yet in prospect that had characterised nearly every important move they made in life. Once the inevitable step had been taken, and Richard had gone, they had bitterly regretted it and characteristically had then cheered themselves up by exaggerating the advantages that would result from the sacrifice they had made.

They were a united and deeply affectionate family. They missed Richard's bright presence and love at every hour of the day. The drawing-room fire became, as Rene said, the wailing wall of Jerusalem, for never did the Gov. settle down there with his paper, and Mum take out her knitting, but one or other of them would mention the dear boy, and tears would flow, and there would be much ado in comforting one another. It was then that the object they had had in view in shipping Richard off would be re-discussed, and the golden results exaggerated, as they had been over so many a financial venture undertaken by the Gov. The chances for a young man of merit in Canada would be dwelt on; the broadening benefits of a Canadian university education emphasised. The Gov. would see Richard as settling down in Canada, and their all going out there, when he had graduated, to join him in a new, free and not tax-ridden life, "away from wars and rumours of wars, and this cursed poverty"; would end the Gov., glaring around the room as though the furniture in it, which was of considerable value and the same that he had had when rich, were evidence that he was deprived of the comforts and amenities of life.

They were momentarily bewildered when a letter arrived from Richard at the beginning of October, posted from Montreal. The letter was a long one. It had been started on board ship, and beneath the affectionate badinage directed by the young traveller at each member of his family, and the amusing characterisations he gave of some of his fellow passengers, the Danbys thought they could detect the homesick

heart, and they yearned for him as the Gov. read aloud the first few pages at breakfast.

But he went on to give surprising news. He described his talks on board with Mr. Besterman, and the feelings these had aroused in him.

"You know, dears," he wrote, "I am really terrified at the thought of mixing with fellows of my own age out there. They will be quite different from me. We won't have a thing in common. There are some young Canadian students on this ship returning for the University term after a summer spent in Europe. They are very large and self-assured, and speak with this strange Canadian accent (which I suppose isn't surprising), and they look at me as if I didn't exist. I must say it terrifies me to think that I will have to mix right in with them. How simple and nice it would be if I were going out to learn to be a Canadian farmer. Mr. Besterman says there are marvellous chances in Canada for energetic people willing to go on the land. I know the Gov.'s fixed ideas about being educated and being a gentleman, but I've got enough education to get by with, and if I'm not a gentleman already a Canadian university will never make me one."

The Gov. raised horrified eyes from the letter.

"Go on, dear," breathed Mrs. Danby ecstatically. Every word that Richard wrote brought his young face vividly before her mind; those sentiments which the Gov. regarded as revolutionary and scandalous were to her evidence of her son's seriousness, his ambition, his beautiful and saintly character. The Gov. would think so, too, when his wife and time **had** worked on his mercurial mind.

The letter was continued from Montreal, not mailed, as most shipboard letters are, as soon as the traveller sets foot on shore. After a perfunctory description of that mountain city and its charms, Richard introduced his bombshell.

"I've made up my mind in these last few days to a step which I know is for the best, but which I am afraid will shock you until you get used to the idea. I know that the Gov. has had to make sacrifices to send me out here. It won't cost as much as Oxford, but the preliminary expenses have been a strain on the old Danby bank account, and I'm sure the Gov.'s **bank** manager,

with his thing about overdrafts, will appreciate my sentiments. Well it's this, my dears. I propose to set myself up as an independent bloke, and damn well work my way, not through this University, but through life. I'm going to get a job and keep myself. What's more, I'm going to try to save enough to contribute something towards the upkeep of the paternal home. Cries of hear, hear, there should be at this point, only if I know you old dears, you will now start fretting about my being on my own, and there'll be weeping and wailing round the family hearth. Don't do it, my loves; it will bring bad luck on me. Give the lad a chance, honest sirs, condemn him not out of hand. For all anybody knows I might be the white hope of Canada. The moment two days ago when I stopped thinking about going to the University, and definitely made up my mind to find a job, I felt happier here. I started liking people and finding the strange sights and sounds all about me more interesting and alive, as though they were beginning to welcome me and were glad to have me here . . . "

Richard had inherited the fatally sanguine temperament of the Danbys, and having made up his mind to this step he was convinced that everything would turn out well. Flushed with his new-born affection towards everything in Canada, he neglected to take into account the possibility that the feeling might not be reciprocal. He was to learn that one cannot take the affection of one's fellow creatures for granted, and that the world does not respond with gifts to one's fine feelings and one's charm of manner. He was indeed to learn much, and the lessons were to be hard. But in those early days in Canada, stimulated by his new-found sense of freedom, and the invigorating air of that golden northern October, he had few misgivings and a boundless sense of confidence in his destiny.

4

Richard spent only a few days in Montreal, which seemed to him very much as though to a large provincial town in France had been added a bit of Edinburgh. He finished here his letter to his parents, counted up his resources, and took a train to Ottawa, which had the double advantage of being in Ontario, Besterman's province, and of being the nearest large city to

Montreal. The future to Richard seemed very rosy, and full of hope. The train rushed through wooded country and by the shores of lakes lying bright and still in the sunshine of this autumn morning, and Richard looked upon his inheritance with eager excited eyes. He imagined himself at work on one of the prosperous farms past which the train was rushing. Here and there he caught glimpses of tractors in the fields, of horse-drawn ploughs, of comfortable-looking farmhouses set well back from the railroad. The train did not stop between Montreal and Ottawa, but occasionally it slowed down when passing through some station, and he could see men in overalls standing about watching the train go through. He liked the look of their brow^Tn, open, strong faces. The country through which the train flew, gathering speed again as it left these wayside halts, was rich and prosperous-looking. Life in this Ottawa valley, he thought, must be very easy and well-filled.

Lost in these thoughts, his face pressed against the window beside his seat, Richard did not notice how much attention he attracted from the other passengers in the coach. It was not borne in on him until much later that the cut of his clothes, his fresh English checks, and particularly his hat, his English bowler hat which had been best wear at his school, excited the deepest interest and curiosity among Canadians.

Richard was travelling in the day coach. Parlour cars, for richer passengers, with comfortable armchairs, tables piled with magazines, thick carpets on the floor, and a negro porter to bring drinks and answer bells, were at the end of the train; but Richard for the sake of economy travelled in the day coach. Here the passengers were labourers and travelling salesmen, small farmers and insurance agents, school teachers and immigrants, like himself, but coming from the more backward parts of Europe. The seats, each holding two passengers, faced opposite each other, and were at right angles to the side of the coach. Between the seats ran an aisle, up and down which there was a constant traffic of passengers, either to the lavatories at each end of the car, or to pay neighbourly visits to one another. The coach resounded with the chatter of many voices, and the atmosphere, compounded of oranges, tobacco, human bodies, and the slight hygienically-treated odour that came from the washrooms at each end, was pleasantly stuffy.

Into the seat opposite Richard, while he still stared out of the

window, dropped with a grunt the stout body of a man. Richard turned to look, and found smiling at him one of the most cheerful faces he had ever seen. Involuntarily, he smiled in return. The heavy round face opposite, encouraged by this response, broke into a hearty chuckle.

"That's better, bo'. I thought you looked kinda glum, but I guess you ain't. Looks are deceivin', eh?"

He was a large man, with heavy hands and chest and legs, and a great round head rising out of a pair of enormous broad shoulders. A checked shirt, open at the throat, showed how massive the column of his neck was. He wore a mackinaw, and a pair of heavy woollen stockings from which Richard could see how stout were the calves of his legs. There was something almost monstrous in his strength; it seemed abnormal, and looking upwards from his feet at that massive trunk, those huge hands and heavy shoulders, one expected to find a face heavy and brutish to match. But the face was pink and round, and, with the puffed cheeks and the brown laughing eyes, gave the same impression of innocence and mirth as that seen on the face of a baby at play. So gentle and reassuring was this face, so eagerly did it seem to implore attention and liking, that Richard had involuntarily smiled as he looked at it, and he felt a glow of friendliness and affection sweep over him.

"Very beautiful country, this we are passing through," said Richard, encouraged to talk by the invitation in those friendly brown eyes.

"Sure is," agreed the giant, swinging one great leg over the other, and withdrawing from his shirt pocket a sack of Bull Durham tobacco and a package of cigarette papers. He shook the fine tobacco into one of the papers, which he had withdrawn from its packet with his teeth and had transferred to his finger and thumb. "English, ain't you?" he inquired with candour, licking the cigarette paper and sealing the cigarette. "Sticks out on you a mile, son. Where you headin' for?"

"I'm going to Ottawa."

"Got folks there? Queer sort of city for a young chap to be heading for. Not much life and excitement in Ottawa. Not like Montreal. Boy, there's a city. I just been spending a holiday there. I had some fun."

This seemed such a diminuendo after the praise accorded to

Montreal, and there was besides in the giant's expression, or so thought Richard, such a desire to be more explicit if pressed to do so, that Richard smiled and said, "You must have found the right spots. I thought it was very borine."

The giant threw back his head and laughed with great abandon.

"Boring? Gosh, I never thought I'd live to hear an Englishman say that word that way."

He laughed again with equal heartiness, slapping his huge knee. "That's a good one, that is, bo'. That's certainly damn good. But tell me more about yourself. What you figurin' to do in Ottawa, of all god-forsaken places?"

"Well, I want to go and work on a farm," Richard replied.

"You ain't got the right hat," said the giant, breaking into loud guffaws of laughter again. But seeing that Richard did not share his mirth to the same extent, he wiped his eyes, and suddenly assumed an air of profound seriousness.

"You down on your luck, kid?" he inquired quietly. "Finding things tough?"

"Not at all," Richard hastened to assure him. "On the contrary, Fpi feeling particularly cheerful. I left home intending to go out to a Western university. I've just chucked that idea, and I've decided to learn to be a farmer. I got off the ship only a few days ago. All the way up the river I was thinking how wonderful this country looks, and when you came and sat down here I was looking out of this window thinking how marvellous it would be when I actually had a job, and was working on one of these farms. I'm not a bit down on my luck."

"That's right, kid. Don't let nothing get you down. How was you figurin* on getting a job? It ain't easy, you know, and you can't go hikin' up to any farmer, rigged out like you are, and expect him to tumble over hisself taking you on as a hired hand. Now I work on a farm, in a manner of speaking. It ain't properly a farm, its more like a chemical laboratory. But they has cows there, and they do produce milk, only they's a great palaver of filling up forms, and experimenting with this food and that, and it's all nickel polish and white coats and what-have-you, but underneath it's just another god-damn farm, with cows making muck, and giving milk and bearing calves. 'Course, I'm just an ordinary cow-hand there, and I can't offer you more than a hint, but whyn't you come along

there and get a job? If you want to learn something, well, maybe since you got some learning of your own, you can make out what they're up to with all these god-damn figures, and anyhow you'll learn something about cows. And the advantage is, you're close to the city. You can live in there, if you like, and see the pictures sometimes, and find a nice bit of fluff of your own, and have a bit of fun now and then, eh?" He winked solemnly, then his wide mouth split into a most infectious, ingratiating grin, so that Richard was forced to smile in return, though prospects of "bits of fluff" had not entered into his imaginings of the golden future towards which he had felt certain he was bound.

"It's very good of you," began Richard, but the big man interrupted him.

"Not a bit of it, kid. Say, what's your name? I didn't get that yet. Richard Danby? Sandy Pearson's my name. O.K. Dick, you go and see Mr. Millington, who's the manager of the farm. Tell him you want to work in the dairy. It's warmer in the winter. He'll give you a note to Andy Mackintosh, he's the dairy foreman. Maybe I'll be seeing you there? Where are you putting up in Ottawa? You go to Maclean Street, you'll see signs outside any of the houses there, 'rooms to let,' you know. You'll be O.K. in any of them. Yes, you come along to the Experimental Farm. If you're a greenhorn, it'll get you used to the country, and if you're set on becoming a farmer it'll teach you something about cows if it don't do nothing else. So long, kid."

The giant raised himself to his feet. His wide mouth parted in a valedictory smile, and one heavy hand came clamping down on Richard's shoulder. "Don't go doing anything I wouldn't do," he shouted. "The girls will sure fall for that hat."

Richard, feeling slightly self-conscious, sat with flushed cheeks in the corner of his seat. A few minutes later, joining the traffic in the aisle himself, and heading for the washroom at the end of the coach, he saw Sandy with three other men, a bottle of whisky on the table in front of them, and all engaged in serious and whispered conversation. Sandy recognised his acquaintance and lifted a huge hand in greeting. "Hiya, kid," he boomed. And as Richard passed through the swing door at the end of the coach, he heard himself being explained to

Sandy's party by his late interlocutor. "Young English kid," he heard Sandy saying, "and as green as they make 'em. Did you ever see such a god-damn hat?"

CHAPTER FOUR

i

AT about the same time as the sleigh-party was taking place at Acadia, some two thousand miles away, in Ottawa, Richard Danby sat in Bowles's Lunch Rooms, eating the very sparse supper which was all that he could afford. He had rationed himself to fifteen cents a meal, and since he was perpetually cold, he went for the hot cheap foods, such as coffee, soup and mashed potatoes. These gave him the illusion of warmth, these and the very pleasant warm atmosphere of the Bowles establishment. Outside on the street it was bitterly cold; in his small room across the river it was, on the other hand, steamingly, and, owing to the peculiarities of the central heating system, clamorously hot. But there was not the company there that was to be found at Bowles's. So he was inclined, tired as he was at night, to linger over his supper. Bus-boys, with large tin trays, came and grabbed any plate that was finished with, and one could not sit on there, under the fierce eye of the cashier, with no dishes on the wooden projection of the chair that gave the place the name of "One-armed lunch." So Richard had to spin out the delights of his soup and potatoes, and often they were cold before he made the last scrape of his plate.

He enjoyed the conversations he fell into with the curious characters who might be found taking their evening meal at this establishment. Sometimes they were toughs, in from the lumber camps, a little lit up by whisky, who suddenly, having like children become very hungry, had paused in their dissipation and come in here for a piece of lemon pie and a cup of coffee. Large, simple, but profane souls were these from whom Richard learnt much about Canada and its backwoods. Sometimes they were reporters from the two newspaper offices in

the neighbourhood. Sometimes, like himself, those he rubbed shoulders with here were simply young men without the price of a more substantial meal; pale young men who "clerked" in stores or at the bank. He thought they looked very ill but he did not say so. More forthright themselves, they laughed at Richard's ruddy cheeks and clear eyes. "Bloomin' Englishman," they said, and nudged each other facetiously in the ribs. "Oh, I say," was their favourite gibe, the words delivered in an exaggerated and drawling tone. But Richard just laughed at them and showed neither timidity nor an excessive desire for their company. So that they came nearer, like mongrel dogs, unsure of themselves, and sat about in the circle of chairs at Bowles's and watched him: and on further evenings, pulled up their chairs a little closer still, and smiled at him as it were sideways, out of their pale eyes.

Sometimes at night, on the cold and slippery walk that led from Bowles's to his room across the river, Richard wondered what his father would think of the background of his new life out here. His small bedroom Gordon Danby would think intolerable, and as for his friends: well, he had to laugh aloud in the darkness when he thought of what the old Gov. would do and say, if he had had the inhabitants of Bowles's Lunch Rooms pointed out to him as Richard's friends. In their company his behaviour would have been impeccable, though on his face would have come the fixed look of long-suffering worn by martyrs in old paintings. But he could not have borne much of it. Richard could imagine him inclining his stately head and putting up a delicate hand before his mouth to whisper: "Not our class, my dear boy. I do think you are making a mistake to be too friendly with them." The dear old Gov.: what a clean healthy old Victorian he was, bless his pink old face!

There were moments when Richard longed for his home with a passionate longing. Spasms of homesickness occurred chiefly when he was hungry or tired, and yearned to be otherwise. He was now nineteen, and all his life up to this winter he had never been hungry without having the chance to satisfy his hunger immediately, and had never been tired or dirty without being able to repair the deficiency or remedy the situation without a second thought. Suddenly, young even for his age, he had been projected by circumstances into a situation where

fatigue or dirt or hunger were as often the natural state as their opposite numbers, and only fate or changing circumstances or a turn of luck could alter them. At first he had been interested in the changed conditions of his life; the difference distracted him and helped him to endure the hardships and discomfort. But when the novelty wore off and the discomfort remained, his thoughts turned back to his home in England, and a longing to see it again wrung his young soul.

2

In England the Danbys thought often of dear Richard, making his way in Canada. Gordon Danby, from his place at the head of the table, admonished his younger son, Gavin. "Don't sprawl in your chair like that, my dear boy. Sit up straight like a man." He straightened his own spine and looked benevolently at his wife over the top of his rimless pince-nez. "Do you remember, Julia dear, how straight Richard always sat to the table, even when he was a little boy?"

Julia Danby paused with a piece of toast half-way to her mouth. "Gordon, I wonder if he has enough to eat; and if he's unhappy? Oh, I do feel we made such a mistake in letting him go to Canada by himself."

"The boy was determined, Julia, to cast off for himself."

"I know, darling, but he's so young. We ought to have insisted on his staying at home for at least another year."

"Now, dear," said Gordon, placing his napkin beside his plate, a little frown beginning to corrugate his brows, "we have been over all this before, many times. Let me repeat the proposition. We could not afford to send Richard to Oxford. The alternative to going to Canada for his education was for Richard to become a motor salesman. Danbys do not sell motor-cars or engage in trade; not yet, thank God, though our circumstances have become hard, have we had to follow menial occupations. Richard is a gentleman, the son of many generations of gentlemen. He is a poor gentleman, owing—I will be frank—to the crass stupidity of his father. My stupidity is incurable," confessed the Gov. dramatically, lowering his gaze to emphasise that he pleaded guilty in this matter, and conveniently forgetting the fact that Richard was not now at a University at all, "but Richard's poverty is not. Give him the

chance, and he will make his way. I have a conviction even that he will be rich. How delightful it will be to have ample means again, not forever to be worrying about this cursed poverty."

Gordon Danby rested his head on his hand, and his thin body sagged miserably under the burden of his thoughts.

Rene broke the solemn moment by saying: "What were you telling Gavin, Gov., about sitting up straight? Look at you, arched over the end of the table like a Virginia creeper."

But Julia Danby rose from her seat, and with a little cry of sympathy ran round the table, and placed her arm over her husband's shoulders, putting her dark head close against his silver-grey one. "Gordon, darling, how dare you say our poverty is the result of your stupidity? There never was a better husband and a father than you, nor a dearer, finer, more courageous boy than our Richard. I know you are right about his being rich one day, Gordon. Do you remember the nurse we had who told us so, who said that his teeth being wide apart was a sure sign of that? But it wouldn't matter if he weren't, dear, would it? We should love him just the same. He would always be our own dear son."

3

Though he had been anxious to come to grips with Canadian farming, and longing to have a job on a farm, various encounters he had had in his brief time on Canadian soil, first with Sandy Pearson, and later with the divers inmates of the boarding-house on Maclean Street where he had finally taken a room, convinced him that for some reason they thought him ridiculous. It wasn't only his bowler hat; he had soon discarded that wretched object, and now wore no hat at all. It was something in himself, he had decided, for every time he opened his mouth they seemed to find it funny, and what always set them off into gales of laughter was his expressed desire to become a farmer. He had at first enough money in his pocket not to be immediately concerned about getting a job, but when his money began to diminish, this unaccustomed sense of shyness and of his own inadequacy began to settle on him, overclouding his share of Danby assertiveness with a feeling of slight dejection.

In the last days of October the land began to prepare itself for the long winter. After some days of wind and rain, when the air had been alive with movement, a breathless silence fell. Life paused; the earth lay waiting. All day the sun shone from a faultless blue sky; at night the stars were clear-cut against a cloth of deep blue, a blue softened a little by the gentler light of the moon. But neither sun nor moon had the semblance of actuality. The sun gave no heat, the moon at night was a pale inanimate thing, the ghost of itself wandering disconsolately in a lonely heaven.

Occasionally at night against the edge of the sky, the flames of the Northern Lights flickered and danced. In the morning a heavy frost gripped the earth, its fine particles scintillating in the air several feet above the ground. In the clear cold atmosphere the smoke from the chimneys rose straight in the air, long thin columns mounting stiffly in the sky until suddenly they ended as though cut off with a knife. The sound of a whistle or of a shunting train became etched upon the air, an indissoluble part of an atmosphere that hung over a quivering world.

Richard had passed on several occasions the grounds of the Government Experimental Farm which was situated about three miles outside Ottawa. One cold afternoon, on his way back to the city from a long walk which he had taken up the banks of the Gatineau River, he turned in at the gate, and on the spur of the moment went into the manager's office and asked for a job.

The manager was a Scotsman, round of body and face, with a dark, untidy moustache growing in a fringe around his mouth. When he laughed, which he did at frequent intervals, he revealed tobacco-stained teeth.

Richard stood before his desk, feeling very nervous and self-conscious, aware that his black coat and striped trousers, for though he had discarded the bowler hat he still wore what was his best suit, were not the best recommendations to get the job he was seeking. The manager leaned back in his swivel chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, and looked at Richard with amused eyes.

"Well, sonny?" he said.

"I'm looking for a job, and I want to go in for farming. I thought you might be able to give me a chance. I know how to milk cows," Richard added, to justify his application.

"And how do you milk cows?" he said.

Richard looked at him, uncertain whether this was a serious question, or an example of Canadian humour.

"Well," Richard answered, "you moisten your hands first, and then catch the teats between the thumb and the knuckle of the first finger, and squeeze gently with a downward motion."

"Really?" he said. "Well, you don't here. We milk them by electricity, and you can keep your thumb and knuckle for sweeping up the manure, which is all that you'll have to do if I give you a job.

"English, ain't you?" he went on. "H'm! I thought so, and been here only for a few weeks, I guess. Well, for Christ's sake get rid of those duds and buy yourself some overalls and a mackinaw, and see if you can't get that green look rubbed off your face, before some of these toughs rub it off for you.

"Here." He leaned forward on his desk and scribbled a few words on a slip of paper. "Take that down to Andy Mackintosh at the dairy and see if he can fix you up."

Richard stammered his thanks, took the slip of paper, and started for the door. When he reached it, the manager stopped him. "Hey, sonny," he called, "was it raining when you left London?"

"Yes, sir," Richard answered.

The manager burst into a roar of laughter, and clasped his stomach with his hands. He waved Richard to go on out of the door. "God, you're good," he called after him. "For Christ's sake, turn the cuffs of your trousers up."

Richard found Andy in a little glass-fronted cubicle inside a vast building containing the most palatial quarters for cows he had ever seen.

At this hour of the afternoon, for it was beginning to grow dark outside, innumerable electric lights were burning, setting up a silver glare from a long row of highly-polished milk-cans that stood all along the length of the building.

There was no smell of manure. Instead, a hygienic odour such as one associates with chemists' shops pervaded the high-arched room. Richard thought of a hospital, and the image was strengthened by the tact that everything in the

building, except the floor, which was cement, and the iron girders that ran across the roof, was painted a glistening white.

The cows stood in six long rows, occupying all the space, except a tiled walk on which he was standing at the moment, which ran down the side, and from which several doors gave exit from the dairy. He noticed that the cows seemed to be assorted according to their markings. There were two rows of black and white Uolsteins, their clean, shiny backs a dead level of ridges, melting one into another, stretching to the far side of the building. Next were two rows of Jerseys, brown and smooth and sleek-looking under the electric light. Finally two rows of a breed he had never seen before, smaller, darker beasts which he learnt later were French-Canadian cattle.

The glass-fronted cubicle was marked "Office." Richard knocked at the door, and a thin quavering voice called him to come in. On a high office stool, bent over a sloping desk, was one of the thinnest men he had ever seen. When Richard went in, this man's back was turned towards him, and he could see only two thin legs, draped in white duck trousers, twisted in a most unnatural way round the legs of the stool, and a thin round back, in a white coat through which the shoulder-blades of the wearer were plainly marked.

Richard stood silently for a moment. He could hear a faint lisping sound, then the sound repeated to a drawing-in of the breath. Gradually he made out the words. Mr. Mackintosh was adding. "Seventy, seven'one, seven'two, seven'three," lisped the whisper; then at the same time as a sharp intake of breath, and to the sound of spittle dancing against the front teeth: "seven'four, seven'five, seven'six, seven'seven, seven'-eight—and nineteen," whispered the voice, "makes ninety-seven."

A long thin arm shot up to a rack above his head and drew down a slip of paper. Evidently the magic number was marked down, and the result satisfactory, for Mr. Mackintosh exhaled a vast sigh, and then swung swiftly round on his stool, his thin legs in their shrunk trousers describing a grotesque parabola through the air.

Mr. Mackintosh stared at Richard, and Richard waited for the inevitable remark his black clothes and his English appearance always seemed to elicit. But for once Richard felt that the advantage lay with him, for if any appearance was justified in

being called odd, Mr. Mackintosh's was. Beneath a vast head, utterly devoid of hair, his face narrowed to a thin, bony jaw, the tremulous and uneven outlines of which were plainly due in part to a badly fitting set of false teeth. His nose was a pink beacon against the white of the rest of his face, but it was a healthy pink, the colour of a baby's skin; and this, together with his blue, watery eyes, which except for their moisture might have looked up from any cradle, gave his appearance an air of gentleness and fragility.

The sense of fragility, occasioned by the preternatural thinness of his body, was emphasised by the fact that his white ducks, shrunken through innumerable washings, clung to every bony contour of his frame.

As he looked at Richard, a corn-cob pipe trembled between his teeth. He withdrew it from his mouth to address him.

"Well, me lad, and what can I do for you?"

"Please, sir," Richard answered, "the manager told me to give you this."

He handed over the slip of paper. Mr. Mackintosh, still gazing at Richard with his watery blue eyes, drew a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles from his pocket, reached behind him to place his pipe on the desk, carefully adjusted the spectacles on his nose, and then slowly lifting his gaze from Richard, read the note.

Then, still holding the paper before his eyes, he glanced sideways at Richard again. Their eyes met. Richard knew that he was not supposed to know that he was being looked at, but he could not tear his eyes away. They stared at each other for a moment, then Mr. Mackintosh's gaze travelled back to the paper. He read it through again, then reaching behind him for his pipe, and fixing it between his teeth, he removed his glasses, and leaning back with his elbows on the desk, he fell to staring at Richard.

A minute or more must have passed. Still Richard did not feel uncomfortable under his gaze. The scrutiny, the questioning, behind those watery blue eyes was so kind that he felt perfectly at ease, and Richard studied him with as much interest as he did Richard. Suddenly his voice piped up.

"What's your name?"

Richard gave it.

"Age?"

Richard hesitated for a moment whether to tell the truth or not. He had made up his mind to say that he was twenty-two. If he said that he was only nineteen, would he think him too young and refuse him the job? But something in Mr. Mackintosh's innocent and kindly gaze compelled the truth.

"Nineteen, sir."

"Don't call me 'sir,' sonny. The boys call me 'Andy,' but I figure there's still some respect due to age and you can call me ⁴Mr. Mackintosh.' We keep hard hours here: 5.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., and you've got to be on time when you're working in a dairy. Where do you live?"

"In Ottawa, Mr. Mackintosh."

"With your parents?"

"No, alone. My parents are in England. I'm in a rooming-house on Maclean Street,"

"How do you figure to get out to work here each day?"

"I could bicycle."

"What! In the winter?"

"I could walk, then."

For the first time Richard realised what this job would mean, but he was so anxious to get started and to earn some money, that not even the prospect of a three-mile walk through the snow could depress him for more than a moment.

"Well," said Mr. Mackintosh, "you can start in to-morrow. Fifteen cents an hour, no half-days, every other Sunday off. Get to bed early at night, I don't want you sleeping round here during the day. I'll give you some overalls when you come in the morning."

Suddenly his face puckered into a smile. "Don't let the boys see you come to work in that rig-out," he said. "They'd never forget it."

He swung round on the stool and bent over the desk again. Evidently the interview was at an end, and Richard had the job. His heart beat excitedly at the thought. At last he could be independent, his own master in this new world. He could buy himself clothes that wouldn't be laughed at. He could make friends. He could do a thousand things he wanted to now that he had a job.

He said, "Thanks, Mr. Mackintosh," to the thin back that confronted him, but a soft whisper that increased to a harsh sibilancy when he spoke, showed that his new boss was once

again immersed in calculations, and he went out, closing the door as softly as he could.

5

Richard discovered that it was torture getting up in the morning. At four o'clock the alarm would stab the black void, dragging him back into a world in which cold and a heavy oppressive darkness weighed down on him as he staggered from bed to turn on the light. He did not dare to lie there, luxuriating in the warmth of the bedclothes, hugging the cosiness that caressed his flesh. The thought of the cold floor, and the dark unfriendly dawn, sent a shudder of physical revulsion prickling over his skin, yet to delay a moment would have been fatal. He would have been swept back by a wave of sleep into that deep sea of oblivion from which he had been so painfully torn.

The electric light would plunge the room into a hard white glare. The window-blind would flap forlornly in the night breeze. If he paused for a moment, the silence would ring in his ears. He was alone in a world of sleep, upright and animate when every one else was horizontal and oblivious. A catastrophe might suddenly come; stop the earth spinning on its axis. He felt that he alone would be conscious of the impact of doom.

That sense of isolation was frightening. It lasted until he left the house. Even the streets, stretching away empty and cold beneath the bleak lights, retained more the outline of familiarity than did the dark and silent rooms of the house.

Yet hardly ever was there a living thing in sight as he walked out through the town. A cold wind would moan suddenly in the street, the dry trees rustle, a few leaves twirl from the gutter on to the kerb. Once, passing a house, he heard a woman's voice cry out; the sound sent a shiver through his body. He had a swift, appalling vision of murder being done, and he hastened his steps though his legs ached with the sudden fright, and his breath would hardly come.

One morning when he left the house, a thin film of snow covered the ground. The wind was biting cold. When he turned out of the gate, it blew with sudden force against him, making his eyes water and his cheekbones ache. Before he had

one far, his feet were numb, and once, stepping up on to the erb after crossing a street, he knocked the toe of his boot against the edge. His ankle ached with the impact, and the numbness in that foot spread up to the knee. When he reached the farm that morning, he was crying. Partly it was the cold, and partly an immense sympathy for himself. To assuage both the cold and his tears, he went into one of the stalls and leant across the back of a cow, pressing his arms and the flat of his hands against her body. The warmth restored his circulation. The cow turned and looked at him solemnly. After a moment, her head straightened again and she went on chewing her cud. He rubbed his eyes with some wisps of hay from the rack in the stall, and went to put his overalls on.

Besides Andy and Millington, the manager, there were three other hands in the dairy: a little Englishman called Dick Shadhouse, who had been out in Canada for three years; Jimmy Calder, a pale, rather stringy Canadian, whose body looked weak but was really very strong, and who was an excellent hand with the cows; and Sandy Pearson, who had received Richard with great bonhomie, congratulated him on getting rid of that damn hat, and on taking his advice about coming to the Experimental Farm, and who showed Richard the ropes, and fathered him kindly during his first attempts at dealing with the cows and the cow-hands.

The men's job was to keep the stalls clean—the animals were bedded afresh at least twice and sometimes three times a day; to feed and water them; and twice a day, as soon as they arrived in the morning, and about four o'clock in the afternoon, to go from cow to cow, attaching to its teats the electrical contraption that milked it. After the machine had extracted .11 it could, the cows had to be finished off by hand. The cows were kept in model fashion. Both before and after milking, their udders were washed with an antiseptic.

There were obstetric operations which kept the others busy at intervals during the day, but from attendance at these Andy excused Richard; indeed forbade him to come near. When all hands were called to assist at such a function, which always took place in a sort of maternity ward section attached to the dairy, Richard would be left alone in the building with three hundred cows under his charge. 5

slightest notice of him, the illusion that he was in charge of a body of troops was complete.

The snow melted with the day's sun, but after a week or two a high wind arose one morning, and by the afternoon heavy black clouds were looming in the sky. The wind dropped, and there was silence for an hour. Then quietly the snow began to fall. A freezing wind followed the first snow, and the blanket of white became for a day or two a hard, shiny surface, so that one's legs ached with the effort of walking over it. Then the snow fell again, fell for days, silently, relentlessly. One measured its quantity by the increase of its height on the sloping roofs. It hung upon the trees, it drifted from the telegraph poles; where a fallen tree-trunk lay on the ground, it mounted along the length like a parapet flung up by soldiers' shovels. It assumed fantastic geometrical shapes, mounting upwards in a form that was like an inverted image of the object on which it was piled. An iron gatepost had a cone of snow upon it; a wheelbarrow, left standing on the ground before the snow fell, was covered by a thick white burden in the shape of a casket.

Then the wind blew again, and fine particles of snow stung one's face as one walked. The wind swept the snow into banks, drifted it into hollows, cleared it from the tops of gateposts, telegraph poles and tree-trunks. It was as though a repentant wind were tidying up after a terrific carousal. Then the wind stopped; the sun came out, but shone without heat; and the land lay locked, unmoving, stiff in the grip of winter.

So the cycles came and went. Occasionally there was a slight thaw, and the silence would be broken by the sound of water trickling in channels it had cut for itself through the yielding snow. A little heat would come from the sun; a soft breeze would spring up bringing with it the scent of green things and of earth that somewhere was open to the sky. But a thaw did not last long. Suddenly the breeze would drop, and in the morning, when Richard turned out of the gate, and started the long walk to the farm, there would be that silence in the air, a stillness broken only by the whispered sound of a wind that whimpered suddenly, as it lifted itself from the street, as though it were, desolate or in pain; and then Richard knew that the battalions were massing in the North again, and that yet another onslaught of fierce snow would be flung against them.

He had now fallen into the routine of his work. It was still agony to climb from bed in the morning, to face the dark streets and the cold unfriendly walk to the farm. But he did it blindly by this time; the process of dressing, of eating his breakfast in the kitchen, of walking through the dark night out past houses, looming above him in the darkness, past little shops and the humbler dwellings of the suburbs, along the white and winding road that led from the outskirts of the town to the farm.

The long hours of work, too little sleep, and the forcing of a still growing body to tasks beyond its strength, had induced a sort of numbness in him. His mind was tired as well as his body. He worked through the morning drowsy and drugged with fatigue. The hours dragged until lunch-time, but often when noon came he was too weary to e^{at}. He could only lie back on the hay and stare at the roof, while his mind raced with thoughts, with memories snatched one minute from the past, the next from the night before; or his mind took part in dialogues that seemed to lead nowhere but which were as carefully phrased, as carefully constructed, as though he were taking part in an important discussion.

He lay there, listening to the talk of the others, w^{atching} the sky through the windows let into the roof of the barn. He would be aware of the coldness and feebleness of his body, and sometimes of the emptiness of his heart. The laughter of the others, the low murmur of their voices breaking in on his drowsy consciousness, crept like a nagging worry into his mind, urging him to overcome his lethargy and share *in* their general companionship. But often his struggles against sleeplessness and misery were unavailing. He gave himself up to his tiredness and his unhappiness, and watching the empty, cold sky beyond the windows, felt bleakly wistful about his own plight, longed for the love and presence of his family again; or, creeping towards them as towards a fire against which he could warm himself, let his mind turn to erotic imaginings in which he seemed to find the love and tenderness for which his youthfulness craved.

CHAPTER FIVE

i

WHEN Elaine awoke at Acadia on a winter's morning in holiday-time, she lay in bed watching the sunlight trying to beat its way in through the heavy frost that clouded the windows. But if it was summer, the windows were open, and she felt the soft air drifting in, and she could listen happily to the sounds of life and activity emanating from the farm-yard below her windows. So many years had she listened to this that she knew from every sound both what was making it, and what the hour of the day would then be. In the kitchen below her room Comma and Norah would be busy with the preparation of breakfast. She could hear the mumble of their voices without being able to distinguish what they said; she could hear the slap-slap of Norah's heelless slippers across the tiled floor, and the heavy thump of Comma's feet moving from the dresser to the table as he shifted crockery from one to the other, loading trays and departing for the dining-room. She knew when he had gone by the fact that the murmur of conversation ceased; to be resumed, when he thumped his way back from the dining-room to the kitchen. What they found to talk about so ceaselessly, considering that the whole of their lives was spent together in this room, she could never imagine, but the steady rumble of their conversation was never interrupted as they went about their preparations for the day.

Outside in the yard, there was the sound both of animals and men, the sound of animals' movements and of men's voices, and superimposed on those, as a shrill obbligato, the querulous tones of Uncle Silas. The cows, having been milked, were let out one by one into the yard. In the winter their footfalls were deadened by the snow, as all sound was from outside the closed double windows. But in summer she could hear them splashing about in the ever damp yard, grunting as they bumped into one another, gently mooing their discontent with the early morning routine.

When she was little, Elaine used to jump out of bed as soon as she woke on fine summer mornings, and run to the window to talk to her favourites in the yard. There were cows which

she knew by name, fanciful names which did not appear on their pedigrees, but which Elaine was convinced rightfully belonged to them. There was Mrs. MacAlpine, for instance, a stout and dignified matron from Ayrshire, who looked up at Elaine and lifted her upper lip in a friendly, matronly smile of recognition. There was Vera Lovemore with the dark brown shiny skin, and the pair of very neat, perfectly-matched horns, who held herself aloof from the others, looking at them superciliously and at Elaine sadly from her liquid brown eyes. There was Fanny, the female clown, with one horn ludicrously crumpled, and with wrinkles that might have been worked there by laughter, splaying out from her dissipated-looking eyes. Fanny was always ready for a joke, but sometimes she misjudged the moment for its proper occurrence, and then the sad, beautiful eyes of Vera Lovemore, or the gentle motherly ones of Mrs. MacAlpine, would rest on her broodingly, and she would become confused, and look up at Elaine with an apologetic expression which plainly said, * I meant it all for the best."

Silas would come amongst them, slapping them on the flanks, adjuring them in his shrill voice to "move over" or "give way," to do this or that, and he would grow frenzied with their impassivity, and swear a little. Looking up Silas would see a small dark head of curly hair leaning out of the window, and smiling at him. "For heaven's sake get into bed, Elaine," he would shout, conscious that she might have heard what he said, though this had been only an elderly, impatient damn or two. "Why aren't you up, you lazy girl?" he would call inconsistently. "Come on down and help me drive these beasts out into the field."

She never knew why it took older people so long to dress. Urged by Uncle Silas, or by the day outside, it seemed to take her only a minute to pull her nightdress over her head, and run into the bathroom, turn the taps on and jump into her bath. It took only a few quick minutes afterwards to slip on the few clothes she wore in summer, and another minute to comb her hair. Then she would be running down the hall, calling to Alfred, the cocker spaniel, or to Norah for her shoes, or to Uncle Silas to wait for her. "What a rumpus, Miss," Comma would say with an indulgent smile, advancing out of the dining-room, "what a commotion!"

"Tell Daddy I'll be back in a few minutes, please, Comma, and he's not to start breakfast without me."

"Your Daddy's got his work to do, Miss Elaine. He can't hang about waiting for you."

"Yes, he can, Comma. He must. I'm a lady."

"Well, now, where are you getting them ideas from? Well I never. Norah, hark at Miss Elaine. Why, isn't she a miss! Lor', like a duchess, ain't she, Norah?"

Elaine turned the squirming Alfred over on his back and ran her hands round his long ears. Then she suddenly darted through the hall door and out into the yard, Alfred in full voice at her heels. "Lor', ain't she a pretty little thing, Norah?" Comma would say, shutting the hall door after her, and coming back along the passage, rubbing his hands with pleasure at the seemliness of everything about him. "So she ought," Norah might answer emphatically, if not grammatically. "Her mother was even prettier when she was a little girl, and had the same high spirits."

"Oh, Uncle Silas, I thought I'd *never* catch you up," Elaine would say breathlessly, putting her small hand with its fist clenched into Uncle Silas's large rough one, and shaking back her curls from her hot face.

"I ain't got no time to stand round waitin'," Uncle Silas would say, staring at the heaving backs of the cows marching ahead of him towards the field where they were to graze all day. "Fine things we're coming to at Acadia when wimmin stay about in their bedrooms half the morning. When Elspeth came here sixteen years ago, why, she was up at six every morning. Now we're lucky if we see her before nine. You're the same, you're just like 'em all; you'd stay in bed till sunset if you was let be."

"Oh no, I wouldn't, Uncle Silas. I always get up early in the morning, but Mummy won't let me come downstairs. She says I have to have ten hours sleep every night till I'm fifteen years old, then nine hours every night till I'm eighteen, and that after that I can do what I like. You see, I'm only twelve now. How old are you, Uncle Silas?"

"Me? I'm three score and three, but, by damn, I got more viggr than you have. Twelve? Why, my lor', you're only a baby. We been plagued with you only twelve years? Seems like you've always been running about this place as long as I can remember."

"It seems like that to me, too, Uncle Silas. I mean, I feel that I've been at Acadia as long as you have. Maybe I was here all the time before I was born. I seem to remember it without Daddy and Mummy. Perhaps I was a rabbit living in Forty-acre field. I think I was a rabbit because I can remember being underground and wearing fur, and always being cosy and warm. I think it was nice, but I like being a girl better, Uncle Silas. You see, the food tastes nicer, and it's nice having Daddy and Mummy, and I can talk to you instead of scurrying off when I see you."

Uncle Silas looked down benevolently at the small bright face turned up to his. "It's kind of nice for us too, Elaine. I guess we'd rather have you than have just another rabbit running about in Forty-acres."

Elaine squeezed the old man's hand in gratitude and affection for this tribute. Then after a minute she said, "Did you know I was going to school in Edmonton next winter, Uncle Silas? I'll be seeing you only at the week-ends, then."

"Yes, I heard them talking about it," said the old man gruffly. "Well, I guess you got to get educated, but you won't never be the same girl again. You'll be bringing all your friends out here, and you'll be ignoring old folks like me, and putting your nose up in the air when I come by."

"Oh, Uncle Silas," said Elaine with honest indignation. "How can you say such a thing? You unsay it right away."

But Uncle Silas stuck his lips out obstinately, and looked straight ahead, refusing to glance down at the small figure tugging at his hand, and dancing wrathfully up and down beside him.

"Unsay it, Uncle Silas," persisted Elaine.

"All ladylike, and fancy teas, and puttin' on rouge on your face," prophesied Uncle Silas, still looking gloomily ahead of him.

"Uncle Silas, stop it."

"Dancing and fiddling about, and thinking of what other folks think of you, instead of being just honest and yourself."

"Uncle Silas," wailed Elaine, "you are *horrid*!" She screwed one fist up into her eye. "I won't cry." She stamped her foot and glared at him out of bright little eyes. "I know you're trying to make me cry, but I *won't*. You know quite well I

won't be like that. You're just saying it out of mischief. I'll always be like I am now."

"And what's that?" inquired Uncle Silas, smiling down at her. "A pudden-faced little girl with pig-tails and thin legs, and freckles on her nose, with her face all smudged from trying not to cry. So that's what you will be still?"

"Yes, Uncle Silas," she laughed happily, and taking his hand again in both hers she said, "Do please unsay it, Uncle Silas, dear."

"Glory, Elaine," grunted the old man. "But don't you forget now. If ever I catch you behavin' like a spoilt young miss, I'll sure take you across my knee, no matter how grown-up you are, and give you the tanning of your life."

"Yes, all right, Uncle Silas. That's a promise. Oh, look where the cows have got to while we've been standing here talking. Now we'll both have to run. I'll race you, Uncle Silas."

Off they went, Elaine swiftly ahead like a young nymph, and the old man with the lean shanks, his face spread in a wide smile, following her like an elderly faun.

2

There are some homes where happiness and content seem present in fuller measure than they do in others. There are some families which appear to have won the favourable attention of Fate, just as there are others which seem always out of favour with it. Since 1913 Andrew and Elspeth had lived happily at Acadia, and even in lean years or in periods of depression things had not gone badly with them. The farm had become richer, they had not known what it was to have illness in the house, their servants and workers had been happy and content; and Elaine, born to them four years after they had settled in the West, had grown up like a little flower, loved by everybody on the farm almost as much as they loved her themselves. Andrew knew that he was a lucky man, and Elspeth knew that God had been kind to her to give her such a home, a man she loved so well as Andrew, and a child as lovely and as intelligent as Elaine. Perhaps it was because every one at Acadia was so consciously aware of their good fortune, that it continued

without a break, for there is nothing that good fortune likes better than acknowledgment, and where happiness and content are already in the air, more happiness and content seem to follow. At Acadia there were cheerful faces and loving hearts, and always generosity of conduct, to be observed in everybody from Andrew down to the youngest of the field hands, and in that atmosphere of deep and pleasant understanding Elaine grew up.

It would be wrong to imply that she lived in a rose-coloured fairyland and never saw grief or anger or impatience displayed. None of these things was hidden from her; all of them, at one time or another she had experienced in herself. But they were not lasting; they passed like a puff of cloud before the sun on a boisterous day and they left no mark or sulkiness; rather they emphasised how good life was, how lovable people were, how kindly and gentle was everything that happened at Acadia. A gust of fresh affection for Uncle Silas welled up in Elaine's heart, easing the tension that had been there when he had "unsaid" his Cassandra-like prophecies about the future.

Elaine was fourteen when she realised that she was pretty. The revelation had come about on her birthday, which was in May. She had woken up that morning feeling especially happy and excited, not because it was her birthday, for that fact she did not remember until she had been awake for some minutes, but because she felt convinced that something very surprising and pleasing was going to happen to her. She had got up and wandered about her room, singing to herself under her breath, and taking down from her wardrobe the new light-blue dress she was to wear for the first time that day. She had leant from the open window for a little looking out at the blue misty morning, and listening with a subdued pleasure to the birds singing for all their hearts were worth because it was a sunny morning, and the leaves in the orchard were brilliant with dew. She had had her bath and had put on the new dress; she had brushed her hair and fastened about her throat the necklace of amethysts which Andrew had given her; and she had leant forward to look in the mirror a last time before she went down to breakfast when all at once she thought, *How pretty I am!* As though she had said the words aloud, she felt suddenly confused, and drew back from the mirror. But she could not

forbear looking once or twice again before she left her room to go downstairs.

Her parents were already at the table when she entered the dining-room. She kissed them both and they both said "Many happy returns, dear."

"Daddy, you smell very nice," said Elaine, her hand on his shoulders.

"You've kissed me thousands of times before, dear, and never mentioned that," smiled Andrew. "Is this new awareness the result of being fourteen?"

"That dress looks charming, Elaine," said Elspeth. "Let me see, child. Get away from your father's chair. Yes, you look very pretty."

"Do you really think so, Mummy? Have you said that to me before? I can't remember. Only I thought I did when I looked in the glass just before I came down."

"That's the sort of thing you mustn't think yourself, dear," said Elspeth with a quiet smile, taking her daughter's hand. "Other people can think so, and tell you so, but you mustn't think about it yourself, or spend your time peering into mirrors. That will make you vain, and there's nothing more unpleasant than a vain girl."

"Well, I've felt especially happy since I've woken up this morning," answered Elaine, "and I could not tell why until I looked in the mirror. Now I know. I think it's very nice not to be ugly. I won't think about it, but I must say I feel rather pleased. I expect you are too really, Mummy, aren't you?"

"Nonsense, child," said Elspeth, with a sidelong, smiling glance at Andrew. "Come and eat your breakfast."

Elaine rapidly forgot her new-found beauty and it was not until she was in her last year at school in Edmonton, that she thought again of the matter of her appearance. At fifteen she had been as slim as a boy, and most of her attractiveness had come from the possession of a healthy body, well-formed features, and a pair of clear, dark young eyes. Then in the next few years it was as though a softness fell upon her like a veil, curving the lines of her hard young body. A gentleness of manner seemed to come upon her at the same time. She was less inclined to run or to shout with sudden explosive mirth or energy of spirits; and this gentleness became reflected in her face. Her dark eyes seemed to become larger. Where once

they had been bright and lively with excitement, they now often seemed to be lost in day-dreams. Without realising it herself, Elaine had ceased to be a young girl, and had become a young woman. She was made aware of the change through an incident that frightened her at first, but pleased her when a repetition of it occurred shortly afterwards.

This incident, and the repetition of it, was nothing more serious than attempts of boys she had known all her life to make love to her. The first occasion was at the Senior dance which ended her High School days. The dance had taken place at the MacDonald Hotel, and for the occasion her father and mother had come in to town and had taken rooms at the hotel. They gave a dinner party for Elaine and some of her friends in the hotel dining-room before the dance. Guy Harrison, a boy with red hair, a wide smile, and a reputation at school, unknown to Elaine's parents, for being rash, brazen and ready for any devilment, sat on her right. He was to be her partner for the first dance, and he acted the young squire throughout dinner with a mixture of impudence and real charm which Andrew found amusing, Elspeth worrying, and Elaine exciting. He took Elaine in to supper at midnight, and led her out again before the meal was ended on to the balcony overlooking the river which had been fitted up as a sitting-out place for the dancers. But when he had drawn her out into the darkness, he clutched her arm, and with all the assurance in the world, said to her calmly, "Come on, Elaine, let's go down to my car. We'll take a drive over the bridge. It's a heavenly night."

Elaine protested that she had the first dance after supper taken, and couldn't leave. But he insisted, and she found herself yielding with feelings that were a mixture of guilt and anticipatory excitement. She knew that Guy would kiss her. She looked forward to that, not because she wanted to be kissed by him very much, though she thought that wouldn't be unpleasant, but because she knew from talk with other girls that he was considered a "catch," and that to have his attentions was definitely to be envied by her friends.

But they didn't drive over the bridge. They turned down a side road just before reaching it, and drove into the grounds of the Parliament Buildings. Guy evidently knew his way about these precincts. He drove his car under a side portico, reached forward and switched off the motor and the headlights, then

with the energy that characterised all his movements, and without a word said, turned to Elaine, put his arms about her, and with the assurance of one who had had long practice in these matters, though he was but eighteen, found her lips with his own and pressed upon her such a long passionate kiss that what she had looked forward to as an experiment became something that induced the strangest and most amazing feelings in her. She struggled free, but only after such an interval that Guy could not consider it a rebuff, and this violent young man, without wasting time on words, moved forward to the next stage of his love-making. This had never happened to Elaine before. She had kissed and been kissed, and had known what it was to sit cheek against cheek with other boys on sleigh-rides or at parties. But Guy was being villainous iji the extreme. He paid no attention to her protests, and her own hands being unable to keep his prying hands away from her, she suddenly, in a great fright, clenched her fist and caught the ardent lover a blow on the chin. He gasped and sat up. Her voice trembling, Elaine said to him, "Drive me back quickly."

Guy was promptly contrite, remembering the powerful Andrew.

"You won't say anything to anybody, will you, Elaine? I'm very sorry. You're so beautiful, I just got carried away."

Elaine was sitting up straightening her hair and her dress.

"No, I won't say anything, Guy. Of course not. But you frightened me terribly."

"Oh gee, Elaine, a pretty girl like you will have to get used to being made love to. You're too sensitive, that's what it is," said Guy, consoling himself as he leant forward to start the motor.

Was it that, she wondered in some perturbation of spirit afterwards; was she too sensitive, had she been silly and shy? Because she had no brothers and sisters, and had been brought up with only infrequent contact with other children, she had a longing to be accepted by them, to do as they did, to be, in a word, normal. But were Guy's rough hands, greedily feeling her body, behaving normally? It was pleasant being kissed, but must this always follow? Her cheeks burned in shame, and she turned her head sideways, with disgust at the memory. She could never marry a man, she thought despairingly. She

could never allow herself to be touched by any one even if she loved them; she could imagine no one who would not revolt her in that attitude.

This mood darkened her mind for some weeks, and during that time she stayed much by Elspeth's side, and often took her mother's arm, or put her own about her mother's waist. Elspeth wondered what inspired this display of affection, but she said nothing, merely remarking in her mind that the child was growing up, and dismissing these gestures as the sign of a restless young heart.

Time after time, Elaine went over in her mind the experiences of that evening, and felt intensely troubled by it all. Two weeks later, when she went to another dance, she was as nervous and unhappy as though she had been going to the dentist instead of to a party. She wondered agonisingly whether Guy Harrison would be there, and whether any of her partners would want her to go outside, and would try to make love to her. She dreaded the experience, but she was determined to go through with it. She hoped that if she were kissed the matter might stop there; she was determined that if it didn't, she would not put up with it. Though it might mean the end of parties and friends in Edmonton, and an old maid's existence at Acadia, she could not stand that sort of love-making.

When she came out of the changing-room, and into the MacAlpines' big drawing-room, with several other girls, Douglas Smith came up shyly to her.

"Before the others come, Elaine, do mark me up for a couple of dances."

Elaine dazzled the solemn young Douglas with her smile.

"Oh, Doug, it is so good to see you. Of course. Will you have the first and will you take me in to supper?"

"Oh, Elaine, you don't want to give me the supper dance, do you? Everybody will want that one from you."

"Don't you, Doug?" She looked at him, smiling in her relief at having found his solid young protection.

"You bet I do, Elaine. But, I don't know, I guess I'm not a very exciting partner, and I don't want to spoil the party for you."

"Nonsense, Doug. I'll think it very rude of you if you don't give me the supper dance, after I've asked you for it."

His grave young face, with the enormous grey eyes, looked at her wonderingly, and a little blush coloured her pale cheeks.

"Gee, you're a wonderful girl, Elaine. I'll be there to claim you."

When supper was ended, Elaine said to Douglas, "Are we going to walk in the garden, Doug? Everybody else seems to be going there."

It was the end of July, and the dry heat of a northern summer which swiftly turns the green the spring has brought to a dry and rustling brown had already fallen on Alberta. But it was midnight, and a full moon was sailing high in the clear sky. The MacAlpine garden was one of the show places of Alberta. Lawns sloped away from the house towards a ravine which formed the western boundary of the city. Judge MacAlpine had spent a large amount of money in bringing strange shrubs and trees to flower in this northern wilderness, and a firm of landscape gardeners from Vancouver had been imported to lay out the garden in a tracery of paths and grottos which satisfied some yearning for mystery and beauty in the Judge's Scottish heart, and provided a perfect background for the midnight strollings of his children's friends at the dance they gave always at this time of the year. Elaine slipped her arm through Doug's, and holding up her long skirt with her free hand stepped down on to the lawn below the house, sighing with happiness at the loveliness of the night, and with content in the security that young Doug's presence gave her. Doug echoed the sigh, and looked dolefully at the moon. If only he was an attractive chap, he was thinking sadly, what good fortune would be his with such a girl as Elaine on such a splendid night.

They walked together in silence for a few minutes. Suddenly Douglas was amazed to feel his wrist gripped by Elaine's fingers. He looked at her, and saw her eyes shining in the moonlight.

"Doug, are you going to kiss me?"

Douglas's heart stood still, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, making him dumb. Then he gasped, "Oh, Elaine," but stood still, trembling, and doing nothing.

"I would like it if you did, Douglas," said a small voice, the head of its owner bent down.

Douglas groaned with the greatness of his feelings, then put

his arms tenderly about the slim white shoulders before him in the moonlight, and bent his large pale face tentatively down. Elaine's face raised itself to his in the darkness. He felt her arms go round his neck, a scent of divine sweetness entered his nostrils, and he felt against his own rough lips the soft and tender pressure of Elaine's. For a moment or two he knew a sense or utter happiness he had never known before in his shy, simple life, and was never to know again. He held her without roughness, but his arms, as emotion began to flood his brain, gradually increased their pressure. She drew her lips away, and he heard her sigh, and the spell was broken. His arms dropped down at hie side, and he stood there silently, waiting for he knew not what. Elaine had been touching her hair with her hand. Suddenly she felt that in comparison with his stillness her own movements were superficial and silly, and a feeling of slight shame swept over her. At the same time something sad passed like a ripple through her heart as she looked at him. Then she reached for his forehead with her hand and touched it, lightly. "Dear Douglas," she said. "How sweet and kind you are! Come on, let us go back inside. The music will be starting again soon."

She slipped her arm through his, laughing happily, and almost urged him towards the house. But Douglas was wondering, and as he had done when he had been a little boy, he was inclined to drag behind when his slow mind was grappling with some phenomenon that had presented itself to it.

"Why did you ask me to kiss you, Elaine? It wasn't because you like me so much."

"But I do, Doug, you know I do. You have always been one of my favourites." She laughed softly and contentedly. His large eyes looked at her small beautiful figure tripping along beside him, at her bare white shoulders and her white dress with the long skirt swimming forward in the darkness.

i'But that wasn't the reason," he went on slowly. "I know you'll never want me to kiss you again. Why did you want me to do it that once? Not just for the sake of the experiment, was it? You know quite well it couldn't be any mystery kissing me. Why did you want me to be your partner to-night?"

"Oh, what a lot of questions, Doug dear. Why do you have to analyse the whole thing? Didn't you like kissing me? You're behaving more like a psychologist than a lover."

"But you'll never let me kiss you again, Elaine, will you?" persisted the serious Douglas.

"Well, no, perhaps not, Doug. You see, I'm very fond of you, but I don't love you in that sort of way."

"I know, Elaine." He sighed heavily.

"You aren't unhappy about it, are you, Doug?"

"No, only a bit," said Douglas Smith, with a mirthless little laugh. Then, squaring his shoulders, and looking up at the night sky, he said, "I guess I've got more important things to do than fall in love. I guess I'm not built for that anyway. I 'ain't shaped right,' as Charlie Donaldson says of a horse."

Elaine, whose own feeling of content was battling with a sense of sympathy for Douglas, clutched at the straw offered by this not very sincere asseveration, and squeezing Douglas's hand as they stepped from the garden into the drawing-room, flashed at him a smile of gratitude and friendship. Then, in the excitement of the rest of the evening, her uncertainty about herself having been completely dissolved by the kiss Douglas had given her in the garden, she forgot him.

3

At breakfast one morning, during the Christmas holidays in 1936, Andrew said that he was going into Edmonton and that he wouldn't be back before nightfall. He had to meet a man at lunch at the MacDonald Hotel, and in the afternoon he had to go to the Wheat Pool offices to attend a meeting of a committee, one of many on which, as the leading farmer in the district, he sat.

Elaine looked at her mother. "Could I go with him, Mummy? After all this is a holiday, just two weeks of break before the new University term starts; and I can't go into town unless Daddy or you are going. Do let me go with him."

Andrew and Elspeth looked at each other from their ends of the table. Then Andrew laughed, "Well, I don't know whose cue it is to say yes or no, Elaine. But as it's Christmas-time and it's a long drive in, I'll admit I'd like the company of a pretty girl like you. We're going by sleigh. The drifts are too deep for the car. So for heaven's sake wrap yourself up warmly, and make yourself look as pretty as you can, because I'm probably

going to introduce you to a very rich and handsome young man at lunch-time."

Elaine did not inquire who the young man was until they were in the sleigh, gliding along towards Edmonton. The morning was bright, but intensely cold. The cutter in which they were driving was being drawn by the mare Jane who had won trophies for her pacing at Calgary and Edmonton, and the sleigh slid swiftly along at twenty miles an hour over the white earth. Under the heavy buffalo robe, their bodies were luxuriously warm. The frosty air exhilarated their spirits. It brought a lovely colour to Elaine's cheeks and turned Andrew's neat brown clipped moustache into a formadable white one.

"He has a letter of introduction to me from an old friend in London," explained Andrew, "and he is stopping oif in Edmonton only for a day on his way to the coast. Ralph Harriman is his name. He has some job in the Foreign Office. I have never seen him, of course, but Richardson wrote me separately to say that he was a very pleasant young fellow, with a passionate interest in Empire projects. His trip across Canada is merely a holiday. He is going down the coast to Los Angeles and then back to England by the Panama."

"It sounds most romantic." Elaine sighed happily and wriggled deeper into the rugs, excited by the air and the prospect of the day before her. "It's always exciting to meet someone new, and a lunch at the MacDonald is always pleasant. But tell me if you don't really want me there, Daddy. I have plenty of friends to call on."

Andrew glanced sideways at her. Not for the first time in the last year, but with a fresh wonder as though it were for the first time, he realised that Elaine was no longer a girl, but a woman. The realisation always perturbed him: why, he could never explain to himself when, the first misgiving past, he asked himself why he should so curiously resent the realisation that she was growing up. It wasn't for the silly reason that it meant he was getting older. He had had no wish to hold on to youth, and now that he was middle-aged he didn't dread—he even looked forward to—the years ahead; to the comfortable slipping into old age with its lesser demands upon the emotions, its greater periods of tranquillity.

Nor was it because it meant that Elaine would marry and

leave them. He wanted that for the greater happiness *it* would bring her.

What it was he could not tell. But he noticed that it was when she suggested doing something by herself, without revealing what her plan was, that he had this curiously disturbing feeling. He laughed at himself for a jealous elderly parent, but it was not an entirely happy laugh.

"Do whatever you would like best, child. If you want to come along about one I shall be there. If not, then meet me at the livery stable at four o'clock and we'll be back at Acadia for tea."

He glanced at her again. "You look uncommonly nice, my child. Is all this splendour just for your girl friends?"

Elaine laughed and slipped her gloved hand inside the pocket of her father's fur coat. An almost breath-taking content flooded her body, setting her heart beating with happiness. Between now and four o'clock the hours were hers. She imagined, borne onwards by the flood of her content, that she would do with them more than she really would. But the rush of her feelings, keeping pace with the sleigh that drove so swiftly through the cold air, brought her for a few moments illimitable happiness.

"What I like particularly about you, Daddy, is that one never has to explain."

"What I like about you, Kitten, is that you are as tantalising as the perfect woman should be."

They were coming in to the western part of the city. White fields had risen on either hand as they drove along. Between the road they followed and these sloping escarpments that rose to meet the sky each side of them was a hollow where in summer was the ditch that kept pace with the road, now banked deep with snow, and the fence-posts that marked the boundaries of farms. On top of the fence-posts little hats of snow stood, that grew taller with each fall of snow, as though to the last they insisted on marking law and boundaries in this white wilderness. Occasionally as they passed, one of these mounds toppled over, leaving glistening in the sun the bare top of a post, glazed with frost.

Here and there, set back from the road, was a farmhouse, none of them as big and as imposing as Acadia. They were comfortable, homely buildings of red brick, set very plain and

foursquare to the harsh landscape about them. Andrew and Elaine knew the family at each farm. Many of them were immigrants from European countries who had settled in the West during the last thirty years. Like Andrew, they had begun their farming life in the West in wooden shacks. When the war of 1914-18 had brought the price of wheat to over a dollar a bushel, they had used the unexpected income to build these large, ugly brick houses, to buy larger cars, and to make holiday expeditions in the winter to California. In the lean years that followed they had fallen on hard times. Mortgages had taken silent ownership of their land, their stock and implements, their houses, and finally their cars. During these extremities of good and bad fortune, in which they had known ecstasy and the deepest depression, they had preserved the customs, the speech, and the inhibitions of whatever part of Europe they had chanced to come from. In thirty years their children had become Canadians. They went to school with Elaine, and attended the University with her. But when Andrew met the parents at Edmonton market or at the Wheat Board, they were as inscrutable, as foreign-looking and as long-moustached as they had been almost on their first day in this western land.

Passing the farms they came next to the sidewalks, the boarded footways marking streets to which the Edmonton speculators of *ipiz* had hoped the city would extend. But no house revealed itself until a row of houses suddenly appeared out of the snow, a complete street of frame dwellings each with its garden back and front, its veranda, its thin column of smoke rising from the chimney. This was 125th Street, the boundary of habitation on the western side of the city. There was something slightly ludicrous in an endearing youthful way in the sudden transformation from wild open country to wide city street. Andrew's sleigh with a bump left the narrow twisted country road they had been following and slid smartly along Jasper Avenue, the city's main thoroughfare. The streets inside the city limit were swept in the winter. The temperature of ten degrees below zero put a fine polished glaze on the surface of the road, and Jane> sensing a warm stable and a feed of oats ahead, threw up her ears, raised her knees and pulled the cutter along at a spanking trot. Andrew had to keep her tightly in check, but he found time to answer the numerous

greetings shouted at him from the sidewalks with a wave of his whip or his mittened hand.

"Half these people I'm waving to are your friends, not mine, Elaine. I wish you'd tell these young men not to feel it incumbent on them to touch their caps to your old father. I always have to reply, and one day we'll end up with the sleigh on top of us."

"They all admire you so much, Daddy."

"Nonsense, my child. Surely you see through their flattery. It's your attention they are really trying to attract."

At the corner of Jasper Avenue and Ninth Street which led by the high-level bridge over from the University they were waved at violently by two fur-coated figures with little fur caps atop their heads and wearing fur-topped boots that reached just above the ankles. Between those and the bottom of the skirt was a clear expanse of silk stocking. This was pure vanity but of a delightful kind. Their faces were fresh and clear-coloured, their bodies slender even in their sealskin coats, and their legs were straight and well-shaped. They looked so healthy and sleek, so alive and vital in the fresh, cold, clear air, that Andrew felt a wave of gallantry spread happily through him as he pulled Jane to a stop, and the sleigh skidded in against the kerb.

"I was just telling Elaine," he called to them, "that all her young friends who have been waving to us since we came into town were thinking only of her and not of me. But I prefer to think of you two as an exception. Jump in, and we'll all have coffee at the MacDonald."

"That would be very nice, Mr. MacTaviot, but we're to meet some people at the Imperial, some of the University crowd. It's a date we can't break. Come on, Elaine, come with us. Can she, Mr. MacTaviot? We don't often have her in town in vacation time."

Andrew pretended to look deprived but in his heart felt glad that Elaine's friends liked her so much that they wanted to add her to their party as soon as they saw her.

/ "Down you get, minx," he said, throwing back the buffalo robe. "Remember, I'll be at the MacDonald for lunch. You had better come and meet my Englishman, if you have nothing better to do."

Elaine stepped down over the shaft of the sleigh and stamp-

ing her feet to restore the circulation and beating her cheeks with her gloves to warm her face, smiled up at her father. "Thank you, Daddy darling."

"How beautiful she is!" thought Andrew, jerking the reins and clucking to set Jane in motion again. As Jane gathered herself into her swift trot, and the cutter slid noiselessly into the road, he looked back and saw the three girls start arm-in-arm up Jasper Avenue towards the Imperial Cafe. "I wonder what I would do if I were a young man," he thought to himself, "and suddenly saw Elaine. These young men see her, and seem excited enough about her, but they keep their sanity. They have more restraint than I would have had at their age. I should have wanted to kiss her and run off with her as quickly as I could." Andrew smiled to himself, and buried his chin deeply into the collar of his coon coat, which was as though to say to himself, "Don't talk nonsense. You're prejudiced about her, being her father. The world is full of pretty girls, and you behave as if she were the only one worth looking at." But though his chin went deep into his coat as he flung the non-sensical idea away, his eyes, fixed on the road between Jane's forward-pointing ears, remained proud and happy.

4

Ralph Harriman, finishing his letter, looked at his watch, and seeing that it was a quarter to one, thought, "I'll just have time to read this over before I go downstairs to lunch." He lit a cigarette, pushed his chair back from the desk, and picking up the sheets of his letter gazed out of his hotel bedroom window at the Athabasca River, and the straggling buildings on the opposite bank. It was strange, he thought, how much alike these Canadian cities were. He had looked at the view from so many hotel bedrooms in the last few weeks, and always it seemed to him the same: a river locked in ice, set down between deep-cut banks, a conglomeration of ill-assorted frame houses generally in need of paint, seeming cold and forlorn against the wintry background; stretching into the distance, white plains and hillocks; the sky on the horizon misty and depressingly grey, but thinning as it reached overhead to a clear and brilliant blue, from which something that looked like a reproduction of

the sun, but was not the sun itself, for it gave no warmth and could be looked at without blinking, a sun without brilliance and without life, stared blankly and uninterestedly down. If he stood at the window he could see on the streets below hurrying figures wrapped in furs or blanket coats, moving without noise, for they walked on snow, and seeming to converse or to call to each other without sound, for the double windows in his hotel bedroom shut out all the sounds of life as well as the cold air.

Ralph Harriman had not been much impressed with all he had seen since his arrival. He had taken note of the vastness of this land, but its immensity had seemed to him like that of a huge catacomb, tremendous but lifeless. The cities had seemed pretentious and ugly, the vast land areas that lay between them, inhospitable, bleak and cold seen from the windows of the train. There had been moments of beauty, white rocks and green fir had twisted themselves into some arresting shape, and the sun at early morning or at sunset fell upon these places. Sometimes the land had dropped away from the railroad bed, and what would have been a lake in summer, but was now at the depth of winter only a vast circular surface of even still white, yet offered something of beauty as when little green-treed islands studded the surface, or on its farther shore could be seen rising against the sky bluff escarpments like battlemented towers. But they were glimpses, briefly noted and standing out from a generally drab view. It was a hard, cold land peopled by an unattractive and unrefined race with little manners of conversation, and in place of these things just a bluntness of camaraderie and an endless, boring volubility. He wrote to his mother:

"One thing I have learned is the folly of accepting one's friends' letters of introduction. You will say, 'But why present them if it bores you to do so?' If I didn't, I should have to answer for it when I got back to England. You see from the address that I have reached Edmonton. Sir George Richardson wanted me particularly to see a man here called MacTaviot. I posted him on my letter of introduction from Winnipeg, to say that I should be here anyway for this one day; and so, on arrival, a letter awaited me from MacTaviot, inviting me to lunch with him in this hotel. I daresay he will be as boring as the others have been all the way from Montreal here. He'll be dying to talk to \$tie about London, and will give me every detail of his

last trip over. He'll ask me whether I don't know Sir Somebody This or Lord That, naming some unfortunate peer who has been on the Gov.-Gen's staff at Ottawa and has married a Canadian. I believe they always go to call on these unfortunate chaps when they are in England, and are terribly hurt if they aren't invited down to their country seats. The purpose of my visit is to find out something about Canada. I keep steering the subject that way; it works to this extent that it produces a little jet-like burst of statistics and a boast about what they call their 'natural resources' which they invariably describe as hardly yet scratched (not surprising considering the amount of snow mat covers them for six months of the year). But then they quickly turn the subject back to the 'old country.' Somehow I hate hearing it called that. This is an old country, very ravaged and scarred and wearied-looking. England is so young and green and vital; she is in the very prime of life. But I listen politely to all that they have to say, and try by books and a close scanning of the Canadian press and periodicals to get the information I'm after. It's very tedious, Mother. You, not having the patience of your son, would be rude to these good people. I'm not, but I'm very bored by them."

The telephone rang by Ralph's side and the telephonist made known Andrew's presence in the lounge below. Ralph slipped the pages of his letter inside a drawer of the writing-desk, and rose with a sigh to prepare himself to go downstairs. "I look a bit wan," he thought, glancing in the mirror over his washstand. "Too much train, and too much of this awful food. I ought to get some exercise, but how that can be done in this icy land God only—or perhaps Mr. MacTaviot—knows."

The chambermaid who had watched Ralph go out came in to tidy his room. When she had finished dusting the desk, she opened the drawers, and finding Ralph's letter lying there, took it up to read it. Half of it she did not understand, but the reference to Canada and the Canadians, though its irony was lost on her, yet seemed to her unflattering. She pushed it back into the drawer and went on with her cleaning. "Stuck-up bastards, these Englishmen," she thought, "especially these well-off tourists. If they don't like the country, what the hell do they come here for? I bet London ain't so grand, always raining and fog." She took one of Ralph's cigarettes and looked out of the window as he had done. The houses on the south bank

of the river stood up against the sky-line, looking bigger than they really were against the background of the horizon. The smoke rose as straight as a ruler from their chimneys. People were coming home to lunch. She could see cars drawing up before the doors, and men getting out here and there and mounting the steps. As the doors closed behind them, she thought of the well-lighted halls and the pleasant dining-rooms in which they would soon be seated. "Nice to be rich and have a home of your own/' she thought. "I wonder if I'll ever meet a rich guy and have a house of my own on the south side, and a car to go shopping in. Gee, it'd be wonderful."

"I'm adding a postscript to this letter/' wrote Ralph later that afternoon, "not having finished it, as I had meant to do, before lunch. It's as well; I should have posted you off another letter full of bad impressions of the Canadians. This postscript gives me a chance to add a necessary rider. MacTaviot was a surprise: a good-looking chap of about fifty, with rather a thin ascetic face, and a very neatly clipped brown moustache. He has a respectable hair-cut, and is not shorn about the ears as so many are here. He has a pleasant, quiet voice, is well-dressed (I gathered that he comes over to England every other year, and gets his clothes at Poole's. His mother would know). He is a moneyed gent, as Richardson I remember told me: owns one of the largest farms in this district, and is quite looked up to by all the neighbourhood. If they had squires in this democratic land, he'd be The Squire, if you see what I mean.

"When we went in to lunch, and were circling uncertainly about the table, he said, 'Do you mind if I sit facing the door? I have to keep an eye out for a daughter who may descend upon us. I have brought her in to town for the day. I dropped her off to carouse with some friends of her own generation but told her that I would be lunching here with you, if she wanted to join us. I hope you don't mind. This is her holiday time from the University, and on the occasions when I come in to town I like to offer her some kind of treat.' A treat, mark you: lunch in this ghastly hotel! But he said it in a sly, amused way, quite clearly implying that she was very young, and to lunch out in public whatever the fare and the surroundings, was something of an event.

"But this postscript, which is assuming the proportion of a

letter, is not meant to be about the father, but the girl herself. She arrived, my dear Mother, and she quite took my breath away. This benighted part of the world shelters one of the most beautiful girls it has ever been my good fortune to see. She can't be more than eighteen or nineteen; like Natasha, in *War and Peace*, she is slender, strangely slender. I know now what Tolstoy meant when he said 'strangely slender.' He meant un-gross; he meant absolute perfection of bodily form, with the fairest and most delicate skin that is almost transparent covering limbs as finely and beautifully formed as though a sculptor had worked long and lovingly upon each fascinating curve.

"I saw but the young woman's face and hands and neck, but the beauty of her entire body was implicit in those, and in the delicate gentle movements that gave a particular grace to every motion she made. She wore a little round Persian lamb cap which sat ludicrously but very prettily a little to one side of her head. She has dark hair, a deep rich chestnut colour, really; it is thick and yet fine, and it shines with health. She has the shape of her father's face, a highish forehead, and a short, perfectly straight nose. The groove in her upper lip is so strongly and finely marked that it seems to pull the upper lip back a little, and when she is listening to what you say, you catch a glimpse of her small well-shaped teeth. I have rarely seen anything lovelier. MacTaviot annoyingly has pet names for her, so I don't know what her real name is. It should be Helen, for she looks like Poe's Helen, but it may be some maddeningly modern corruption of some perfectly unpoetic name.

"I don't deny that I was impressed by her, but she seemed very little interested in me. She was perfectly polite, listened to what we were saying and put in a remark of her own every now and then. But though I strove mightily to be my conversational best, and addressed myself to her frequently with what you would call my sexual leer, I made no impression on the young lady. She regarded me with great composure and detachment.

"I was sorry to see them go. I pressed MacTaviot to visit us when he comes to England next year, and I've said that you, dear Mama, would love to meet them. I spoke with entire conviction on this point. You would take greatly to this young lady, I am sure. But, Lord, they've gone, and I am off to Vancouver at midnight, and I have an unhappy feeling; I shall

never see them again. I somehow wish, if it doesn't seem to you an absurd thing to do, that you would write them a note. Richardson will give you the address. Be indulgent to your only son, and make this gesture."

5

The sun was a huge crimson ball of fire hanging on the horizon as Elaine and Andrew drove home to Acadia that evening. They drove straight towards it, watching with pleasure how the banks of snow appeared ruddy against the sky when the road dipped down through valleys and undulations, and how unmenacing and beneficent it seemed when they topped a rise and saw it aflame against the western sky. The night promised to be very cold. There was not a cloud to be seen, and when the sun sank beneath the horizon and the cold white stars came out, the iron of the northern night would grip the frozen earth with its fierce, unrelaxing hold. But by then they would be inside the warm walls of Acadia, settled with books in the deep easy chairs that stood about the great fire in the drawing-room. The last light of the sun would see them driving up the avenue.

"Did you have a good day, darling?" asked Andrew.

"A lovely day, Daddy. It was such fun at the Imperial. Half the freshman class was there. Ann Hanover is in love with such a nice freshman. His father is a judge in Calgary. And Jennie Barlow is giving a party next week. She was asking every one she saw to come. She asked me, too. Could Comma drive me in, Daddy? Jennie says I can stay the night. Jack Beaton has asked me to go to the Junior Prom with him. I've said I will, but I wish Leonard Myles had asked me. I know he hasn't asked anybody yet, and everybody's dying to know who he will ask. I think he might be going to ask me. He has dropped all sorts of hints, and he seems to take it for granted that I will be going with him, but he hasn't actually asked^s me."

"He sounds a most unpleasant young man," said Andrew.

"Well, he's terribly good-looking, Daddy. He plays football for the University and captains the Ice Hockey team. He's a senior; he's graduating in medicine this year. AH the girls are half in j⁸ j ^ w i t h him, **but** he never sticks to anybody."

"Sounds a bit too conceited for my taste," said Andrew. "How old is this prodigy? About twenty-two, I suppose, and already quite sure that he can keep everybody dancing on a string. I'm glad you're going with Jack Beaton. Jack's a nice boy, even if he's not particularly clever. Has Myles the magnificent ever been to Acadia?"

Oh no, Daddy, he's too frightfully grand. I don't mean for Acadia——" she squeezed his arm and laughed up at him, "but I mean, I'm only a freshman, and he would think it awful cheek if I asked him to my home, unless he gave me an indication that he wanted to be asked."

"Good God!" said Andrew.

"Oh, Daddy, don't be the old country gentleman," she laughed at him. "There are social rules at the University, and though they sound ridiculous to you, they really aren't. They keep everybody in their proper place. I'll be a senior some time and then you will see with what enormous respect the freshmen treat me."

They were silent for a while, each of them happy in his own thoughts and with the presence of the other. Then as they were slipping past the Acadia boundary, Andrew said:

"You didn't tell me what you thought of Mr. Hairiman."

"Rather nice, but rather frightening, Daddy."

"Frightening?"

"Well, he looked at me rather like a stage lover. That was the nice part." She laughed happily. "But I felt as if I was on the stage with him and I didn't know my lines. That was the frightening part. He seemed very anxious to be nice and that we should like him. If he's exerting himself to be as charming as that all the way across Canada, he'll be worn-out by the end of his trip." She laughed with great freedom, kicking up her heels under the buffalo robe, so that Jane's ears swung back to inquire what was going on. "You know what I really think, Daddy? I don't believe he has met any one as nice as us on his way across Canada. I bet he has been writing the rudest letters home, and that he was bored to death at the thought of having lunch with us; and it gave him such a shock to meet you and find you civilised that the encounter has left him in a whirl. He looked quite disappointed when we left."

"Good God!" said Andrew. "You are as bad as Master Myles, you conceited puss. Harriman must be thirty-eight. Not

that that's an advanced age, but he knows something of the world, and I don't think he was swept off his feet by lunching with you and me."

Jane rounded the end of the drive at a spanking trot, and drew up before the door with channels of steam, visible in the cold air, blowing from her nostrils. Charlie had heard the sleigh-bells and came running around from the stable-yard. Andrew and Elaine got down from the sleigh, stamping their stiff limbs to restore the circulation. As they mounted the steps, Comma opened the door. "I put tea in the library, Mr. Andrew. Missis is waiting there for you."

He took their coats and wraps, and arm-in-arm Elaine and Andrew walked along the hall to the cedar-panelled library. The smell of newly-baked scones was in the air, and when they opened the library door, and saw Elspeth sitting on the low stool before the fire, they shouted together as they came towards her, "Oh, we're hungry. It's terribly cold out." They kissed Elspeth and rubbed their cold hands together and stretched them out towards the crackling log fire. The tea-table shone in the lamplight. Under the silver kettle the spirit-lamp was burning, and its blue light and the mellow glow of the lamps were reflected in the silver covers that stood over the plates. Scones and cakes and honey and hot tea. How good it was to come into out of the cold evening; how lovely to see this room and Elspeth at the close of a day. Andrew smiled to himself with great satisfaction as he looked down at his wife's head, and moved by tenderness he put his hand on her shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze.

CHAPTER SIX

i

TOWARDS the end of January Sandy Pearson's spirits rose alarmingly even above their usually mischievous high level, and at lunch-time, as they sat sprawled about among the hay, he began to toy with the thought of another brief holiday in Montreal. Burns Night was in prospect, and his strain of

Scottish blood yearned to make obeisance to that anniversary; he had been working too hard and saving too much money, a state that he declared to be unnatural and unseemly in any red-blooded man; and the femmes, "them French femmes," deserved some relaxation and entertainment, which he, Sandy, thought he could offer them after their undiluted diet of "pea-soupers," in which derogatory term he included all the French Canadians of Quebec.

The others watched Sandy making up his mind, even helping him to do it by their rough suggestions and laughter, for they derived a vicarious pleasure from anticipating the orgies in which he would play a part. Richard laughed with them, unaware of the full meaning of all the references, but sharing the general pleasure aroused by Sandy's excitement and hearty threats to "do it all brown."

"Why don't you come along with me, kid?" asked Sandy, after the trip had been discussed for several days. "Andy will give you a holiday. You've worked nearly three months now, and you got a few days off coming to you. I remember you didn't have much of an opinion of Montreal. You ain't seen it under the right auspices. You come along with me. The femmes will like a nice fresh young fellow like you."

He gazed at Richard with solemn anxiety. Richard knew that if he said no, that expressive face would fall, and he felt that a refusal might be taken as censure of Sandy's way of life. Censure was the last thing he had in his mind. He did not see himself being quite the success among Sandy's lady friends that Sandy anticipated, but it would be pleasant to have a few days off, to be warm and eat good food, to drink a little more than he had ever been able to do, to kiss somebody and be kissed in return, to forget for a few days this ever-present cold and drudgery. He could not afford it. What was the good of subsisting on a diet of soup and potatoes to save money if he went and blued it all on a sudden extravagant trip like this? The faces of Gov. and the family appeared in his mind looking pathetic and grieved at his delinquency; but Richard, sitting young and cold in his overalls, with a long hard afternoon's work ahead of him, and a walk back through the snow and darkness to his lonely room, said, "Why, sure, Sandy, Fd like to." Any momentary compunction he might have had over a decision so rashly reached was blotted out by the warm

delightful smile that broke over the large good-natured face he liked so much. "Boy, that's swell," said Sandy.

They left Ottawa at six o'clock one evening in late January. The boys came to see them off, and while they stood on the platform outside the day coach in the cold dusk of a winter's evening, they indulged in back-slapping and hoarsely-delivered loud admonitions, a form of excitement in which Richard was happy to feel himself share. This was the first time he had been on a train since he had come from Montreal *in* October. He felt a great sense of satisfaction, almost of achievement, in contrasting his feelings then and now.

The train pulled away into the night, and Sandy and Richard made themselves comfortable on opposite seats in the day coach. Richard had brought a book with him. After a little talk with Sandy he opened it, and then was suddenly aware that Sandy was looking at him. He glanced up and met the troubled eyes of his companion brooding on him.

"What's the matter, Sandy?" he asked.

Sandy heaved a sigh and started, as though his reverie had been broken.

"You keep your eyes screwed up too much on them books, son. Me, I like a book in the proper place. A bit of readin' is all right, but it's a kinda disease with you. Here you are startin' off on a bit of fun, and instead of lettin' your mind rest on that, you stick your damn' nose straight away in a book, and get yourself all muddled up over somebody else's business. You remind me of a guy I once knew who was always readin' when he might have done better for himself keeping his mind on his job. He was night-watchin' for a warehouse, and here's this guy readin' a detective story about a guy who was murdered, when some guys broke into the warehouse and made an end to him. They stole all the furs there, and when they found this guy, this friend of mine, who was killed there, he was still clutching this blamed book all about crime and disaster, and himself murdered completely." Sandy heaved a sigh, whether in pious memory of his friend, or in sad anticipation of what lay in wait for Richard, it was left for Richard to guess.

At the Windsor Station in Montreal, they turned up the collars of their mackinaws, pulled on their gauntlets, and went out from the brilliantly-lit and overheated station into the cold streets. Snow had been falling lightly during the afternoon; it

lay about an inch deep on the pavement and in the roads. Their boots crunched through it as they walked. In the streets motor-cars with chains over the tyres sped up and down the hill outside the station, and sleighs, pulled by fast-trotting horses with bells cheerfully ringing, dashed at great speed out from side streets, almost colliding with motors and foot passengers, righting themselves on one runner to recover from the shock, and then speeding away to the music of their bells under the brilliant lights.

Sandy and Richard walked eastwards, from the station to the poorer quarter of the city. Sandy knew a lodging-house, just east of the St. Lawrence Boulevard, where he always stayed on his holiday excursions to Montreal. The house belonging to a Frenchwoman; as pale, as black-clad, as gaunt as so many French landladies Richard had seen in the seaside villages of Normandy and Brittany, where he and his family had gone year after year. Madame Dupre and Sandy were on intimate terms; there were great embraces and hearty badinage for the first five minutes of their encounter while Richard stood shyly by.

"Why, damn' me, I nearly forgot the kid," said Sandy at last. "Madame, meet Dick Danby. He ain't a Canadian, he's an Englishman, but a good enough guy. I figured on showing him Montreal, and a bit of life. Ask me, he's been working too hard and saving too much money. I figure Montreal will work a cure, eh, Madame?"

"But he is so young, he's a boy only," protested Madame, smiling at Richard.

"Don't try that crack either, Madame. He resents remarks about his age," said Sandy.

"Never mind," said Madame. "He is too nice, this boy, for some of the places you go to, my friend. Ha, I know how it is, Th6r&se will take him out and will look after him while you go your wicked way, you big monster." Madame ended on a high cackle of laughter, but Richard, who had not committed himself to the expenditure involved in this holiday to see the sights of Montreal under the escort of anybody but Sandy said, somewhat shyly, "I think I had better go along with Sandy."

"And so you shall, my lamb," breathed Madame. "But you don't know Sandy when he gets started. Oh, he's a villain, that man. Come along now to the kitchen and have some supper before you go to bed." She put her arm through Richard's and

smiled at him. Her breath was offensive, and he shrank a little from that and from the pallor of her features, from which her black glittering eyes looked forth in a frightening way. She was like an animated corpse, he thought. If Madame felt his shrinking, she gave no sign of it. "Come, Sandy, you naughty man," she called over her shoulder. "Ah, the villain!" she breathed at Richard's face. "Oh, la, la, and for him to have with him such a nice boy as you."

Therese had just risen from the table as they entered. The impression Richard had of her at his first swift nervous glance was not unpleasant, but to Madame's introduction of her daughter he responded only coldly, and looked at Sandy imploringly to save him from this embarrassing situation. Therese was dark and pale, like her mother, but she had a neat figure, and when she smiled she showed attractive teeth. She looked more healthy than Madame Dupre, and on that account less sinister. But her smile did not reassure Richard. He thought it anticipatory.

Madame busied herself at the stove. Therese set about putting out plates and cups and saucers. Sandy stretched himself back in the best chair and gave his soul up to gossip with Madame and Therese. He seemed to have forgotten Richard's presence. Richard sat on a hard upright chair in one corner of the room and watched this scene with no very cheerful heart. Two feelings fought in his breast like wolves rolling over one another in a deadly struggle. He felt shut out from the circle of their good-nature, and an unpleasant feeling that he had behaved like a prig began to settle coldly on him. He had felt revolted by Madame's attentions when they were directed towards him, but how that she no longer showed herself aware of his presence, he felt neglected and disliked. "Sandy is sorry that he brought me along with him," he thought unhappily. "If I weren't here they would be having a fine time. Therese would be sent out of the room on some excuse. They could easily get rid of her, but it is difficult for them to get rid of us both. I shouldn't have come with Sandy. I'm spoiling his fun."

He looked at Sandy's broad, good-natured face, shining red in the glare of the unshaded electric light bulb. "What a good, simple-hearted chap he is," thought Richard, his heart yearning and swelling towards Sandy, as a dog's heart swells with

affection for his master. He could stand his isolation no longer. His eyes moved from Sandy to Therese, and he smiled at her, a friendly, boyish, half-shy smile that expressed, unknown to himself, his uncertainty, his loneliness, his desire to be liked. Therese, a young woman of the world, responded to the invitation. She left the stove, by which she had been standing, and came over to where Richard sat, dropping with the pretence of weariness into a little straight-backed chair next to him. She looked at him in friendly fashion with her large brown eyes, and showed her attractive teeth in a smile.

"You look kind of a lonely little bastard," she observed, with no trace in her voice of the rough French-Canadian accent that marked her mother's speech. Richard's good intentions about not being a prig withered, in spite of himself, as he gazed with round eyes at this young woman. He had never heard a girl talk like this before. If it had been some old hag or a drunken slut he would not have been shocked. The soft brown eyes and the attractive mouth of this shocking young woman showed nothing but quiet amusement.

"I'm not lonely," said Richard. "What makes you think I'm lonely?"

"Oh, I don't know. You look kind of miserable. I guess you miss England, eh?"

"It would be nice to be back," said Richard. "But I'm enjoying Canada very much, what I've seen of it. Very cold, you know. Well, of course you do know," he ended with a laugh.

"You're telling me," said the girl. "Say," she went on, her eye lighting with interest. "What you figure on doing after supper? There's a place near here where I go and dance on Friday evenings. Like to come? It won't cost very much, and there's a swell guy playing the piano. Like to step out and try it? You don't want to go hanging round with Sandy. Him and my mother will be visiting folks, and you'll feel kinda out of it. I'll introduce you to some pretty girls if you come down to the Andalusia with me."

It was the feeling he had that he was spoiling Sandy's fun that made Richard accept this invitation; and immediately afterwards he felt happier, and as though his presence here was justified and nobody had to go out of their way any longer to entertain him. Sandy said, "That's right, kid. You go ahead

and enjoy yourself." He winked broadly at Madame. "What do you know! He ain't been here an hour and he's got himself booked up dancing already. These young fellows are swift workers, eh, Madame?"

The night was clear and very cold when Richard and Therese left the house at nine o'clock. "It's only a couple of hundred yards up the street. If we walk it quick we won't feel the cold. Here, put your arm through mine, and then you won't slip on the ice and we'll both feel cosier." She gave his fingers a little affectionate squeeze as his arm slid through hers and his hand found her hand. "You're kinda nice, you know," she confided in him. "I guess you didn't like me using that word 'bastard,' did you? I could tell by your eyes you were shocked. Gee, I don't use language like that all the time, but figuring you was a friend of Sandy's, I thought you'd be tough, and it was like I was using the language I would have expected you to use. But, gee, you're refined. It was quite a shock to my Ma, I could see that at supper. She ain't used to them drawing-room expressions like 'Could I trouble you for the salt?' and 'Can I pass you the bread?' Me, I like nice manners, but don't you go overdoing them or folks will think you're trying to high-hat them. You got to be human, you know, cuss a little now and then, and have a bit of fun with the girls. Geel" she looked at him archly—"I bet you're so polite a girl wouldn't even know if you'd kissed her. She'd think, 'Well, maybe he just knocked his head against mine by accident, dodging something or other'." Therese laughed heartily at her own humour, an encouraging, flirtatious laugh.

"I've kissed plenty of girls," lied Richard, his heart beginning to beat faster. "You speak about me as though I were a small child. I've seen a bit more of the world than you have, probably."

"Oh, sure," Therese tossed her head. "Why, I've never been outside Quebec. You don't have to travel to see the world, I mean the kind of folks that make up the world. There's plenty to see right here in Montreal. Maybe you have travelled more than I have, but I bet you don't know as much about the facts of life as I do."

She gave his hand another little squeeze, and Richard was suddenly conscious both of himself and of her, and of the attraction of her body close beside his in the white silence of

this empty street. He felt uneasy, but at the same time elated; he felt worried lest he should do something ridiculous, but eager to jump the gap that existed between his sober stiffness and this girl's ease and sureness. He stopped suddenly, laughed nervously, then threw both his arms around her shoulders and pulled her head towards his. He was so awkward that a second or two elapsed before his lips found hers. She had laughed and thrown back her head, but when his warm lips touched hers, she stopped laughing and kissed him in return. Her arms reached up around his neck. She pressed his head against hers; and Richard, who had known only the kisses of English schoolgirls before, felt with a shock the tip of her tongue touching his own tightly-closed young lips.

They stood apart breathless, looking at each other. "Well, you certainly aren't as quiet as you look," said Therese. "Come on, we had better get on. It's too cold standing about here."

Quite unconcernedly, she tucked Richard's arm inside hers again, and they struck out towards the end of the street. Therese went on chatting about the people who would be at the dance, and about the fun they always had at the lake where they went for their summer holidays. She seemed not so much to ignore their kiss as to take it for granted, as though such a commonplace were not worth discussing. To Richard, whose soul was in a turmoil, this was a very extraordinary thing, and he kept wondering about it, hardly listening to what Therese said, until the moment when they went into the hall.

Something of that stiffness which Richard now felt was a deformity of his character returned to him when he stepped into the brightly-lit hall. They had arrived at a moment between dances, and the centre of the floor, towards which Therese made her way to reach the other side of the hall, was empty. Feeling self-conscious, Richard started to follow her, and half-way across he noticed that the corner towards which she was heading was occupied only by girls. A frenzied thought occurred to him that this might mean it was the entrance to the Ladies' Room. Therese was striding on ahead, taking no notice of him. He paused uncertainly in the middle of the floor, feeling very embarrassed and the cynosure of all eyes. A wish that he had not come battled with a feeling of acute dislike for Therese for the central place in his thoughts. He saw that Therese had reached her corner, and with her back to him was

chatting and laughing with a group of girls. He thought that they might be laughing about him, and he had a sudden impulse to turn right round and leave the hall. But he was afraid that that would attract even more attention to himself, and what he desired above all things was to submerge his identity in this laughing, chattering crowd. He was saved for a moment by a young and sleek-looking Jew who came up to him smilingly and said, "You haven't been here before, I guess. Did you come with Therese Dupre? Come along over to the side where the stags stand. When the music starts up you can go and claim her." He nodded his well-greased head towards the opposite corner of the room, and with his hands in his pockets led Richard off.

Standing with his back against the wall, his shyness a little abated now that he no longer held the spotlight, Richard observed the men about him. They were nearly all young, nearly all black-haired and pale-faced, and dressed with a curiously exaggerated, rather cheap smartness. Some of them spoke French, but most spoke English. They were talking about the girls with whom they had just danced or were about to dance. They spoke without cynicism, but with strange innuendos running through their talk; or so Richard assumed them to be, unable otherwise to understand why simple statements, and others that seemed to him obscure, should provoke, such amusement among them. Of Richard, after a first glance, they took no notice.

The orchestra, consisting of a saxophone, a piano and a set of drums, started to play the music for the next dance, and at the first notes the girls on the far side of the room turned about expectantly, the young men about Richard stopped their conversation and laughter, and with an air of great briskness started to cross the floor, except for two or three who remained standing near Richard with an air of indecision which exactly suited his own feelings. He looked at them with kindly eyes, but they paid no attention to him. They seemed preoccupied with anxieties of their own.

Gradually, then with increasing speed, united couples now swept out of the far corner of the room. They surged by Richard as the crest of a wave seems to sweep by when observed from a lifeboat. The music was rhythmic and the piece the orchestra was playing was sweet and sentimental. With rapt

faces, unsmiling, not talking, they twisted and turned in the ecstasy of the dance. Therese came by in the arms of a young man. Her eyes fell on Richard, but did not recognise him. It was suddenly apparent to him that he should have gone and asked her for this dance.

He noticed that one of the young men beside him sprang abruptly to life, advanced to one of the couples swinging by, and slapped the man on the shoulder. The man, without a change of expression on his face, relinquished his partner, and the other took her in his arms, without her having ceased to dance, and the two swept on, he who had forfeited his partner returning to stand with the others beside Richard against the wall.

When he had seen this process repeated several times, and understood its purpose, Richard waited until Therese was near him, then, not without nervousness, he stepped forward and tapped her partner on the shoulder. The man made no protest, but ducked aside, leaving Therese with arms outstretched towards him. He put his arm around her waist and taking her hand, broke into step with her. He felt pleasantly elated, partly because he had escaped from his embarrassing solitude, partly because there remained in him a residue of the excitement which had been aroused in him by their kiss.

Her head was close to his and he could whisper to her as they danced. "I didn't quite know what to do. I'm glad I've got you again. I thought I'd lost you when you left me all alone."

She rolled her head a little, to bring her mouth close to his ear, a deliberately tantalising gesture. "I didn't think you'd be so green. Haven't you ever been to a dance hall before? The men always go one side and the ladies the other. Gosh, you're a funny kid. But I guess it may be different in England, eh? I always heard there was so many girls there you men was all spoilt."

"It was nice kissing you, Therese. You're a sweet girl."

"You aren't such a bad kid yourself."

"I wasn't terribly looking forward to this trip, but I believe I'm going to enjoy *it* now."

"Who with? Yourself?"

"No, with you. You've got to look after me."

"Perhaps I've got other things to do. I wasn't just sitting

waiting for you to come along, you know. As a matter of fact, I'm all dated up."

"Well, you can break them," said Richard, with a new assurance born of the happiness and excitement of the moment. But Therese, intent on defending the dignity of woman, said, "Oh, yeah?" and the music stopping at that moment, she turned her back on him casually and sauntered off with the others of her sex to the far side of the room.

Richard rejoined his own kind with most of his original shyness gone, and stood against the wall waiting for the music to start again, meaning this time to claim Therese right away. He looked with happiness at the cheerful scene before him, impatient for the music to begin.

At last the moment arrived. The orchestra struck the beginning notes and Richard followed his companions across the room. Before he reached the other side he saw that someone ahead of him had claimed Therese, and that already they were swinging out on to the floor. A momentary pang of annoyance with himself disturbed the harmony of his spirit. He had meant to be there first to claim her, if only to indicate that he wanted to pay her honour and was impatient to have her in his arms. But there was no help for it. Therese was dancing, and he would have to wait until she and her partner came round to his side of the room and he could claim her.

He watched them approaching, smiled at Therese as she passed him, then walking on to the floor and coming behind her partner he tapped him gently on the shoulder. But Therese's partner did not release her, and Richard, thinking that perhaps his pat had been mistaken for a knock given by another dancer's elbow, tapped the man again on the shoulder, this time with considerably more force. But the only result was that the man turned and scowled at Richard, an unpleasant scowl which quite plainly meant "Go away." He turned his head again and swung on with Therese, but Richard, made a little angry by being ignored and resenting both the scowl and the failure of his purpose, again ducked behind the man's back, and this time brought his hand quite firmly down on the man's shoulder, and lest his purpose should be mistaken, added the command "Hey."

Like a flash the man turned, hunched his shoulders, drew back his arm, and hit Richard such a blow under the chin that

he felt his head snap back as though his neck had been dislocated, and his knees give at the back as though someone had kicked him there. With more haste than grace he sank to the floor. The music had stopped, and other couples hearing the blow came running up arm-in-arm, inquiring of each other what had happened. A babel of voices and explanations arose, and Richard, lifting himself from the floor and feeling very sick in his stomach, and aware that he mustn't leave it like that, but must hit the man who had hit him with the least possible delay, stared about him to pick out the face for which he was searching. There was no difficulty about that, for there before him was a gentleman with smoothly-brushed hair and exaggeratedly smart clothes, shoulders hunched forward and his fists up in an undeniable posture of offence. Richard felt very giddy and still dreadfully sick, but it was plain that a certain duty was expected of him, for the crowd had made a ring and every one was waiting for him to go in to the attack. So he stumbled forward, feeling a little strength return to his legs and his arms as he did so, and when he was almost within striking distance paused for a moment, and watched his opponent. He had forgotten Therse, forgotten even the cause for which he had become engaged in this battle. He was intent only on avoiding a repetition of the blow that had first knocked him down, and on getting in a similar blow of his own, if he possibly could.

The pause lasted only for a second or two. Then with head bent forward between his hunched shoulders, and with arms milling madly, Richard's opponent came in at him. Richard brought his right and left down with swift strength to each side of the man's head. He could feel the soft flesh of his ears and the hard bone of his jaw beneath his clenched fists, but he had only a moment to savour the satisfaction when the hard head of his opponent butting into his solar plexus knocked all the wind out of his body, and the man's right arm swinging up wildly seemed with a grinding noise to be tearing his head from his shoulders. Everything went black before his eyes, and he felt himself falling through endless space.

His faintness lasted only for a minute or two, but he was not fully conscious of what was happening to him until he found himself being helped from a taxi by Thirese outside the front door of her house. He found the tare, then stumbled up the

stairs beside her. He waited while she fitted the key into the lock, and could not tell from the back of her head whether she was angry with him or full of sympathy. In the hall she switched on the light, and looked at him, half with amusement, half with irritation.

"Well," she said, "you certainly spoilt my dance for me. How are you feeling now?"

"Pretty groggy," answered Richard.

"What did you want to cut in on that dance for? It wasn't a 'tag/ Didn't you know that?"

"What's a tag?" asked Richard innocently.

"Oh, gee," said Therese impatiently, "how am I going to explain everything to you? It will take you a lifetime to learn. I guess you've got a pretty sore head. You better get to bed, or you won't be any good to-morrow."

"You'll come out with me, then, to-morrow?"

"I guess I better. You'll have to have somebody to bring you home. I can't stop you being murdered, but maybe I'll be useful in identifying the victim."

"Good," said Richard, lingering at the foot of the stairs. "I suppose," he said, his hand on the banisters, "you wouldn't like to kiss me good-night?"

Therese laughed. "Boy, you can certainly take punishment." She moved up close to him, a professionally provocative look shadowing her young dark eyes. "Well?" she said, smiling at him.

"Good-night, Therese," said Richard, putting his arms about her and bending his aching head towards her. The elements of gallantry circulating within him had survived the shock of the collision on the dance floor. He found the same elation stirring within him as he kissed Therese for the second time that night.

2

Richard woke next morning, feeling stiff in body but most cheerful in mind, contentedly aware of a number of things that could be counted for satisfaction. In the first place, the dawn had had to report for duty, and he had not. From where he lay, through a not altogether clean window, about a foot and a half above a neighbouring chimney, Richard could see the sun climbing against a sky or still, cold blue. It looked large and

active and immersed in its work, but it was creating a deal of pother about nothing. It wasn't doing what a sun ought to do, give warmth. It would be shockingly cold, he thought, outside this warm bed.

But what gave him most cause for content was the prospect before him of a day's holiday with the girl Therese. He did not know what they were to do, but his body being young and healthy, he felt hungry, and he had pleasure in imagining a good lunch and dinner in a restaurant with Therese. His body being alive and youthful, it yearned, too, for a repetition of those caresses which had given him so much pleasure the night before. He remembered the dark street and the girl in his arms, and the swelling of emotion like a living force within him. He hadn't known this feeling before. He knew that it existed as an emotion, that it came to people in time to feel it; but it was new to him, and more mysterious and alluring than he had anticipated it would be. He was pleased with himself that *it* had occurred with such force, and had appeared so propitiously at a time when he could take full advantage of it. The day and the night ahead held possibilities which it gave him a vast content to contemplate.

Sandy and he were sharing a room, and in a bed over by the other wall Sandy was still asleep. Richard had not heard him come in during the night. He looked fondly at the large red face lying on the pillow, its mouth open, its usually animated features still, but caught in a sort of grin as though Sandy's last waking thoughts had been happy ones. His huge arms were under the bed-clothes for warmth, and the sheets and blankets were drawn right up to his chin for the same purpose. With only his pleasant-numoured face showing, Sandy looked very innocent and childlike.

He got out of bed, found the bathroom, went through the still almost unnecessary process of shaving, then drew himself a very hot bath. When he had thoroughly scrubbed himself all over to make sure that the last redolent vestige of the farm had left him, Richard lay down in the tub, and gave himself up to further reflections on the pleasures of the day ahead. Suddenly aware that he was very hungry, he wondered what they did about breakfast in this place. So far gone was he along the road which his thoughts had been following that the question of whether Th6rfcse was to cook the breakfast occurred to his mind

as a picture of her in her apron, as he had seen her the night before, leaning over the stove. What had rather repelled him then seemed to him now to have a warm attractive domesticity about it, intimate and affectionate like quiet laughter between friends.

He finished dressing without waking Sandy, looked at himself anxiously in the glass, wondering what impression his features would make on this girl, and not wholly satisfied with the answer the glass returned, went downstairs towards the kitchen. The door was open, and a pleasant odour of coffee permeated the air of the somewhat stuffy hall. When he looked into the room, Therese was sitting at the table with her back towards him, resting her head on one hand, and reading a newspaper. He noticed that in the morning light her black hair had a pleasant healthy sheen, and that her neck, slender and abnormally long, was pretty to look at rising out of the collar of her black dress. A robust and mischievous mood possessing Richard, much as it had done at home in England before he came here, instead of making his presence known by calling her name and walking into the room, he crept silently towards her and, bending down, kissed her neck.

Therese started and jumped to her feet, turning to him with a pleased laugh. He noticed with a slight sense of shock that she was not quite as pretty as he had imagined, but she was undoubtedly attractive, and that she seemed pleased to see him made him feel very cheerful and self-assured.

"Well, you look as if you've recovered all right," she said. "I was just wondering what to do about yours and Sandy's breakfast."

"Sandy's still asleep," Richard answered, "but if there's any breakfast going I am terribly ready for mine. I usually have it at 4.30 in the morning and now it's nearly ten. I feel as if I haven't eaten for a week."

"Well, sit down there," said Therese, "and I'll cook you an egg. Here's a cup of coffee to be going on with. Aren't you stiff or sore after your experiences last night?"

"A bit stiff in the jaw," answered Richard, "but nothing to worry about. I'm glad he didn't hit me in the eye. I would have been a sight this morning."

"Well, what about to-day, Therese? What are we going to do? I want to see some of the sights of Montreal, and I want

you to be my guide. Then I want a good lunch somewhere, and I want you to be my guest. Then I want to see a show, and I want to hold your hand while I do it. Then I want a good dinner in a restaurant somewhere, some place perhaps where we can dance. Good Lord, what's Montreal like? Is it expensive? I should have said that I wanted to do all that on something under ten dollars, which is all the cash I have with me, though I daresay Sandy would lend me some. I wonder what that old buzzard is going to do. And what about your mother? Will she mind my occupying your whole day?"

"You seem to have the programme all worked out," laughed Therese, "and you don't seem to remember that I told you I was all dated up. You'll be getting punched in the jaw again if you don't watch out."

"Please, Therese," said Richard earnestly, unaware whether he was being teased, but so anxious not to lose any of the opportunities that this day held out for him that he felt prepared to go to any lengths to win her over to his plans, "you must chuck them up and spend the day with me."

"The day will be all right, perhaps," said Therese, "but I am not so sure of the evening. I've got a living to earn, you know."

"A living? What do you mean?"

She laughed at him. "Did you think I was a lady of leisure, supported by a mother who keeps a boarding-house? What an odd kid you are! You're such an innocent baby in some things, and such a man of the world in others."

"What do you do, then," said Richard, "that keeps you busy on Saturday night, and leaves you free on other nights such as last night, and gives you the whole clay off? Are you a cracksman's nark?"

"What's that?" asked Therese.

"I'll tell you if you tell me what you are."

"I'm a hostess at a dance-hall on St. Catherine Street. They call us hostesses, but we are really dancing partners. We sit at tables, and we get paid ten cents a dance and twenty per cent of what the men spend on us in food and drink. We work six nights a week. Last night was my night off; that's why I wasn't there, and could go dancing with you instead."

"So it was a busman's holiday for you," said Richard. "That was pretty brave and generous of you. Do you like your job?"

Something of the pleasure of the day had gone for him. Many men must have kissed her as he had done. She must be very well used to the sort of gallantries he had thrust on her. I wonder, he thought savagely, if she gets a commission on kisses, too. He had felt passion, and had thought that she had also felt it, but it was her job to be embraced, just as it was his to shovel manure and groom cows. Everything in the world was hard and unpoetic. All the glory of the morning that he had seen from his warm bed was dimmed as though a cloud had spread over the sun.

The heavy tread of Sandy was heard approaching the kitchen. Richard scowled at the unwelcome sound. He wanted to thresh this problem out unattended by Sandy's heartiness. He was irritated that Therese had not been as much impressed by him as he had been by her. He had more than a suspicion that he could overcome her reluctance if he had a chance to overwhelm her with the direct attack that had proved so successful last night, and a repetition of which had promised so well for their relationship this morning. Richard had begun to realise that the flow of vitality that often surged in him carried him forward over obstacles just as a swimmer is carried forward on the crest of a wave, and vitality was pounding in him this morning. But a display of it was not feasible before Sandy, and a scowl which acknowledged that fact clouded his fresh young brow as the weatherbeaten face of his companion appeared at the door.

Sandy observed it and the ready smile which was flickering about his own broad mouth hovered there uncertainly as though ready to take flight if the atmosphere was not congenial. "Hi-ya, lad," he said, and glanced at Therese. "Am I interruptin' a tet-a-tet, as you Frenchies say?"

"Of course not, Sandy," said Therese cheerfully. "Come and get your breakfast. Have you heard about the trouble your young pal here has been in? My Lord, Sandy, what a boy! Into a fight before the second dance down at the Andalusia, and knocked for a row of Sundays. Up bright and early this morning, with plans all laid for a day out with me as his partner, and sore as hell because I ain't sure I can get the evening off."

"I'm not sore as hell," growled Richard.

"Well, you didn't look exactly pleased when I said I had to work on Saturday nights, and I shouldn't have been very

flattered if you had. Say, Sandy, this is what I call a violent guy; if anything obstructs him, why, to hell, and in he goes."

Sandy looked pleased. "Quite a kid/' he agreed, nodding at Therese, but looking benevolently at Richard.

Richard smiled, both to cover some shyness he felt and to hide the fact that he was a little mollified by being complimented instead of condemned for his behaviour. "Oh, damn it to hell," he said cheerfully, pleasantly assured that he was using the common idiom, "I want Therese to spend the day with me, and if she can't do it properly by taking Saturday night off from her licentious job, well, I guess there's plenty more fish in the sea, eh, Sandy?"

"You guys eat these eggs," said Therese, "and maybe I'll telephone and see what I can fix up."

Having served them, she left the room, humming a little tune, a smile on her face which seemed to have become prettier in the last half-hour. Sandy held his knife and fork in the air, preparatory to getting down to his breakfast. "You sure got a way with you, kid," he observed, nodding and smiling at Richard. "If you can get them angry as hell one minute, and singing the next, why, you got the master touch, that's all I can say."

Richard smiled with unbecoming vanity. "Oh, I dunno, Sandy," he mumbled, but in spite of this unconvincing denial he was thinking that perhaps Sandy was right.

3

Therese did fix it up, and at eleven o'clock that morning they set off, Madame and Sandy, who had engaged to go off on an expedition of their own, waving good-bye to them from the front steps. They cut through the streets of the French quarter until they came to St. James's Square, and found what Therese had suggested, a horse-drawn sleigh in the charge of an elderly and not very clean French-Canadian driver, wrapped up from head to toe in at least two overcoats and a number of mufflers. It was not a very comfortable conveyance and it was open to the sky, but the straw on the floor kept their feet warm, and the old driver tucked them in beneath a heavy blanket which he

took off the horse's back. The blanket was warm and smelly from contact with the horse, but the air was fresh and cold, and it was invigorating to slide along the street and to feel the sun on their faces. It was cosy beneath the rug. Richard's hand sought Ther&se's, and a quick shiver of pleasure ran over him when he found and clasped it. They turned and faced one another at the same moment, laughing with the happiness they both suddenly felt. As they went westwards through the city they spoke little but found frequent occasions to laugh, and somehow each cheerful outburst brought their bodies closer together, so that when the sleigh started to leave the houses of the city behind it, and to climb the steeper slope of Mount Royal, they were joined in a happy mood which matched the clear sky over them, and the green-banked walls of trees through which the sleigh made slow and jerky ascent.

At the top of the mountain there is a small plateau on which a tea-room stands, and here on a runway cabs and sleighs and motors can park in a circle while their occupants walk round the plateau and gaze at the city and the river lying below. At this hour of the morning the plateau was deserted. The driver, climbing stiffly down from his elevated seat, drew the heavy blanket off Richard and Therese and transferred it to his steaming nag, without saying a word. Left thus uncovered, they had no option but to get down from the sleigh themselves and stamp their feet to restore the circulation. Then Therese, slipping an arm through Richard's, drew him to the balustrade at the edge of the plateau. "Beautiful, isn't it?" she asked. Then as though not to let his attention be distracted from her by the scene, "I like beautiful things, too, you see. You must think when you hear me talking to Sandy that I am terribly tough, and I know you was disappointed when you heard that I earned my living by dancing. But I'm not such a hard egg, really. I like nature, too. I can appreciate that this is beautiful just as much as any refined girl who doesn't have to earn her living the way I do. But, you see, a lot of the time I have to be with people who would think me crazy if I pointed out a nice sunset, or a pretty view like this, and it isn't until I meet someone like you that I remember how much such things mean to me."

She laughed, a little flushed by what she thought was a doubting look in his usually clear and candid gaze. "And I

guess you think I'm crazy for ever talking about it. God, it's hard to do the right thing, isn't it? I guess if I was really tough I wouldn't give one hoot in hell what anybody thought of me. It's because I'm soft and simple that I want always to be what anybody I'm with wants me to be, like tough with Sandy, and some of those guys you saw at the Andalusia last night, and all pure and ladylike with you. I wish I could just be myself."

"What would you be like when you were just yourself?" asked Richard, smiling. "When since I've seen you have you been the real Therese Dupre? Tell me," he insisted, seeing that she was uncertain whether he was teasing her. He stopped smiling. "Tell me, Therese. I think I know what you mean." And when she remained silent with what seemed to him a somewhat piteous look on her small pale face, he went on:

"You think I'm priggish and pure and that awful thing you call refined. I'm not in the least, really. I suppose you think I'm just pretending to like being up here with you on the mountain. I'm not. I would rather be with you at this moment than I would be anywhere else in the world. But I'd like to be sure that you felt the same, and that you weren't just pretending because you thought it would please me."

She turned her head and looked at him, her face set and angry-looking. Then she took a step towards him, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him fiercely on the mouth. But the moment that he put up his arms to take her, she jumped back.

"You shouldn't have asked me that," she said. "That was the real Therese, the one who kissed you."

"Well, I'm very glad I did ask," said Richard. "It was very pleasant meeting her so suddenly."

She gave a hard little laugh, and thrust her arm through his again. "Come on, Ricky," she said, "let's get going. Do you mind me calling you Ricky? I decided in the night that it would be a nice name for you, and I've been waiting all morning for a chance to use it."

"Isn't it good to be alive?" said Richard, shivering with pleasure, and turning his cheerful face towards Therese. "It's such a glorious morning. I'm so glad I came to Montreal and met you. I wish this day would never end, don't you, Therese? I don't want to get out of this sleigh. I want it to go on and on,

sitting warm and snug beside you like this. It is so lovely, everything, and I am so happy about it all."

His eyes took in the snow-covered mountain, rising steeply on their left, falling away abruptly on their right, and the fir trees shining green in the light of the sun. There was not a cloud in the still blue above them, and not a breath of wind. They moved through a landscape lit with gold and white and blue, and because they were high up and looking down, because they were remote from any human contact, and because he was very happy, Richard had a cheerful impression of being in paradise, and gave expression to his exhilaration with those enthusiastic words.

"If you don't want to go back, Ricky, there's a nice place to have lunch just outside the city. It's only a few miles from here. This sleigh could take us on."

"Therese, how marvellous! What sort of a place?"

"Well, it's a dance-hall. Don't look shocked. I don't work there. I was going to say, it's a restaurant, or what do you call it, a roadhouse people go to at night or on Sundays for lunch. It ought to be quiet on a week-day like this. It stands at the edge of the river, and it has a glassed-in balcony where you can have lunch. Would you like it?"

Said Richard, "Tell Jehu in your best French what his orders are. Attendez, Alphonse. Mademoiselle veut parler avec vous."

The ancient, in response to Richard's cheerful shout, squirmed in his seat to look at them. Under his peaked cap, with the ear-muffs, his thin face covered with an untidy moustache looked exactly like that of a poodle, Therese talked to him rapidly in patois which Richard could not follow. The driver listened impassively, and when she had finished sat silent and sombre, as though lost in thought. Then the huge moustache lifted to show his yellow teeth in a smile. "Bien," he said, and turned and reached for his whip. The nag, now on level ground, responded to his French-Canadian exhortations and the touch of the whip, and the sleigh slid along the road, its bells musical, its human load in complete accord.

"Some people say," remarked Richard, his mind alert and responsive to the glistening light of everything about him, and feeling need to give expression to his exuberance, "that you should never say how happy you are, but just be quietly

thankful. I remember my grandmother used to say 'Sing before breakfast and you'll cry before tea.' But how can you help singing if you feel that you'll burst if you don't? I tell you frankly that I've never seen such a lovely day as this. I'm going to enjoy every minute of it."

He used his excitement to cover his intention, and, pretending that he did it on impulse, withdrew his hand from hers and slid his arm round her waist. Then, abandoning restraint, he put his other arm about her, and pressed his cold face against hers. "Oh, Ther&se," he murmured, "you are so sweet, and life is so wonderful."

She clung to him in return. "Silly boy, Ricky," she whispered in his ear. Richard felt himself completely and happily abandoned to the moment, ineffably contented with everything just as it was. But Therese, although excited by his presence and by a sense of adventure, had on too many occasions felt this same rapturous lightening of the spirit that was drawing Richard untrammelled into paradise, and from experience knew that this enticing world had both an entrance and exit. Coming away from it was too often painful, she knew. Besides, she was a woman, and she would be left: when he went away. He was not of her kind, he would forget her. She knew his type. Unlike the more common lot, they grew bored and were cruel with their tongues instead of with their fists. He would some time or other sneer. She knew them, these ones they called gentlemen. To hell with them. Did he think, because he took her out for the day, that he could do what he liked? She ceased to cling to him, and she set her lips thinly, and started to push him away. He looked at her in surprise, and with such a bewildered expression that her lips relaxed and she smiled. She nodded at the driver. "Look out," she said quietly, "he will see." Then she settled back primly in the seat, drew his arm from around her waist, and took his gloved hand and held it in both hers. Richard sighed deeply, and gazed up at the hills. But after a moment his cheerfulness returned. "Gosh, I'm hungry. I'm ready for my lunch, aren't you? Therese, he won't be able to see us going back in the dark, eh? Do you think I'm very young and foolish? Why do you try to look so severe sometimes?" He laughed with great heartiness and youthful self-assurance. "Gosh-all-dang-it, as Andy—he's my boss—says, woman are strange critters."

The Mayflower Inn stood on a downward slope between the road and the river, a little lower than the road, so that the first storey, up to which a broad flight of wooden steps ran from the ground, was level with the sleigh as it left the road and swung almost sideways down a short drive that led to the foot of these steps. As in* many French-Canadian buildings of the same architecture, the ground floor, which was built of stone, was part garage, kitchen, junk-room and cellar which housed the central heating. Upstairs, on the first storey, were the grand rooms of the house. In winter the snow often blocked the ground floor from view. At intervals, when it was necessary for some purpose, a passage to the ground-floor door could be dug through the snow which reached up sometimes over the level of the windows. But passage to the upstairs part of the house was never blocked, because of these broad wooden steps. They became slippery with ice, and were often dangerous to navigate, but they were always there and survived any snow-storm uncovered except at the base.

Richard and Therese dismounted from the sleigh for the second time, and stamping their feet on the bottom stairs to restore their circulation, they ran up the rest and rang the door-bell. The proprietor, dressed in a mackinaw shirt and woollen trousers, stuck into high rubber boots, opened the door to them. He was a pleasantly ruddy-faced French-Canadian, with black shining eyes and full red lips which parted to reveal dazzling white teeth. He knew Therese, whom he addressed in French. Richard whose knowledge of the language was limited to what he had learnt at school, or on holidays in France, and to whom the many patois expressions were in any event completely incomprehensible, waited for the flow of dialogue to cease.

Therese turned to him. "He's not usually open for lunch on week-days, he says, and he has a friend coming over for the afternoon to go ice-yachting with him, so he wants to get away early, but he says if we'll take his pot-eu-feu we're welcome. I've said that we will. If you're hungry, it will satisfy you, but it won't be the sort of lunch you were talking about at breakfast time."

The proprietor watched her imparting this news to Richard, and smiled engagingly at him, as though he hoped he would say yes. Richard was in no doubt about the matter, and both

because of the proprietor's friendly attitude, and because he felt drawn by an atmosphere of warm attractiveness that seemed to emanate from this house, he thought it fitting that he should express his thanks in the proper language, so he began somewhat haltingly, "Enchanté, monsieur. Ce sera admirable de vous," when the proprietor broke in with a laugh, "Oh, I speak both languages, you know. You have to in this business. More than half my customers can't speak French. Come along in and take your things off."

He led them through a main room on to a glassed-in balcony beyond. Through the glass walls and roof the midday sun poured in, and with the central heating to lend artificial aid the temperature of the room was almost oppressively hot. Tables for four, with a few larger ones, stood on the balcony, at one end of which there was a raised dais for an orchestra, with music-stands, chairs and a piano and a big drum in an untidy muddle on it, just as the musicians had left them the night before. In front of this, running from it to the far end of the balcony, was a dancing-floor, smelling pungently of the waxing it had been given that morning. Through the glass windows that ran from the ceiling almost to the floor of the balcony they could see the outside world: the river white and still, almost below them, its farther bank rising steeply, trees set thinly at its edge but merging into a veritable forest beyond; and in the distance the snow-covered hills rising to meet the sky. It was a familiar Canadian scene, as familiar as hedges and sloping fields would be to English eyes, but so lovely and fresh on this day of sunshine that it seemed like a Christmas fairyland, an innocent, laughing and carefree place that some kindly-hearted giant had fashioned for children to play in.

Here, on a little table set against one of the windows from which they could see the world outside but nothing of the garish scene in the room behind them, a peasant woman served their lunch. It consisted of one course, a huge soup-dish filled with a savoury stew potent with the flavour of garlic, and soaking in a delicious gravy which burned the gullet pleasantly as one swallowed it. Without asking them what they wanted to drink the proprietor sent in a stone jug of a rough red wine, from which the waitress filled their glasses. She left the jug by Richard's elbow, as though she expected him to finish it. When she had left them, Richard looked down the neck. "Good

Lord," he said to Therese, "it holds half a gallon at least. We will be pie-eyed if we down that."

"We don't have to drink it all," smiled Therese. "Andre, that's the proprietor's name, draws a jug like that from the cellar each day for his family. They drink it at lunch and supper, every one of them from Grandmere down to little Pierre, who is only five years old. He has his with water, but I think Grandmere laces hers with a little rum for her rheumatism. But that jug is for a family, not just for two like us."

When she came in to clear away their plates the peasant woman brought them large cups of coffee, and while they were drinking this, pleasantly warmed by the food inside them, and a little drowsy and quiet because of the heat of the room, Andre came in wearing a heavy mackinaw coat with a highly-coloured woollen scarf wound round his throat, to ask them if they would like to have a run in the ice-yacht. Richard bounced with enthusiasm at the proposal. Andre's wife, a fat beaming Frenchwoman, dressed in the traditional black, lent them extra sweaters and mittens and scarves. They went out by steps at the back of the house, and down a twisting path that led to the river. Here Andre's friend, the farmer, was waiting for him, and here the ice-yacht stood, moored to a tree, looking very fragile, white and cold beside the bulky figures that now clustered about it.

The yacht, called *Desiree*, was pulled out into the centre of the river, one sail was mounted, Richard and Therese were invited to get in, Andre took his place by the mainbrace, while his friend, who was standing down for this trip in order that Richard and Therese might be indulged, rocked the yacht and then bending down, pushed with all his strength against it to start it sliding on the ice. Coming along the road in the sleigh there had seemed to be no wind, but down here on the flat surface of the river, which widened almost to the dimensions of a lake at this point, they could feel the breeze whistling past their faces, and slapping and tugging at *Desiree's* sails, as though with impatient fingers.

Richard sat immediately beside and behind Andre on a seat that ran sideways round the inside of the yacht, and behind him sat Therese. Their right cheeks were turned to the wind, unless they faced straight ahead, but the cold then, as *Desiree* gathered speed, was so intense that it was as painful as an aching nerve,

and could not be borne for long. *Desiree's* first motions were unpoetic and wobbly, and the sound of them was grievous to the ear. The steel runner squealed against the ice, setting the teeth on edge. Richard found himself trembling with cold and excitement, and his nerves jangling at this unpleasing uproar. But gradually *Desiree* yielded to her element; the protesting shriek of the runner, as the yacht gathered speed, sank to a quiet contented steady murmur; the sails, for Andre had now mounted another, ceased to flap and belly awkwardly, and pressed forward taut and still under the pressure of the wind. The banks of the river started to race by, trees mounted along the crest of the hills that ran parallel to the river rose as they came into vision, and then seemed to submerge as *Desiree* sailed ahead. Richard looked up and saw the flawless sky, and turning his head he saw the afternoon sun in full and untrammelled glory looking down with huge interest on the scene. *Desiree*, flying now with the grace and swiftness of a bird, sped forward up the river. The happiness and content that had been resting, like something warm and living, inside him all day, sent its glow, as it were, up through his windpipe until Richard longed to shout his exhilaration to the surrounding hills. He felt strong and quick with life, he yearned for something to defy, he longed for something to adore with the passion he felt himself capable of giving to it. He had forgotten Thérèse sitting quietly beside him. Even André, on his other side, manipulating the sails and the rudder, meant nothing to him. Though those two were with him in *Desiree*, he felt happily and paramountly alone, as though *Desiree* were bearing him to some celestial appointment with none other than God. The wine he had drunk, the air, or the exhilarating effect of speed so buoyed him up that he felt he could talk to God without abashment. This was a world through which angels and archangels might move, a fitting background for the mystery and purity which they combined in their persons. When God himself appeared among grimy slums their **horror** would be darkened by the effulgence his presence radiated, but here God might walk upon the surface of this river, in this white and green world, and it would be as though he walked in paradise.

Where the river narrowed again, André pressed hard against the rudder, and though they were travelling at over fifty miles

an hour, without a tremor the yacht curved in a wide sweep, and only the fact that he felt his back pressing painfully against the side of the yacht and that the sweeping panorama on the farther bank of the river came into view made Richard aware that they had turned. André made a rapid adjustment of sails, standing up for the purpose. Then at a somewhat quieter pace, and with the wind blowing coldly against a different part of their heads, they started the run back.

They faced into the sun on the return journey. So strong was its glare that it was difficult to look continuously directly ahead at the river. Richard turned his head alternately to the right and left bank, to the hills rising and stretching into the distance in the north, to the lower slopes, tree-covered and more variable, in the south. All around him was the serenest and most majestic beauty. This land was lovely and it was immense. Sailing up the river he had imagined himself complimenting God on a decent job of construction. Returning, his mood was more submissive, but his wonder at the glory all about him was no less. He pressed with his feet against the floor of the yacht, and clenched his hands inside the mittens to sober himself, and his mind suddenly shot back to the voyage up the St. Lawrence on the day of his arrival in this country. The hardships and hunger he had endured since then had blotted out the memory of his first impressions of Canada. The happiness he felt all this day did not diminish, but from being something mysteriously and vaguely felt, like the effect produced by drink, it became something explainable and real, it provided a vision on which he could fasten, it offered him on that late golden afternoon something he could adore. Canada, as something living and tangible and real, lay all about him, personified in this river locked in its ice, the snow-covered hills rising on either hand, the blue sky above that covered with its protective arc this immense and silent land. Richard looked about him with a new sense of wonder, suddenly aware that of all this he had now become a part. He looked at André's broad back, and turned with a delighted smile to look at Thérèse, exultant over his kinship with them.

The yacht turned into the little bay from which they had started and circled to a stop. André's farmer friend came running to lend his great strength to prevent *Disirée* collapsing on her side, as though overcome with weariness after her run.

They got to their feet and jumped awkwardly over the side, their legs and arms stiff with cold. Andr   bit at his moustache with his lower teeth to remove the drops of ice that had formed there. He beat his hands together and smiled at Richard and Therese with his large liquid brown eyes.

"Like that?" he asked, stamping his feet. "Now run along and ask Madame to give you a cup of hot coffee and a glass of rum. That will warm you up. See you soon, Therese. Good-bye, monsieur. From Ottawa, Therese says you come. A fine little city. A lot of my compatriots live over the river there at Hull. When you come back to Montreal come to see us here again. A bientot."

Richard and Therese, arm-in-arm, ran up the winding path again. Inside the balcony room the heat rose at them as though they stood before the mouth of a furnace. They drank their coffee and rum, their cheeks burning and their fingers aching in the heat of the room after the intense cold outside. Then they said goodbye to Madame, were tucked into the sleigh by Alphonse, and side by side and hand in hand, as darkness was falling, they were escorted by Alphonse and his nag towards Montreal.

4

It had been an exciting day for Richard, and the day was not yet over. He was reassuring himself with that pleasant knowledge as he lounged about in the Dupre kitchen later that evening, waiting for Therese, who was upstairs changing her dress. Being happy and free from care, his thoughts wandered, and did not follow any particular train, as they are inclined to do when one is worried or distracted. He thought of his family, and wondered what they were doing at this hour; of Andy and the farm, both of which, Andy the person, and the shining white background of the dairy, seemed very remote just now; of Thdrese upstairs, who had been such a good companion all day; and he thought with great pleasure of the evening awaiting him as full of enticements and exciting moments as this one promised to be. He thought himself a very lucky fellow to have found such good friends; and suddenly he remembered the feeling that had come over him in the ice-yacht, the sense of having been assimilated by the

background, of being at one with the people living here, brother of Andre and Therese; it had been as though the hills running along against the sky on either side of the broad river had reached down and gathered him up within their arms protectively and affectionately. Richard felt that an honour had been done to him. He felt proud, and at the same time felt anxious to demonstrate his faith in return. But all he could do at the moment was to shift from chair to chair in the kitchen, or wander restlessly about looking at the calendars on the walls, his hands in his pockets, whistling softly to himself.

Therese, busy before her glass upstairs, was engaged with less solemn thoughts, but these concerned Richard, whom she could hear from time to time moving about in the kitchen which lay directly below her room. Therese had had less experience than Richard of putting into recognisable form and continuity the thoughts that passed through her mind on any particular subject, and was less well-equipped both by her nature and her sex to analyse the emotions that surged from time to time into her life as they do into the life of everyone. She acted by instinct in these matters, and since instinct very often advises the contrary of what reason would recommend, she gave the impression of being volatile and unreliable. Richard had yet to discover this, although instances of it had been presented to him, as when Therese had pushed him away in the sleigh. But he had been too absorbed in his own cheerfulness and good spirits to notice it.

In her rather haphazard life Therese had met no one quite like this pleasant English boy. She liked many things about him which she found unusual: his cleanliness, which was a strange thing to discover to be likable, she realised, but she could not deny that the smoothness, of his cheeks, their fresh ruddy colour, a scent of soap or tooth-paste or something that she liked when his head was near, pleased her; the unexpected and very boyish things that he said; his vitality and enthusiasm; his direct approach to what he wanted, like a child, she thought, banging with its spoon on the tray of its high *chair for something it has not been given. These things in him tugged at her heart; she could feel herself being drawn to him by them, and instinctively she put up her hands, as it were, to *ward off the attraction.

Not Thérèse herself, but the particular world in which she

lived, and the only people she had known, were responsible for her belligerent attitude towards softness. If she had not been able to set her lips thinly, and summon frigidity to guard her at certain moments of crisis in her short life, she would have been many times in serious trouble. The evidence of laxity in this respect was all about her; many of her friends, who had abandoned caution for that one fatal moment, and had succumbed to the predatory male, had paid for it with the ruin of their lives. Not all of them would admit that it was ruin. Some averred that anything was better than the continuation of dull life in the poverty-stricken homes from which many of them came. Yet perhaps they were like the fox whose tail had been cut off. They could bluster as much as they liked, and affect to scorn those who had not had the great experience. But, having had it, what had they left? They could never repossess innocence, they could never hope for the right sort of marriage with the worthwhile man. In innumerable and not unsophisticated ways the young of Therese's generation and class earned their living and found their amusements, with no chaperons to guard them and no deep faith in what was right or loathing for what was wrong to guide them, but only with this combative instinct to protect the priceless little that was all that they had to give or to sell.

The predatory male, wandering about the kitchen downstairs, with his hands in his pockets, whistling a tune, his mind flooded with the glory of the knowledge that he had inherited a new world, would have been surprised if he had known what thoughts were passing through Therese's head upstairs. Richard did not stop to consider whether or not Therese liked him; one did not weigh up things like that; it was too egotistical and self-centred. He did not ask himself whether he would ever see her again when he left Montreal; it no more occurred to him to wonder over that than it would have done to wonder whether Sandy would have a happy and comfortable old age. The future was in God's hands; it was a mist through which one walked, finding each day a patch of brightness in which one could discern what lay immediately about one, but which interposed an impenetrable barrier to hide the view of what lay ahead. Richard was on terms of great amiability with God; he admired, respected and trusted him. Though the mist at times obscured things, he always walked into it in perfect trust,

innocently confident, unlike Th6rese, **that** everything **would** work out for the best.

5

Saturday night in Montreal. A million people living in ten square miles along the bank of a great river, and behind them, humped against the sky, that mountain which the French discovered in the sixteenth century and named Mount Royal. It is night, and it is winter-time, and the street lights shine on the snow banked up *in* the gutters, on the human beings hurrying here and there, on sleighs and motor-cars, on the faces of mean buildings and homes and blocks of offices. There are splashes of brightness and alternating areas of shadow. Everything moves as waves move. The tide of human voices rises and falls, the sound of motor-horns and of tyre-chains flapping on the frozen streets hangs in the atmosphere, dying thinly and slowly in the cold frosty air. The workers have been paid, and are spending their money, and from all the little houses clustered about the gaunt and smoky factories and shipyards that line the river front they come out with their wives to walk on the streets, to visit shops and clubs and picture-houses. It is as though when night fell a great wave broke near the city, and all the flotsam pushed by little rivulets emanating from its force moved up a little on the beach that was these city streets, moved up and then back, undulating and receding,, breathing and suspiring. The city was like a living thing that heaved with the motion of drawing breath.

"Therese," said Richard, as they walked through the darkness to a restaurant. "Therese," he repeated, delighting that it was a name that could be said endearingly, and gripping her wrist in his strong hand, "I love you very much."

"Don't say that, Ricky. You don't mean it, and it's nonsense."

"It's no nonsense. I love you and adore you. I have been with you all day, and I have grown to love you more every minute I have spent with you."

"You're going back to-morrow."

"I — I know I am. Don't remind me of it. I don't want to think of it. I will miss you very much."

"No, you won't. You'll forget and I'll never hear from you again."

She made as though to pull her arm away. She could never disguise this quick anger, but always had to express it with some physical gesture. Richard gripped her arm the tighter.

"I ought to spank you. You're exactly like a spoilt little girl. You shouldn't argue with your betters. What I say is right. I won't forget you. I'll write you a letter every week. Oh, don't let us talk about to-morrow and afterwards. Therese, I tell you I love you. If I could only kiss you now, my dear."

She was silent. They had hurried on as they spoke, and now they were nearing the much more brightly-lit St. Catherine Street. As they turned the corner into this main thoroughfare, Richard glanced at her face. He saw that it was set and uncheerful. "Therese, darling, what's the matter?" he said anxiously.

She raised troubled eyes to his, then with a pathetic little grimace the sternness of her expression broke down, and for a moment she was near to tears.

"Oh, Ricky dear, I don't know. It is all so very difficult." She squeezed his arm. "Come on, let's get going. I don't want any cross-examination on a cold street corner like this."

6

It was almost exactly as it had been the night before; not the scene, that was a little more splendid, but the people, and the music, and the dusty, garish air. If they had come there in the heat of intimacy, warmed and responsive to each other, this would have been an ideal place, for they sat at tables with shaded lights upon them, and the music was lower-pitched than it had been the night before; and in the dimmer light of the room the silver shone, and the soft lights added to the mysterious quality that each dancer felt his partner possessed. But Richard and Therese hurried in from the cold street, he wondering what it was that had upset her, and she with cold, unfriendly eyes and a trembling lip, rebelling against the fate that seemed ever at her back intent on spoiling her fun. The evening did not promise well.

Neither of them knew how to surmount the barrier* that had raised itself between them. If they had been alone in the

darkness of the street for a little longer they might have found a way of doing it, but in this room it was impossible. Waiters came, and for the first few minutes it seemed to them that the people at the adjoining tables were looking at them and listening to what they were saying. They were conscious of being noticeable. Richard was wondering whether anybody here knew Therese, and Therese was wondering whether any one here would attract Richard's attention and make him regret that he had her for a partner, and not some other whom his eyes desired. They talked to each other with false animation, aware that they were posing, and because each of them was aware of it, and secretly ashamed of it, instead of blaming themselves they blamed each other for putting them in a false position, and a cold wave of hostility flowed between them. A reeling that this was wretched, and not at all what he intended the evening should be, overcame Richard, but instead of trying to break down the barrier, he became youthfully sarcastic, at first about the people at the tables near them, then about life and himself, and when he got only cold responses from Therese, about Therese too. He knew that he was treading on dangerous ground, but something vindictive in his nature drove him on. He had remarked with youthful arrogance that he didn't like the look of the people frequenting this place, "a cheap-looking lot" he called them. Therese had said that it was one of the nicer places in Montreal. "If you object to the crowd here I wonder what you would think of the place where I work every night. It's a good job you haven't seen that."

Richard said, "Could they be any lousier?"

"The lousiest ones," said Therese fiercely, "are not the regulars, but an occasional visitor who thinks he's too god-damn good for every one else. They usually end up on their ear out on the pavement."

"Rather like I did last night, I suppose," said Richard, with a pale smile.

"Yes, rather like that," said Therese, resting her chin on her hand, and gazing about the room. Both her gesture, which implied the completest indifference to him, and her words stung Richard. If there was ever a maddening girl, he thought, it was this, and he wondered to himself what he could have seen in her pale, pinched face, and he was amazed that he should have been so excited at the prospect of spending an evening in

her company. Great Scott, what a fool I have been! I was actually telling this girl, not fifteen minutes ago, that I adored her. What on earth could ever have possessed me?

Richard had ordered a bottle of wine. He drank it too fast, filling his glass and Therese's several times before they had finished their first course, so that he had to order another. He hoped that the wine would calm his spirit and hers, but it made him more aggressive and her more silent. When they danced, this bitter mood evaporated; no emotion was substituted for it, but it was as though the music was a narcotic, and under its influence numbness succeeded pain; but the wound recommenced its throbbing each time they returned to their table.

The climax came when an unprepossessing young man came up to their table and started talking to Therese. Richard stood up, but when Therese, displaying unwonted animation, engaged herself in talk with the young man, and made no move to introduce him, and when the intruder did not even bother to glance at him, he sat down, feeling both angry at their behaviour and embarrassed in case anybody at the nearby tables had seen how foolish he had been made to look. He stared fixedly out of the room, though he listened greedily to everything that they said. The greasy-haired youth was trying to persuade Therese to join his party; somebody called Eric, it seemed, was there, and the intruder, whom Therese addressed as Jules, held out Eric as an attraction who couldn't be denied. "Why doesn't he come and ask me himself?" Therese wanted to know. "Well, we tossed a coin," said Jules with a smirk, "and I won. Eric says you're the best dancer in Montreal. C'mon, Therese, you gotta come along."

Richard frowned at the intruder. "You happen to be talking to the lady I brought," he interrupted coldly.

An uncomfortable moment of silence followed. The young man looked not so much embarrassed as uncertain what he should do. His eyes slid from Therese to Richard and back to Therese, as though waiting for her to answer. Therese showed no intention of answering. She looked angrily down at the white table-cloth and kept silent.

"And you didn't seem to have had the good manners to invite me to this party of yours," went on Richard relentlessly. "If you want my girl, you've got to have me as well; **and** if I don't like your party when I see it, that goes for my girl, too."

"Sure, sport," said the young man, swallowing nervously and offering an ingratiating grin. "Why, sure, you come along too."

"After that pressing invitation, who could refuse?" asked Richard. "Come on, Therese. Where do we go, sport?"

"Well, we was just going to have a drink here," explained the pale young man, "and then we was going on to Eric's flat. Sure you want to come?" he threw out desperately. "I ain't really the host: it's Eric's flat and Eric's booze, not but what he won't be pleased to see you, sport, but you know how it is. Perhaps I better go on ahead and explain it to Eric."

"No, let's keep it as a surprise for Eric, sport," begged Richard. "Let's break it to him little by little."

Jules, looked excessively uncomfortable. He glanced in an annoyed fashion at Therese as though he held her responsible for her partner's unconventional behaviour. Therese had kept silent throughout this dialogue, but it was a silence that radiated wrath as Richard and the young man were aware. Richard was deliberately prodding her into an outburst of anger; she knew it, and was determined at least not to give him that satisfaction; the young man guessed that they had quarrelled, and he felt injured that his mission of pure good will, following on winning the toss, should have landed him in a situation which acutely embarrassed him, and still left him to deal with Eric. Three more unfriendly and unhappy persons could not have been imagined as they crossed the floor to join Eric's party.

Eric was revealed to be a heavy-featured lout, with dark shiny hair parted in the centre, a prominent nose and bad teeth, and hands excessively equipped with jewellery. He was heavily-built and tough-looking, and he had an unpleasant habit, instantly revealed when he stood up as they came to his table, and he listened to Jules's tale, of hunching his shoulders and narrowing his eyes when he was displeased. Eric, in spite of his gentle name, was the perfect type of mean town bully. Richard had had enough drink to be amused at the situation. While Eric looked at him from his narrowed eyes, Richard put up a finger to his own jaw, still stiff from the blow it had received the previous night. Now for another, he thought. But I wonder, if I'm very careful with my aim, if I can land one on his beefy frame first?

Eric invited them to sit. He had a girl each side of Tiim, one a rather washed-out blonde, unhealthily thin, who spoke with an affected drawl, and answered to the name of Lily; the other dark and quite pretty, but a little too fleshy in the upper part of the arms and around the neck to be anything but repulsive in Richard's eyes in spite of her superficial prettiness of face. She was called Helen. She smiled mistily at Richard; she seemed a little drunk, he thought, but she was undoubtedly friendly, and such had been the atmosphere of hostility between him and Ther&se, and between him and the others, that he responded in spite of himself, and offered Helen what was almost a rapturous beam of friendliness in return.

"Ah thought/" said Lily, with an astringent smile, "Jules had gone home, he was so long away. Ah didn't quite catch your mend's name, Therese."

"Dick Danby. He's an Englishman. Kind of a handful to manage. A nice enough guy, but definitely a handful to manage. Or so I found. Perhaps he's more your style, Lil."

Richard stared at Therese. Good Lord, was she really as common as she sounded, or had he suddenly changed himself? Surely she hadn't been like that when they had been alone to-day.

Lil favoured Richard with an inquiring smile.

"Lay off it, Lil," muttered Eric. "Don't let's have no trouble."

Richard turned to Helen. "Well, now that everybody knows my name and my reputation, how about if I ask you all to have a drink?"

"You can't get anything but wine or beer here, unless you've got a hip-flask with you. No? I guessed it. I never yet met an Englishman who had. Of course, if you're anxious to get hold of something, why, Jules can fix it for you. Give him the money and he'll get a bottle of Scotch and we can keep it under the table and fill up ginger ale-glasses with it."

"Sure, fella, I can fix it," announced Jules, as though laying claim to expertness at a difficult parlour trick. "It'll take five bucks."

Richard pulled a five-dollar bill from his pocket and threw it at Jules with as insulting a gesture as he could manage.

Jules seized the bill, jumped up from his seat and made swiftly off.

As though Richard's hospitable gesture about the whisky, and his offensive treatment of Jules, both deserved some acknowledgment from him as host, Eric turned to Richard, his large shiny head well settled down into his shoulders, one corner of his lips lifted in what might have been either a smile or a snarl. Richard found it needed an effort to hide his dislike of him, and he was half disinclined to make the effort, so belligerent was his own mood. But his better sense prevailed, and he nodded at Eric and returned the smile.

"Hope we didn't break up your party, chum? Therese is kind of an old friend of mine. I got to go back to the States on Monday, and I had something to tell her before I left."

"Not at all!" Richard answered with a mirthless laugh. "We weren't hitting it off this evening, and I rather think she was pleased by the invitation."

"You were the one that was fed up," said Therese.

"I wasn't fed up," protested Richard.

"Well, you kept on criticising and grumbling."

"Well, I'll be damned, you——"

"Oh, for God's sake," said Lil.

"How right you are!" said Richard to Lil. "What's the good of arguing about it? Here comes the sprightly Jules with a suspicious-looking object under his arm. Good man, Jules, you got it?"

How disgusting, he thought, to be sitting here drinking bad whisky surreptitiously out of ginger-ale glasses, bickering with as common a lot of swine as could possibly be found in one place. He looked at the floor crowded with dancers, and the tables near them over which couples bent their heads towards one another. The atmosphere was thick with cigarette-smoke and the dust raised by the dancers' feet. The music throbbed against his ears, and added to it was the pressure of innumerable voices chattering. He felt suddenly lonely and sad again. He felt that he was disliked. There was something in his character that other people found obnoxious, that stirred their venom, and made them shut him off from their intimacies. He was alien here and was despised, and being young and anxious to be liked, he felt hurt and angry as a child feels hurt and angry when an adult who has been paying a great deal of attention to it suddenly becomes tired and ignores it. Richard felt his eyes stinging with tears and a lump growing in his throat as he

looked out at the dance-floor where everybody else seemed so happy. He fought down his inclination by an extra display of belligerency. He had gulped down the generous whisky which Jules had poured for him. He pushed his glass across. "Fill it up again," he commanded. "Don't be mean with it," he adjured the little man, "it's my whisky."

Jules had jumped when Richard had spoken to him. With a startled expression he picked up the glass and putting it down between his legs, reached under the table for the bottle. Richard watched him angrily. "Why all the mystery?" he asked the table. "Why must Jules muck about with the bottle and my glass in that sinister fashion? I don't like the hygienic aspect of it."

The others at the table looked at each other a little anxiously. Trouble was plainly brewing, and since that was so Lil and Helen averted their eyes after one meaningful glance, and stared in silly fashion out into the room. Therese looked at Richard, then with a sigh and a shrug of her shoulders as though she washed her hands of him, looked down at the table. Eric's head sank a little lower between his shoulders. He reached out a damp hand and closed it over Richard's. He spoke with theatrical softness.

"I guess you better get going, kid. Your manners aren't exactly good, and on second thoughts I don't like your face." He squeezed Richard's hand and smiled at him unpleasantly, "No, I don't like your face at all." He pushed Richard's hand off the table with a swift thrust. "Get going, I tell you, before I throw you out."

Richard's heart immediately started to pound with excitement. The moment he had been perversely seeking for had come. He felt a little frightened but at the same time pleased and his unhappiness evaporated like a mist suddenly sucked up into the sky. This last hour had been wretched. The next few minutes would be intensely miserable and perhaps painful. After that everything would become clear and happy again. He itched for the excitement to start.

"Where will we argue this out?" he asked pleasantly. "Right here, or shall we go outside and not disturb these other people?"

Eric paused uncertainly. Evidently he hadn't expected this. Do they usually run from this greasy-haired individual?

Richard wondered to himself. Does he think he is talking to Jules? Eric made up his mind. "You girls wait here," he ordered. "Come along/" he said to Richard, pushing back the table. He walked off between the tables. "I'll be back in a minute, Th6r£se," said Richard. "Ah doubt it," said Lil, with a forced smile. Richard made off after Eric's disappearing back. Behind him, breathing heavily and anxiously, he could hear Jules.

They did not stop for coats, but went out into the white night. After the beat of the room the wind bit at them as a dog bites at a bone. The cold made Richard catch his breath and pause a moment, but he quickly recovered and followed Eric on. Eric turned into an alley-way just past the building, and Richard hurrying around the corner to catch up to him found liis two wrists suddenly seized, a knee come up and catch him in the stomach, knocking his wind out, and then a fist come up and catch him a blinding blow on the side of the head. Under its force his feet slipped on the icy pavement and he fell, striking his forehead against the wall of the building by which they had stood. Blackness came over him for a moment, but he did not lose consciousness and as he fell on his back was conscious of the coldness of the ground against the back of his head. He felt deathly sick and in great pain. He tried to cry out but only a groan escaped his lips. He tried to sit up but the effort was agony. He turned on his side and with his fingers slipping against the cold smooth wall near him, tried to pull himself up. Suddenly he was seized by a great sickness. When that was over he felt better, and slowly and painfully he got himself to his feet. He felt so giddy he could not trust his legs, but by leaning against the wall, and testing each footstep carefully, as though he walked along the edge of a height from which a dangerous space fell away, he got himself the few yards to the brightness of St. Catherine Street. Then he paused. The street near him was empty, but in the doorway of the dance-hall he could see the heavily-coated figure of the doorman. He took a deep breath and staggered along at a half-run towards the door. The doorman saw him and came out, looking at him wonderingly, obviously uncertain whether he was drunk or sober.

Richard felt in his pocket and produced a coin, then in another pocket and found the ticket for his hat and coat. He

gave them to the doorman without a word, leaning against the glass door that led into the hall.

"O.K. I'll get 'em/' said the doorman. "Guess somebody's been treating you rough, eh?"

"Hurry," said Richard. "I'm freezing."

His one desire was to get as far away as possible from this place. While he waited he looked up at the clear frosty sky overhead and at the stars burning brightly and coldly in it. It looked so pure and unsullied, so remote and unconcerned with all the beastliness that was going on below it that Richard felt ashamed of himself and of the world.

The doorman returned, and with a muttered "Thanks" Richard moved away along the street, putting on his hat and coat and scarf as he went. Tears were blinding his eyes, and an immense sorrow was welling up in him, which sprang not from sympathy for himself but because he was alone and unliked. He did not now blame others for this, but only himself. Why had he done the foolish things that he had done this evening? When he had been making progress in adapting himself to this country, why had he had to run into people like Eric and Jules and Lil and Helen? He thought back over the day. It had been such a happy day, and it had ended like this. Everything had gone right with it up to this last hour. What had he said or done that had altered the happiness of the day into the misery of the evening, as suddenly as a light is switched out in a room, leaving it in darkness? His eyes were wet and between sniffs which no one in the night heard he went over each event of the day, but the meaning of it all escaped him, and only his unhappiness remained.

He found himself walking eastwards. He had not been in this part of the city before. St. Catherine Street ran very straight and level for ten miles out this way. Although it was nearly eleven o'clock, and the shops were all shut, enough restaurants and cafe-bars with large brilliantly-lit windows were still open to make the street quite light. As he began to take notice of his surroundings he saw that the names over all the shops and restaurants were foreign, most of them French but many of them Polish or Russian. The longer he walked the poorer became the type of building, and the brighter a glare in the sky and a sound of industry from the direction of the river where factories kept a night shift. As he walked on, a little

part of his unhappiness disappeared, but only a little, and his mind began to dwell on other things instead of his own grief, such as the buildings that he saw, the glow in the sky over the river, and the people he passed occasionally on the street. His eyes stopped stinging, and he was conscious of it and was glad.

Suddenly he felt a craving for a cup of coffee, and he determined that the next quiet-looking cafe that he passed he would go in and get something to eat. He rejected the first three he came to as too crowded. He didn't want to mix with people. He wanted to sit quietly by himself and drink hot coffee, and get warm, before he walked back to the house. The third place he came to seemed quiet; he was not certain at first that it was open, so dim was a little blue light that shone over the doorway, and so heavy the steam on its plateglass window that it almost shut out the light from inside the room.

He pushed open the door and saw a long bar running parallel to the wall, with two big nickel coffee-urns bubbling on it, and on the counter the usual display of pies and cakes. Behind the counter stood a negro in a white coat and chef's cap, washing and drying cups and saucers and singing softly to himself. He wore silver-rimmed spectacles well forward on his broad black nose. Hearing the door open, he pushed these back with a wet wrist and looked at Richard benevolently.

"Come right in, suh," he beamed. "I'se open."

Richard walked to the counter and slid into one of the high revolving chairs that lined its length. "Can you give me a piece of that lemon pie and a cup of coffee?" he said, drawing off his mittens.

The negro laughed with a great good cheer. "Ah certainly can, boss, if you'll give me just a minute to wipe these heah hands of mine."

"Never mind, no hurry," said Richard shyly. "Go ahead and finish them off, if you like," he added, nodding at the pile of cups and saucers.

"Why, boss, I got the whole night to wash up datdiddle pile cups and saucers. Exceptin' round about midnight when Ah gets some of dey shipyard workers in heah, why, I ain't hardly got nuthin' to do but that liddle bit of washing up. 'Course I got to wash de floah, and shine up them coffee-oilers, and have de place all spick en span for the boss when he comes at six o'clock in the mawnin'. Lawsy, it's busier 'n a state fair at

breakfus' time, but in de night roun' here, old Father Time, he sure jes' draggin' hisself along like a weary old tramp. Yes, suh, jes' like a weary old tramp.

"Oh, de Lawd knows life's a weary business,
Oh, de Lawd, he mos' certainly docs know,
For de Lawd, he's de Father of Creation,
De Lawd it was who fixed it should be so.
He done fix it,
He done fix it,
De Lawd, he done fix it to be so."

He had started to sing the first line softly as he waited at the coffee-urn for the flame underneath to burn brighter so that he might draw a hotter cup for Richard. His spectacles had slid forward on his nose again, and he gazed at his reflection in the coffee-urn without being able to see himself, and hummed the first line of this little song. The words were improvised as he went along; the volume of his voice rose until at the lines "He done fix it" he was singing almost at his full power, with such a look of ecstasy on his black face that Richard was startled and wondered whether he was to cap his day's adventures now by running into a madman.

"You'll excuse me, boss, I guess I was singing too hearty. I sort of gets carried away if I ain't careful. Mr. Erickson, he my boss, he warned me against it already several times. 'Vincent,' he says, 'Vincent, you black coon, I'll sho' bring our engagement to a terminus if I catch you catterwallin' dem ims in my place of business.' He sho' enough a reasonable man, Mr. Erickson. 'How yo think yo preacher wud lak it ef I got up in de church and started yellin' kitchen orders lak I was callin' through de hatch,' he says. He quite right. I ain't got no business for to sing at my place of work, only it kinda lonely in here at nights, and de time goes kinda slow, and I gets to thinkin' about de Lawd, and afore I knows it I'se a-singin' But you'll excuse me, boss. How you like dat lemon pie?"

"It's good," said Richard. "And so was your song. I liked it. People don't sing very much these days, do they? I wonder why that is? I remember when I was a small boy at home we used to have quite a lot of music. My father couldn't bear with gramophones and radios. He said that God had given some of

us pleasant voices, and it was denying the purpose of his gift to use them only for talking. My father would have liked to hear you singing that song."

Vincent leant on the counter and beamed from ear to ear. "Yo pappy sho' is right, chile, he soun' a fine man. Oh, it's beautiful to praise de Lawd and all creation with song. I come from Savannah, Georgia. When I was a liddle coon we wuz always singin', I mean de big folks wuz, whether dey wuz workin' in de fiel's, or walkin' along de dusty roads or jes' sittin' outside de cabins at night. It was wunnerful music, and de Lawd he listened, I know for a fac' he listened, for I could see-him, a white and dazmlin' vision with a pleased smile on his face, jes' standin' there hearkenin' to them niggers a-praisin' of his name."

"It must have been wonderful," said Richard. "We did our singing around the piano in the drawing-room. My mother played and sang, and my father sang and my sister and brother and I joined in. It was lovely," he sighed. "I used to enjoy it so much."

"Why you say dat, boss? Ain't you do it no more?"

"No, I've left home now."

"Where your folks live? Cain't you go back sometimes and visit them?"

"I'm afraid I can't. They're in England, you see. It's a long way away," he sighed.

"It sho' enough is. I ain't never been dere, but I heard a lot of folks talkin' about it from time to time. It sho' must be a powerful place. As big as de United States, I guess?"

"Oh, no, not as big as that. In fact, it's quite a small country, not the size of Quebec. But it's a crowded place with lots of people. It's a lovely country, too, or rather most of it is. You miss it a lot when you leave it. 'Oh, to be in England, now that April's there.' That sort of thing, you know. Wherever you are in the world you never forget little things about it. But I suppose that's true of anyone's birthplace. You probably feel the same about Savannah. You must hate the cold up here, don't you?"

"I bin here a long time, boss, mos' thirty years. I ain't sayin* I got used to it, it sho' is mighty cold, but I got kinda able to bear it. Ah don' rightly know ef I'll ever go back. You see, I travelled a lot, I was a railway porter until dey done tell me Ah

was too old and forgetful for to be of any use. I travelled right across Canada hundreds of times. I see it all de way from de Atlantic Ocean to de Pacific. It got kind of with me so I don' feel attached to any place. I jes' work along happy and enjoying myself till somebody tek it into deir head 'that no-account coon, Vincent, he jes' clutterin' up de landscape. Here yo' pay, Vincent. You keep on goin' and don't come back/ "

"But, good Lord, what do they do that for? I'm sure you do your work well."

Vincent looked shy and self-conscious. Then he raised troubled eyes to Richard, as though begging his pardon for the confession he had to make.

"Ah guess I ain't got a very strong intellect boss. I disremember things, and . . . and . . . Ah forget what someone done tell me I got to do. It ain't deliberate. Ah tries very hard, but Ah gets to thinkin' about other things and Ah can't rightly keep my mind fixed. Like Mr. Erickson, he a reasonable and kind man, but he laid into me about them ims, and here am me singing before de Lawd, and you settin' there waitin' for your coffee. Mr. Erickson, he be mad ef he seen that. Some time, sure certain thing, he goin' to say, 'Vincent, here's yo' money. Don't let me see dat black face of yourn no mo'." He sighed heavily, and stood there musing, and his steel spectacles slid forward again on his flat black nose.

"Gosh, that's pretty tough," said Richard. And thinking of his evening's experiences, he added, "What a lot of beastly cruel people there are in this country I"

Vincent looked up startled, then a placatory smile broke out over his black face. "Oh no, boss, you got de wrung idee. Now what put dat notion in your head, I wonder? I figured you wuz downcast about sumpin' when you came in here. Somebody been doin' suthin' that's left you feelin' down, and now you got de idee dey's a lot of wolves in human clothin' what's de human race." He laughed heartily and yet peered over the top of his spectacles a little anxiously to see whether Richard was amused too. "Sho', dere's some folks, a few, got miserable dispositions, but de ones dat's real cantankerous dey usually got a misery in deir bodies which de doctor can't cure up. Dat's all it is, boss, I insure you. Folks generally got kind hearts."

"I haven't found it so, in this part of the world," said

Richard gloomily, resting his chin on his hand and staring before him.

"Ah, shucks, chile/' said Vincent, putting both arms akimbo on the counter, and looking sadly at Richard. "What you sayin'? Ain't you know better den dat? Human peoples is de same everywhere. It don't make no difference what part of de country dey come from. Why, lawsy, I see 'em everywhere in dis blessed land, north and suth, east and wes', dey's all de same. Sometimes somebody a little mean, folks what's got a misery in dem, but generally folks is jes' lak you'n me, de Lawd's creatures fidgetin' deir way to heaven. Yo sho' thinking wrung, chile."

Richard smiled in spite of himself, touched by Vincent's earnestness, and by the thought that here he was at midnight, sitting at a coffee-bar, being argued into a state of charity by a coal-black negro. He remembered some sort of song about this, something he had heard sung or had had told to him when he was a boy, about a black man whose soul was white. The physical bruises and the soreness of spirit he had felt when he nad come in here had ceased to smart. He was conscious of a glow of happiness thrilling inside him, and a feeling of innocence and purity refreshing him as a cold breeze refreshes a hot and tired body. He lifted his head and smiled directly at Vincent, and turned and looked about the room as though seeing his surroundings with new eyes.

"Of course you're right, Vincent," he said. "Something just happened to upset me to-night. I'll get over it all right. I feel better already. Give me another cup of coffee and tell me something about the West. I was supposed to go out there, but I changed my mind at the last moment and tried out my hand here at farming. But I've half a mind to move on out West when spring comes. Tell me what it's like."

Vincent got the coffee and brought it back to Richard, and leaning his elbows on the counter and supporting his head between his hands, he fell into a reverie. Various expressions flitted across his face. Richard, with his own elbows on the counter, holding the cup to his lips, watched Vincent over the edge, and smiled to himself at the emotions so transparent on this broad black friendly countenance. Then Vincent started to speak, softly at first, as though talking to himself, but more loudly and excitedly as he spoke of the mighty West. This

wasn't the great Blackstone's view of it, who had thought of it only in terms of its natural resources and its rich future. This was the view of a wondering child, awestruck by the magnificence of mountain and rushing river and boundless plain; of someone very innocent and childlike who could not understand the mystery of God's creation, but could recognise it and be transported into rapture in remembering it. Many were the biblical similes and phrases Vincent used to describe the majestic scene, many of them ludicrously inapposite, or apposite in a ludicrous way. Winnipeg, which lay on the flat prairie, he called the City of the Plain. The Athabasca River, making its turbulent and fast-moving way to the Arctic Sea, and pale-white with the melted snows that flow into it in the early summer of the year, he said was a river flowing with milk and honey. The mountains to him were the tabernacles of God, and the pure white snows that covered the highest peaks were altar-cloths or the vestments of priests who stood there continually chanting the glory of God.

But ludicrous though Vincent's description was in some sense, and over-coloured in many ways, and sometimes incomprehensible because of the softness of his speech and his misuse and mispronunciation of words, it brought into Richard's mind something of the feeling he had had when the ice-yacht had flown along the surface of the frozen river that afternoon. A feeling that the land was ready to embrace him; that moving though he was through this vast white landscape with irresolute and uncertain steps, lonely and unhappy, there was somewhere just near him a glow, a friendliness, the means to understanding and companionship, and that he was on the point of grasping all this. He longed with all his heart at this moment to be a part of Canada, not a stranger continually making errors, misunderstood and himself misunderstanding, but at home in it as he had been at home in England, at one with it as Vincent was, absorbed into its ways and its background. He thought yearningly that when the spring came, and the snow had gone, and the land was uncovered again as it was when he had first seen it in October, he would go there and see the things of which Vincent spoke. Sitting at the counter he shivered with longing for the warm days to come.

Before Vincent had finished his oration the cafe door opened, and two workmen came in, stamping the snow off their boots

and unbuttoning and throwing back their mackinaw coats. Vincent broke off to greet them. Evidently they were regular customers, for they teased him and laughed at him, though in no unfriendly way, and nodded at Richard as they took their seats at the counter. Others came in, and soon the café was noisy with their talk and the air was thick with the smoke of their pipes and cigarettes, and Vincent bustled about in a state of great activity. Though he now and then fell into a state of abstraction, from which he had to be roused by a customer impatient for his order, no one seemed to get angry with him, perhaps because they knew of his failing, and accepted the impossibility of altering it. Richard saw that he would have no further chance of talk with Vincent, so after a little he went to the end of the counter where the negro stood at the silver urn, drawing from it cups of the delicious-smelling coffee. Richard leaned over the counter to pay his bill.

"So long, Vincent," he said. "I'm going back to Ottawa to-morrow so I won't see you again. But remember me: Danby's my name—I'll come back here one day and look you up. Keep out of trouble and write to me if you ever leave this job so that I will know where to find you. Here's an address which will always find me." He passed across the counter a slip of paper. "You've done me a lot of good, and I am most grateful to you."

Vincent raised a smiling face to Richard.

"So long, boss," he said. "Ah guess de Lawd will look after you all right, but you got to keep your spirits up. De Lawd, he cain't do that for you. Lawsy, he got too much to do to go roun' unfrettin' people. Ef you go West, you let me know. Mebbe I might move on there myself ef my bones ain't too weary, and see dem heavenly fields agen afore I die. Yes, suh, Ah sho' would lak see dat country agen. Good-night, Massa Danby, Ah sho' am privileged to meet you. Good-night, suh, thank you, suh."

They gave each other a parting and understanding smile, and saying good-night to some others who were looking at him, Richard left the café, turning his steps westward again to the house on Cadieux Street.

CHAPTER SEVEN

i

RALPH HARRIMAN returned to London on a chill golden evening in March, 1937. The journey back across the Atlantic in a fast American liner had been tedious, for the company at the captain's table had been unusually dull, the weather on deck consistently cold and uninviting, and the ship's bar, to which he always liked to repair for half an hour both before and after lunch and dinner, invariably filled with a repellent crowd of people, the women overdressed and loud-voiced, and the men professionally jovial. Watching them out of the corner of his eye, or above his book or from behind his glass, he was certain that the men were buyers, and the women either shop-girls, taken along for diversion, or the buyers' wives, who had been saleswomen, and were now able to insist on accompanying their husbands to Europe. They drank many cocktails and played much poker, and were heavily facetious with one another. As far as Ralph could see, they stayed in the bar all day until bed-time. The noise and vulgarity that emanated from this group offered a contrast to the fresh ocean world through which they were moving, and to a quiet vision that had had a corner in his mind for some time, and which, now that he was entirely alone on this ship, swam to the forefront of his thinking at frequent intervals.

Ralph Harriman was at this time thirty-eight years of age, and the product in outward appearance of all that Eton, Oxford, substantial means and fifteen years in the Diplomatic Service could combine to achieve. His father, General Sir George Harriman, had died at the beginning of the last war, and Ralph, an only child, had been brought up by his doting mother. Until Eton and university had got hold of him, with their caste discipline and training, Ralph, an intelligent and handsome child, had been badly spoilt. When Balliol relaxed its hold, the junior grades of the Diplomatic Service had kept him under restraint; but his intelligence was marked, and he rose above these junior grades, and his charm of appearance and character, as well as his great eligibility in the matrimonial market of London, further emancipated him from the need of considering

other people, so that from the age of thirty on, living with his indulgent mother, he had been lapsing back into the spoilt, self-centred and egotistical state which had characterised him before he went to Eton. An instance of his intolerance was the offence he believed he received by his enforced contact with the vulgarity of the crowd inhabiting the bar of the *Gotham* on its cast-bound passage. A further and enlightening indication of his character at this time was the slight sense of frustration he felt over an encounter he had had with a young girl and her father in a hotel in a backward Canadian city.

Ralph was used to being pursued by women. If they did not do so actively, and many of them made embarrassing nuisances of themselves in that way, they yet revealed by their ardent attitude of attention to anything he said, by their habit of gazing at him with interest and expectancy, most of all by the irritation they fleetingly showed at any interruption when in conversation with him, that they realised the importance of Ralph Harriman and joined in the tribute due to his handsome and distinguished appearance. Usually this rapt attention was boring; it was too much like that which occurred in the animal world; it was unintelligent and instinctive, not rational and restrained. Lady Harriman, observing with intelligent eye the potentialities of her remarkable child, had instilled into him a piece of advice: "Never have anything to do with a girl who runs after you. She won't be worth anything." It is doubtful if Lady Harriman saw clearly what the effect of this advice would be. It saved Ralph from early and mistaken matrimony, but it did not prevent him from pausing occasionally until the fair pursuer had caught up to him. Having indulged himself fleetingly in the pleasures for which other men had to give up their freedom or pay expensively, he could then recollect the excellent advice of his mother, and with a relatively free conscience leave the lady nursing a bruised heart and gazing at her fallen hopes.

The girl in that Canadian hotel. It was idiotic to keep thinking of her, but impossible to refrain from doing so. He thought, driving from Waterloo Station to his club on the evening of his return, that he would soon forget her in the hurry of social engagements and work that were to occupy his next weeks. He began sorting out in his mind what he must do, and what it would give him pleasure to do, in the next few days; his report

for the Foreign Office, a telephone call to his mother in the country, some games of squash to get him fit after the lazy passage on the ship; luncheon and dinner engagements that he must make, visits to friends, and the pleasurable excitement of taking up again the threads of affairs he had left lying loose when he sailed for America. He went over mentally the two or three women friends he would like to see, summoning their faces and their mannerisms to his imagination, and he was conscious of an unpleasant sense of disappointment and frustration, and could not for the moment seek the cause. A little round fur cap, set at an angle above a smiling and eager young face, swam again into his thoughts. It was intolerable. Even here on a spring evening, he could not escape the vision. '

He complained about the room that the club gave him, and when the flustered servant called the steward to answer the gentleman's complaint, he said, "Oh, God, leave it," and almost pushed the obsequious steward out of the room. He changed, and went down to have a game of squash with the Pro, and met that friendly individual's surprised comments on his long absence and inquiries about his trip with scarcely a polite reply. He played squash well, and could stretch the Pro almost to the full extent of that worthy's game. They played fiercely and silently, until at the end of half an hour Ralph stopped abruptly. "That's enough, Thompson. Thanks very much. Good-night," he said, and stalked off to the plunge. The Pro, wiping the sweat from his red face, complained to the squash-room attendant, when he brought his statutory pint of beer, allowed him by accepted rule for every full half-hour played with a member, and charged to the member's account: "Dunno what's come over Mr. 'Arriman. If it was any other gentleman, I'd say it was a 'angover, but 'e don't go in for wild parties." The squash attendant, who lived perpetually in the basement, and was never conversed with but only commanded by the gentry or the Pro, leaned on his broom and beamed vacantly at the pleasures of sociability opening up before him. "Bin crossed in love, p'r'aps," he said, drawing a conversational bow at a venture. The Pro lowered his tankard and frowned at him. "Oo's asking you for your views?" he demanded sternly. "Get on with you now. Put Mr. 'Amman's racket away in his locker."

After his swim, Ralph went upstairs to his room, ordered

himself a whisky and soda, and lying down on his bed still in his bathrobe put in a call to his mother.

Lady Harriman was dressing for dinner, and the phone was switched to her bedroom. Her maid told her that it was Mr. Ralph on the line. Though she had not spoken to him for three months, and had been waiting eagerly for this moment, Lady Harriman paused before leaving her dressing-table, lit a cigarette, and glanced at herself in the mirror, as though her critical son was to see her and not merely speak to her on the telephone. Then she crossed the room swiftly with her long graceful step, and sitting down on the bed took the receiver from her maid.

"Darling," she said happily, "so you're back."

"Yes, mother, back sare and sound. I've just got in and am staying at the Club. I'll have to go to the office to-morrow and on Friday, but I'll come down by the 4.45 on Friday afternoon, so tell Matthews to meet me. How are you, darling?"

"I'm splendid, Ralph. But tell me something about yourself. You could have said everything you have said to Nixon to pass on to Matthews. I'm your mother, darling, not the butler or the chauffeur. I want to know how you are, what sort of a trip you've had, whether you're glad to be back, whether you've fallen in love with an American heiress, if you've got any stouter or gone a little bald, if your digestion's working properly, though God knows it never does anything else, you lucky brute." She laughed happily. "No, I don't want to know any of those things, darling, but just simply, how are you inside yourself. You sound a little distraight, or is it a bad connection we have? Never mind, you'll be down on Friday, and you can have a good week-end's rest. I'm longing to see you, Ralph. I've missed you, darling. I've discovered I've got a maternal heart, and if I hadn't known you were coming back I should certainly have adopted a foundling."

Ralph laughed. Whenever he had been unhappy in mind about anything, he had always felt more cheerful after a talk with his mother. If only the women he had fallen in love with had had her sense of humour, her capacity for shrugging off a difficult moment, life for themselves and for him would have been easier. He replaced the receiver, and lay back and stretched, then reached for another cigarette and lit it. What would his mother think of that girl? What would that girl think of his

mother? That was an extraordinary thought, he realised with a shock of surprise. He had never before, even when on one or two occasions he had imagined himself most deeply in love, been apprehensive about what effect his mother would have on a girl he was introducing her to, but only an awful desire that some shortcoming in the girl would not betray itself to his mother's clever eye so that he would share in the ridiculousness her amused manner would cunningly reveal to be there. What oddness was this that had come over him, that made him wonder whether Elaine's clear and calm gaze would uncover something not genuine, something too highly-polished and insincere in his mother's aristocratic assurance? Lord, he was becoming quite obsessed with the thought of the girl; it was what his mother called falling in love with love. He *must* shake himself out of it. He lifted the receiver and put in another call, and began working himself back into the life of London again once more.

2

The chief of Ralph's division at the Foreign Office, Sir Bernard Purvis, was a highly civilised little man with an intimate knowledge of European character, and of European languages, and a profound distrust of nearly everybody or any official status in any of the European governments. This distrust he hid beneath a bland and affable appearance and manner. So much had it become his habit not to betray his sense of outrage when in conversation in the capitals of Europe he discovered continuous and barely-disguised preparation for a second war, that his reputation among the European conspirators who passed for statesmen was not flattering either to their estimate of his intelligence or their perspicacity. Englishmen—English official opinion, at any rate—were held in some scorn by the European bandits who nearly everywhere held power in the mid-thirties, so that little attempt was made to disguise from an official of the English government the many nefarious and deep-rooted schemes that were afoot in Europe in 1937. If the English didn't like it, they could lump it, was the attitude of several of the great Powers.

Nothing in Sir Bernard's manner showed any resentment at this effrontery. His leathery face reflected nothing of the bitter

anguish he felt over his own and his country's impotence to put these gangsters in their place. His smiling grey eyes would look down his beak of a nose and he would incline his bony head, as though in agreement with the policy being expounded by the particular governmental ruffian booming at him. He would answer with soft and vague words though there was in him an inclination to kick the broad European bottom sitting opposite him, and out-yell the villain in defiance. But it was no good doing that. Whitehall was in the full ebb of its tide of abnegation. As though soft answers and a continual moral withdrawal could have any effect on these brigands, except to spur them on to greater knavery! But Sir Bernard had been too long in the service of government to rebel against its dictates. His government was England. He felt like a servant watching his master make the most blatant social *gaffes*, and suffering considerable loss of prestige in the process. He was as powerless as the servant would be to alter the course of his master's conduct. All that he could do was to ameliorate as best he might the worst consequences of his mistaken behaviour.

Sir Bernard was a humane and philosophical man who had preserved the wisdom he had acquired in the course of fifty-eight years of life. Rooted in him was a great love of England; he was possessed by the ardour of a hero-worshipper for his country's history and achievements. His store of wisdom did not persuade him to condemn this attitude as ridiculous in a man of his age and his international experience, for though he was cynical about many things, he was not cynical about this. For England's misguided policy in the years following the war, he knew that not he, and his kind of experts, were to blame, but the people of England or rather their elected representatives. He felt a great indulgence towards the people of England, whom he personalised in his imagination as a cross between a bus-conductor and a country parson, for their sublime faith in the possibility of a better and more peaceful world, and a wave of affection for them in their blind stumblings of policy, which he and his kind were sent forth to motivate, made him love them and hate the more the gangsters and knaves who had got the reins of European power into their hands and were taking advantage of the distracting idealism which was taking his own country off its course.

Sir Bernard was a small and unimpressive-looking man, He

had never been anything but slight in frame, and he had fallen into the hands of a tailor, to whom he stuck with his capacity for loyalty, who made his suits always seem a size or two too large for him. One shoulder, by some malformation of his body, was a couple of inches higher than the other. His head was heavy, though well-shaped, but it seemed to balloon forth from an excessively thin neck, so that all in all he presented a somewhat unimpressive appearance. But you had only to look at his eyes to know that he was not the ordinary figure he seemed. They were grey, large and very friendly, and they were alight with a deep intelligence. When he spoke his voice was soft and musical. He had a marked sense of humour and a philosophical turn of speech, qualities that stood out by their rarity in the drawing-rooms and country houses of England in the years after the war. These gifts, and his prominence in the Diplomatic Service, made him a popular and frequent guest in these places. Besides being Ralph's chief, he was Lady Harriman's friend. Ralph and he left London together on the 4.45 on Friday to spend the week-end at Stratford Towers.

A seven-mile drive separated the house from the station. Matthews, the chauffeur, had greeted his young master with great warmth, and Sir Bernard, whom he knew as a guest of old, with the respect due to his being a great man, but more especially to his being the chief of Mr. Ralph. The heavy Daimler car swung through the darkening lanes, and the early March winds whistled and battered against the glass windows. It was snug inside the car; it was delightful to both men, sitting silent in the darkness, to be drawn through this wild evening towards the shelter, the warmth and comfort of the house.

Nixon, the butler, stood at the top of the steps to greet them, while two footmen in the mulberry-coloured livery of Lady Harriman's service opened the doors of the car. Sir Bernard, muffled in an ulster of overwhelming proportions, his head almost obliterated by a huge hat, limped up the steps, nodded amiably to Nixon and proceeded inside to be divested of his outer garments. Nixon remained outside to bow a warm welcome to Ralph, who was immensely popular with the servants. Nixon followed him in at the door, closing it after him; then stood with a quiet smile of satisfaction to direct the disposition of bags, and to answer the visitors' queries about the rooms they were in, what other guests were staying, what

the weather had been like and was to be like; all the small-talk which is the butler's privilege in the first few moments after arrival.

Ralph left Sir Bernard warming the back of his thin legs at the study fire and reviving himself with a whisky and soda. He galloped up the stairs, happy to be home again in these familiar comfortable surroundings. The long corridors through which he passed were silent and empty, for this was that delightful hour of the day in a country house when host and guests separate to change for-dinner, and in the privacy of their own rooms relax and bathe and rest, conscious of a day pleasantly spent in the open, of a good dinner and a pleasant lazy evening ahead, and of a comfortable early bed with no responsibility for what the morrow may bring forth. Ralph, striding along the corridors to his mother's room, thought how well-ordered and secure was the form of English life of which he was a part. People with no roots in the past, those who frequented the bar of the *Gotham*) and Canadian trains and hotels, were like the rushing restless wind outside the house, noisy but ineffective. His own kind had held on to this gracious form of life, this quiet, restrained, gentle and civilised way of living, for many generations. Some said that it was dying out; even Sir Bernard spoke of the new democratic and vigorous world that was pushing its way up from below. Ralph had never felt very seriously any threat of this kind; he had never felt it less than he did this evening, home again after three months abroad, and absorbing now with every minute the sense of security and privilege bred into him by his upbringing in this house.

Lady Harriman turned from her dressing-table to greet him.

"Darling," she said, and rose to embrace him. Demonstrativeness was rare between mother and son, but reunion after separation excused it on this occasion. They sought in the first few minutes to cover up the breach in their usual ironic and affectionate treatment of each other by the lightness of their tone.

"As beautiful as ever, mother," said Ralph, holding her off at arm's length, and smiling at her. "The chief jumped at the invitation with alacrity, leaving Europe to stew in its own juice over the week-end. I know it was you that brought him down, not the chance of a day off with his young assistant. He sees quite enough of me during the week."

Lady Harriman laughed happily, a girlish laugh that was one of her greatest charms, and which came only when her soul felt buoyant as it did at this moment.

"It is good to have you back, Ralph. Your letters were marvellous, but you seemed lonely at times. I began to be worried about you. It isn't like you ever to give yourself away. I had a feeling that you were unhappy about something. The maternal heart, you see, ever worrying over her little lamb. Did you really enjoy it, dear?"

Ralph sat down on the chaise-longue beside his mother's dressing-table, while she turned back to her mirror. How often in the years had he sat here, or leant as a smaller boy against the table itself, watching her perform this evening rite of preparing for dinner. He had never told his mother much about his troubles; they had never been serious enough to break down the barrier of mannered reserve that stood between them. It wasn't seemly to confess one's acts, to come repentant about something or distracted with some private worry, to disturb the graceful atmosphere of this pleasant room. But though he never came to confession here, he did at such hours as this approach nearer to intimacy and understanding with his mother than at any other time. They had their private jokes here, their exchange of secrets; they discussed what plans interfered with the even tenor of their lives. It was here that Ralph had told his mother that the Foreign Office was sending him to Washington on a mission, and that for the purposes of certain information he would be travelling to the Canadian Pacific coast. Three months later, here he was at the same hour, sitting in this familiar charming room, happier than he had been since he had left home, gazing at the same beautiful face that time seemed never to mark. It was as though nothing had happened in between; as though, in a play, a curtain had dropped and had risen again on the same scene. The disturbance of mind and spirit he had brought back from America seemed ludicrous, now that he was back at Stratford Towers.

"Nixon reeled off the names of those who were staying, mother, but I wasn't paying much attention. I gathered Freddy Castleborough is here."

"And his beautiful young duchess, darling, who is Rosina Fairfax's daughter, do you remember? After your time, of course, when she came out. Then there's General and Mrs.

Peabody. I asked them weeks ago for this week-end. If I'd known earlier you were to arrive, I would have put them off. Do be kind to the old general, Ralph. I know he's a frantic bore, but he was a very dear friend of your father, and he has been a gallant old boy in his day. Let me see: Oh, yes, I was almost forgetting, Elizabeth Warrender and her daughter."

Her eyes looked at his in the mirror, and he smiled at her.

"You weren't forgetting, mother darling. They were right in the forefront of your mind. I don't mind betting you only invited them on Wednesday when you knew I was back."

"She's such a nice girl, darling, so talented."

"And so plain."

"Nonsense, darling. She has the sort of good looks that improve with the years. At forty she will be really beautiful, whereas some of these young things you fancy will be wrinkled hags."

"When she is forty, I'll be about fifty-five, mother darling, and not frightfully concerned over what my wife looks like. I want her to look beautiful now. Anyhow, I want to be in love with her, excited about her, you know what I mean. I'm not excited about Helen Warrender, and I think it would be a kindness to the poor girl if you wouldn't lead her up the garden path, so to speak."

"Darling, I don't think your language, to say nothing of your attitude, is in the best traditions of the Diplomatic. Now **run** off and change, or you'll be late for dinner. Come and see me when we go to bed, and we'll have a nice long chat about all your travels."

She put up a powdered cheek to be kissed, and Ralph went, as thirty years before he had gone to his nursery when his mother had said, "Now run off, darling, Nanny's waiting for you." When he bent to kiss his mother's cheek he had a sudden mischievous desire to say, "Oh, by the way, I've fallen in love with a Canadian farmer's daughter whom I am rather thinking of marrying and setting up as mistress of this house. Could you make it convenient to find another spot to live in fairly soon?"

He refrained from insubordination. He remembered his childish temper when, as a small boy in pyjamas, he had resented being sent off to bed, away from the shaded lights and sweet scents of his mother's bedroom, to the black loneliness of his nursery. He had wanted by way of protest to push over the

glass candlesticks on his mother's dressing-table. The urge to destroy something when he was opposed was still in him. He kept silent, but walking back along the corridor to his room, he felt that a slight shadow had beclouded the glow of his happiness at being home.

3

Under the calm all-seeing eye of Nixon, the young footmen had removed the fruit plates and had passed the cigarettes and cigars. Nixon himself had offered the gentlemen port or brandy, and had returned the decanters to their rightful position in front of Mr. Ralph. He had turned out the lights, and now only the candles on the table shed, under their pink shades, a warm glow on its polished surface. Nixon cast a final glance of approval at the scene before he left the room. He noticed with satisfaction that Sir Bernard, whose cigar was drawing well, had settled back in his chair with a contented look. Nixon was used to judging the temper of a dinner-table. He could foretell almost to the minute when it would be time for him to enter again and clear the table. Pie was satisfied that to-night it would be a long time before he need return. He liked, in his own words, "to get clear of everything" as soon as the next butler, but he liked more to feel that the dinner-parties over which he presided were a success, and to have the satisfaction of that knowledge he would willingly sacrifice his own time. To-night looked like being what he called, in the language he reserved for ordinary use, as-distinct from that he adopted in communicating with the gentry, "a proper sitter."

The conversation had been general and pleasantly unrestrained throughout dinner. Castlborough's duchess sat on Ralph's right, and Mrs. Peabody on his left. At the other end of the table his mother had Sir Bernard on her right, and on her left the boring but adoring general. Elizabeth Warrender sat next to the general, and between her and the duchess a ruddy-complexioned young neighbouring landowner, Captain Freddy Sparkes, a very lively and healthy man who loved everything so much in life, from his hounds to the beautiful duchess who happened to be his dinner partner, that in the intervals of enjoying his dinner and his wine, he was prepared to flirt with the duchess or play the sympathetic listener to Elizabeth

Warrender's report of the glories and luxuries she had known in Edwardian society which Captain the Hon. Freddy Sparkes had been able to view only from his pram. On the other side of the table, between Sir Bernard and Mrs. Peabody, sat immersed in the solemn silence from which he could be aroused only with difficulty or with the aid of port, the young Duke of Castleborough, who possessed more land than anybody else in western England, and less brain than anybody else in the United Kingdom. That is unfairly put. Both the immensity of his landholding and the burden of his responsibilities—he was forever being harried by his income-tax advisers, and appealed to by innumerable elderly relatives of doubtful legitimacy, for his grandfather had been very fecund—had made him seek refuge in speechlessness, in which state he found that he was least likely to commit himself to error. After wine, particularly after port, his rather watery eyes seemed to focus; behind his youthful and bushy Guards' moustache his flaccid lips formed into human shape; he quivered and spoke. His voice was thin, and not even port could make his intelligence profound; but under the glow of the candlelight he would give utterance. With the duke come alive, and when Nixon, casting a last satisfied glance around the room, swept silently into his pantry, Lady Harriman's party was at the point of embarking, as so often house-parties did in 1937, on a discussion of the situation in Europe.

Sir Bernard was naturally appealed to by his hostess, who with intent drew the rest of the table into the conversation.

"Betray us no secrets, Bernard, but what are these horrifying Germans up to now? I'm told that a book has just been published in London, a translation from the German, by a Professor of Military Science, or some such formidable title, which shows that the Germans are preparing for war, and have cut-and-dried plans for the invasion of England! I haven't read the book, but there have been articles about it in *The Times*. It sounds to me very sinister. When I think how they *crawled* and *moaned* in the years just after the Armistice, and how we sacrificed our own interests to play the good Samaritan to them, and how, after we've lifted them to their feet, they've increased their bluster and demands until now they are positively threatening us, *blackmailing* us, I *do* think it is time we took a firm stand. What are we to do with these people, Bernard?"

Having with a sufficient number of emphatic verbs and stressed adjectives drawn the attention of the table to the fact that *one* important subject was now under discussion, Lady Harriman settled back in her chair, happy in the knowledge that Sir Bernard, properly responding to stimulation, could be relied upon to keep the table in enthralled attention for what remained of the time before the men had to be left alone with the port. Which is what happened, Sir Bernard, with a philosophic smile inside himself, realising that he must now sing for his supper. He began with general and vague phrases, but gradually, perhaps under the influence of his good dinner and wine, perhaps a little intoxicated by the continuing pleasure of comfort he had known since he arrived in the house two hours before, his voice and phrases took on a more serious meaning. He was insistent that he knew no more than they did, which was not true; that he knew only what he read in the papers (he and Ralph exchanged a significant glance; let them think I mean newspapers, this glance said), and he spoke, not, as Lady Harriman had indicated that he should, for which omission of duty his eye shot her an apologetic flicker, upon the dereliction and evil intent of the German State, but upon the wrong-headedness of one type of European as contrasted with another.

"Yes, there will be a war," he said, in his quiet musical voice, one shoulder lifted as though opposed to the blow that Fate was threatening, and taking the cigar slowly from his lips, "because a type of mind bred in discontent wills it so. If we could solve the discontent, we could solve the problem that the guns will debate five or ten years from now. I am afraid that we shall not solve it, that it is now beyond human solution, at least in the time that remains to us before the most hot-headed, which is not to say the most discontented, fling aside the bonds of restraint and make a grab at what they think is the solution of their troubles."

Sir Bernard, aware that his charming hostess wished him to continue, and that a monologue of this sort was a contribution always expected of him on such an occasion, was still playing with the outward form of an idea, not delving—for he thought that the port hour in the country house of an old friend was not the moment at which to grope towards philosophical truths. The table was silent, listening to him. He was aware that Kis thin, tired and elderly body sagged comfortably in his chair,

replete with food and wine; his palate savoured the taste of his excellent cigar, his calm and gentle gaze rejoiced in the sight of a softly-lit, well-inhabited room. His mind, as so often in the pursuit of his work *it* had to be, was temporarily dissociated from what he was saying and what he was thinking, until his calmly-roving eye fell on the face of the beautiful young duchess. Not more than twenty-two or twenty-three, he thought; what lovely bones, what a perfect vessel to bear the aristocracy of England! She might have been fashioned by the

- hand of God to be a living cradle to the best that we can produce.

Gradually his voice took on a deeper note; he spoke not in generalities but of England's place in a warring world. The heart of the lover began to beat more quickly. His kindly gaze fell from the face of the beautiful duchess, and he stared at the stem of the brandy glass which he twirled in his thin fingers.

"God knows what lies ahead of us. Nothing more horrible than what we have already known in our time, that is, the sacrifice of millions of young lives to reach an answer which time may prove to be the wrong one, as the years since have proved that the solution we thought we had found in 1918 was the wrong one. Discontent, that is what is tearing at men's souls everywhere, not in Europe only, but in Asia and America. They articulate their discontent by the political governments they form, and expressive of their own particular national form of discontent, as well as of the unrest and dissatisfaction this breeds in men's souls, these governments have a mandate to find a quick cure, and to spare no other peoples' feelings in doing it. How can you have peace in the world when all nations, except a few, are ready to fly at each other's throats to express their discontent with the existing state of affairs? You cannot expect it. We are the least discontented, we English and our sons in every part of the world. But we will be drawn in for humanity's sake, and because the discontented envy us our content.

"This is a pessimistic view," he apologised, sweeping the table with his beatific smile, "and unworthy of this truly memorable brandy. I had rather talk of more cheerful subjects than of the cloud which, thank God, is as yet not bigger than a man's hand on the horizon."

Mrs. Peabody, who had been gazing steadily at Sir Bernard

during his monologue, rested her chin on her hand and said earnestly: "I have only one son, Sir Bernard, and he is twenty. If the war comes in five or ten years, he will be in it. Isn't there any way in which we can avoid war?"

"We are trying to," replied Sir Bernard, "in every way that we can. No country ever sacrificed more of its pride to keep out of war than we have—done."

"Have we sacrificed enough?" insisted Mrs. Peabody. "What is the pride of a nation? It is not the collective feeling of its people. It is a matter of form, not of humanity. I don't despise the Italian mother or Bulgarian mother because her country can't lay claim to the territorial possessions or wealth that mine can. If she wanted to be in a position to boast of national possessions, she wouldn't sacrifice her son to gain them any more than I would sacrifice mine to defend my share of them. What you call discontent," finished Mrs. Peabody, a little flushed at her temerity at talking to the great Sir Bernard in this way, but driven on by the sincerity of her feelings, "isn't it the egotism and vanity of individuals—the individuals in power who won't see things in human terms? In terms, I mean, of the boys who will be killed and the mothers who will mourn them?"

Sir Bernard twisted his awkward bony frame round in his chair to answer Mrs. Peabody. "You are quite right," he assured her in his gentle voice. "But"—he paused a moment and drew a long breath on his cigar—"the discontent has gone too deep. It has been festering in Europe for 150 years. Neither humility nor humanity will heal up this festering sore. I haven't a son, Mrs. Peabody. I wish that I had so that I might, by the equality of my potentiality for sacrifice with yours, assure you that what I say is genuine. This war will come, and England will be in it. In one important respect it will not be a war like the other. You and I will be caught up in its terrors; we shall not only read casualty lists; our names may well figure in them. What is true of us in peaceful England will be true of Europe generally. Such a great pain will twist the world, such a racking of spirit that discontent, I believe, will be dissolved, not by treaty at the end, as we tried to do after the last war, but by the recognition of communal suffering. You, and the Bulgarian and Italian mothers whom you quoted, are agitated by apprehension of what may happen to you personally, and you

believe, perhaps with cause, that the heads of governments are not properly aware, as you are, of what the personal consequences of war will be. That may well be so, but it will not avoid the war. We are committed to suffering, living in 1936, as much as though we had inherited an inescapable hereditary disease. I grieve that it should be so, but I rejoice to think that beyond this purgatory lies a paradise which the survivors, and the whole human race that comes after, will inherit."

4

When the men rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, Lady Harriman, conscious of her duties as hostess, and enjoying the fulfilment of them, set about introducing a lighter and happier note into the atmosphere.

"General, you would like a rubber, I know. Elizabeth, will you play? Mrs. Peabody, you will help to make up a four, won't you? Now, *let me see*, how about you, Captain Sparkes? Do you play? There'll be no high stakes, mark you, I never allow more than a shilling a hundred in my drawing-room. Nixon, put out the table, please. Now, Ralph, show Helen some of our new records. I'm sure it won't distract the bridge-players, and it will protect us from the noise of their arguments at the end of each hand. Don't look so blandly innocent, General. I detest the game myself, but I know it is your passion, and there is nothing more fierce than a keen bridge-player who feels that his partner has let him down. Bernard, dear, come and sit with the Duke and Duchess and me. Duchess, would you like to dance? Ralph can put on some dance records if you would like it. No, you would rather sit with us. I shall keep Sir Bernard off sombre subjects—we have had quite enough Cassandra-like utterances for one evening. There is a lighter side to diplomatic life. What a night it is outside! Listen to that wind. How pleasant to be by one's fireside!"

Bernard looked at the pretty duchess while Lady Harriman rattled on. He wondered whether this child was intelligent. Her eyes were dark brown and very clear, and her skin was warm-coloured and looked charmingly soft. She had spoken but little at dinner, but she was young and newly-married, and it might have been modesty rather than lack of intelligence which kept her silent. How splendid and fair were the sons and

daughters of God! This girl and Ralph, what a pair they would make! How English in type each of them was! Castleborough, with his inbred face and dim intelligence did not deserve so beautiful a jewel. What would their union bring forth? An heir to the dukedom with a face a little less like a rabbit that was Castleborough's, with a mind a little brighter because of her healthy blood, but not perfection, not the godlike sons of England he knew the future would need. He smiled his friendly smile at the duchess, and eased his slight awkward frame into a chair beside her.

Castleborough began explaining to Lady Harriman some scheme his agents had put up to him for improving a part of his land. The scheme was one of drainage, but his Grace, by vague references to this "feller" and that "feller," who were unidentifiable by a company not particularly interested in the subject, and by the use of technical terms which he did not fully understand himself, made a marshy enough subject a complete bog, and gradually he lapsed from incoherence into inaudibility, Lady Harriman making no effort to rescue him as he went.

"I'm sure it will all be lovely, Charles," she said sweetly, glad that the duke had had his say.

Sir Bernard, while pretending as others were to listen to the duke's halting explanations, watched the little duchess. He was interested to see what feelings would show on her pretty face as her husband revealed to the company the inadequacies of his mental powers. "She will either make a fool of him," he thought, "by siding with us in our unspoken but obvious condemnation of his imbecilities, which will mean that she doesn't love him, or that she herself is superficial and vain; or she will make a fool of herself by trying to draw him out, by pretending that what he says is sensible, or if it were, that it is a fit and suitable topic for conversation after dinner in a large company. That will mean that she loves him, which will be a pity."

The duchess did neither. "Your life must be more interesting than that of a landowner," she said to Sir Bernard, when the duke had finished his monologue. She said it easily and quietly, as though it were a natural comment arising out of the point made by the duke's anecdote. It did not shame her husband, and it effectively turned the conversation. Sir Bernard had time to admire the trick before he answered.

"Mine is a very overrated profession. Motion pictures and historical novels have given it an air which much of the ordinary routine doesn't justify."

"Yes, I suppose it is sometimes tedious," said the duchess. "But there must be exciting moments. It must make you feel rather pleased when you have a knowledge of the affairs of other states, and when you know what they are up to, but mustn't tell any one else. Isn't it rather like being behind the scenes at a theatre, watching the play from the wings, and seeing the villain or the hero ready to come on before the audience can see them?"

"If you were only an onlooker it would be," replied Sir Bernard. "But you see, we naturally take sides in impending events. There is a sort of nightmare, you know, in which the dreamer feels powerless to raise an arm or move a muscle to avert a fate that is hanging over him. He makes the most frantic struggles, but to no avail. Mercifully the dreamer always awakes before the threatened blow has fallen. Diplomacy is like that, except that you don't always wake, and everything does not necessarily come out all right in the end."

He was not thinking particularly of what he was saying. With age he had acquired the habit of speaking sometimes with only half his mind, conversing, making words do their service, while his thoughts drifted off in pursuit of other interests. This tendency to detach himself from the subject under discussion, and to let his contemplative mind play with speculations on human conduct and character, had kept him sane at the many conferences he had had to attend up and down the length of Europe in the years following the war. Meetings at the Quai d'Orsay, missions to the Wilhelmstrasse, important discussions in a villa by a beautiful lake in Italy; moments when it was supposed that his mind was sharply and fiercely concentrated on the shaping of policies out of which his country stood greatly to lose or to gain, had passed, and his chief remembrance of them was the stridency of some voice, the bellicosity of some moustache, the meanness, the selfishness, or the depravity shadowed in some foreign face. He had remembered afterwards not the variety of the proceedings, the empty nature of the promises and undertakings given at conference tables, but the speculations which had absorbed him about the behaviour, with their mistresses or wives, with a

stomach-ache or in their baths, of these pompous and bullying men. In this way he had been able to preserve his sense of humour and his sense of proportion.

In addition, Sir Bernard was possessed by a conviction of the inevitability of history. It was a bad equipment for one whose advice helped to shape England's foreign policy, for it paralysed his will by absolving him from the necessity of exercising it. The pattern of what the history of Europe was to be in the course of the next twenty years was so plain to him, the possibility of avoiding its dire consequences for his own country so remote, that to take refuge in detachment, and rest there supported by faith in the ultimate triumph of right, was the only means of continuing sane. Awaiting the fulfilment of this purpose, he allowed himself the leisure to observe the idiosyncrasies of human conduct. At conferences which made plans for the shaping of Europe, he listened and spoke, was consulted as an expert and gave his opinion as an authority: all this with but half his mind, the other half drifting among the fancies and ideas which the characters and mannerisms of the members at the table gave rise to.

The bridge players were silent, fiercely concentrated on the play of the hand of which at the moment Mrs. Peabody had command. At the other end of the long room Ralph and Helen were crouched down at the foot of the enormous gramophone sorting out records. The fire around which they were sitting at this end hissed and crackled, and the duke with two fingers supporting his indeterminate chin sat gazing into it, lost in musings of his own limited contriving. Lady Harriman sat straight and very beautiful in her high-backed chair, working on a large piece of petit-point on which Bernard remembered she had been engaged for the last twenty years; it was, he knew, not a task she had set herself to finish, but a part of the pleasant fireside attitude she adopted on such evenings as these.

Ralph had selected the records he proposed to play, and had placed them on the machine. It was Wagner's music, peculiarly suitable to the blustery stormy night outside, and provocative to the turn of thought Sir Bernard's mind was beginning to follow. He had been amusing the pretty duchess with anecdotes of international figures at Geneva and elsewhere, spurred on to extend himself by her laughing approbation, and the vivid sense of life that her beauty and vitality communicated to him,

but the music starting gave him an excuse to fall silent, and to follow without rudeness the duke's example of gazing thoughtfully at the fire.

The wind which had risen since nightfall beat against the house, an east wind blowing from that continent from which all strife and enmity emanated. In keeping with the music and the storm, and suddenly conscious of the precious and fleeting beauty of youth, Sir Bernard's mind apprehended with sharp clarity the vision of the years immediately ahead. His awareness of the inevitability of war was nothing new, and the sacrifice of life and wealth that this would mean to England had been grim details which he always accepted as part of the pattern that history was following. Life could have too high a value put on it, but beauty, the beauty of youth, could never be too much prized, and it was increasingly dreadful to him that the youth of the world should be moving towards these fields of destruction.

CHAPTER EIGHT

i

SPRING came with the rushing sound of water. The ice on the rivers cracked and boomed like guns. The trees dripped moisture, and stood forth washed clean after a winter of frozen sleep. The melting snow sought out any level lower than itself, and the ditches beside the road sang with the burden of moving water as it raced away towards the rivers.

Then the roads were turned to mud as the ground itself gave up its frost under the heat of a warm sun. Everywhere everything glittered and was wet. The boughs of the trees were dark with moisture, the fence-rails shone in the sun. Wherever there was a depression in the ground, a little lake formed. The fields were boggy and the animals, where they walked, left the marks of their hooves stamped in the drenched earth.

There had been no smell of anything but frost all winter, but now the scent of the woods swelling under the heat of the sun,

the smell of the earth, the odour of grassy banks and damp ferns perfumed the breeze that swept slowly over the dripping land. For a week there was this vast turmoil of change. Then the breeze dropped, the rushing sound of water died away, the sun shone from a sky unflecked with clouds, and the earth, with only a patch of snow here and there, lay shining and new, waiting for the bursting forth of blossom and grass and flower.

Richard was first made conscious of the arrival of spring, not as he had been in England by a quality of atmosphere, or the sudden burst of song from birds, but by the heaviness of his clothes, by an oppressive heat that sat between his skin and what was next to it. He found it now and then difficult to breathe. His cheeks felt flushed. He had a feeling of not being bodily clean. That dissatisfaction affected his spirits, and made him restless and irritable. Andy said to him one day, swinging round suddenly on his stool, "I'm neither stupid nor deaf, my boy. Don't behave as if I were. When I ask you a question, answer me civilly and quietly." Richard was shocked into contrition. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Mackintosh. I didn't mean to be rude." Andy had looked at him fiercely through his spectacles, but the severity of his gaze quickly melted to its customary mildness. "Well, you were, my boy. I think you're suffering from this spring weather. Spring here is not like it is at home. It's a major operation, and the body takes some adjusting to get used to it. Come by home with me afterwards, and I'll get the missus to give you a dose of medicine." Sooner than offend Andy, Richard complied, and swallowed a large glass of senna tea which Mrs. Mackintosh had by in readiness for the season.

Andy gave him time off the *next* morning until ten o'clock to recover from the ravages. The medicine left him weak and subdued, but the next morning his clothes did not feel quite as oppressively hot as he walked to the farm, and he could smell the promise of spring in the damp air, and life seemed more hopeful. Andy had no further cause to complain of his irascibility.

Since his return from Montreal, Richard had been eating more substantial food. He still took his evening meal at Bowles's Lunch Rooms, but he had abandoned his menu of mashed potatoes immersed in soup, which cost fifteen cents, for chicken

pie or roast beef with vegetables, which cost thirty-five cents. This left him one dollar fifty a week poorer, a sizable item out of a weekly income of eleven dollars, and removed any excuse either for self-pity or self-congratulation on his endurance, but it made him indubitably warmer and more comfortable in his stomach. The glow extended from his stomach to his heart. The faces of his fellow diners assumed an amicability, like a view coming into focus through binoculars. They talked to Richard, and he talked to them, and from laughing *at* each other they came by stages, and through this change of menu and the passage of time and the onset of spring, to laugh *with* each other. They recognised each other's idiosyncrasies, but these differences no longer offered cause for dislike or suspicion; they were treated as affectionately and humorously as an uncle's bald head or a grandmother's deafness.

The advent in February of a newcomer among the regular patrons of the restaurant attracted Richard's eye, and gave him that pleasant feeling of relief experienced by a boy at school who, in his second term, finds that a fresh crop of neophytes have delivered him from the ignominy of being "new." The newcomer was a pleasant-looking youth of about Richard's age with a solidly built young body, and a square-cut heavily-boned face that would have given an impression of stolidity were it not for the eyes, which were lively and intelligent. Shyness kept these cast down more than they should have been. Wrapped in silence, with bowed head, Kropelnyk seemed the typical child of Ukrainian peasants who had emigrated to Canada. His square body and square-ended, thick, strong fingers, the heavy bones of his skull suggested the slow-witted offspring of generations of serfs. Iic wore a shiny blue suit which was a little too tight and too short in the leg for him, circumstances which suggested that it had been inherited from his father who, keeping it only for Sunday wear, had never worn it out. He was stoutly shod, and wore home-knitted thick grey socks. His shirt too, with collar attached, was plainly home-made and more remarkable for its durable qualities than its fit. In spite of his unimpressive appearance and his shyness, Richard felt attracted to him; and when there was an empty chair next to Kropelnyk, he took his own tray of food there and made little attempts to engage him in conversation. Kropelnyk always answered with a curious little smile

and a worried look in his clear eyes, and he would quickly look down again at his plate. It was difficult to carry on a conversation with him, but Richard persisted, partly out of aggravation at his failure, partly because it pleased him to see Kropelnyk's eyes light up and his stolid face quiver into life. Often one speaks to a faithful and affectionate dog for the pleasure of hearing its tail thump on the floor, and seeing a gleam of recognition come into its eyes. Richard's satisfaction was the same.

One Sunday morning in April, when Richard had the day off, and was breakfasting late and comfortably at Bowles's, and turning over in his mind what he would do with himself, he called to Kropelnyk, who was sitting a few chairs away from him, and asked him if he would like to take a walk along the banks of the Gatineau. Kropelnyk, who had finished breakfast and was sitting staring up at the soft blue sky visible through the tall windows of the restaurant, turned with a quick angry movement of his head towards Richard, smiled agonisedly, and said that he would. Then, instead of looking away, as he ordinarily would have done, he stared at Richard for a moment, and said, "I usually go for a walk by myself on Sundays, but I should like you to come with me." He smiled at Richard, as though to say, "Well, now that we have the preliminary awkwardness over, and are good friends, you can put yourself safely in my care."

When they came out on to Center Street the sun struck warmly on their faces, and a little breeze with the scent of damp evergreens in it blew softly against them. All the snow had disappeared from the city streets. But in the country it clung in patches to slopes of the earth shaded from the sun, and the gullies alongside the road were murmurous and sibilant with bubbling water made from the melted snow carried away from the hills. It was a soft day, and walking in it lifted up the heart.

"Have you got a first name," asked Richard, "a little easier to deal with than Kropelnyk?"

"Sure. Nicholas is my name. Nick, they call me. Richard is your name, eh? I heard some of the men calling you that. It's a very English name. There are Nicks in every language, but not Richard, eh?" He spoke in short, jerky sentences, with pauses between each remark, trying out speech as a convalescent

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tries out his legs, ready at any moment to give up the struggle as too much for him.

"There are Nicholas's in England, too, but I suppose it isn't such a common name. I wonder where we get it from. Saint Nicholas, I should think. You get it from your emperors, and they in turn get it from the Saint, so it all comes to the same thing in the end. You're a Ukrainian, I think you said once? That must be a fine part of the world."

"Perhaps. I don't remember it very much. My father and mother came over in 1924 when the famine was bad. My Uncle Oscar had come to Ontario before the war, and he sent us the money to come. I was only nine years old when I left. I remember it, sure, but I don't like what I remember. Too many hungry people, and too many dead ones. This is a fine country." He looked about him, lifted up his chest and sniffed the air appreciatively like a connoisseur tasting a really good wine. "No hunger here, lots of work, plenty of chances to get on."

"What do you do, Nick?"

"I'm working in a livery stable near the Parliament Buildings."

"Has that got a bright future attached to it?"

Nick weighed this question up for a minute, and then decided to treat it as a humorous contribution. He gave vent to a heavy guffaw, but seeing that Richard did not laugh too, but instead looked at him with surprise, he fell into a state of embarrassment, blushed furiously, and frowned at the ground ahead of him.

"No, but seriously, Nick, is that the best you can do for yourself? Good Lord, who am I to talk! I'm not doing much differently myself. I groom cows, you groom horses. Only, I don't intend to stick at my job. I'm chucking it up at any moment and going West."

"Going West, eh?" said Nick. "That sounds good. My uncle Oscar is in Manitoba, farming near Portage La Prairie."

"Well, why don't you come along with me, and I'll drop you off at Portage La Prairie? You can have farming. I've had enough of it after one winter."

"What are you going to do? Plenty of jobs, eh, for a clever man like you? You'll go into an office, eh?"

"Good Lord, no, Nick, I wouldn't be found shot in one. Oh, I don't know. Don't call me clever. I'm not at all. I don't

know what I want to do," he said suddenly and impatiently. "I just want to get on in the world, and be moderately well-off and happy, and enjoy life without working like an animal. But it is all very difficult. You know what I feel, Nick? I feel that I'm just marking time, waiting for something to happen. I don't know what, a war or something, I suppose. But it's very frustrating. I don't feel like sticking to anything for very long. My father wanted me to go to University out here. I thought it would be grand to work on a farm, and I dodged that issue. Now I'm going to chuck up the farm, but still I haven't any intention of going back to a University. That *would* be a waste of time, I feel. I don't quite know why. But there it is, I feel I might miss something important if I was shut up in a University."

"When are you going to go?"

"Oh, I don't know, in a few weeks, I think. I've got to give notice out at the farm, and I feel rather embarrassed about it, so I've kept putting it off. They've been rather good to me there, especially my boss, Andy Mackintosh."

"But if you haven't got a job to go to, how are you going to get along? Have you got some money saved up?"

"Only seventy dollars. It will take most of that to get there. But then, I didn't have a job here when I came, but I got one all right. I'll get along, don't worry."

"Where are you going to head for, one of the cities?"

"No, I'm going out to the Rockies. There are coal mines there, I hear, paying good wages. I want to see the Rocky Mountains."

"But you don't know anything about coal-mining."

"I'll soon learn. I knew damned little about cows when I started here."

"Gee," said Nick, admiringly, "would you let me come along with you?"

"As far as Uncle Oscar, do you mean, or right on to Alberta?"

"No, right on," affirmed Nick, a broad, enthusiastic smile breaking out over his face.

"Why, Nick, you're quite an adventurer. I thought you were a sober, industrious chap. Haven't you got any family ties?"

"I've got a father and mother, and seven sisters and brothers. They're all working in different places, some in Quebec and

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"I've got a father and mother, and seven sisters and brothers. They're all working in different places, some in Quebec and

some in Ontario and one in Manitoba. My father has a small piece of land in Northern Ontario. He won't mind/ He expects me to look after myself. Sure, I'll come with you, eh, Richard?" He nudged Richard's arm, and nodded his head at him excitedly, as though persuading him to consent, and an enticing, yearning smile covered his heavy face.

They stopped walking and looked at each other. "O.K./" said Richard, smiling *in* return, "Let's shake on it."

They walked on, united by this new bond, talking enthusiastically about their plans, Nick no longer monosyllabic but expostulatory, insistent, argumentative and highly elated with life and its prospects, and every so often turning his head and looking fondly at his new-found friend. They arranged that they would each give notice on the next Saturday, and would leave for the West on the Sunday night a week afterwards. About two o'clock that afternoon they reached a little village, and found there a small French-Canadian hotel perched on a rocky eminence overlooking the river. Exhausted with all they had been talking about, and their long walk, and thoroughly heated by the sun, they stopped there and ate bread and cheese and drank beer on a table outside the inn. On the opposite bank of the river, an unbroken wall of spruce trees mounted against the sky. Over their tops the soft, clear blue sky appeared like a warm, calm sea. The scent of balsam and fir was pungent in the still air, and the pounding of the waters below over the rocky bed of the river accentuated the silence on the banks, a silence so profound that the wind seemed to whisper past the watcher's ear, as though fearing to violate the solemn quietness of the scene.

"I'm glad we're going off together, Nick," said Richard, after they had watched this scene for a little while without speaking. "I knew that I had been missing something but I wasn't sure what it was. Now I think I know. I wanted a companion. It will be pleasant having you along."

Nick rolled his heavy head on the solid column of his neck, as though modestly to deny any contribution he could make to their partnership, but his eyes, as he looked at Richard, were radiant with satisfaction.

When Richard told Andy Mackintosh that he was leaving to go out West, Andy took his spectacles from his nose, and looked at him for a long time without speaking. Then he shook his head, and clicked his tongue against his teeth to indicate disapproval.

"I figured you'd been entertaining some crazy notion like that, kid, you've been that damned restless and jumpy. What's the matter with you? What's the matter with all you young folks? You've got a kind of St. Vitus's dance, you can't sit still or stick to a job for any time at all. Damn me, when I was a boy I'd have got a damned good hiding from my father or my boss for even suggesting a fool idea like that."

Andy clenched and unclenched his thin hand, and looked at Richard severely over the top of his spectacles, as though weighing up the benefit of a similar treatment for him. Then he sighed heavily, and went on:

"You remember that afternoon you came to ask me for a job? I said to myself when we were talking, 'Now, here's a bright young lad, with plenty of guts in him and ready to work. I'll teach him something about cows, and make him into a farmer, and the lad will go far.' You see, kid, you were fixed pretty much as I was when I landed here. Well, I had a tough time of it for my first few years, and I figured I might save you from some of the bumps you're bound to take unless somebody lifts you over them at the right moment. You're the kind of lad that is bound to hit those bumps pretty hard. Now I do believe I could make a right good farmer out of you, if you stick along with me for a bit. Why don't you give up this damn' fool notion, kid?"

Richard felt very uncomfortable. He had anticipated that the interview would not be an easy one, but that was because he felt Andy would consider it unsatisfactory in him to leave as soon as he had enough experience to make himself useful. He had not guessed that Andy had had that paternal and protective feeling for him. It seemed ungrateful still to persist in his determination to go, but persist he must, and Andy saw by the way he held his young head, and by the embarrassment on his face, that his mind was made up, and nothing would alter it.

"I'm afraid I've simply got to go, Mr. Mackintosh. I can't tell you why: I don't properly know myself. Only I've got to go, I know that. I'll come back again some time or other, I really will. There is nobody I would sooner work with than you."

Andy shook his head, and replaced his glasses on his nose to indicate that on this matter he could say no more.

"Well, you're a damn' fool, kid. But I never yet saw any sense in trying to change a man's mind for him when he'd got it absolutely set, so I won't say anything more. Only for Pete's sake try and take care of yourself."

On the Sunday night of their departure, Richard and Nick took their bags down to the station, and put them in the cloak-room. They had meant to go to Bowles's Lunch Rooms and say good-bye to the boys there, then to go for a walk, for they would be on the train with no opportunity of exercise for three days and nights, and to return in time for a cup of coffee at the station restaurant before the train left at ten o'clock.

Darkness had fallen when they emerged from the station shortly after eight-thirty. The evening was mild and clear as they walked down Center Street towards the restaurant, but such was their state of excitement that they found little time to admire the evening, and no cause for regret that they were leaving Ottawa and might never see it again. But as they came to the restaurant they were seized with the same thought, and because they had come to know one another so well in these two weeks of preparation for their adventure, they saw instantly as they looked at each other that the same idea had struck them.

"Let's not go in, Nick. Let's just look through the window at them and say good-bye mentally. I feel too excited to sit about and chat with people I've been talking to all winter, don't you?"

They came close to the plate-glass windows of the restaurant, and peered in at the brightly-lit interior. There near the right-hand wall they could see the familiar group, the assistant-accountant and the teller from the bank, the book-keeper from the fur shop next door, the two O'Kelly brothers who shared a room and shared their food, and were distinguished separately only by having two jobs instead of one. Others were there,

three or four of the usual habituds, eating and smoking and chatting together and laughing. Richard with his face close to the glass peered in, and remembered the first nights of his stay in Ottawa *in* the previous autumn, and the sparse unhappy meals he had had then; and he remembered how these men he was looking at had watched him, and had come nearer to him, and asked him tentative questions so that they might establish some sort of friendship with him. He had been shy of them at first, then, as he had succeeded with them, he had become rather assertive and bossy; and they had accepted it, whether because they thought he had more right to lead than they had, or because he was an Englishman, and they didn't quite know what to expect from an Englishman, hadn't been made plain. Their conversation had not really been very enlivening; it had in fact often been dull; but they had been friends of a sort, they had been the first to talk to him in his loneliness, and he could not help feeling a journeying wave of affection spread out from his excited heart towards the little party.

But after a minute he and Nick turned and looked at each other, then nodded simultaneously, and they turned away from the window, and made their way slowly and thoughtfully back up Center Street towards the station. Neither of them spoke, but each was glad that he was not going forth alone, leaving behind him that little ciicle of chairs in that pool of light in Bowles's Lunch Rooms.

When the clock in the restaurant pointed to nine-thirty, Richard paid the bill, and they walked through the barrier to the train. They put their bags *in* the tourist car, and then came down the steps to walk up and down the platform. It was it that moment that Richard saw three figures, familiar in outline, marching down the platform. One at least was unmistakable: the thin, spectre-like frame of Andy, wrapped in a voluminous black coat, his spectacles hanging forward on the end of his nose.

It was Sandy who called out first.

"Here's the young bastard, Andy."

"Hallo, kid," said Jimmy Calder.

Andy peered at Richard over the top of his glasses. "Well, kid, we've come along to see you off. The boys figured that since you were going without our blessing, you might feel kind of lonely, so we thought we'd drift along and say a farewell."

"That's awfully good of you, Andy; and you, too, Sandy and Jimmy, but you shouldn't have come all the way down town when you've got to get up so early for work."

"Ah, shucks, kid," said Jimmy.

"This is Nick Kropelnyk," Richard said, pulling him forward. "He's coming with me."

The boys said "Howdy," and Sandy put out his hand to shake hands with Nick. There followed a moment's awkward silence, then Andy pulled from his pocket a small cardboard box and took from it a wrist-watch.

"The boys chipped in to get you some memento of your time with us, kid, and I'm deputed to hand it over to you. I guess I should make some heartfelt remarks about how much we're going to miss you, but you know damn' well I'm no speech-maker, and you can take everything I don't say for granted.

"I know the boys have been glad to have you working with them. You've been a good kid, not too ornery, and you might have learned to be a good cow-hand if you hadn't got this dam-fool notion about going West into your head. Well, if you don't break your young neck, we'll all be pleased to see you back some time, and we'll be grateful for a card now and then to know how you're getting along."

The boys had maintained a respectful silence while Andy was delivering his oration, gazing into space with countenances as solemn as though they were participating in an aldermanic reception. But when Andy had finished, they unbent. Sandy clapped Richard on the shoulder, bade him beware of the women of the West, and if in any difficulties on that score, to let him know. Jimmy's large pale face beamed from ear to ear. He was inarticulate but he exuded a sort of dumb friendliness, and in the way he shifted his weight from foot to foot, in the squirming of his shoulders, and his eagerness to laugh at everything Sandy said, to listen respectfully to everything that Andy said, indicated how much he was at one with the general air of benevolence and goodwill prevailing.

Richard tried to thank them. It was plain that they did not expect as formal a reply as Andy had given a presentation. Once the present had been given, the curious air of restraint that had sat upon them when they had first walked up melted, and in a few minutes it was as though they were all sitting on

the hay together at the farm, rather than standing together on the windy platform.

There was a scurry of excitement as the porter cried "AH aboard/" and the conductor started to wave his green flag. Richard and Nick gained their seats, but the train, which had a four days' journey before it, was in no hurry for a minute or two here. Through the window Richard saw Andy and Jim and Sandy standing together peering up at him. As the train started slowly to move, he waved at them and saw Sandy's mouth shape a shouted message that did not penetrate the thick glass of the window and the noise of the train. Richard started to grin a response, but as the train drew away, he saw one face, the face of Andy, pale in the shadow of the lighted platform, staring intently at him through the glass. Andy's face looked sorrowful and yearning. As the train gathered speed, and he flung himself back in his seat, the image of Andy's thin, pointed, kindly face, caught in that dumb look of loneliness and deprivation, fastened itself on Richard's mind. He thought of the old man's long journey back to the farm, and of him wrestling by himself on the morrow with those damned forms, his thin figure in the spotless white and shrunken ducks arched over the high desk. "God," he said to Nick, "it's miserable parting from people, isn't it? Parting is like dying, it's a lonely business."

But soon, being young, he regained his spirits, and Nick, as he settled down to sleep in his corner of the scat, congratulated himself on his good fortune in finding so remarkable a friend and companion as Richard. The train steamed northwards in the darkness and made much noise, and stopped often, in the course of its journey. But the young adventurers slept on, undisturbed by any thought of their own or sound from outside.

CHAPTER NINE

LADY HARRIMAN, sitting at her writing-desk in the morning-room at Stratford Towers, looked up from the letter she was finishing to her friend, Lady Waverley, and stared out at the pleasant garden lying bathed in the sunlight of a late August morning. Through the open window drifted the scent of stocks and sweet peas. There had been a heavy dew, and the lawn still sparkled with it. The day promised to be hot, but not unpleasantly so, for there was a light breeze which every now and then lifted the heavy curtains beside Lady Harriman's desk, brushing them over the carpet with a soft sighing sound, not at all unlike that one which Lady Harriman herself gave, as she withdrew her gaze from the garden and turned again to her letter. To Jane Waverley, who had been at school with her forty-five years before, she could speak as though in the confessional.

"A madder scheme was never set afoot. Here we leave England at a time when the garden is at its most perfect, and all one's friends are expecting to be asked to stay, and we go to Canada; not merely to it, my dear, but right across it. Ralph is to have a two weeks' shooting trip with a Canadian farmer in the West, and we are to go on to the Pacific coast to stay with old General Pawney. Frankly, there is something mysterious, something I don't at all like, about the whole proposition. If Ralph wants to shoot, why must he take his mother with him? He was there only six months ago. Why should he want to return so suddenly? Why must we be packed on to the coast, if what I suspect to be the reason for all this journey is the true one? The reason, Jane dear, is, of course, a girl; and I strongly suspect that the daughter of this farmer is the chit in question. This isn't feminine intuition; it is putting two and two together, plus some monosyllabic and maddeningly masculine grunts from Ralph. Mark this chain of evidence, and see if you do not come to the same conclusion as I reached.

"Ralph went to Canada on an F.O. job and his letters seemed perfectly natural and cheerful until he reached a place called Edmonton, near which this farmer lives. He spent merely a day there; not long enough, you would think, for a sensible,

balanced man of Ralph's experience to lose his head over a pretty girl. Yet from that point on, his letters became more *distrain*, more uninteresting. Since his return he has behaved very queerly indeed. He has had no heart for his work, and here, where he is usually full of high spirits, he has merely drooped about, uncommunicative to a degree you would hardly credit, except on the subject of this depressing trip into which he has inveigled me.

"Naturally, as his mother, I have asked him whether he has lost his heart in Canada, and if the purpose of the trip is not to recover it, but with that irritatingly enigmatic smile he has caught from Bernard, he merely answers that I will see. Am I likely to like the girl? I ask, driven to desperation by his manner. Time will show, he answers. 'Do you mean to marry this person, whoever she is?' I asked him outright the other evening.

" 'My dear Mother, I've only met her once, over lunch with her father. She may hate the sight of me. I can't tell.'

" 'That isn't answering my question,' I replied, 'and I don't really think, darling, that you are treating me with the confidence to which I am entitled in this matter.' He merely grunts. His manners have become appalling since he came back from Canada. I can't tell you with what distaste I look forward to this trip, and how much I fear its consequences. But it is unavoidable. Juliet, thank God, is coming with us. We sail on the *Empress of Britain* from Southampton next week. Think with sympathy of me, my dear Jane, sitting on the stoep of a Canadian farm, watching my son making sheep's eyes at a Canadian miss with an appalling voice. I only hope we do not bring her back with us. To find my successor as mistress of this old house on a western Canadian farm is really too appalling to contemplate."

Jane Waverley was Lady Harriman's oldest friend, but to others she knew well she wrote in the same strain, all in the strictest confidence. Ralph Harriman's case came to be discussed in a good many drawing-rooms. Not only those mothers who had marriageable daughters of their own, and suffered a sense of impending deprivation, but others who thought Lady Harriman was being badly treated by her son, or that there were more than enough young Canadian girls finding husbands amongst eligible Englishmen—two heirs to peerages had quite

recently married girls they had met in Canada; or that a farmer's daughter in Stratford Towers really was letting the side down: all these wrote to each other, condemning Ralph, or to his mother, sympathising with her, so that by the time they were ready to leave Lady Harriman felt quite fortified with her friends' support, and commenced the journey in a not uncongenial spirit of martyrdom.

Of all this Ralph was quite unconscious. Once he was on the ship a feeling of tension that had gripped him all summer relaxed. He felt much as he had felt on days when he had been coming home from school for Christmas or the summer holidays; that the something for which he had been longing was now within his grasp; that he was on the train, as he was now on the ship, being carried irresistibly forward to his longed-for goal. The depression that had clouded his spirits for so many months lifted, and happiness broke out in him, he recovered his gaiety, and his mother and Aunt Juliet, comforting themselves with the faces of martyrs, looked at each other in confirmation of their worst suspicions. The boy was undeniably in love, and the *Empress of Britain* was every day bringing them nearer to the object of his desires and that of their fearful apprehensions.

CHAPTER TEN

I

SPRING, which brought a lightening of the heart to Richard and Nick, and a sense of joyous release to other inhabitants of Canada, weighed heavily upon the undergraduate life of the University of Alberta, because it brought with it "exams." From mid-April until the end of the month, students, pale of face through late study and twinges of conscience over past neglect, some of them muddy-complexioned from the caffeine which they took to keep them awake while they studied, and which had a groundless reputation amongst them for retaining in their minds whatever they committed to memory while under

its influence; students with these marks of ill-health and anxiety upon them might be seen walking furtively and alone, or in groups of two or three, across the campus to their rooms, or across the high-level bridge to their homes. Spring might be thrilling in the air; the sun might shine brilliantly, or the atmosphere be pearly-grey with the moisture being sucked up into the sky from the cold ground, and the broad river under the high-level bridge be surging massively forward, throwing northwards great cakes of swiftly-moving ice; the air might be still with that exciting sense of expectancy that marks the end of winter in Canada. Yet while Nature thus expressed her joyousness, the twelve hundred undergraduates of the University, gazing with horror at the prospect of rendering an account of what they had learned, would silently and gloomily perambulate the shoulder of land on which the University stood, oblivious of the excited interest the world took in its own rebirth, aware only of their own sad state.

They had so much enjoyed the winter term. Large, cheerful, healthy and uninhibited (until this fateful hour) they had been present at every football game, lustily cheering the varsity team on; they had attended every dance; they had contributed their time to the University magazine, and to student committees and clubs and class plays, and had pretended now and then to study, but had found the pursuit uncongenial and had not stuck it for long, but had made off to the tuck-shop instead, or to the pictures, or to other students' rooms, laughing and chattering and shouting their defiance of the omnipotence which had now suddenly called them to account. Now at this crisis in their affairs they drank much coffee, and tied wet towels about their heads, and shut themselves up alone in their rooms, or met only to work out, with others as doomed as themselves, keys and systems and cribs for conveying to the desk at which they would write their examinations the vital information which they could not store in their minds.

Across the greensward of the campus paced still another kind of being, those who were to sit in judgment, the professors, the associate and assistant professors, the lecturers and demonstrators. These great men, the high priests of the mysteries about to be performed, were aware only that the end of another year of toil had come, and thought longingly and lovingly of the idle summer before them when they would be free of the dis-

tractions and cares presented by these students who raised respectful caps to them as they crossed the campus, and looked at them with those yearning sheep's eyes which, the old and experienced teachers among them knew, craved their indulgence and sympathetic understanding when their untidy papers came before them for marking. The pedagogues moved majestically on, and the few self-assured students who were smugly certain of academic honours, pattered here and there to get last-minute references from the library, or to buy new fountain-pens and erasers; but the great and uncertain majority moved forlornly about, sick with dread of the hour that was at hand.

Coming out of the Arts building the evening before the great trials were to begin, Professor Bryden met Elaine coming in. "Well, my dear child," he greeted her, "are you ready for it all?"

"Was anybody ever ready for it, Dr. Bryden?" She smiled at him. "I feci as if I were going to have a tooth out. I couldn't feel worse."

Don Bryden could not resist the pleasure of turning the knife in the wound. "Exams are rather a beastly method of testing the extent of knowledge acquired by a student, but no satisfactory alternative to them has been devised. The results aren't always fair, but we have to go by the results. I hope for your father's sake they are going to be satisfactory in your case, Elaine."

She sighed and looked unhappy. "I hope so, Dr. Bryden. Daddy will be very upset if they aren't. But there is such a lot I don't know. It will be just good luck if the papers happen to hit on something that I do know."

Professor Bryden smiled enigmatically. "This is the moment when a weaker pedagogical vessel than myself might commit a serious error by yielding to the entreaty in your troubled young eyes, and dropping at least a hint of what is to be in the English papers, so that you could narrow down the range of your research. Research," he laughed scornfully, "this silly season of the solemn parrots, stirring their dull brains to remember what it was that was told them. Not you, my child, my dear Elaine. You are one of the few who have some brains, you almost alone are human in these otherwise ape-haunted glades. I will on second thoughts give you some information that will set your mind at rest. Examinations have been set for years,

and scientific inquiry has disclosed that always a certain percentage of students pass, and a certain percentage fail. The prospect before you may look bleak and threatening at the moment. You may feel quite appalled at the thought of all you should have at your finger-tips, and haven't. I wouldn't worry, my child. If you haven't learnt what you should at this late hour, you can't possibly do it in the little time that is left. So put your worries aside, and let your mind dwell on strange and beautiful things, such as the colour of this spring evening, and sweet summer ahead."

He nodded his head benevolently at her while he fitted a cigarette into his brown wooden holder. "What a dear old thing he is!" she thought, watching his thin head shaking, with its ludicrous little tweed cap perched on it as though it were a symbol of headgear rather than a cap. She wished that she might take his arm and march him off to his car, tucking him in and placing the rug round his knees, and waving good-bye to him as he sailed off to the Little Brown House. But that was impossible. He and she were in different camps until the issue between the teachers and the taught, now about to be joined, had been settled. Woe betide those who were thought to curry favour with the teachers.

So she pushed her hand up over her forehead and ran it through her dark curls and smiled at him ruefully. "I do keep thinking of the summer, and longing for it. Oh, Dr. Bryden, what fun we'll have! You'll come out to Acadia often, won't you? Daddy is never so happy as when you are coming to dinner."

"And I never so happy," said Don Bryden quietly, "as when I am to see him. Are you going away this summer, Elaine?"

"Yes, Dr. Bryden, from June till September. We are going up to the mountains, to Jasper, where Daddy has taken a cottage. Daddy can come only for the last week of September, because of the farm. Isn't it a shame? We have to come back then, because an Englishman we met last winter is coming with his mother and his aunt, I think, to stay with us. Daddy is going to have his real holiday then. He's going shooting with this man, up at the lakes. You'll be going too, I suppose. Ralph Harriman is the name of the Englishman. Has Daddy told you about him? He's quite nice, but I wish we didn't have to come back from Jasper just to entertain him. English people

are tiresome sometimes, don't you think? At least, their visits always seem to coincide with our holidays and conflict with our plans."

"I said, let your mind dwell on lovely things, my child, and here you are within a few minutes of receiving that sage advice becoming fretful and worried about an engagement which is to take place in September. What a nervous lot you young people are! Anything might happen before September. A war, for instance; or you may meet the love of your life; or your English visitor may change his mind and never turn up. Don't go about frowning over a prospect that has not yet heaved into view/'

She smiled and Don Bryden's fragile frame was suddenly aware of its decrepitude, and of the beauty of the spring evening, and it came upon him that such evenings were numbered for him but stretched illimitably ahead of this lovely young girl. She was worried over her examinations, and yet in the mists ahead what adventures and loveliness awaited her, what men and brave things were waiting for her to come! He was suddenly aware of the futility of his profession, of his pomposity, his frail unimportance. He looked down at the cigarette-ash which had dropped on his overcoat and caught sight of the narrow toes of his ridiculous boots sticking out. He could not forbear looking up at Elaine again, but it was an abrupt look, and his eyes turned quickly away. "Good-night, Elaiiie, my child," he said. "Good luck with your trials. I'll see you at Acadia when it is all over."

She watched him hurrying through the grey evening towards his car. Then she turned and went into the building and joined a party of her young friends at one of the tables in the library. Elaine opened one of the books she had with her, and turned to her notes. Dr. Bryden's talk of summer had started a longing within her for that time to come, and she felt suddenly that the air in the library this evening was oppressive. She sighed and looked up from her notes, and on the opposite side of the table Douglas Smith looked up too. Her dark eyes caught his, and Doug was moved, as he often was when he looked at Elaine, by an unaccountable earthquake of an emotion somewhere inside him. But the monstrous seriousness of the hour caught at Doug's mind before it had a chance to float away. He smiled at Elaine, an apologetic haunting smile, then threw his tired young thoughts again into his book.

The two or three days after the examinations were a halcyon time. The weather at this moment equally became golden; the dampness of the ground and the gusty winds that were always there at the end of April melted into the warm stillness of the first day or two of May. A vast relief rolled like a tidal wave through the entire student body, even amongst those who had no reason to feel optimistic of the results of the exams. The graduating students who would wait about for two weeks for Convocation and their degrees, knowing that they were to leave for ever, became hosts and gave a great dance in Athabasca Hall which was attended by almost the entire student body save those who had to hurry off to work so that they might earn enough to return for another year. There were afternoon teas, and theatre parties, and a constant whirl of gaiety; and once or twice a day an exodus from the campus to one of the two railway stations in the city to see off parties of students to their homes in different parts of the province.

One night in early May, Elaine, who was to return home the next day, went with a party of others to the station to see off some friends who were going out to their homes on the coast. The Transcontinental by which they were to travel had just steamed into the station; her friends had boarded the train to put up their bags, and had come down to the platform again, where they stood, an excited group, talking and laughing among themselves, and attracting a good deal of attention from the other passengers who had got off the train to stretch their legs during the twenty-minute stop.

One of the boys who was going away, Gerald Aitken, had been one of Elaine's many ardent admirers during the term. He had drawn close to her in the crowd when he stepped down from the coach, and suddenly he slipped his arm through hers and whispered to her, "Walk up the platform a bit with me, Elaine."

They slipped away from the crowd, and walked arm-in-arm up towards the front of the train.

"Will you write to me, Elaine?" asked Gerald, smitten with the prospect before him of a summer without seeing her.

"Yes, I will, Gerald, if you'll write to me."

"I will," said Gerald, "every day. I promise you."

"Not every day, Gerald," said Elaine, laughing. "You've got to work, haven't you?"

"Oh, I'll find the time," said Gerald. "I've got an easy job. But you'll forget me, won't you?" he said, pleading for contradiction. "If you get to a summer resort like Jasper you'll meet all sorts of people. Promise me you won't forget me, Elaine. I'm terribly, terribly in love with you."

"You're sweet, Gerald," she sighed, patting his hand. "I'll miss you as much as you will me. More perhaps; I'll have more time to think of you."

"But you've got so many to think about. Everybody loves you, Elaine. All the boys think you're easily the nicest girl in the University."

"Oh, nonsense, Gerald." And because she felt a moment approaching at which she would promise something she didn't really want to promise, she made an agitated little movement to break the thread of their conversation.

"What a lot of people on the train, Gerald! Look at that extraordinary young man; he has quite grown out of his suit, poor boy."

"Some bohunk," said Gerald tersely, "just arrived from Poland or Lithuania or somewhere. This country is filling up with them."

Richard, who was approaching with Nick, overheard the remarks. He stopped suddenly, and felt a flame of anger shoot up in him. Nick touched his arm, whispering, "Never mind, Richard, come on." Richard stared angrily at Gerald, who was conscious only of Elaine. Deprived of physical satisfaction, Richard tried his tongue instead. Loudly he spoke:

"That's what I call a damned pretty girl, Nick. I'm glad that there are such refinements of civilisation out West."

Elaine caught her breath, surprised and annoyed at the young man's temerity. She turned swiftly and looked at him, as he turned back and looked at her. He smiled at her boldly and she thought that she had never seen anybody so self-assured and unpleasant. She frowned at him, and lest the effect of the frown should be lost in the dusk turned her back on him as swiftly and as rudely as she could manage.

Gerald, indeterminate and wrathful, anxious not to lose a moment of Elaine's time and attention, but aware that the con-

ventions demanded some move from him, muttered something in condemnation of Richard's "nerve/" and said, "Shall I go and bash him, Elaine?"

"No, leave him, Gerald. He hasn't done anything."

"Some of these damned foreigners/" said Gerald wrathfully. "Come on, Elaine, we better be getting back to the other end of the train. Gee, will you kiss me, Elaine, before we go back? I do love you very much."

"Oh, Gerald," she said with a little sigh. She stood on tiptoe and put one arm round his neck and kissed him swiftly and coolly on his lips. "Good-bye, Gerald dear. I won't come down to the others with you. Tell them I'll wait for them at the car."

She turned swiftly and made her way through a side exit to the space outside the station where the cars were parked. She found the car in which they had all come down from the University, and climbed in beside the front seat. She sat there alone in the falling darkness, feeling a little perturbed and annoyed, and at the same time, oddly enough, a little excited. She tried to pretend to herself that the parting from Gerald was responsible for this feeling, but she was too used to being honest with herself for the pretence to be sustained. But she could be angry with herself, and was, that the chance remark of an impertinent stranger on a station platform should have a greater effect on her feelings than the sincere things Gerald had said to her. She felt a sudden dislike of herself, and with it an inclination to get away from Edmonton and other people, and back to the simplicity and quietness of Acadia, a longing to be home again with Mummy and Daddy, and Uncle Silas and Comma and Norah. She sighed piteously in the darkness of the spring night, and looked towards the station where that impertinent and scornful young man and his odd-looking friend were lost somewhere in the light and bustle, the smoke, the clanging of the train bell, and the confused shouting of a continental train departure.

3

At a point 200 miles west of Edmonton, just after sun-up, the train stopped at a wayside station which bore the name of Brunelle. This station stood at the entrance to the Yellowhead

Pass which cuts through the Rockies to the Pacific slope. Ahead of them, as they stood stamping their feet on the wooden platform in the cold dawn, Richard and Nick could see two tall mountains, of barefaced rock except at their base where some thin pines grew, sloping downwards to form a narrow cutting through which the rails, shining in the early sun, disappeared. To the north, a grass-covered hill rose immediately before them, falling over into a gentle hump at the top, as though it had given up the struggle to compete with the greater peaks surrounding it. To the south, immediately behind them, and almost directly below the wooden platform on which they stood, was a broad, still lake, almost two miles in width, and reaching from a point a mile or more behind them to the base of the mountains which formed the cutting that was the beginning of the Ycllowhead Pass. There was no human habitation in sight other than the somewhat derelict station. The town of Brunelle,'they found on inquiry from a taciturn and cold-looking stationmaster, lay two miles up a branch line, on the farther slope of the grass-covered hill confronting them. A mine-train, with a load of coal cars, would be down in half an hour's time, and they could ride up on that, said the stationmaster uninterestedly, as though to imply that equally, as far as he was concerned, they might ride by any conveyance they chose, to the devil.

The Transcontinental pulled out, and disappeared as though drawn like a fine black thread through the opening in the mountains to the West. Richard and Nick were left alone on the platform, for the stationmaster had withdrawn into his house, slamming the door after him to emphasise that not only were they not invited to follow but they would catch hell if they did. A smell of coffee and fried bacon drifted out of the house into the keen morning air, and the boys, who had been subsisting on snacks for the three days of their journey, felt hungry and aggrieved.

Nick frowned at the station-house. "Not very kindly/' he said slowly.

Richard had to laugh in spite of himself. "You are a charitable old Ukrainian, you know, Nick. I should call him a **l**oper old bastard. That's what you mean too, only you can't bring yourself to say it. We'll remember that guy, Nick. Assuming that we get jobs up at Brunelle, we'll pass by this

way, quite often. Let's make a memo of the fact that we will rub his nose in it some time when the opportunity offers. What do you say?"

"Ah," said Nick, with a faint smile, "let's not worry about him."

"It isn't that," said Richard, passionately. "I can't forgive the mean bastard for not worrying about us. He might have asked us in for a cup of coffee instead of leaving us standing here."

Nick looked a little disturbed. "I think you worry too much ;about things when they don't come out right for you, Richard. It must be pairiful for you, my dear friend. Why do you give yourself unnecessary pain?"

"Because I'm not used to being treated as though I were a dog by ignorant people like that," responded Richard fiercely.

Nick's look grew very sad. He looked first down at the ground before him, then up at the mountains, and finally let his troubled gaze rest on his friend's face. He made as though to speak, but checked himself and looked at Richard instead a little plaintively.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Nick, don't look as though I'd lacked you. Please don't try to reform my character. You never seem to get angry with anybody. Well, I'm not a saint. I get great satisfaction out of damning a fellow who is just plain mean. You leave me to it, you old Russian." He finished with a smile, most of his quick temper having escaped through this little outburst.

The branch train with a load of flat-cars filled with coal came hurtling down the single-track line which ran down the side of the grass-covered hill before them, and came to a clattering stop opposite the station. Richard and Nick approached the guard who had jumped down from the van at the end of the train, and asked if they could get a lift up to the mine when he returned. "Sure thing," responded the guard. "Jump in there and sit by the stove until we get going. You can help yourself to a cup of coffee if you want. Cups in the cupboard over the stove." He slouched off to the station, while Nick and Richard clambered in. "That's what I call human," said Richard, sighing with satisfaction as he climbed into the van after Nick. "Sure," responded Nick, with a broad smile. "If you wait long enough,^ there's always somebody nice who turns up. It's a waste of

breath cursing the ones who are not nice." "Ah, Nick," said Richard, smiling in return, "you're a great guy."

The little train which had rushed with such abandon down the hill made heavy work of its climb back up. The incline was so steep that every now and then the engine wheels could be heard spinning madly on the track while they failed to grip it. When they did, the long train of empty flat-cars moved slowly and jerkily forward. Richard and Nick sat in the van at the end of the train regarding through the open door the striking view which was revealed to them as the train slowly but steadily mounted higher on the hill. Mountains, which had been hidden from them when they stood in the valley, came into view, their tops covered with snow. Peak after peak rolled northward and was lost in a haze in the distance. Meanwhile they had climbed into sunshine, and the air had become both clear and warm. Enlivened by their coffee and the exhilarating air, Richard and Nick looked about them with eager eyes.

The train having reached a precipitous height, paused trembling and creaking while the brakeman threw a switch, then with brakes released it rolled backward down a slight spur, and the township of Brunelle was revealed to view. It lay scattered along the side of a hill, as incongruous on this wild rock-faced landscape as a bird-dropping on the head of a statue. Four rows of small timber-built houses, each row about a mile in length, ran from one end of a broad steep hill to the other. Behind them, higher up the hill, entrances to the pits were visible, • several hundred yards apart, yawning black chasms sloping into the side of this rich, coal-bearing hill. At one end stood the gaunt and hideous tippie. Coal-cars drawn out of the pit ran along a narrow-gauge railway from each pit entrance out on to the tippie, where at the end each car vomited its load of coal into a chute, down which it slid and clattered to the waiting open railroad-cars below. Smoke and dust filled the air, especially in the neighbourhood of the tippie, and the clatter of hoists drawing up the cars from the pits, the shunting of the engine hauling the flat-cars into place under the chute, and the shattering din made by the several great gear-wheels that operated continuously on the tippie, made such an unearthly din that conversation where the train came to rest was almost impossible. Richard and Nick jumped down from the train and looked about them at what they hoped was to be their home for

a while. The mountains still hemmed them in, and the sky overhead was the serenest blue. But close at hand the scene was ugly and depressing. The mountain from which coal was being brought forth looked like a wounded beast lying on its side, being torn at by the dogs that had brought it down.

They made their way to the pay office. They had heard on the train that work was plentiful here, and that a mining union made the pay very good, but now they had come to the point of applying for a job, they felt uneasy. Brunelle seemed shut away from the world. It wasn't like Ottawa. Out of a job there you had only to walk a few yards to get another, but here you would have to take a train. It seemed, before you got on to the pay-roll, to be an uncomfortably remote place.

The timekeeper asked them only perfunctory questions: where had they come from, whether they were members of the union, what they could do. Then he signed them on, making Nick, who had said he knew something about horses, a teamster, and Richard a driller's helper. That meant a surface job for Nick, and an underground one for Richard, but because of that Richard was to get \$7 a day, which seemed to him remarkable wealth, and Nick \$5 a day, which completely satisfied Nick, who was delighted at the prospect of working with horses.

The timekeeper pointed out to them the hotel and the store, told them that they could get rooms at the one place and working kit at the other, and gave them instructions to report to work at seven o'clock next morning.

The hotel they found to be a large squat frame building of unprepossessing appearance outside and in, with the added disadvantage inside of an unattractive smell. But, as Nick had said, when things were bad you only had to wait for the good to come along. They were given a room together which, when Nick had borrowed a broom and Richard had prised the window open, was made quite clean and presentable. They sallied out to the stores. These, they discovered, were owned by the company, who found some means of restitution for the extravagantly high wages they were forced to pay by charging monstrously for everything they had to sell. Since there was no competition allowed in the town, the stores remained impervious to the complaints which their rough customers made frequently and with profanity.

Richard and Nick bought what they needed, and returned to the hotel for supper, a meal which was served as soon as the day-shift had come off work and away from the wash-house to which they retired for a perfunctory shower. In the dining-room the men sat at two long tables. They ate hugely and noisily off tin plates, reaching black-grained hands for the bread and butter which was piled on plates up and down the table. Richard, new to these manners, was so pained that he was put entirely off his food, but Nick, to whom food, like most things in his life, was a serious business, was not dismayed, and applied himself steadily to each dish set before him.

The others at the table took little notice of them. Labour was constantly coming and going at this time, which, being remote and without distractions of any kind, failed to exercise an attraction save on the workman who seriously saved his money, or the newly-arrived immigrant who knew of no better place to go to. After supper Richard and Nick walked out of the hotel. The sun was setting over a mountain to the west of the town, and the shadows that fell here and there upon the valley below softened the distant view and made it seem sad and beautiful. A depression had fallen on Richard's spirits. He longed for sympathy, and he wanted to get away from the horrible hotel and its unattractive inhabitants. His thin young face registered dissatisfaction with life. Nick's placidity remained undisturbed, but he glanced apprehensively once or twice at Richard, as they set off for a walk, as though preparing himself to meet an outburst of temperament.

They followed a road that went between two rows of the small timbered houses. These were lived in by the married miners, the single men living either in the hotel or in shacks, put up by themselves, on the outskirts of the town. The paraphernalia of humble family life were visible and audible as they made their way up the road; the cries of babies, the shouts of children who here and there in the pursuit of some intricate game rushed out of a house, chasing each other with shrieks and cries, and disappearing again behind another house. A mongrel dog was usually mixed up in these infantile sorties. Observing Nick and Richard the dog would detach itself from the pack, rush, and come up and sniff them suspiciously before it returned to its play. Washing hung out behind most of the houses, and the sound of gramophones and radios and of voices raised in

argument, made a continual noise as they walked up the hill. "Tin Pan Alley," said Nick, observing that Richard looked about him with disapproving eyes. Richard merely grunted.

At the end of the road, when they had passed the last house, a track continued, sloping to the right and making for the top of the hill, several hundred feet above them. They continued along this way. A few trees stood scattered here and there, short, grey, bent and shrivelled-looking from lack of soil into which to dig their roots and from exposure to the fiercest weather on this mountain-side. A form of clumpy vegetation grew among the rocks. From below it had looked as though this hill was grass-covered. Up here it could be seen that there were open spaces of bare rock, and that this thick-rooted vegetation grew only where soil had settled in some depression of the rocks.

Near the top the track narrowed to a path, and they followed one another in single file until they reached a small plateau on which the vegetation grew with some profusion. The plateau formed a slight depression, so that not only had this wind-blown fine soil settled here, but the snow which had but recently melted had formed into a little lake about twenty yards across, and in the evening light this reflected the still sky, flecked with light clouds and ruddy with colour, which cupped in the valley made by the surrounding peaks.

Nick and Richard stood and looked about them; then, warm with their walk, flung themselves down on the edge of the plateau overlooking the town below. Over the top of the smaller hill up which the train had laboured that morning they could see Brunelle Lake, a shining sheet of silver lying between green banks. At the western end where the steep sides of the higher mountains at the entrance to the pass rose up, the sun was setting with great delicacy and art. A chorus of light clouds, like a well-drilled *corps de ballet*, had formed themselves into a position which modestly disguised their own contribution to the effect, and left the golden sun to sail majestically down a pink and feathered path "that led behind the tallest mountain, which reared itself a little self-consciously, like a bald head in a theatre, caught in a spot-light, at that end of the valley. At the western end the sides of the mountains sloping towards the valley were already in shadow, but at the eastern end where the sun still played on them they glowed with light as though

coated with fine gold. The valley in between lay part in shadow, part in light, and with pinks and purples and golds seemed to lie adorned for the coming of night. The boys looked at this scene for a little while in silence. "Beautiful, Nick, isn't it?" said Richard at last.

"Very nice," said Nick, who had never learnt not to be embarrassed at the mention of beauty.

Richard turned and smiled at him, then flung himself on his back and stared at the sky overhead. "You old vandal," he said, "I don't believe that a beautiful sunset means anything to you."

"Sure," responded Nick, "but nice sunsets will come again. There may be one to-morrow night. There will certainly be lots before I die. You can't keep on saying it's beautiful. Not like a good meal, for instance, or a warm bed. You mightn't have those to-morrow night, or sometime. When I eat good, or sleep nice and warm, I say to myself that's beautiful, like I was sort of thanking God for it, you see, and hoping he'd do it for me again."

"It must have been the famine you went through, Nick, old boy. It's blunted your finer sensibilities."

"That sounds like I had an accident or something, Richard," laughed Nick. "What's wrong with thanking God for a good meal?"

"Nothing at all, my boy, very right and proper: as long as it is a good meal, and not that sort of slop, for instance, they served us at the hotel to-night. If it's a question of what God has done for us, you must admit he's making a better job of this sunset than he did of that supper."

"There wasn't much wrong with that grub, Richard. Sure, I've tasted better, but it was good wholesome food. What put you off wasn't the food, it was the people. But you'll get used to them. It'll be all right if you wait."

"Nick, you're the greatest procrastinator I've ever met. Your advice is always to wait, and everything will turn out all right."

"Well, don't it?" grinned Nick triumphantly.

"No, it don't, I mean it doesn't," Richard said firmly.

"We haven't done so bad, landing ourselves good, well-paid jobs here. It looks like a nice place to work. I never lived in the mountains before. Seems kinda nice to me," said Nick mildly, looking about him with appreciative eyes.

"The mountains are all right," said Richard, "it's the people. It's the same everywhere you go in this country. The scenery's grand, the air's magnificent, the opportunities to get on are tremendous, but the people, God, the people."

"What's wrong with them, Richard?" asked Nick plaintively. "They seem all right to me. There's good and bad everywhere, it don't go by nationalities. Maybe it's just what you're used to. You won't get a Canadian to believe that all Englishmen are fine chaps. Why should he be wrong any more" than you are? You know what I think, Richard," asked Nick after a moment's pause, turning towards his friend with a determined look as though nothing should stop him from saying what he had made up his mind to say, "you aren't really a working man; you can't understand working men and they can't understand you. Somehow you both manage to get across each other. Me, I was born a poor farmer's son, and my grandfather was a serf on a baron's estate in South Russia. I'm used to a rough life. But you aren't. You sort of go all sensitive when you come in contact with rough manners. You think the people are awful, and they think you're being superior, and because you're a hot-tempered guy nearly everything ends for you in a fight. Then you begin to hate the people, and begin to think the sunsets are finer than them, and the mountains grander, and the country more magnificent. But if it hadn't been for these people you despise you wouldn't be here. They built the railroad for you to travel by, they opened up this mine which is going to pay you \$7 a day. You've got to try and understand them a bit better, Richard, and don't do it like you was a charity visitor bringing soup so that you could look into the kitchen and see if it was kept clean. You got just to keep quiet when you feel angry, and be patient when you feel impatient. By and bye you'll meet other people in this country. The population ain't all Bohunks and working men, you know. You remember that girl we saw on the station at Edmonton last night, the one you said was so pretty, and who looked so angry when she heard you say it. She took you for a working man, and turned up her nose at you, and you was as sore as hell. Remember?

"Gee, it's, funny you and that girl getting angry with each other. If you was introduced properly you'd get along fine. She'd understand what you feel about things, and you'd under-

stand her. Yes, you and she would understand each other fine, but you can't understand the men in the hotel. That's because she's your class, and these men aren't. But you're not living in England now, Richard. This is Canada, and things are different here. One man is as good as the next. Look at me, for instance. I'm a serf's grandson. You know what a serf was in the old days in Russia? He was just like a slave. My father was a free man, but until he came out here he wasn't any better off than his father had been. Look at him now: he's got his own farm. Look at me: I'm earning \$5 a day, and I don't need to give a damn for any one unless I feel like it. You can't afford to despise any one in this country. They've got just the same chance as you have to get ahead, and if you start thinking that the scenery's grand but the people awful, you'll get left behind, Richard, and you'll end by hating this country like hell."

While Nick had been delivering this onslaught Richard had been first amused, then angry. Once or twice he thought to interrupt him, but he contained his feelings, and when Nick finally finished, and sat looking out over the valley, his square, solid face looking solemn, Richard suddenly felt small and ashamed of himself. While Nick had been talking he had raised himself on his elbow and looked at his friend's face, but when he stopped he rolled over on his back again, and looked up at the darkening sky overhead. Pie remembered the ecstatic vision that had presented itself to him as he sailed up the St. Lawrence; he remembered the loneliness of his first few months in Canada which had ended with that impression of being adopted by the country and of adoring it; he remembered his conversation with Vincent on the night of his great trouble in Montreal. How much alike were the things that Vincent and Nick had said to him! How badly he had failed in what he had set out to do! He groaned with revulsion against himself, and clenched his fists and beat the ground beside him. Nick turned his head swiftly and looked at his friend.

"Gee, Richard, did I say too much? Don't take it badly. We'll get along all right, you and me. I'll look after you, Richard. I'm as tough as these guys are. I only said what I did so as to make things smoother for you."

"O.K., Nikolenko," said Richard, smiling ruefully at him. "I wish I were like you, but the next best thing to that is having you for a friend. Come on," he said, getting to his feet, "let's

get back to the hotel before it gets dark, or we'll be marooned up here."

They scrambled down the path by which they had come, and when they reached the road which ran between the houses, fell into step with each other. Neither of them spoke, but each was aware of the other's companionship, and felt glad in his heart because of his friend's nearness.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

WORKING at Brunelle was in some ways easier and in some ways more difficult than working at the farm had been. Getting up in the morning was a much pleasanter experience. Richard had risen for so many months at four o'clock in the morning that he found himself for a while automatically waking at that hour, and realising that he had another two hours in bed, turning over with a luxurious squirm for another blissful sleep. He had risen in Ottawa each morning in darkness and cold, and had got dressed and eaten his breakfast in a benumbing solitariness. But now it was mid-May, and when they woke their room was flooded with sunlight, and the cold fresh mountain air was pouring in through the open window. The whole hotel was astir; men were wandering to and from the wash-room, and the smell of breakfast cooking flooded the hallways and the stairs. It was pleasant instead of being alone as one dressed to have Nick in the room. Nick was always immensely serious before breakfast. Richard was always aggressive and in a mood to tease his solid friend. When they finally clattered down to breakfast together Nick had been affected to some extent by Richard's high spirits, and Richard by the expenditure of energy in the keen morning air had summoned an appetite of no mean proportions. He had got over his feelings about the food within a day or two of his arrival, but whether this was

due to Nick's harangue or to the mountain air he had not paused to consider.

But it was not as pleasant working underground as it had been working in the dairy. The lamps on the miners' caps pierced the darkness of the shaft only a foot or so in front of them; outside their pale yellow effulgence blackness pressed in like a suffocating wall. A feeble spirit of life seemed to animate the darkness, making it more frightening. When one paused and stood silent the darkness beat like a muffled drum in one's ear, and sometimes eerie whisperings would seem to come from it, and a creaking (which actually came from the timbers supporting the shaft) would sound in the darkness as though a spirit were trying to creep by without attracting notice. Sometimes the ceiling of the shaft suddenly lowered where hard rock had been encountered, and taken unawares the novice like Richard would receive a sickening blow on the head. Sometimes the going underfoot was smooth, but often there would be little holes and puddles half-filled with broken rock to trap the feet. Richard found that he had to look up and down and sideways as he moved forward along the shaft, and since he had to carry at the same time a heavy length of air-hose and a drill he was continually in a state of muscular and nervous tension.

The atmosphere in the mine was cold and damp, and impregnated with a smell of wet coal. Down the long line of the shaft he could see lights continually flickering as the pump men tramped to and fro to nurse the pumps on which the lives of all of them depended. Frequently, as they advanced to the face where they were to work, they had to step aside and press themselves flat against the side of the shaft, while a long train of little coal-cars, drawn from the working face by a hoist, trundled by, the oily cable that pulled them shining in the light from the miners' caps like a writhing snake. Sometimes, as a train of these cars started to move from the face, and the hoist outside took up the slack of the cable too swiftly, the cable would jump like a living thing; and several times, until he got used to it, and learnt to walk closer to the side of the shaft, Richard received a blow from it on his legs that felt, like the stinging lash of a whip.

In some ways it was better right up at the face. There were enough men working here for their accumulated lamps to give a really effective light so that the threatening darkness was

pushed back and hovered pulsating behind them. The train of cars was several yards away. When one was to be filled it was pushed up to the face by a workman with a naked, muscular torso, glistening with sweat. These fillers worked on piece-work, being paid so much for each car they filled. They worked in fierce silence, hardly pausing even to straighten their backs, never speaking to one another or to any of the other workmen, and cursing fiercely but in a grumbling monotone whenever anything went wrong, spitting tobacco-juice without regard for where it fell, labouring like animals to mount up a tally of cars that brought them in wages of sixty and seventy dollars a week.

When Richard had attached his drill to the air-line and passed it to his driller, he had nothing to do unless his driller called for a new drill, and he could lean back against the wall of the shaft, deafened by the roaring vibration of the drills, and watch the strange scene before him. Water trickled down the wall at his back, and often he stood in puddles that came over the tops of his rubber boots. He was cold, a little miserable, and not a little afraid, but he stood braced against the wall of the shaft with no impression of suffering a hard fate, such as he had often felt at the farm.

But he looked forward to the end of each day. It was heaven to emerge from the mGuth of the shaft and feel the warm afternoon sunlight beating on his face, and the clean air sweeping in through his dusty nostrils and throat. In the wash-house he stripped to the skin, and luxuriated under a hot shower. Then, leaving his overalls and cap and miner's boots in a locker, and with a clean old coat and trousers and a singlet covering his freshly-washed and glowing body, he could walk contentedly through the town to meet Nick and drink a glass of beer at the bar attached to the hotel.

As they settled down into the life of the little town Richard and Nick met some interesting characters whom they liked. Nick's sermon on the hill-top to Richard had had a good effect. After making a little effort to like his fellows, Richard found that he liked some of them quite a lot, and they in their turn responded to his friendliness and high spirits. Nick and he were recognised as a pair of friends who supported each other in all circumstances, and who had to be treated as a single unit, not as a couple. You bought drinks for both or for neither. If you quarrelled with one you quarrelled with both, and although

the young Englishman was the more ready to fight, the young Russian was the nastier to deal with in a scrap. When it became a real fight and Nick got down to it seriously, no amount of punishment seemed to have any effect on him; battered and bleeding, he stayed on his feet until his opponent or opponents were down and out. Then, when it was all over, he fell into a great sadness, and had to be led away by the young Englishman, before he burst into tears.

Fights were very frequent in that mountain valley. There was so little else to distract the men, and the wages they were earning were so good that they spent more than they should have done in the bar. Great games of poker and crown and anchor took place in the shacks on the outskirts of the town. In the bar this wasn't allowed. Corporal Manton of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who was the representative of law and order among the two thousand miners living in this valley, saw to that.

He was a thin, wiry-looking man of middle height, with a pale, open-featured, stern face, and with thin lips always tightly closed as though he were in a perpetual state of controlling his temper from some outburst. He wore the striking uniform of the Mounties, red coat, blue riding breeches with broad yellow stripes at the side, and highly polished riding boots. Richard felt for him an enormous admiration and respect.

The chance to meet Manton came about in an unexpected way, and indirectly it brought about a dramatic change in Richard's life. The township of Brunelle was held by the owners of the coal mine on lease from the Dominion Government, and although it lay within the Province of Alberta, as did the adjoining great National Park of Jasper, for certain purposes of administration it came under the direction of the Dominion Government of Ottawa, instead of the provincial government at Edmonton. It was because of this that the Mounties policed the territory instead of the provincial police. For the same reason the mineowners could make their own laws about liquor in the township. They allowed beer but no spirits to be served in the town bar. There was a certain illicit trade in spirits, which were run into the township by undesirable characters who found that the well-paid miners provided a lucrative market, and many of the hunts which

Manton had to make day and night were to track down these bootleggers.

One evening in mid-June, Manton came into the bar about five o'clock, when Richard and Nick and only half a dozen others were there. He nodded to Kelly, the barman, then leaning with his back against the bar and tapping one of his highly-polished boots with the riding-switch he always carried, he cleared his throat and demanded their attention.

"I want a volunteer," he said, "to drive the speeder for me, and help me with a rather unpleasant task. Some Indians have fished a drowned man out of the lake two miles west of the station. I've got to pick him up and take him on to Jasper. The Transcontinental won't be in until morning. I want to get him up there to-night. Who's game?"

Richard jumped to his feet. 'Til do it. Let me," he cried, stumbling forward in his eagerness from the table at which he had been sitting with Nick.

"Can you manage a petrol engine?" asked Manton.

"Sure I can," affirmed Richard. "When do we start?"

"In half an hour. I'll meet you at the engine-house. Bring a sweater, and get your side-kick there to report your absence to your foreman. We won't be back until to-morrow afternoon."

He turned quickly and left the bar, and Richard with shining, excited face said to Nick, "That's a bit of luck, eh?"

Nick shook his head slowly. "You'll miss a shift. That's seven dollars you'll be short this week."

"To hell with the seven dollars," said Richard cheerfully. "If I'm short I'll borrow off you."

2

The speeder was an easily-managed engine. It consisted of a single-cylinder motor mounted on one side of a small flat-car about five feet wide and six feet long. On the level it could run at about forty miles an hour; upgrade, if it was carrying a heavy weight, the speed dropped to about ten miles, but downgrade it would go like a bat out of hell. With a rough deal box aboard to hold the remains of the drowned man, and with Richard sitting on one side of this and Manton on the other, they set off at 5.30, zooming down the branch line at great

speed, the afternoon sun beating in their faces, and the breeze blowing through Richard's curly hair.

At Brunelle station they stopped to get from the taciturn stationmaster an all-clear for the line west, and ten minutes later were travelling swiftly along the main line. It took them only about twenty minutes to reach the lake from which the drowned man had been taken. They stopped by an Indian encampment which stood in a meadow that lay between the road-bed and the blue waters of the lake. Under a tarpaulin down by the shore was the dead man, lying on his face, his arms stretched out, just as he had been drawn from the water. Richard and Manton had carried down the dead box. Richard had never seen a dead man before, and the sight of one who had died a violent death filled him with a superstitious dread. But before Manton he could not betray this. Holding his breath, and shutting his eyes as much as possible, he bent down, under Manton's instructions, and lifted the dead man by his shoulders, while Manton lifted his legs. He seemed to Richard to be terribly heavy. They had to turn him over on to his back in mid-air so that he might lie more decently in the rough, wooden box which they had first lined with ferns pulled from the shore of the lake. As they turned him Richard caught sight of the dead man's face, and his own being writhed with horror at what he saw. When they had placed the body in the box, he turned away, feeling very sick, and while Manton nailed down the lid he walked away towards the shore, his legs trembling and his body shaking. But after a minute or two, thinking of Manton's thin-lipped, fine face, he turned back, and reached the box again just as Manton was driving in the last nail.

Manton looked up at him and said nothing, but he smiled at him in a friendly, understanding fashion.

With the help of some of the Indians they carried the heavy box up from the meadow, scrambling up the steep side of the roadway, and dropping it with a thud on the flat surface of the speeder. Then Richard started the speeder again, and they began to roll onwards towards the West.

Manton pulled a pipe and a pouch from his pocket and when he had lit the pipe, leaned back on his elbows, puffing contentedly. Richard longed to ask about some of his adventures, and while he was glancing at him shyly, and casting about in his mind for some opening, Manton turned and looked at him.

"Where do you come from, son? You haven't been a miner all your life, have you?"

"I'm from England, Corporal Manton. I came out about nine months ago."

"Do you like it out here?"

"Oh, yes, tremendously. I didn't like it much at first, but I'm getting along very well now."

"What makes you go in for mining? Rather a tough job for a young fellow like you, isn't it?"

Richard saw his chance, and seized it. He smiled by way of apology for what might seem a rude retort. "Well, I might say the same about you. Why are you a policeman?"

Manton took his pipe from his mouth, and looked rather sternly at Richard.

"You know all about me, I suppose. Some of those bar-flies have been talking, and telling you that I'm really an Oxford man, and a hell of a hero into the bargain?"

"Well, Kelly showed me a newspaper clipping of one pretty heroic exploit," said Richard.

"They're like a bunch of old women. Old ladies are not in it with working men for gossip."

"Wasn't it true?" asked Richard.

Manton didn't reply, so Richard went on, "Y Q U must have done lots of brave things in your time."

"Really?" said Manton, with a harsh laugh. "You surprise me. I'm not aware of having done more than my duty. Nobody's given me a medal yet for being brave. I think my fame must be confined to the bar-room of Brunell's. Very nice of fat Kelly to keep a file of my achievements. With a man like Kelly, it's usually the police who keep the file."

While this conversation had been taking place, the speeder had careered on its way along the main line, with Richard and Manton sitting on top of the box containing the dead man. The sun had just gone behind a peak ahead of them so that they were travelling in shadow, but behind them the mountains were still lit by the sun.

"It's getting cold," said Manton. "Let's stop and put on some more clothes."

Richard slowed down the speeder, the locked wheels shrieking until they came to a stop. Ahead of them, about fifty yards on, yawned the black mouth of a tunnel. Richard pulled on his

sweater, and Manton a British-warm. As they were doing this Richard saw two men walk out of the tunnel, one on each side of the track, stepping from tie to tie. Manton had his back to the tunnel and could not see them. Richard said, "Where are these chaps walking to?" and Manton turned swiftly and looked. He watched them for a second or two, then Richard saw him grow tense and half duck down beside the speeder. He turned to Richard, and spoke quietly, "Don't say anything. Get down behind the speeder." Richard obeyed, but he peered round the box and watched Manton.

Manton, still bent down, drew off the British-warm he had just put on, then drawing the revolver from the holster on his hip, stood up, his red coat a bright splash of colour that could not be mistaken in that landscape. The two men had been looking down at the ties as they walked, but just as Manton stood up, one of them looked up and caught sight of him. He stopped dead. The other glanced at his companion, then looking ahead, stopped also. For a second or two they stood still; like a tableau, thought Richard, looking past Manton's still figure to the two men standing tense and immobile in the shadow of the hill. Then they suddenly turned and ran back towards the mouth of the tunnel.

"Stop," called Manton. "Stop, or I'll shoot."

But they had reached the tunnel before he finished. He turned and shouted at Richard, "Get the speeder off the line," then he ran along the track towards the tunnel, jumping from tie to tie.

Richard stood up irresolute. His instinct was to rush after Manton, but his instructions had been clear. Yet how was he to get the speeder off the line, and alone? He supposed Manton meant in case a train came along. Suddenly he heard one shot, then, after an interval of a second or two, another shot ring out from the tunnel. In a panic in case Manton had been killed, and he had been left alone with a drowned man in a box, and two criminals at large not a hundred yards away, he put his weight against the side of the box, tipped it on to its edge, then with a frenzied push sent it toppling down the embankment. After rolling over and over it came to rest in a marsh half-submerged in water, twenty feet below. Then he pushed the speeder ahead a few yards, lifted it by the two short shafts that stuck out behind for that purpose, and with a twist and a turn

sent it over the embankment, too. It came to rest lying wheels upward in the same marsh a little ahead of the coffin. Richard was left standing in the middle of the track. What to do next, he had no idea.

He waited for a few moments, then started to walk towards the tunnel, uncomfortably aware that any moment he might meet the two men, and not Manton. Just as he reached the mouth of the tunnel, and paused for a moment to catch his breath before plunging into the blackness, he heard stumbling footsteps. He stood back, pressing his body against the smooth face of rock that ran down perpendicularly just outside the tunnel. Then to his great relief Manton appeared, holding with each hand one of the two men.

He smiled at Richard as he came out into the light. "Two more passengers for our gas-wagon," he said. "Take my gun and keep an eye on these fellows while I lock their wrists."

He handed Richard his gun, then paused as he saw the empty track ahead. "No, wait a minute. I guess there's a little job for them to do first." He got behind the men, and prodded them in the back. "Get going," he said.

Richard followed behind, his heart beating rapidly with relief and excitement. When they reached the point where the speeder and the coffin lay in the marsh, Manton turned and grinned at him. "Made quite a job of it, didn't you? There's a better place ten yards ahead." He pointed to where the level of the land rose to within a few feet of the track. "Never mind, it will do these hoboos good to have some exercise." He turned to them, and commanded them gruffly: "Come on, get that speeder back on the line, and mind how you handle that box. There's a dead man inside."

The two men scrambled down the track, and grunting and swearing dragged the speeder up the embankment, then with marked distaste got hold of the box in gingerly fashion and started up with that. But in order to keep a foothold in the loose earth they had to take a firmer grip of the box than they had been disposed to do when they learnt of its contents, and when they finally got it on to the flat top of the speeder it was to the accompaniment of the same forceful language with which they had delivered the speeder to the rails. Manton then handcuffed them together, and sat them side by side at the front of the box, facing the direction in which they were going. He

and Richard sat at the rear facing the two men. Once again the speeder started on its journey, rolling swiftly through the tunnel where lately the excitement had occurred. As they emerged on the farther side Manton told Richard to stop again. Then he spoke to the two men who, in answer to his question, pointed to some bushes below. Manton slid down the track, pushed his way through the bushes, and after a few moments emerged with a case of whisky. Three times he did this, each time coming out with a case. When the three were piled on top of each other he called the men down to get them. They were carried up and placed on top of the grim box, the men were handcuffed again, and once more the speeder started westward, rolling slowly along with its heavy burden.

"I'm afraid I let you in for a rather exciting party," said Manton, when the journey had finally restarted.

"I don't mind," said Richard. "I think it was very brave of you to dash into the tunnel after these men. You must have been a perfect target for them in that coat, outlined against the end of the tunnel. Was it you or they who fired the shots?"

"They, unfortunately for them," said Manton. "They were too scared to shoot properly. There's no more cowardly crook in the world than these bootleggers. For God's sake, don't add this to my legendary exploits. I'm merely trying to get promotion to a sergeant, and the more booze-runners I catch the better my chances are. I assure you, I was simply after that extra stripe. I knew these skunks couldn't shoot straight. I've met this kind before."

"How did you know they were bootleggers when you saw them come out of the tunnel?"

"I didn't. That's why I took off my top-coat and showed my red one. 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all'; do you know that line? As soon as they saw the red coat, they ducked and ran instead of trying to face it out. Honest men don't run from a policeman."

"Well, I thought it was magnificent," said Richard, "and it fully bears out everything I've heard about you."

Manton flushed and turned angry eyes on Richard. "Oh, for God's sake, shut up about that. You don't know what you're talking about. You may be the illegitimate son of a duke, but I don't keep on trying to find out. Leave my history alone and I'll leave yours alone."

After this angry outburst he stared ahead, his arms folded on his chest, and spoke no more to Richard. Dusk was falling, and over the tops of some of the surrounding peaks pale stars were beginning to emerge from a shadowy violet sky. Richard began to feel the box hard to sit on, and suddenly he remembered what it contained. Ahead of him sat the two bootleggers, who had begun to huddle against each other for the sake of warmth. He glanced sideways at Manton, and saw that his face was frowning and that he stared fixedly ahead as though his mind were caught in some unpleasant day-dream. How odd life is, thought Richard, looking up at the surrounding mountains, and thinking to himself with some pride: Here I am sitting on a corpse, and with two criminals and a policeman for company; how interesting it is! Manton's a queer chap. I haven't been in the least inquisitive, but he's certainly very touchy. I'll sleep well to-night, if I don't dream of this corpse I'm sitting on. What a terrible face the corpse had I Jasper. I'm glad I'm going to see that. It must be quite a place.

Even as he thought that, they reached the top of a long grade up which the speeder had been labouring for ten minutes, and there, ahead of them, were the lights of Jasper twinkling in the dusk.

3

The next morning Manton said to Richard, "You had better go and amuse yourself for the day, Danby. I reckoned only on a post-mortem, but now I've got an arrest as well. Our two bootlegger friends come up before the magistrate at twelve o'clock. I won't be through with that and the other matter before three or four o'clock. Go and see something of Jasper Park. What would you like to do, swim, climb, walk, drive? The world is all before you, my son."

It was a lovely June day, such a day as only June can produce in the mountains. The sky was a tropical blue without a cloud stirring in it, and the atmosphere was so clear that distant peaks stood out with a purity of outline that made them seem carved pieces set against a drop-scene of deep blue, as a jewel is set against a velvet-lined case. A dew had fallen in the early hours of the morning so that the air was fresh and vigorous, but the day promised heat, the pleasant heat of the high mountains

where cooling snow lies permanently only a few thousand feet above.

Richard was in the guardroom with Manton and the Jasper mounty, Sergeant Brook. His face betraying both pleasure at the prospect before him and indecision what to do, Sergeant Brook interposed with clear-cut advice. "I should go for a swim if I were you, my boy. The lakes are crystal clear round here, and it will be grand swimming by noon-time to-day. You don't want to swim at the Lodge. Place is full of tourists and very fashionable. You want to go to Lake Manilou, two miles beyond the Lodge. That's a good quiet spot. I'll get one of the Fire-Ranger's trucks to give you a lift out. Now, what about your lunch? I know, the very thing. Andrew MacTaviot's out there, George; he's taken a cottage for the summer. You're not shy, I hope, my boy. That's right, you don't look it. You can't miss MacTaviot's cottage. It's the only one on the north shore of the Lake. Tell him you're spending the day waiting for Corporal Manton. He'll ask you to lunch all right. I'll get one of the trucks coming back about five o'clock to pick you up. You'll be all right if you get away about six, eh, George? That will get you back to Brunelle before dark, provided you don't run into any more excitement on the way."

Richard, feeling very happy at his good luck, mounted a truck beside a Fire Ranger, and they drove out westward towards Lake Manitou. He had never seen a more beautiful morning or lovelier country. They were farther into the heart of the Rockies here than at Brunelle, and not only were many of the mountains snow-capped, but one or two had giant glaciers clinging to their sides which shone and glistened in the sun. Poplars lined the road along which the truck sped, their trunks shining silver in the morning sunlight. Water was everywhere, little mountain streams tumbling down the hills to the right, swallowed up in culverts which ran under the road, and dropping away in a shower of spray to the left. The road twisted continually to avoid little hills and rises in the ground. Every half-mile or so, as the road turned a corner, they came upon a little lake lying still in the sun, as blue in colour as the sky above. Richard had never seen anything like it in his life. He wished that the truck would go more slowly so that he might have more time to absorb it all, but the truck-driver was impervious to all that lay about him, being used to

it and being no aesthete, as his unshaven, cheerful face, with a cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth, and his blood-shot eyes fixed firmly on the road ahead, plainly showed.

A turn in the road brought them in sight of Jasper Lake and the Lodge. The lake was circular in shape, and the road curved around half its circumference, nearly three-quarters of a mile in extent. The lake was very deep and very clear. As the truck sped along its side, Richard could see, even a dozen yards out from the roadway, the sandy bottom, and the coloured stones and shells lying there. On the farther shore stood the Lodge, a great building made entirely of logs, surrounded by small log bungalows in which the visitors slept. There were canoes out on the lake, and inshore a great swimming-pool running the entire length of the front of the Lodge. Even at this early hour of the morning, human figures like insects could be seen scuttling along the edge, climbing up *on* the diving-booms, and running down the steps that led from the Lodge. The driver was sarcastic on the subject of summer visitors.

"They come all the way up to the mountains, and then sit about on the veranda of the hotel, or duck their tootsies in the swimming-pool which is heated up for them. Half of them don't go more than a mile from the Lodge all the time they're here, except out in the hotel cars on a conducted tour, sitting wrapped up in rugs taking pictures pf the scenery. They make me sick."

They passed the Lodge in a fine cloud of scornful dust, the driver blowing his horn with great emphasis to get perambulating visitors out of the way. Beyond the Lodge the level of the road continually rose. Turning and twisting it revealed the same unexpected and beautiful glimpses of water and rocky, snow-capped mountains which had so delighted Richard in the first stage of the journey. After a drive of twenty minutes, the road suddenly turned and ran beside a lake about as big as Jasper Lake, but not defaced by a building like the Lodge. The tree-line around its edge seemed indeed unbroken at first glimpse. Under the sun it lay still, unruffled, and blue beyond belief, reflecting with perfect clarity in its depths each of the great mountains that ringed in the horizon. The driver brought his truck to a stop. "Here y'are, bo'. Lake Manitou where Sergeant Brook said for you to meet another truck here at five o'clock. You won't miss this spot, eh? You'll know it

by this clump of ash-trees. Anyhow, Mr. MacTaviot or his daughter will show you. You've got a swell day ahead of you, bo'. Having a bit of a holiday, eh? So long."

As the truck clattered off, Richard looked up at the mountains and drew into his lungs a great breath of the exhilarating air. He looked at his watch. It was just eleven o'clock. He thought he would wait until twelve before going to call on Mr. MacTaviot. Meanwhile, he might have a dip by himself, and try out in private (in case the MacTaviots suggested a swim after lunch) the probably more than ample pair of red bathing-trunks Sergeant Brook had put at his disposal. It looked good swimming everywhere. He looked about for a place to change away from the road, and finally turned away from the MacTaviot's side and, leaving the road behind him, followed a path along the other shore.

A hundred yards or so along he found a little clump of bushes that screened him from the road, though wondering to himself why he should take that trouble or bother with the bathing-trunks, so remote and undisturbed was this heavenly spot. Sergeant Brook's trunks were designed for Sergeant Brook's girth, but with the aid of shoelaces he adjusted them to adhere to his own boyish waist; then, drawing a long breath and throbbing with an unspeakable happiness, he ran to the side and dived into the clear depths. The shock set every nerve tingling with pain. He had no idea that water could possibly be as cold as this. It was like diving into melted ice. His eyes opened under the water, and he saw the golden sandy bottom reflecting the sunlight, and the reflection of his own shadow moving over it. He broke surface with a great gasp, stood for a moment treading water as he looked about him; then, the blood surging back into his veins and tingling all over with exhilaration and health, he put his head down and swam for a little spit of land that ran out into the lake about fifty yards away.

Richard was a strong swimmer. He covered the distance in record time, then turned on his back and floated, warmly content, lapped and sucked at by the water which now seemed to him delightfully cool instead of icily cold. The water drummed in his ears, and he looked up at the still, blue sky with happy eyes.

When he had lain thus for a few minutes, he turned and stood

up to tread water, and saw with a sudden sense of shock that a canoe floated not fifteen yards away from him. In the canoe a girl sat, a book on her knees, her chin cupped in her hand, gazing at him. Just as he looked, she took her hand away from her face and smiled at him, and called "Good-morning." As she did so, he suddenly recognised the girl he had seen on the Edmonton platform, who had been so annoyed at his remark. It was the same girl, even prettier now than she had seemed when he had seen her in the dusk. She wore a light summer dress, and a string of corals round her throat gleamed in the sunlight and made her skin seem bright, warm and flushed with health.

"Hallo," said Richard. "I didn't know you were there."

"I thought you were one of the Fire Rangers I knew. They often come for a swim here." It was plain that she did not recognise him, a fact which amused him.

He stood treading water, the hair plastered down on his forehead, the water dripping down his face. Then he ran his hand through his hair, and smiled at her, and at that instant she did recognise him. The smile died on her face. She leant forward and picked up a paddle from the bottom of the canoe, then looked at him again.

"I remember seeing you before," she said coldly. "You were on the station platform at Edmonton one night about six weeks ago, weren't you?"

Richard laughed. "Yes, I was, and you looked very fierce because I said to my friend how pretty you were. Do you always get angry when people make remarks about your looks? You must be perpetually in a state of anger."

"It wasn't that," said Elaine. "It was the way you said it, and the way you laughed afterwards."

"You're very sensitive," said Richard, laughing.

"And you're very impertinent," said Elaine, frowning.

"That may be," said Richard, raising his arms above the surface, and slapping at the water. "I'm also getting very cold. I'm going to swim back to my clothes. Do you live round here?"

"Yes, on the other side."

"Ha. Good Lord! your name isn't MacTaviot, is it?"

"Yes, it is. Why?"

"Well, you may not know it, and since I seem to have created a bad impression, perhaps I am not going to, but the general

intention in Jasper this morning was that I should have lunch with you."

"Oh?" The inflection of her voice asked for further information, but Richard was in one of his characteristic teasing moods. It was pleasant to talk to a girl like this again.

"Is your father there? Perhaps I might have better luck with him."

"Yes, he's there. If you like to get your clothes on, I'll paddle you over to the cottage. You can ask Daddy. There's no harm in trying. I think he'll probably not extend an invitation if I say that you've been rude to me, but you never know."

"You never know," agreed Richard, smiling. "He might be pleased that I have such a good opinion of his daughter."

"He hates self-assured young men."

"Oh, I'll take that off with my bathing-suit," said Richard. "Give me five minutes, and then come and fetch me, will you?"

He swam away, kicking up a fine spray of water to get himself warm again. Elaine looked after him, a slight frown wrinkling the skin at the top of her nose.

4

MacTaviot was sitting on the veranda of the cottage, smoking a pipe and tying flies, when hearing voices on the shore, he looked down and saw his daughter and a young man tying up the canoe. Now what has the child found? he asked himself. Some student from the University working somewhere in the Park for the summer, he supposed, but he didn't recognise this one as having come to Acadia. Not a bad-looking specimen, was his involuntary thought, watching Elaine and the youth walking up the path together, looking happy and pleased with themselves and with life.

"Daddy," called Elaine, "here's someone, who has a particular favour to ask of you. This is my father. Daddy, this is Richard Danby."

Andrew rose and shook hands with the young man, smiling with that pleasant, attractive good-nature which always made Elaine's friends feel perfectly at ease with him. "What's the favour?" he asked. "Granted in advance, if it is within my power."

"Well, it's only that I had a day to put in while waiting for Corporal Manton, sir, and Sergeant Brook advised me to come out here for a swim, and told me to call on you, and——"

"What he's trying to get at, Daddy, is that he hopes to be asked to stay for lunch."

"Well, of course, my dear fellow," said Andrew. "We wouldn't dream of letting you go. Elaine, go and tell your mother and give Norah the word. Then get two bottles of cold beer from the refrigerator, like a good child. Sit down there, Danby. You don't mind if I go on with these flies? I'm going off on a three-day fishing trip to-morrow, and I've got to finish this tin."

Elaine disappeared and left them alone on the veranda. Richard settled back happily in a large wicker chair. Life had never seemed to him more glorious. His body felt tingling with health after his swim; the lake lying still and deep blue in the noonday sun, and the clear-cut mountains rising all around, seemed to him the most beautiful thing he had ever seen: his meeting with Elaine had aroused in him a happy feeling which he found difficult to contain.

Andrew, his sleek, well-brushed, greying head bent over his flies, followed his customary procedure for drawing out the young. The results were more interesting than he had anticipated, and came with a good deal less effort than he was used to expending in this process. Richard not only answered Andrew's pleasant tactful questions, but amplified the answers, and gave not only a full account of his family in England, but a detailed report of his adventures in Canada, the ambitions he had felt and the despairs he had suffered during his nine months here. Andrew had no need to feign the perfunctory interest he always accorded to the confessions of the young. He was interested. He could guess what Richard had gone through, and strongly appreciating the comforts and refinements of society himself, he could sympathise over the things that had made Richard wretched.

He had dropped any pretence at working on his flies as Richard's narrative went on, and had looked at the young man with warm sympathy and good-nature. When Richard finished his little tale with an account of his doings the night before, Andrew picked up his beer-glass, and looked at its amber colour against the sun.

"I suppose you were right," he said, "in chucking the University. It was a good way to get to know Canada and the Canadians, to work amongst them as you have done. But you don't want to keep on being a coal-miner, lucrative though the job is. If you mean to make your life in Canada you want to meet young people of your own tastes and interests, and you want to equip yourself to follow some professional career. *

"But I can't take money from my father, sir. He's really terribly hard up."

"You can work your way through, my boy. Over eighty per cent of the students out here do. They are the better for it."

"I'm sure they are, Mr. MacTaviot, but, you see, although it sounds rather presumptuous, I wanted to help my father instead of just helping myself. If I'm earning I can send him something. I can't if I have to save it all for my University education."

"Does he really need help as badly as that? After all, he did send you out here to go to University. He must have been quite prepared to support you."

"Yes, he was, sir. But he really couldn't afford it, I know. His affairs are actually in a terrible state."

"Well, my boy, you must decide for yourself. I'm not going to read you a lecture within the first half-hour of meeting you. Ah, here comes my wife."

Richard stood up and looked at Elspeth MacTaviot, and thought how like his mother she seemed, as pretty, as neat and dainty, but with an air of brisk efficiency his own mother lacked. He was aware that she was looking at him with a critical eye, but he was not embarrassed. It was so long since he had been in a home like this that he felt quite undisturbed.

Elspeth MacTaviot saw before her a pleasant-looking, cheerful young man, calmly at his ease but not over-assured. She was taken with the appearance of this stranger, but the fact that Elaine had met him in strange circumstances, and had brought him unannounced to the cottage, roused her protective feelings for her daughter, and although she was pleasant and gracious to him, Richard found her not so easy to talk to as her husband had been.

Lunch was served on the veranda. Except for the disturbed and unhappy meal he had had in the restaurant with Thérèse in Montreal, this was the first time since he had arrived in Canada

that he had sat down to a table laid with a tablecloth, eaten off thin and pretty china, and had joined in talk as he ate. He suddenly realised that this more than anything marked the difference between the working class and the others, this matter of treating food simply as a refuelling process or as an occasion for relaxation. The white linen tablecloth ruffled in the light breeze that blew up from the lake to temper the heat of the day. An alabaster vase filled with a lovely red sharp-petalled mountain flower stood in the middle of the table. Across it Richard could see Elaine, at her throat the coral necklace, and above it her heart-shaped face. She sat with her back to the lake, and the brightness behind her dazzled Richard so that her face remained partly in shadow. He kept looking at it, his eyes turning to her whenever he stopped talking to Mr. and Mrs. MacTaviot, or when he raised them from his plate.

After lunch they sat on, in the cool shade, and continued their talk, looking out on the lake which changed colour with every hour that passed. In the morning it had been a light sapphire, and as noonday approached the colour deepened to cobalt; then as the sun passed the meridian, the colour had become aquamarine; the ruffle nursed by the noonday breeze had died away, and the water had become still and transparent, so that the mountains that lived in the depths seemed real not reflected things.

"Elaine, take Richard for a walk," said Andrew. "I do hate to see young people sitting about after lunch. Come back at four o'clock, and we'll have time for a swim before the truck comes by."

"Would you like to?" Elaine asked Richard, a little shyly.

"I should love it," he said, jumping to his feet; and then realising from Andrew's and Elspeth's glances that he had put, more emphasis into his words than the proposal had called for, he suddenly felt a little embarrassed and self-conscious. But Elaine's friendly and companionable look restored his courage. "Come on," he smiled at her, yearning to express his gratitude for that secret assurance. "I agree with Mr. MacTaviot, it's too grand an afternoon to sit about."

They followed a little path that ran along the shore of the lake, away from the road. The same feeling that he had had in Montreal, in similar circumstances, gripped him now; a feeling that the time left to him was short, that he must make the most

of every minute of this precious hour. But he did not know how to begin. He glanced down at her walking beside him; at the top of her head, which reached just to his shoulder, her slim neck, her straight back and brown, bare legs, and her feet shod in straw beach shoes. She seemed to him incomparably the neatest and sweetest thing he had ever seen. Her brown arms swung level with his as they walked along. He yearned to touch her arm, to feel it with his fingers, certain that a pleasurable, electric thrill would quiver through him if he did. But if he did that, would her face, look up at his with a troubled, or an angry, or a happy expression? He could not tell, and so anxious was he not to lose her friendliness and good-nature he dared not put the matter to the test. So, as he walked beside her through the shadowy woods, he was in an agony of indecision. She said nothing, but looked straight ahead of her at the path. He looked sometimes ahead, and sometimes at her, but never at the woods and the lakes, or the mountains lifting into the sky.

"Elaine/" he said at last, "you've been awfully good to me to-day. I'm terribly pleased I've got to know you. You have forgiven me, haven't you, for being so ill-mannered the first time I saw you?"

"Of course," she replied. "I didn't know anything about you then. If I had known you were new to the country, and were living such a hard life, I wouldn't have behaved like that. You must have thought me rather silly."

"Not silly," he protested. "I told you this morning that I just thought you were beautiful, and I couldn't help saying so."

"Well, you mustn't say so any more," she protested, laughing. "Besides not being true, it's one of those personal things that people don't talk about."

"It's funny you should mention it," said a suddenly shy Richard, "but I was just going to go into the subject again."

"Richard," she said, raising her hands in protest.

He caught at one of them, and as he had anticipated a delicious thrill ran through his whole body. They both stopped in the middle of the path, and a frightened look came into her eyes. He could not let her hand go, but he could not bear to look at her for fear that he might see on her face the end of the happiness he had been treasuring all day.

"Don't, Richard," she said quietly. She drew her hand gently

away from his. "I've known you for about three hours. Do you always behave as precipitately as this?" She laughed, **but** it was an easy, gentle affectionate laugh, not what he had dreaded. He looked up at her shyly.

"I'm terribly sorry if I've offended you."

"You haven't, Richard. It has been nice being with you to-day. Perhaps you'll come to Edmonton, and come to see us at Acadia?"

"I'm coming in the autumn," said Richard, suddenly aware that his mind was made lip. Nick's face appeared in his imagination, and the Gov.'s, but he knew that what he had said was certain to come about, and that it was for the best. "I'm coming to the University. I'll see you there, and perhaps when I've known you for three weeks or three months, and I touch your hand, you won't take it away."

"That we shall see," laughed Elaine, and looking away from him along the path, "I shouldn't be surprised if you were right," she said.

They walked on, and he told her about Nick, and their life at Brunelle. That led him back to the start he and Nick had made at Ottawa, and that involved telling her about what had brought him to Canada. He told her about the Gov. and his mother, and about Rene and Gavin. Because he was so vividly aware of the pleasure he had got from being with her family that day, he recalled all the happiness he had had in his own home which, except for certain idiosyncrasies and vagaries that sprang from the odd character of the head of the house, was so much like her own. She encouraged him to talk, observing that it gave him pleasure to do so, and subtly aware that with this talk he was combating a loneliness from which he suffered. He talked well, and with a complete lack of self-consciousness, so that she could see in her mind the whole of that peculiar but attractive family. She had never talked to anybody of her own age in this way before. Each of them, being young and capable of absorbing themselves completely in the moment, forgot that awkward, embarrassing one that had preceded this. They made the complete round of the lake, and still talking came in sight of the cottage again. Observing them from the veranda, coming along the path, entirely taken up with each other, Elspeth said to Andrew, "Elaine seems to have taken to that boy more suddenly than I like. I think the child

must be lonely **here**. I am glad her friends are coming to stay next week."

Andrew grunted, absorbed with the tying of a very difficult Red Machray. His mind merely registered what his wife had said, but as the boy was going on again in a minute, and they would probably never see him again, and as he was plainly busy, he did not think it necessary to reply.

5

"Nick, it was marvellous," said Richard, when he gave his friend a full account of his adventures, and announced with a rush of pride his new-found determination to go to the University. "Jasper is the most heavenly spot, and the MacTaviots are really wonderful people."

"Isn't it like I told you?" asked Nick with a slow smile. "If you wait everything turns out all right. I told you all Canadians weren't like the toughs living in this hotel, and that if you waited you would meet people of your own kind. They're the sort of folks you should be with, Richard, not these hard-boiled, sweating miners, not people like me," he ended a little sadly.

Richard jumped up from the end of the bed on which he was sitting.

"Nick, what nonsense. You're the best friend I've ever had. I wouldn't exchange you for the whole MacTaviot family. I've never heard of such a thing. You've taken leave of your senses."

Nick smiled self-consciously, then looked at his friend with moist affectionate eyes. "But, Richard, you're going to this University, and then I won't be seeing you again."

"Good Lord!" Richard started to walk up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, his brow furrowed with thought. He had accepted the new plan with enthusiasm, and without any thought of possible obstacles.

"You wouldn't come into Edmonton and work, would you, Nick? No, that won't do. I shall have to live in some sort of University residence, so Elaine says. Say, I wonder if you would like to work on MacTaviot's farm? He would give you a job, I'm sure. You'd like him: he's a fine man. You could be with horses there, you would be with one of the nicest families

you could possibly meet, and I could get out at the week-ends and see you. How about it, Nick? Will you let me write MacTaviot?"

Nick looked about him while he weighed up the proposition. It was sad to leave this good job at five dollars a day, for one on a farm which couldn't possibly pay him more than \$60 a month and his keep. All his careful, plodding instinct urged him to stick to this job. But his instinct, though it was fully aroused, could do nothing against his affection for Richard. Nick's heart opened very rarely to admit a new friend. When it did, it closed about him and nothing could relax its grip. He looked at Richard's bright eager face and smiled. Sure, Richard, if you think you can fix it, go ahead."

So Richard spent all his next few evenings writing letters. He wrote first to the Gov. telling him everything that had happened since he had left Ottawa, and giving as a reason for his change of mind about the University, not the impression Elaine had made on him, but MacTaviot's sage advice. He said that he hoped to have saved three hundred dollars by the end of September, so that the demands he would have to make on the Gov. for the first year would be reduced by that extent. He said that he fully expected after that to be able to work his own way through, without any assistance from the family. He asked the old Gov., seeing his thin, pink face in his mind as he wrote, to forgive him for not living up to all the promises he had made of contributing towards the upkeep of the Danby family, for he believed that by doing this he would be able to contribute more in the end. He said that he felt a selfish cad, that he loved them all very much, and wished that he could show himself more worthy of them.

That long and sentimental epistle he despatched by air mail.

Next, he wrote to the University for registration forms, and filled these up. He was accepted as an entrant, and told to report for registration on September 29th.

Finally he wrote to MacTaviot, using as an excuse for a letter the thanks he owed them for having given him such a happy day. He told Andrew of what he had done about entering for the University, and then he introduced the subject of Nick, reminding Andrew that this was the companion who had shared all his adventures, and from whom he could not bear to be separated. He extolled Nick's powers with horses, his manliness

and great energy and application, and finally, after much leading up to the subject, asked MacTaviot if he would give Nick a job so that they might not be separated.

Andrew, inwardly a little amused with the letter, and, for some reason which he could not explain to himself, not telling Elspeth or Elaine about it, wrote back briefly, congratulating him on his wise decision, and saying that he would be happy to try out Nick. He said that Nick should write to him at Acadia when he was coming away from Brunelle at the end of September, and that he would arrange to have him met in Edmonton and driven out to the farm.

Finally, to complete the harmony, came a stately cable from the Gov. which puzzled Richard, its meaning being apparent but its manner oratorical, until he received a follow-up letter of explanation from Rene. It seemed that the Gov. had been overcome with joy at the news of Richard's decision, and as a fitting response to one about to become a student of the humanities he had composed a message in Latin, which the cable companies had refused to transmit. The Gov. had screamed defiance at them, and had written to *The Times* about the matter, but *The Times* proving indifferent and the cable companies adamant the Gov. had been persuaded just this side of apoplexy to translate his message into the vulgar tongue, and the cable that reached Richard read, "O fortunate youth take up thy staff and scrip and set forth knowledge is life love Danby."

In due course the Gov. himself wrote a long and eloquent letter, couched in the style of Lord Chesterfield, but every now and then breaking into expressions of the warmest love and admiration for this, the finest son any man had ever had.

The summer died away and the early autumn frosts came to the mountains. The foothills began to turn crimson and gold as the foliage on the trees mellowed in the embrace of autumn. There came a Saturday when Richard and Nick drew their last pay-cheques, and spent a sentimental evening paying calls of farewell. On Sunday they lunched with the Mantons, with whom they had become good friends during the summer, and in the evening they made their way down the track on foot to catch the east-bound continental at the station.

"Remember," said Richard, as they waited on the wooden platform, and looked at the stationmaster who was 'sible

through the window, reading a paper with his feet up on the desk, "how we cursed this fellow the morning we arrived? We promised to rub his nose in it, and we've never done anything about it."

"Ah, let him be," said Nick, whose soul was sadder at the departure from Brunelle than was that of the more mercurial Richard. "He's quite harmless."

"You're an old sentimentalist, Nick," said Richard, putting his arm over his friend's shoulder and giving him a slight affectionate hug, "and you'll never get anywhere if you give way to your feelings like this."

Nick smiled at his friend. "I'm certainly getting places by hanging on to you. I wonder where we will end up together?"

CHAPTER TWELVE

i

THE University of Alberta occupies a commanding position on the edge of the escarpments that rise steeply from the valley through which the Athabasca River runs. The Athabasca, at this point, is a chalk-coloured stream, a good 75 yards wide, flowing with vigour to meet the Arctic Ocean, 800 miles to the north. Once Indians drove their canoes swiftly with the current along this great waterway. Once the Hudson Bay Company's posts were established at intervals along the sandy flats from which the steep bituminous cliffs soar to meet the impenetrable forests of pine and fir that then mount back for several hundred miles from the river's edge. Once upon a time, nearly all traffic had to move northward and southward in this part of the land, but now the railroad had come, to cut across the Athabasca at Edmonton, making its direct, uncompromising way from east to west, and the commercial life of the Athabasca had dwindled and died. Little by little the signs of human habitation along its shores vanished. The log cabins that had been

the traders' posts were one by one abandoned; they had never been home, but a wilderness outpost to those who inhabited them. The Athabasca still pushed its way resolutely towards the north, but in the nineteen-thirties it was to the inhabitants of Edmonton a mere geographical line dividing the north side of the city from the south side. Most of the well-to-do people lived on the north side. On the south side, the University commanded the river bluffs. The frame houses in its vicinity were occupied by the teaching faculty and ladies with large maternal hearts, either widowed or in reduced circumstances, who let rooms to the students, and lived perpetually on the brink of bankruptcy.

The University buildings were plain, flat, red-faced things, squat and shapeless. There were three residences: Pembina, occupied by the girl students; and Assiniboia and Athabasca, occupied by the men. In front of them was a greensward, whose surface was visible only in the first and last month of the long term which stretched from October to April; the rest of the time it was covered in snow. Across this board-walks ran towards the Arts building, a pretentious Gothic structure, and the Medical building, which except for a few cupolas and other adornments, was a replica in its flat, unimaginative outlines of Athabasca and Assiniboia. Here and there in the radius of the University grounds rose a few frame and stucco buildings, of modest dimensions and unprepossessing exterior, plainly marked as temporary and makeshift by the fact that they consisted solely of one storey: these were the Agricultural buildings, the Engineering and Science buildings, and the University Extension department.

The level of land on the south side of the river was much higher than it was on the north. Thus the University with its unattractive buildings, and its separate, young and busy life, sprawled in a sort of remoteness from the rest of the city, but was always visible to the eye of Edmonton's inhabitants, most of whom sent their sons, and many sent their daughters there. Since the majority were not residential students but came back to their homes every night, the University exercised a potent influence on the life of the town.

On that afternoon at the end of September, when he first saw the University, Richard was in no mood to criticise the architectural shortcomings of these buildings. Walking across the high-level bridge which connected the north side of the river with the south side, he was aware not of his surroundings but of himself, and of the concourse of students going and coming on the narrow footway. Did he walk as they did, with that rather big stride, that forward-thrusting motion of the shoulders? Hastily he corrected the gait that was natural to him, as he watched and tried to imitate that of several young men who walked ahead of him.

On a sudden impulse, Richard smiled at three broad-shouldered young men approaching him, an ingratiating friendly smile, as he stepped back against one of the beams of the bridge to allow them to pass him without breaking their step. They smiled back and nodded, and one of them, the largest, called out, "How are ya, kid?" Richard felt emboldened by this to speak to them. Nodding his head in the direction of the University buildings, he asked, "Is that the University?"

"Sure," said the biggest one, and the three of them swung round to face him. "Freshman?" the big fellow inquired.

"I think so," said Richard. "I mean, yes. I've just arrived and am going over to register."

They looked him up and down. "For God's sake," the big fellow inquired of the others. "What'll we have next?" They laughed, and with no further word, swung on their heels and walked on in the direction of the north side.

Richard felt a throb of anger surge in him. "Louts," he said to himself. Then, turning towards the south side, he strode on. "For God's sake," he muttered to himself, "what will I meet next?"

It was at such moments that he became utterly homesick. Why were Canadians so brusque? Surely English people were not. At home life was simple, people understood one another; the thing one expected from one's neighbours was kindness and affection. Here kindness was given grudgingly; people

were hard and suspicious, ready to take affront before affront was offered. These louts to whom he had just spoken were typical of so many with whom he had come into contact; anxious without formality and tact to establish your identity, and eagerly seizing the chance that knowledge gave them to be bloody rude to you. There was no land but England where men were kind.

To the vibration of these hot thoughts he had crossed the bridge, and was making his way towards the University.

He was walking on a board sidewalk not more than three feet wide. On either side of the street, wooden houses stood. He noticed that, except for some minor idiosyncrasies of structure, they were identical in size and general outline. Each had a strip or lawn in front of it, and each one was separated from the other by a wooden fence, not more than five feet high, which ran back to what was evidently a garden beyond. The lawns in front ran right down to the sidewalk. There was no attempt, he noticed, to guard the privacy of the house from the street, but the ineffectual attempt, symbolised by this wooden fence, to guard it from the house next door. In this strange contradiction he found a sour amusement, and his mind was busily gnawing comfort from that when he saw approaching him a group of girls. There were five of them, three walking abreast arm-in-arm, and two following behind. They wore skirts and white blouses and the air being cool on this late September afternoon they wore white coat sweaters, on the left breast of which was sewn a big golden "A." Again he had to stand aside to let them pass. They were all pretty, he noticed; but one, with a small neat figure, and with dark smooth hair, parted in the centre and swept back so as to reveal her small shell-shaped ears, especially caught his eye, and for one pleasant moment, as she looked at him as she passed, he thought he had caught her interest too. But unlike the broad-shouldered young man on the bridge, they swept by without greeting.

Richard was never to forget those first few months he spent at the University of Alberta. What came back to him most vividly was not certain hardships and indignities he was called upon to bear, but the golden days of that long October, days on which the woods about the city turned red and molten gold, and the sky was a miraculous still blue, against which a magnificently large golden sun swung its way from one horizon across

the arc of the sky to the other. He had never seen an autumn like this. There were glorious October days in England, but they were like bars of light let into a general background of mould and grey. Here day followed day in a splendid and inspiring succession: it was like, he thought, a surplined choir mounting the steps of a cathedral chancel to majestic and triumphant music. The heart lifted with the glory of it, the mind felt inspired, and his young body glowed with health and hunger.

It was of these things, these sights, and the keen frosty smell of the countryside that he thought later. The miseries of freshman "hazing" he forgot, although it was this that led to the founding of a friendship and to his meeting again with Elaine. There was a barbarian spirit among these young men which rose to a head in the autumn months of each year. It lasted a few weeks and subsided as quickly as it had risen. It was the human counterpart of the pecking to which a newcomer in a hen-run is submitted when she is first put down amongst those who feel it is their own. In the University it was practised on freshmen. By tradition the practice of barbaric rites was the prerogative of the second-year students, the sophomores.

Richard had submitted quietly enough to the milder forms of repression. He had his head shaved: he was forced to wear for the period of hazing, which lasted about three weeks, a silly little cap, quartered in green and gold, the University colours, which sat atop his shorn head as a badge of shame. He put up with being tipped out of bed at night by husky young men who stole into his room while he was asleep, freshmen being forbidden to lock their doors. The sudden shock of waking from a deep sleep in the second it took to fall from a high bed on the linoleum floor was as painful as the resulting bruises, but there was no arguing with giant young men in the dark, and protest would have brought direr forms of torture.

But at a point he did protest. There was a trick with a razor which consisted of freezing the blade and then, with the freshman blindfolded, and to the accompaniment of low-voiced discussion between the assailants meant for the freshman's ear, of applying the back of the frozen blade to a very private portion of his anatomy. The shock of cold blade drawn across warm skin was terrible, as Richard already knew from the account of their experience given by other freshmen. But it

was the indignity of the thing, not fear of pain, that made him revolt as they were about to submit him to this operation. They had blindfolded him, and one sophomore was holding Richard's arms behind him, but his legs were free. Not knowing whether he would reach his mark or not, he kicked his right leg up. There was a shout of pain, followed by curses. In the ensuing excitement, Richard's arms were released. He lost no time. His arms were stiff, but he struck out blindly in the dark. In the melee that followed he received a blow on his chin that made him dizzy, a kick in his stomach that made him feel physically sick, and a punch over his eye that felt less painful at the time, but produced a sinister and highly-coloured swelling before morning.

In English next morning, Professor Bryden had noted the evidence. "English Prose from Bacon to Hardy" was the subject of this particular class, but Professor Bryden had discoursed on it for many years, and weary of the monotony of this desert track, watered with so few sensible questions from the large and witless flock before him—it was much the largest of his classes—he was ready for any diversion. A black eye was a fascinating phenomenon. Not because of its rarity—in the course of twenty-seven years teaching experience, Don Bryden had seen many—but because he knew it to be a symbol of independence. The recipient of the black eye had resented ill-treatment. The supine coward was more likely to have a black bottom than a black eye. He had noticed this lively-looking boy before. He carried himself with a certain dignity which Don Bryden admired the more because he was so conscious of his own frail and rather shaky frame. So at the end of class, sweeping his books together, he threw out at the tiers of seats before him: "I should like to see Mr. Danby in my room at 3.15."

"And now what's the punishment?" wondered Richard as he made his way miserably across to Athabasca Hall for lunch. "Is there a penalty for coming to class with a black eye?"

Apprehensive of some further outrage, he was standing stiffly on his dignity when he went to the head of the English department's room at the appointed time that afternoon.

Don Bryden's shaking head was bent over some papers on his desk. He looked up as Richard entered the room, and motioned him to a chair.

"How do you pronounce w-h-e-a-t?" he asked, still intent on the papers before him.

"Weet, sir," answered Richard, slightly taken aback at the question.

"Young man," said Don Bryden, looking up and gazing sternly at him over the top of his glasses, "in this part of the world we whistle the two first letters: we say wh-eet."

Richard stared at the shaking head before him, and was relieved to see a smile curving itself about the thin grey lips. On a sudden impulse he grinned, and winced as he felt the skin wrinkle about his injured eye.

"Sit down, my boy," said Don Bryden. He leant back in his chair, selected a cigarette from the box in front of him, and spent a minute or two adjusting it to his holder. What a funny old chap, Richard was thinking. With that continual and automaton-like shaking of his thin head he looked as though he were going to collapse at any moment. Don Bryden was thinking: A nice-looking boy, comes from a good family, that's obvious. His aggressive, rather self-confident air will get him into a good deal of trouble. How can I persuade him to drop it? What brings him, I wonder, to this remote part of the world? Ten to one, he'll fire up if I ask him, and assert his Englishness by being excessively frigid.

He lifted his kindly eyes from his cigarette and smiled at the boy again. "I won't ask you how you got that black eye, but I will suggest that you mourn with it in decent solitude. A man who flaunts such a beauty as yours is bound to attract considerable and embarrassing attention."

Richard felt the familiar flash of anger rising in him as he thought, Why in hell's name should I hide myself? If any one is looking for trouble, I don't want to get out of the way. He glared down at his knees, unwilling to look up at this mild-mannered, gentle-voiced old boy who was obviously trying to be kind, but who was succeeding only in being irritating.

Don Bryden pushed back his chair. "Martha, my ancient motor car, is waiting outside and longing to complete the journey home. Get in with me and come back for a cup of tea. You've been in this country long enough to know that tea-drinking in the afternoon is considered a worse vice than whisky-drinking before breakfast. But I am addicted to it, and

I should like your company over a secretive cup. Do you feel like it?"

Martha was waiting in the parking-space behind the Arts building. "I hold two females in the greatest respect/" explained Don Bryden, lifting the rug from Martha's ancient snout, and raising the bonnet itself to give sundry digs and little jerks at her intestines. "One is my wife, who has wisdom exceeding my small allotment; the other is Martha, the secret of whose scientific life has remained a fascinating mystery to me ever since I first possessed her. I think of them as Sacred and Profane Love," he explained, squeezing himself into the driver's seat, and opening the door beside him for Richard to get in. "'To the one faithful; to the other ever drawn.' I'm not quite sure which poet said that, but I think you will see what I mean. Martha and I have been on many romantic journeys together. She represents," said the Professor, pulling hard at the choke to help Martha up the hill, "freedom to me, a primeval freedom from any cares whatsoever. We have been as far south as Mexico in her. Twice we have made the journey to the coast. Those were longer flights, representing complete abandonment to Martha's spell, trusting ourselves completely to her care. But when we have sought temporary escape from the worries and disturbances of University life, but have had freedom only for a week-end, then Martha has taken us forth on these Alberta highways and has given us the peace both Rose, who I should tell you is my wife, and I have so eagerly longed for. She is more than a car," said Professor Bryden, gripping the wheel with both hands, "she is a symbol to us that life need not be spent in chains."

He had spun on at this length because in his first desire to make the boy feel at ease and forget his troubles he had stumbled on his favourite subject. Now, glancing sideways, he saw the thin young face, with the ludicrous black eye, staring through Martha's windscreen with that same constrained rather absent air that had first attracted his attention to the boy.

"I am a garrulous old man," he apologised, with a little chuckle. "It is one of the penalties of being a Professor of English in a country where the well of English is far from undefiled. Resenting the shoddy colloquialisms of ordinary prairie speech, and seeking to show the shades of meaning of which the English language with its incomparable vocabulary

is capable, one is inclined to overdo it. Do you know those two lines of *Macbeth*'?

'The multitudinous seas incarnadine
Making the green one red.'

"Lovely lines, aren't they?" He repeated them softly. "The very thud and tumble of great seas restlessly heaving are conveyed by Latin words like 'multitudinous' and 'incarnadine'; and the oackdrift when a wave has spent itself, the momentary silence when the boom of a mountain of water breaking has died away, is apparent in the simple Saxon words of that second line."

He sighed deeply. "My failure has been that in attempting to oppose the slackness of colloquial speech I have fallen into the bad habit of being polysyllabic; and that, I am afraid, has made me somewhat more garrulous than the needs of human intercourse, especially in this part of the world, require. You must forgive me. At tea-time it will be your turn to talk. You shall tell us what favourable wind has brought you to our shores."

Martha was now pursuing her sonorous way along the heights of the south bank or the river. The city lay behind them. The dirt road they were following wound among larches and poplars which Richard noticed were golden about their leafy tops, but were stark and silver and barren beneath. They had passed no house for nearly fifteen minutes, and the Professor had just finished his animadversion on the deficiencies of prairie English and the richness of Shakespeare's, when the road curved around a bluff, and turned a little inland from the river to reveal a house standing in a small garden, so marked by a profusion of flowers that Richard's first thought was: This might be a place in England. The Professor, silent now and with the fierce concentration of the driver of a steam-roller, exerted his strength to turn Martha sideways into a narrow drive.

By a side gate that led into the garden Martha was brought to a halt, and Richard followed the Professor along a flagged path bordered with autumn flowers between small green lawns up to the house. While the Professor was busy in the hall, divesting himself of mufflers and overshoes, his cap and gloves

and overcoat, and transferring cigarettes and his holder from the pockets of his overcoat, Richard had a chance to look about him.

He was impressed by the shiny neatness of the narrow hall. The late October sunlight, coining in through a window that looked out from the stairs, shone on a polished chair and hall table, and on the walls of pinewood. He noticed a few small etchings which seemed to stand out in their neat dark frames against the lighter background and a dark grandfather clock on a half-landing of the stairs. The atmosphere in the hall was compounded of warmth and a faint and pleasant odour of furniture polish, all of which brought some happy association to his mind of a dimly-remembered country cottage of his childhood. He felt suddenly a pleasant sense of expectancy. When the Professor turned away from his struggles with his outer garments, he found the young man smiling at him from his one good eye, and looking rather yearningly, like an affectionate Dalmatian puppy, from the damaged one.

They mounted the stairs and went along another narrow^r hall to a room at the end.

"Rose, my dear," announced Don Bryden. "Here is Mr. Danby whom I have persuaded to honour us for tea."

Rose, who had looked up when the door opened, saw standing behind her husband a thin, nervous, rather pale young man who was attempting ineffectually with his left hand to hide the evidence of a very black eye. She stood up to take his hand, smiling a little to herself to think how needlessly embarrassed the boy was. This wasn't the first injured fledgling Don had brought home. Each autumn, when the freshmen initiation period was on, Don discovered some lonely youth, battered usually as this one was. He brought him home, and had a pleasant hour indulging his paternal instinct. Sometimes the unlucky fellow betrayed some superficiality of mind or vulgarity of manners; the paternal flow dried at its source, and that fledgling came no more. Sometimes he came several times, but with the lightening of sophomore oppression, after a few weeks, came, Rose would notice, with a more reluctant air, and betrayed a new-found spirit of independence by being more assertive. Don's interest in the fledgling would slacken before the sight of recovering animal spirits. This, thought Rose, is this year's offering, not much different from the rest except that

his manners are pleasantly, not boorishly, shy. She smiled at Richard. "Tea will be here in a moment. How nice of you to come."

Don, seated in his favourite chair, in his favourite room, the day's work done, and at tea—his favourite meal, because so little eating need be done—was, she noticed, embarked on the flood of his autumnal paternal feeling. The boy, shy and a little awkward, was answering in monosyllables. His voice was pleasant, and the shape of his head, thought Rose, looking at it in profile, was quite admirable.

She interrupted Don's flight of eloquence, as she alone knew how and dared to do, and addressed a question to the boy that she might look at him more directly. The bruised eye seemed to upset the contour of his whole face, but she thought that his forehead, the curve of his jaw, and his thin-boned hands, which rested quite naturally on his knees, showed signs of good breeding; and that once the barrier of his shyness had been penetrated, an interesting mind might be found.

She set herself the task of drawing him out gently, to make him take the lead in conversation, so that gradually his monosyllabic answers blossomed into little sentences of comment and explanation; until gradually, as the room grew darker, and they sat before the fire among the tea-things, Richard was talking as he might have talked at home, without constraint and with eagerness, as the Danby family always talked.

He told them of his family. His pride in them needed little of Rose's and Don's urging to make him do that. The Gov. thin, nervous, austere to the outside world, but indulgent and affectionate with his family; his mother, very pretty, and affectionate with everybody, and taking it for granted that everybody loved her; his sister and younger brother, of whom he spoke with such yearning, and of whom he told so many affectionate anecdotes, that Rose could see he missed them more than he did his parents.

But this is a long way to come to a University. What brought you all the way out here?" asked Rose Bryden.

The boy showed signs of embarrassment, and for a moment she regretted having put the question, and looked anxiously at Don for his judgment of her action. She was relieved to see that his embarrassment was only momentary, taking his confidence as a compliment to her and Don's company.

"Well, you see/" said Richard, "we haven't any money any more, but my father was insistent that I should take my University degree. He knew the Premier of this province, Mr. Blackstone. My father always manages to know the great in any locality whether he has been there himself or not; he says it's just a knack, though we call it a pursuit. Mr. Blackstone visited us and recommended this University."

"So you know the great Blackstone?" said Don.

"Well, only slightly, sir, as you see."

Richard looked at the Professor. He is rather like the Gov., he thought to himself, and when the Gov. looks frightfully wise and stares at the fire after asking a question, he is usually waiting to be drawn. "What's he really like, sir?" asked Richard.

"An ignorant fellow," said the Professor fiercely, glaring so hard at the fire that his eyebrows seemed to stand out from his forehead in ruffled indignation. "My dear boy, with all due respect to your father's friendship for him, Blackstone is an uncommonly ignorant fellow,"

There was the sound of a car in the drive, and Rose went to the window to look down. "It is Andrew and Elaine," she cried happily. "How fortunate for you, Mr. Danby! They will be able to drive you back to the University, and you are about to meet—isn't he, Don?—two of the pleasantest people in the world."

The news of the arrival had made Professor Bryden as happy as it had his wife. His momentary burst of indignation over the unspeakable Blackstone had quite vanished. "Why, certainly, my dear." He smiled happily at Richard, and rubbed his hands together. "We parted from these friends at one o'clock this morning. You must excuse our excitement at this reunion after such a notable interval."

Richard stood somewhat awkwardly beside his chair while the first greetings were taking place, hesitating to break in, and shyly conscious that no notice was being taken of him. He had seen MacTaviot at the MacDonald Hotel when he had handed Nick over to him three weeks before. MacTaviot had said that he must come out to lunch as soon as he could, but he had named no definite date. Nick had sent one or two notes, to say that he was very pleasantly fixed at Acadia, and would be coming into town soon to see Richard. Of Elaine he had been able

to catch no glimpse at all. She was in a different year and in different classes from him. In the excitement and strain of those first few weeks, although he knew that she was close at hand, and was subconsciously pleasantly aware of it, he had forgotten her. Seeing her now he was freshly struck by her remarkable beauty.

Professor Bryden turned to introduce him. "Rose and I , " he said, "have been trying to find out this young man's history. His black eye first brought us together, and when I found he was a stranger I brought him out here to give him tea. This young lady," he said to Richard, "is a fellow student of yours. Elaine, my dear, you must look after this boy. He doesn't know the conventions. He has so outraged them as to exchange blows with a sophomore, with this much damage to his countenance, and God knows what to that of the sophomore."

Elaine and Andrew laughed simultaneously. "Don," said Andrew, "we already know this young man. He lunched with us one day at Jasper."

They came forward and shook hands with him, Andrew saying, "I have been meaning to write you and ask you to come out to Acadia, but I've been away on a shooting trip. Your young friend is doing very well."

Elaine and Richard looked at each other, while the Professor and Rose, amazed at what they heard, listened to the explanation as to how all this had come about. Then the Professor drew Andrew near to the fire. Out of the corner of his eye, Richard could see them: Andrew in the middle, his back to the fire, his hands behind him, palms open to the blaze: Rose, with her arm resting on the mantelpiece, her gentle face smiling at Andrew and at Don, in whom conversation had once more boiled up. They did not talk to me like that, he thought, submerged for one shy moment in that misery which engulfed him whenever he felt that any one showed relief at turning away from him to another. He looked with anxious, uncertain eyes at Elaine, and longed to be gone.

"I've been wondering when I should see you," she was saying composedly. "You seem to have created rather a disturbance in sophomore circles. It's very unusual not to submit, you know. I'm afraid they can make things awfully uncomfortable for you, if you go against their rules."

Richard shifted uncomfortably on his feet. Ilis revolt

seemed an inevitable opening to any conversation, and it was very difficult to talk about it without showing himself to have been either an aggressive boor or, alternatively, the weak and helpless victim of bullying. "I thought they behaved rather childish," he said to Elaine, "but I've no doubt they think I did. I seem to have talked about nothing else since it happened."

Elaine laughed: "I'm sorry. In other words, this isn't a favourite topic of conversation with you."

"Well, it does seem to have attracted rather an undue amount of attention," Richard answered, feeling himself a little more at ease. "In the dining-hall at Athabasca, they either avoid me like the plague, or look at me as though I were some curious specimen with a foreign label attached."

"Well, that may be because you're English," said Elaine, "not because you're the central figure in this exploit."

"But is it so very odd to be English?" asked Richard, impatiently. "We shouldn't at home stare at a Canadian as though he were a Tibetan or a figure from a fabled land."

"Now that you mention it I see that we must seem to behave rather strangely," she said, a light of amusement dawning in her eyes. She was thinking: He's rather fun to talk to. I remember that I liked him for that at Jasper. "You see," she went on, putting a gloved finger up to the corner of her mouth, an instinctive movement that, had Richard known it, she made only when she was happy, "an Englishman freshly out from the old country is rather rare here. Scandinavians and Poles and other Europeans come in large drafts every year. We accept them and expect them as we do the snow at the beginning of winter. And, you know"—she laughed happily at the simile—"they merge into the landscape like the snow so that we hardly think of them as strange. But an Englishman comes only rarely, and usually singly, never in batches the way the immigrants come. You notice him because he's more or less unique, and because he is so very sure of himself, which is something that we both envy and dislike. Do you see what I mean? You have an active dislike for the sophomores because they made you do a lot of things which you think undignified and silly. They have an active dislike for you because you not only resented submitting to an old-established custom, but did it on the purely personal grounds that you thought it was all very

silly. I'm afraid you won't like the University very much if you treat all its customs on rational grounds and insist on your own rules for everything."

She ended on an uncertain laugh, feeling a little uncomfortable for having spoken with such assertiveness herself. She was wondering, as she laughed uneasily, whether she had done so merely to defend her University and its way of life against the scorn of this self-possessed young man. She was unsure. In spite of his battered appearance, there was something attractive about him, something that made him different from other boys. His directness and self-possession attracted her as much as they had repelled the sophomores. He looked as though he might be very rude or fierce if the mood impelled him. Elaine was at a stage of growth when she secretly desired to be treated with fierceness instead of with the exaggerated courtesy and clumsy ardour sometimes pressed upon her by the youths who had grown up with her in this Alberta countryside. But this was something that she could not admit, even to herself, in a room such as this where other people stood. So she laughed uneasily, and looked down at the little black muff she was holding in her hand, and wished that she hadn't said all that she had said, and that Daddy would call out that it was time for them to go.

"You remember when I first saw you, on the Edmonton Station that night, and again at Jasper that day? I thought you looked so nice," said Richard thoughtfully.

"And you think now that I'm not?" She looked up at him smilingly.

"Well, I don't think all you've said is exactly sympathetic. People out here seem so determined to put one in one's place instead of letting one find it for oneself. Professor and Mrs. Bryden have made me feel really at home for the first time."

"Oh, we'll do that at Acadia if you will come out and see us. Besides we have a friend of yours working there. You should have come out long ago."⁵

"How do I get there?" asked Richard.

"Mr. and Mrs. Bryden will bring you out. Daddy has come to ask them out to lunch next Sunday. You must come too."

"Daddy," she called, "I've asked Mr. Danby to lunch next Sunday. Mr. Bryden, will you bring him out with you?"

"Of course, Elaine, my dear." The Professor left the fire and walked over to them, his head a little on one side and shaking

benignly. "How charming of you, my child, to have taken pity on this young stranger! How well Fate is ordering things this afternoon! I was about to break the news to Mr. Danby that Martha can never be persuaded to trot back to the University at this hour of the evening, and that having enticed him out here to tea, he must walk back, and lo, here is Andrew to take him. And when I was about to return him to the bleak halls of Athabasca uncomforted and forlorn, here are you made manifest to show him that all our young are not savages. And finally, and this I think really rounds the matter out, he is to be introduced to Acadia. You little know it, young man, but you have found your feet. Your damaged eye, by making me take pity on you in the first instance, has served you well, as you will see.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

i

RICHARD found his new surroundings stranger and less congenial at first than even he had anticipated they would be. He envied Nick the freedom he enjoyed at Acadia. He felt himself a good deal older than his fellow undergraduates, for he had seen something of life, he had been a working man. These smooth-faced boys in the campus with names like Nikiforyk and Bolonsky, with their round-faced looks of innocence, their bad haircuts and heavy boots, their shiny blue serge suits; they were mostly inferior in every way to men like Sandy, and certainly less likeable and understandable than his own beloved Nick. Richard had a supple figure inherited from ancestors who had done no manual work, but had kept their bodies exercised in the field. The amiable shades of several generations of Danbys beamed ghostly approval of their Richard as he walked across the campus of the University. Richard was unconscious of their spiritual support. The Nikiforyks, the Bolonskys, and the others were equally unconscious of what mitigated the sourness which they might rightfully have felt at this exhibition of self-assurance and self-sufficiency. Ancestral shades stood behind them, too, but with centuries of toil and respect for

their betters ingrained in them to such a degree that it must have penetrated beyond their tired bones into their souls, and have fled with them to the realms of eternity.

The vast and iridescent grandeur of a northern autumn moved majestically through its phases while Richard faced the beginning of his second year in Canada. Comparing his circumstances now with what they had been at the Experimental Farm he could not own but that they were much improved. But his feelings were not. He felt restlessly that he had lost his liberty. He envied Nick the freedom of his work, the silent acres of Acadia with no one to command his movements other than kindly Andrew MacTaviot.

The golden days accentuated his desire to leave the campus, and wander among the tawny woods that swing away in three directions from the University. The tranquil blue sky, day after day unflecked by any cloud; the surging forests swimming away into the distance, and the scents of northern autumn, of burning leaves, and dying vegetation, and frost afar off, made Richard feel the confines of classrooms, the tiled corridors of the academic buildings through which he moved from lecture to lecture throughout the day, as oppressive as a prison cell, the campus like an exercise-yard between high stone walls in some gaol.

He did not find the work difficult. Except in the matter of mathematics, his standard was well above that of the Canadian students, and when the half-term tests came in November his examination papers were so good that he was called to Dr. Bryden's room for a conference. First-year students always had nominated for them a member of the Faculty as their adviser, with whom the student was supposed to talk over from time to time his difficulties and ambitions. Don Bryden, his interest having been attracted to Richard, had called at the registrar's office early in the term, and had instructed the registrar to put him on his list.

"Well, my boy/' he opened the conference, having given Richard a cigarette, and with much shaking of the head and silent concentration, having fixed his own in the familiar brown cigarette-holder, "you seem to have treated the first year mid-term tests with the contempt that they deserve."

Richard said nothing, and tried not to look smug. He had learnt to be careful of Don Bryden's opening conversational

moves. He assumed that he was to be congratulated, but was uncertain whether he had not done something that would merit reproach.

"You are obviously more advanced than your fellow-louts," went on Dr. Bryden, "and are acting under false pretences in being a part of these first-year classes. You are at an advantage over the others from having had some rudimentary form of preliminary education; they, poor devils, have had no education, but instead have had some information of a heterogeneous kind pumped into them at school. They have not been taught to think for themselves. We cannot have you continuing with this false pose, so I am going to have you put into the second year where you will have to work to keep up to the others."

Richard's heart gave a jump. Won't the Gov. be pleased, he thought. He loves these little triumphs of his family.

"Does that mean, sir," said Richard, "that I shall get my degree in three years instead of four?"

Don Bryden frowned at the boy. "Confound the degree," he said fiercely. "Have you been infected already by this Canadian passion for results? It means that you have three years instead of four in which to get your untidy young mind into some sort of order. What do you propose to do with yourself when we turn you out from here?"

"I am not quite sure, sir." Then perversely, because he knew that it would displease Dr. Bryden, he added fiercely, "Make some money, I hope."

"I see," said Don Bryden coldly. "Your education is to be a means merely to that miserable end. It is a pity, a great pity. If it is obvious that your looks deceive, and that you are not really very intelligent. And how do you propose with an Arts degree to set about making money?"

Richard said, "I'm sorry, sir," with a burst of smiling frankness. "As you've guessed, I said that without meaning it. I don't really know what I want to do. I just want to live and work, and not be hungry, and have books around me, and get on quietly at something or other."

"Other desires," quoted Professor Bryden softly, "'perish in their gratification, but the desire of knowledge never: the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear filled with hearing.' My dear boy," he went on, his voice resuming its normal tone, and a smile parting his thin lips which had been set in straight

lines of disapproval, "I have some hopes of you. You invited me to be rude just now by that ridiculous and abhorrent statement you made about money. I take back what I said about your intelligence. I suspend judgment. Let me see you use k_y and I will let you know whether it will carry you to high places or merely function mechanically like your body. I shall say no more on this matter until I see your second-year examination papers at the end of term."

He sat there, his head shaking, his eyes behind their thick-lensed glasses beaming benevolently at Richard, his cigarette-holder clenched in his teeth, and the smoke from his cigarette soaring in a straight thin line up above his head. Richard could not help but smile in return. On the several occasions on which he had had anything to do with Professor Bryden he had begun by feeling aggressive and ended with this ridiculous rush of sentiment for the old man. He felt a strong desire to do something to make Don Bryden pleased with him; but what he could do he didn't know, so he smiled yearningly at him, and if he had had a tail he would have wagged it.

After a minute of this silent communion Don Bryden asked Richard how he was getting along in the University residence.

"Not very well, sir," answered Richard with a rueful grin. "I'm most unpopular with every one; I find the food unappetising, the beds hard, and I'm not sure that I love those of my fellow-men shut up with me there as much as I ought to."

"You'll get used to all that, Richard," said the Professor kindly, using his name for the first time, "but Christian charity demands that I should do what is in my power to cushion the shock. Would you like to come out to my house, and spend the week-end with Rose and me? We will take you to Acadia on Sunday, and bring you back to your bleak residence on Sunday evening. What do you say?"

"It would be marvellous, sir," answered Richard with rapture.

"Good," said Don Bryden, rising. "Meet me at my car in the parking-place at 4.30 on Friday afternoon, and we will go home and start the week-end with a cup of Rose's tea by the fire in the study. That will give us lots of time to talk," he added. "Meanwhile, try to develop a little more forbearance in your relations with your fellow-students. You have another three years at least to spend with them. Take a lesson from my book.

I am not a simple or a gullible man. I begin by hating each year's batch or freshmen, vigorously and unreservedly, and when they pass out three or four years later, I am ready to snarl with chagrin and pain at parting from many of them. I think you will feel the same in time, and they will feel the same about you. If you realise the inevitability of that happening you will alleviate some of the tension you must be labouring under at the moment."

At the door, he patted Richard's shoulder genially, and then turned back to his desk. Richard went clattering down the stone stairs from the Professor's office, and out on to the campus, his heart swelling with a new benevolence which he longed mightily to express.

2

The opportunity did not come immediately, but he kept his eyes and heart open during the next weeks, and gradually out of the indistinguishable frieze of students one or two emerged towards whom he felt himself drawn. He made slow progress with these at first. They were inclined to look at him a little coldly, and to hesitate a second or two before answering any comment he made to them. But Richard was a persistent and genial youth, and when he set himself out to be pleasant the cheerfulness and frankness of his brown, open face could break down almost any barrier of shyness or distrust, so that after a little they came to smile on him, and to call him Dick, which his family had never done, and to accept him, if not as one of themselves, then at least as a not inharmonious addition to their circle. Richard was pleased with what he had achieved here, but he still resented the confined circumstances of his life. It was so much like being back at school again, and after the fine burst of independence he had enjoyed during his first few months in Canada, that sense of being under supervision was an intolerable thing.

Lectures started at 8.30 in the morning, and with occasional breaks of an hour went on until 4.30 in the afternoon. In the lecture rooms in the Arts building the students sat on chairs which had broad right arms, not unlike the dining-chairs he had known in Bowles's Lunch Rooms in Ottawa, which were used as desks.

By going to the second-year classes Richard found himself attending every lecture with Elaine. He formed the habit of sitting in the row behind her, and a little to one side, so that he had always before him when he chose to look the pleasant vision of her slim, white neck with the dark shining hair so neatly pressed against it. The effect tugged at his senses in a strange way. He knew that she was beautiful, but he was not now conscious of any desire to make love to her. Remembering how his passions had been aroused by Therese, how he had almost burst with the longing to kiss her, he was surprised that Elaine should leave his feelings so undisturbed. The cause of his constraint, he knew, was something else; something which if he let himself dwell upon it, meant the end of all his hopes. It was a brief and unhappy glimpse he had had of a scene at Acadia when Harriman had returned there after the shooting trip with Andrew.

Yet he was happy whenever he found himself near her.- He could talk to her and tease her with all the ease in the world, and experience delight and happiness at her responses, her direct, warm glance, the careful, lovely, neat pattern of her face and hands and body. But he was held back from turning this friendly intimacy into something warmer, something more deeply felt. This was not due to the check he had experienced when he had tried it in the woods the first day he had met her at Manitou Lake. What she had meant then was, It's too soon, we don't know one another well enough. Nor was it shyness. That was a drawback from which Richard did not suffer with people of his own age. It was his knowledge that since October Harriman had established a prior claim.

Nevertheless, Richard loved to look at Elaine, he loved to be near her.

There were girls everywhere one turned in this place, and this Richard found disturbing. In England he had met his sister's friends, but only at parties during the school holidays. He had not thought much of them or about them. In Ottawa he had thought a good deal more, for Sandy's talk had started pulsating within him those emotions which are like nerves that are quiescent until some shock starts them throbbing. With Therese he had come nearest to having an adventure; that had failed, and only in his imagination had women had any place since then. But here they were everywhere; sitting in the same

classrooms, bent opposite him over desks in the library where the students went to work or gossip between lectures; walking across the campus, arm-in-arm; at student dances on Saturday nights; in the University tuck-shop at mid-morning or at tea-time. Richard watched them and thought about them. He imagined making love to this one or that one. He took preliminary steps at the Saturday night dances, and kissed one or two of them, but they measured up ill in his mind compared with Elaine, and he didn't pursue the chances open to him. The girls thought him odd. He found that he did not make the same headway in their estimation as he did with the young men of the University.

These emotional stirrings upset Richard considerably, and he took more and more to spending his spare evenings at the Brydens', and his week-ends at Acadia. He slept in Nick's room, and had long talks with old Nick about it all. Nick, now completely immersed in his Acadia life, and thinking only of the beloved horses under his care, was brought by love of his friend to turn his solid mind towards the great problems Richard expounded. But there was little he could do to help, except to look at his friend with interest and admiration, and to get in on his own account, every time an opportunity occurred, some word of praise for Elaine, who seemed to Nick the most wonderful girl he had ever met.

Even meeting Elisaveta, it seemed, did not lessen Nick's opinion of Elaine. Elisaveta was a waitress in the Crown Restaurant where Nick, to begin with, chanced to take his meals when he was in Edmonton on some errand from Acadia. Elisaveta, or Veta, as he came to call her, was, like himself, the offspring of emigrant parents from the Ukraine. Both of them could talk Russian, but neither of them found it easy to talk anything, being both very similar in nature, quiet, solid, observant and slow. Veta's duties were onerous, and even if she had anything to say she would have found it difficult to get time to say it, so busily did she have to rush from table to table in the crowded little restaurant. But chiefly by looks, or by some form of telepathy that their common blood and outlook gave them, they managed—though in a way which Nick could never satisfactorily explain to Richard—to fall in love with each other. They intended to get married, though when, Nick could not be persuaded to say. He and Veta, at the beginning

of the winter, were, so to speak, eyeing the prospect. Their engagement had so far advanced that Nick now met Veta outside the restaurant, took her to a cinema, took her back to the Crown Restaurant for a cup of coffee afterwards, and conducted her to her home before leaving for Acadia.

"Have you ever kissed her?" asked Richard, one day, exasperated by the dry details of this courtship.

Nick blushed a fiery red, and was taking refuge from his embarrassment in silence, when Richard repeated the question. Nick got angry, and spoke fiercely for the first time in their friendship.

"It's none of your business, Richard. Why do you always want to know the *whole* of everything?"

Richard was so dumbfounded at Nick turning on him that he could not answer that one.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

i

ANDREW'S shooting trip with Ralph Harriman had taken them up the Peace River as far as Great Slave Lake. There they had left the north-bound train, and with a retinue consisting of two guides, a camp cook, and a man to look after the pack-train, had pushed into the mountainous country west of Great Slave Lake, following old trails made by pack-trains a hundred years ago. Andrew had been to the edge of this country some years before. He had always promised himself that one day he would return and sample thoroughly the richness it had promised then when he had had only a few days at his disposal.

The splendour of autumn had descended from the sky, and it clothed the country with its shimmering colours of gold and crimson and blue. "The thin forests of poplar and fir spread over the rolling hills to the bare ricky peaks that lay upon the horizon. There were no roads; only the narrowest of trails, which could not be observed from the height of any hill, made their way through the rustling, whispering woods that thronged the valleys, emerging into the open when an elevation in the land thinned out the tall trees. They breathed continually a

delicious scent of balsam and of fir. The sun shone with little heat but with an unparalleled clarity from out a cloudless blue sky. The air was invigorating and so still and clear that a shout from the man in charge of the horses carried across a valley, and then did not die, but seemed to swim on to the illimitable distances beyond. Andrew and Ralph felt as men do when they have put aside all care and are free from restraint; that is, very cheerful and healthy and boisterous. The strain of the few days spent at Acadia before they left, which both of them had felt, had lifted from them in this wonderful air and undisturbed country, and so great was their relief they could have shouted aloud with joy, and shaken each other's shoulders with the sense of comradeship their association on this trip now gave them. Andrew and Ralph knew that the subject which had been in both their minds would have to be returned to before the trip was finished. But both felt that it could be postponed to the last night they were out, and dealt with as they sat before the last camp-fire they would share on this trip.

2

To Andrew it had all come as something of a shock. Ralph Harriman, his mother and his aunt, had been expected at the middle of September. The shooting trip had been arranged to start a few days later. Ralph had wired from Montreal that they would reach Edmonton on a Friday night. It had been agreed in correspondence that Lady Harriman and her sister should stop off with them for a week-end before going on to the coast, where they were to be joined after the trip by Ralph. Ralph was to spend two weeks in Victoria before returning, and it had been arranged that he and his mother and aunt would spend a further week at Acadia on their way East again in mid-October.

The arrangements had so far worked out as planned. Andrew and Elaine had driven in to Edmonton, with Comma following in the Ford to deal with the luggage, on that Friday evening to meet the Transcontinental. He had confessed to his daughter that he felt a little nervous.

"Our hospitable instincts are too well developed in Canada," he told her. "After all, I've met this man only once over lunch,

and now I'm proposing to go on a two-weeks' shooting trip with him. He seemed pleasant enough over lunch; he ought really to be an interesting companion if he's as important at the Foreign Office as Richardson, who originally sent him to me, says that he is. It will be awful if he turns out to be a bore, or a danger with a gun, or a silent moper by the camp-fire."

"I don't think there is much danger of that, anyway, Daddy. He had plenty to say for himself that one time we met him. He seemed rather nice, though a bit frightening, I remember."

But Andrew's nervousness was not allayed. "Then there's these two women, his mother and his aunt. We've never set eyes on them before, and here they are to land on us for a week-end. We could hardly not invite them, but it would have been tactful of them to say that they preferred the hotel."

"They could hardly have done that, Daddy, if Mr. Harriman was staying out with us. They could have seen that we had plenty of room."

"Well, I'll be glad when they've landed on us and we've got over the first shock. I always hate meeting people I know at trains. As for those I don't know——" lie left the sentence unfinished, but then he and Elaine laughed at each other, and felt encouraged because they shared these apprehensions between them.

Andrew, always at his ease, liked by everybody and liking everybody, put down to the fact that they must be tired by their three-day journey a certain stiffness and uncommunicativeness that the elderly ladies revealed on their first evening at Acadia. On the journey out to the farm Elaine had sat between them in the back seat of the car, and Harriman sat with him in front. His beloved child had made brave efforts to establish a sense of ease and casualness in the opening conversation, but she received only distant and stiffly gracious replies from the ladies. Andrew could see her reflection in the rear mirror, and he smiled at her, but she could not see his face. Meanwhile Harriman talked to him with great affability about their coming trip, making admiring comments on the scenery through which they drove, and said how much he was looking forward to seeing Acadia.

It was not until after dinner that night, when they had sat for an hour in the drawing-room, and the ladies at last had begun to melt, that the atmosphere became easy. Andrew was still

Izzled why there should have been that stiffness. Was it that he had been too long away from the wider world, seeing week in and week out only his old friends around Edmonton? Had he lost the knack of making friends quickly, and had Elspeth and Elaine lost it too? He could not really think so. The visitors were responsible, not he and his family; but that did not explain to him why there should be this curious air of constraint over the whole party, Acadia was used to freer and more friendly intercourse.

But after dinner things had become easier. Lady Harriman had beckoned Elaine to come and sit beside her, and she had smiled at the girl and had obviously made an effort to be pleasant. Elaine had been her natural self, a shade more grave in her manner than she usually was with her young friends, but that gravity sat prettily upon her, and, watching her, Andrew thought with a little thrill of pride what a great lady she might be if she were to move in those important political and social circles to which Lady Harriman had referred at dinner whenever she entered the conversation.

Andrew noticed that Ralph stopped talking when Elaine went over to sit with his mother. Andrew looked at him once or twice, for his silence became noticeable, and he felt flattered to find Ralph's eyes fixed on Elaine. He had a daughter to be proud of. She would catch the eye of all London if ever she went there. It occurred to him suddenly that it might be an idea to take her over one summer.

On Sunday night, after dinner, when Andrew and Ralph were left alone with the port, Andrew had suddenly found himself confronted with a situation which he had sometimes amusedly imagined as happening to himself, but thought of as lying in the distant future. Ralph Harriman, betraying excessive nervousness, Andrew afterwards thought, for one whose business it was to handle delicate affairs, had shattered the pleasant after-dinner atmosphere in which Andrew was lazily submerged, with the following blunt statement:—

"I think I ought to say, Mr. MacTaviot, that it wasn't only the prospect of a pleasant shooting trip with you that has brought me out to Canada a second time this year, and made me bring my mother and my aunt with me."

He laughed nervously before going on, seeing Andrew look up in startled fashion at this introduction. He knew all the

tricks, thought Andrew, remembering afterwards with special clarity every emotion that had passed over the countenance of this handsome, self-assured Englishman. It was as though Harriman had said to himself, "I must appear modest and uncertain of myself if I am to create a good impression/" His nervous laugh had, therefore, a thin, hollow echo, but Andrew did not notice that at the time; he remembered it only afterwards.

"I don't quite know what to say," Harriman went on, speaking rapidly, and looking down at the table in front of him. "You will, I'm afraid, think me very precipitate. The fact is, sir, I am in love with Elaine I wanted to ask you if you would approve of my asking her to marry me."

Andrew looked at his guest with a horrified glance. He had expected from this formidable introduction some excuse that pressure of work would make Ralph cut the* trip short, but he had not expected a request for Elaine's hand. So this is what it feels like when some marauder comes along and wants to take your only daughter away, he thought.

"My dear fellow," he said, feeling very embarrassed, and at the same time more than a little angry, "I — I don't know what to say. What am I supposed to say—except that it's impossible? Quite impossible. It's more, it's ridiculous. You have met Elaine only once before this. What on earth do you mean by saying that you are in love with her? That's quite inconceivable on so short an acquaintance. Oh, Lord," he went on impatiently, "there are a thousand other reasons why the idea is out of the question. Elaine is only twenty: she is half-way through her University course; you live thousands of miles away from us here; she is our only child and we adore her."

He put his hands flat on the table, and looked earnestly at Ralph, who had been watching him closely as he spoke.

"My dear fellow, you put me in a very embarrassing position. I hope I have not seemed too gruff, but it was the last thing I expected you to say. The thing is frankly impossible, and I really should be greatly obliged if you wouldn't mention it again. I don't know how much of a disappointment my refusal will mean to you. If you'd like to cancel the trip I shall quite understand. I had no idea that you had another motive in mind when you arranged it." He could not keep from his voice a certain sharpness as he said this.

"Mr. MacTaviot," said Ralph, speaking earnestly, and with great emotion, "I know what I have said must have come as a great shock to you. I am terribly sorry. I have been in love with Elaine from the first day that I saw her when we lunched together at that hotel. I have thought of nothing but her since that day, no matter what I have been doing or who I have been with. I love her so deeply that I shall never be happy again if she will not marry me. I don't think she finds me objectionable. I have said nothing to her yet, but I am sure that she knows that I care deeply for her. I am not so old-fashioned as to think that I must have your support and approval before I could speak to her, but it seemed to me rather discourteous to come here as your guest, and within a day or two propose marriage to your daughter, without telling you of my intentions first."

"I should think so," said Andrew. "I am so old-fashioned myself as to think that imperative."

"But you see, sir," went on Ralph, speaking with great energy and emotion, "I have to go back to England. I cannot bear the thought of going through another period as painful as these last nine months have been. If Elaine will only become engaged to me, that is all I want. Then next year, if she will come over and be our guest for the summer, she can get to know me better, and all my relatives, and have some chance of seeing whether she would like the sort of life we lead in England. If at the end of that time, she did not love me sufficiently, or like England enough, I would not hold her to her promise. She would be at perfect liberty to break the engagement. Surely no harm would be done by that."

"But, my dear chap, I know nothing about you and your family," said Andrew. "Except that you are in the Diplomatic Service, I know nothing of the sort of life you lead. Her mother and I are sensible parents, I think, and we would never propose to dictate to Elaine what sort of husband she should have, but as she is our only child we have hoped that she would one day marry a Canadian, preferably an Albertan, so that she would be near us for the rest of our lives."

"She could come over and see you as often as she liked," said Ralph, speaking in a rapid earnest voice. "I am well enough off, and she would have every comfort that money and love could provide for her. I am considered to be fairly successful in my career. I could, if I wanted it, get a post at any

of the big embassies abroad, I haven't done it, because it's been more interesting, with events in Europe occurring as they have in recent years, to be at the centre."

Andrew frowned down at the table, wishing that this conversation would come to an end. He felt that the more he listened the more he committed himself, but nothing could stop the flow of Ralph's eloquence.

"I don't want to give you a statement of my affairs at this stage," he laughed nervously, "but I wanted you to know that I am comfortably situated. I have a big house in Hampshire, and a smaller one in London. My mother lives in the Hampshire house, but she would move to the dower-house as soon as I married. I have a rent-roll of £15,000 a year, and a fairish income from dividends."

Andrew interrupted this catalogue with an impatient slap of his hand on the table. "My dear fellow, don't go on. I am sure you have everything that a father could desire for his daughter. All the objections to marriage for Elaine that I mentioned at the beginning of our talk still stand: she is too young, she hasn't finished her education, and you haven't known her long enough. I don't want to seem too inconsiderate. Elaine is the one, of course, who must decide. I can advise her as to what I think is right; you can ask her with some of the eloquence you have practised on me. If you are still minded to go on this trip, then I will agree that when you come here on our return you may ask her. Meanwhile I want you to say nothing to her. Will that do?"

Ralph Harriman looked relieved. He stood up, as Andrew had done to indicate that this conversation must be brought to an end. "I'm very grateful, Mr. MacTaviot. Certainly I will say nothing until we return."

At the door Andrew paused. "By the way, how old are you?" he asked.

"Thirty-eight," answered Ralph.

"It does not seem a very considerable age to me," said Andrew, "but it is double that of Elaine."

He had thought over many times on the course of this trip the details of this conversation. He had not told Elspeth yet,

thinking that she might become worked up over it while he was away, and without him there to discuss it with her, start to talk to Elaine about it. That Andrew did not want to happen. He could not tell why, with any exactness, but dimly he felt that if Elaine were entirely unprepared for the question she might react to it with the same unfavourable feelings that he had done.

He had watched Ralph closely throughout the trip. He was not a bad fellow, he had to admit. He talked interestingly, and he obviously knew of what he talked when the subject was the state of Europe. He was a surprisingly good shot. Andrew was proud of his own prowess, but he had to admit that Ralph was better. He enjoyed the comparative hardships of camp life, though the western saddle, Andrew knew, must be torture to him after an English one. He was never in the way, as some people always seemed to be when setting up or taking down a camp; he got on well with the men, which was surprising in an Englishman newly out, as Andrew knew from previous experience; and he did his share of the chores without having to be told every time what it was that he was expected to do. He created altogether a favourable impression, but none of these things, Andrew kept reminding himself, dissolved the objections he had to him as a possible son-in-law.

4

One evening, just below timber-line, they set up camp on the floor of a valley beside a mountain lake. There was an hour to go still before it would be dusk, and while the horses were being run down to a meadow which lay a hundred feet below, and half a mile from the lake by which the camp was being established, the men took their guns and started out by a trail which wound upward from the valley over a shoulder of land two or three hundred feet *in* height. The hill was rocky and sparsely covered with timber. The trail they were following had probably been formed by mountain goats or sheep. A great deal of fallen timber covered the hill; that, and the broken rock which covered the ground on each side of the trail, suggested that avalanches fell here from the nearby mountains, particularly from a high and steep wall of rock that rose almost perpendicularly from the crown of the hill, becoming a formidable mountain face reaching more than a thousand feet above the

floor of the valley. It was ideal country for mountain goats. On one of the precipitous ledges that obtruded from this sheer mountain face they hoped to see some of these animals.

They followed each other in single file up the narrow trail, Andrew leading. When they reached the top they scanned the bare rocky wall through binoculars, but could see nothing. Andrew then suggested that they should separate, and that he should go towards the left and Ralph should go towards the right, so that they might each reconnoitre in preparation for the morning; whether any slopes of rock occurred at either end by which they might climb a little way up the face of this gigantic wall.

To reach either end, the trail had to be left. Jumping over fallen timber, and leaping from broken rock to broken rock, Andrew made his way towards his objective. It was hard work with a heavy gun and an ammunition-pouch to carry. From time to time he stopped to look through his binoculars not only at the mountain face, to see whether there was any trace of animals, but at the hump of rock at the lower end towards which he was making his way. He had been doing this for twenty minutes, and was just considering turning back to reach the camp before darkness fell, when he heard two shots, fired almost simultaneously, indicating that Ralph must have emptied both barrels at a large animal. Then he heard ringing across the broken rock a sharp blast of the whistle, which they used to call one another when separated. Andrew took a last long look through his binoculars at the mountain face to imprint its topographical features on his memory. Then turning, he made his way back by the same awkward and clumsy method by which he had come. When he reached the trail, hot and foot-sore, he found Ralph waiting for him, and betraying signs of excitement that he had not shown before on the trip.

When he caught sight of Andrew, Ralph came running up to him.

"I've shot a bear," he called, when he was still a few yards away.

"Good man!" said Andrew. "A big one?"

"Enormous," said Ralph excitedly. "I think it's a grizzly. It must be eight feet from tip to tail."

"Good God," said Andrew, "that *is* excitement. You don't often find grizzly at this altitude. They're usually higher up at

this time of the year. Let's go and see it. We'll have to leave it till the morning before we can drag it down, for the horses have all been let loose. I hope the coyotes won't get it."

They started off together. "I'm rather afraid it's a female," said Ralph. "Actually it had a cub with it, about four months old, I should say. I could have shot that little beggar too, as he scrambled off, but there didn't seem much point in doing that."

"No, I'm glad you didn't do that," said Andrew. "Actually, it's rather a pity you shot it if you saw that it was a female. Grizzlies are becoming rather scarce out here. There's no law against shooting female grizzlies, but there's a sort of unwritten law in shooting parties to let them alone, and try to track down the male, who has the better skin anyhow. However, I can quite understand the temptation. A grizzly really is something to add to one's bag. You must have the skin dressed and take it back to England with you."

They scrambled over the fallen timber and loose slippery rock towards the eastern end of the mountain face, Ralph this time in the lead. After about ten minutes when the light was beginning to fade they came to the body of the bear. She was certainly a big one, though she probably looked bigger than she actually was, sprawled back in death, her paws extended rigidly in the air, her teeth bared in a snarl. But she was a grizzly, of that there was no doubt. What extraordinarily fine feasts they are, thought Andrew, the last of the great savage animals left living on the wild American continent, never coming near human habitations, unlike their more bourgeois and common kinsfolk, the brown and black bears, who are never happier than when routing round in a rubbish-can. High up above the timber-line, living as they must have lived thousands of years ago, noble, erect—for they walked upright more often than the lowlier kinds of bears, who loped along like mules on all fours—savage and free. Andrew had a vision of the small chap who would be standing, palpitating and amazed, off amongst this fallen timber somewhere; for the first night of his life alone under the sky. It was wretched killing anything when it had young attached to it. He wished that in spite of the temptation his companion had not pulled the trigger. Somewhere off on the hunt the mate of this dead beast would be roaming. There were tales that were told of grizzlies, that

the males were not only monogamous, but that having lost their mate they never took another one again but remained, more savage than ever, in perpetual widowerhood. It was rather sad to think that such a fine beast as he probably was had been doomed, by a thoughtless shot on this lovely evening, to a life of lasting grief and pain. But there it was: it had happened. Nothing could be gained by reading Ralph a sermon on the subject.

They made their way back to camp. The next morning they started up the trail again, accompanied by the two guides and two of the horses. When they had superintended the arrangements for dragging the grizzly down to camp, they started off together with one of the guides towards the shoulder which Andrew had reconnoitred the evening before. The day was clear, and sunny, and though the air had been cold as they started off from camp after breakfast they knew that it would become very warm as the sun advanced. After a long and strenuous climb they reached a ledge where they found the markings of mountain goat, and after they had eaten their sandwiches and had started off again, they came across the animals themselves. Andrew and Ralph each got one, Andrew's with a particularly fine head. They made their way back to camp wearier than they had been at any time on the trip.

That night after dinner they sat beside the camp-fire, leaning back against their saddles, and smoked their pipes. The camp cook always picked balsam branches for them to sit on, and with a blanket thrown over the saddle to make a cushion, it was always pleasant to relax by the fire after the day's energetic exercise in the cold, clear mountain air. On this night, an hour or so after dark, they heard a sudden whinnying scream from one of the horses tethered below. "Sounds frightened," said Andrew. "I wonder what he smells?" They stood up and listened, but could hear nothing, and after a minute or two sat down on their beds again.

The cook had made up their sleeping-bags in their tent, and he came now with the bottle of whisky and the canvas water-bottle and two glasses to serve their night-cap.

"Good hunting," said Andrew, lifting his glass. This was the nightly toast by the camp-fire. "We haven't much country left to cover. We should be out at the railroad in three days' time."

"It's been grand," said Ralph. "I've never enjoyed anything so much in all my life."

"Well, you've been a very good man to have along," said Andrew, smiling.

Ralph, emboldened by this, took a sudden plunge. "No one could want for a better companion than you. I'm sorry now that I spoke to you so suddenly on that Sunday night at Acadia. It would have been better if I had waited until we got to know one another out on the trail."

Andrew laughed again. "Don't think that because I approve of you as a hunting partner I am ready to accept you in a closer relationship. That's for Elaine to decide. I will go this far perhaps. If, in spite of my advice, she accepts you, then I won't be as worried over her happiness as I might have been if I hadn't seen you out on the trail."

"That's all I want," said Ralph, smiling happily. "She will never be unhappy through me. That I promise you," he added firmly and seriously.

5

It must have been between three and four o'clock the next morning when every one in the camp was wakened by the shrill excited yapping of a little smooth-haired terrier which belonged to the cook, who shared another tent. Andrew and Ralph woke simultaneously and sitting up looked at the open flap where the still starlit night appeared. They listened, and heard the voice of the cook admonishing the dog to be quiet, but they could hear nothing else. The dog, plainly being quietened by having its jaws held together by the cook's large hand, was squeaking frenziedly. "I'm going out to have a look," said Andrew. "Don't you bother. I'll call you if there's anything."

Pulling on some moccasins he had beside his sleeping-bag, and drawing on a mackinaw coat, he crawled through the opening. He stood up and looked about him. The sheer face of the mountain up which they had laboured the day before rose blankly into the sky on his left. On his right he could hear the water of the lake lapping and sucking gently at the shore. The three other tents which formed their encampment stood white and ghostly in the half-light. The dying embers of their camp-fire glowed every now and then when a little puff of wind

came to lift the white wood ash that overlay them. Everything was still and peaceful, but for the moans and protesting squeaks that came continually from the muzzled dog.

Then suddenly Andrew said, "Good God!" and he felt a little pain prick at his heart. Against the whiteness of the farthest tent he saw a huge figure slowly rear itself to its feet, and saw the creature's fangs bared in the starlight, and heard a half-stifled groan come from its chest. It had seen Andrew, but it made no attempt to turn and run. Instead it rose to its full height, opened its arms, and lifted up its snout, not as though to sniff the air but to call the mountains and the sky to witness its grief. Then, as Andrew stood there, paralysed into inaction, the great head lowered, and the creature stood swaying slightly from side to side, staring at him out of eyes that seemed at one moment red, at the next quite sightless; and every few seconds exhaling, as though with difficulty, this smothered and pitiful groan.

Then abruptly its great paws which it held extended open before it, in an attitude that seemed like supplication, swung upwards, and it turned and rent the canvas of the tent with one tearing blow of its claws. This was the tent in which the cook and his dog were sleeping. The dog shot out under the tumbled canvas, and with a shrill crescendo of barking fled to the boundary of the encampment, where it crouched yapping hysterically. Andrew saw the cook roll out of the other side of the tent, a ludicrous figure in a single-piece suit of long underwear, and jump to his feet and run wildly into the woods. Behind him Andrew heard Ralph coming out of the tent, and released at last from the fearful tension which had gripped him, he turned his head, and yelled at his companion, "The guns, bring the guns."

As he shouted, the great beast turned and looked at him, and again lifted its snout to the night sky; then with a deep grunt from its chest it bowed its head and came towards Andrew. As it passed the second tent it swiped sideways with one of its huge arms. The canvas adhered to its claws for a moment or two, and it swung its arm wildly over its head, and the tent described a white and weird parabola in that dim light as it sailed over a tree and landed with a faint splash in the water of the lake.

As the monster swung towards Andrew two things happened

simultaneously. The little dog, which had been creeping closer on its stomach, all the while barking furiously, seeing that it was about to attack a man, which to most dogs, and to this loyal-hearted unknown in particular, was high sacrilege, rushed in front of Andrew at the bear. The great animal, its head lolling on its shoulders, its laboured breathing now dreadfully audible, bent over, and with one fierce sweep of its paw caught the little dog a blow which sent him flying through the air forty feet away, where he fell, a small white crumpled heap, his barking stopped for ever, his ribs crushed to pieces.

At the same moment Ralph was by Andrew's side. He thrust Andrew's gun into his hand, and almost simultaneously raised his own to his shoulder and fired both barrels. The bear, swaying on its hind legs before them not ten yards away, opened its mouth, and a shrill whimper of pain, strangely at variance with the frightening sounds it had made hitherto, burst from its throat. It hesitated for a second, and then with that slow and awful swaying gait came on, its eyes now blazing red, its enormous frame stretched to its full height of nine feet or more, its arms open and eager to grasp them.

Andrew's gun had by this time come to his shoulder. He, too, fired both shots. The bear paused again, and then with a deep sigh threw up its paws, and fell full length before them. The earth seemed to shake as it hit the ground; it fell so close that involuntarily Andrew and Ralph stepped back; even then they could feel a little gust of wind which that falling mass created.

For a moment there was the deepest silence. Then, "Good God," said Andrew, "I rather think you saved my life. Thanks very much."

They grinned at each other in the half-darkness, partly in relief that this was all over, partly out of a sense of partnership more richly developed.

"Another grizzly," said Ralph, examining the bear with a torch. "And a male this time."

"It would be the mate of the one you shot yesterday," said Andrew. "Poor old beast, it was a good end for him coming so soon."

"Do you mean," asked Ralph incredulously, "that he was beating up our camp because we killed his mate?"

"I do," said Andrew. "It makes you think a little less of

humans and a little more of animals, doesn't it, when you see this poor brute, and this noble little bit of compressed courage lying over here?"

He went towards the little dog, over which the ridiculous figure of the cook, still in his socks and underwear, was bent. "A good little chap, George," he said to him. "He helped to save my life. I'll get you another one when we get back to Edmonton."

The cook did not answer, but knelt there, rubbing his hands together, and looking solemnly and pitifully at the corpse of his little companion.

There was no more sleep for them that night, for the tents could not be repaired in the half-darkness. Andrew and Ralph pulled on some clothes and went for a walk along the shore of the lake. Andrew was thinking that the gods were favouring the prospects of this self-possessed young gentleman walking beside him, and he was uncertain after the experiences of the last hour whether he was pleased or pained by that development.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"HOUSE FULL?" inquired Professor Bryden cheerfully of the room, poking his small head round the door, his face wreathed in a happy smile. "Standing room only?" he inquired, looking at every one, his head shaking with a kind of mirth.

Andrew came forward from the fireplace to greet his friend, and seizing him by the arm drew him into the room. Don protested, "But you have no room. We have mistaken the day, Rose, dear," turning to his wife who stood smiling in the doorway, "we have come the wrong day. Not even Acadia can feed all these people."

Rose followed her husband into the room, and behind her came Richard, feeling a little self-conscious and shy at being made to take part in the Professor's charades. This was his second Sunday in succession at Acadia, but last week there had been only Elspeth and Elaine, the Brydens and Nick and himself. It had been very pleasant to be with Nick again. Usually Nick ate his meals with the rest of the farm staff in a large hall off the kitchen, but with that true democracy that may be found

only in a Canadian home where the servants are often regarded as part of the family, he had been invited this day to take lunch in the big dining-room, and everybody felt themselves sharing in the pleasure which Richard and Nick found in coming together again.

To-day there were fifteen people in the morning-room all drinking a glass of sherry before lunch. Richard knew who most of them were, for in spite of the entrance he had made, Don had known who was to be there, and had told Richard all about them on the way out in the car. Besides Andrew and Elspeth and Elaine, there was a handsome well-dressed man of about thirty-five or forty whom Richard recognised from Dr. Bryden's description as the visiting Englishman, Ralph Harriman. The two formidable elderly ladies standing by the fireplace would be his mother and his aunt, Lady Harriman and Lady Sylvester. Then there was a boy he had seen on several occasions at the University and whose rather shy, rough-looking appearance he had liked. Douglas Smith was his name. He and Richard exchanged embarrassed smiles, uncertain whether to reveal the fact that each knew the other by sight quite well. The fat cheerful man, and the thin, yellow woman standing beside him were Douglas Smith's father and mother. Then there was a Mr. and Mrs. Vyland, a pleasant-appearing couple. Finally, thanks be, there was Nick again, standing shyly in a corner by himself, dressed in his inadequate blue suit, wearing an unbecoming, stringy tie, his hair pasted down on his head, but wisps of it beginning to recover from the severe measures with a wet brush to which it had been subjected, and sitting up and peering about, and completing poor Nick's handicaps. Nick had been standing dumbly in a corner by himself, watching with envy and a painful sense of his own inadequacy every one else talking and seeming to enjoy themselves. When he saw Richard his eyes widened and shone, and a transfiguration seemed to light up his homely, square-cut face.

Richard went over and stood by Nick, and Douglas Smith, gladly abandoning the company of the elder people, came over and talked to them. Richard carried on a sensible conversation, but his eyes followed Elaine as she moved about the room. He was quite certain that he had never seen anybody whom he liked as much. He wished she would come over and talk to them, not only so that he might see her more closely, and watch

her face, but so that she might not then talk to Ralph Harriman, whose good looks and air of serene self-assurance Richard found distasteful. There he was standing with one hand in his pocket, and the other holding his glass of sherry, carrying on a conversation which Richard could not overhear, with Elaine, her father, Dr. Smith and Lady Harriman.

Comma announced lunch, and they all made their way across the wide hall to the dining-room. At Acadia it was the custom to place only the chief guests; Andrew took one each side of him at his end of the table, and Elspeth placed one on either hand at her end. The others filled in between as they chose. Richard found himself at the centre of the table, with Nick, who clung to him like a limpet, on one side of him, and Douglas Smith on the other. Directly opposite him was Elaine, with Ralph Harriman on her right and Dr. Bryden on her left.

The menu for Sunday lunch was traditional at Acadia: roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and a fruit pie. Norah came in from the kitchen to carve, and Comma rushed about the table, very red in the face and breathing heavily with anxiety and exertion, as he placed large heaped platefuls of food before each guest.

Don Bryden shot an ironical glance at Richard over the top of his glasses as he bent over his plate, then before beginning to eat he turned to Elaine.

"Allow me to draw your *attention* to Richard's neat appearance, Elaine: the well-brushed head, now beginning to grow quite a respectable crop of hair, the carefully chosen tie, the air of immaculateness, so markedly at variance with his bruised and dishevelled appearance in the first few weeks of our acquaintance with him. He has recovered from his ordeal nicely, don't you think?"

Elaine smiled. "Very nicely. Better than I had hoped, Dr. Bryden. He was so violent and unco-operative. All the sophomores were complaining of him."

Richard grinned, pleased to be taken notice of this way, happy to have Elaine's smile directed at him. "Well, I'm glad it's all over," he said. "It all seemed slightly silly to me."

"What was silly?" asked Harriman.

"Initiation," Elaine explained, turning to him. "The initiation rites by which new members are admitted to the tribe."

"It sounds rather violent," said Harriman, laughing.

"You're English, aren't you?" he asked Richard. "What school were you at?"

Richard said, "Hertfield."

"Hertfield," repeated Harriman, trying not to look puzzled.

"What one were you at?" asked Richard.

"Er—Eton," said Harriman.

"Don't apologise," said Richard, laughing: "I believe Eton's quite highly regarded. A training school for the higher posts in the Civil Service, Governorships and Vice-regencies, and the like, isn't it?"

Harriman flushed a little, and looked startled. Elaine was gazing at Richard with that same puzzled look he had caught in her eyes once before. How wretchedly I'm behaving, he thought. What on earth makes me want to be rude to this fellow? He's probably quite a decent chap. My manners are appalling.

So Don Bryden evidently thought. "My boy," he said to Richard, "we shall have to send you up to the nursery if you are impertinent; or are your toys and rocking-horse now put away in the lumber-room, Elaine?"

"I hear you had quite an adventure on your hunting trip," he went on, turning to Harriman. "Andrew says that if it hadn't been for you keeping your head, he would have been hugged to death by a grizzly. Tell us about it. Andrew's accounts of any exploits in which he took part are usually under-coloured as far as his own share in them is concerned."

"You are quite right," said Harriman. "If it hadn't been for **him** we might all have been killed, or at least badly mauled," and he gave, without drama, his own version.

"Richard, anxious to recover the ground he had lost, said, "I think you both did pretty well. It must have been a frightening experience. Have you got the skin? I've never seen a grizzly. I should love to."

"It's outside in the yard-house," said Elaine. "We'll go and look at it after lunch. Do you shoot, Richard?"

"No, I don't," said Richard, "I've never had a chance."

"Your chance will come," said Don Bryden. "Let me educate you first. I've just got my hands on this boy," he explained to Harriman, with a smile. "He is so aggressive with his fists **that it** would be a positive danger to put a gun in his hands. **When I** have equipped his mind with some appreciation of **the**

humanities, he may, if he wishes, return to his wild pursuits. That young man you see sitting on his left is dedicated to war. He can hardly wait to get to Europe and fight for the oppressed. He has notions about Spain, haven't you, Douglas, and is convinced that on the successful issue of that internecine struggle depends the future happiness of mankind."

"He's not far wrong," said Harriman, half laughing, looking at Douglas's clear young face which had turned fiery red at the Professor's remarks. "What side do you favour?" he added kindly, seeing Douglas's embarrassment. "The government, I suppose."

Douglas glanced a little fearfully at his parents at the other end of the long table to make sure that their attention was distracted. "Why, of course," he said, putting down his knife and fork. "The others are army Fascists put up by Germany and Italy, to try to seize power. If they succeed we shall have another war."

"I'm afraid you may be right," said Harriman. "But Professor Bryden implied that you wouldn't find that distasteful. People of your generation often like war. It gives them excitement and the chance of adventure. There are some in England, I think, who feel like that, who don't actually look forward to a war, for they feel that would be wicked, but who would welcome it in their hearts if it were suddenly to develop. Do people in Canada feel that?"

"I can't answer for everybody," said Douglas shyly. "Yes, I think perhaps some of them do."

"But what do you yourself feel?" persisted Ralph.

"I hate it," said Douglas, with sudden fierceness; then looked appalled at Dr. Bryden and Elaine, and sideways at Richard, that he should have made this sudden dramatic confession.

"He hates it enough," said Don Bryden, feeling that a word put in would give Douglas a chance to recover, "to want to go and help to quell it while it is still of manageable proportions. That's it, isn't it, Douglas?"

"You're very right," said Ralph Harriman, "but I am afraid there are not enough people who feel as you do. It's a pity there are not."

He started to tell them stories that were current of the true nature of the Spanish War. He talked well and with authority, and he soon had the little group at the centre of the table

absorbed in his account. Douglas's mind was transported to that peninsula which he saw in vision with the same ecstasy as the Crusaders saw the Holy Land. Elaine's thoughts were concerned as much with Ralph Harriman himself as with what he was saying. She was beginning to be less afraid of him, even to feel herself attracted by him, and to enjoy sitting next to him and hearing him talk. She thought he was like her father, firm, sure of himself, handsome, and very strong. Since his return from the hunting trip he had devoted himself almost entirely to her. This had flattered her and yet had embarrassed her, for she thought that he looked at her very strangely at times, and on several occasions their conversation had taken a turn which she would have known well enough how to deal with had he been of the age of Richard or Douglas, but which she found difficult and uncomfortable because he was so much older than she was; so much more like her father than like one of her own friends. She had managed to avoid these moments so far, to her great relief. She liked him the more because he accepted her sudden change of manner on these occasions without question, and with a patience and kindness which she felt she didn't deserve. But when he talked as he was doing now, and as he had often done during the week at Acadia, she looked at him with admiration, and felt herself attracted by him in a way that she had never felt with any one before.

Richard watched her with a feeling of unhappiness, and his eyes wandered from her to Ralph Harriman, whom he regarded with envy. Don Bryden and Nick, on opposite sides of the table, listened to Ralph and watched Elaine. Both of them knew what Elaine and Ralph were feeling; Nick because he had been at Acadia all the week, and had seen them together; and Don Bryden, because Andrew had talked to him in confidence and had asked for his advice.

The others at the end of the table had gradually fallen silent as Ralph, conscious that he was talking well, and aware that he was showing to advantage in Elaine's eyes, added to his anecdotes some detailed information and some characterisations of European personalities which gave them more than passing interest. Every one listened to him, and every one at the table except Richard thought how clever and charming he was.

"Well, that's- all highly interesting," said Andrew when, as

they finished their coffee, a pause occurred in the conversation. Nobody felt competent to express an opinion of their own after the authoritative and lucid survey of the situation given by Ralph. "Highly interesting, but a little foreboding. Let us hope the situation will finally be solved without war. Now let's get out into the air. It's too fine an afternoon to sit about. Come on down to the stables, Don, and you, Doc. Maria has foaled, and I'd like you to see her youngster. What will you do, Ralph—go with the youngsters, who I suppose are going to be energetic, or come with us?"

"If Elaine feels like a walk," suggested Ralph, hopefully.

"Let's all go for a walk," said Richard. "What about it, Elaine? Douglas, what about it? Can you come, Nick?"

They started off without hats or coats. The day was a golden one at the end of October, the sun shone from a smoky blue sky, and the air was invigorating and made the blood dance. Coming down the road from the house, Richard, Nick and Douglas, who were walking a few yards in front of Elaine and Ralph, were so overcome with an access of sheer animal spirits that they suddenly shouted with joy, pounded one another's shoulders, tried to trip one another up; then like dogs at play all at once started to run down the road. Elaine watched them with dancing eyes. If she had been with them she would have run too, and as though her feet were linked with theirs, she took a quick little step, and then paused abruptly, observing that Ralph had not been infected by the same enthusiasm. He looked at the boys disappearing down the road with amused eyes. "They seem very full of energy," was all he said.

They walked on by the road that led downwards to the boundary of the estate where a thick wood of oak trees grew. The road twisted continually and the boys had by now got quite out of sight ahead. It was pleasant walking along the dry road; pleasant to smell the autumnal scents that seemed to hang in the smoky air, and to feel the breeze cool upon the face while the body felt warm and invigorated.

"Elaine," said Ralph, after they had walked for a few minutes in silence, "I'm glad the others have gone ahead. There is something I have been wanting to say to you all the week but I haven't had the courage. Really only desperation drives me to it now, for unless I say it before to-morrow I shall be lost, for I'll go in the evening.

"Elaine/" he continued, moving nearer to her and looking down at the top of her dark head as they walked along, "I love you. How shocking it sounds said suddenly like that, doesn't it?" He smiled at her with tension in his face as she looked up at him swiftly, and then down again. "But it's true, Elaine. I've loved you and have thought of no one else ever since I saw you that first day at the hotel. I came out here so soon again only because I loved you so much that I could not do my work or lead a normal life until I had asked you to marry me. Don't say no to me, please, Elaine, don't say no. It sounds melodramatic, but I do believe I could not go on living unless you promised to marry me. Look, my darling child." He stopped and took one of her hands in his and made her look up at him, and he tried to put into his gaze all the intensity of his love for her. "I will promise anything, to wait for years if need be, as long as you will not tell me there is no hope. I know I am much older than you, though I am still a young man by the usual standards. I swear I will make you happy, Elaine. I will dedicate all my life and thought to that, and everything that I have."

When he stopped speaking, he was breathing heavily as though he had been running. She was like a trapped deer, her head turning anxiously this way and that, but her eyes avoiding his. She could feel the attraction of his presence, but it repelled her as much as it attracted her. If only I did not have to kiss him, she thought wildly; if only I could say "yes," and he would go. She had a longing to be with her father and mother; and then, thinking that ridiculous and baby-like, a longing to be scampering ahead with Richard and Douglas and Nick, laughing and running in the free air, not hemmed in by this intense aura of passionate feeling and rhetoric.

Then she looked up at him, and thought that she saw fear and unhappiness in his eyes, and noticed lines that seemed suddenly to have been drawn beside his handsome mouth, and her heart was touched by a feeling of sorrow for him and a shocked surprise that she should be the cause of it. And glowing towards him with a newly-kindled feeling of sympathy, she was freshly aware how well-shaped his forehead was, and how attractive was his hair. A feeling that she had never known before surged up in her, and she felt—if only he wouldn't ask me, but would take me in his arms; and if only I

could feel his face against mine I don't believe I would mind; I think I would like it and be happy.

But being incapable of expressing all this, when her eyes finally met his, she could only smile at him like a child that desires to be liked but does not know the art of coquetry; and at that he did what was wisest, and put his arms about her, and his cheek against hers.

"Darling Elaine," he whispered.

She turned her face and her young lips sought his, cool and fresh and tender as he had not known that lips could be.

It was as though a weight that had been pressing down on him for all these months was suddenly lifted, lie looked up at the sky and at the sloping fields that lay all about them, and it was as though the earth smiled back at him congratulating him on his good fortune. His hands were on Elaine's shoulders. He held her off and smiled at her incredulously; then his hands pressed her shoulders wildly, and he laughed, a chuckling, happy laugh that made her smile in return.

"It's relief," he said apologetically. "Oh, Elaine, I was so afraid."

"Afraid of what?" she asked. "Not of me?"

"No," he said, looking at her seriously, the smile dying from his face, "of my fate. I love you so much I could not have gone on if you had refused me. You haven't said 'yes' yet. Will you marry me, Elaine? Will you come back to England with me? No, that can't be yet. I promised your father—yes, I've spoken already to him—that I would not try to rush you. He is under the impression that your education is not yet completed. To tell the truth, he doesn't altogether favour an English son-in-law. He wants you near at hand. I've suggested to him that you should come over and stay with us in England next summer and meet my friends and see what sort of a life we lead there. I want only your promise that you will marry me, Elaine, not a definite date at which that promise will be fulfilled. Say you will marry me, Elaine, dear."

"Yes, I will, Ralph." She looked at him shyly. "That is the first time I have called you Ralph, and yet I've kissed you and been proposed to by you. It's almost Victorian, isn't it? I ought to keep on calling you Mr. Harriman. You will go away and I shan't see you for months. How shall I ever learn to know you?"

"You won't forget me, Elaine. I will write to you every week, and you must do the same, and then next summer we will come to know one another well."

"It isn't as I imagined it would be/' said Elaine, a little puzzled.

"Darling," he said, "I haven't given you time to get used to it." His arm passed about her shoulders again, and he bent his head to kiss her. Again she felt happy and excited, and again his own heart leapt at the contact of her fresh lips.

Richard, who had turned back from the others, to see what was keeping Elaine and Ralph, stood watching them from a turn in the road fifty yards ahead. He watched Ralph take Elaine in his arms, and a sick feeling of disappointment flowed through him like a wave. He kicked the ground in front of him with an impatience he could not control; then, turning, made his way not back towards Nick and Douglas, but through the woods that ran alongside the road.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHEN the Harrimans had departed, and the University term had got well under way, and the snow had driven down from the north covering the land and locking it in its long white silence, life seemed to follow almost its normal course at the University and at Acadia. But the uneasiness which every one felt over the news from Europe seemed to find its reflections in a number of personal unhappinesses which threatened to make this winter very different from the happy placid ones of the past.

Early in December Don Bryden became gravely ill. He was removed to the University hospital for treatment and observation. What he was told there he told to no one else, save possibly to Rose. He was about again before very long, looking even more frail than usual, a little paler, even thinner, if that were possible. He brushed all inquiries about his health aside with a nervous shaking of his head. "I'm perfectly all right," he said to every one. "I beg you not to make a fuss."

"God is beckoning us," he said to Andrew, with a smile one

evening at Acadia. He and Rose had come there for the weekend. It had been too cold for the Professor to go out, and all the winter afternoon he had sat in Andrew's library with a book, making the air blue with cigarette-smoke, while Rose and Elspeth sat over a fire of their own in the drawing-room. Andrew had been out, busy about the farm. At tea-time he came in. "How are you, old fellow?" he asked Don, as he sat down by the fire to take off his boots. "The better for an afternoon in this quiet room," said Don. "What is the farm doing, and how are all its inhabitants, both human and animal?"

"I don't like the look of Uncle Silas," answered Andrew, pulling his slippers on to his feet. "He has looked wretched for weeks. This morning I made him stay in bed. This afternoon they sent for me to the wood we are cutting about a mile from the house to say that one of the cows was beginning to calve, and when I came into the barn, who should I see but that old fool, with a pair of trousers and a sweater pulled on over his pyjamas, assisting at the operation. I yelled to him as soon as I saw him to get back into bed, but the blamed idiot is so obstinate I had practically to carry him there. Fve got plenty of people to look after the cows. Silas doesn't need to worry; in fact, he's a damned nuisance, and just adds to my' anxieties. As well as a dead calf Fd have had a dead Silas on my hands if he'd superintended that operation to its end.' But wnat can you do with an obstinate old idiot like that? It would kill him if I told him he was of no further use, and if I ordered him to stay away from the stables."

Don Bryden listened to this outburst with shaking head, staring at the fire. When Andrew had finished he looked at him with a pale smile lurking unhappily about his thin lips, and it was then that he said, "God is beckoning us, old Silas and me. We are of no use any longer."

Andrew looked at him swiftly, consternation and love of his friend in every line of his face. "Don, what are you saying? Forgive me, for God's sake, for talking in that way about Silas. But that doesn't matter so much as your thinking that I resented weakness and frailty. My dear old Don,—" he had crossed the room, and he sat down on the arm of the Professor's chair, and put an arm about his shoulder, and gave him a little hug,—'Silas will be all right, and so will you. We've had such an undisturbed existence here that even to see

any one ill fills us with a sort of irritation, as though we resented any disturbance of our lives. We're a selfish lot."

Don looked up at his friend, smiling at him with great affection. "Nevertheless, my dear Andrew, God does beckon. But I think we may, without appearing rude, pretend that we haven't noticed. At least, not just yet. What is to be done about the old fellow?" he went on. "Are you getting the doctor out?"

"Nick is going into Edmonton to-night," answered Andrew. "Our Nick, so Charlie tells me, is in love," he added, smiling at the image that crossed his mind of the grave-faced Nick engaged in courtship. "He is going *in* to see his girl. I told him to telephone me before he leaves Edmonton to-night. If Silas is no better, he can bring the doctor out on the farm sleigh, and I'll drive him back in the morning. Nick is in with Silas now. A great friendship has sprung up between those two; odd, considering the difference in their ages, though Silas always did love the youngsters. But the funny thing is that it's Nick who is paternal and protective with Silas, not the other way about. Silas rather likes being petted and cosseted by young Nick. He acts like an ailing, spoilt baby whenever Nick is about."

"Nick is a good fellow," said Don. "I hope Silas doesn't absorb all his attention and care. My young Richard needs him."

"I should have thought your young Richard knew how to take care of himself. How is he getting along at the University?"

"Well, scholastically. Somewhat better in his relations with his fellow-students. He is a tempestuous young man, and naturally finds it somewhat difficult to adjust himself to a strange environment."

"An odd boy," commented Andrew. "One can't help liking him. But do you know, I have a feeling that what you call his tempestuousness is going to land him into trouble."

"What sort of trouble do you mean?" asked Don anxiously.

Andrew laughed at his friend. "Talk about Nick's paternal attitude towards Silas. You're very fond of the boy, aren't you, Don? No, I don't mean anything awful. He won't end in goal. I'm **not** a clairvoyant, but Richard seems to me to have a **tendency to** fling himself blindly against any obstacle in his

way. If the obstacle is quite immovable, he may some day smash himself against it. If he does, it will be because he believes what he is doing to be right, not because he's obdurate or obstinate. I like the boy, too, you know. And as for Elaine——"

"Falling in love with him, is she?" asked the Professor, eagerly smiling at the promise of drama.

"Oh, no. Her affections are engaged elsewhere, as they say. Besides, the child is sensible. Richard seems to treat her in rather an off-hand way. I should resent that if I didn't think it was best that it should be so. I suspect that Elaine is attracted to the boy by his attitude of indifference to her. It is always the way, I believe, in affairs of the heart. However, they are only children. I don't think we need take their passions very seriously."

"It's rather tempting fate to say that, Andrew."

Andrew laughed. "You read too much poetry, old fellow. Believe me, the modern young don't spend all their time mooning for each other. They are hard-hearted and single-minded young wretches."

The two old friends sat on talking in the dusk. It was by now almost dark outside. Comma had not yet come in to draw the curtains. The cold grey evening light pressed against the windows of Andrew's study, and the two men, sitting in easy chairs with their backs to the window, watched the glowing fire or each other's faces in the flickering firelight. It was the peaceful hour of the day at Acadia, that time between tea and dinner when quietness had settled down on the house and in the yard, where the animals, fed and contented and warm, looked with their mild eyes into the darkness and pondered their own private mysteries.

In Uncle Silas's room, Nick sat in a wicker chair, watching the old man who lay with closed eyes on his narrow bed, his thin, pointed face as white as the pillow on which it rested. Nick should have started for Edmonton an hour before, but his distress at being late was as nothing compared with the distress he felt for Silas. He could do nothing by sitting here, but something kept him from going out to the barn and harnessing up Betty to the sleigh. If Uncle Silas had opened his eyes and asked for something, if he could have served him in some way, he could then have gone. But to steal away

without doing anything seemed to him very inhuman. At last, as it was growing dark, Uncle Silas, without opening his eyes, dismissed him.

"You get going, Nick. What are you sitting about for? Get going, I tell ye."

Nick got stiffly up from his chair, and went off with a sad heart to his courtship.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

i

OFTEN in the afternoon, after the last lecture of the day, Richard went for a walk across the high-level bridge to the north side of the city. At first he went alone, but sometimes meeting Douglas Smith and young Gordon Vylard on the bridge pathway he walked with them, and then fell into the habit of going into their homes, or accompanying them to the homes of other students. Gradually in this way the range of his acquaintanceship widened. He found himself becoming interested in his new friends, and felt pleased to think that they were becoming interested in him. He hastened to tell Don Bryden of all this, at first so that the Professor should see that he was carrying out his instructions, but later because it interested him to talk about them, and it seemed to him that it must interest Don Bryden too.

Of all those whom he got to know in this way, Douglas Smith attracted him most. Richard was amused by Douglas's pale shyness, and was drawn to him by the intensity of feeling on many points which he discovered underlay this shyness. In company, or whenever he met him alone, Douglas was tongue-tied to the point of being dumb, but after a little, when he was sure of his friend, or sure of his subject, he would talk with great rapidity, though always in a curiously quiet voice. As he was the only child of parents who doted on him his shyness, which was a characteristic, had become intensified by lack of contact with other children. But children take unattractive as well as attractive qualities from contact with one another, and

Douglas had avoided the drawbacks as well as missing the advantages of a more normal childhood. At twenty years of age he had still the rather sweet, innocent smile that a young child might have; a trusting, affectionate quickening of his features which Richard found most attractive. He had been solitary all his life, and his loneliness had given him an opportunity to think without having his views affected by those of others. This concentration explained his intensity, for what he felt, he felt deeply. He was by nature humane and gentle; the thought of oppression and cruelty revolted him. When the Spanish War started, his sympathy for the Spanish people, and his passionate abhorrence of the army clique which he thought had started the civil war, were so fiercely aroused that they threatened his whole life with an upheaval; and his fond fearful parents looking on at this earthquake riving the soul of their beloved child were in despair. Richard met Douglas when the Spanish War was approaching the climax, and Douglas was contemplating leaving everything to throw himself into the breach. Of this idea he talked to Richard at great length on their many walks together.

Sometimes Gordon Vyland was with them. Gordon was the youthful image of his father; thin, neatly dressed, his hair always carefully brushed, his mind and his ideas as well ordered as his appearance. His own plans for his future were carefully arranged. He meant to take a law degree, and to go into his father's office. His views on everything were conventional and conservative. There was nothing he desired to have changed, no wrong that he thought ought to be righted. In this respect he was a marked contrast to Douglas. He was a good-looking boy, with the complexion of a girl, or rather of a baby, for his skin had that delicate peach-bloom appearance that the skin of the very young has. His eyes were grey and large, and such emotions as he allowed himself to feel were mirrored in them with perfect clarity. But there was very little that he did allow himself to feel. To anything unpleasant or painful he shut his mind as firmly as though he had pulled down a blind to veil the horrid sight from him. He was purely and quite deliberately selfish, Richard observed, after he had watched him for a little while. But he was also intensely ambitious, and he very much desired his friends to think well of him. Richard found himself liking Gordon very much, in

spite of the faults of character he could plainly see in him. He could not help feeling that Gordon meant him to like him, and so soon as he was sure that he did, he would bother no further with him. In spite of that Richard willingly yielded himself to the young man's charm.

A fourth member of the University who often accompanied them on the walk back across the bridge was Tom Sproule. Beneath the innocent face of a child, Tom had, as Richard quickly discovered, a heart as pleasantly wicked as might be found in the whole province of Alberta. But he had the happy faculty of making shocking behaviour seem no more reprehensible than the high-spirited frolic of a lamb in spring. Sandy had been but a vulgar sinner, Richard now realised; Tom was young, fresh and enthusiastic; he gave to indulgence in the same* vices that had occupied Sandy's whole thoughts a cleaner, healthier and altogether happier air. To Douglas's sober thoughts, as well as to Gordon's well-defined and utilitarian ambitions, he offered the contrast of a splendid haphazardness, and one side of Richard's restless nature was attracted by him. Like Gordon, he was handsome, but unlike him, he was not neat. He had a strong figure; he was muscular, his frame was well-built, he walked with the lithe step of a wild animal. He invariably wore a cheap tweed jacket, which fitted his broad shoulders very well, and an unpressed pair of trousers tucked into thick socks which showed just an inch or two above great thick boots. Walking across the narrow pathway on the bridge with his three friends, and thinking about them, Richard observed that Tom walked like a panther, lean-flanked, highly-strung, yet superbly self-confident. Watching Douglas Smith's large frame lumbering along beside him, Richard thought that if Tom was like a panther, Douglas was like an elephant, steady, purposeful, indestructible, a massive force. Pursuing this fancy, he thought that Gordon walked like a cat, delicately and slyly. With their coat collars turned up, and their caps pulled down over the tips of their ears to prevent them freezing, the four young men marched over the bridge nearly every afternoon in the winter, ducking their heads now and then behind a girder to take shelter from the fierce north-east wind that blew down the river valley, and emerging after a moment's pause, laughing and talking all at once, just for the pleasure of feeling the skin of their faces

relax from the stiff, painful tautness of the cold through the moment's shelter they had had.

The cold was intense. Richard had known nothing like it in the East. For weeks the temperature stood at 36 degrees below zero. Occasionally a chinook wind blew from the south, and the temperature fell to 5 or 10 below zero. But once a dead pallor filled the north-eastern sky, the very atmosphere seemed to hang immobile, and a cold as though the sky had cracked and was flooding the world with its great store of icy air, fell upon the land. The temperature dropped to 56 degrees below zero. Even the wheels of the street-cars found it difficult to turn in this tight-stretched atmosphere without cracking. A great silence ensued, and an uneasy sense of some doom impended. But after a week the sun came out, the earth, and the air above it, seemed to relax as though relieved from some awful tension; and time which had seemed to stand still, moved on again towards the longed-for spring. Each winter, when the cold snaps came, the older and frailer inhabitants of the city thought, "We can never stand another spell like this. It will be the death of us." But they survived, and forgot when spring came each year the horrors they had known.

2

On fine Sundays during the winter a number of young people from the University would hire a flat-bottomed sleigh from the hacking stables, and be driven out the eight miles to Acadia. There one of the lighter farm sleighs would be waiting already harnessed, and with Charlie sitting impassively on the box. They would go into the house for a moment to get warm, and would then come out with Elaine now added to their party, and be driven on by Charlie the two or three miles beyond the estate to a place where there were two short steep hills sloping down to a wide lake known as Morland's Lake. In a more or less sheltered cove by the shore, Andrew had built for Elaine and her friends some years before a log cabin, consisting of only one room. He had put in a Quebec stove which kept the place beautifully warm, and on which coffee could be made. Here they could sort out their skis and snowshoes, and sometimes their skates, for if there was not too much snow, the lake,

in this sheltered corner at least, provided a wonderful place to skate.

One bright Sunday morning in January Charlie drew up his team with a fine flourish beside the log cabin, and out of the sleigh tumbled happily Elaine and a dozen of her friends. There had been a heavy fall of snow a few days previously, and as there had been but slight frost afterwards, the snow had remained white and powdery and light on the branches of the pine-trees and the poplars which surrounded the cabin. The shouts of the visitors, and the energy which they displayed, disturbed the delicate burden which hung so lightly upon the trees, and every now and then there was a thump as a heap of white dazzling snow fell from a tree on to the hard ground, raising a little shower of fine white spray.

Charlie and the horses were the only figures in that sunlit landscape which moved with any appearance of deliberation. The others seemed to run about aimlessly, throwing up their arms and turning their faces to the sky as though enraptured with the delight of living in such pleasant circumstances. And indeed, people with less reason to be happy than they, people older and less healthy, might have been invigorated by the lovely air and the pure untarnished beauty of this little cove.

The sky above was a clear, pale blue, with just enough breeze stirring the upper air to prevent the light from appearing hard and to keep off the frost. The figures running about below could see the open sky if they looked up directly overhead; otherwise they glimpsed it through the green branches of the pines which each bore their burden of unsullied snow. The 'blue depths beyond seemed both less pale and more remote seen through the branches of the trees. These, with their white coronets of snow, piercing the still, deep emptiness of the sky, reminded Richard, who was standing quietly for a moment beside Elaine, of some moment in the past when as a small boy he had stood beside his mother on some bright Sunday morning at church. A feeling of happiness that he believed he had felt then seized him again now, not ordinary, unthinking happiness, which is effervescent, and can subside, but that happiness which is contentment, which pervades the whole body and dies more slowly away.

And with that contentment flooding through him, he looked down at Elaine standing beside him. She was looking at him

not with that half-amused, ironical glance which, he suddenly realised with a stab of impatience, everybody wore here, but with an earnestness, with an inquiring look, as though in the next minute she would ask him something of the deepest importance. Around them there could be heard the shouts of the others: out of the corners of their eyes, as it were, they could see the flashing colours of their companions' clothes, their faces red with exercise and hilarity, the brown glistening flanks of the huge team shining in the sun, as Charlie led them away to a sheltered lean-to which stood a few yards away from the cabin. They were conscious of all this, and could at any moment have answered any question shouted at them by their companions. Nevertheless, for a minute or two, they were enclosed in a golden and white world of their own. They looked at each other questioningly, they were aware of each other, and with that the constraint that there had been between them for these several months was shattered. Yet they did not speak. Elaine turned aside to answer a question shouted at her by Phyllis Trevor, while Richard wonderingly watched the firm, beautiful line of her cheek in profile. Then Tom Sproule, wrestling with the skis on the floor of the sleigh, called out, "Hey, Richard, bear a hand with these and stop admiring the scenery. You'll have a better view from the top of the hill."

He smiled at Tom and walked towards the sleigh. Such a feeling of carefree happiness suddenly engulfed him that he wanted to shout aloud with mirth, and he looked about him eagerly for something that he felt certain was funny and exciting, and which would explain why he felt he must laugh uproariously. The girls had gone into the hut to start the stove, and Doug and young Gordon Vyland, with twin brothers called Farebrother, had gone in among the trees to find some fallen branches for the fire. Charlie, having thrown blankets over his beasts and given them some hay, had lit his pipe and was wandering back to the sleigh with his hands thrust into his mackinaw pockets, and his chin tucked down into the collar of his coat. Tom Sproule was sorting out the skis and throwing them over the side of the sleigh into the snow.

"What are you looking so darned cheerful about?" he asked Richard,

"It's such a lovely day," responded Richard, with such

enthusiasm that Tom, his back bent over the skis, looked up at him with a suspicious eye.

"It's been like this ever since morning," he grunted. "Haven't you got used to it yet? You're a queer guy."

"Am I, Tom? I believe you're right. I think I'm what you'd call a mutt. I've been missing something all these months, and I've just wakened up to what it was."

"Yeah?" said Tom briefly and inquiringly. "Tell Uncle Thomas. You act like a guy in love, or like one that's had a narrow escape. It isn't natural to stand about looking as self-satisfied and happy as you're doing. What have you wakened up to?"

It was on the tip of Richard's tongue to say "Elaine," so anxious was he to share his secret discovery with someone, so engaging and friendly was Tom's good-natured face. But he restrained himself. Charlie came up to the sleigh just at that moment, and Richard turned to him.

"How are you, Charlie?" he asked.

Charlie gave a start. "Why, I'm all right, Dick," he replied. "I seen you before to-day, ain't I?"

"Oh, sure, Charlie, but I didn't ask you how you were before."

"Well, I'm okay, doing dandy," responded Charlie. "And the sooner you kids buzz off up that hill, and I can get in and sit by that fire, the better I'll feel. It's colder than a barrel of monkeys. You get inside there, Dick, and roust them girls out. I'll build up the fire while you're all gone."

"Sure I will, Charlie." He went to the door of the cabin and looked in. He looked at Elaine and she looked at him. "Charlie wants us to get going," he said to her. "Can I carry your skis up for you?"

"Thank you, Richard. Yes, please. I'm just coming, if you'll wait. We can walk up together."

She went to a mirror on the wall and pulled on her cap, tucking in her curls. She had her back to him as she did this, but he could see her face in the mirror, and their eyes met there, and again they looked at each other wonderingly as they had done in the snow outside. Elaine's fingers, busily touching her hair, paused for a moment. Then her gaze broke away from Richard, and with a hand to each side of her cap she pulled it down firmly on her head, as though with that action she said, "I won't be silly any longer."

They were silent as they walked up the hill. Elaine walked ahead, Richard behind her, carrying the two pairs of skis on his shoulders. Nearly all the rest of the party were ahead of them so that the path they followed to the top was fairly well beaten down. Behind them Douglas Smith and Phyllis Trevor followed, and they were nearly as silent as Richard and Elaine were. In front there were shouts and laughter, and trippings-up and tumblings in the snow, and the general hilarity produced by the lovely day and the congregation of youthful spirits. But a shyness had fallen between Richard and Elaine. It would have been difficult to talk save by shouting, for they walked one behind the other. It was impossible to shout after the looks that had been exchanged between them. So silently they climbed the hill, Richard from behind watching Elaine's small figure, and wondering to himself what their day together was to bring forth.

It was a twenty-minute climb to the top of the hill, the descent of which in skis could be made in three minutes. At the top they paused to fasten on their skis. Before strapping on his own, Richard knelt on the snow to fasten the buckles of Elaine's. With his hands exposed to the cold, he fumbled with the leather thongs, conscious that his awkwardness was prolonging the pleasure he felt from kneeling beside her. He had so, often watched her with detachment during the last few months, that he was, in the midst of his new happiness, surprised that he should now be so thrilled by the nearness of her. He rose awkwardly to his feet, brushing the snow off his knees and hands, and bent to fasten on his own skis. Then he straightened up and looked down at the still white surface of the lake three hundred feet below them. The tracks of the other skiers wound down over the hillside, ending far out on the lake where the run came to an end, and where already some of the party could be seen like small black dots against the white background of the frozen lake. They were alone on the top of the hill, for even Douglas and Phyllis, who had come up behind them, had started away.

Elaine looked at him. "Will you start?"

He was reluctant to leave their isolation and join the others, but he could think of no excuse to continue standing on the brow of the hill. He pretended that a strap on one of his skis still needed adjusting, and he knelt down to do it. A sudden shyness overcame him, but he heard his own voice speaking.

"You don't really love that Englishman you're supposed to be going to marry, do you, Elaine?" •

She was silent, and he dared not look up.

"Who told you about that, Richard? Nobody is supposed to know."

He stood up and faced her, his young face looking very grim. "I watched him kissing you."

"That wasn't like you, to spy."

"I wasn't spying," he protested indignantly. "That Sunday, when we were all out walking together, and we had gone ahead, I came back for you, and just as I turned a bend in the road I saw him put his arms about you and kiss you. So I didn't interrupt. I went away. He's such a solemn, middle-aged cove I can't believe he would have taken that liberty with you if he hadn't been asking you to marry him. And you must have said yes, because you showed no signs of reluctance at being kissed."

"And is that why you've avoided me all these months?"

"I haven't avoided you, but I didn't want to thrust myself on you."

"But I wanted you to, Richard." She was like a little girl appealing for something. She threw out her hands in a helpless gesture.

"Why did we have to wait all these months to tell each other this?"

"Then you don't love him, you aren't going to marry him?"

"I don't know, Richard. I am supposed to, but I don't know him. He writes me letters all the time, and I answer him, but I'm not getting to know him any better. Isn't it awful, I forget sometimes what he looks like. I have to go and look at his photograph to remind myself. It's all terribly hopeless, isn't it?"

"Hopeless," laughed Richard, "not a bit of it. It's very hopeful. For me," he added with a grin, his shyness now replaced by the self-confidence characteristic of him.

He drew near to her, moving sideways on his skis, feeling very aggressive and afraid now of nothing. "Before we go down the hill, kiss me once, Elaine." And when she looked at him alarmed, "To show me you bear me no grudge for the neglect of the past few months. Kiss me, Elaine."

He took one of her gauntleted hands in his, and pulled her towards him.

"Richard, don't," she protested.

"Elaine, darling. Ever since the first moment I saw you . . . Elaine . . ."

His lips brushed against her cool cheeks, and he saw her dark eyes look at him in a worried way. Then awkward because he still stood on skis, but with his old impetuosity in full flood in him, he threw his arms about her, found her lips with his, and gave up his whole heart to her in a kiss.

After a moment he released her.

"Richard," she said, pushing against his shoulders with her hands, "they'll see us from below. Come on, let's go."

He stood smiling at her.

"Don't look so pleased with yourself," said Elaine. "Come on, let's start."

He continued to smile, his lips parting in a wider grin.

"Oh, Richard," she complained, smiling herself. Suddenly she leaned over on her skis, kissed him swiftly on the cheek, then with a call of "good-bye," dug her ski-poles into the snow, and started swiftly down the hill on her run. Richard threw back his head, and laughed exultantly at the blue sky, then dug his own poles into the hard snow, and was off like the wind after her.

3

They made two or three runs before lunch. Then at a call from Charlie, they took off their skis and tramped from the lake towards the open cabin door. The Quebec stove was glowing with heat, and the atmosphere inside the cabin, mingling the smell of coffee, fried bacon, and wood smoke from a leaking stove-pipe, aggravated their hunger and emphasised their feeling of well-being. The small room echoed with their voices. Charlie, with his pipe clenched in the corner of his mouth, and a food-sack from the sleigh tied about his middle, dashed backwards and forwards from the stove to the table, now with the frying-pan, now with the coffee.

"Lord's sake, Peter, out of the way. You might have scalded yourself."

"Charlie, what's this bit of frizzle? Say, I could eat ten times that amount."

"Look out, Elaine, coming over." A sweater and a cap

whistled through the air, hit the stove-pipe, and dropped on to the stove. A smell of burning cloth arose.

"Now who done that?" demanded Charlie, seizing the smoking object and beating it out against his apron. "Miss Elaine, your young friends . . ."

"Hey, move over. Now do you expect me to sit on this . . .?"

"Gosh, I'm hungry. I could eat a horse."

"Say, where's my grub, Charlie? There isn't enough to go round. Old Charlie's been having a private tuck-in."

"You wait your turn, Raymond." This from Charlie to one of the Farebrother twins. "Ladies first. Why, Miss Phyllis, she ain't been served yet."

"C'mon, you old hash-slinger. You don't call chucking that bacon about in the frying-pan serving, do you? Ladies, hell. They ain't no ladies. They're our friends."

As they got down to their food, silence descended, and Charlie had time to wipe his brow, fill his pipe afresh, draw himself a cup of coffee, and come and sit at one end of the table and gaze at them benevolently.

"How you getting along, Douglas?" he ventured. Doug was always his favourite.

"Pretty good, Charlie."

"How's them damn' greasers making out, son? Settled their disputes, yet?"

Not yet, Charlie. It looks pretty bad for the Republicans."

Charlie hadn't the faintest idea who the Republicans were, but judging from Douglas's tone that they were his party, he clicked his tongue sadly.

"Too bad, Doug. I guess all them Europeans are a pretty bad lot. Guess there'll be another war before we're all much older, eh?"

"Yes, there will, Charlie."

"But this time we'll keep out, eh, son? We lost enough damn' men the last time, and look at all the good it done. Why, if we was in it, all you kids would be going off to fight. And what the hell for? To raise some new Hitler ten years from now? No, sir. I guess we learnt our lesson."

Doug shifted uncomfortably on his hard seat. He didn't want to launch out on the topic that occupied all his thoughts, not when the party was so happy and all his friends were here.

de smiled sadly and apologetically at everyone to remind them that Charlie, not he, had started this discussion. Richard could guess at his feelings.

"I don't suppose it will be up to us, Charlie," he said. "If these Nazis attack England, I guess we'll have to go."

"You're English," said Charlie, shrewdly getting at the root of Richard's argument. "Most of these kids have never seen England. It don't mean any more to them than Germany or France does. It's just a place."

"Yes, but a special sort of place," said Richard. "It's where we all came from originally. You speak the same language, and have the same feelings about things. It means something special to you, Tom, doesn't it, and you, Doug?"

"I don't know that it means anything special," said Tom slowly. "It's more familiar to me than any other country because I've naturally read more books about it, and I've seen more pictures of it. But my people haven't lived there for over two hundred years. Like Doug's ancestors, mine came over the border from the State in 1812. To tell you the truth, Richard, you've proved an exception, but usually we don't like Englishmen as much as we do other Europeans."

"Europeans?" said Richard, smiling. "Surely you don't call us Europeans. Why, we're the same as you. It's everybody else who are foreigners." He felt suddenly deprived of support; he had a feeling of being isolated and withdrawn from them, of not sharing in their unity. His eyes sought Elaine's, and because she was smiling at him in a friendly, affectionate way, he felt emboldened to speak out.

"You won't let us down when the time comes," he said confidently. "What a pity it is that you don't know England! It must be like never having known your mother. Wait till the time comes." He nodded at them. "If she's really down and out, as they say she was last time, you'll come running all right. It will be a good thing. Then you'll get to know England, and love her. Why do you say that you don't usually like Englishmen? It isn't the people who matter, it's the land and what it stands for. England and Canada have the same ways, and a man can do what he likes. I hated Canada when I first came here, and now I love her; and I tell you it's the same sort of land, and in both countries there are the same sort of people. You'll come all right, if England is attacked."

Gordon Vyland said, smiling his prim smile, "Quite a speech, Richard. You'd make a good recruiting sergeant. But I'm not sure you're right. What you are saying is that when the moment comes, sentiment in us will prevail over reason. All you've said is that our way of life is the same as yours", and so that you may keep on with your way, for ours out here isn't in any kind of danger, we'll rush to save you. Perhaps, and perhaps not. It depends on whether you get yourselves into trouble, or are forced into it. You've made a pretty good mess of things, you know. We did our share in the last war, but we had our own country to come back to; and having done our share we left you to carry on and look after yourselves. You haven't done it very well. You've been careless and you've been drifting towards trouble again. I don't know; we may come back again to help, but you mustn't count on it. Tom's right. We haven't got a special feeling about England, most of us. I think our fathers had, or at least they had a greater degree of feeling than we have. But in each new generation of Canadians the feeling is less. I dare say the same thing is true about all the other Dominions. You see, we don't call it the Mother Country any more. Our grandparents did; sometimes our parents do. But we call it England, and speak of it as we speak of Russia, France and Germany. All that is left is a common way of looking at things, and even that may change as time goes on."

"What do you say, Doug?" asked Charlie, looking at his pet.

Douglas put down his knife and fork, and looked shyly around the table. "What Gordon calls 'the common way of looking at things' is all that matters," he said quietly. "It isn't a question of what nationality you are any longer. In Spain there are Germans and Italians fighting on the army side because they think that is right, and Frenchmen, Englishmen, Russians and Germans fighting for the Republicans because they think that is right. When the next war comes, it may start with Englishmen and Frenchmen fighting against Italians and Germans, but *in* the end there may be Germans and Frenchmen fighting with England against Germans and Frenchmen. We'll be fighting, not to help England but to free ourselves. It won't be like the last war, just sending over contingents to help England win. We'll all go. We'll fight for survival, for plain survival and nothing else. Maybe when we have got

through the first and the worst part of it, and have survived, we can defeat the others and get rid of all the evil. But when we go, a year or two years from now, for it won't be much longer than that, we'll go because we'll have to."

Charlie drew fiercely on his pipe. "Conversation's getting too personal," he said. "We ain't giving the young ladies a chance. Come on now, Miss Elaine. You're the hostess. From what I read in books it's up to you to change the subject."

They all laughed, and the tension was broken.

4

After lunch they went out again, leaving Charlie to clear up. From the top of the hill behind them a series of smaller slopes and gentle rises stretched back to another hill about four miles distant, of approximately the same elevation as that from which they had skied that morning. On the farther side of this hill, there was a steep run-down, about three-quarters of a mile in length, to where the road by which they had come that morning wound by in a valley. They had decided to follow this route back to Acadia, and they started off about three o'clock in the afternoon, arranging to meet Charlie and the sleigh at the point where the road bounded the hill.

They started off in a group to climb to the top of the hill immediately behind them, and at the crest divided off into pairs, the boys fastening on the girls' skis before fastening on their own. As each couple finished their preparations they sailed down the first slope, and again at the last, by his own design and delay, Richard was left alone with Elaine. But now he was no longer shy. He was eager to speak to her of what was in his mind. They started to ski down the slope that ended half a mile farther on where the land rose again. Here they had to take off their skis and carry them on their shoulders up the next slight rise. The others were by now well ahead. Lifting both pairs of skis, which he had strapped together, on to his shoulder, Richard took Elaine's band in his as they started to walk along the track made by their companions.

"Elaine," he said, "I love you very much. So very much, I can't think of anything now except you. What can I do about it? I feel as if I could not bear to let you out of my sight for a

single moment. Tell me you love me, or at least that you don't think me too awful."

She squeezed his hand in answer to that, and looked at him and smiled in a way that gave him new confidence.

"Richard, it's awful. I said that I would marry him. I'm so sorry. I don't know why I did it. It sounds terribly scatter-brained, but I said that I would because I was sorry for him. He looked so sad."

"You must write and tell him now that you won't. You must say that you're going to marry me."

She smiled at him. "But you haven't asked me."

Richard said, looking at her with his grey eyes large with the feelings that were stirring within him. "If that's all that's required, I'll soon remedy that. Elaine, my love, my heart, will ..."

But a look of apprehension came over her face, and she stopped and turned swiftly, and put up her gloved hand over his mouth.

"Richard, don't. Don't say it. Not yet at least. Some time, darling Richard, I hope that you will. But not now. Not until I have written to him or spoken to him."

He let the skis drop from his shoulder and took her in his arms, and she clung to him with the eagerness and delight she was too inexperienced to hide. Their lips met, and fire danced through their young bodies, and they were possessed by a sense of happiness neither of them had ever known before. They felt that they could not bear to let each other go.

But at last they did, and walking on, Elaine was suddenly eager that her lover should think well of her.

"I think I have been in love with you for a long time, Richard. I only tell you that because—" she hesitated, then made bold by her happiness, she said, "because I have never wanted to kiss any one before so much as I have wanted to kiss you, I thought that even if you did not like me I should have to find some excuse to make you kiss me. But it wasn't because I'm a flirt. I'm not, you know, You don't think that, do you?"

"Of course I don't, darling I've been watching you ever since I came out West, ever since that first night I saw you on the Edmonton platform. You were like a little white moth in the dusk, and you flitted away just as quickly. I should have had a net to catch you then, and I wouldn't have lost all this time."

"The time hasn't been wasted for you, Richard. I'm sure you are much nicer now than you were then. The longer you stay in Canada the nicer you'll be, so that when you're an old man nobody will be able to resist you."

"I don't care what anybody else thinks of me, only what you do, Elaine."

She laughed happily and softly. Everything that he said was delightful to her.

He didn't answer. Instead, he stopped and looked at her suddenly and with anxiety. "Fm very average compared with you. You're so superb in every way. Do you really, really care for me?"

"Richard." She breathed the name. Her small heart-shaped face bent back a little, and she gazed at him through half-closed eyes. "I love you more than all the world."

He put out wondering hands to take her, and rapture lit up their hearts again as they kissed.

And so, wandering like lovers along the track more actively pursued by their companions, they came to where Charlie and the rest of the party waited when dark had fallen for half an hour.

Charlie was fretful. "I was nearly coming back to look for you, Miss Elaine. What kept you? I was getting blamed anxious."

"We were just talking, Charlie. I didn't notice how much we had fallen behind until it got dark."

"Talking!" said Charlie scornfully. "You hop quickly into the sleigh. These horses are getting cold."

"Talking!" the others chuckled, as Richard and Elaine clambered into the sleigh, finding places on the floor amongst the straw.

"Bit cold to stand about and do that."

"Having an argument, or was Richard merely explaining what a debt we all owe to England?"

Richard and Elaine did not answer. Sitting side by side against the backboard, their arms linked, their hands touching, they were conscious of each others nearness, and of the happiness surging through them like a sunlit, rushing stream.

The party started singing, as they always did on the return journey. "Dinky Joe" was an old favourite, and especially popular because topical allusions could be worked into it.

Dinky Joe,
The kinky-haired young rascal,
To his Mama bringing always heaps of woe.
You know Joe?
He's the guy from Rocky Mountain House,
A Latin lover, and a louse.
Some beau is Joe.

He loved a Rancher's daughter
And she loved him so,
But no matrimonial halter
Ever caught young Joe.
He had his fun, departed,
Leaving Mabel broken-hearted,
And went back to Rocky Mountain House,
That louse, young Joe.

He'd rob blind men of their pennies
If he needed dough. . . .

Their voices rose, young and hilarious into the night sky. Tom and Belle and Nellie were happy because they were headed homeward, and the sleigh was drawing easily behind them. Charlie chewed on his pipe, dreaming of the past, happy to have the young people at his back. And in the darkness of the sleigh Elaine and Richard sat side by side, so content with each other that they had no need to speak.

C H A P T E R E I G H T E E N

A NEW and brighter world seemed to open about Richard. He wrote at great length to his parents telling them about Elaine, and they responded with enthusiasm, with expressions of longing and hopes to meet her, requests for pictures of her, and anxious inquiries as to the status of her parents. Richard answered at still fuller length, sending some snapshots which Elaine had given him, and supplying the Danbys with a pen-picture of Acadia and the MacTaviot family which roused his

family's handsomest expectations and hopes for their fine son. They were surprised that Richard begged them not to write to Elaine or her parents, and a little shocked to hear that she was already half-engaged to another Englishman, but they entertained no doubts that if there were two suitors for her hand, she would eventually bestow it on Richard. The question of what Richard was to marry on, financially, did not occur to them other than as one of those troublesome but unimportant details which always tend to stand in the way of any desired object. Richard had not thought it necessary to mention to his parents that there was no hope of his marrying for three years, that is, until he had taken his degree. The wait seemed in the new glow of his happiness such a little thing, and meanwhile he could see Elaine every day, and often spend the evenings with her.

In February, when the weather was very cold, the Brydens asked him to come and spend a few weeks with them. The Professor's health had failed considerably during that winter, and Rose Bryden felt that he ought not to drive Martha over the slippery, ice-bound roads to the University each day. She also felt that he wanted cheering up, and it was at her suggestion that Don asked Richard to dinner one night, when, without having prepared Don for what she was about to do, she proposed to Richard that he should come and stay with them while the cold weather lasted and help Don by driving him to and from the University. After several months of the comparative rigours of University Residence board and lodging, Richard found the invitation attractive, and the prospect of spending happy evenings with Don and Rose Bryden, of whom he had grown very fond, was an additional joy. It did not mean that he would miss seeing Elaine. He could still go to Acadia on Saturdays and Sundays, and there would be odd evenings during the week when he could call on her at the Women's Residence, or she could come to the Little Brown House. He jumped at the invitation, and Don, while protesting that his frailty was nothing like what Rose supposed it to be, was pleased, too. Gathering Richard into the house, not for an occasional meal or an evening, but to stay, gave him the feeling that he had got a son at last. He beamed with great affection on Richard.

"Really, in the hands of women, what are we, my boy? Mere clay, mere clay. But it will be very pleasant to have you

here. We are servantless at the moment, thank God, so that we need suffer no tyranny of meals at fixed hours, or feel beholden for our comforts to any one but our dear Rose."

The three weeks passed rapidly and enjoyably. Each night after supper while Don Bryden made the coffee upstairs by the fire in the study, Richard helped Rose with the washing-up. Each dish that they had used was washed twice, and then polished by Richard to a fine state of lustre before it was put back to stand on the china shelf. Rose had a passion for cleanliness and neatness, carried to such a point of zeal that nothing greasy was ever cooked or eaten in that house. While they worked they talked. Rose's white head and brown face bent over the sink, her sleeves rolled back and her long finely-tapered arms immersed in a white enamel dish full of suds as she talked in her soft southern drawl, imprinted on Richard's mind a memory he was never to forget.

Upstairs beside the fire they would find the Professor sunk in his armchair with a book, little wreaths of tobacco-smoke weaving out of the chair into the semi-darkness of the room, and the coffee in its little brass container sitting warming before the fire. They would all sigh with content when they settled down there for the evening, happy that the distractions of the day were behind them, and pleased at the prospect of the quiet evening ahead.

It was then that Richard's education properly began. What he learnt all day at the University was merely a summary of knowledge on certain subjects thrown out by his teachers as a fertilizer might be thrown on to the surface of an arid soil. What the Professor did in those fire-lit hours was to turn the soil. It had delighted Don Bryden in the early stages of their acquaintanceship to discover in Richard an intelligence, keenness, and a power of appreciation. What was lacking was knowledge and direction. In quiet talk beside the fire the Professor implanted the knowledge and gave direction to Richard's mind.

Their talk after dinner might fall on any subject in the field of English literature, a play of Shakespeare's, a verse from Chaucer, one of the eighteenth-century poets, an early novel or one of Dickens's, or one of Aldous Huxley's. Don Bryden would launch out upon one of the soliloquies which made what

he said seem quite unlike a professor's lecture, but rather the entertaining small-talk of an expert on his subject.

A new feeling of pleasures shared bound Richard to Rose and Don so that when, at the end of three weeks, they renewed their invitation, and begged him to stay at the Little Brown House until the end of term he did not hesitate but accepted with an emphasis that gratified the Brydens.

2

While his mind was being richly fed his heart was being equally sustained by the frequent days he spent at Acadia. The MacTaviots, observing what had come about between their daughter and Richard, were a little perturbed, Elspeth more than Andrew. Elspeth, being as most mothers are, primarily ambitious for her daughter's future, had become more easily reconciled than Andrew to the prospect of her marrying Ralph Harriman, and living so far away from them. She saw in her imagination Elaine as a London hostess, presiding over diplomatic dinners, mixing with the great people of the world; and when Elaine tired of that, say once a year, coming back to Acadia for a month or two, and refreshing herself with all the associations and happiness of her childhood. Andrew, less imaginative and more intuitive, was not impressed with Elspeth's picture of Elaine as a lady of importance in London. He preferred her closer at hand, even if it meant more humble circumstances for her. He wanted to see her children growing up near him. He had consented to this "understanding," for it was not officially an engagement, hoping secretly that what understanding there was might vanish in the absence of Ralph.

But he had not bargained for Richard. He had not reckoned that the end of Ralph might mean the beginning of someone else, especially of someone with such empty prospects as Richard. So when Elspeth pointed out the danger of Elaine's becoming too attached to Richard, and suggested that as it was now April they ought to take up with Lady Harriman the question-of their visiting England this summer, Andrew somewhat reluctantly agreed.

They thought it wiser not to tell Elaine of their decision until plans were all cut and dried. Elspeth wrote to Lady Harriman saying that they planned to visit England at the beginning of

June, and hoping that they might renew their acquaintanceship then. Within a fortnight came a long and pressing cable from Lady Harriman, saying that she would meet them at the boat, and that she hoped they would stay at Stratford Towers for June and July, before going on to the Continent or completing whatever itinerary they had in mind.

It was then that they told Elaine, and the result was not what they expected. Elspeth made the announcement at tea-time one Saturday afternoon when Richard was there, the cable having come that morning.

"I haven't told you yet, darling," said Elspeth, "but a cable came just before lunch from Lady Harriman asking us to stay with her for June and July. Daddy has been on to the C.P.R. about ships, and we've already made bookings for the *Empress* sailing from Montreal on May 25 th. We'll have to leave Edmonton about the 18th, as Daddy has a day or two of business things to do in Toronto before we leave. So we'll be off almost as soon as the term is over."

Elaine looked at her mother with wide-open eyes, and put down her cup with trembling hand.

"Mummy, why didn't you tell me that you were fixing that up?"

"But, darling, aren't you pleased? You knew what the general plan was, but we didn't want to tell you the actual date until it was finally arranged."

Elaine looked up swiftly at Richard, and then down again. She clasped her hands and rested them on her knee, and little lines of apprehension and worry rode up vertically between her brows. She looked like a little girl about to cry. There was a moment's embarrassed pause which Elspeth tried to fill by turning brightly to Richard.

"Don't you think she is a lucky girl, Richard? I'm sure you'd love the chance of a trip to England, wouldn't you?"

Richard did not answer Elspeth nor look at her. He stared instead at Elaine, his face set as stiffly as though it were a mask.

Elaine jumped up from her chair and ran over to where her father sat on the other side of the table. From behind him she bent down, put her arms around his neck, and pressed her small head against his.

"Daddy," she said, "I don't want to go."

"Why, my little kitten," he said, pulling her round in front

of him, "do you want to stop your hard-working parents from having a well-deserved holiday? I've been looking forward to this trip all winter."

"Oh, Daddy." She smiled at him through eyes that glistened with the force of tears behind them. "But I don't want to go to the Harrimans."

"But, you know, that is part of the engagement. We arranged that when they were here last year. We could hardly go to England and not visit them."

"Then, Daddy, I can't go," said Elaine with emphatic finality.

"But why, dear?" pursued Elspeth.

Elaine was silent for a minute, frowning down at her clenched hands. Then with great courage she looked at her mother, first glancing swiftly sideways at Richard, and said quietly:

"Because, Mother, I'm in love with Richard, and I can't marry Ralph as I said I would."

"Darling," laughed Elspeth. "This must be very embarrassing for Richard. Andrew, why don't you two go out for a stroll and leave us to talk this over."

"Come along, Richard, my boy," said Andrew, rising and taking out his pipe. "Let us go round to the stables and see Nick. He is breaking in a new foal this afternoon."

But they didn't go to the stables. Once outside the house, his heart hammering with the urgency of his desire to get this over, Richard took Andrew's elbow.

"Would you mind, sir, if we didn't go round to the yard? There's something I want to say to you very much. Can we just walk along the road towards the gate?"

Andrew smiled to himself, while at the same time wishing himself well out of this. I knew, he thought, that I should never be any good at this part of a father's duty. I'll have the Harriman business all over again, but this time I'll definitely have to say "no" to this rather nice boy.

He paused to light his pipe, looking at Richard over his cupped hands: then threw away the match and they strode out together.

"Well, young fellow?" said Andrew encouragingly.

Richard swallowed convulsively, then remembering Elaine's courage in the drawing-room, took a grip on his nervousness and said: "I'm in love with Elaine, sir. I want to marry her. I

want her to wait for me until I am through the University. Don't take her to England. She doesn't want to marry Harriman. It'll be so awkward and difficult for her."

Andrew put his arm through Richard's. How much nicer this direct approach, he thought, than Harfiman's. That fellow, with his suavity and details of his rent-rolls, and so very flowery and eloquent into the bargain. What a nice chap in many ways this one is! I'd like to have him for a son.

"I don't blame you, Richard, for being in love with her. She is a nice child, you're both nice children. But forgive me, it's my duty to say this, you *are* both children. You're still at the University. You haven't any prospects. All that nonsense, you know. But there it is. I believe I'm supposed to look out and see that my daughter makes a good match. Lord knows, I don't want her to marry at all, but she is bound to, so I have to take all these precautions and discourage ineligible suitors and cast about for likely ones. It's a terrible business, isn't it?"

Andrew had adopted the line of breezily passing off an embarrassing situation, but the young man's face refused to relax its tight look under the easy badinage.

"But she loves me, sir. I mean, she is just as ready to wait as I am. Why bring her into contact with Harriman again if it will make her unhappy?"

"Girls are not supposed to know their own minds, Richard. She was very happy with Ralph Harriman while he was here. You know, I suppose, that what they call an 'understanding' exists between them? Elaine has told you? Well, you see, she has seen a lot of you this winter, and nothing at all of the estimable Harriman. Turn about is only fair. Let her see a lot of Harriman this summer and nothing of you, and then let her decide. Don't you agree?"

There was not much to answer to that. Richard tried, but knew he would fail before he tried.

"But it will embarrass her, sir. It would be easier for her to write to him and tell him than to say it. In fact, I believe she has already written."

"Has she, by Jove?"

"Yes, I think so, sir. She wanted to be fair, you see."

"Well, then, it's up to you to be fair, and let her go away with us for a few months. If Ralph Harriman has accepted

her refusal and our presence isn't too welcome to them in their home, we can easily move on. But go, I think, we must/'

They had reached the gate and stood there leaning against it for some minutes. Overcome by the hopelessness of the argument, Richard wanted to leave it and get back to Elaine. Andrew noticed his tentative shufflings, and again smiling to himself, said, "Let's get back to the house, and then you'and Elaine go off for a walk by yourselves. I'm sorry, my boy."

He squeezed Richard's arm affectionately, and wished that he had not had to behave in such brutal fashion.

When they were within a hundred yards of the house, at a turn in the drive, they came across Elaine walking swiftly towards them.

"Uncle Silas said you had gone this way," she explained. "Daddy, I want to have a talk to Richard. Do you mind if we leave you?"

She had taken Richard's hand in a protective way as soon as she had come up, and she stood close in front of him looking at her father. She really does love the boy, thought Andrew unhappily, noticing that for the first time she had looked at her father as the intruder, and observing that the gesture with which she took Richard's hand was instinctive.

"Of course, darling. I'll see you both at dinner."

Richard and Elaine watched Andrew turn the bend in the road before they looked at each other.

"You're going?" said Richard, looking into her eyes.

"Don't talk about it here, Richard. Let's go over to Kee-wayden Woods and sit on a bank there. I want to get right away from every one."

They followed a path that led off from the drive and wound over rough grazing land towards a little copse of beech trees which crowned the small rise in the ground. It was here, Richard remembered, that they had set off to walk that first Sunday he had met Harriman. But here he and Elaine had come many times since, and the memoir of that first painful Sunday afternoon had been erased from his mind by the many happy hours they had spent together there. Now the details of that afternoon came back to him, increasing his feeling of anxiety and utter hopelessness.

They crossed a wide ditch through which water had once

run but which was now dry except when the snow melted in the spring. The remnants of the winter's snow, in glazed and shiny little patches, still lay in the more shaded spots at the bottom of the ditch, but elsewhere the new green grass was showing, and the light wind of a warm afternoon in late spring danced through the tops of the beech trees, and brought with it the scent of warmer lands and new-turned earth to the south. They sat down side by side at the base of one of the great trees, and for a moment were silent, looking out over the vast acres of Acadia to the low-lying hills that separated Edmonton from them. Overhead a bird and its mate squeaked their protest at this disturbance of their privacy, and fluttered about in a futile attempt to distract these human eyes from their newly-built nest. Richard looked up at them and then turned to Elaine and tried to smile bravely at her. "Everybody's being upset to-day," he said. "Even the birds."

"Richard," she said, "darling. Don't look so sad."

"Nothing has happened," he replied, "to make me feel gay. If you go I shall never see you again. You'll marry Harriman."

"Darling," she replied, leaning towards him, her eyes misted with adoration of him, "I won't. I promise you I won't."

He put out his arms as he had done so many times this winter, and the old feeling of contentment and fulfilment rose in him like a surge of water released from a dam, when he felt her body against his. But the marks of pain remained on his face even when his lips had met hers, and they had yielded themselves to their feeling of love for each other.

For ten minutes they sought in their embraces to wipe out the thought of the shadow that had come between them. But the more deeply their feelings were aroused the more they were conscious of the hurt that had been done them. With a groan Richard sat up, ran his fingers through his hair, and stared out over the landscape at the hills, and at the low-lying land at their base now darkening in the evening light.

Elaine, stretched on the ground beside him, raised herself on to one elbow and looked at his set profile.

"Richard, darling, we mustn't be unhappy about it. I've given you my promise."

He was silent and youthfully grim. .

"You don't doubt that I'll keep it, do you?"

"No, Elaine darling, of course you will," he said, turning

and looking at her. "But I can't bear not to have you here with me. I can't stand the thought of that fellow, Harriman."

"I can't put it as strongly as that, Richard. But I can much more pleasantly bear the thought of you."

They smiled at each other, but there was no happiness in their smiles.

"Let's go back," said Elaine, "it's nearly time for dinner."

Richard stood up, and then gave her his hands to pull her up, and as he had done so often and so happily before, he brushed off her skirt and sweater. But he did not, as he usually did, blow imaginary bits of grass from the nape of her neck, and kiss her there to put a seal upon the task done. Elaine noticed the omission. Silently they walked away from Keewayden.

3

Richard was staying as usual for the week-end. After dinner, which had been an embarrassing meal simply because the topic in everybody's mind was being so carefully avoided, Elaine said to him, "Let's go and visit Uncle Silas. He didn't look very well when I saw him sitting out in the garden this afternoon."

Glad of any excuse to get away from Elaine's parents, Richard jumped up and followed Elaine out of the room. They crossed the yard to the quarters where Nick and Uncle Silas and Charlie and Comma and Norah all lived, having bedrooms of their own but a communal sitting-room. Uncle Silas was sitting propped up in bed, and Charlie and Nick sat in chairs on either side of the bed.

"We're just visitin' Uncle Silas, Miss Elaine," explained Charlie, getting up and pushing his chair towards his young mistress. "Visitin' a sick man, and supposed to cheer him up, but it's more like being had up before the beak for being drunk and disorderly. He wants to know all that we've been doin', and then he tells us we've been doin' it wrong. He's cussed Nick for this* and me for that, and blamed if I don't think he's got enough spirit and energy to get up out of that bed and do a day's work himself if he wasn't, so to speak, swinging the lead."

Charlie beamed down benevolently on the parchment-coloured shrunken face of old Uncle Silas propped up against

the pillows, his illness and frustration combining to give him an expression of fierceness and irritability.

"How are you, Uncle Silas?" asked Elaine, sitting down on his bed, and taking the old man's hand in hers.

Uncle Silas bared his yellow teeth in a smile of welcome, then frowned at Charlie. "Get on, Charlie," he said irritably. "It's close on nine o'clock. What about locking up them mares?"

Charlie consulted his great silver watch.

"I make it only eight-thirty."

"That watch of yours," snarled Uncle Silas.

Charlie replaced it in his vest pocket with a smirk of complacency. "Ain't lost a minute since I bought it from a drunken land-agent nigh on twenty years ago. But I guess I can take a hint. Come on, Nick, Uncle Silas ain't got nothing more to say to us. We'll go and do our chores."

"And don't forget that sow that farrowed yesterday," called Uncle Silas fiercely at the retreating back of Charlie. "I never heard such a damned row as she was making early this morning. Likely enough you forgot to feed her last night. Forget her," yelled the old man, lest Charlie had not heard the charge in full.

His thin chest rose on a heavy sigh. Then the look of fierceness left his face and one of sweetness and great affection came over it as he gazed at Elaine.

"Well, how's my little girlie?"

"Quite well, Uncle Silas."

The old man frowned, and looked swiftly from under his bushy eyebrows at Richard.

"Who's been upsetting you?"

"Nobody, Uncle Silas. I'm not upset."

"Look here, Elaine. You tell me the truth." The old man squirmed angrily in his bed, and brushed an irritated hand over his forehead. "Everybody's telling me lies," he said petulantly. "Everybody's treating me like I was a sick old fool. I guess I am. The sooner I die the happier every one will feel."

"Oh, Uncle Silas, dear." She tugged gently at his hand to make him look at her, "It's only that I've got to go to England next month for the summer, and I don't want to go."

Uncle Silas lay still and frowned at her for a moment in silence.

"To meet that guy?" he demanded.

She nodded her head, half smiling at him.

Uncle Silas turned his head slowly and looked fixedly at Richard, then looked back at Elaine.

"You don't want to go, girlie?"

He looked at Richard again. Then he gave a little cackle of laughter.

' You don't want to leave your old Uncle Silas, is that it?"

Elaine smiled at him, but said nothing. Then after a moment's pause, Uncle Silas turned to Richard. "See here, Richard, go and talk to Nick for fifteen minutes, will you? I want to have a private conversation with Elaine."

Richard came round the bed and took the old man's other hand. Somehow he could sense that he had Uncle Silas's sympathy and support. He did not know what actual good that would do him, but some part of his feeling of depression was lightened by the knowledge that someone was on his side.

"Good-night, Uncle Silas," he said. "Sleep well. I'll be out in the yard with Nick or in his room, Elaine."

He and Nick were leaning over the yard gate when Elaine came out. The night was warm and starlit. A soft wind blew from the south in sudden little gusts, but it was close to the earth and smelt of the earth, and its vernal boisterousness had no effect on the dome of the sky, which was unclouded and sprinkled with a million small stars.

They parted from Nick and walked arm-in-arm towards the house. At the front door they stopped and kissed each other. "Don't let's sit up too late, Richard. It's unhappy in the drawing-room to-night."

So Elspeth must have felt, for, anxious that this day should come to an end, she gathered up her sewing at ten o'clock, and said, "It's time we were all in bed. Come, Andrew. Come on, Elaine. It will do you good to have an early night, Richard."

Richard parted from the three of them at his door, which was on a half-landing at the top of the first flight of stairs. Elspeth and Andrew's room was at the far end of the hall which ran along from the first landing, and Elaine's room and bathroom were in the same passage, but only half-way along.

Andrew and Elspeth said good-night to him first, then tactfully left Elaine alone to say good-night. "Come along when you've undressed, dear," said Elspeth to Elaine, "and say good-night to us."

Elaine waited until they had turned along their landing, then swiftly she flung one arm round Richard's neck, and whispered to him, "Darling, be in my dreams." Then she turned and ran up the remaining stairs, leaving Richard bewildered and unhappy, but—for some reason which he could not explain to himself—half-happy at the same time.

He undressed slowly, and knelt and said his prayers as he had always done. To-night the urgency of emotion that was within him distracted his thoughts while he repeated the old familiar phrases which had been taught him by his mother so many years before. Realising that his mind was wandering, and that he might as well be in bed as kneeling there in an attitude of supplication, but not asking for help or guidance, and instead simply submerged in self-pity and inarticulate longings; realising this, he gripped his hands more tightly together and shook his head, from old habit, to summon the image of God, and began to pray that his affairs might be put right, and that all might be well between him and Elaine. But he could not put into words or into his thoughts the depth of his passion for Elaine. The set phrases he had always used in his prayers, even when they were extemporaneous, could not contain his longing and love for her, and feeling defeated and unhappy he rose to his feet. He turned out the light and made his way to the window. There he drew the curtains, pulled up the wide window, leant his elbows on the sill, and looked out at the fields of Acadia lying peacefully under the starlit sky.

Every prominent feature of the land was clear in that dim half-light, but the rest was submerged in shadow and in the mist of this fresh spring night. But the features, a wood here, a hill there, the flash of silver that was the little river running to join the Athabasca: these were places remembered because on that-bright day or that white night in these last months, he and Elaine and others had gone there and been happy. Now, for the few months ahead seemed an interminable prospect, he would never know that happiness again. He had not realised how much his life had become bound up with Acadia and its inhabitants, yet how slight was the thread since it could be snapped by Elaine's going away. Burdened with these thoughts, and chilled by standing at the open window, he got into bed and his unhappiness drove him into sleep.

How long he had been asleep he had no means of knowing,

but suddenly he was wide awake, lying on his back, his open eyes staring at the ceiling of his room. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the window curtains shift slightly in the night breeze. He had not moved, he felt for some reason that he dare not move and he waited quietly for something to happen. Then suddenly he heard someone draw a little sobbing breath. He sat up quickly in bed. There kneeling beside him, her forehead buried in the clothes at the edge of his bed, was Elaine. She lifted her head, and the starlight coming in the window irradiated her face. Richard saw her dark eyes, and her teeth catching her lower lip as though to prevent it trembling, and he saw the little frill of her night-dress, the white V of her throat as she lifted her head. He stared at her, his heart beating furiously, but a sense of wonderful happiness opening in him, as a flower opens under the sun. He reached forward his hand and felt the smooth velvet stuff of her dressing-gown. Through that he could feel the warmth of her flesh. And suddenly he caught her to him, she half rose to her feet, and they clung to each other trembling. "I could not help it, Richard," she whispered. "I love you too much. I could not sleep without kissing you good-night, and promising again that I will love you, and you only, all my life."

"Darling Elaine!" He pressed her to him, rubbing his lips over her cheeks and across her eyelashes still wet with the tears she had shed while she knelt by the bed. He knelt there, holding her in his arms, so utterly content with this moment that he thought of nothing else until suddenly he felt her shiver.

"You must be cold, darling. Let me wrap this eiderdown around you."

She submitted, lying back on the pillow. He pulled the eiderdown off the foot of the bed and laid it over her, and as he finished doing that was aware that she lay there looking at him with large, wondering eyes that had followed every move he had made. He stared at her for a moment, then flung himself down beside her and took her slight body in his arms and strained her to him with such an agony of longing that he thought it could never be satisfied.

"I'm afraid, Richard," she whispered. Then again, as though to herself, "Afraid."

He had been tense and frightened himself, but when she said this some force that he had never felt before took possession of

him. Gentleness was in it, yet such a strength of purpose that all the indecision and unhappiness he had felt until that moment vanished, as her fear did too; and half-gently, half with fierceness, they fed at last their hunger.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I

ELSPETH and Andrew had finished breakfast next morning when Richard came down. Richard knocked at the hatch that led to the kitchen, and like a jack-in-a-box, Comma thrust his head through. "Won't be a minute, Mr. Richard, Norah's just going to fry you an egg. How did you sleep?"

"Like a top," answered Richard, feeling himself blush slightly. "Where's everybody?"

But Comma had not stayed for an answer. The hatch door was shut, and Richard was left alone in the dining-room. He wandered to the window and looked out on the field that fell away from the house. The sun was shining from a sky in which a few light clouds floated high. It promised to be fine all day, which was a relief, for they could be out of doors. Richard wondered how many people would be here to lunch. He knew that the Brydens would come, for they had arranged to take him back to the Little Brown House in the evening. Someone had said, too, that the Smiths were coming. Where was Elaine, he wondered? Was she avoiding him? A place didn't seem to be laid for her.

Comma came bustling in.

"Where's Miss Elaine, Comma?"

"Oh, she's having breakfast in bed, but she sent a message down by Norah I was to give you to say she would meet you in Uncle Silas's room at eleven o'clock, and she'd then walk down with you to meet the others that's coming out. Got everything you want, Mr. Richard?"

"Yes, thanks, Comma. Say, how's Uncle Silas this mornin'?"

"Not too good. He had a bad night. The chief, he's sent for Doc Smith. He was coming to lunch anyhow, but the chief he phoned him and asked him to come early. Left a message the

chief did. Couldn't get hold of the Doc or Mrs. Smith. Hespoke to their cook, and she never makes much sense. But I heard the chief say to Mrs., they had an upset at the Smiths' too. Seems like the whole world's in a turmoil," said Comma, with an air of satisfaction.

"What's gone wrong there, I wonder?" said Richard, half to himself.

"I don't know, but we'll soon know, soon as Doc comes," said Comma.

"Comma," said Richard, "will you do me a favour?"

"Granted sooner than asked," said Comma.

"Then ask Norah is she will go up to Miss Elaine and tell her that it's a lovely day out, and couldn't she make it a bit before eleven?"

"Why, sure, Mr. Richard."

"And, Comma."

"Sir," said Comma.

"Give her"—he paused—"my love, Comma."

Richard, amazed at his own boldness, then looked down at his plate with some embarrassment. He looked up in time to see Comma smiling back at him as he went through the door and his embarrassment became less painful. On Comma's face there was undeniably a look of partisan benevolence.

When he had finished his breakfast he got up and walked out into the yard. There he found Nick sitting on a bench in the sun polishing his own shoes with an air of complete absorption. He sat down beside him. Nick said, "Good-morning, Richard," barely pausing to look up from his task.

"Making rather a splendiferous job of them, aren't you, Nick? They look to me like courting shoes."

"Well, then, they look what they are, Richard. These shoes are going to take me into Edmonton this afternoon to see Elisaveta."

"Ah, how's that affair coming along, Nick?"

"It's coming along well," said Nick firmly.

"Any news, Nick, of the great date?"

Nick put down the shoe he was holding, and looked at Richard severely.

"It's about time you asked, Dick. Say, I thought we were friends. You come out to Acadia all the time. Sure, you see me. You come and talk to me. You say, 'How's it going,

Nick?' and that's about all I see of you or hear from you. Off you go with Miss Elaine, or some of these University fellows, and it's to hell with old Nick."

Compunction seized Richard. His friend was quite right. He put his hand on his arm.

"Nick, I'm sorry. What a rotten sort of cad I must have seemed! I — I can't explain it, Nick. Not yet, that is. Really, there's nothing to explain. Nick"—he moved up beside his friend on the bench, and looked at him with a winning, affectionate gaze—"Nick, I'm in love with her. With Elaine. Now, don't look so surprised. You knew it. But, Nick, she's wonderful. Oh, Nick, boy, I think she loves me too."

"What about this Englishman, Harriman?" asked the practical Nick.

Richard dismissed Harriman with a flip of his fingers.

Nick accepted his friend's dismissal of Harriman. He smiled with pleasure at the prospect of Richard's happiness. Then his face fell into serious thought again.

"She's got to wait, eh, Richard? You can't get married, or anything like that?"

"No," said Richard, "but it's only three years."

"Three years is a long time, Dick."

"Nonsense, Nick, not if you love somebody."

"O.K., Dick. Me," he said proudly, "I'm waiting just a month."

Richard sat up excitedly. "Nick, you old devil—you're going to marry Veta in a month, and you never told me."

Nick assumed an aggrieved expression.

"I was waiting for you to ask me. I thought you weren't interested."

"Nick," said Richard. "Well, I never."

"Mr. MacTaviot's going to let us live here. Veta, she's going to help in the house. It's swell," said Nick happily.

"I should say it's swell," said Richard. "In a month, eh? Just before the MacTaviots go."

"Yes, Dick. And look, I want you to be my best man, will you? The wedding's going to be out here. Mr. MacTaviot's letting us have two horses and a pack horse, and we're going to have a honeymoon going up the Athabasca Trail."

At this moment Elaine came out of the house. Richard had been looking forward to this moment, yet suddenly, as she

shut the door of the house behind her and turned towards them, a feeling of momentary nervousness took hold of him. He stood up and watched her walk across the yard. She was wearing a beige-coloured dress which gathered into pleats towards the neck. Over this she wore a white coat sweater unbuttoned. She looked so slim and girlish as she walked across the yard, and when she came up to them looked so fresh and bright-eyed, and fragrant still from her morning bath and dressing, that Richard's heart, as he watched her, swelled almost to bursting with the deep and passionate love he felt for her. She looked at him with no shyness or shadow of anxiety in her lovely dark eyes. Though Nick was there she put out her hand and touched the back of his lightly, and she said "Richard" softly as though idyllic happiness lay for her in touching his hand, in saying his name.

"Elaine/" said Richard suddenly, "Nick's going to be married. Of course, I suppose you know. I am the only one from whom the old curmudgeon kept the news."

Elaine smiled down at Nick, still busy with his polishing.

"It's going to be nice, Nick, having you and Veta here. We'll dance at his wedding, Richard. You're to be best man, Nick says."

While she had been talking she had quite naturally slipped her arm through Richard's. They stood there together in the sun, looking down at Nick busy at his task. On Elspeth, watching them from the window, the attitude of the little group, radiating happiness, understanding and affection, had a disturbing effect. She thought to herself, "These children are getting too fond of one another: the sooner I get Elaine away, the happier I'll feel"; and almost at the same moment she thought, "How sweet they look. What a pity that nice boy isn't older and more settled in life!"

2

She was aroused from these reflections by Comma announcing Doctor Smith.

"Alec," she said to him, coming forward from the window with outstretched hands, "my dear Alec, you look as though you had been up on a case all night. How wretched the lives of you doctors are! We should not have got you out here so

early in the morning, if it hadn't been that you and Joan and Douglas were coming to lunch anyway, and if Andrew had not been so worried about Uncle Silas. But sit down, Alec, and let me get you a cup of coffee before you go and see him. You look quite done in. Would you like a drop of whisky or brandy instead?"

Alec Smith stood there looking tired and ill, swaying a little on his feet, his eyes bloodshot, his face unshaven. Elspeth took his bag from his hand, and put her hand lightly on his shoulder to press him into a chair. He slumped down on the edge of it, and looked at her with haggard eyes.

"It's happened, Elspeth/" he said.

"What, Alec? Not Douglas?"

"Yes, he's gone. He went last Tuesday. We didn't say anything to anybody, naturally, for I hoped to get the boy back, and I didn't want to make him look a fool in the process. I got in touch with the Chief of Police. They bungled it, as you might have expected. He left a note for me, just saying, I'll write to you as soon as I am fixed up. Don't worry and don't try to stop me. My mind is made up. Just that, nothing more. No love to his mother, or anything like that. She's absolutely prostrated. You know what a fool she is about the boy. I've been up with her all the last few nights. She damned nearly went off her head. She's quieter now. We've heard at last, I had a telephone call from the young beggar this morning.

"Yes, I was saying. Trust the police to make fools of themselves. The only idea they had was that he must have gone west to the coast, or east to Toronto. They spent days telephoning along the line. I asked them not to issue a description, because I didn't want to shame the boy. This morning he telephoned from Calgary. He's joined the Air Force. Been in it three days. Said I couldn't get him back since he was over twenty-one, had his birthday, you know, only last week. He just waited for that and off he went. He couldn't even wait to finish this year's work at the University."

He sighed heavily, and ran his fingers through his bushy, grey-sprinkled hair.

"Poor Alec," said Elspeth, "I'm dreadfully sorry. But it is not as bad as it might have been. This is just training. If there is no war, he will come back. If there is a war, well, then, we have lost them all; they will all have to go. Meanwhile he is in

no danger. You and Joan should not worry. The boy has his own life to make, Alec."

"But we miss him so, Elspeth. We, we . . ." He hesitated and looked at his knees with some embarrassment before he raised troubled and anxious eyes to Elspeth. . . . "We love him so very much, Elspeth. He is the only one we have. He has been such a great joy to us, so affectionate and sweet always, right from the time he was a little fellow. I can remember when I used to pick him up in the garden from the little sand-pit we had for him, to carry him in to his lunch, and he would put his little arms, hot from the sun, round my neck and hug me, and put his warm little face next to mine, and say, 'Daddy, I do love you, very, very much.'

"It sounds silly, doesn't it, when you think of the big fellow he is now, and how quiet and serious he has grown. But he's been a loving son to us every year that we've had him, and now that he's gone it's as though the bottom had dropped out of everything. If he is killed, Elspeth—God, if he is killed, we shall die too, Joan and I. Oh, this frightful talk about war, the madness that it is."

He got up from his chair and strode nervously up and down the room.

Comma came in with the coffee-tray at this point. Sensing that something was badly wrong, Comma almost dropped the tray on the little table beside Elspeth's chair, and hastened out of the room as fast as his twinkling legs could take him.

"Drink this, Alec dear," said Elspeth, handing him a cup.

He took it, and standing over her, sipped it, his bloodshot eyes looking at her each time he took the cup away from his lips.

"You must not worry about the war, Alec. If it comes, it comes, and nothing that any of us out here can do can stop it. But don't let it kill you in advance, just by its threat. Alas, I have no son, but Gordon Vyland, Harry Sproule, dozens of other people we both know, have sons just Douglas's age. Just think, if every one worried as much about it in advance as you do, what a wretched state we should all be in."

"Yes, but mine's gone already."

"Not to fight; only to train."

"Perhaps I love mine more than they do theirs."

"Ah, Alec dear, what nonsense! Only the most unnatural

fathers, and none of our friends are that, would be insensitive to the fate of their sons/'

He put down his cup and summoned a grim, tired smile for her.

"I guess you're right, Elspeth. We'll just have to get over it. But come and see Joan, won't you? You can help her so much. Of course, there's no question of her being able to come out to lunch to-day. You'll understand, won't you? I'll leave you to break the news to the Brydens, and whoever else will be here.

"Now, come on. I've been neglecting my job for a week. Let's go and look at old Silas. It's a marvel to me how the old man's kept going. He's had enough heart attacks to kill twelve ordinary men."

Crossing the yard, they saw Elaine and Richard still arm-in-arm, and still talking to Nick, who was now polishing the harness to be worn by the mare he was going to drive into town that day. They all waved to the doctor, Elaine quickly withdrawing her arm from Richard's.

"Tell these youngsters about Douglas, won't you, Elspeth? Douglas was fond of that boy Richard."

They crossed the staff sitting-room, and at Silas's door Elspeth stood aside to let Alec Smith go in first. As she started to follow him, he stopped suddenly, turned round quickly to face her, his former lethargy and unhappy tired look replaced by one of quick intensity. He stood broadly in the doorway. "Get Andrew quickly, Elspeth. Then get me some hot water. Run." He pushed her shoulder as though to hasten her.

She stood hesitating, her heart thumping. Then, before turning away, she looked at the bed. Silas lay back at an angle on the pillow, his face almost blue in colour, breathing heavily in slow gasping breaths.

She ran to the door of the staff quarters, and called across the yard to Nick.

"Quick, fetch Mr. MacTaviot. I think he is down in Forty-acre field. Say it's Silas. You'd better ride down. Elaine, tell Norah to come at once with a bowl of hot water."

She ran back to Silas's room. Nick dropped the harness and raced for the stable. He led out one of the horses, slipping a bridle on to it as he did so, then he mounted it bareback and galloped out of the yard. Elaine had run towards the kitchen, calling out Norah's name. Richard was left standing by the

bench, feeling utterly helpless and not knowing what to do.

Norah came from the kitchen followed by Elaine. They ran across the yard and disappeared into the door of the staff quarters. Richard walked slowly over to it, and as he reached it Elaine came out with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Richard, he's going to die."

"Did Doc Smith say so?"

"No, he didn't speak to me. But you can hear Silas breathing even in the hall. Mother wants us to go down the road and meet the Brydens and the Vylands, and tell them what has happened, and look after them until she can come."

3

Old Uncle Silas was for it this time, there was no doubt of that. Doc Smith had given him a hypodermic to ease his breathing and to make him feel more comfortable, but his pulse was so weak that Alec could barely feel its faint flutter as he held the old man's wrist. Silas lay propped up on pillows, his eyes closed, his breathing now quiet. He might have been asleep were it not that every few minutes he opened his eyes and looked at those in the room with a curious, wondering, half-frightened look before he closed them again. Remembering Silas's careless blasphemy, his love of a good time, the innocent little wickednesses in which he indulged from time to time, the handful he had always been to manage, Andrew could scarcely recognise the Silas he had known all his life in this frail and solemn-looking figure stretched out on the bed. He'd been a good man, thought Andrew. He'd worked like a dog all his life, keeping himself going in his hard tasks with constant thoughts of what he would do for himself one day when he had the money. That day had never come. This one had instead. The last day. Time for old Silas to down tools and take his rest. It will happen to us all, thought Andrew. To me, and to Elspeth and Ekine. Strange it is . . . and yet, if it happens like this, after a good hard life, it's not too bad.

Doc Smith was thinking of many things while he kept his two fingers lightly on Silas's wrist. He's got about an hour, I should think, if that. His breath might just stop at any minute. Funny, I've seen this old chap about Acadia for years

and never really had a talk to him. The kids loved him, I remember. Douglas was always telling me funny stories about him. Yes, I remember now, of course. One day in the winter when Doug was a little chap of about five. He wore a blue coat and blue leggings and red mitts, and a French-Canadian cap. Rosy cheeks he had, and big blue eyes. God, he was sweet. Yes, old Silas it was, driving the sleigh. All the kids had been out to a party here, near Christmas, I guess, and Silas was delivering them home. Doug must have been the last to be dropped. When they pulled into the front gate there was little Doug sitting up on the box beside him, holding the reins, and as happy as a sandboy. I can see him smiling now and shouting at me, "Look, Daddy." Oh, God, if only he was a little boy again. I'd give my right arm once more to be nursing the little fellow on my knee. I think I'd better give this old chap another shot of belladonna. The pulse might flicker out at any moment. Not that it would make much difference if it did. God knows why I'm working to keep him alive just for another hour.

He got up from the chair beside the bed, took his hypodermic needle from the boiling water over the little spirit-lamp which Norah had brought, and injected some more of the drug into Silas. The old man lay still for a few minutes longer, then his eyelids flickered open again, looked at Doc Smith for a long moment, then turned to Andrew.

"Chief," he whispered.

Andrew got up from his chair by the window and tiptoed over beside the bed.

"I guess I'm quitting, chief. Got to hand in my checks."

Andrew, standing on the other side of the bed from where Doc Smith sat, took Silas's other hand in his.

"There's a lot of things I've left undone, chief. I guess I ain't been so hot lately. I felt kinda tired."

The old man paused and shut his eyes. Andrew was on the point of speaking to him, but he thought he might have drifted off to sleep, so he sat there quietly, gazing into the old man's face, and thinking back to the earlier years at Acadia.

"Say, chief." Silas had his eyes open and fixed on Andrew, but his voice was so weak that Andrew could scarcely hear it. He paused, and his mind seemed to wander. He kept his eyes open, and they wandered around the room, but what he said was merely a meaningless jumble of words.

Suddenly he gripped the fingers of Andrew's hand. Andrew bent his head near him.

"Something been worrying me, chief. All night worrying. Couldn't sleep. Miss Elaine. Don't you let any one make her unhappy, chief. She's like she was my child. I won't have any one make her unhappy."

In his anxiety to emphasise what he was saying, the old man had lifted his head off the pillow. Doc Smith pressed his forehead lightly with his fingers to make him lie back, and Silas gave a little moan and fell back. They watched him anxiously for a few minutes. Then his lips curved in a sort of smile, and his mouth opened, and a dim echo of his old cackling laugh came out. Alec Smith and Andrew looked at each other across the bed. Then the old man's head fell sideways as though all his muscles had relaxed, and he was dead.

4

There was a hillside two miles from the house, but still among Andrew's acres, where pets of Elaine's and other animals, horses, a dog or two, even a little lamb, which had been brought into the kitchen at Acadia, but had survived only two days, were buried. Silas had been verger and priest at most of these funeral services. Elaine could remember many occasions when she had been a little girl and had ridden in the cart with Silas to some sad obsequies there. Silas, out of his great understanding of children, because he loved animals so dearly, perhaps because he was a child at heart himself, had carried out these services with proper solemnity and observance, and when they turned away from the little graves together often the tears were as bright in his eyes as they were in Elaine's.

It was decided that Silas should be buried here. Three days after his death, at five o'clock in the evening, the funeral cortege wound from Acadia towards the distant hill. Charlie drove one of the farm carts in which the coffin lay. There was only a rough track to the hill, and no other conveyance could have been used. Behind the wagon walked a huge crowd, Elspeth, Andrew and Elaine together, then all the other Acadia workers and behind them over a hundred of Elspeth's and Andrew's friends, and Elaine's friends. Richard walked with the Brydens, close behind the cart.

Alec and Joan Smith walked with the Brydens too, and with them was Douglas on forty-eight hours' leave for the funeral. Joan Smith held her son's arm, partly for help over the roughness of the way, partly that every one should see Douglas. Her face, when she lifted it to speak to her tall son, was radiant with pride and happiness. She kept looking round, catching the eye of a friend, and changing her place in the procession to talk to them. Throughout she held on to Douglas's arm. In his recruit's uniform, which did not fit him very well, he looked awkward and uneasy, and his mother's obvious pride in him caused him some embarrassment, as Richard could see whenever he caught his eye. Douglas was thinking of Silas with grief in his heart. He was irritated by the distractions his mother caused. But when he showed the slightest sign of impatience such a look of apprehension came into her face, as though she feared that he might turn there and then on his heel and return to Calgary, that each time he yielded to her gentle tugs and went off with her to talk to someone else.

Meanwhile the cortege wound over sloping fields and up the incline of the hill to where the cemetery lay. Here, by the open grave, the wagon stopped. Four of the Acadian workers, who were sitting there with the surpliced clergyman, stepped forward, removed the backboard, drew out the coffin and laid it on the ground beside the grave. The MacTaviots and all the workers from Acadia drew round the graveside, and the others stood on the higher ground behind the head of the grave. Richard, looking down from this vantage-point, saw Elaine standing between her father and mother at the foot of the grave. He had not seen her since the previous Sunday when old Silas died. She was dressed in black; she wore a small black felt hat which sat roundly on her head, and made her seem when she looked up ridiculously young. Her face seemed to him pale, but it may have been that the setting sun hung in the sky behind her, or that her black clothes emphasised the natural pallor of her skin. She looked up frequently. He tried by concentrating all his spirit and thought to convey to her the love he felt for her in her sorrow. It seemed to him that his little experiment succeeded in part, for he saw her look up several times at the crowd amongst whom he stood, as though to distinguish him from the others.

When the coffin had been lowered into the grave, and they

started to walk back towards Acadia, he said to the Brydens: "Do you mind if I leave you? I want to have just a word with Elaine."

He pushed through the crowd until he came up behind her. Again she was walking between her father and mother. He hesitated to go up to them, not only because he was uncertain what reception he would get from Elspeth, but because he wanted to speak to Elaine alone, not with her parents there. He walked behind them for perhaps fifty yards while debating the problem, when suddenly it was solved for him by Joan Smith. Still with her arm through Douglas's, she had pushed through the crowd, and was now walking next to Richard. Of him she took no notice, but Douglas threw him an imploring look as though to say, "I'm not trying to show off. It's my mother's doing." Then close behind the MacTaviots, Joan Smith cried, "Oh, Elspeth, I did not want to speak to you before, but may I now?"

Elspeth, Elaine and Andrew stopped and turned round, Elspeth with her sweet smile saying, "Look, Andrew, here's Douglas. How fine he looks in his uniform!" At that moment Richard caught Elaine's eye. His clenched fist went to his heart, and he directed at her such an imploring look that she left the others and came towards him.

"Richard," she said, "I looked for you. I was thinking of you. I wish you had been standing beside me. I know Uncle Silas would have liked it to be so."

He turned sideways to her, so no one should notice that he put his hand under her elbow. He looked down at her, all the intensity of his feeling for her concentrated in his face. "Is everything well with you, darling?" He spoke in a low voice so that no one should hear. "You're not too sad? You look so sad in those black clothes, and so beautiful, too."

"No, I'm not sad, Richard. Walk with me a Utile way behind the others. There is something that I want to say to you."

They fell back a few paces in the crowd, and to its outside edge, taking up a position in the general march towards Acadia where they knew they were surrounded by people not likely to interrupt them.

"Richard, darling," said Elaine, "you remember the night before Uncle Silas died, when he asked you to leave us alone and sent you out to talk to Nick? You don't know what he said

to me. I haven't had a chance to tell you. You remember I was unhappy about having to go to England. I hadn't told Uncle Silas I was unhappy, but then I never had to tell him when I was, he always knew. He saw that I was unhappy that night, and he wanted to find out why. He sent you away so that he could talk to me.

"I told him, Richard. I had already told him about Ralph Harriman, and now I told him that I was in love with you, that I didn't want to go to England, that I wanted to stay here with you.

" 'Really in love, Elaine?' " he said to me. " TMot just infatuation."

"To prove to him that it wasn't, I told him how I felt about you, in a way that I don't think I could even tell to you. But I could always talk to Uncle Silas in a special sort of way. He heard me through, and then he said something, Richard dearest, that..."

She paused and looked down, and looking at the curve of her cheek Richard could see that she was blushing. He squeezed her elbow lightly with his hand. "My little love," he bent his head to whisper to her while they walked in the midst of the crowd, "don't say any more if it hurts you or makes you feel uncomfortable."

At that she looked up at him, her eyes shining with her feeling for him. "Richard, my darling heart, why should I be ashamed? Uncle Silas said, 'If you really love him, Elaine, trust your heart and don't let him go. You'll have to go to England. You've a duty to your parents, remember. But if you love him, and are sure that you love him with all your heart and soul, then don't let him go, and don't hurt him or yourself. Go to him and give him all your heart and he will give you his, too, and when you come back from England he will be waiting for you.'

"Richard," she went on, "that is why I came to your room to kiss you that night. I wanted to give you all that was in me, all my heart and soul, because I love you so much, I do love you so much."

They were like children, stumbling along in this procession, engrossed in each other, oblivious to every one else.

What can we do, Elaine? I can't bear to let you go even for those few months."

"I must go, Richard. What Uncle Silas said was true. I owe it to my parents, and to Ralph Harriman, too. But I'll come back, my love, oh, my own sweet love, I couldn't live without you now."

"Elaine, I'm so wretchedly poor and young and hopeless at everything."

"We can wait, darling. Don Bryden says that you are the cleverest undergraduate he has had through his hands since he started teaching. You'll be a great man one day, my Richard." She looked up at him with love and admiration in her gaze; and Elspeth, who had turned back to find her, noticed the look and hastened towards them.

"There you are, my child," she said. "Well, Richard, my dear boy. What have you done with the Brydens? I hope you'll stay to supper with us before going back. You'll be too busy the next three week-ends with exams, I suppose, but I hope you'll come and spend the last week-end with us before we go away. Find the Brydens, will you, Richard, and say that I want them so much for supper to-night. I don't want Don to sneak into that car of his and dash off. He has a bad habit of suspecting himself sometimes of being a nuisance. There was never any one less of a nuisance. I want him particularly to-night to cheer Andrew up."

How she rattles on! thought Richard, dismissed and turning to search for the Brydens among the hundred people straggling over the landscape. I'm rather afraid of her, he thought. She's nice, but I don't think she likes me.

In fact, she didn't. For a long time Elspeth had felt uneasy about Richard, but it was only on the afternoon of the funeral that she had made up her mind that she disliked him. She had expected that Silas's death would upset Elaine a good deal; Elaine had been so much attached to Silas ever since she had been a little girl, and this was the first death that had occurred at Acadia since they had come there. She had talked to Andrew about it the night before, and she had said that it was a good thing that they were going to England so soon; that would give Elaine a chance to recover. New scenes, new people, and—Elspeth had begun secretly to hope, though she didn't speak of this to Andrew—a change in Elaine's life from the quiet back-water to a prominent and exciting place in London society.

This would get her over the painful break in the happy continuity of life at Acadia.

She had expected that Elaine would be depressed and unhappy coming away from the funeral. In the general movement of the crowd, with so many friends coming up to speak to her about Silas, and the roughness of the trail they were following splitting up the crowd, so that now one little group surged ahead of the others, then fell behind, then was borne forward again, she had not noticed that Elaine was no longer by her side. At first she thought she had stopped to talk to one of the many little groups that seemed to coalesce, then to fall apart, about her and Andrew. She looked around at first casually, then more anxiously, then, not seeing her, had started to move back amongst the on-pressing crowd, dreading that she might find her fallen out, hiding behind one of the rocks that sprang up at intervals beside the path they were following, giving way to her tears. Instead, suddenly she saw her talking to the boy Richard, her face alight with joy and happiness, oblivious alike of the crowd round her and the grave which they had just left.

Elsbeth naturally felt angry, but she controlled her feelings, dismissed Richard in search of the Brydens, gathered Elaine under her wing, and hurried forward to rejoin Andrew. She longed impatiently for the day when they were to start their journey. As Richard descended in her estimation Ralph rose in it. She thought of him not as a prospective son-in-law, but as someone to whom she could entrust Elaine for safe keeping.

CHAPTER TWENTY

I

THE MacTavoits were to leave on Monday evening, and for the last week-end the Brydens and Richard had been at Acadia.

In the three weeks since Silas's death the University year had completed its cycle. The end-of-year examinations had taken place, and the term had closed. At the suggestion of Tom Sproule, Richard had applied to Jasper Park Lodge, a large hotel managed by the Canadian Railways, for work as chauffeur

during the summer. The chauffeur staff was composed entirely of undergraduates drawn from all the Universities of Canada; their work was to drive the high-powered seven-seater cars filled with tourists from the hotels along the finely built roads constructed by the Government through the mountains, linking up one beauty spot with another. Tom Sproule had worked there the previous summer, and had saved over \$1000 out of his wages and his tips. It was, he told Richard, a lovely life, out in the open all day, high up in the mountains, on the move the whole time, never with the same people. The majority of the tourists were pretty dumb, and some were irritating, but there were others who were interesting and likable. Richard had applied for the job and had got it. He had been told to report to Jasper Park Lodge on May 25th, a few days before the hotel was to open for its summer season, and a few days, as it chanced, after Elaine was to leave for England. This week-end at Acadia was the last for them both.

They had made the most of every minute of it. Saturday had been Nick's wedding day. The wedding had been held at Acadia. Elisaveta had come out at eleven in the morning, accompanied by a numerous band of relatives who had manifested from various farms round Edmonton, the male part dressed in badly-cut blue serge suits, their sunburnt faces looking very stiff, shy and uncomfortable above the white collars and ties they had donned for the occasion; their women-folk in flowered print dresses with large shapeless straw hats, festooned with floral decorations and little bunches of waxed cherries and ribbons. They were silent and immensely shy in the early stages of the proceedings, but afterwards, made to feel at home by Andrew and Elspeth, and sensing the free-and-easy atmosphere of Acadia, they melted and spoke hoarsely in their broken English, and gave way now and then to hearty guffaws of laughter upon the least provocation.

It was hard to believe that Elisaveta sprang from this thick-bodied awkward stock. She was slim, and moved and spoke gently, and her features seemed in contrast to theirs to be refined. She wore a blue coat and skirt, her feet and ankles were neat, and she had a little blue felt hat that made her look like a schoolgirl.

The wedding took place at twelve o'clock. Richard was best man to Nick; a young friend of Elisaveta, with a freckled

brown face, and a humorous wide smile, was bridesmaid. When Nick had kissed Elisaveta, and they turned and walked down the aisle made by the chairs in the drawing-room, Richard followed with the bridesmaid, and the four of them led the way into the dining-room where a buffet lunch was laid out, and vast quantities of beer and punch stood on the side-board.

When the food had been dealt with, the speech-making began. Andrew toasted the bride and groom. Andrew was good at this sort of speech. He teased Nick a little, complimented him on the acquisition of Elisaveta, foresaw the day when Nick would be running Acadia for him, and he himself could go off and live in California or Florida on the vast profits which Nick's industry would be sure to yield; foresaw a vast family of little Nicks and Vetas growing up, overrunning the limits of Acadia and acquiring new land, breaking it up and turning the waste areas of the province into rich food-bearing lands, an ancient patriarchal Nick, white-bearded and solemn, sitting back in his old age and contemplating the fruitful results of what he had started. Nick blushed and grinned, and looked at his chief with fond eyes, and was suddenly stricken dumb and appeared tortured when Andrew finished and he found that he was expected to speak. He looked at his Veta for guidance and inspiration, and seemed to find it in the gentle proprietorial smile with which she regarded him. He got slowly up from his chair, his brow corrugated with the immense speculations his mind was turning over. Then very slowly and hesitantly he began to speak.

Mr. and Mrs. MacTaviot, thank you for letting us be married here. It's mighty nice to be married and to have the reception afterwards in a house, not in a hotel. Veta and I, we got to know each other in a restaurant, and we been mostly seeing each other in public places ever since. It sure makes us happy to be together at last in a nice home like this.

"In about half an hour, we're going off on our wedding trip, into the mountains, away from Acadia. That will be nice. But it will be nice also to think of Acadia being here, and to know that we're coming here to work. I've been very happy here. When Richard and I came West last year we didn't know a damn thing and nobody, if you'll excuse the expression. Now look what's come to us. I've got a lovely job, and a very nice

wife, and Richard, he's all set to be the clever man he is. I knew it, when I first met him, that he was bound to do big things, and if I hitched myself on to him, why, I was likely to get places and share in his success. You see, it's worked out that way. I've got everything I want in life," said Nick swiftly, looking as though he were about to burst with pleasure at the contemplation of his own good fortune, "and I guess Richard's turn will come next." He paused a moment, while the wide smile of pleasure faded from his face, and the wrinkled lines on his forehead revealed that he was wrestling with a fresh vein of thought. Then he looked up quickly, and at the crowd of Ukrainians who sat solemnly watching him, let fly a few rapidly-uttered sentences in his native tongue. His expression was so set and concentrated as he spoke that* it appeared as though he were haranguing them over some fault, but they merely smiled complacently, the ladies nodding their heads, so that the decorations on their hats sprang up and down violently, the men folding their arms or pulling softly at their long moustaches, and beaming at Nick with a great benevolence.

"Excuse it," said Nick to the rest of the company, "that I speak to my own people in our language. I want them not to misunderstand. I tell them," he explained with his shy smile, addressing himself to Andrew, "not to forget their good fortune. In the Ukraine, what would we be doing? Starving, working for a communal wage that would not keep our children alive or strong. In Canada, what happens? We have our own land, and we live like barons, and our children are fed and clothed like angels. Sometimes there is danger that we take it as our due. But it isn't our due. We didn't fight for this land or bear all the hardships of the early days. I tell my friends, be strong for this country, and be humble amongst its people, and then perhaps our children may have the good fortune to call themselves Canadians, and be a part of the British race."

A great outburst of clapping was accorded Nick as he sat down after this oration, and one among the party of Ukrainians, who had an accordion slung over his shoulder, started to play God Save the King. At the signal, Andrew and the others stood up feeling a little self-conscious as people do when the National Anthem is played in an unaccustomed place. The Ukrainians followed their example, but instead of looking embarrassed gazed with fierce infatuation ahead of them, as though professing

readiness there and then to take on any one threatening the safety of the Empire or the person of the monarch to whom they now owed allegiance.

Then it was time for Nick and Veta to go and change into their riding clothes for the start of their trip into the mountains. Richard accompanied Nick over to the staff quarters, and sat on his bed while Nick changed.

"You'll be gone to Jasper, Richard, by the time I get back?"

"Yes, Nick. It's depressing losing you and Elaine at the same time."

"You'll be all right, Richard," said Nick consolingly. "You'll have all your University friends up at Jasper. It sounds to me like very interesting work."

Richard was moodily silent, sitting on the end of Nick's bed, watching his friend moving about the room, taking off his blue suit and folding it neatly away, stuffing shirts and socks into his saddle-bags. Suddenly he looked up at Nick.

"Nick," he said, in a nervous voice, "I'm unhappy about Elaine."

Nick turned round from the chest of drawers and looked at his friend. Then he threw what he had in his hand back into the drawer, shut it with a slam, and came over and sat on the end of the bed beside Richard.

"She's going to marry this Englishman," he said. "That's what she is being taken over to England for. Hadn't you better lay off her, Richard?"

"She doesn't love him. She told me so. She isn't going to marry him."

"I feel it's going to get you into trouble, all this, Richard," said Nick persuasively. "Can't you forget about it?"

"Forget Elaine?" said Richard indignantly. "Could you have forgotten Elisaveta?"

"I don't have to," said Nick. "We cared a lot for each other, and there was nobody else in the way."

"I care a lot, more than a lot, for Elaine, and there is only that solemn English poop in the way."

"And Elaine's mother, and the chief?"

"Oh, I know," said Richard impatiently. "And I haven't got a bean, and I'm too young. There are thousands of reasons against it, but one overwhelming one for it, and that is that Elaine and I love each other."

"Well, she's going on Monday," said Nick. "You can't alter that. Let's see what happens this summer, eh?"

"You mean," said Richard, "that she'll get married, and I'll get over it. You're wrong, boy. You ought to know me better than that."

"You won't do anything crazy, Richard, will you; that is, without consulting me?"

"And if I get your consent, it will be all right? I can go ahead and commit suicide, or start to drink heavily to drown my sorrows if you O.K. it? You damned old Ukrainian." He hugged Nick's shoulders. "I just have to talk to somebody about it, Nick, and you're my best friend. And I'm so damned jealous of you and Veta all happily married that I just had to spoil your pleasure for a minute. Go ahead and finish your packing. You'll be keeping your bride waiting. A fine thing to do."

Nick hastened about his preparations while Richard observed him with an affectionate smile.

"That was a fine speech you made this afternoon, Nick, and thanks, by the way, for all the kind references to me and my future in it."

"Aw, shucks, Richard."

"Don't be modest, you old Russki. It was damned fine talk. I liked the bit you addressed to your fellow-nationals especially. Do you remember, Nick, when we first came to Brunc lie, how we used to talk about Canada in that way? We haven't had a talk like that for a long time."

"You're busy with your own friends, Richard. It's quite right that you should be."

"I haven't got a friend as good as you, Nick. We've come a long way together, haven't we?"

"We have, boy. And we'll go a long way further yet, I've got a feeling." Nick turned his square, honest face and looked at Richard very solemnly. "It's funny, but it's there. We're going to go a long way together yet, Richard. I hope it will all be as happy as this last year has been."

Richard laughed, got up from the bed and stretched himself. "You old Russian mystic! But maybe you're right. If I'm in trouble, I'd like you to be along, Nick. I need your solidity and siireness. Come along, old fellow. How do we throw confetti on to couples mounted on horseback? That's some-

thing the best man ought to know. The others will be looking to me for guidance."

2

When Nick and Veta had ridden off, followed by two pack-horses, the wedding party retired to the barn where the floor had been cleared for dancing. The Ukrainian with the accordion provided the music, and the Ukrainian guests, to begin with, did most of the dancing. The music he played was their national folk dances, and flushed now with beer and confidence elderly farmers led their stout wives out on the floor and there went through a variety of strenuous measures to their own perspiring satisfaction, accompanied by the applause of those who lined the walls.

Andrew and Elspeth and the Brydens had come in and taken chairs along the wall where they sat watching the dancers. Elaine and Richard stood together near the door looking on, but keeping an ear open for the cars that were to bring a party of their friends out from Edmonton for a moonlight supper at Morland's Lake. Soon there was the noise of the cars arriving, and Elaine and Richard left the barn. Four cars, all somewhat decrepit in appearance, being old cast-off models abandoned by their parents to their young, had brought the party out from Edmonton. They jumped out, calling to one another and to Elaine and Richard, as full of energy as bounding puppies after having been cramped up in the cars for so long.

"We needn't start for an hour yet," said Elaine. "Come into the barn. We're dancing as an aftermath to Nick's wedding."

A solemn square dance was in progress when they trooped into the barn, but their arrival put ideas into the accordion-player's head. He stood upon his chair and clapped his hands to draw attention. "Take your partners for a waltz," he cried, and beamed at them so paternally and fondly that they cheered him, and looked about, the farmers and the students alike, for their partners. Something in the goodwill of the place, something that was in the atmosphere of Acadia, made the dancers turn, not to those they knew best, but with laughing eyes and hands stretched out to strangers. Elaine's friends yielded themselves up to Nick's male Ukrainian relatives; Richard and Gordon Vyland and Tom Sproule and the other boys seized the ample

waists of the farmers' wives, and to the tune of "Mammy's Little Coal Black Rose" they swept and undulated round the floor.

"Where else in the world," Don Bryden asked Andrew, "would you see such a scene as this? We dwell in paradise, brother, and do not know it. These are the children of God at play."

"Some of them rather large children," smiled Andrew. "Look at the one who has got hold of Elaine."

A red-faced farmer, with enormous handle-bar moustaches, his lips parted in a wide grin, was whirling Elaine past them, his boots clattering on the floor.

"She does not look as if she were suffering," said Don, smiling. "We shall miss you all in the next few months, Andrew. Rose and I are to be utterly bereft. Richard is going to Jasper to work. We had thought of dwelling quietly in our garden. Rose is working at her translation of Dante, and I have a selection of eighteenth-century verse to do for my publisher. But we shall be distracted by our loneliness, after a winter of such social activity, so we think of driving Martha down to Yellowstone Park and on to Salt Lake City."

"That's a good idea, Don. You need a change after your illness. We should be back by August. Meet us here then. Come and stay at Acadia for the harvest. You will be left alone to do your books, for I shall be out in the fields all day. When the harvest is in, we might all go to Jasper for a few weeks' fishing, and observe how the intrepid Richard is getting along with his tourists."

"A happy thought, Andrew. I'm sure Rose will agree. Great Scott, what is this towering mammoth of a man doing?"

A young farmer in his thirties, with a nice broad open face now thickly beaded with perspiration, had approached Elspeth for a dance. Elspeth smiled at him, got up from her chair, and was whirled away. Rose, sitting by herself, looked a little lost for a moment, and was just about to get up and move over beside Andrew and Don, when the clergyman who had conducted the service, a Lutheran minister of the Reformed Church, stepped quickly before her, bowed ceremoniously, took her hand and together they glided away in a more seemly interpretation of the music still being riotously descanted by the accordeon-player.

Don laughed and slapped his knee.

"The gentle Rose," he said to Andrew, "in the embraces of a Lutheran parson. What an evening we are having!" He stretched his thin arms and beamed about the room with his pale face. "Before long, I shall be stepping a measure."

3

The moon had risen behind the hill down which they had skied on that Sunday afternoon the previous winter, and a path of gold from its reflection lay across the lake. They had ouilt their fire down by the water's edge; a great blaze it had been, but now, late in the evening, the flames had died and it glowed redly, reflecting itself in the water near the shore. They lay on the soft spongy turf, and looked up at the hills and the moon, and the blue starry heaven over them. They had been noisy while they ate, and afterwards before their youthful spirits had subsided under the beauty of the night and the calm overbearing silence of their surroundings. Now they lay in couples and whispered together, and the tops of the tall pines above their heads swayed lightly in the night breeze, rustling slightly as though they echoed the whispering of the little group below. The mellow moonlight bathed the scene with softness, and the trees and the hills were a light blue against the deeper blue of the sky.

Isn't it beautiful, Richard?" Elaine whispered. "I do so hate to leave it."

She lay with her head on his shoulder, with his strong young arm around her back. His fingers had been stroking her neck, and playing with a little tendril of hair that always curled there. A faint scent of something pleasant that came from her hair was in his nostrils. He had been lying silent, thinking of Nick and Veta, wondering where they had made camp, how Nick was making love to his bride.

When Elaine spoke, putting back her head to whisper in his ear, he kissed her forehead and squeezed her tight against his body with his arm. He felt reckless and abandoned. Thinking of the long months of absence from her ahead of him, he had one immediate desire only; that was to repeat the happiness he had known with her that night a month before. But he was still very shy and young, and he did not know how to go about

suggesting it. Since that one night they had spent in each other's arms, neither of them, out of shyness, had referred to it.

"Why do you only kiss my forehead, Richard darling?" whispered Elaine. "I want to kiss your lips."

He kissed her mouth, his other arm coming over her shoulder, crushing her smaller body to him with all his strength. Then he released her with a sigh, and again she laid her head on his shoulder. "Oh, I do love you very much," she sighed happily. Richard's mind, concentrated on his goal, suddenly burst the bonds of his shyness. He turned his head so that his lips were against her ear.

"Elaine, this is practically our last night. Don't leave me, will you?"

She was silent, uncertain what he meant, but that he might not be put off by her silence, she played with his cheek with her fingers.

"You know what I mean, Elaine," he went on urgently. "That one night . . . I want that night to happen again. I . . . want to make love to you, Elaine darling, so that when you are away from me you won't forget me."

"Richard, I want to so much, but it's wrong to do that. We have to wait. I'll come back; I've promised you that I will. I'll keep my promise. I can't do anything that would hurt Daddy and Mummy if they knew. Besides, the risk. I'm totally ignorant, Richard. I could not ever talk to you about this if it weren't dark. I don't know. . . . Oh, darling." She sought his lips again with hers, and clung to him wildly, tempestuously, fearful of losing him, fearful of yielding to him.

Richard chuckled and gripped her strongly with his arms. She smiled too in the darkness, and whispered, "Don't behave like a villain in a melodrama. I'm not sure that I like that laugh. It bodes no good."

"Oh, it's just that I'm supremely happy," Richard excused himself.

"So am I, Richard," Elaine confessed, sighing again, and resting her head on his chest. Beneath his coat she could feel his heart beating strongly. She pressed her hands flat against it, loving it as she loved at that moment every part of his young body.

When it was nearly eleven o'clock somebody in the party

suggested that they ought to start moving back. There were cries of protest, but gradually they detached themselves from the darkness and came back to the fire, stirring the ashes to get up a last blaze before someone got water from the lake to put it out. They stood about the fire reluctant to leave. It was the last party of the year before they all met again in the autumn; they were going to all parts of the province, Elaine was going to England, some of them, having graduated, would not return. There was always a "last" party at the beginning of every summer; it always had its sad moment like this when they felt, leaving a picnic fire or a dance, that the best of life was over, and they would never be so happy again.

They started up the cars and drove as far as Acadia. It was eleven-thirty when they reached there, and the lights of the house were out. They talked to each other quietly so as not to wake up the household, but it was impossible to say good-bye in whispers, so Elaine asked them to come in and make cocoa. They trooped out of the cars with muffled cries of joy, and followed her and Richard along the stone passage to Norah's kitchen. Here they could make as much noise as they liked, for they were not under any of the occupied bedrooms. They sat about on chairs and tables, eating slabs of Norah's home-made bread and farm butter, and drinking mugs of cocoa, talking and laughing, and making a good deal more noise than they were aware of. They were surprised when the door opened and Elspeth in a dressing-gown came in. The boys jumped down from the tables and got up from their chairs, and a sort of frightened hush fell on the room which had been resounding with laughter and chatter only a few minutes before. It was not that they expected a reproof from Elspeth: they all liked her too much to believe that she could be severe with them; but the unaccustomed sight of her in a dressing-gown, with her dark hair plaited down her back, looking exactly like Elaine, gave them all a sudden shock.

"Sit down, children, for goodness* sake. You don't mind if I join you, do you? I just wanted to make sure that you were all right and had everything that you wanted."

She moved to the table and picked up a piece of bread and butter from the plate and started nibbling it. Someone offered her a chair, but she sat on the edge of the table instead, swinging her legs. Richard thought to himself, "How charming and

sweet she can be when she wants to! But I know what she came down for. To make sure that Elaine goes off to bed and that I don't hang about."

She chattered in a lively fashion with the others, and Richard sat silently watching her. "A fine thing to expect her to be friendly," he thought, "when I'm seducing her daughter. Lord, what an awful word to use," he frowned to himself, "seduction's a momentary thing, casual and thoughtless. I love Elaine, and she loves me. This is the woman, looking so gentle and charming and nice sitting there, who is going to try to make her marry someone she doesn't love. She's hard-hearted really; it's no use pretending she isn't."

"What makes Richard so silent?" asked Elspeth, turning to him. "You look tired, my dear boy. I think it's time you were all in bed. Especially Elaine. She has three days on the train ahead of her. I hate to break up this party, children, but I do think it's time you started. I'm going off to bed." She kissed Elaine. "Be quiet with your good-byes, darlings. Remember Don is staying here and he's not very well. It would be a shame to give him a wakeful night."

She tripped out of the room, flashing them all a smile, and waving her hand at them as she went.

"What a swell mother you've got, Elaine," said someone enviously.

Elaine looked up proudly, her face alight with happiness.

"The best in the world," she said.

She and Richard stood on the steps and watched the party drive off, then came back to the kitchen to clear away. Richard was anxious. He felt that Elspeth's interruption had broken the spell that had been wound about him and Elaine during the evening. He watched her as she moved about the kitchen, putting platters and cups in the sink and running water over them, thinking how pretty and housewifely she looked, longing for her to show by some sign that she still loved him as tempestuously as she had shown that she did at Morland's Lake, and that no compunction had sprung up within her to spoil their last night together. But she said nothing, and he sat there on the kitchen table watching her at work, and keeping very silent.

When she had finished, she dried her hands on the tea cloth with her back to him, then folded it carefully on the rail in front of the oven, before she turned and looked at him.

"Thanks for helping me, Richard," she said.

He smiled. "Say 'Richard, darling.' "

"Why should I?"

"Because you love me."

"I'm not sure that I do."

"Well, then, because I love you."

"Do you really, Richard?" She came a step or two towards him, and looked at him seriously from under her lovely brows. "You're not just flirting with me, are you? That would be too terrible."

"Oh, Elanie, how can you suggest that?"

"Well, you look like a flirt, you know; you do really. You're so good-looking. I oughtn't to tell you that. But you're good-looking in a cheeky, impudent sort of way. Your eyes are always smiling, and your hair's curly and untidy, and your face is brown and . . ." She hesitated.

"And is that what a flirt looks like, Elaine? Curly hair, brown face?"

"Don't tease me, Richard," she said piteously, and suddenly he saw that there were tears glistening in her eyes. He slid off the table and took her in his arms.

"Elaine, my darling, my darling. I love you with my whole heart and soul. I'm not flirting. I swear to you, and I know inside me that it is true. I'll never have anything to do with any other girl in the world but you. But something urges me on. I don't know what it is. I know I'm precipitate and always rushing into things without thinking. Nick always says that. But I know I'm right with you. I know it, darling, I know it. And we've got such a little time together. I don't mean only you're going to England. I don't know what I do mean. But I feel there's a sort of Fate of some kind going to interfere with us all. Not just you and me, I mean all of us."

"Darling, you mustn't become like Doug."

"I don't really know what I mean, Elaine, and I'm not using it merely as an argument to persuade you." He shifted restlessly, and tightened his grip of her and rubbed his cheek against hers. "Only believe that I love you truly and with all my heart, darling."

"Richard," she said, and gave a little sigh of love that was the utter and final yielding of her heart to him.

On Monday night about nine o'clock the MacTaviots left Edmonton on the Transcontinental. A large crowd came down to see them off, friends of Elspeth's and Andrew's, as well as friends of Elaine. A drawing-room with two berths and a sofa was reserved for Andrew and Elspeth, and a single compartment next door for Elaine. When the train came in their bags were stowed aboard; then as the train waited at Edmonton for half an hour, they came down on to the platform and formed two animated groups. Richard stood next to Elaine; in the dusk his arm was tucked through hers and his fingers clutched hers.

"Do you remember, Elaine," he said to her when the others were talking, "this is where I first saw you, and you thought I was rude?"

She squeezed his fingers in reply. "If I hadn't liked what I saw of you then, I probably wouldn't have noticed that you were rude," she said.

"You'll see my family in England, won't you?"

"Of course I will, Richard. I'm longing to meet them. I do hope they will like me."

"I'll guarantee that," said Richard emphatically.

A little while later the negro porters were calling "all aboard/" and Elspeth looked about for Elaine.

"I'll get in this other end, Mummy," she called, pointing to the step at the far end of the coach. She kissed her friends goodbye, then with her hand in Richard's, pulled him along in the dusk to where a negro porter stood grinning at them. Without letting Richard's hand go, she drew him up the steps after her, and stood there facing him, a shy and tremulous smile on her lips.

"I had to kiss you once more, Richard. I couldn't bear to say good-bye in front of all those people."

He folded her in his arms; her own she reached up around his neck, and they clung to each other for a moment, saying nothing.

The negro porter coughed politely, and Richard turning, caught his wide smile fixed on him.

"Ah sure hates to interrupt you, boss, but they ain't room for you to get off and me to get on at the same time, and this heah train's about to get going."

"Good-bye, my darling," said Richard.

"Good-bye, Richard," She squeezed his hands, and all her soul and her love for him were in her eyes as she looked at him.

"I'll look after her for you, boss," said the porter, grinning at him. "I reckon it's right painful partin' like this."

The steel doors shut and the train moved out, and Richard, his heart sick with a sense of loss, moved down the platform to join the Brydens.

CHAPTER TWENTY - ONE

I

TOM SPROULE had been right, it was a marvellous place to work.

From the floor of the wide valley the mountains thrust up towards the sky; the nearer ones with tops of bare rock, some grey and some red. Behind these the great peaks stood, ramparts to hold back the sea of mountains that surged beyond, which but for this barrier seemed as though they might burst in on the peaceful valley through which the Athabasca wound its yellow turbulent way.

The floor of the valley was studded with lakes, emerald-green or sapphire-blue according to their depth, the colour of the sky, and the reflection offered by the surrounding peaks. As one climbed higher into the folds of the mountains other lakes appeared, lying exposed to the sky, fed by the glaciers that rested like necklaces on the steep sides of the higher rocks. Water was everywhere, the sight of it lying still like glass as in these lakes, the sound of it running down the bare face of the rocks beside the roads to feed lakes or rivers lying hundreds of feet below.

Behind the hotel, two or three miles across the floor of the valley, stood a mountain of bare rock worn by the weather of thousands of years and the action of ice into the semblance of a man's head. This was a landmark in the district known as Old Man Mountain. On the opposite side of the valley stood another mountain of red rock known as Pyramid Mountain. On the north-west side of the valley where the peaks were ranging towards the height of land there lay a mountain of the purest

shme named Mt. Edith Cavell. Pendant on *it* was a huge white and blue glacier in the shape of spread wings. This peak, over eleven thousand feet in height, blocked the view of the taller mountains beyond. To the south-east of the valley the hills fell away towards the foothills; the timber here reached almost to their tops, a bald fringe of rock surmounting the green waves of pine trees that crept up their sides. In comparison with the more majestic peaks at the other end of the valley, they looked slightly ridiculous and pretentious, except when the mofning sun rose behind them, and they blushed in the early dawn and seemed as shy and as innocent as children.

The air was like a sparkling wine; effervescent and invigorating, it raised the spirits and gave one the impression of enjoying abundant health. From time to time when he was first there Richard was moved by the flow of life within his body to stretch his arms above his head and draw the strong air into his lungs for the pleasure it gave his senses to do so.

The hotel consisted of one large log building which housed the dining-room, a spacious lounge, and a few bedrooms. Otherwise the guests were accommodated in small log bungalows which dotted the shore of the lake on which the hotel stood. Behind the log cabins were the staff quarters where the cars were kept, the chauffeurs, of whom Richard was one, slept, and the waitresses, waiters, chambermaids, and the kitchen staff had their being.

Richard was one of ten chauffeurs. He and Tom Sproule were the only ones from Alberta. The others came from universities all over Canada, from McGill to British Columbia. They seemed to have been picked for no special qualifications, other than to be pleasing in manner and appearance. The guests had to pay for the trips which they took by car to the various scenic splendours offered by the hotel folder which described these things. Tourists, being sometimes lonely people set upon their travels by the lack of congenial company at home, often became very attached to these good-looking, sunburnt young men, with the nice manners and the University background, and instead of just taking one trip, found themselves taking all that were available on condition that they had the same driver. The hotel did nicely out of these fond attachments; Richard and his colleagues did, too, for usually they were rewarded handsomely when the guests departed and

they drove them to the station. Tips of twenty and fifty dollars were not uncommon, and sometimes even a hundred-dollar note was thrust into the hand of the chauffeur by an embarrassed, inarticulate visitor departing for fresh fields.

It was a queer way to earn a living, thought Richard, but he had been in Canada long enough now to know that no way of earning money was to be despised, or lost the earner caste, particularly if he were "working his way" through University. The company he drove in his car entertained him greatly; he liked particularly the elderly ladies who tried to mother him, and the elderly gentlemen who would sometimes ask him to come and work for them in New York, in Cincinnati or St. Louis when he was through University. He was so happy that summer, his mind filled with thoughts of Elaine, that an overflow of his happiness seemed to emanate from him. "He is so very cheerful and thoughtful and nice," the old ladies told the car manager. "If we go out again we must have him." At lunch or supper in the chauffeurs' quarters the car manager would tease him about this. "What do you do to them old dames, boy?" he would ask. "They all want to adopt you or something."

At night, when the others were dancing in the staff recreation room, or out on the lake in boats with hotel visitors or other members of the staff, Richard would take a pad of writing-paper to a rock high up behind the hotel, and write to Elaine, sometimes to the Brydens, and occasionally to his family. Elaine had been wonderful about writing. He had had a long letter written on the train, another written while they were in Toronto, and another mailed from Montreal while they were waiting for the ship. He had had several written on the boat, and one written after she had been in England for a few days.

Ralph Harriman and his mother had met them at Southampton, and had driven them straight to Stratford Towers. The letter which told of their meeting with Harriman was a strange one. She had evidently found it difficult to write to Richard while she was staying in Ralph Harriman's house, and before she had had the talk with him that was to be vital to their future. Richard's heart yearned for her. He longed to be with her to share the difficulties she was facing. He could see vividly in imagination the little frown he loved, puckering her forehead, the dark shadows that seemed to come over her eyes when she

was troubled. His letters to her, written on that bare rock in the evening light, were full of love and passion. Elaine occupied his mind to the exclusion of everything else.

2

At the beginning of July the blow fell.

One evening when he came in from his trip the car manager met him at the steps of the hotel and, when the passengers had left his car, came down to him and said, "Got a cable here for you, Richard." He knew with an inner certainty that it was from Elaine, and not bad news from his family. He could not open it there. He got quickly into his car and tore up the drive towards the garage. In his impatience it seemed to take an interminable time to back the car into it. When that was done, he slammed the door and came out into the sunlight, tearing the flimsy envelope open with nervous fingers as he did so. The glare of the sun after the darkness of the garage made the block letters of the message dance before his eyes, and he had to read it twice before its meaning gradually penetrated his brain which seemed suddenly to have grown numb.

"Richard please forgive and don't think badly of me am marrying Ralph Harriman to-morrow. Writing you fully explaining everything. Wait for my letter before replying and don't cable. Love you as always.—ELAINE"

He crumpled up the cable and stuffed it in his trousers pocket, and started to walk swiftly in the direction of the staff quarters. His heart was pounding uncomfortably, and at the back of his throat he felt a little pain, caused by a tightening of the muscles, which he could only relax by repeatedly swallowing. Inside him somewhere a pulse was beating; a pulse that was familiar from boyhood, that would begin to beat in the first shock of disappointment, and increase in tempo and force until it would darken his mind and make his young soul sick; or so it had seemed when he had met the minor frustrations of life in childhood. The familiar throb was there now, and stiff with misery after the shock of the cable, he encouraged it, sensing with a bitter relish the anger growing in him.

He went to the room he shared with Tom Sproule and one other chauffeur, and was relieved to find *it* empty. He lay down on his bunk. He could hear the others in the common room at the end of the passage, laughing and talking; and terrified suddenly lest one of them should come in to pick him up on their way to supper, he got swiftly off the bunk, changed quickly from his uniform to flannel trousers and a sweater, and went quietly out of the hut, following a path that led away from the hotel towards Lake Manitou.

The path led through pine woods. It had been made in the old days, before the Lodge had been put down here, by animals coming from the hills beyond to drink at the lake. Visitors from the hotel sometimes came there after dinner for an evening stroll, but at this time in the late afternoon it was completely deserted. Richard walked with his hands stuffed into his pockets, his head bent down. Here and there, where the path became steep, the fallen pine needles made a slippery surface on which to walk, but when he stumbled or slid he corrected his balance with a twist of his young muscular body, hardly bothering to look up or about him, so fiercely concentrated were his thoughts on the hurt that had been done him.

At a point a mile or two beyond the lodge the path crossed the main motor road that wound round Lake Manitou. When he jumped down on this road, Richard remembered the morning he had come here last summer, the bright day on which he had first met Elaine. He paused a moment considering, then leaving the path he walked on along the road. Where the truck had dropped him that morning, he plunged down beside the lake, following the path that wound round it. He noted the spot from which he had bathed, and the spit of land pushing out from the shore near which he had broken surface and found Elaine smiling at him over the side of her, canoe. Bitterly he remembered that moment, cursing himself for a fool that he had succumbed to such girlish wiles. For the purposes of his rage he forgot that Elaine had made no advances. To assuage his hurt, he was determined to build up a case against her, that he might persuade himself that she was no loss, that he was well rid of her, that Harriman was to be commiserated and himself to be congratulated on the present turn of affairs.

He made his way swiftly and angrily around the lake,

passing the MacTaviots* cottage with only a glance, and came out on the road again as the light was dying on the hills. Again he paused: there were only two ways to go, back to the lodge, or still farther away from it, out to where the road ended at Maligne Canyon. He found himself appalled at the thought of going back to his quarters and facing the high spirits and good cheer of his friends. He turned towards Maligne Canyon, walking less swiftly but with long tireless strides, plunging little by little into the deep shadows and the silent gloom that filled the spaces between the walls of steep rock through which the road from time to time now ran.

Maligne Canyon was formed by an underground river which found exit from the base of a nearby mountain, and in the course of thousands of years had cut its way through the soft limestone floor of a small valley before disappearing underground again on the farther side. At its deepest parts it now thundered through the rock a hundred feet below, a narrow, gushing, resounding stream that got its name, meaning evil, from the gloomy whispers and thin wailing cries that issued from its depths as it rushed tumultuously along. In the light of day it was a pleasant and picturesque place. At dusk, when Richard came upon it, an eerie atmosphere clung to it, hemmed in closely as it was by the mountains, and echoing and roaring with the sound of the ghostly waters underneath the rock.

Where the water ran level with the ground, he stretched himself out on a rocky ledge, and to cool himself dipped his head in the ice-cold water, then drank deeply of it. Then he got up and wandered slowly along the edge of the canyon. An unutterable fatigue gripped him, and his misery through careful nursing had so grown that it felt as if it would suffocate him. He was now seven miles from the Lodge, but his physical weariness as well as his longing to be solitary made him feel that he could not return that night. He thought of sleeping under the trees, and looked up at the pinewoods that grew at the base of the hills rearing up from the valley. Where he saw a path he followed it, and after *ten* minutes of a climb came among the trees. In a little depression in the ground that was covered with fallen pine needles, he threw himself down, and lay there, looking up at the sky glintipsed through the tops of the trees, in which a few glittering stars were beginning to appear. He thought of Elaine and Harriman, lying as he was

lying, but in one another's arms; he imagined the whispered words of love that they used, and saw Elaine's face, looking as it had looked when he had kissed it. He groaned aloud in the extremity of his feelings, and kicked his heel into the ground with the passion of his resentment. She was false, cruelly false, and while he lay stirring himself to hate her, the tiredness of his body and his exhausted spirits overcame him, and he fell asleep under the stars.

He awoke at the first light of dawn, stiff and cold and with an aching pain at the base of his skull where he had lain against the hard ground all night. He stood up and stretched himself, remembering why he was there, and testing his grief to see if it still hurt, the way one tests a painful tooth after a night of sleep. The pain of his hurt rushed back over him, and with it a feeling of hatred and antagonism, not only against Elaine and Harriman, but against everybody, and particularly those friends who would try to comfort him. He made his way down to the river again, for in spite of the cold, his throat was parched and burning. As he came out from among the trees where he had slept, and saw the valley before him in the early dawn, his eye was caught by a thin column of smoke rising from a fire on the opposite side. He eyed it speculatively as he walked down to the water.

When he had dipped his head in the water again and had washed the sleep from his eyes, he stood up, running his hands through his wet, curly hair, and drawing into his lungs a breath of the fresh morning mountain air. Suddenly he realised that he was ravenous, and that he had not eaten since noon on the day before. Again he looked at the camp-fire; then realising that it could be no one whom he knew, he jumped from rock to rock across the stream, and made his way over the farther side of the valley, and up by a steep path through the trees towards the encampment. When he was within fifty yards of it, he was tantalised by the smell of frying bacon and of coffee. He quickened his pace. He heard voices, but these died away as the sound of his footsteps was heard, and when he came into the clearing where the fire was burning, four figures were kneeling round the fire, staring at him without saying anything. He saw at a glance that they were half-breeds. There were two men, a young woman and a small boy.

"Good-morning," said Richard. "I've been out all night. Can you give me some breakfast? I'll pay you."

The eldest of the four, a stout man with a round, black hat, a black silk handkerchief knotted round his neck, and a face more Indian than white in feature and colour, grunted in reply. Then he sat back on the ground, relaxing from the kneeling position of awareness he had taken up when he heard Richard approaching. He said something to the girl in an Indian dialect. She looked at Richard with a half-smile in her pretty dark liquid eyes, then stood up in one graceful movement without putting her hand to the ground and went over to a packing-case which stood against a tree. From this she took a tin mug and came back to the fireplace. Richard had been watching her; when he saw the mug he turned his eyes away, and looked again at the stout man.

"Going some place?" asked the half-breed, picking up a charred stick and poking at the fire.

"Nowhere in particular," said Richard. He was disinclined for conversation, yet he knew that in return for his meal he would have to offer this party some information about himself and his plans. But he felt that until he had had some breakfast he couldn't make up his own mind about his future, so he sat with his back against a tree and stared at the fire and at the girl, who was now frying bacon for him in a pan. Whenever he turned his eyes away from her, he saw that the eyes of the other three were fixed on him with great intensity and undisguised curiosity. They are a good deal more polite than I am, he thought to himself. They obviously want to know why a stranger should materialise out of a mountainside at dawn, demanding breakfast, but they aren't asking, while all I can do is to keep my eyes fixed on that bacon and coffee-pot.

The girl brought him his food, the bacon placed with her fingers on a thick hunk of white bread, and the coffee-mug filled to the brim. He thanked her and took an eager bite of the bread and bacon, and for ten minutes he was silent, chewing away at this and drinking great gulps of the coffee, while he watched them and they silently watched him. When he had finished he gave a deep sigh of satisfaction, brushed his mouth with the back of his hand, ran his fingers through his hair again to concentrate his mind on the task of explanation he had now to undertake, and looked at the stout man. The stout man, by way of easing the conversation, allowed himself a fleeting smile.

"You hungry, eh?"

"Yes, very," said Richard abruptly. He had suddenly

realised that he had no need to explain himself to this motley crew. He could pay them for the food they had given him and move on. Now that the pangs of his hunger no longer tore at him, he had a desire again to be solitary with his pain. Yet he could not get up and march off as soon as he had finished the last crumb. He looked at the stout man inquiringly.

"You got some horses here?"

"Yes," the half-breed said, "they are tethered down at the foot of the valley."

"Do you often come through here?" asked Richard, to maintain the conversation.

"About twice a year, in the spring and just now."

"Which way are you going?" asked Richard.

"Through to the Okanagan Valley. We go there and pick fruit in August. In the winter, trap, up in the Peace River district."

A sudden idea crossed Richard's mind.

"I say, look, will you take me along with you, to the Okanagan? I'm looking for a job. Can I get a job there, do you think? It's not the job I want so much as to get away from this place. I'm fed up with it here. I've been working in Jasper at the Lodge. Don't look anxious, I haven't committed a crime. I just want to get away from people. There's too many of them at the Lodge. Take me along with you, will you? I'll help you with the pack-horses. I can load a pack and handle a canoe. I'll earn my keep. I'll be no trouble, really; I'll be a help to you. Please . . ." He looked appealingly at the stout man, who looked at Richard with his mouth open for a minute or two, then turned to the other Indian, and spoke to him rapidly in the dialect they used. The girl joined in to their conversation, and even the small boy, who could not have been more than ten years old, contributed his shrill comments on the situation. It seemed to Richard, watching them anxiously, and not understanding a word that they said, that at times all of them talked together and could not have understood what each other was saying. But finally their jabbering ceased, and the stout man turned to him.

"O.K. If you like, you come along. But you got to work to pay for your food. One of the pack-horses has gone lame and can't carry such a great load, mebber you can help. If we not get along we part, eh? What's your name?"

"Richard Danby."

"Me, I'm Charlie Drew. This my daughter; this" (pointing to the younger man) "my daughter's husband; this my small son. My daughter, she called Ann. She got Indian name, but it begins like Ann, so most people call her that. My son-in-law, he Tommy Kolchak. The little boy, he called Rat."

"Rat?" said Richard, smiling for the first time that morning.

^ "Yes," said the proud father, gazing with great fondness at his son, who looked back up at his father, smiling proudly, but not explaining the derivation of this strange and unflattering name.

"I see," said Richard. "How are yc, Rat?"

"I'm fine," said Rat. "I got a gun," he hastened to add.

"Have you, Rat? What sort of a gun?"

"It's a real gun," said Rat, frowning fiercely to emphasise the spectacular dimensions of the weapon. "It shoots. Gee, yes, it shoots real bullets. My father said I could tote it if I liked."

"I'll have to see it, Rat. It sounds a pretty good gun to me."

"Sure is," smiled Rat.

Charlie Drew was pleased. His pride in all that his little son said and did was so intense and absorbed that often his face reflected the expression that was on Rat's face, and now he was smiling serenely too. But there was work on hand to do, and he got up and stretched himself; then said to Richard, "You better go along with Tommy and corral the horses while we clear up here."

Richard didn't much like the look of Tommy Kolchak. He would rather have stayed with the others amongst whom he had had his first cheerful thoughts since the evening before. Tommy Kolchak looked sulky and ill-tempered; his face was pale, like that of an unhealthy white man, and the impression of ill-health was emphasised by the fact that his skin was pock-marked. He was strong and stockily built; he wore moccasins and walked a little pigeon-toed as Indians used to the woods do. Richard walked behind him down the narrow path towards the end of the valley, where in a meadow of lush mountain grass the ponies had been tethered. Tommy Kolchak's shoulders were hunched as though he were angry about something, but Richard was afterwards to discover that this

was his normal gait, just as his usual expression was the sulky one he had worn at their first meeting.

They rounded up the four horses and led them back up the trail towards the camp. The sun had risen above the hills, and the whole valley was now bathed in an aqueous morning light, and the air was sharp and invigorating. Two of the horses were heavily loaded with the packs, but the other two had only a blanket slung over their backs, and on to one of these Ann mounted, and up on to the other, the lame one, Rat was lifted by his father. Rat sat there, his gun clutched in his arms as another child might hold a favourite teddy bear. Then the cavalcade started off, Charlie Drew walking in front leading a pack-horse, Rat following on his horse, Richard walking behind. Then came Ann on her horse, and behind her another pack-horse unled, and bringing up the rear Tommy Kolchak, his shoulders hunched, his face scowling, his moccasined feet padding along unweariedly in the dust of the trail.

The cavalcade wound westward over the Maligne hills, mounting steadily all morning towards the narrow pass that led through the mountains to the Pacific slope. They passed from valley to valley, the mountains continually opening out to receive them, then slowly closing in behind them, then opening out again to fresher and higher valleys, where the lakes seemed even more blue, and the scent of pine and tamarisk more pungent. Loons rose with shrill cries from these still, blue waters, and sometimes a fish jumped, a curled steel splinter sprung from the depths, casting wide rings that wasted out upon the surface as far as the eye could reach. Every now and then, as the trail led them near the precipitous side or some bare brown mountain, Richard looked up, and had the impression that the mountain, too, had been lost in thought, dreaming into the blue sky, and, disturbed by the presence of this human cavalcade, had looked down as someone, suddenly aroused, might raise himself on one elbow and peer, startled, over the edge of a bed. At noon they stopped where some pine trees fell away at their left hand towards the shore of a little lake lying very still under the heat of the midday sun. For the last hour, Richard had been feeling both tired and hot, and the nagging pain which had been created by Elaine's cable, and which had been quiescent as they had moved in the freshness of the morning through these upland valleys, had started to

throb again, as he had fallen into the monotony of the slow march along the trail. Two or three things had occurred to him with a slight sense of shock during the morning. He had told no one at the Lodge of his leaving. What would they be thinking? What sort of a search party would they organise, or would they not consider him worth such trouble? As he had left like this, he could never go back, and now he would never receive Elaine's explanatory letter. About that he was conscious of feeling glad. Why should he listen to any explanations? Nothing could explain this. Her word had been given. It had been a bond. She had broken it within a month. He had been a fool to care for her. A great part of his thoughts during the morning had been taken up with learning to hate her.

Lastly, he had thought of the Brydens. What would they think when they heard of his disappearance? He was conscious of feeling a little ashamed about this, and he determined to write them some sort of letter of explanation as soon as he could. He would do it at the same time as he wrote to his parents to tell them that he was not going back to the University. The dear old Gov.! Well, he was used to the buffetings which his soaring ambitions always met during the course of their upward flight.

So, when they stopped at noon under the shade of the pine trees, slipped the packs off the backs of the horses, and led the sweat-stained animals down to the water to drink, Richard's mood was a good deal more despondent than it had been that morning. Again he and Tommy Kolchak were deputed to do this work while Ann and her father prepared a temporary camp, Charlie building a fire to boil some tea, and Ann opening one of the saddle-bags to get out some food. Rat tripped along beside Richard, glad to stretch his small legs after four hours on horseback. Forced to remain silent all morning for lack of an audience, he was now voluble to a degree. Richard listened to what he was saying with only half his attention. The rest of his thoughts were still engaged with his own gigantic grief.

It appeared that Rat was urging him to come fishing with him after lunch while the rest of the party were having their siests.

'Won't you?' asked Rat persuasively, clutching Richard's hand with his own small one, and looking up at him beseechingly.

Tommy Kolchak turned round and spoke for the first time that day.

"Leave him be, Rat," he commanded. "He won't want you bothering him."

His surly glance met Richard's, and they eyed one another silently for a moment. The thought flashed across Richard's mind, "Trouble with this chap some time," and his heart leapt in gladness to meet the challenge. He smiled down at the small boy.

"Sure I will, Rat. Any time you say. I bet yo*i know all the best fishing places."

Rat assumed an expression of portentous wisdom. "I guess maybe I do," he said. "My dad showed me. I'll show you the best places on this lake," he adddd, with a burst of eager friendliness. He eyed Richard admiringly. "I like you," he said, his head a little on one side. "You'll be my friend, eh?"

"There's nothing I'd like better, Rat," said Richard, smiling. "You know a lot about the trail, being on it all the time as you are. I'll learn a lot if I stick along with you, I think."

Rat surveyed his new friend with fond eyes, and when Tommy and Richard pulled at the horses' heads and led them away from the water, Rat fell in beside Richard on the path, and thrusting his hand in his, walked with him up towards the camp.

After they had had a snack under the trees and the others had lain down for a nap, Richard and Rat, carrying two poles and two lengths of line, with some bacon for bait, walked down to the lake again. Half a mile along the shore they found a number of rocks running out at right angles, each separated from the other by a yard or two of water, but forming a peninsula about fifteen yards long. They took off their shoes, and obeying Rat's instructions, Richard rolled up his trousers, lifted Rat on to his shoulders and waded out to the farthest rock, which rose about five feet above the surface of the water, and had a smooth circular top a yard or two square. On this promontory Richard placed Rat and the lines; then with Rat's aid scrambled up himself. The water lapped busily around the base of the rock and swirled through the opening between this and the rock behind. It was cool out on the water where a little breeze was blowing. It looked too bright to be good for

fishing, but Rat scorned this observation. "They'll bite anything up here," he promised; and proved himself knowledgeable by hauling in a fine two-pound rainbow trout a few minutes after he had let his line into the water.

Richard enjoyed the Rat's company. He was sufficiently talkative to be entertaining, and sufficiently winsome to keep Richard's mind off his own troubles. Rat knew no reticences. Like some sharp-beaked bird, to which with his thin, pointed, ugly face he bore a resemblance, he flew straight at any point. He wanted to know all about Richard, so he plied him with questions: where he came from, what he ordinarily did, why he was here. Yet he was as generous in giving information as he had been direct in demanding it. There was nothing he considered it necessary to withhold.

So Richard learnt a great deal about the life of a nomadic half-breed family, and about the members of this particular group. His father Rat held in the highest esteem, and justified his high opinion by listing his accomplishments as guide, trapper, trail-rider, hunter, mighty man of the woods. Rat was afflicted with the average boy's distrust of a sister's qualities. He grudgingly allowed when pressed by Richard, that Ann was pretty; yes, he admitted, she was a good sport, sure, he liked her all right; and then the Rat, unaccustomed to evasions, came out with it flat, looking at Richard with a deep boyish seriousness. The truth was that he didn't like her to be married to Tommy Kolchak. The utter basis of the whole thing was—his downcast look and sudden silence implied—he didn't like Tommy Kolchak.

"He gets drunk and beats her, and then she cries," said the Rat angrily. "When my father catches him at that, he beats him and gives him a damn good hiding. Tommy wants to take Ann away, but my father won't let her go, so he hangs along with it. He hit me once, but I didn't need my father to help. Me, I went for him and bit his hand and kicked his shins," said the Rat, smiling proudly at his exploit.

"Yes, I don't think he likes me very much," said Richard.

"He don't like anybody/' said the Rat. "You watch him," he advised his friend, "he'll pick a fight with you. When you go for him, jump in quickly and grab his left wrist. That's the hand he reaches for with his knife."

"Good God," said Richard, "does he use a knife?"

"If he gets a chance," said the little Rat, nodding with great emphasis.

"Lookit," he said suddenly, "there's a redcoat." Richard looked in the direction of the trail. There, not a hundred yards away, but barely noticeable in the shadow of the trees, was a mounted policeman, his horse going at a walking pace in the direction which would pass their camp. Suddenly Richard had an idea.

"He might just be looking for me, Rat," he said, standing up. "I think I'll hail him before he reaches the camp." He stood up to his full height on the rock and whistled sharply. They saw the policeman stop and look down towards the lake. Richard knew that their figures would be clearly visible outlined against the water. He waved his arm, and watched the policeman turn his horse down to the shore.

"Come on, Rat, we better go and have a word with him."

He transported Rat, their lines, and the three trout they had caught back to the shore, wading out of the water just as the policeman reached the edge of the trees that stood a few yards from the lake. Richard lifted the Rat to the ground, and looking up found himself being watched by Sergeant Brook whom he had met at Jasper when he came there the year before with Corporal Manton.

"You're just the guy I'm looking for," said the sergeant. "Thanks for calling me."

"Well," said Richard, "sorry if I've caused you any trouble."

"Hallo, Sergeant Brook," said Rat, advancing with a large friendly smile on his dark face.

"Well, if it isn't little Rat," said the sergeant, smiling back at him. "So you two have fallen in with each other, have you?"

"Sure, Richard's my friend," said the Rat, with a bland, proprietorial air.

"Where's your father camped, Rat?" asked the sergeant.

"About half a mile up," offered the Rat.

"You run on and tell him I'm just going to drop in and say howdy, will you, Rat?"

"Sure," said the Rat, and bounded off. But when he had gone twenty yards, he paused and came slowly back, his face cast in serious lines.

"You aren't going to do anything with my friend, Richard, Sergeant, are you?" he asked.

The sergeant burst out laughing, and the Rat, his fears allayed, laughed too. "Good Lord, no, Rat. You run along. We'll follow you up in a minute."

"What's the trouble, son?" asked the sergeant quietly, when they were alone again.

Richard kicked at the ground, thrust his hands in his pockets, looked glum and showed all the signs of resenting questioning. "Nothing's the matter," he said.

"Well, you've given me a bit of trouble chasing you up," said the sergeant.

"I've already apologized for that," said Richard. "How did you know where I'd gone?"

"Somebody saw you starting off in the Maligne direction. When you couldn't be found this morning, hadn't slept in your bed, and had disappeared as soon as you got a cable, they naturally called me in. I rode out to Maligne, saw the marks of Charlie Drew's camp, thought you might have fallen in with him or that he might have seen you, so I tracked him up. That's how it was. I'll have ridden forty miles by the time I get back to Jasper to-night, and will have spent a day on your case. So perhaps you'd better tell me what the trouble is."

Richard remained silent.

"I've seen the cable, of course. I had to get a copy of that from the telegraph office," went on Sergeant Brook. "I guess all that meant some bad news for you, eh?" he inquired sympathetically.

Still Richard remained silent.

"Well, are you coming back to the Lodge with me?" asked the sergeant. "I guess we'll have to borrow one of Charlie's horses."

"I'm not coming back," said Richard.

"Kind of mean to leave them in the middle of the busy season, isn't it?"

"I can't help it. I can't come back."

"Well, I can't make you, son. You haven't done anything wrong except cause me a bit of trouble, and you're not the first citizen in these parts to do that. What do you figure on doing?"

"I'm going through to the Okanagan Valley with Charlie Drew."

"You are, eh? Well, if I can't do anything else I can give you

some advice. Watch out for that son-in-law of his, Tommy Kolchak. He's a tough guy, if you cross him. I've had him locked up once or twice. He's inclined to use the knife. Keep an eye peeled for him, and whatever you do—since you've set on travelling with half-breeds—don't drink with them. They can't handle drink, so remember what I say, don't drink with them. If I seem kind of firm about that, it's because I think you're an obstinate guy, and inclined to believe you know best. Well, I've been dealing with Indians and breeds for thirty years, and in this case you follow my advice, or you'll certainly be sorry for it. Come on, let's go and see Charlie. I got to be getting back."

CHAPTER TWENTY - TWO

i

THREE days' travel brought them to the height of land. There were peaks here and there that stood up above them, like crooked figures hooked into the sky, but now their trail was 7000 feet above the sea, they were crossing a broad shelf of rock, and were on an eye-level with the summits of many mountains that swam away into the distance like the grey waves of a polar sea. At intervals during the day they would hear avalanches thundering down the side of some nearby mountain, but except for these sudden reverberations there was a ghostly silence over the land. The air was keen and sharp. They met little winds, buffeting through some channel of rock, ice-cold with the snow across which they had brushed; and wet with sweat one minute, they would find themselves the next aching with the agony of cold. Here and there the track they were following would be covered for a few yards with a wet snow on which the horses slipped. They were above timber-line and saw few trees, except those a thousand or more feet below them. At night they camped behind rocks, and huddled in blankets to keep warm. They rose at first light and crouched shivering over the fire before the coffee-pot was put on it. Richard usually awoke feeling stiff and miserable, but the sight

of little Rat, peeping out of a blanket like a ferret out of a bag, would make him laugh, and he would stretch himself, shake off his stiffness, go and pull a protesting, squeaking Rat out of his blanket, and feel his spirits rise with the beginning of day. «

Sometimes, when the going was easy, Rat would be hoisted from his horse and set atop the pack on one of the other horses, and then for a few miles Richard would be able to ride and rest his burning feet. It was pleasant for a little to sit thus perched, and to watch the vivid, clear-cut scenery swaying before his eyes, as he swung with the motion of the horse. But he felt that he was being regarded as a weakling, and besides the freedom to let his mind move set it wandering upon paths he wanted to avoid. Elaine's face appeared in his imagination; he could hear her voice, and remember the feel of her lips. The irrevocability of what she had done angered him, the ultimate step taken without letting him know, without giving him a chance to persuade her against it. He grew bitter, thinking of this as he swung this way and that as the horse stumbled along the rocky path. He longed to do something that would hurt Elaine, and because in this remote spot there was nothing that he could do, he grew truculent and ill-humoured instead. At this stage, recognising that he was hurting only himself, he usually jumped down from the horse's back, and walked silently and moodily until they made their next halt.

The girl Ann had been regarding him for several days without Richard being aware of it. She hardly ever spoke to any one. When he first joined the party, Richard had been aware of her as a pretty girl, with dark brown eyes, long even eyelashes, a pale skin tinged with yellow; a slim figure wearing a sweater and a leather coat, a pair of riding breeches, and leather boots that reached just below the knee. She looked capable, strong and attractive. She had a great capacity for graceful silence. When others talked, she stood or sat with head bowed, her hands folded before her, the meekness of a slave in her attitude. But when she was addressed and lifted her pale face to look at the questioner, she showed no signs of bashfulness or fright, and gave not the slightest impression of humility. She had a very soft, rather sweet, girlish voice, and she spoke usually in quiet monosyllables. But Richard had noticed that her eyes could, and did, reflect all the emotions, surprise, laughter, dissent and anger, usually conveyed by ordinary

people with a welter of words. He had got so used to her silences that he had ceased to wonder about her, and accepted her as part of the picture imprinted on his mind of the cavalcade, together with the canvas-covered packs protruding from each side of the laden horses, the slightly bent figure of Charlie Drew walking ahead, the narrow trail, the steep rocky faces of the hills squeezing in on him, the clear sky overhead, and the sun that in the middle of the day beat down on them with huge force.

But Ann had been watching Richard. What thoughts passed through her contemplative Indian mind it would be hard to say, for never by any gesture or word did she show that she was thinking of him. But her eyes followed him, and, without his being aware of it, rested on him for long intervals; a point which the wily and mischievous Rat noticed, and conveyed to his friend Richard when he was helping him to water the horses one night.

The Rat uncovered the matter that was in his mind with the directness characteristic of him.

"You know what I think, Richard? I think my sister's fallen for you. Say, she's got her eyes fixed on you all the time."

Richard, though he was used to the darting pattern of the Rat's conversation, was startled by this matter which affected himself.

He laughed incredulously.

"What on earth are you talking about, you miserable little boy? Whatever those mumblings of yours meant, pipe down, or you'll be getting into trouble."

Rat shook his head and laughed with certainty, fixing his bright eyes on Richard.

"Oh, I know," he said. "She can't fool me, Ann can't."

Richard had to laugh at the little gnome, but his own feelings were a queer mixture: pleasure that the Rat's guess might be true, apprehension, in view of the trouble that was bound to result, if it were. But there was only one thing to be done with the Rat. Richard seized his ear, and gave it a slight twist.

"I'll kick your little bottom very hard if you so much as mention a word of this again, to me, or to any one else. Do you understand?"

He spoke seriously and the Rat recognised it. "O.K., I won't say anything. But, Richard, you watch her eyes."

Richard found himself doing that, at supper that night, at breakfast next morning, at noon-time when they stopped to rest. It became quite an exciting and diverting experience. Ann undoubtedly was watching him, and her eyes fell away swiftly when his gaze encountered hers.

I'll be damned, thought Richard to himself. Then, suddenly aware that he was thinking of her and considering her charms, he grew angry with himself, got up from his place and saying that he was going down to see if the horses were all right, left the camp-fire by which they had been sitting after supper and took a path that led away through the woods.

2

He felt sick at heart. What a worthless sort of fellow I am, he thought. I lose Elaine, run off dramatically into the wilds, forfeiting the good opinion of all my friends, and disappointing every one; and within a week I'm lusting after a half-breed woman. I believe I'm the kind that ends up by being a criminal. I'm certainly shiftless enough. I've jumped about from job to job ever since I came out here. All the ridiculously noble thoughts I had about Canada meant nothing; I was simply striking dramatic attitudes. The only thing that did mean anything was making love to Elaine, and there was nothing very distinguished about my conduct there; sleeping with a man's daughter while I was a guest under his roof.

And here I am, right under Tommy Kolchak's eye, wondering what it would be like to make love to his wife.

I must be a very lustful person. I wish I weren't. I don't enjoy it. I was much happier when I was a boy, and thought occasionally about God, and said my prayers morning and night, and was fresh and clean. Now I feel dirty and ignoble, as though I were a rather lewd goat.

He sat down on a fallen tree-trunk and looked at the still waters of a little lake that reflected in the evening light all the mountain peaks surrounding it. Darkness was beginning to suffuse the prospect at the end of the valley, and a pearly-grey light bathed with softness the lower pihe-covered slopes of the hills, leaving their bare summits clear, so that trees still mirrored themselves perfectly in the placid surface of the lake. Richard stared unhappily at this beautiful scene. Elaine, my

darling, he thought with furious anguish, why did you desert me? You've ruined everything, my happiness and yours, and now nothing will ever come of our lives.

He sat on for an hour or more while night replaced day, his thoughts sombre and sad, and his heart heavy with grief. He yearned to be home again with his family, to regain the simplicity and innocence which he had lost, to be clean and kind and forthright instead of twisted and unhappy as he now was.

A silver light bathed the little lake, and the pine-clad hills that ran down into it on the farther shore. The darkness instead of increasing was diminishing as the first quarter of a golden moon climbed above the hills. The setting, and the light which played upon it, were of such an unearthly beauty that Richard momentarily forgot his grief in contemplation of their sublimity. It was a light and a scene through which some spirit might have been expected to move, a silver angel with wings spanning the valley to sweep with a mighty rush over the lake; or God Himself to become manifest, these hills His throne, this silver patch of water a jewelled footstool at its base. If only He would appear, and Richard might kneel at his feet and pour out His troubles to Him.

He was aware that in his own soul, as in the souls of all men, a little flame had been set to burn when he had been given life. His body was the temple in which it was to burn; his task to be the keeper of the flame. It was not an onerous duty. It was not meant to be an intolerable responsibility. It was a distinction, a setting apart from the creation of dumb beasts, from the inanimate world of nature, a recognition that man had been created in the image of God. It was the mark of man's kinship with divinity.

According to his conduct that flame flickered, lost its blue intensity, grew pale, subsided to a spark; or burnt brighter and more powerfully until its radiance suffused the walls of the temple, the inner light leaping up until it shone through and was reflected back in gentleness and serenity. As it was in the case of Don Brydeh. As it was in the case of Nick. As it was not, Richard was aware, sitting there and making up his own accounts, as it was not in the case of himself.

He weighed up the chances of his attaining that serenity. He now knew his own weaknesses, or imagined that he did. From the ruin of what he had made in the two years since he left

England could he build up anew something that would be worth while? He looked about him at the towering hills; their rugged grandeur and steadfastness was in contrast with his collapsed hopes. Was there a chance for him still in this country which he knew he loved so much, where he had found so many friends and good companions, who had put up with his waywardness, his quick temper, his vanity and selfishness, and had helped him, each in their different way, towards manhood?

He would have to stop pitying himself about Elaine; he would have to stop yielding to such an idle fancy as that Ann Kolchak had aroused in him. He would have to forget those sensual pleasures, the thought of which seemed to have been pricking his imagination so much since he had come out here. Was he capable of sustaining himself on such a course? He doubted it, but the alternative being a continuation, if not a worsening, of his present state, it was worth a try.

And having reached that conclusion, he promised himself, looking at the silver lake, and hearing its cool ripples lapping at the shore only a few yards away, to try to blow into a life of flame again the dim spark that was all that remained of his spirituality.

3

Two days later the cavalcade had descended still further the Pacific slope of the Rockies, and was to reach the following day Prince George, a town to which Charlie Drew referred with such respect that Richard looked forward with interest to seeing it. From there they were to branch southwards to reach the Okanagan valley.

Now that the mornings were warmer Richard tried to get up early, and before he went to bring in the horses, take a dip in any lake near which they had pitched camp. On this morning he had risen at first light while the rest were still sleeping, and had walked down a path he had found the evening before, leading to a lake about fifty yards away. He had taken off his clothes and slipped into the water, had swum vigorously out to the centre of the lake, turned on his back to float and watch the sky; then without looking at the shore, had turned over and swum as vigorously back. When he was within twenty yards of the shore he trod water, and suddenly noticed a few

yards from him the Rat, who was an imperfect swimmer and loathed the water. The Rat was showing his imperfections to their fullest extent. How he had got into the water and out as far from the shore was a mystery, but that he was in a state of exhaustion and about to drown for want of rescue was apparent. He had evidently sunk once, and Richard caught sight of him as his head with bulging eyes and open mouth, and a thin little arm crooked pathetically, emerged for a moment from the water, propelled to the surface by the Rat's fearful struggles, and a frightened gasp burst from him before he sank like a stone again. But Richard with a few quick strokes was there as he sank. He plunged head and shoulders beneath the water, caught hold of the squirming Rat, lifted him shoulder high, and carried him gasping, weeping and bringing up water simultaneously, to the shore. There he laid him on the grass, turned him over on his face, and applied the first principles of resuscitation to the small damp form. As the Rat came back to life, and his lungs were emptied of water, he used the new air to set up a thin wailing. Richard stood up and pulled on his trousers, but kept a watchful eye on him.

"You'll be all right, Rat. Shut up," he commanded.

He heard the quick pad of moccasins coming along the path and looked up to see Ann. With a little "Oh" of pity, Ann dropped on her knees, and took the Rat's wet head in her lap, spoke to him in an Indian dialect, and rocked him to and fro to comfort him. The Rat's thin wail subsided, but he lay still as though afraid to move.

Then Charlie Drew came running down the path. Charlie's concern for his son, the apple of his eye, dominated the scene. He pushed Ann away, dropped to his haunches, picked up the Rat and hugged him to his breast, spoke endearments to him, kissed his forehead, brushed back his lank wet hair; and then looking up at the others demanded to know how it had all happened.

The Rat was now recovering, and making preliminary motions to speak, struggling into a sitting position from his father's shoulder, waving his thin arms, and finally, after an effort, summoning his familiar broad smile, and with this surveying the company.

"Guess I can't swim as good as I thought," he announced, with a rueful smile. "Richard didn't know I was following him

this morning when he left the camp. When I got to the edge of the lake he was in the water, and heading out to the centre fine. Gee, it looked easy, the way Richard did it. I thought I'd go in and surprise him. I swam a bit all right, but then my breath all left me. Gee, it was cold. I felt I was going to strangle. I was certainly in deep trouble when Richard saved me. He saved my life/' the Rat said earnestly, looking at the others. "He ought to get a medal for that."

Charlie Drew looked long at Richard. Then he got to his feet, and Richard was appalled to realise that he was about to be thanked formally for fishing the Rat out of the water. He stopped Charlie as soon as he began to speak.

"Forget it, Charlie, it was nothing. The kid was only about ten yards out. You'd better be getting him back to camp and pouring some hot coffee into him. His teeth are beginning to chatter."

Charlie's smile expressed to Richard all the gratitude that he felt; then he took the Rat's hand and started running with him back to camp. Richard was left alone with Ann. He was standing there with bare feet and bare chest, his hair a mass of curls from the water. He reached down and picked up his heavy sweater, meaning to pull it over his head. When he straightened up, Ann stepped towards him, on her face an expression of subdued excitement, which seemed to communicate itself to him in some way, for suddenly his heart began to beat fast and his mouth felt dry.

She put her hand on his bare chest. "My father did not thank you properly," she said softly; then suddenly threw both her arms round his body, and drew him to her fiercely, and her lips fastened on to his mouth with a passion which he felt with a sense of shock. For a moment he was dumbfounded by the suddenness of the attack, but then, suffused and overcome by the feelings that were always dormant in him, he put his own arms round her, and strained her as fiercely to him. They drew apart only after a long minute from this embrace. A multitude of thoughts were tumbling through Richard's mind, and though all, with one exception, enticed him on to continue this folly, that one was strong enough to make him halt. The exception was provided by the memory of his sober thoughts a few nights ago beside the lake; his new determination to do better; his consciousness of the little flame inside him.

He turned aside from Ann, and to avoid the embarrassing silence, busied himself with his sweater. His face emerged from the pullover rather shy. "Come on, Ann," he said, "we had better get back. They'll be looking for us."

She smiled at him in her inscrutable way, put up a hand to touch her hair, then patted his shoulder lightly, and with a nod started up the path swiftly before him. Richard followed, fazing solemnly at the ground, wondering whether she thought him a prig, wondering, indeed, whether he was, and whether he hadn't been a fool to miss so easy a chance. On the path he met * Tommy Kolchak coming slowly down. Kolchak looked at him in an ill-tempered and surly way, and didn't greet him. "Troublesome bastard," said Richard to himself, continuing towards the camp-fire. "It's just as well that I'm not going to get mixed up with him."

4

They made camp a mile or two from town at five o'clock the following evening. When the horses had been put out to grass, and a tent erected, Charlie Drew and Tommy Kolchak set about cleaning themselves up for a visit to town. They were as nervously excited as children getting ready for a party. They heated some water to shave their beards, washed themselves with noisy splashings, brushed their black hair flat with brushes dipped into the water, knotted clean black silk handkerchiefs about their throats, took off their moccasins and put on ugly, brown "store" shoes, and started off to walk the dusty mile or two into town. While all this had been going on Charlie Drew had hardly ceased from talking, and Tommy Kolchak had worn instead of his customary frown an abstracted look which somewhat improved his appearance.

Richard was to be left to his own devices. Charlie Drew had invited him to come along with them, but Richard had scoffed at the pleasures Prince George had to offer, had made fun of the others as they washed and anointed themselves for the excursion, and had said that he meant to go for a walk instead.

When Charlie and Tommy started off, he had got to his feet and lounged away into the woods, leaving Ann and the Rat behind. The Rat had not been allowed to accompany his elders,

and Ann had had to remain behind to look after him. Richard, having firmly determined to have nothing to do with Ann, had watched the others preparing to depart. He was fixed in his resolution not to abandon his newly-formed purpose, but he looked forward with secret excitement to the matter being put to the test. He knew that before night fell it would be.

He walked along a path away from their little camp with many different thoughts leaping through his mind. At one moment he was sad and despondent, regarding himself as an outcast, unwanted by any one. At the next he thought how difficult it was to be virtuous. He was too impetuous by temperament to plod along the straitened path of virtue; it was a weary and unexciting road, and you had to travel a long way on it before you earned any applause. Then he found himself thinking with guilty pleasure of what it would be like to abandon his resolution and fling himself and his pent-up feelings upon Ann. Shame then subdued him and, scowling fiercely at the ground, he fixed his thoughts on the Gov., the Brydens, Elaine, and what had been the familiar background of his life.

A prey to these successive agitations, he walked for a mile or two along a broken path, then suddenly swung on his heel and made his way back to camp.

He had been gone an hour or more, but Ann was still sitting where she had been when he had left, sewing coloured beads on a buckskin coat. The Rat was away playing by himself somewhere. Ann looked up as Richard walked into the camp, his hands in his pockets, on his face a sulky, angry look which reflected his inner turmoil.

He flung himself down against one of the saddles and watched her sewing.

"What time will they be back?" he asked her.

She lifted her head slowly and looked at him for a few seconds before replying. Then she shrugged her shoulders and smiled, and looked down again at her sewing.

"Who knows?" she said softly. "They are Indians, and this is the first time they have been to town for several months. My father, he come back first, but very late. Tommy? Who knows?"

"What time will we eat?" asked Richard abruptly.

"When you wish," she replied. "Now?"

"No," said Richard. "Whenever you're ready. When the

Rat has to go to bed. Afterwards, when he's asleep, would you like to walk a bit with me?"

"Yes," she looked up slowly, smiling at him. "I should like it." She put her sewing aside, and got gracefully to her feet.

"I call Rat now. It's seven o'clock. It's time for him."

"You bloody fool," Richard addressed himself savagely. "This is asking for trouble."

5

It had grown almost dark by the time they had cleared up the supper things, got the protesting Rat off to sleep, and were ready to leave camp. But the moon had waxed since last, in a contrite mood, he had sat and observed it, and its gentle light was increasing as the brief twilight fled. Ann had put a red shawl over her shoulders before leaving, and stuck a red comb in her hair. This attempt at coquetry moved Richard strangely. He found that in an obscure way—or was it the peaceful night, and the moon, and their complete aloneness?—his senses were provoked. Yet at the same time it seemed to him a sad and ridiculous little attempt. He had an impulse to take the comb from her hair, and tell her not to be a silly girl, or to try to be a better wife, and order her off to bed. But he did nothing of the sort. Instead he took her hand under the pretence that it was too dark for her to see, and led her down a path that ran away from the camp towards a little copse of trees.

There, awkwardly, he kissed her, and with greater experience she returned his kiss, and his head swam and he did not know what to do. To talk was impossible. She was too hesitant a speaker; he was too impetuous to wait for her replies. Yet he longed to tell her all the trouble that was in his heart, and to explain why, out of loneliness and misery, he had kissed her.

That all being impossible, he asked her to sit down, and pulling a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, he lit one for her and one for himself, and sat on a hard hummock of grass, gazing at the strange and beautiful night. She watched him intently. He was aware that she was doing so, and he was in such a state of irritable uncertainty about everything that this animal-like quietness and submission added to his feeling of resentment towards her. He kept silent, staring at the sky-line, at the thin jagged stumps of some burnt-out trees which stood on a hill

outlined against the light sky, and at the dreaming moon, pensive above them, resting on a little mattress of cloud.

How sad the prospect seemed to him! The burnt-out trees were like gallows, or like crosses from which the bodies had been taken down. An atmosphere of forlornness brooded over the scene. It seemed derelict, as though mankind, with their shouting hopes and joys, and all the noise of their busy life, had gone on, leaving behind them the ravaged and desolate countryside, and a lonely and disconsolate outcast, who was Richard.

It seemed incredible that only this afternoon he had indulged in the thought of making love to this woman who sat in the darkness beside him, staring at him as an animal might stare at its prey. Was he lost to all sense of decency, was he beyond all hope? If Elaine had been true to him, this wouldn't have happened. Or was that just an excuse? Was he really insignificant and worthless, a mixture of high ambitions and low designs, following the one or the other as the circumstances of the moment offered?

They sat there for an hour, saying nothing, Richard a prey to these furious thoughts, and the silent Indian woman sitting immobile, with her shawl around her shoulders, watching him.

At the end of that time, Richard threw away the cigarette he was smoking, and got to his feet.

"Let's get back," he said. "To-morrow I'm going."

She said nothing, but got swiftly to her feet, and plodded along the path beside him back to the camp. They had left a log fire burning. Suddenly, as they approached the camp, Richard felt a stab of surprise that it should be still burning so brightly. They had been away from camp for an hour and a half, and it was now ten o'clock. The fire should have been by this time a mere heap of embers.

"One of them must be back," said Richard. "Someone's built up the fire."

When they came into the circle of the firelight, however, they could see no one. Several broken branches had been thrown carelessly across the fire, so carelessly that the grass nearby had caught the flames and was burning. Richard stamped this out, and stood looking down at the blaze moodily, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets.

He could hear Ann moving about behind him. Ail at once

she called out something in a frightened voice. Richard swung round, and in the light of the fire saw Tommy Kolchak crouched almost down to his haunches, creeping from the darkness of the trees which surrounded the camp. In a brief flash of understanding, Richard was aware of everything: that Ann, who now stood with the back of her hand against her mouth, and with the other clutching the shawl tightly at her neck, had seen Tommy Kolchak creeping from out of the shadows; that Kolchak had meant to creep up on him without being seen; that he was now in for the fight of his life. He could see the glint of the steel that Kolchak held in his left hand. With all that registered in his mind in one brief, illuminating flash, Richard was aware of that glorious sense of elation that always came over him when he was actually launched upon a fight with someone against whom he had been nursing a grievance for some time. The familiar elation was there, but with it this time there was a premonition of the inevitable remorse. It would be grand to bash Tommy Kolchak, but, oh, those sad, gallows-like trees upon the hill, and the forlorn night pressing in on them in this circle of firelight. Afterwards he would weep, he felt sure.

But he took preliminary steps to see that the fight went to his advantage. Tommy Kolchak looked an evil customer at the best of times. With a knife in his hand, and a fixed insane look on his face, and the firelight flickering on his crouched body, he was formidable indeed.

Richard moved sideways, circling round to get away from the fire. To keep Kolchak occupied for a moment, he talked in a tone of patient reasonableness.

"What's up, Tommy? You don't look very impressive crouched there like that. What's the game?"

"You take my wife. I watch you. I come back long time ago. I see you sitting over there. I wait for you. Now I kill you. Good thing."

Kolchak spoke in short, jerky sentences, and between them drew a sobbing breath as though he had been running.

Richard had by now placed himself at right angles to the fire, and at the margin of its light. As he had circled, Kolchak had circled too. Now, evidently fearing that he meant to fly off into the darkness, Kolchak straightened himself, took one or two slow steps nearer, then raised his knife and jumped at Richard.

Richard put up his arms tight against his own chest to take the weight of Kolchak's body, and ducked violently to escape the knife. He and Kolchak fell back on the ground and rolled over. With the thought of the knife only in his mind, Richard rolled quickly over, and grabbed at Kolchak's wrist. But Kolchak was strong, and though Richard's grip impeded the movement of his arm, it did not make him release the knife or prevent him from bringing it down in a slanting way against Richard's chest. Richard's grip was strong enough to divert the blow. ^ He saw the knife, which had been aimed at his chest, come at his face instead, and he had a horrible fear that it might put out one of his eyes. He groaned and turned his head swiftly, and felt a hot seam run down his cheek, and realised that the knife had slashed his face. He heard the knife thud into the ground.

Then a tearing anger seized him. That a half-breed Indian should be doing this thing to him, trying to murder him, Richard. His rage was so great that he let out a bellow. He had let go Kolchak's wrist. They were both still sitting on the ground. He raised himself to his knees, while Kolchak with a quick gasp and a lightning movement swung himself on to his haunches and reached up with both his arms to get at Richard's neck. It was the touch of the Indian's hands that produced the bellow of rage from Richard. He turned quickly, leaning his head back to keep away from those dark hands. Then suddenly he flung himself on Kolchak with a cry like that of an animal. As he came in Kolchak got his arms round Richard's shoulders; but Richard's own hands seized Kolchak's thick neck, and he pressed against him, instead of away from him. Kolchak strained against the force, but could not support it. He squirmed to try to move sideways, and he let go Richard's shoulders to put his hands on the ground, so that he might press against that and prevent himself from falling back. By doing that, he left himself defenceless. Richard's hands closed on his throat, the fingers locked behind his neck, and the thumbs pressed fiercely into his windpipe. Kolchak cried out, but the rush of his breath was stopped by the fearful pressure on his throat. Suddenly his body sagged and fell limply back on the ground, and his neck slipped from Richard's grasp. As quick as a flash, Richard jumped on to his chest, locked his fingers again behind Kolchak's neck, and applied his

thumbs to his windpipe again. All the time he was snarling as a dog snarls, and before his eyes was a red mist of rage. He knew that somewhere near him was a fire, and outside the circle of firelight the sad blackness of the night. But he was aware of nothing else, only of the great consuming rage that licked up and seared inside him, and of the soft throat under his hands.

Then, when an age seemed to have passed, he was aware of a hand shaking his shoulder, and he came slowly out of the red mist as one emerges from a heavy sleep when one is being awoken. He was aware of Ann's voice, sobbing, but he could not at first hear what she said. Then the words became distinguishable, though they seemed to come from a great distance, as though she called them from the top of a hill to him in a valley below, and as though the wind carried the words up and down the valley in wide sweeps until gradually they came lower, and, by straining his ears and standing perfectly still, he could hear them.

"You've killed him. You've killed him," Ann was saying, sobbing and shaking his shoulder.

Richard looked down at the still body between his knees. Kolchak's face was turned away into the shadows. He lay perfectly still. He looked grotesque and huge stretched out in the flickering light.

All at once a wave of emotion which felt like tiredness and felt like sickness drained away inside him. He could feel it roll down from his head through his body, and up from his feet to his body until it settled in his loins, and he felt terribly cold and frightened. He staggered to his feet, putting a hand up before his eyes. He took a step or two as a drunkard would walk, then dropped his hand and looked around him. Ann was bent over Kolchak, touching his face with her hand. At the door of the tent, the Rat was kneeling, staring white-faced at the scene. Richard started to stagger towards the shadows outside the glaring firelight, but suddenly he groaned and stumbled, and fell full length. He did not faint, but he lay there, his head buried in his arm. For a few minutes he was perfectly still. Then from the depths of his body convulsive sobs started to rise. He could feel them choke him as they passed his windpipe. There were long intervals between them at first, but gradually they came more frequently until half an hour later, when the

police arrived, conducted by Charlie Drew, he was lying on the ground, sobbing like a child.

CHAPTER TWENTY - THREE

ONE evening in the middle of August, 1939, just as she was dressing for dinner, Elaine Harriman, who was staying with the Brevoorts at their villa outside Cannes, was called to the telephone.

' C'est Londres qui parle, Madame/' said the maid, and asked her if she would speak from the telephone room downstairs where the line would be clearer.

Elaine rose from before her dressing-table. She had just been putting the finishing touches to her hair. This she now patted with expert hands, leaned forward, as she rose, to look closely at her eyes in the mirror, picked up her powder-puff and patted her nose with it briefly; then turned and walked swiftly towards the door which the maid held open for her. Elaine's mind was busy with the possible reasons for Ralph's call. Some of these reasons afforded her anxiety; one of them was that the call might be to announce that he was joining her in the south of France. Yet, though she was busy with these private speculations of her own, she was not so absent-minded as to forget to smile at the maid as she passed. The maid's pale cheeks blushed, and she bent forward with a respectful and admiring bob as the beautiful Madame Harriman rustled through the door.

Ralph's voice came distantly over the wire. It was characteristic of Elaine's state of mind at this time that she had to strain to catch what he was saying, and that the exchange of words between them was formal and precise. It was also characteristic of the state of affairs between them that they kept interrupting one another. There was none of that understanding which exists between minds perfectly attuned, where much can be left unsaid yet be understood.

Ralph was speaking in guarded tones. How well she knew

that hush-hush manner, and how secretly antagonised by it she was. That portentous sense of being in the know about something or other. In the two years of her marriage, how tired had she become of people in the Government, who tried to give the impression that they were the bearers of vital secrets; that enormous events were in train, and that they had had a hand, rather a large hand, in setting these matters in motion. "I want you to come back to London by the Blue Train to-morrow, darling," Ralph was saying. "I've made a reservation for you. Don't on any account miss the train. I can't go into details over the 'phone, but I tell you it is essential to come home. You must trust me. I'll explain everything when I see you."

"But at least tell me what it is, Ralph. Are you being moved to a post abroad, has a cable come from my family, or is it just the situation?"

Ralph, in London, laughed hollowly, and the telephone obediently transmitted his empty mirth to Cannes. "*Just* the situation, darling? That's been enough to keep us all at the office, almost day and night, for two weeks. Yes, it's that. Your family are all right, and I'm not being moved. But I want you to come back right away, without a minute's delay."

"It's frightfully inconvenient, Ralph. Are you sure it's really necessary? Couldn't I stay until the end of the week?"

"Elaine." His voice was still patient, but she could detect in it a note of sharp authority she had heard him use to others, but never to herself, before.

"Well, Ralph, if I must. But if this is merely another false alarm, I shall be very angry with you."

His tone became anxious and conciliatory. That was what always made her feel ashamed of herself. He never bore her a grudge for her rudeness to him; he was always patient, quiet, enduring. When what she longed for was tempestuousness, he was strong and calm and patient. After two years of marriage, she knew that that was what she fought frantically against with her spirit, his unwearying patience and rightness. Sometimes her struggles to oppose these qualities resulted in her being rude and unkind; but his calmness and sureness were proof even against that. She felt herself trapped and unhappy; she knew that her marriage was a failure. But she admitted nothing, and never revealed her irritation with him except in private. In the eyes of the world Elaine Harriman was a beautiful and

gifted woman, and Ralph Harriman had added to the promise of his career in marrying her.

"Have you been enjoying yourself, darling? I am a brute to drag you away from your holiday."

She dodged the question so that she might avoid the empty politeness of denying his brutal action.

"Are there any cables or letters for me from home, Ralph? I haven't heard from the family for weeks."

He could have told her of Andrew's anxious cables to him, urging him to send Elaine home for a trip in view of the rapidly worsening situation in Europe. But he dreaded to say anything of that on the 'phone. One thing that constantly puzzled him was Elaine's obstinate refusal to go back to Canada for a visit. That had been the source of several arguments between them.

"You seem strangely anxious for me to go, Ralph," she said to him once, when urged on by a private letter of entreaty from Andrew, he had tried to persuade her to give up the idea of a holiday on the French coast for a trip to Alberta. "A jealous wife would be suspicious, but I'm sure it's just your kind and tactful heart trying to do the best for every *one*. You think I'm not being very thoughtful to my mother and father, don't you, and it's an affront to your diplomatic sense not to have everybody pleased. You know that it's perfectly ridiculous to think that I don't want to see my father and mother, but I've spent all my life in Alberta, and now I want to see other places for a bit. I'll go back, don't you worry. Probably next summer. But leave me to make my own plans about that, my dear."

She knew that that was an untrue explanation. It wasn't a passion to see the sights of Europe that kept her away from Alberta. The necessity of giving a false reason to Ralph, and the fact of having no one in whom she could confide, increased her unhappiness. Yet the success with which these agitations were hidden beneath the cool and lovely appearance of Elaine Harriman might have given a lesson in disguise of the emotions to some of the experienced members of the Diplomatic who most frequented her drawing-room.

The day after the telephone conversation she sat in a compartment of the Blue Train as it sped through the sunlit landscape of France. She threw aside the newspaper which she had been reading, and stared, chin on hand, through the window.

When she was alone like this, and knew that she was not observed, some reflection of the unhappiness and discontent she felt with herself and with the world was apparent in her expression.

If any one had been sitting with her in the compartment, that expression would never have been allowed to show. Had any one come to the door and she had been aware of them, it would instantly have disappeared. They would have seen only that charming young Canadian, Mrs. Harriman, who had attracted every one in London by her young beauty and unaffected vivacity. Elaine had made a great effort to win their liking, and she had been aware of her success. But when she knew that she had achieved that object, she had been aware that in something else she had failed. Her failure was equally of her own making; and, it seemed, was equally inescapable.

Elaine's childhood had been so nappy that the past year, in which she had known some unhappiness, stood out as a great forbidding mountain which shut out the sun. Her life seemed to have moved into a shadow, and that shadow was deepening now in gloom, or she felt as though" she moved forward towards a dark tunnel to which she was being irresistibly drawn, and from which there would be no escape. Nothing there, she thought, with a feeling of panic, but ultimate and undissolving blackness pressing in on her. With her spirit she struggled against this overwhelming pressure, but the struggle was unavailing; the sole evidence that she had struggled at all was apparent in the irritation which she presented like a shield to every attempt Ralph Harriman made to soften the acerbity of their relationship.

Why, he often thought, why did she ever consent to marry me if she finds me so intolerable?

Then he blamed himself for having over-persuaded her, for hastening her into marriage before she had had a chance to make up her own mind. He remembered that he was twice her age, that life in London was different from life in Alberta, that he had taken her away from all her young friends and thrust his older ones upon her. And a feeling of compunction seized him, and this acted upon the love he had for her as a bellows acts upon a dying fire, and his heart felt so full towards her that it ached as though it were a pain in his side.

And Elaine thought, why did I do it, why in heaven's name did I do it!

When in June, 1938, the MacTaviots had arrived at Southampton they had been met by Lady Harriman and Ralph. The meeting had been a difficult one for Elaine, and it seemed difficult for Ralph, too, who appeared nervous and shy, and over-apprehensive that everything should go well. The sight of his uneasiness had quietened Elaine's own fears for a while. But when it became plain that his embarrassment was due to his anxiety to please her, the apprehension returned. She had made up her mind that she would tell him as soon as possible that she wanted to withdraw her promise to marry him. She suddenly realised that that would have been easier to do if he had acted the forceful lover claiming his rights; it was more difficult to come to the dreaded point just because he was so anxious to please her and make her happy, so intent on not making her feel that she was bound in any way.

They had motored to Stratford Towers. Sir Bernard Purvis was staying there, and Lady Sylvester.

The uneasiness of those first few hours was lightened a little for Elaine by Sir Bernard. The others, even Ralph, were formidable strangers, but Sir Bernard, without making a great to-do of it, used his forty years' diplomatic experience to ease the difficulty of this present hour for the shy, charming young stranger, and was rewarded for his effort by seeing some of the apprehension fade from her eyes when she talked to him; by a fleeting smile of relief and welcome she bestowed on him when he took his place beside her at dinner that evening, and made straight for her when the men returned to the drawing-room later on. His old and empty heart fluttered a little with gratitude for that smile.

Ralph, with whom she walked in the gardens, and who motored her round to see the sights of the neighbourhood during the day, did not once introduce the subject of their marriage, though it was quite plain from the way he talked, and devoted all his attention to her, and, showing her his property by a sort of inference rather than by precise words the idea that it was to be her property as well, and that her views on these proposed changes were vitally important. She longed to stop the flow of his conversation, to say quickly, "Oh, by the way, Ralph, talking of that, I wanted to tell you that I can't marry

you . . ." and then escape to her room, and as soon as possible from Stratford Towers.

But it was impossible to say it. Sooner or later the subject must be raised, but convention demanded that it should be raised by Ralph, and with each hour spent at Stratford Towers Elaine found herself increasingly conscious of the inviolability of convention in this environment. Lady Harriman and Lady Sylvester had appeared formidable enough against the easy background of her own Canadian home, but here at Stratford Towers they were positively frightening. Elaine remembered that she had joked with Andrew once about Ralph's correctness, the impression she felt that they were on the stage, and that he knew his own lines but that she had forgotten hers. It was no joking matter now. Here he was beside her, walking with threatening assurance through the vast gardens and over fields that he owned, never at a loss for a word, handsome, a little gay and good-humoured, as a compliment to her presence, but formidably correct. She stumbled along beside him—she felt that she was stumbling—the object of all these kind attentions, all this frightening assumption about a settled future, plotting escape *in* her heart, longing for, yet dreading, the moment when she could cut and run.

With each hour that passed she felt herself becoming more bewildered and frightened. She had never thought that it would be like this. She had imagined, without thinking out the details of the scene very closely, that on an evening after dinner Ralph and she would find themselves alone, and that he would say, "Do you like it here, now that you have seen it? Have you learnt to like me a little more? Will you marry me?"

Then she could have told him, as a friend might tell a friend, that she admired him, and thought with fondness and respect of him, but that she did not love him enough to marry him. Knowing the inevitable correctness of his conduct, she had imagined then that he would say nothing more, and though his feelings might be hurt he would never betray it. In a day or two, they might have escaped. How happily the summer days beckoned beyond this dark moment! And in September there would be Acadia again, and Richard. Her thoughts on the way over on the ship had indeed dwelt far more on the reunion with Richard than on these days of penance that had to be spent at Stratford Towers.

But it was not like this, not like this at all. A feeling of panic began to invade her. She felt as though a door were stealthily being closed behind her. Unless she were careful there would be no escape. It was ridiculous to think of it in these dramatic terms; nevertheless, she felt that she was being trapped, that all of them, Lady Harriman and Lady Sylvester, by the particular and creaking kindness they showed towards her, Ralph by his avoidance of the subject that was in suspense between them, and by his smothering her with this solicitude and attention, even Sir Bernard, by his sympathy and tact, were conspiring to commit her to this decision.

To her feeling of panic at the turn events were taking was added a frightening feeling of isolation. She felt that it was not only useless, but unwise, to confide her feelings of apprehension to her mother. That more than anything added to her unhappiness. Never before in her young life had there been a crisis of any sort which she had not immediately shared with her mother. Now suddenly she knew with conviction that her mother was not on her side in this matter. She wanted this match; she didn't want her to return to Alberta and to Richard. Elaine looked at her mother with new eyes. She saw the same handsome and gentle face she loved so much. Her mother's eyes when she smiled at her had the same affection and deep understanding in them that she had always known there. But Elaine wondered that she had betrayed her in this way. She must have known that by bringing her here she was committing her to this marriage. She felt shocked that her mother should have done this thing. She longed to go to her when she was alone, and say, "Mummy, it isn't true, is it, what I have been foolishly imagining, that you want me to marry Ralph, even though you know that I don't want to do it? I told you that I loved Richard. I did tell you, didn't I? You don't want me to do a thing that will make me unhappy, do you, darling Mummy?"

She was several times on the point of going to her mother, but something held her back, the apprehension that her fears might prove to be correct. Amidst so much that was uncertain she did not want to put to the test the deep, unquestioning love she had for her mother.

A week after their arrival Sir Bernard walked with her on the terrace one evening before dinner. They had been the

first down, Elaine had come out through the great doors of the drawing-room which were standing open to the terrace on this lovely June evening. She had walked to the balustrade at the edge, unaware that she was not alone, and had stood there gazing down the wide grass avenue that led to the sea, her mind filled with unhappy thoughts of the awkward days yet before her.

Sir Bernard, his frail figure lost in a voluminous dinner-jacket, rose from the chair on which he had been sitting, gazing at the same view, and crossed the width of the terrace to Elaine. Watching her bowed shoulders as he did so, and sensing that she held her hands, which he could not see, clenched in front of her, a sudden inspiration moved him to say something completely unpremeditated.

"My child, do you find it lonely in this great house, and amongst people all older than yourself?"

She turned swiftly and smiled at him. I have never seen anything more innocently enchanting, he thought, than that quick, vivid smile this girl has. How fortunate Ralph is to have found someone so unspoilt and so lovely!

But the smile was a lightning flash; it disappeared, and Sir Bernard was aware that his inspiration had not been misguided. The child was troubled. Her eyes were limpid pools reflecting her emotions. In time, which was a pity, she would learn to hide what she was thinking.

"It is always sad to leave one's friends," said Elaine simply.

"But you are among new ones, who cannot admire you less. New friends, like new boots, require some breaking in. You find us a little stiff and strange in our ways, I don't doubt. But we are so eager to be your friends, my child, and to have you like us, that I hope you will overlook our little idiosyncrasies until you get used to us."

"We are here only for a short stay," said Elaine swiftly and quietly, looking away from Sir Bernard's candid gaze.

He was silent for a brief moment, watching her. It came upon him that it added to the charms this girl possessed that she should be genuinely reluctant to make this match. This was no silly affectation of manner, a shallow pretence that a gifted and handsome husband and £25,000 a year were not unique. This was the struggle of the frightened fawn caught in the thicket;

it was the loss of childhood's freedom her young spirit was regretting. Sir Bernard longed to comfort her.

"Take my arm, my child, and let us walk up and down for a few minutes before the others come"

She put her arm through his. As they started to walk he looked down on the arm, lying white and slender against the black of his coat. He felt that this arm through his was a symbol of her trust in him, and felt more elated and proud over that than he had done at many moments historically more significant in his long professional career.

He knew that the others would be coming and that their private communing would be broken, so he dispensed with comments on the beauty of the evening, avoided the circuitous approach, and came straight at her last remark.

"You are not to leave too soon, I hope. We have been expecting you a long while."

He felt her arm grow tense. The fawn shivering at the approach.

I think perhaps you are appalled by the air of expectancy every one here radiates in regard to you. My dear, you must not let us frighten you. But Ralph has for so long fed us with accounts of your charms, and we are so happily surprised to find our expectations, instead of being disappointed, fully borne out that we find it hard to contain our enthusiasm. You are among friends, my dear child, who are most happy to know you."

"Everybody is so kind," said Elaine weakly. "I shall be spoilt with so much attention, and when I go back to Alberta among my own friends they will think me obnoxious. None of us pay much attention to each other there, you know." She smiled up at Sir Bernard. "We have all grown up together. We know each other so well that we take one another for granted. Here everybody is much too kind to me."

"It must be pleasant," said Sir Bernard, thinking of all that young life tumbled together in the open spaces of the West. He sighed. "If you go back, it must only be temporarily. We shall be lost without you, once having known you."

"Oh, but I'm going back," said Elaine, looking at him with wide eyes. "And I don't know when I'll come back to England again. Probably never."

Sir Bernard was diplomat enough to know when he was

trespassing upon the territory of another. He had implicit faith in Ralph's powers, and a great fondness for him besides. He found himself much taken with this charming shy girl. Ralph needed no urging, that Sir Bernard already knew. But he would take occasion to remind Ralph that here he was not dealing with the sophisticated young woman usually to be found in society, and to advise prompt action than he thought Ralph might be contemplating.

"I think perhaps," he said to Elaine, "I ought to confess that, as an old friend of the Harrimans, I have been let into the secret of Ralph's feelings for you. I would not have mentioned this did I not suspect that you have an uncomfortable feeling that you are on trial before us. My dear," he squeezed her hand, "you have already won all our hearts. I only hope that all our apparent stiffness and pomposity does not prevent us from standing favourably in your regard."

She stood still suddenly, and her arm slipped from his. She could not look at him. Instead Sir Bernard saw her lovely profile, as she stared down towards the sea. Unmistakably, there was unhappiness in her tense attitude, her drawn face.

Sir Bernard was an old man, and a wise one, but it was a long time since he had had occasion to look into the heart of youth. He stood there looking at this lovely young girl, yearning to comfort and encourage her, but not knowing how to do it save by gentle and friendly words.

Hearing quick steps approaching through the drawing-room, Elaine suddenly brushed her hand across her forehead.

"Please," she said swiftly to Sir Bernard, "tell the others I am not feeling well. I shall not be at dinner to-night. I must go to my room."

He bowed his big head in understanding, hearing the rustle of her long evening dress as she stepped quickly across the terrace, and lifting his gaze to catch a glimpse of a white form disappearing in the fading light through one of the drawing-room doors, just as Ralph, looking happy, pink and refreshed from his evening bath and change, stepped through another.

Elaine's headache was not pretence. For days she had been feeling miserable physically. she had thought at first that this

was only a reaction to the mental strain she was undergoing; then she realised that another physical cause was adding to her uneasiness. Ordinarily she would have gone to her mother with her vague anxieties of a young girl whose body is still a mystery to her. But she felt reluctant to do that during those first few days at Stratford Towers. She avoided anything that might lead to a confidential talk, afraid that she might find her mother joined in the conspiracy driving her into this decision she was determined at any cost to avoid. So she kept this new worry to herself, adding to her unhappiness, and feeling so physically distraught that she continually found herself on the verge of tears.

Her mother had come running to her room when Sir Bernard had announced that she would not be coming to dinner. Elspeth had found Elaine lying on her bed with her face buried in her pillow.

"My darling, what is it?" Elspeth cried, bending down swiftly, slipping her arm round Elaine's shoulders and lifting her up gently.

"Nothing, Mummy. I have such an awful head I couldn't face dinner. Tell Lady Harriman. I've taken an aspirin, and I'm just going to get into bed."

Elspeth felt her forehead. It was certainly hot, but her practised eye told her that the child had no temperature. She had been doing too much, Elspeth thought to herself.

She helped Elaine to undress, drew the curtains to shut out the still bright evening light, kissed her daughter, promising to look in again after dinner, and to see that she was sent some hot milk, then went downstairs.

Left alone, Elaine stared at the darkened room, and gave herself up to her unhappy thoughts. If only she were at home in Acadia, how happy she would be, she thought. How menacing everything was here! Even Daddy and Mummy seemed to have become strangers. They kissed her good-night and good-morning; they smiled at her and talked to her; but they were like strangers. She wasn't *alone* with them; she longed passionately to be alone with them, as so often she was at Acadia, as she had always been when she was a little girl.

She had looked forward to being grown-up. But this was what being grown-up meant; being pursued by someone like Ralph. She didn't want to marry. It would be horrible to

marry; like dying a death and being reborn into another life. She wanted her home, and the old familiar things, the scents and sights and sounds of Acadia, the animals, and simple folk like Nick and Comma and Norah. And Richard. Dear, gentle Richard. She could marry him. She would have no fear of that. With Richard she was at ease and her heart was happy. With Ralph, and in these surroundings, she was frightened and lonely.

Richard's brown, smiling, confident face formed *in* her imagination. The dear one! In the half-darkness, thinking of him, a smile of affection pulled at the corners of her lips. How long was it since she had seen him? She counted the days since that night when she had gone to him, driven to that wild act by some force in her which she had not been able to deny. She counted the days again and again; and then, with her heart beating rapidly, and her eyes staring into the darkness, once again.

It couldn't be true. It couldn't possibly be true.

Was this the cause of her sickness, of her awful feeling of despair?

She sat up in bed, and put her hand to the pulse that was throbbing in her throat.

She was to have a baby. God Almighty help her! Richard's baby. To discover it here of all places.

Panic overwhelmed her. She struggled to get out of bed, nearly falling headlong to the floor, disengaging her foot in the darkness from the complicated fold of sheets. She found the electric light switch; then hastened to the window and pulled down the blind. Then she ran to the mirror and looked at her face in the glass, wondering if this awful secret showed there. She saw only her flushed face, her dark frightened eyes, her dark hair falling forward from her shoulders as she leant towards the glass.

She got up from the dressing-table stool and walked quickly up and down the room. "Dear God, dear God, help me," she kept whispering to herself. This fear that had crept upon her so suddenly now had her in a grip as cold as ice. She felt incapable of thinking coherently, of making plans, of deciding what to do, to-night, to-morrow, during the next few months.

Suddenly she ran swiftly to the door and locked it. Then she came back to the far end of the room where a long mirror stood

in the embrasure of the window. She remained for a moment looking at herself in it. Then she drew over her head the silk nightdress she was wearing, and her small beautiful figure was reflected back from the glass, one hand trailing the garment she had just discarded. She turned sideways and looked at herself anxiously. Then she put the back of her hand to her eyes in a gesture of despair, and walked over to the bed. She drew on her nightdress, and because she was icy with fear she put on a dressing-gown; then turning out the light, she crept back into bed.

She tried to persuade herself that she must be mistaken. This couldn't be; it was something that happened only in books. But she could not disprove the awful certainty of dates. It had happened to her, Elaine. It seemed to her in her panic that the Fates could not have chosen a victim more likely to suffer the worst consequences of it all. Other girls could have told their parents. It wouldn't be easy for them, but Elaine felt that their parents would not suffer the same wretched unhappiness that Andrew and Elspeth would suffer when they came to know of this. She knew that all their happiness was in her. Just as all hers was in them. That she should have to strike this cruel blow against them, when she loved them so much! Her heart was wrung with pity for them, and she wept in the darkness.

She had heard that there were ways in which the matter could be avoided. But how could she go about discovering the ways? She hadn't a friend here in whom she could confide; not even Richard, who was responsible for this. She felt a fierce, quick anger against him. She thought of him in the sunlight and the hills of I asper, smiling, strong, unmoved by any fear, while she lay here carrying this awful burden of their guilt which must soon be known to every one. Why had he let her go? He should have known that this might happen. But her anger against him couldn't be sustained. It faded into an intolerable longing for his presence. But that in turn faded as the panic rose again within her.

She heard someone try the handle of her door, and then a quiet knocking, and her mother's voice calling "Elaine." She had to get up to unlock the door. The prospect of facing her mother terrified her. Her mother had always known what was in her mind; she had never been able to hide anything from her. Would she discover this, she wondered, as she opened the door.

Her mother stood there with a maid carrying a tray on which were a thermos of hot milk, a plate of biscuits, and an apple.

"Darling, were you asleep?" asked Elspeth. "Why did you lock your door? Did you not want to be disturbed?"

She put her arm protectingly and affectionately around her daughter's shoulders and led her towards the bed.

"We were so lonely at dinner without you, darling. Everybody felt depressed, particularly our host, who looked positively mournful and hardly said a word."

This bantering tone was meant to cheer Elaine, but something of the understanding that usually existed between Elspeth and her daughter had been lost in these few days. Elspeth felt it, though she mistook its cause, putting it down in a motherly way to fatigue from the voyage over and the formality and ceremonial to which visitors at Stratford Towers were subjected. So that when Elaine didn't smile at her banter, she did not worry unduly. She went through the process of tucking her up, sat on the bed while she drank the glass of milk, then drawing the curtains and opening the windows, she kissed Elaine good-night, turned out the lights and slipped quietly from the room.

Elaine was left alone with her terror. She had longed to be alone, while her mother sat there talking to her, but now that she lay in this darkened room, listening to the muted sounds of a country night outside, watching the grey luminescence where the windows stood, the terror and the anguish came back to her, and she longed for someone who would understand her predicament and comfort her. That which she had dreaded so much before she discovered this awful thing, the feeling of being trapped into a marriage she did not want, now seemed to her ridiculous and unimportant. If she had only that to worry over, how simple and joyful life would again be.

Ralph was solid and good and kind. She felt that if she could go to him and say, "I have done a most dreadful and wicked thing. Will you help me to keep it secret from my mother and father, especially my father, whom I love so very much?" he would understand, and would help her. But how could he help her? What could he do to help, except marry her? and if he knew what she had done, he would despise and hate her. Yet in her imagination she could not see his face growing cold and angry. She could not think of him except as kind and trustful.

She could say that she would marry him, and wait until her mother and father had gone back to Canada before telling him the truth. By then she would be safely married to him. He would get a divorce; she would have to return home. The disgrace could not be hidden. Whichever way she turned, this thing had to be discovered.

Sleepless, she lay all night, tossing and turning on the wide bed, watching the grey light at the window fade into blackness, then emerge again through greyness to the lightness of dawn. She ached with weariness, but she could not sleep. All the happiness of the past years had suddenly in a moment faded away. Everything seemed cold, hard, hostile, as the blackness around her bed. She wanted more than anything in the world to be comforted by her father to whom she had so often turned with her troubles in the past. When she thought of Andrew, the hostile darkness momentarily yielded. Into her imagination swam Andrew's gentle hands with his kind eyes. She lay still, longing for him, yet not daring to move lest she should betray her guilt to him whom she loved with every force of her being. Thinking of him, with grief swelling her heart, and her eyes stinging from the tears she had shed during the long night, she fell asleep exhausted as dawn came into the room, and the birds began their song in the gardens outside.

4

Soon after Elspeth, saying good-night to every one, had left the drawing-room to go and see Elaine, Lady Harriman began her preparations for taking herself off to bed. Left in the drawing-room after Elspeth's departure were Lady Sylvester, in fierce combat with herself over a game of patience, and Andrew, Sir Bernard and Ralph. It was true that Elaine's absence had been felt by them all. Conversation had been desultory; had continued only because Lady Harriman, rising to her responsibilities as hostess, had continually whipped it up. She had drawn out Andrew on the subject of Canada, Sir Bernard on the subject of speculation in continental bureaucracy, and Ralph on his plans for taking a shoot in Scotland that autumn. She had not even allowed her sister to wrestle in silence with the demon who opposed the orderly coming out of her cards. Nobody believed that Lady Harriman was being

successful in her efforts, except Lady Harriman herself who never admitted defeat.

But at eleven o'clock she started to wind up her needlework, and Ralph, watching her from under his eyes, so to speak, was glad to observe that this wretched evening was coming to an end.

When his mother and Aunt Juliet had gone, he could take the others into the library for a good-night drink. Andrew, he thought, would not stay long. He would then be left alone to have a talk to Sir Bernard on the matter which was burdening his mind, and making him feel part wretched, part deliriously happy, but altogether unsure of himself.

Matters worked out as he had hoped. When Lady Harriman and a protesting Lady Sylvester had finally been seen up the stairs, the men at Ralph's invitation went along to the library where before a log fire a table stood with the drinks. Sir Bernard settled himself comfortably in one of the large chairs beside the fire, but Andrew, restless and a little unhappy, sat as though temporarily perched upon the arm of another. He took the whisky and soda which Ralph passed him, pulled his pipe from the pocket of his dinner-jacket, but instead of filling it, tapped it thoughtfully against his teeth and stared silently at the fire.

Sir Bernard looked at him, took a sip of his drink, then put it on a low table beside his chair, and dusted his hands with a little gesture of briskness against one another, as though relegating the drink to a moment of ease that would come later when certain solemn matters had been disposed of.

"MacTaviot,"—he cleared his throat, and smiled gently at Andrew—"this is the hour when men may speak honestly to one another, so believe me when I say that we shall miss you sadly when you go. Your daughter hinted to me on the terrace to-night that your stay in England was only to be a short one."

Andrew looked up from the fire swiftly.

"I don't know," he said uncertainly. "We mean to go on to the Continent. I leave the details of these plans pretty much in my wife's and daughter's hands." He laughed a little shyly. "I am merely their male escort," he added.

Sir Bernard said, "I find the Continent abhorrent, but perhaps that is because I have seen too much of it in the last few years."

He folded one leg over the other, put the tips of his fingers

together, smiled with great benignity on Andrew and Ralph, and proceeded rashly, though with the noblest intentions, on to ground where at this juncture angels might have feared to tread.

"If you, or rather they, insist on leaving England, why do you not make up a party, and why do not you, Ralph, join them? You know Europe well; a short spell of leave from the P.O. would not be denied you."

Ralph blushed and looked self-conscious. His eyes swiftly sought those of Andrew to see how this suggestion was received, and he turned pale and worried when he saw that Andrew did not welcome it.

Andrew got up from the arm of the chair on which he was sitting, and put down his emptied glass. "That's a very attractive suggestion," he said, frowning slightly, "but our plans are too uncertain. Ralph would be driven mad at the way we travel as a family. Our arrangements are always subject to feminine whim. We may end by not going at all, or by going at the last moment, or by suddenly returning to Canada. We shall have to see how Elaine gets along."

He nodded and smiled good-night to them both. Ralph sprang up to open the library door for him, and when he had closed it came back and flung himself down in a chair.

Sir Bernard picked up his drink. "I'm afraid," he said, "I didn't offer a very good lesson in diplomacy in my handling of that particular moment, my boy. It was meant well, which is what may be said of everything we do in our service these days."

Ralph looked up with a quick smile at him, but looked down at the fire again, and seemed lost in thought.

"Forgive an old man's clumsy efforts, Ralph. You are in love with this child, I think?"

"Very much, sir. Terribly in love with her."

"Have you—er—asked her to confirm her promise to you?"

"Not yet, sir. For two reasons. It seemed rather rushing it. I wanted her to see something of Stratford Towers first, and to learn for herself whether or not she liked England. And . . . well, to put it frankly, sir, I was afraid that if I asked too soon, she might say no."

"You are relying on your personal charms to win her over, do you mean?"

"Oh, Lord, no. It's just that although it's painful being uncertain, it would be torture to know that there was no hope."

Sir Bernard fell to staring at the fire himself, and there was silence between them for a little space. Then Ralph looked up with shining eyes, and Sir Bernard felt himself enchanted with this sight of a heart in love.

"You do like her, sir, don't you? Do you understand now that you have met her what she means to me?"

"Fully, my dear Ralph. You have found an extraordinarily charming and beautiful creature. You will need to use great kindness with her. She is not one of the young sophisticates we too often meet these days. She is utterly unspoilt and very young. I think I should counsel you not to delay your moment, my son. Something is troubling that child. You may with gentleness solve her uncertainty for her, and put an end to your own fears. I wish you luck. I believe that you will be lucky."

5

After a troubled sleep of a few hours Elaine was awakened by the movement of a maid in her room drawing back the curtains. The golden light of a summer's morning darted into the room, flinging itself against the walls. Through the window she could see a cloudless blue sky, and the branches of one of the leafy elm trees in the park stirring gently against it. It was a morning on which to awaken in a happy frame of mind, and to feel a sense of hurry until one was dressed and out in the air.

But as soon as she was fully awake, even while she looked at the summer sky and the light beckoning branches of the elm, Elaine was aware that the burden of sorrow with which she had gone to sleep was still pressing on her heart and darkening her mind. How could she get through this long day, and the interminable days that lay ahead? How could she behave naturally with people, pretend to be happy, amused, interested, when all the time she would have this terrible thing drawing her thoughts towards the plight she was in? Sooner or later discovery was inevitable, but she felt that she would go through anything if for a few days her father and mother could be prevented from knowing about it. She could not stay in bed, for her mother would be sitting beside her all the time, or they would get a doctor; privacy would betray her.

The only thing to do was to get up, pretend that she was well again, move about amongst them all, and hide her private terror under the disguise of normal behaviour.

The maid brought a message from her mother to ask how she felt and would she be coming down to breakfast? If she did not feel well enough to get up she was to stay in bed and Mrs. MacTaviot would come in to see her on her way downstairs.

Elaine sent back word that she felt completely recovered, and would meet her mother at the breakfast-table.

It took her longer than usual to dress and make herself ready for the sight of others. When she came into the breakfast-room they were all there at the table, save Lady Harriman, who always breakfasted in bed, with the social page of *The Times*. The men sprang up. She smiled at them, and hastened across the room to kiss her mother.

"So here you are, dear," said Elspeth brightly. "Yes, you look quite recovered."

"Daddy," she said, putting her face against his for a moment, and touching his shoulder.

Ralph pulled back a chair for her.

"I'm so glad you could come down," he said. "I'm terribly sorry you felt unwell last night. What can I get you? There's bacon and eggs, and kedgerie. Do you feel up to them?"

She looked up at him and smiled. "Just some coffee, thank you."

"Do eat something, dear," pressed Elspeth.

"I couldn't possibly, Mummy. Just some toast."

Ralph poured the coffee at the hot-plate, and brought it to her. He placed the cup down gently beside her, then stood for a moment irresolutely behind her chair. Sir Bernard thought it a very pretty scene, but feeling that Elaine would be happier if attention were distracted from her for a moment, he indulged in a little elderly badinage.

"Ralph, who was making good progress with his breakfast, now pretends that his appetite has failed. Is this meant to make your guest feel at ease, my boy? That is carrying hospitality too far."

Ralph blushed, the other laughed, and he returned to his own chair. He suddenly felt very happy and excited. The moment for which he had waited so long was near at hand, and the omens for its outcome were good. The smile Elaine had

directed at him had not been conventional or forced. He thought he detected in it something more than gratitude for the little service he had performed. It was as though she had been pleased to find him there, behind her chair, as though she relied on him and trusted him. He felt his love for her spreading like a series of waves throughout his body, each one pushing on the one that had preceded it. He tried not to look at her, but he was aware of her and of the fresh morning light in which the breakfast-room was bathed. He was never to forget that particular quality of light afterwards. He was always to associate it with happiness, to think of it as a prelude to the satisfaction of a longed-for hope.

After breakfast he asked her if she would walk in the gardens. Again she flashed at him that smile of gratitude and trust. Sir Bernard, who had intercepted and interpreted that smile, as well as the earlier one she had given Ralph, thought that matters were working out well. Conscious that he was in an amiable mood, he therefore took a copy of *The Times* on to the terrace, to read in print the news he had seen in telegrams at the Foreign Office anything from a day to a week before.

Ralph's father had planted the rhododendron garden which lay at a little distance from the east side of the house. It had been laid out by an expert landscape gardener. Old Sir George, who had loved playing about with water, had set an ornamental lake here and a little pool here and there. The garden, which was about fifty acres in extent, was protected from the winds on one side by the house and on the other by a rise in the ground. Tropical palms and exotic flowering bushes of various kinds grew there. Water-lilies floated on the surface of the lake and the pools. A cunningly devised arrangement of waterfalls made the garden musical with its sound and with the joyous shouts of little birds engaged in their morning bath. Rhododendrons were the chief glory of the garden, but camellias were grown profusely there too, and at this time of the year, especially at this hour of the day, the place flashed with colour, was iridescent with moisture and light, and seemed as fresh and innocent as the young birds who made it their playground.

Ralph was busy pointing out the various shrubs and trees and telling Elaine something of their history. When they came to the margin of the lake there was a wooden seat, very inviting in the shade of a tall beech tree, and offering a beautiful view

across the surface of the still water to a slope that rose up on the other side thickly covered with rhododendrons in full flower.

"Shall we sit for a moment?" Ralph asked Elaine. "You don't want to overdo it if you weren't well yesterday."

It was restful and cool here. She felt herself being refreshed sitting in the shade, with Ralph beside her. Yesterday she had dreaded being alone with him, and her mind had been full of the trap into which she had felt herself being drawn. But now his steadiness and the very formality she had found so irritating, and, yes, so dully English, drew her. She had never felt so close to him. He is kind and good, she thought, and dependable. He's even a little like my father. A quiet, safe, orderly life—had she ever wanted something else, something wildly young and dangerous? She shivered.

"Elaine," said Ralph quietly.

She looked up and found him looking at her.

"Are you happy here at Stratford Towers?"

"Yes, Ralph, I like it very much. You have all been very good to me. You particularly, Ralph. I haven't been a satisfactory guest, I'm afraid, but you have been very understanding."

"My dear, you must not think of yourself as a guest here, nor of me as your host, or we shall make no progress. I shall never, for instance, be able to ask you the question which I am burning to ask you, for I shall have to remember my duties as host." He laughed a little, and she smiled in return. Then she grew serious.

"I know what you mean, and what you are going to ask me, Ralph, and, do you know, I have been afraid of the moment when you would ask me. You don't know, Ralph, anything about me. You really don't know what I am like at all."

"That you are lovely. That I love you with all my heart and soul. That's enough, isn't it?" asked Ralph quietly. Then he put his hand gently over hers. "I might truthfully say that you know nothing about me, my dear. I think we shall only learn about each other from each other."

She bent her head down, and spoke so quietly that it was as though she talked to herself.

"Do you really love me? Can you really love me?"

He did not answer, but sat looking at her, at the sadness that was visible in her face. Am I the cause, he wondered, and felt a

pang as a physical pain at his heart. She was so young, so helpless, so innocent. He and his world were so knowledgeable, worn and vicious and ugly with knowledge, and into that world he wanted to draw this fresh and lovely thing. It was as though walking in a garden at night in the interval of a dance one wrenched a delicate flower from some stem, pushed it thoughtlessly through one's lapel, and went back into the heat and scent of the ballroom where it would wilt and starve and die. He looked at his strong hands and thick legs spread on this bench, and at her, slender and delicate in her white dress, sitting sadly beside him. But the intensity of his love for her was so great it drove him on. .

"Dearest Elaine, I love you. I could make a thousand promises to you and swear to keep them all, but this means and promises everything, that I love you with all my heart and soul."

"But, Ralph, love by itself isn't enough, is it? There are other things that are necessary for marriage, understanding and trust chiefly."

"I could promise you those, my dear. You could have implicit faith in me, I swear it."

"But you would have the right to demand the same thing from me. Could you have implicit faith in me? Could you trust me utterly?"

"My darling, as though you could deceive any one!"

He laughed at the idea, but her air of seriousness increased.

"I could, Ralph. Why do you assume that I am so good?"

He thought of youthful peccadilloes, but his mind was too anxious to be attuned to hers for him to laugh at her seriousness.

"Nobody is perfect, I suppose. But you are so near to perfection in my sight, my dear, that I would be ready to accept your faults only as the flaw which makes perfection interesting."

"But if you knew that I had been wicked, Ralph, would you still love me?" She asked with such earnestness that he paused so that he might give the effect of weighing up the question carefully before replying. What a child she is, he thought, looking into her candid young eyes. If she but knew what kinds of wickedness there were, how infinitely varied were its gradations, how gross and vicious were some of the things that went unpunished, and sometimes in society were not even frowned on; if she but knew by what standards wickedness

in the great world of the 'Thirties' was judged, how terribly shocked she would be.

Well, from a knowledge of some of the evil of the world he could protect her. By his gentleness to her he could shield from her sight some of the harsher things that were done by men to one another.

"If I knew that you had been wicked/" he said slowly, looking at her seriously, "I would say to myself that it had not been your fault, and I would still love you. I think I would love you even more, if that were possible, because someone had been unkind to you. You see, my darling, when any one is wicked for the first time, though perhaps they can never be entirely innocent again, they are not on that account irretrievably vicious, unless they persist in doing the wrong thing."

"But the consequences sometimes last/" said Elaine quietly and sadly.

"Not for ever," said Ralph, with a smile.

She looked up at him again. Her gaze was very direct and searching. It roamed over his face as though she would search out any mental reservation of feeling that might lie behind what he had just said. He looked at her with equal candour, but in his gaze was something which he could not disguise, the intensity and depth of his love for her. She could not help but recognise this. She shivered a little, and her eyes fell away from his.

Oh, he is kind, she thought. If only I could tell him, he would understand.

"Dearest," he said, moving a little on the bench towards her. "Don't let me worry you with my importunity. Your happiness is the only thing that matters. If I am too soon, I must wait. I could wait for you for ever, Elaine. Nothing else matters to me now but you and your welfare, and if that is better served by my possessing my soul in patience, then patient I shall be."

"Dear Ralph," she said, and placing her hand lightly over his clenched one, she looked up at him again. He was surprised to see that her eyes were filmed with tears. "You won't suffer through me. I will tell you to-morrow. Let me have this day happily with you without thinking of the future at all. To-morrow, by this time to-morrow I will tell you. Until then, don't let us think about it. Just be with me all day, Ralph dear.

Be by my side, be near me all the time. Will you, Ralph? Say that you will."

He caught her hands in his and bent and kissed them. She looked down at his head sadly and with great wistfulness.

6

Elaine had drawn back the curtains from the tall windows. She *had* been lying sleepless for hours—it must, she knew, be nearly three o'clock—and she could lie still no longer. She drew a chair to the window and sat looking out. The soft mellow light of a full moon flooded the room. The windows were wide open. The park, stretching down two miles to the sea, lay peaceful and beautiful in the white night. The rich scent of flowers growing in the beds at the foot of the house swam into the room. The air was still. Everything was asleep.

She was not going to have a child. All the agony of mind she had gone through had been needless. But sitting there, looking out at the night, she did not think to herself, "How foolish I have been! What an innocent little ninny I was! If only I had gone to mother with my worries." She thought instead how lovely it was to be alive and to be young, and how beautiful the world was.

She thought for a minute of Richard. But he seemed very far away. She thought of him neither with hostility nor with longing. She felt detached from him, as though some thread that there had been between them until this moment had broken, and that she was now powerless to renew the link. A feeling of sadness invaded her heart when she thought of that. She loved him, but it was too late. The moment for them had passed.

A subdued feeling of happiness began to invade her. Suddenly she felt young and strong again. She leant with her elbows on the window-sill, and joyous thoughts of the old happy days she had known at Acadia began to throng in her mind.

The garden lay sleeping peacefully in the moonlight. A blessed weariness came over her. She went towards her bed without drawing the curtains against the lightness of the night, and fell asleep. The moonlight flowed into the room like the waves of some sea, showing Elaine's dark head lying still

upon the pillow, and a gentle affectionate smile that had accompanied her last waking thoughts lit her young face as sleep fell upon her.

7

The first hot spell of the summer was beginning to manifest itself. The following morning dawned clear and warm, and a cloudless sky, with a slight milky haze where the horizon met the sea to the south, promised a warmer day than yesterday.

Elaine sang quietly to herself with happiness as she bathed. She dressed quickly, and ran down to the garden. She found a rosebud, pinned it to the white open collar of her dress, and walked slowly towards the doors of the breakfast-room which stood open to the lawn. She could hardly bear to go in and exchange the scent of this fresh morning for the mixed one of coffee and kidneys and bacon. But her young appetite was strong enough to overcome any aesthetic reluctance on this score, and her pace quickened when she came within sight of the room.

As she stepped up on to the terrace, Ralph came to the open door, carrying his napkin in his hand.

"Good-morning," she called to him. "You ought to have come out and smelt the garden before you sat down to breakfast. It's lovely. It's a divine morning!"

"It is," he said, "but I have to breakfast early and see my agent before he goes into Southampton."

"A real day's work," she teased him;.

"I do whatever he tells me," smiled Ralph, "but I have to lend an attentive ear or he gets huffy."

"Would I be allowed to listen in to the interview? I should like to know what was involved in running an English estate."

Suddenly she was aware of what she was saying, and blushed. "I mean," she added swiftly, "compared with the work of running a Canadian farm."

He seized his opportunity. "I should love it if you would come. After we've finished with the agent, I have to visit a couple of farms. I have to go in a dog-cart, for I have to go overfields in one or two places. Would you like it?"

"I'd adore it," said Elaine. "Don't let my mother make you withdraw the invitation. Insist that I go with you."

"You can be sure of that," grinned Ralph, and led her into the breakfast-room.

She helped herself to her breakfast this morning, while he stood over her and gave her advice, pointing out the cook's strong points and failings and recommending what were the best dishes among the variety that simmered on the hot-plate.

They were alone at the table, for none of the others had yet come down. Elaine chattered on, enjoying her new-found happiness and peace of mind so much that she could hardly bear to eat.

But after a little she became aware of something. Once or twice, laughing about something, she looked up and saw that Ralph was looking at her with an air of suspense. The moment she caught his glance he looked away, or smiled at what she said, but he was not quite quick enough to hide that look from her. The first time she noticed it she was reassured by his slickly returning smile, but when after a few minutes the same thing occurred again, she suddenly realised what until that moment, in her newly-found relief, she had forgotten, that she had promised to give him her answer to-day. Her feelings of unutterable joyousness faded: a sense of guilt returned to her.

A Irish young chestnut cob, also conscious of the beauty of the day, drew the dog-cart over the hills at a spanking trot, with Ralph and Elaine behind him. The New Forest was purple with young heather and the dog-cart bowled along with the scented common falling away on each side. When they stopped to look at a view of the sea caught from a headland, they could hear the bees frantically busy among the grass and see white butterflies like bits of white silk drifting down from the air to fall on the heather cups. The sea below was blue and still; the air above them was still and blue. On an eye-level stretched away the slopes of green and purple and the thin forest trees. England on this early summer morning was very beautiful. Elaine smiled at it; it seemed to smile back at Elaine.

Twice they had turned off the road, following tracks that led over the common, and had come upon small farms settled back on a rise of land. Elaine had held the reins while Ralph went in and talked to the farmer or his wife. Elaine had looked at the cob's cropped mane and tail, and at his smooth shiny back, and wondered what Charlie would make of him. He looked a very

English horse, very sleek and gentlemanly. He would feel the cold in Canada. Elaine pictured him with a Persian lamb collar instead of the shiny leather one he now wore, and with spats over his white fetlocks; and a running nose, she supposed, and cantankerous remarks about the climate.

But she ought not to be sitting here like a school girl indulging in very juvenile images of this sort. It was the splendour of the day that made it difficult to concentrate on serious things; and the relief, after so much, of no longer having to worry.

But she had promised Ralph that she would tell him to-day, and she knew not only from that look of agonised suspense which she had intercepted at breakfast, but also from certain moments of silence that had fallen between them during the drive, that the matter was to the forefront of his mind, and was not to be avoided by any trick or deception on her part.

Sitting there, with the warm sunlight on her back, and the happy sense of life springing within her, she felt ashamed of the half-formed intention she had had towards him. Had she really meant to marry him, only to avoid the discovery of her wickedness with Richard? Her mind said "No" immediately, but she remembered her feelings when they had sat by the water yesterday morning, and the thought that had slipped into her mind when she lay sleepless in bed. She had been frightened then. Fear might have driven her to do this awful thing, for awful it undeniably was if she didn't love him. She believed that she would have been ready to make him the scapegoat of her offence. It would have been a terrible and shameful thing to have done, but she believed that she would have done it.

What would Ralph have done and said when he discovered the deception? Wife-beatings were considered justifiable in such cases, but Ralph would hardly have done that. She could not imagine him losing control of himself. Shouted and stormed? No, hardly that. He was too instinctively gentle and kind. What would he have done, then? Borne it uncomplainingly, behaved like a martyr? No, none of these things. Suddenly she knew, with a little rush of affection towards him, that he would have forgiven her. He would have helped her to get over it, stood by her, protected her, and helped her to try to forget it when it was all over. How land and reliable and strong he was! How weak, wicked and treacherous she was! The girl who married Ralph would be lucky. She would have

days of happy freedom like this with him. She would have him always to stand beside her in trouble. She would have a well of kindness and understanding from which she could always draw when she was in trouble or difficulty.

She smiled at him when he got back into the trap.

"Well, that's that," he said. "A day in the life of an English squire. Don't pretend to me that Canadian landed gentry work harder."

"We don't have landed gentry in Canada."

"We don't here any more," he grinned. "This is a side-line to my work at the Foreign Office. Were you bored waiting?"

"Not at all. I've been thinking about something."

"And what was that?" he asked, getting into the trap and taking the reins from her.

"You," she said quietly.

She felt him grow tense beside her.

"Me?" he said, turning and looking at her with serious eyes.

"I was thinking how kind and nice you are, Ralph."

"Oh," he said, a little flatly.

"You are, you know," said Elaine. "Terribly kind and nice."

"Oh," he said, with a little groan.

"Why do you take it so sadly?" she asked.

He looked down at his gloved hands.

"It sounds frighteningly like the prelude to a blow I've wished very much to avoid. You know," he smiled bitterly "I could love you like a brother, but I could never marry you."

"Oh, but I didn't mean that," she hastened to say.

He looked up quickly, hope dawning in his eyes.

"Oh," she said, "wait a minute." She put one hand on his arm and the other against her cheek. "Oh, Ralph dear, do wait a moment. I must think carefully. Oh, dear, I believe I have thought. Ralph, I'm going to say 'yes.' I will marry you if you will still have me. I don't think I quite love you in the proper way, but perhaps I will when I get used to it. But I am very happy and I feel very safe when I am with you, Ralph dear. I promise I'll try to be a good wife."

He looked at her, exulting in the happiness laid open before him. He could have shouted with joy. Instead he sat there staring at her, his arms hanging down beside him, a smile of

incredulity growing on his face. Then he saw her face swaying towards his.

He caught her in his strong arms, his lips found hers, and with the sunshine warm on his back and the scent of an English summer day in the air about them, Ralph caught up with the happiness for which he had been seeking ever since that winter's day in Canada.

. 8

Nixon had superintended the clearing of the dessert dishes, had reproved with his eye a footman who had allowed a fruit fork and knife to rattle together on a plate as he carried it away from the table, had placed the port and marsala before his master, and was preparing to leave the room when he heard Mr. Ralph push back his chair. Consternation seized him. What had gone wrong. He looked back and saw Mr. Ralph looking as embarrassed as he had done at his coming-of-age celebration when he had had to make his first speech to the tenants.

He might have looked embarrassed to Nixon's fatherly eye, but Ralph spoke without any self-consciousness or shyness, only with an excitement which riveted the attention of every one at the table, who had been as startled as Nixon at Ralph's sudden rising.

"I've got something to say," he said, "but God be thanked it can be said very briefly, and since we are all 'family' here, so to speak, it might as well be said now as broken to each of you separately. I have some wonderful news. This morning Elaine promised to marry me. Lift your glasses and drink to Elaine."

There was a moment or silence, then "Bravo," said Sir Bernard, and immediately voices broke out all round the table. Everybody got up. Lady Harriman rushed round and kissed Elaine, then kissed Elspeth. Sir Bernard shook hands with Ralph, and because Elaine was surrounded by Lady Harriman and her mother, with Lady Sylvester trying to break into the ring, Ralph went and shook hands with Nixon.

"I think it rather calls for champagne, Nixon," he said. Nixon beamed, and swung out through the serving door.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so happy about this," said Lady Harriman. "Ralph would have been intolerable to live with had you

refused him. I must give him a good character for having been a satisfactory son. I really think he'll make an excellent husband. Mr. MacTaviot, oh, I must call you Andrew. *Isn't this very satisfactory news!*"

Andrew smiled his gentle smile. "I think it will do very well," he said. "I'm not sure that my rights as the girl's father haven't been trampled on. I should have been consulted once again before the matter was made public. But if Elaine is happy, that is all that matters."

Sir Bernard gently pushed Lady Sylvester aside. "You have forgotten your nephew, Juliet," he said with a smile. "Well, Elaine, my child, this announcement has made me very happy. It is the best day's work I have seen done in a long time. *You are happy now, aren't you, Elaine?* Say nothing. I can see it in your eyes."

He patted her shoulder and got up to make way for Elspeth. "Dear child," said Elspeth, sitting down beside her daughter, and taking her hands and smiling at her. "I could have wished nothing better for you. I know that Ralph will make you happy. I am so glad and relieved for you."

It was a strange word, that "relieved." Elaine looked at her mother quickly, but this was no moment to analyse what was meant. Her own happiness, which had been with her ever since she awoke this morning, seemed to reach its flood now that she was sharing it with all these people who trusted and loved her.

Nixon came back with the champagne. Every one took a glass and Sir Bernard called for a toast to their happiness. Elaine was looking at her father. When he put down his glass she noticed him looking at her in his old quizzical way. She went over to him and took his hand and kissed him.

"Dear Daddy," she said.

"I'll miss you, kitten," he said.

"Oh, Daddy," she said, and squeezed his hand and pressed it against her cheek. "I love you far more than I can ever love any one else," she said.

When she was alone in her room later that afternoon the thought of her father's look, and what he had said, and her mother's use of that word "relieved" returned to her. Was her

father unhappy because she had said "yes" to Ralph, she wondered? Didn't he approve? Because he knew her so well, could he see that she didn't really love Ralph? But he didn't know what she had been through in the past few days. It had been that, as much as gratitude to him for his kindness to her, that had made her promise to marry Ralph. It was a longing to wash out from her memory that awful nightmare, a passionate desire to do something that would irretrievably cut her off from Richard and prevent her from ever thinking of him again.

Well, she had done that. She realised, now that she was alone, with what terrible effectiveness she had done that. She had betrayed Richard. She had used him as well as Ralph for her own purposes. She felt that although she would have to suffer for that, her action would make Richard and Ralph suffer too. It had seemed so easy, so pleasant a solution to cut herself free from Richard, to attach herself to Ralph and forget the troubles and the grief she had borne by immersing herself in the kindness and goodness with which Ralph would surround her.

Now it was too late. The act was done. One final thing only she had to do, and the more quickly she did that and shut the memory from her the better she knew it would be for her peace of mind. She had to tell Richard. He must learn it from her, and learn it quickly. A cable was the thing. She thought, I can't send it from the village post-office. I must send it from London. I must get Daddy and Mummy to take me there as quickly as possible.

On the evening before her wedding, Elaine and Elspeth, who were staying with Andrew at Brown's Hotel, had dinner early in their sitting-room. Soon afterwards Elaine retired to her own room. She had sent her cable to Richard only two days before on their arrival in London. She had wanted, on this last night before her marriage, to write him the letter her cable had promised, and to try there to explain everything that had led her up to this step and to the breaking of her promise to him. She undressed slowly and got into bed, meaning to write there. For half an hour she lay back on her pillows, thinking of the old days at Acadia, and especially of Richard and of the months she had been in love with him. Finally she took some writing-paper, and with her heart full of love for him that nothing, not

even this thing she was to do to-morrow, could exorcise, wrote him a dozen lines addressed to the Lodge Jasper.

"I had meant to keep my promise to you, but there are reasons why it is impossible. I am going to marry Ralph Harri-man to-morrow, and I feel now that we shall never see one another again. That is my tragic loss, Richard, for you will fall in love with someone else and find true happiness, while I shall be missing you all my life. It is strange to be writing that to one man on the eve of marrying another. You see what a bad girl I am, Richard, and how well you are rid of me. I shall think of you all my life, my dear, with fondness and love. God bless you, Richard.

"ELAINE."

CHAPTER TWENTY - FOUR

ELAINE reached forward and opened her dressing-case, drawing from it a leather portfolio which she opened with a key from her purse. She took from this a bundle of letters tied together with a silk ribbon, and as the train sped onwards towards the coast of France, she undid this packet and began to read the letters through again. Mostly they were from Don and Rose Bryden, a few of them were from Nick, and several were from her friends of the old days at the University, from Phyllis Trevor, Tom Sproule, and others who had known her at Acadia, and who knew Richard and wrote of him. For this was the sole meaning of the bundle of letters, locked away in her leather portfolio; they gave her news of Richard. Sometimes the letters contained only a passing mention of him; sometimes, as was often the case with those written by the Brydens, they were almost completely devoted to an account of what he was doing. She had fed hungrily on the smallest reference to him, and had read again and again the longer letters of the Brydens which told her almost the full story of what had happened to Richard since he had received the cable she had sent from London the night before her marriage.

Rose Bryden's first long letter, written to wish Elaine

happiness in her marriage, gave her the first account of Richard she had had since then. The Brydens had reached Banff on their way back from Salt Lake City towards the end of July, and had stayed over for a day at the big hotel to bathe and rest and recover from a month of nights spent in motor camps. There Don had been got on the 'phone by Sergeant Brook of Jasper, who had tried to get Andrew MacTaviot and had failed, and who reported that Richard was in trouble in Prince George. The trouble was serious, and Don had been asked if he could come there right away.

"I went with Don," reported Rose. "We left the car behind and hastened there by train. Sergeant Brook met us at the station. He had given Don no hint on the 'phone of what the trouble was; said he couldn't speak of it on the wire. We wondered how the boy had got to Prince George from Jasper, and had speculated on our journey what ill-starred course had led him there and what had transpired to bring Sergeant Brook on the scene. We had made up our minds that the worst must have happened, but what we had imagined to be the worst was but a pale and innocent reflection of the trouble he was really in.

"Said Sergeant Brook, after some moments of hesitation and obviously uneasily, but in answer to Don's determined query, 'the boy was in goal charged with manslaughter.'

"I think you were not without a certain fondness for our Richard, Elaine, though your sudden marriage has proved that it was not so deep as I thought and hoped, so you can imagine what effect this announcement had on Don and me who, as you know, have come to love him as though he were our son. Sergeant Brook hurried us off to the local hotel in a taxi, and we had to go through the seemingly interminable business of registering before we could reach our room, to which the sergeant accompanied us, and where we could get from him something more than the dramatic statement he had made on the station platform. In the taxi we had been too stunned to ask any further questions.

"But behind the door of our room Sergeant Brook gave us the full story: or at least, as much of it as he had. Much still remains wrapped in mystery. Sergeant Brook said that Richard had received a cable at Jasper which evidently had upset him very much. He would not tell us—said officiously that it was not evidence and he did not feel himself permitted to tell—

from whom the cable came, but I suppose from his family, whom I regard, confidentially, with that suspicion and dislike usually accorded by a foster-mother to a child's parents. Richard left the Lodge without notice and fell in with a band of Indians who were making their way by pack trail across the Rockies to the Okanagan valley. The party consisted of a father, his married daughter and her husband, and a young son of the father's. At Prince George, Richard and the son-in-law, a man called Kolchak, who had, I gather, a pretty bad reputation, had a fight. The father and Kolchak had gone to some Indian celebration taking place a few miles away, and Richard had been spending the evening in the camp with the woman and a boy. At some stage the man Kolchak had returned the worse for drink and had attacked Richard, who was never one to scorn an invitation to fight.

"At a certain stage in this struggle Kolchak pulled a knife from his belt and Richard's cheek was badly cut, and this act, which was meant to have cost Richard his life, cost Kolchak his. For Richard then got his hands round the man's neck; and the end, my dear, was that he killed him. Alas for my poor dear Richard, than whom no one could be gentler or sweeter-natured, to have to kill a man with his own hands.

"But the law is a h'ass, my dear, as you know. Richard had been engaged in defending himself from a drunken Indian armed with a knife; he had acted in defence of his own life; he had had to defend himself with his bare hands. This courageous action the law described as manslaughter, and locked Richard up. The small boy, tearful and voluble, and his sister, quieter but no less sincere, were energetic witnesses on Richard's behalf and against their respective brother-in-law and husband. But Richard could be got to say nothing in his own defence, he remained obstinately silent about who had struck the first blow, whether feelings had been bad between him and Kolchak for some time, whether Kolchak had been jealous of his, Richard's, friendship with his wife: a truly ridiculous supposition. Then the law, whose whole intent at first seemed to be to condemn Richard, proved its h'assedness by working manfully to obtain his release. There was the semblance of a trial; I say semblance, for it was soon over. A verdict of justifiable homicide was returned and Richard was released, with a reprimand from the Judge for not having assisted the law to clear up this matter by

giving more helpful evidence, and advice from the same quarter to live more peaceably amongst his own class in future. Richard flushed angrily at this rebuke, but kept the same silence he had preserved throughout the trial. He came back with us to the hotel, and we left there that night for home. He had some idea of not going back to the University, but Don has cured him of that. Now we are back in the Little Brown House, with a month of the summer vacation still blessedly to spend, happy to have weathered this storm, and to be drifting quietly in this little backwater once again. The garden is filled with the flowers of late summer, and the air is impregnated with the evidence of Don's and Richard's industry. They are sweeping up the leaves and burning them.

"I am happy to think that you are happy, my dear. We miss you very much. Acadia will not be the same without you. We speak of you often, but I think you have left a scar on our Richard's heart. He listens with an eagerness I think he tries to hide when we talk of you, but he says little himself. I have urged him to write to you. If he does not, you must put it down to the shock of this summer's experiences. The boy is going through a difficult time, but we love him so that we hope our tender care may efface the bitter thoughts that must often be with him at the moment."

Nick wrote in his rather large, schoolboyish hand in May, 1939, to announce that he and Richard had joined the Air Force.

"I guess you know the way it is, Elaine," he wrote *in self-defence*. "I just couldn't let him go off by himself, especially the way he is now, kind of sad and quiet and bitter. Look at the trouble he got himself into at Prince George when I wasn't along. Of course I'm a married man, and I don't know whether your mother told you, Veta is going to have a baby. Seems kind of crazy to leave home when a fellow's got these responsibilities, and I've got such a good job. But you know how it is, Elaine," persisted Nick, producing all his reasons not in order of their importance but the other way round. "It looks pretty certain there'll be a war. When this guy Hitler marched into Czecho-Slovakia, that was the end. He's pushed us round long enough. We got to stop him some time, the sooner the better, I think. When the war comes I'll have to go anyway. I don't want to be stuck in the infantry. Dick said he

was going in for the Air Force. It kind of appealed to me, too, I'll come along with you, Dick, I said to him. You don't have to, he says. I'd like to keep an eye on you, I says, sort of teasing him, see? But he's very touchy, Richard is, these days and you've got to be careful. You don't trust me, eh, Nick? Afraid I'll get into trouble? Oh, to hell, I says to him, wishing not to upset him. Please yourself, he says. What day are you going to Calgary to join? I asked him. Thursday, he says. I'll be there, I said, and I was.

"Your father has promised to keep my job open for me, and your mother is keeping Veta on. With my pay and hers, and our own little bungalow at Acadia, we'll get along all right. When the boy is born, I mean the baby, only I got used to thinking of him as a boy, I'll still be here. Maybe the war won't come for a year yet. But I think maybe it will. Perhaps we'll come to England with the R.C.A.F. and see you. That would be swell."

After this declaration of martial purpose from Nick, Phyllis Trevor's letter sounded a thin and querulous plaint. "It is so dull in Edmonton now, Elaine. Mother and I had two weeks at Lake Louise, but other than that I've spent the whole summer in Edmonton where it has been both hot and unbelievably dull. Nearly all the boys are away, not working this summer, but at Army camps or in the R.C.A.F. Some of them are taking short training courses, but others have already joined up, particularly in the R.C.A.F. Douglas is now a Flight Lieutenant and an Instructor, and very grand and dignified, but I think very happy too. Whenever he comes home on leave we go out a good deal together. It's funny to see the other boys have to salute him and to treat him with great respect when they used to spend so much time teasing him.

"Do you remember how we all used to argue about what we would do if another war ever came? Well, as it turns out, Doug was right. Everybody is going. Nobody is asking themselves whether they ought to, or whether the war will really come. They take both propositions for granted, unless, like myself, they have sticky parents with an ostrich complex who think it is more important to finish a University course than get ready for the big event that is coming up. Doug says I shouldn't worry, that I should just keep on with what I am

doing until the war does break out. I remind him that he didn't wait, that he was one of the first to anticipate it. But then he just looks solemn and wise and changes the subject.

"I envy you being in England, right at the heart of things, and mixing with all those important Foreign Office people. Your head must be simply full of the most violent secrets. It's so dull leading this quiet provincial life, duller than ever now that you are not at Acadia. Richard Danby, and that friend of his who worked at Acadia, Nick, are training under Douglas. Doug told me that Richard would make a first-class fighter pilot. I believe he's very reckless and dashing which strangely enough are the qualities needed. He looks very nice in his uniform, and rather attractive, in a sinister way, with a deep scar that runs right down the side of his cheek, collected in a fight with a drunken Indian last summer. You and he used to be rather fond of each other, didn't you? But I suppose you have forgotten him and all of us now, mixing with the good and great in London."

Forgotten him! Elaine put down the letter and stared out of the window of the train. He was always in the background of her thoughts, and sometimes, as had been the case this afternoon, her whole mind was flooded with his image and with memories of him. When she was alone with these memories she knew an uncertain, a half-painful happiness. In a few hours' time she would be in London, and there she was hardly ever alone, and even this half-bitter, regretful, nostalgic happiness would be gone, leaving an emptiness, a despairing void, a darkness in which she moved without direction or impulse.

CHAPTER TWENTY - FIVE

i

WHEN a great building collapses the roar of noise seems to be followed by an instant of utter silence, as though nature were aghast at the ruin and stood appalled, looking at the havoc that had been created. A similar moment of stupefaction followed

the fall of France. It was incredible that the collapse should have been so swift, that so much monumental greatness should now be represented by these heaps of broken masonry and this cloud of dust. Yesterday there had been an Empire; to-day there was only a country lying stunned and bleeding, and running over it in all directions the grey columns of the enemy busily engaged in tying it down, binding and gagging it, making it powerless to achieve any recrudescence of its strength.

In face of this, the greatest disaster they had yet known in their history, the British people for reasons unaccountable to the enemy and inexplicable to themselves felt better and more cheerful than they had felt for a long time. Something of this mood was caught by Elaine, and her remorse over the past, which had lasted throughout the first eight months of the war, was lessened in the days of Dunkirk when a summer silence, sweet and peaceful, brooded over England, and the old things like hedgerows and church steeples and the elm trees in the park at Stratford Towers leaned delicately against a soft blue English sky. Suddenly at this moment England seemed to Elaine to have become pastoral and innocent. Motoring through Hampshire lanes one day she could see men cutting the hay. In fields here and there machines were at work, but horses pulled the hay-rakes, and men, not machines, threw the hay up on to the wagons drawn by lumbering English cart-horses. Here and there she saw a man swinging a scythe. She saw men with brown faces and mahogany-coloured arms, and women in print dresses carrying food out to the fields, and children riding on the hay wagons, and farm dogs lying panting in the sun, or flying over the fields after a suspicion of a rabbit. Memories of the harvest fields around Acadia thronged into her mind. She saw herself as a little girl again, riding with Uncle Silas on a haycart, innocent of the future that awaited her. Something of that enviable childish innocence she had known then, and had lost since, seemed the mood of these English people. As though a continental Empire had not just fallen. As though the British Empire too were not toppling to its fall. The sweet innocents, gathering in their little bits of hay in their old-fashioned slow way, as though another winter would come, and the stock would have to be fed!

For a moment she felt ashamed of her own restless unhappy state, and envious of their placidity. Suddenly a glimpse of understanding and an impulse of affection for all that England meant brought them closer to her. When she stopped at the next village for petrol she said to the man at the pump, "What do you think of the news?"

"They're getting our men out," he replied. "Give us a bit of a breather, and we'll be back in the ring again."

"They might try to invade us now," said Elaine. "I mean, before we can get back into the ring."

"A h," he replied, shaking the pipe-line to get out the last few drops of petrol. "Wouldn't half mind trying a crack at 'em myself. I've got a 12-bore gun that's too big for rabbits. Blows their blasted heads off." He grinned at her, holding out his hand for the money. "Just right for Jerry," he added, with the semblance of a wink.

It's absurd, she considered, driving on towards home. It's as though they don't realise the mortal danger they're in. And yet they must, she thought, her irritation returning. How stupid of them* to behave as though Dunkirk were a victory, as though they had got the better of the Germans by eluding them! No wonder they have people like Ralph and his friends running their affairs for them; it's all of a piece with an Alice-in-Wonderland world where a defeat's a victory, evacuation a 1 prearranged breathing spell, and the edge of doom the proper place to set about collecting the hay for next winter's feed.

A moment ago I was feeling faintly sentimental about them. But I'm really tired of them and their complacent, selfish ways. It's a country of stupid egoists. What right have they got to drag Canadians, Australians, and the others into their imbroglis? England is so like an elderly relative who has known better days, and is down on her luck, doing all she can to keep up a semblance of her old state and getting the youngsters to pay for it. That stupid garage man with his brave talk about blowing Germans' heads off will bolt like a rabbit when he comes up against the reality; like the Foreign Office staff who rushed about Europe arranging pacts, and were caught with a look of pained surprise when the Germans and the Russians arranged a clever and devastating one of their own.

She sounded the horn of her roadster impatiently at the gates which led into the park at Stratford Towers, and after the usual

delay the lodge-keeper's wife—the lodge-keeper himself being an ex-sergeant in the Guards had returned to duty with his battalion—came out wiping her hands on her apron. The gates were a little heavy for her to open, but she managed with an effort to do it, though she did it awkwardly, and Elaine drove through. She stopped her car when she was through the gates and called to the woman.

"Is everything all right, Mrs. Bates? Have you heard from Bates?"

The woman came forward at a trot, honoured to be inquired after by Mrs. Harriman. She had some difficulty in being articulate, for she had forgotten to pop her teeth in when she heard the sound of the horn. She had been washing some clothes at the sink, and since she liked to sing to herself while doing that, she had taken out her teeth and put them on the kitchen table, and lo! here she was without them. She felt proper ashamed, she did.

"Oo I ain't 'eard, Ma'am. But I ain't worrige about Baych. Come through shum proper shrapes, 'e did, in je larsh war. Teh ain't likely 'e'll be caught by thege Narzy Germangs when the Proosiari Germangs couldn't down 'im."

She grinned toothlessly with pride.

"I should think so," said Elaine, with a smile. "You ought to have someone to help you with these gates. They're too heavy for you. I'll speak to Mr. Harriman."

Instead of appearing grateful the woman looked terrified.

"Oo naow, ma'am, I can manish eashy. Oo, Baych would be proper annoyed if any one touched them gatches but me while 'e wasn away."

Elaine smiled at her, but sighed to herself. "All right, Mrs. Bates, but take it easy. You went at them just now as if you were going to pull them off their hinges."

She drove on with a wave of her hand at the woman. Terrified, she thought, of losing her job. Quite certain Bates will survive and the "Narzics" be vanquished, but terribly uneasy in case someone else is given her place.

But she had to stand or fall with them. Though at times she resented England's calm assumption that everybody of a right mind, and especially those who had drawn their blood and tradition from her, would stand beside her in an emergency,

Elaine felt herself carried forward eagerly in that tide of love and patriotism which spread like a great river over the English-speaking world in the summer of 1940. She joined the St. John's Ambulance Corps as an ambulance driver. The events of these few weeks, up to the time of the Armistice between France and Germany, involved the last despairing struggles of the Foreign Office to save something from the wreck and to postpone Italy's entry into the war. Ralph was kept constantly at the Foreign Office, and could not come to Stratford Towers even at the week-ends, so to relieve others who had more urgent family affairs, Elaine volunteered for week-end duty. One Sunday afternoon she was waiting at headquarters, reading a book and smoking a cigarette, and more than a little bored with a long day spent sitting about, when a telephone call came for five ambulances to go to Southampton, pick up some wounded from a ship which was to dock there in half an hour's time, and take them to a dispersal hospital at Netley.

Elaine went off in the convoy. The two stretcher-bearers with her were genial souls from the East End of London, with a genius for making themselves quickly at home in any situation, voluble as only Cockneys can be, and under fierce compulsion to betray surprise at nothing. They were like a couple of cheerful sparrows twittering on a telegraph wire, as they swayed backwards and forwards in the cab of the ambulance, giving their souls up to gossip with each other of things and scenes they knew in common.

They drove on to a dock at Southampton, and backed up against the wall of a shed guarded by a military policeman and two soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets. Every one looked stern and purposeful here, and even the carefree spirits of Bert and Jack, who had ridden with her in the ambulance, were subdued by the atmosphere at the entrance of the shed. Their pale, Eeaked faces ceased to jerk and grimace. They pulled in their elts, stuck out their white pinched noses, rubbed their hands together briskly in place of spitting on them, drew the stretchers out of the ambulance and marched through the entrance to the shed. Elaine got down from her cab, and leant against the wing of her ambulance, talking to one of the girls driving anotner of the ambulances parked beside hers.

Ten minutes later the stretcher-bearers reappeared carrying the wounded. A nursing sister walked beside each stretcher.

Elaine looked at the faces of the wounded men as they were carried past. Some were in pain, kept their eyes closed, and grunted when the stretcher-bearers stumbled or the rhythm of their step was broken as they stepped across some railway-lines which ran into the shed at the point where she stood. Others, less seriously wounded, were grinning widely, though whether with pleasure at being back in England, or with shyness at being looked at by so many people, Elaine could not tell. She thought it a strangely moving scene, and was smiling to herself with a certain emotion when she gasped, and felt her heart contract with sudden pain, then beat tumultuously again. On one of the stretchers being carried past her, Richard was lying. A bandage lay across the lower part of his face, but it was recognisably Richard. His eyes seemed to her to be burning with deep feeling, but he was neither smiling nor groaning. He was looking steadily at her, his face disfigured by the bandage, emotionless, one of his hands gripping the side-bars of the stretcher.

"Richard," she cried, stepping forward quickly.

The nursing sister on the other side of the stretcher looked up at her, and the military policeman who had been standing a few yards away at the entrance to the shed ran over to her.

"You aren't allowed to address the wounded, Miss," he said with authority.

Elaine shook off his hold impatiently and was starting after the stretcher when he seized her with a firm grip by her upper arm.

"Give over, Miss," he commanded gruffly, "else I'll have to give you in charge."

Elaine squirmed in his powerful grip, and tried to stutter an explanation. "But he's my, he's my . . ."

The policeman grinned largely and sympathetically.

"I dessay, Miss, but you ain't allowed to speak to 'im 'ere. You're drivin' one of these 'ere ambulances, ain't you? Well, you don't 'appen to 'ave drorn 'im, but you'll catch up to 'im at Netley, woncner?"

As she stood in front of the ambulances she did not see which one Richard had been put into. She wanted to run after him but the policeman would not let her go. At that moment two stretcher-bearers who had gone back to the ship for a fresh burden were stopped opposite her ambulance and one of the

wounded was being slid on his stretcher into one of the four racks inside it. There was by this time a vast coming and going of nursing sisters in uniform, bearers coming out with loads and returning to get others, and the front ambulances had already started their engines and were beginning to pull out. Realising that Richard might be in one of these, and that nothing was to be gained by continuing to struggle with the policeman, Elaine, making an effort to calm herself, climbed back into her cab, and waited impatiently for the full complement to be put aboard her car so that she might start on the road to Nctley.

2

Richard, seeing Elaine for the first time after two years, felt the pain that was in his leg throb violently for a second or two, then felt the throbbing suffuse his whole body, leaving his mind clouded and his thoughts indistinct. He was aware of the look of amazement on her face and of the effort she made to get near him. But then he was carried past, and in a moment his stretcher had been hoisted shoulder high and slid into a rack, and he was left staring at the sloping curved roof of the ambulance, only about eighteen inches above his head.

So he had seen Elaine at last. He had known that some time he would. When he came to England he had made up his mind not to seek her out, but he knew that at some time or other, in one place or another, he would come face to face with her. He had wondered many times what he would do when that longed-for moment came. He had never thought that it would present itself just when he would be incapable of making any response, when he was so tired and in such pain that he was barely conscious of what was going on around him; or that it would come upon him when he was caught up, as he now seemed to be, on the conveyor belt of a vast organisation which had moved him from field hospital to base hospital, from train to trail, and then on to a boat, while France and, for all he knew, the whole world was collapsing in smoke and flame and the shrill screams of defeated, panic-stricken people.

He was aware that he was happy—he had seen her. The aching weariness which had enveloped him for days as though it were a dark cloth, was shot with this ray of light. She was wearing a uniform. She was a driver of some kind, perhaps

driving one of these ambulances. She was well and she was alive, and she remembered him. With that knowledge, settling some aching query of a nerve that throbbed within him, he was for a moment content, and wanted nothing further. Thereafter he lapsed into that state of semi-consciousness in which he had subsisted ever since that moment when, 8000 feet above Abbeville with a bullet in his leg, and his plane starting to burn, he had fallen away in a steep dive from the planes which had been attacking him. He had flattened out from his dive in order to turn the plane on its back, for his leg was useless and he could not jump for it, and there was nothing for it but to fall out. The cockpit was filled with the fumes of glycol, and ugly little yellow flames were stabbing the murkiness like the tongues of snakes. Suddenly he noticed that his flying boots were blazing and that his left glove was on fire. He beat the glove on the edge of the cockpit to put it out, then fainted, and fell forward with his lips in the flames, and then gently dropped into space. A moment of consciousness returned to him and he remembered to pull the rip-cord of his parachute. He felt its violent tug as it opened out, and noticed that his flying boots were burning fiercely, and that the blaze blotted out an enormous area of the countryside, and swinging slowly from side to side in an arc he drifted downwards towards the defeated face of France.

CHAPTER TWENTY - SIX

1

WHEN Richard's parachute brought him to earth he was unconscious, and though he landed in an open grass field the blow with which he struck the ground broke one of his legs and dislocated his shoulder. His other leg had a bullet embedded in it from the gun in the German plane which had shot him down. His boots and his right-hand flying glove had been charred to fragments. His left hand had not caught the flames. When he hit the earth and was being slowly dragged along it by his parachute, he recovered consciousness for a moment, and more by instinct and training than by any conscious

thought, with his good left hand he had detached the harness. Before he fainted again he was aware of the peaceful evening sky, and of the branches of a beech tree waving against it, and of a flight of rooks which had been disturbed by his arrival settling down w4th shrill cries to their nests in the tree. Then a sea of pain rolled over him, submerging him in its depths, and he lost consciousness again.

In the days that followed, it was as though he were bound to the spoke of some vast wheel which rotated through space. He passed from utter blackness to the greyness of half-consciousness; from that to an angry yellow-red atmosphere in which he was fully awake and aware of what went on around him, w^hen he cried with the pain that seared his skin and throbbed like a living thing in his body. Then back again to the merciful blankness of unconsciousness, to be dragged from there by his young and healthy body which fought its way up from the grip of death, swimming into that awful yellow-redness which his nerves abhorred, but which was the chamber through which he would have to pass to life.

In his delirium he muttered to himself and twisted and groaned, and those who looked after him sought to keep him still so that he might not chafe his burnt skin and drive himself back into unconsciousness. His muttering made no sense to them, but his mind was active, and images floated into it, and he was trying to explain, longing to explain to these shadowy figures he knew, who looked at him, and listened to what he said, but made no reply. Nick must understand, Nick had always understood. But Nick stood in that shadowy world, with his flying helmet slung over his shoulder, his parachute harness hanging behind him, looking at Richard as though he wondered and thought it curious that his friend should appear so perturbed. Richard groaned, and with the greatness or his effort to be understood urged himself, as it were, into that yellow-red mist of pain, and the tears rolled from his eyes, and his puffed and swollen lips were like heavy iron gates resting on his face, the cross-bars of which had to be moved and combined to shape the words he wanted to say.

A French farmer had seen him come down, had harnessed a horse to an old farm cart, wrapped him in a blanket, and driven him in three or four miles to the nearest town, and there had delivered him up to the local hospital. This hospital was about

twenty miles behind the French lines, but the French were falling back so fast that the military authorities moved in and took possession of it within an hour of Richard's arrival, evacuated all the patients, and turned it into a field hospital ready to receive the casualties which would start to arrive as soon as the great battle which had been expected for days was joined. The bullet was extracted from Richard's leg, his broken Jones set, the dead skin taken from his hand and his legs, the burnt surfaces of his body were painted black with tannic acid, then he was loaded unconscious into an ambulance and driven south-east towards the base.

The next evening the ambulance had crossed the British lines. The papers of the occupants were checked, and Richard's identity being discovered, he was removed from the ambulance, and put on board a British hospital train that was leaving for an embarkation port. Still being rotated on that vast wheel to which he was bound, Richard spent three fearful, jolting days. The train was like a trapped animal, darting this way and that to find some avenue of escape. Three times it made for a different port, but each time the Germans, their armoured columns swinging along the coast as though at the tip of a scythe which was mowing down north-western France, had taken possession of the port. The train waited in sidings while signals were exchanged, then backed up as though to gather speed for a new rush to the coast. On the third day it steamed into Le Havre.

Richard, with a number of other stretcher cases, was carried on to a hospital ship which lay there at anchor. The Germans came that evening at sunset and bombed the shipping in the harbour. Richard was conscious at the time. He heard the pathetic, angry stutter of the ack-ack guns, and the scream and whine of bombs descending, and he felt the ship shudder and rock as they struck the water. But the ship was not hit. At midnight they moved out into the Channel, and at dawn entered another French port, and embarked more wounded. At noon, as the sirens in the harbour were sounding, they put out to sea again. For three days they moved stealthily down the coast, but on the fourth morning the ship's prow was turned towards England, and in the late afternoon they came into Southampton Water. After eight days, disturbed though they had been, Richard's pain and the morphia that had been given

him had induced in him a state of semi-consciousness, in which at one moment he was fully aware of what was going on around him, and at the next his thoughts were drifting calmly over the events of the last few years. His friends, and the life he had led, passed before him as though they, and the things he had done, were figures and events in a film. But a film of things long ago forgotten, all the emotion and urgency which had precipitated them then, drained away through the passing of the years, so that now he looked at them through that mist of sadness that comes of recalling old, fond, half-forgotten things which can never be repeated in actuality.

So he saw Elaine when he had been carried through the dark sheds at Southampton and came out into the afternoon sunlight. All that was surprising was that she should be wearing a uniform. Then he forgot that and saw only her face. But she moved towards him, and held out her hands, and her face lightened and smiled at him. He felt a half-forgotten pain twitch at his heart, and as though that sent an electric shock through his body that dispelled the cloudy mists from his mind, he knew that it truly was Elaine, not the Elaine of that monochrome photographic sequence which had been unrolling before his mind, but Elaine herself.

But he could not move. Eight days' company with pain had made him afraid of it. He lay still lest any violent movement might attract its hostile attention. He lay still, staring at the white curved roof of the ambulance. His weakness made the tears spring to his eyes. He could feel them form on his eyelids, and pause a moment before they ran down his cheeks to fall into the bandage below. He felt unutterably lonely and neglected. He was left alone, he thought, because he was going to die. They could not spare time for a dying man; there were too many others needing attention. Even Elaine had let him pass by, with only that gesture of recognition, like the wave of a hand to an acquaintance across a street.

He wanted to call out, but was afraid that it might hurt his lips. He was frightened of that pain which kept him company when every one else ignored him. He saw it as a hooded baleful figure, with burning malevolent eyes. These turned on him now, and the dreaded weight of its ghastly hand pressed down on his chest; the great wheel turned, the yellow-red mists rose up obscuring the white paint of the ambulance roof, and with

a groan he fell into chill unconsciousness as into a dark and angry sea.

2

During his stay in hospital, Elaine came many times to see Richard. At first she had found it difficult. Richard could not talk, for his lips were swollen and painted with tannic acid. The nurse had explained this to her before bringing her into his room on her first visit. The nurse had said that Elaine was to do all the talking, that she was not to excite Flying Officer Danby, that if he appeared in pain she was to be called.

"We have many of these cases of burns/' she concluded, her hand on the door leading into Richard's room. "Their nerves are often injured more than their bodies, and visitors, except those closely related to them, find it sometimes very painful and exhausting to be with them. They are very courageous boys, and deserve special consideration. Are you a relation?"

"No." Elaine hesitated a moment, and then added, "Just a very old friend."

The nurse, Elaine thought, looked at her curiously, and seemed to pause longer than was necessary before opening the door. But suddenly she opened it, and stood aside to let Elaine pass in.

Richard was lying on his back with his eyes shut, and he did not turn his head when she came into the room. Elaine moved forward to his bed a little uncertainly. She heard the door behind her being closed.

"Richard," she said softly.

His eyes shot open, and he stared at her. Then suddenly, to her vast relief, she saw the skin round his eyes crinkle, and she knew that he was smiling at her.

"Oh, Richard," she said, putting her gloved hand on his uninjured one.

She looked about for a chair, saw one on the other side of the bed, and moved quickly around to sit on it. His eyes followed her as she did so, but he did not speak.

Conscious of the injunction to do all the talking, and out of relief that he was happy because she had come, she was suddenly garrulous as she had never been before. She told him of everything that had happened since she had seen him on the dockside the day before; how she had followed in her ambulance to

Netley, but had not been allowed to see him **then**, for **he had** been taken almost directly to the operating theatre; how she had made inquiries of nurses who had been with him **on** the hospital train and on the boat, and had learnt the extent of his injuries and nearly all that had happened to him since his crash. They had told her that she might come back this afternoon, and all night, and all through this long morning, she had been waiting for this moment.

And then she fell silent because she saw his wondering puzzled stare fixed on her, and she knew that all this was not what he wanted to hear, but she felt lost and embarrassed and did not know how to go on.

"I wonder how Nick is," she said, "and Douglas Smith. You are all in the same squadron, aren't you? I know that from the letters I've had from Alberta. But I mustn't ask you questions. They said I was not to let you talk."

"I can talk," said Richard slowly, moving his thickened lips with difficulty. "Tell Nick I'm here, and "all right. He'll be worried. He must be back from France. I hear we are all getting out. All that trouble for nothing." He smiled at her, then with his good hand squeezed hers.

"You," he said. "Tell me. Why . . ."

He rolled his head back on the pillow and shut his eyes, and she saw that he was in pain. The nurse had told her to call her, and she stood up to do so. But he thought that she meant to go, and his eyes opened again and he pulled at her **hand**. She sat down.

"Another time, Richard. Not now. I'll come and see you again to-morrow."

He looked at her doubtfully.

"I will, my dear," she said. "We will not be parted again."

She stood up once more, and his eyes smiled up at her.

"Kiss old friend," he said, with that same painful slowness. "Wounded hero's due."

She laughed softly and suddenly, and her heart was in that laugh. She bent swiftly and touched his forehead with her lips.

"Still the same impudent Richard," she said softly, her face **just** over his. "Oh, my dear." She squeezed his fingers again, **and** without looking back at him, hurried out of the **room**.

Driving her roadster back to Stratford Towers **that afternoon** she felt so happy she could have sung. All the unhappiness,

the dark moments of the last two years seemed to have evaporated into the golden air of this late June afternoon. She felt as light-hearted and carefree as she had often felt at Acadia on summer afternoons; then because the school or University term was over and she was free, now because, because . . .

She had kissed Richard. Like a silly, giggling schoolgirl she had yielded to what had only been a teasing request, and had bent and kissed him, and said, "Oh, my dear," with her heart throbbing in her voice. What would he think of her? That she still loved him and had meant that kiss? She *bad* meant it, she asserted to herself wildly, she had truly and deeply meant it. But he had had no explanation of why she had deserted him so suddenly, and here she must have seemed to him to be as ready to do another desertion, to leave Ralph Harriman as suddenly for him.

Her mood of happiness vanished as swiftly and as irrationally as it had come. Elaine, climbing slowly the broad stairs at Stratford Towers, one hand on the balustrade, her head bent down in the secret sorrow of her thoughts, looked like an unhappy little girl being sent unwillingly to her room. So thought Ralph Harriman leaning against his study door, watching his wife.

He had heard her come in, had left his desk by the window where he had been working, and had come out to greet her. She had already started to ascend the stairs when he opened his study door, but she was so lost in her own thoughts that she did not hear him. He longed to speak to her, but he hesitated, sensing with that strange sixth sense he was beginning to develop about her, that she was unhappy over something, and fearing that cold rebuff which by now he had learnt to expect and to accept when she wished to shut him out from her private world.

3

On her second visit she had given Richard the explanation for which he had asked.

"The nurse said that I let you talk too much yesterday, Richard. To-day I'm really going to do all the talking."

She did not hold his hand this time. She had rehearsed in her thoughts her entrance into his room this afternoon, **and** it had been as she had intended it should be. She had come forward with a friendly, sympathetic smile **that had conveyed**

nothing of her feelings for him, had asked him how he had slept and how he felt, but had forbidden him to answer, saying "Those are just the sort of remarks people have to make to patients, though I found out the answer to both from the nurse before I came in. They say you slept well, and that you're better. I'm so glad, Richard. But the rule against talking still holds good, so I'm going to do it all this afternoon."

She settled back in her chair, with her hands clasped on her knee. She noticed the puzzled, amused stare with which he was regarding her, and she looked down at her hands, so that she might not be distracted, and hurried on.

"Richard, I wrote you a letter, you know, at the time of my marriage, but it came back to me through the Dead Letter office. By then I had heard that you had returned to the University and were living with the Brydens, and I could have sent it on to you again. But I decided that it was better, since so much time had elapsed and you had evidently recovered, not to disturb the sleeping waters by throwing a stone from the past into them, so I didn't send it on.

"But I think I must tell you now what was in that letter, especially as I think I behaved rather like a silly flirtatious school-girl when I was here yesterday, and you must be completely unaware of what made me marry Ralph Harriman."

Richard interrupted, rolling his head on the pillow towards her and speaking with that same slow, painful hesitation.

"I suppose you loved him."

"No, Richard, I loved you."

He looked at her, his grey eyes staring at her unwinkingly, as though he would probe her for the truth, and she hurried on, looking down at her clasped hands again.

"Don't force me to make this a dramatic confession, Richard. I'm giving you simply an explanation, so you mustn't interrupt. It wasn't easy for me to do this.

"When I came to England," she went on, "I had made up my mind, as I promised you, to break that half-engagement I had with Ralph Harriman, and to return to Alberta and wait for you. I loved you very much. I thought only of the moment when I should be back with you again."

She hesitated for an instant, suddenly aware, with his unwinking stare fixed on her, of how difficult this explanation was going to be, conscious that it did not show her in a good light.

Richard's grey eyes, staring at her, made her see the truth in **the** past. Richard, lying still and hurt on this bed, while she who had not been hurt sat here disinterring the past, made that past seem suddenly despicable. She had paid for her share in it by two years of unhappiness, but Ralph, too, was unhappy, and now Richard was to be made to accept his portion.

She looked down at her hands again. The knuckles were white because her interlocked fingers squeezed each other in the muscular tension that accompanied her nervous tension.

"I . . . I think I can't go on, Richard. It's too painful raking up the past."

After a moment's silence, he spoke. "Afraid, Elaine? I was afraid once. That's why I left Jasper and went away. I was afraid that you had written to say that you didn't love me. Didn't want my vanity hurt, I think, so I ran away. We are both cowards."

He had rolled back on the pillow again as though he could not bear to look at her any more, and that which had made her frightened, his steady penetrating gaze, now that it was withdrawn, seemed to her a deprivation, as though he had shut a door between them.

"Yes, afraid, Richard. I suppose that is it. But I shall not be afraid if only you will understand. Oh, my dear, how hard it is, and how wicked I've been."

She paused a moment, and then hurried on, speaking rapidly and nervously. She was aware, though she did not look up from her clasped hands, that his head had rolled back towards her again, and that his eyes were once more intent upon her, patient and unmoving. But this, which had distracted her before, now gave her confidence. It was, she felt, a sign of his trust.

"I thought I was going to have a child, Richard, your child. For days I was in an awful state of misery about it. You were not there to help me. My first thought was of how wicked I had been. My next, what a terrible shock it would be to my parents if they were to know. I was alone, Richard, and terribly afraid. He, Ralph, was kind to me, so good and kind. He knew nothing, of course. I wanted to wipe the memory of you and me out of my mind for ever. Suddenly I knew that I wasn't going to have a child. I had worried needlessly. The relief was greater than you could understand. But, Richard, there is

something I haven't confessed. When I thought I was going to have a child, I thought I would marry. Ralph, just so my parents wouldn't find out. When the fright was over, and I realised just how badly I might have behaved, I was bitterly ashamed of myself. He had been so good and kind, and I had been so ready to take advantage of it. You seemed very far away. I said I would marry him. Then it was too late to withdraw. I thought at first that I would write and tell you, and that I would run away from Ralph. I kept meaning to do it, but I kept putting it off. That was cowardice if you like. I've meant to now for two years, and I haven't done it yet. From time to time I have come very near it, but I have never quite brought myself to it. Meanwhile I've been terribly unhappy, Richard."

She looked up at him at this point for the first time, as though to beg for sympathy. But she quickly looked down again, for she thought she saw in his eyes an angry, hurt look. And this kept her silent, so that she could not continue her defence.

Richard spoke: "And Ralph, is he unhappy too?"

She hesitated for a moment. "I suppose so," she said quietly.

"Pretty hard luck on him, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it is, Richard."

She looked round the room in a puzzled way, as though somewhere, if she could only find it, there was some explanation of her strange relationship to Ralph.

"I don't know what it is, Richard. Is it something bad and hopeless in me that brings unhappiness to any one I love, such as you, or to any one who loves me, such as Ralph? I wish everything were simple and uncomplicated the way it was in the old days at Acadia."

"You mean, you wish that Ralph had never come there?"

"Yes." She hesitated. "No, not quite that. I am glad I have known him. There are many things that I like about him. He is very strong and sure, and when I was in trouble he gave me a wonderful sense of safety and protection. Everybody likes him, you know. He is very popular, and his friends, especially his men friends, adore him. Yet he never pretends, he is never affected. But there is something about his sureness **and** patience, his determination, that both frightens and antagonises me. And I think this is the thing that upsets me, Richard. He is good, and I am wicked. I don't mean good and wicked in the conventional way. I **don't** mean **that he's** a saint and I'm a

sinner. I mean, deep down"—she touched her breast and looked at him with sad eyes, trying to make him understand what she meant—"deep down he is loyal and well-meaning, and, though I am not in love with him, I would do anything in the world not to hurt him."

"I think you love him, Elaine," he persisted.

"I don't, Richard, I don't." She was like a little child beating its knee in protest, and he could not help but smile at her. "I love you only, Richard. My marriage is a failure, don't you understand? I do not let Ralph come near me. He does not try, but if he did I would not let him. That isn't because I have found you again. It has been so ever since a few weeks after our marriage. Oh, Richard, I feel shut in by it all. I want to escape so much. I never wanted to be married. In a mad, foolish moment, out of gratitude to him, I married Ralph, and ever since then I have been longing to escape."

She was so carried away by her feelings that she rose from the chair on which she was sitting, and fell on her knees beside the bed.

"Richard, be kind to me," she begged. "Darling, don't sit in judgment on me. Don't remind me of the claims Ralph has on me. I am wicked, wicked. Let me be more wicked, darling, by loving you. Help me to forget Ralph. I want only to remember the old days when we were together, before this unhappiness came upon us."

He lay there, his face turned up to the ceiling. She looked at the face of which she had thought so often and so constantly. It was the wreckage of what had once been bright and beautiful in her eyes, but it was more than ever precious to her now with its wrinkled patched skin, its red, bitter scars.

At last he rolled his head sideways and looked at her.

"I'm not worth that, you know, Elaine. Not worth any one throwing her cap over a windmill. And in spite of what you say, I think you love Ralph, and you would regret it if you ever left him for me. God knows, I'm no saint. If you call yourself wicked, then what am I? You will be happy with him in time."

She saw that she could not persuade him to the truth that was in her heart. The sense of being caught in a trap, which she had felt ever since her marriage, was deepened and made more frightening by these words of Richard's. She knew now that,

without realising it, she had been waiting for Richard. That was why she had treasured those letters about him. Some time she had thought, the trap will open and I shall escape. But when the longed-for moment had arrived, the trap had not opened. From inside she could see freedom and happiness without; but could not escape. The trap was sprung down, firmly and irrevocably.

She got to her feet with tears in her eyes.

"You are crying, Elaine." He touched her hand. "Don't, my dear, it will come all right in the end."

"Oh, Richard," she said, "I wish I could make you understand."

"I understand, my dear. Better than you realise, I think."

She went towards the door.

"You'll come back, Elaine? To-morrow?"

She nodded at him from the door, without speaking. Then, with a last look at him, she went out into the grey, outside world.

4

But on the morrow when she arrived, Richard's parents were there. Here at last was the Gov. She had had his address when she left Alberta, but she had never looked him up, as she had promised Richard to do when she had left Canada, meaning to return.

The Gov. was coldly ceremonious. He recognised that this was the young woman who had promised to marry Richard, and then had committed the indescribable offence of jilting his son and marrying someone else. The Gov. sat as pink and remote as an unlit single candle on a birthday cake, while Julia, recognising the feelings of her spouse, but anxious that Richard should not be upset, twittered into a loquacity that knew no pause, and which, like a rushing stream, avoiaed obstacles by changing its course instead of overcoming them.

Did Elaine live in the neighbourhood of the hospital, and was her husband in the Forces? Julia was made aware telepathically by a quiver of the Gov.'s ramrod frame that the husband of this young woman was a delicate subject. She swerved, but sailed on, while Richard watched amused and Elaine thought how lovable the two darlings were.

The Gov. finally interrupted his wife.

"That's enough, Julia dear. We are supposed to be visiting Richard, not holding an inconsequential conversation with Mrs. Harriman. My dear boy," said the Gov., turning to Richard and speaking in a clear, high, and most dignified voice, "the doctor gives me a very good report of your progress, and Squadron-Leader Smith, who came to call yesterday with Sergeant—er—an unpronounceable name—said that he believed you were to be mentioned in despatches. All this is very gratifying. Your great-uncle Charles—Colonel Danby" (he added for Elaine's benefit), "was twice mentioned in despatches, once in the Matabele War and once in the Boer War."

"It will be nice to get even with great-uncle Charles," said Richard, who, Elaine noticed, was speaking with much less difficulty to-day. "I remember him being very pontifical with me when I stayed with him at Worthing when I was a child, an innocent child."

The Gov. warmed to a family joke, ignoring for a moment the presence of Elaine. He tittered majestically. "Frankly, my dear boy, my Uncle Charles was a bit of a bore and similarly plagued my childhood by assuming a grandeur in addressing me worthy of a larger and more appreciative audience. Did I ever tell you that once when I was nine or ten, after a heavy Sunday lunch, I fell asleep in a large chair in the library, when he was reminiscing about some martial exploit in which he had been engaged?

"I awoke to find Uncle Charles furious on the hearth-rug, denouncing me to his butler for whom he had rung to have me removed. Whibley, the butler, took me by the hand and led me out of the room under sentence of banishment to my own room where I was to remain without tea for the rest of the afternoon. I did. My uncle's orders were not disobeyed in his own household. But Whibley, the footman, the cook and a maid brought their own tea up to my room and had it there. By mistake they happened to bring an extra plate and cup and an immense supply of cake. I did myself well, and Whibley, who had been on active service with my uncle, told me stories of the Boers infinitely more interesting than the egotistical monologue with which my uncle had put me to sleep."

Richard laughed, and Elaine joined in. She had always

imagined that Richard had a family like this. She wished that she had got to know them before.

Said the Gov., "We cabled those excellent Brydens as you asked us to do, and we have had back from them a most affable response. Julia, dear, where is that cable?"

Julia extracted it from her bag, the Gov. mounted his pair of **E**ince-nez on his thin nose and read the message. "So happy have news of Richard please write fullest details sending parcels as well as deepest love.—BRYDEN."

"Elaine knows them well," said Richard to his family.

The Gov. became a little less frigid. She was an attractive-looking girl, and no doubt bitterly regretted having lost Richard.

"They have been foster-parents to my son. I owe them a great debt of gratitude," he said with a slight bow, as though he were returning thanks to the Brydens by proxy through Elaine.

"They are darlings/' Elaine answered. "They are devoted to Richard, and so is Nick, that Sergeant you spoke of."

The Danbys received these tributes to Richard with gracious pleasure. The Gov. registered the fact that the girl had charming manners. He looked at his watch.

" "But at my back I always hear, Time's winged chariot hurrying near,' " he said, rising, with a smile. "We shall miss our train, dear, unless we leave immediately. My dear boy, thank God you are getting on so well. We look forward to your convalescence at home. That will fix you up all right. We will come again on Friday."

Julia bent and kissed her son's scarred face. She held her own to his for a moment as though by that she might hide the scars, and looking up with tear-filled eyes took the Gov.'s hand, whispered good-bye to Elaine, and hurried to the door. Elaine saw them go with regret. Because Richard's mother loved him so much, her own heart felt overflowing **with love** for Julia.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

i

A FEW weeks later Richard was moved from Netley to a hospital in the suburbs of London, and at about the same time the Harrimans closed Stratford Towers, preparatory to handing it over to the Government, and moved themselves to their house in Cheyne Walk. It was then the middle of July. More than three weeks had elapsed since the fall of France. Mr. Churchill had launched upon that series of great orations which dispelled the sense of failure and of shattered hopes to which the free peoples everywhere might otherwise have succumbed, and miraculously there had come over England once again that feeling of well-being and self-reliance from which, at so many critical moments during her long history, she had been able to recruit her strength.

There was ardour and buoyancy in the air, a sense of suppressed excitement, and a palpitation of movement as though the land were drawing quicker and more vigorous breaths, as the Home Guard was recruited, the Civil Defence Services more thoroughly manned, the factories speeded up. It was as though the doors of all the homes of England were flung widely back, and every one, the old and the young, rushed out to take up their posts. The moment of crises was drawing near. The nation tensed itself and waited without fear.

Ralph Harriman, without saying anything to his wife, and with a conscience-stricken feeling that this was but a poor contribution, considering his age and health, to make to his country's cause, joined the Auxiliary Fire Service. Elaine did not know of this until he had been in it for several weeks. Then his practices became so arduous and the hours he spent on duty so long, that he had to go to the Foreign Office in fireman's uniform, and it was not until she saw him thus accoutred one morning that he admitted what he had done. He was so apologetic and shy about it that she felt touched, and said, "It's time I got busy about my own work. I've been in London a fortnight, and have done nothing yet."

"But you've been busy," said Ralph, as though to defend her, "looking after young Danby. How is he getting along?"

Elaine felt a little confused. She had told Ralph about

visiting Richard at Netley, and had said that he had been moved to a London hospital. But she had not told him of her daily visits there. It was odd that he should know.

"He's getting on very well," she answered. "He should be out of hospital in a fortnight, and is then going down to his parents' home to recuperate. He isn't a Canadian, you remember. He's really English."

She went on: "I thought it might be nice to give a little dinner party for him when he is well enough to go out of hospital for an evening. Do you think it would be a good thing, or are the times inappropriate?"

"My dear, of course not. We are not forbidden to dine nor to rejoice, if there's occasion for it. Young Danby should certainly celebrate his emergence from hospital. He had a close shave, I believe."

"Yes, Ralph." She was silent a moment, then said idly, "Did I give you details of his crash? I had forgotten."

"No. I was lunching at my club with a man. A Canadian Squadron-Leader was there as a guest with someone else, a young fellow who said he had met me at Acadia one Sunday at lunch, though I'd forgotten him. Said Danby was in his squadron. He told me all about him, said he had seen you several times at the hospital, and how good you had been to Danby."

He got up to go to the office. "Certainly have that dinner party. I should like to see Danby again myself."

Left alone at the breakfast-table, Elaine glanced again at her letters, but was aware of a curious sense of uneasiness shadowing her mind. She thrust the letters from her impatiently, got up and walked to the French windows of the dining-room which looked out over a small balcony to the gardens and the river beyond. London, a city of moods, was pretending at this hour that it was a small, sleepy village, drowsing in the sunshine of an early summer morning. There were peaceful shadows beneath the plane trees, and the embankment was cool and fresh-looking, while the Thames surged calmly eastwards to the sea. Some children were playing in the gardens. She could hear their shouts and cries, and see the flash of their white shirts as they raced amongst the trees. All the children were supposed to have left London. Whose were these, she wondered, who were courageously and rashly kept here, defiant

of the enemy only seventy miles away? A woman walked past with a shopping basket on her arm, leading a lethargic spaniel on a leash, neither of them hurried or perturbed by the tearful assault being mounted against them. Was it innocence or ignorance that kept these people so calm in the face of so terrible a danger?

The feeling in her own mind persisted. She knew what its origin was, but she held it at arm's length, as it were, refusing to shape it into a definite thought. Ralph had known that she had been visiting Richard daily, but had said nothing about it. How strange of him! But then, they hardly ever had moments of intimacy. They were really strangers, though they shared the same roof. He might have told her that he had joined the Fire Service. It would have looked so silly if she had heard it from someone else. It was slightly noble of him to have done it, to have doffed his Foreign Office grandeur for this badly-fitting uniform; less noble of her, who had no other claim on her time, to have done nothing in the few weeks she had been in London except spend her time with Richard, and to have been so absorbed in that as not to have known what Ralph was doing, not to have remembered what England was moving towards.

Elaine realised suddenly, watching the quiet street, that she herself was drifting towards danger. But she felt passionately reckless, and she shrugged her shoulders to shake off these burdensome thoughts, and went to dress to go out.

Nevertheless, on her way to the hospital that afternoon, she went to Chelsea Town Hall, and put down her name as a driver in the A.R.P. service. She was told to report for a driving test the next day, and came out into the hot sunshine of midday and walked down King's Road with a little of the weight lifted from her mind. The date was August 23rd. On her way to the hospital that afternoon, the sirens went and the sound of the anti-aircraft guns, though they were firing in the outskirts of London; could be heard above the roar of the traffic.

Z

Richard was by now almost recovered. His arm and broken leg had set satisfactorily, and though his legs were still in plaster of paris he was no longer kept to bed, and usually in the afternoon she sat with him in the gardens of the hospital. He was

kept in hospital only for saline bath treatment for his burns, but he was due to leave at the beginning of September, and to have ten days' leave before reporting for a medical board. He was now anxious to get back to his squadron which was stationed at Biggin Hill.

Sometimes in the afternoon Douglas Smith or Nick would be there when she called, or Gordon Vyland or some of the others from Alberta who were at different fighter stations in the south of England. Often they would be called to the telephone from the garden, and then a nurse would come out to say that they had been ordered back urgently to their stations, and had to leave without coming back to say good-bye. The Battle of Britain was now in full swing, and the fighter pilots never had more than a few hours off duty, and even that short release was often interrupted. Richard used to become very impatient when this happened, and fret over his continued stay in hospital. Elaine would try to comfort him, and the others urge him to make the most of his rest. But his impatience was never of the kind to be quietened by soothing words. He would grow bitter and scornful, and would say things that would hurt Elaine, and instead of apologising afterwards, he would look at her with hard eyes, and not conceal a desire to be left alone. The Richard who had survived the crash in France was not so gentle and so eagerly impetuous as the one who had made love to her at Acadia.

On the afternoon of August 25 th Douglas Smith was killed. Nick came the next afternoon to tell Richard, and when Elaine arrived at three o'clock she found them sitting in the garden together. Nick stood up and gave her the stiff, solemn little bow with which he always greeted her. There was something a little more rigid in his attitude to-day, and she missed the usual wide and friendly smile which she always looked for to offset his otherwise stiffly ceremonious greeting. She noticed a grim scowl on Richard's face, too, and stood there uncertainly for a moment before she asked: "What's the matter? Has something happened?"

Richard answered her. "Doug's been killed. Yesterday afternoon. Shot down into the sea off Kent. Nick has just come to tell me."

"Oh!" she groaned, and feeling her legs giving way under her, sat down quickly in the chair which Nick had vacated.

"Oh, his mother and Doctor Smith. This will kill them. It's what we always dreaded. Poor, dear Douglas! Oh God, how awful it is!"

"We will all go the same way in the end," said Richard. "It's bad for our side that Doug should have been the first. He was a good pilot. They could better have spared me."

"Or me," sighed Nick.

"Nonsense, Sergeant," said Richard, with a quick smile. "You're quite indispensable. Damn it, we should be lost without you bringing up the tail end of the formation. It always gave me great comfort to know that you were back there, keeping an eye skinned for Huns dropping on us from out of the sun. I should refuse to take part in these reckless sorties if I didn't know that you were there at the back, lending an air of respectability to an otherwise vicious proceeding."

"Do you remember," Nick said, "how we all used to talk about what we would do when the war came? What a bunch of kids we was, arguing it all out so kind a solemn. Only Doug knew what was right and what was certain. You fellows used to tease him, but he knew. We haven't been teasing him much in this last year, have we, when we've been fighting with him. We've been too glad to be under such a good leader. He never lost his head in a scrap, and he looked after us all as well as himself, herding us on, telling us where and how to attack, with an eye on everybody in the squadron, his voice going quietly on the R.T., never flurried or excited, always clear and straight. Good old Doug! He was a fine guy."

Elaine watched them talking together, reminiscing about Douglas and the squadron, remembering, it seemed, nothing that was sad, but only the cheerful things, that schoolboys might recollect if ever they paused to remember the past. How young they are, she thought. They have hardly altered since the old days in Alberta. Their faces are older, but not their minds or their hearts. I am the same age as they are, but I feel infinitely older and shut out from their affairs. I never felt that way at Acadia. What have they done, or what have I done, that has shut a door between us?

She knew that she was in love with Richard, but in a strange, profoundly unhappy way. She was uncertain what she wanted from her love. For the moment she was content just to be near Richard and to watch him, occasionally to touch his hand, or

put an arm round his shoulder when she helped him into his chair; or occasionally when leaving him to brush his scarred cheek with her lips. These things gave her present pleasure, but left her uneasy and dissatisfied, for she was aware that they were not enough and that soon her heart would grow hungry for more, and she awaited that further stage with a mingled dread and excitement.

CHAPTER TWENTY - EIGHT

THE little bar-boy in his white monkey jacket and black trousers, both too big for him because he had inherited them from a larger predecessor now in the Army, smiled conspiratorially upon them, and took their orders for drinks. He liked waiting upon Royal Air Force men, and here was one that had been wounded, and had a pretty lady with him, and it gave him both pleasure and pride to serve them. Neither Richard nor Elaine wanted to drink, but such a favouring smile as the bar-boy laid before them, as it were, could not be ignored.

"We'll have whatever you suggest, John," said Richard.

"How about a coupla dry Martinis? Me name's Charlie, sir."

"We'll have just those, Charlie," said Richard, and turned from the worthy Charlie to look again upon Elaine.

"Thank God I'm free of that hospital, Elaine. The whole day, no, ten whole days before us. I feel like a kid before a table of cakes at a party. I don't know where to begin."

"But you must go and stay with your family, Richard."

"Sure, if you'll come too."

"Oh, Richard," she smiled at him, "I can't come. Your family won't want me. Besides, I'm a respectable married woman."

"Let's say, a married woman."

"Richard!"

"Besides, the Gov.'s fallen for you in a big way. He says you're intelligent. Which means that you were polite enough to agree with his opinions. My parents would adore having you."

"I'm a war-worker, Richard. It's quite impossible to get

away. I have two jobs: one, driving an A.R.P. heavy-rescue ambulance; and I'm an evacuation officer for Chelsea as well. If the raids come any closer into London, we will have to evacuate still more of these families who so far have resisted all blandishments to move them from their little back streets to the open country. They cling like limpets to bricks and mortar."

"You've got a third job, my girl. Looking after Flying Officer Danby to whose restoration to health and equanimity England is eagerly looking forward. They've got a nice little new Spitfire all ready for him, and they are most anxious to have him well and happy again. So they've detailed Mrs. Harriman to do a therapeutic tour and cure combined to achieve that worthy purpose, and that job takes priority over all others.

"Charlie," called Richard to the bar-boy, who stood against the bar gazing at them, "repeat these amber horrors."

"We'll see," said Elaine, feeling at that moment that anything might be possible.

They decided to lunch at Pastori's. They told each other that they did not feel any more like food than they had felt like drink. "But if we do as well with Pastori as we have done with Charlie," said Elaine, "he will have nothing to complain of."

They walked along Park Lane, crossed Piccadilly and went into the Green Park. The sky was a deep blue, and the air so still and warm that it might have been a day in mid-summer instead of in September. The all-clear had gone as they crossed Piccadilly, and walking through the Park, with the roar of Piccadilly traffic growing dimmer as they went on among the trees, it was as though that all-clear had signalled the end of hostilities, and the war was becoming a distant, half-forgotten echo.

"When it ends, Richard, will you go back to Canada?"

"If I survive, my sweet, and if you'll come back with me."

"That's impossible, Richard."

"My survival, you mean?"

She felt his mood swiftly change, as a light cloud can momentarily obscure the sun.

"Of course not, Richard. And I was wrong to say impossible. Nothing is impossible. You know how much I love you. But let's not talk of these things yet. Time enough later for that. **I want only to be happy** to-day because I am with you. And I'm

to be with you *all* day. That's the lovely thing. I've had only snatches of you before, an hour or two, and then not always alone. Now I'm to have you to myself, and I'm much too miserly to want to waste a single minute of it by worrying about the future."

Richard took Elaine's hand and squeezed it. People were everywhere in the Park, sitting on the benches, lying on the grass, walking up and down the paths. "If it weren't for all these," said Richard, laughing and waving his free hand at the assembled witnesses, "I'd stop and kiss you, just to show how much I agree with you. Let's talk of to-morrow to-morrow. The present is what counts."

Pastori greeted Elaine with rapture. He managed to convey the impression that this day was made for him, that the restaurant was theirs, that he had never seen a more beautiful woman or a more distinguished-looking officer in the entire course of his restaurant experience, that his staff might stand a few yards off and pass him things but that he would not forgo the honour of serving them himself; that he recommended oysters, that there was a beef-steak and kidney pie, which among beef-steak and kidney pies owned a distinction which they among human beings possessed. Then he smiled at Richard, put a finger to his lips as though sharing with him a secret, and said: "Wine! Allow Pastori to provide a bottle of *Lafite*. As a tribute!" He bowed his head upon his chest and closed his eyes for a moment, as though in solemn contemplation of some unutterable mystery, and then left them to set these preparations afoot.

Richard smiled nervously at Elaine.

"Tribute to what? The lovely Mrs. Harriman?"

"No," Elaine laughed, and touched his hand. "To you."

"Me?" said Richard, appalled.

"The silver wings upon your chest, my love. Don't you realise what heroes you men in the R.A.F. are?"

"Good lord," said Richard nervously. "But I don't believe it. He seems to know you very well."

"We've often been here for dinner parties," said Elaine. "It's the nicest restaurant in London. At least, Pastori is the nicest restaurateur."

Pastori came back, carrying with exquisite care a wine-basket, in which a dusty, cobwebbed bottle lay. He held it reverently

before Richard. "Chdteau Lafite 1924/' he said softly. "Ah, sir, what a wine!"

Richard, who knew nothing about wines, tried to look properly appreciative.

Pastori looked left and right sideways at the other tables. "I would not give it to any one else to drink/' he said softly.

He waved away a wine-waiter who had had the temerity to approach with a corkscrew in his hand, produced his own special silver corkscrew from his pocket, and proceeded to uncork the bottle himself. He poured a little into a glass, held it up to the light, smelled its bouquet, allowed a look of rapture to flit across his face, then filled their glasses and stood back with his arms folded to watch them taste it.

The wine was delicious. Richard put down his glass. "Marvellous," he said.

Pastori bowed acknowledgments; then with raised shoulders, palms spread upwards, his distinguished head on one side, let slip a little of the flowery English he reserved for special moments.

"A wine for the brave, sir, and," bowing to Elaine, "for the fair, Madame."

They had not felt like food, they had said, but they were young and happy, and this was the first meal they had ever had by themselves. It was like being on a honeymoon. They watched each other with absorbed interest, unaware of any one else in the restaurant; they talked and laughed inconsequentially, not really so concerned with what they were saying as with the thoughts that each had in his mind, and was aware that the other had too. Fortified by Pastori's wine and food, and by the happiness in their hearts, they moved from moment to moment, aware that they had a treasury of hours still before them, but half reluctant to let each minute go.

"What would you do," asked Richard, "if you were *in* love, had the object of your affections along with you, and you wanted to spend a nice sunny afternoon peacefully with her?"

"You're asking the Chelsea evacuation officer, with her theory about green fields and open spaces? Well, I think I'd recommend Richmond Park. We can walk there, and rest a bit under the trees, and come back for tea. We can go to my garage and get my little car and drive out. Would that please my noble Richard?"

"If you'll drive. I'm a little drunk, I do believe."

"Richard!"

"Not with Pastori's excellent claret, but with love. I should be putting an arm around you in the middle of the traffic, and having a crash, or whatever you motorists call it when you bang your little tin traps into one another."

"I'll drive," said Elaine severely, "and you shall go to sleep."

"On the grass beside you, darling?"

"Richard!"

"Don't keep saying 'Richard' in that shocked voice. You know quite well that I've got designs on you, and Pastori's my accomplice. That wine has given me the most unbecoming notions."

"Richard, please." Then looking into his smiling eyes, she felt herself carried away by a mood of abandonment, so that she longed to throw her arms about him and press his thin, scarred face to her breast, and comfort him and kiss away his pain.

Elaine drove her roadster into Richmond Park by the Robin Hood Gate, and they walked up the slope of land that rises to a little tree-crowned hill. The time was between three and four o'clock. The afternoon was very warm, but the air seemed a little sultry. It was the lunch they had had, suggested Richard, when Elaine spoke of the sense of oppression that seemed to hang in the air, though the sky was clear and there was no hint of thunder anywhere. But Elaine shook her head. "That's what older people always used to say, Richard, when we felt the presence of doom in the air, and there is nothing more maddening for a child to be told it has eaten too much when it quite clearly recognises the gestures and features of Fate, about to strike."

"Do you feel that now, Elaine?" He had taken off his cap and tucked it under his arm, and his brown curly hair, lifted by the breeze, was shining in the afternoon sun. She felt comfortable about him, and smiled to have that part of her fears reassured.

"Not threatening you, my Richard. But I do feel uneasy about . . . well, I don't quite know. About England, about London especially, and about all the simple, humble people; those, for instance, who live in the little houses round about ours; the ones I see on the King's Road every morning; the little woman who keeps the vegetable shop I call at two or three times every week. Her husband has been missing since

Dunkirk, she has **five children, the youngest only a year old**. Her whole life, not to mention her whole capital, is wrapped up in that little shop and her family. With so much at stake, she ought to be in a state of absolute panic. She isn't, and the fact that she isn't makes me feel ashamed of myself whenever I call in there and I'm worried or unhappy over some little matter. Look now," she stopped and put her hand on his arm, "I've had three lovely hours to-day already, and I have you safely with me at this moment, and that is all that I care about; I *am* happy"—she insisted, looking at him with her wide eyes—"but I talk about a sense of doom being in the air, and feel frightened. Yes, I have to admit, I *do* feel frightened; and then, when I think of that little vegetable woman, who at this time on a Saturday afternoon will be rushed off her feet, worn out but not frightened, then I do feel hideously and desperately ashamed of myself."

He saw that she was, and because he knew that at this moment in their relationship it would be wrong to offer her false comfort, to contradict what she said, to laugh at her fears, to hold the vegetable woman up to polite scorn, he did not say anything, but looked at her with eyes that loved her, and took her arm and walked slowly on.

When they reached the top of the hill, they sat down beneath the Spanish chestnut trees that grew there, and looked eastwards towards the city. A low bank of clouds seemed to hang on the eastern horizon.

"A storm coming up," said Richard. "But a funny place to come from, from the east. And it's so clear in the west."

He looked back over his shoulder. The descending sun hung in a sky of the sercnest blue. A few little white puffs of clouds, so innocent in demeanour as to seem positively infantile, floated here and there against the light blue sky.

"Funny," he muttered, then shrugged the phenomenon away. He lay down on his back, and looked up at her face. She was playing with a leaf, tearing the green parts carefully, so as not to break the "fishbones." Her expression was still serious and preoccupied. His inclination was to take her in his arms and kiss her fears away, but a right instinct restrained him. He put his hand in her lap, and she dropped the leaf and smiled at him.

"Do you remember, Elaine, the talk we'all had in the shack

at Morland's Lake that first day I told you that I loved you? Do you remember—Lord, how long ago it seems now—how we all began to talk at lunch about what we would do if the war came? Doug was certain that it was coming and that we should all have to go. How right Doug always was about things like that! That was what made him such a good squadron leader. He could always make up his mind well in advance about anything while the rest of us were debating first of all, whether the problem really existed, and second, what was the best way to tackle it. We used to tease Doug in the old days at Alberta for his *idée fixe*, but we didn't once we were in the R.A.F. Partly because it isn't seemly or customary for junior officers in the R.A.F. to make fun of their Squadron-Leader's decisions, but chiefly because we always knew that Doug was right. Bless the old boy's spirit.

"It's funny to recall now the different ideas we all had as to what, under certain conditions, we would do to help England if she were foolish enough to get herself into trouble. I think every one of us who was there that day is over here now, or training in Canada, and nobody has joined because they have had to, all of us did because we wanted to."

She had leant on her elbow, and her face was nearer to his. Her eager interest had been aroused by his reference to their days together in Alberta. She still held the hand which he had given her. When he paused, she said, "Yes, I remember, Richard. Go on. What were you going to say?"

"I was thinking of your vegetable woman," he replied. "I rather think that she was what we all had dimly in mind that afternoon, and it was her, or someone like her, whom Doug was seeing when he talked about the ordinary man fighting for his freedom and his right to live his own little life, unmolested and undictated to by any self-appointed power."

"Yes," she said, "go on," when he again paused.

"You must not feel ashamed of yourself, darling, or frightened, because you think you feel the doom and they don't, because you think you are frightened and they aren't. When the moment comes, you'll stand it as they will. I'm sure of that, just as I was sure at Morland's Lake that Doug was right, and Gordon Vyland, Tom Sproule, the Farebrothers, and the rest would rush to fight the moment the battle opened."

"Darling, you have too good an opinion of my character. If

you only knew how weak and worthless I am. I have done so many things of which I am ashamed that the secret of my own worthlessness can't be hidden from me."

"I love you," said Richard, "I love you with all my heart and my soul. Darling Elaine, you could do nothing that is really wrong, I know. I tell you, I know, darling," he said fiercely. "Kiss me. Put your head down on my shoulder and kiss me. I feci that I shall never be able to kiss you enough before I die."

He drew her down fiercely, and their lips met, and the fears that each knew were in them, in spite of what the other had said, were momentarily plotted out by the richness and the agony of their love.

She lay there for a little while with her head on his shoulder, neither of them speaking, but each completely happy. Then she lifted her head, and said, "Do you hear that, Richard? Listen! The guns."

Far away in the distance could be heard the dull thud of heavy guns firing. They sat up and looked eastwards again. The low bank of clouds they had first noticed when they sat down here had thickened and swelled and now arched higher into the sky. The cloud which had been grey before now seemed brown and black, and as they looked they thought they could see it writhing as though it were the ugly underbelly of some giant reptile struggling in a deadly fight.

"It's smoke," said Richard, "not a cloud. That's the East End of London. About where the docks are, I should think. The Hun must be beating it up in considerable force to raise such a smoke as that."

They watched it for some moments. The light in the eastern sky seemed yellow, and to gaze at it for any length of time made the eyeballs ache. Now that they were concentrating on it, they could feel the earth shake every time there was a louder explosion. "Guns could not do that at this distance," said Richard. "Those are bombs, and heavy ones at that."

"Let's start back," said Elaine. "It seems wrong to sit here while this is going on. Besides, a sense of propriety suddenly comes upon me. What if any one should see Mrs. Harriman, the wife of a distinguished Foreign Office official, lying on the grass with a young airman? Think of the scandal!"

"To say nothing," laughed Richard in return, "of my position in the service. The R.A.F. is a most respectable organisa-

tion. It enforces the rule very strictly about seducing other men's wives."

"Oh, what's the penalty?" laughed Elaine. "Do they court-martial you?"

"No such luck," grunted Richard. "The name and address of the lady in the case become the property of your superior officers, and from then on you're completely cut out."

As they drove towards Chelsea the darkness over the eastern end of the city increased, and a smell of burning timber began to impregnate the air. Several times they had to draw in to the kerb to let fire-engines with bells clanging go swerving by. Burnt-out ashes carried several miles through the air splashed against the windscreen, and a strange and eerie darkness began to blot out the late afternoon light.

They drove without speaking down Kensington Road. People were coming out of the Park. Occasionally there was a frightened face to be seen, pale and distraught, or a pair of legs that gave the impression that they were moving faster than their owner wished to have noticed. But generally the people wore a look of subdued excitement as though they were spectators at some tremendous drama.

"London Town is burning down," said Richard quietly to Elaine. "This is the opening of the promised *blitzkrieg*. What boasters these Germans are! They have been mouthing the most frightful threats for years, and now that they are about to put them into practice they are positively screaming hate and nellishness. If they are as certain as they say they are that they can blot England out of existence, why do they need to make such a hell of a song and dance about it? And why has it taken them over two months to get as far as setting fire to the docks of London?"

She did not answer. She was thinking of the docks in the East End as she had seen them when Ralph had driven her down there one day before the war. It was when the Munich crises was at its height. Ralph had had to go down to the docks on some Government matter connected with shipping; she had asked if she might accompany him, for she had some confused, romantic notions of the dock areas arising out of Edgar Wallace's books and tales of Chinatown.

The little houses, the memory of them came back to **her** now **with a** sharp poignancy; the little grey houses joined **together**

in interminable rows, funny, narrow, grey streets, the little shops, the brown shiny public-houses, the children playing in the streets, the men with handkerchiefs knotted round their throats, slouching along with their hands in their pockets. Thin men with sharp, peaked faces under dirty caps, and women, their thin shoulders covered in shawls, wearing caps too, with their hair screwed up into biins behind, hurrying along the streets with baskets on their arms. She remembered now the smell of human bodies, of thousands of human bodies, packed into small houses with little rooms, with no bathrooms, and kitchens that were bedroom and sitting-room as well as kitchen, where the smell of fried fish and stale beer and the remains of tea in unwashed cups, and oily margarine, comingled into one vast sour smell that seeped through thousands of badly-fitting windows into hundreds of -small, mean streets, displacing the air, supplanting the air, hanging there through the hot summer months and the grey, wet winter ones, the atmosphere of London's East End. Into this honeycomb of horror and poverty and human foulness, the Germans were at the moment dropping bombs. While she and Richard had been lunching at Pastori's, and lying on the grass in Richmond Park idly talking, ten miles away the little homes of these people were dissolving into a powder dust. The little people, probably, too.

The fire-engines still raced by them. If they were being taken from the West End, she wondered if Ralph had gone, too. The fire-station to which he was attached was in Chelsea. Those passing them came from Hammersmith and farther west, so almost certainly he had gone. She had a momentary vision of his stern face under one of the steel helmets worn by all these men clinging to the engines. She thought, He will do well. He does everything well!

And for once she found that this thought did not irritate her. It was Ralph's rectitude, his eternal correctness of behaviour, that had always so irritated her. But the thought of what he was probably doing in the East End at this hour, which was undeniably the right thing to do, did not arouse that familiar hostile feeling in her, but one of something near satisfaction, something embarrassingly near pride, that he should be playing his part. It made the threat to life, manifest in **the uninterrupted mutter of these guns, the explosion of bombs,**

the ever-increasing cloud of smoke **billowing from the** east, less frightening, to know that in those flaming narrow streets the products of public schools were standing shoulder to shoulder with those of Bermondsey and Bow, mingling those elements which Churchill had promised that Englishmen might sacrifice, the blood, sweat, toil and tears which were the price of redemption.

The atmosphere of the sky, the drama of this long-awaited hour, induced these disturbing thoughts in her, and in an effort to shake them off, and recapture the happiness of being with Richard, she tried to turn her mind from all this.

"Come home with me and have some tea, Richard. And what are to be our plans for the rest of the day? You won't want to dine quietly at home on your first day out of hospital. Shall I make myself beautiful, and shall we go out and dine where there is some music? Or would you like a theatre instead?"

They settled on a theatre, and when Nixon brought in the tea he was instructed to get seats for Leslie Henson's show. Nixon reappeared to announce that the seats had been obtained and to remove the tea-things, and they sat in the drawing-room, in the strange, eerie dusk of that Saturday, trying with talk of the old days at Acadia to forget the unceasing reverberations sounding from the east.

At six o'clock Elaine went to bathe and change. Nixon conducted Richard to a dressing-room on the ground floor where he could wash. There were silver-backed brushes on the dressing-table with the initials R. H. mounted on them. There were one or two framed photographs on the wall, of Ralph in his School XL, Ralph in a rowing group at Oxford. Nixon, his figure bent in its perpetual arc of respect, took Richard's coat away and brushed it while he washed. When he returned with it, Richard was examining the photographs.

"Mr. Harriman when young?" asked Richard, pointing at the one he was looking at.

Nixon allowed the stiffness of his attitude to relax by an almost imperceptible degree.

"Oh yes, sir. Pardon me, sir. This is Mr. Ralph at Eton. He played for the Eleven, sir. A most excellent bat. This is Mr. Ralph in the college boat, sir. You know, of course, that he got his Blue for rowing. If you will pardon my mentioning,

sir, Mr. Ralph was a first-class athlete, really first-class. He is still very energetic. Plays a good deal of, squash. The professional at his club tells me that Mr. Ralph is in the championship class."

Nixon held out Richard's coat, and glimpsed his gloved hand.

"Pardon me, sir, but I believe that you have been wounded. Allow me to express my regrets, sir, and to wish you a quick recovery."

"Thank you," said Richard, smiling. "I gather I'll be needed, and any others they can lay their hands on quickly, if the sort of monkey tricks the Hun is up to this afternoon are to continue on an extended scale."

Nixon frowned at the darkening window.

"If I may be allowed to say so, sir, it's most reprehensible, most reprehensible, this bombing of civilians. We are fighting a ruthless enemy."

"We are that," said Richard, turning for the door.

Nixon skipped to open it for him.

"I have put some refreshments in the drawing-room, sir. Madam wishes you to make yourself a cocktail, and instructs me to say that she will join you in about twenty minutes' time."

"London Town is burning down," hummed Richard to himself, as he wandered round the drawing-room, his hands in his pockets, looking at the pictures on the walls, and at the backs of the books on the shelves. "And Nixon thinks it most reprehensible."

Suddenly he flung himself down on a chair and buried his head in his hands. "Oh, God," he groaned to himself, and then again, running his hand through his hair, "Oh, God."

He had the clear impression suddenly, and not for the first time, that the shadows were closing in on him; that he had reached the time of dusk in his life, and that only a little space now separated him from the eternal night. Four years ago he had walked round a kitchen in Montreal, whistling to himself, and waiting for Th6rese, as to-night he was waiting for Elaine. Everything was the same, yet everything had changed. Without his having altered, the shadows had moved on over him. Then how happy and carefree he had been, now how unhappy and weary he was.

He knew with cold certainty that when he went back to flying he would be killed. He had no fear of death, but a

terrible fear of the approach to death. He feared the pain, if he was not to die quickly; the appalling utter loneliness of those last few instants of life if the end were to be sudden. But not fear of what was to come as much as regret for what was now irrevocably missed filled Richard with sadness, and drove him in an extreme of despair to fall into his chair and hold his head in his hands.

He had meant to do so much with his life. The beginning had unfolded on that autumn morning as the ship had turned her prow from the open sea into the St. Lawrence. The morning mists rising from the river, and the little farms emerging into view, had held out a promise of something mysterious and exciting to come, as the curtain rising on a stage promises something to the spectator in a darkened theatre. He sensed again the chill, fresh scent of that autumn morning, the dying odour of salt water, and the open, windy sea, fading as the scent of woodlands and of grassy banks washed by the river swelled out from the shore and enveloped the ship. He remembered leaning against the rail, watching the maple-covered hills rising out of the mist, glinting red and gold in the light of the early sun. Beyond these hills, mounting skywards with vigour and with strength, he had seen the mountains of Quebec, rolling backwards and ever backwards until they were lost in the distant north.

Like Ulysses, he had sailed on towards his longed-for goal.

Sitting here in London on this dark afternoon of wrath, he remembered the lights and colours of his odyssey, the friends he had met who had helped him on, the things he had done that were foolish but now in retrospect seemed so innocent and child-like. Sandy, who was his first boisterous contact with Canada; Andy, so gentle and fatherly, and Thérèse in whose company he had first glimpsed what Canada was to mean to him. The journey westward with Nick, the beloved old square face. Nick's voice broke through his thoughts. "He ain't so bad, Richard. Ah, let him be. Canadians ain't all hobos and bohunks. There's decent people living here, too. One day you'll meet them." Dear old, mollifying Nick, who had been at his elbow all through those harsh but sunlit days, and who still, thank God, would fly wing-tip to wing-tip with him in the cruel, shadowy ones that remained.

Yet at some point, he thought, he had lost the road. Was it

when he had fallen in love with Elaine? Until then, **all had** been moderately well. He had got to know Canada. After **a** little preliminary coldness, she had taken him to her bosom. He had found friends such as Nick, and he had learnt to love the woods, the lakes, the rushing rivers, the hard blue sides, the whiteness of winter and the brownness of summer. Then suddenly he had fallen in love with Elaine. As though Canada were jealous because his devotion had been diverted from her, things had started to go wrong. He had been unhappy since. He had lost the ecstatic vision of the future; and the war coming, as a school of fish is caught up in a net, so had he been caught up, one amongst squirming thousands, and plunged into the horror, the drab meaninglessness of all this. And this gloved hand, he thought, looking at it, and these flat shiny lips are the marks I bear of it. The brand put upon one marked for the sacrifice. All the fine promise I saw as the ship sailed up the St. Lawrence has ended in this, scarred face and body, and a few months left to live. And after that extinction. Never another chance.

He wished, with all the passion that twenty-three years old can feel, that he might be allowed to live these few years over again. But the darkening windows, and the scent of charred timber that seemed to come even into this drawing-room, forbade that. He was caught up in a climax of history. There was no going back. Canada for him had been a chapter in an unfinished book. But still he loved it, and the memory of it was rich to him even at this moment of his depression. Elaine he could never have. He knew that with the deepest certainty at this dark hour; she did not know it, but he did. He believed that she was in love with Ralph. She would deny it violently, he thought, if he were to charge her again with it. Everything that she had said had been evidence against that. But he knew her so well, and loved her so well, that he could read what was in **her** heart better than she could herself. She was faithful merely to an old loyalty, to which in the past she felt that she had been false, in pretending that she loved him. She thought that she did, he believed that, but part of his sadness at recognising the shadows of death that stood waiting to close over him, as the shadows in the East End that afternoon had become **later** the lowering clouds that had blotted out even the western light; **part of the sadness came from realising that he had lost**

Elaine as well as Canada. He could hear in his thoughts Uncle Silas's thin tenor singing in the snow, and his own and the others' voices joining in the old song they had so often sung:

"If you my land should see,
My so unhappy land,
Say to my friends from me,
They in my memory stand.

"Oh so delightful days,
Vanished you are, Adieu!
And my own land, alas!
Never again I'll view."

The tears were shining in his eyes when he looked up at last, hearing the door open, and saw Elaine dressed in white, looking down on him with a look of shocked surprise.

"Richard," she said, and came running towards him, and knelt down by him and put her hands on his knees. "My darling, what is it?"

He was first minded to look away to hide his feelings, but her own eyes, so dark and troubled, and the perfect beauty of her face, held him, and he looked at her long and deeply, without saying a word. Then, because she was like a troubled child, he had an instinct to comfort her, and because his own future was irretrievably brief and dark he had a longing to make hers bright and sure. He squeezed her hands with his good one, and waved the other gloved hand in the air. "I knocked it," he explained, "while I was washing, and the damned thing had just given me a twinge or two of pain. It will be all right."

She looked at him doubtfully, but he bent forward and kissed her white forehead. He thought with sadness that this was the first time he had ever given her a brotherly, passionless kiss.

CHAPTER TWENTY - NINE

RALPH HARRIMAN worked methodically, with energy and concentration, but not with unthinking hurry. He did the job he had to do with case and efficiency. It was not a task that called into play all his mental and physical powers. It consisted merely of standing by the hydrant, which he had opened, and making sure that the flow of water was steady, and that the coupling did not leak. At intervals he had to unscrew one hose and attach another, and then he and another fireman had to roll up the discarded hose and return it to the engine. The work itself was not arduous, but the circumstances in which it was being performed left something to be desired.

Incendiary bombs had set fire to the warehouse which was now engaging the attention of Ralph and the crew to which he belonged. Smoke billowed from all the windows, which had been first shattered by the explosions, and then torn out by the firemens' picks. Long ladders had been run up the walls as far as the roof, the hoses had been swung up, and water now poured from half a dozen hydrants into the black and smoky pit which was enclosed by the shell of the building. The enemy were dropping H.E.s as well as incendiaries. There was a chance that these might miss the building, which might then be saved if the fire had been extinguished. The alternative was that H.E. would destroy the building, not to mention the firemen on the roof, on the walls, and at the hydrants below. But this latter prospect was not taken into account. If it had been, none of the fires would have been put out. London would have burnt steadily and completely until nothing was left but some charred timbers and some heaped-up masonry. That was as the enemy desired it should be. Londoners were obstinately working to prevent the plan being put into effect, were perversely being killed, and disappearing into the inferno, but others were rushing down from other parts of the great city to fill up the breach. It seemed a hopeless task to stay these flames, but obstinately they persevered with it.

There was little wind, so that the smoke from the burning buildings, which now covered many acres, rose straight upwards towards the sky. The streets were running with water, and the air echoed with an inferno of noise produced by

tumbling walls, dull reverberations as materials inside the warehouses exploded from the heat, the shouts of men, the running of hundreds of motors, the hiss of thousands of gallons of water falling into the flames, and the giant subterranean explosions as every now and then a bomb burst in the burning area. Overhead, invisible in the smoke, were the enemy planes, diving to drop their bombs, whining downwards to the burning earth, then climbing away with an angry snarl to find height again. Whenever a bomb fell, men would hunch their shoulders as the long thin scream gained in crescendo. Sometimes, when the sound came near them, they would have to throw themselves on their faces on to the wet streets to avoid the blast or a hit. They would get to their feet again laughing, and pick up their hoses, or their axes, and chaff each other in the vulgar tongue about near misses. Ralph Harriman, aware of all this going on about him, threw himself down to earth when the others did, and getting up awkwardly to his feet afterwards, encumbered by his heavy oilskins, his asbestos gloves, and his heavy steel helmet, would grin quietly to himself, listening to the remarks of his nearby companions, then apply himself sedulously to his job again.

There were six men in his crew, and although he had been training with them only for six weeks, he felt that he knew them well and he found it comforting to know that they were about him in the midst of this burning whirlwind. Standing by the engine, fifty yards away, and directing operations, was the captain of the crew, Albert Lang, a tobacconist-newsagent in Manor Street, who in war-time just as in the more normal days of peace, supplied Ralph's town house with its daily papers and cigarettes. He was a pale man with dark eyes and a longish dark moustache, a native of Lincoln who had emigrated to London after the last war, and with his gratuity had bought the little shop in Manor Street, and neither prospered nor dwindled in business, but remained, as he had told Ralph, "on a pretty even keel." He was an omnivorous reader of the daily press, being able by his trade to follow this inclination without cost to himself, and was well informed on a variety of strange matters that were inessential in themselves, but a knowledge of which, it was impossible to deny when he so asseverated, was likely to come in handy sometime. He had joined the Auxiliary Fire Service at the time of Munich, and had devoted all his spare

hours to it since, with the result that by June, 1940, he was head of a crew, and when Ralph was assigned to a Chelsea fire-station he found himself under Albert Lang's command.

George Whitlock, No. 1 of the crew and the designated heir-apparent to the captaincy should anything untoward happen to Albert Lang, was a chauffeur to an octogenarian lady and that lady's Pekinese dog. The dog was more often taken out for air by George than the lady, who was a mere bundle of desiccated bones fragilely united by an obstinate spark of life, dwelling in the care of a companion and a nurse. The dog was female, elderly and bad-tempered, and George often prayed for the day when it would be gathered to its fathers, and dwelt on the thought of whether he might in an inconspicuous way expedite its journey. But George had a large heart in his slight, sparrow-like frame, and a deep well of courage, as the events of the autumn were to show.

Mosie Greenbaum had a little clothes-pressing shop in Chelsea. He had emigrated from the East End, soon after the last war, and that, except for a trip to Southend twice in the previous ten years, had been the extent of his travels. Mosie Greenbaum had a wife and five children who were devoted to him. When the crew had been on duty in the quieter hours before this September night, Mrs. Greenbaum and a selection of the children used to come to the station each day or night with a small tin lunch-box for Mosie, and a thermos full of a peculiar, medicinal hot brew he drank, which he fervently believed to be an aid against heartburn from which he considered himself to suffer. In actuality Mosie's heart burnt ferociously over an entirely different matter. Mosie hated the Germans with a hot, fanatical hatred. He knew little about them, being neither a reader nor a traveller abroad. All he knew, and that from the personal experience of two wars, was that they continually disturbed the peace and systematically persecuted his race. He desired utterly to exterminate them, and he hoped that this war was going to do that. Ordinarily a solemn, quiet little man, with a yellow doleful face, when he was aroused in talk about the Germans, his skin flushed, his claw-like hands waved in the air, and words poured from him, spoken with the curious lisping accent of the East End Jew. He found no difficulty in adjusting his relations with Mr. Harriman. Characteristically humble, even servile by nature,

once he was united with the others in the task of fighting **this** common enemy, these disabilities dropped away from him, and he was as independent and as companionable as any one in the crew.

Tom Shipley, the fifth member of the crew, only recently married, was the son of one of the most distinguished solicitors in London, and a member of his father's firm. He could not have been more than thirty. He was a pale, good-looking young man, with a wide attractive smile, very courteous in his manner. He recognised in Ralph a kindred spirit, and often came and sat and talked to him at the station when the opportunity offered, but so sensitive was he to the feelings of others that if he saw Mosie Greenbaum or George Whitlock sitting by themselves, he would avoid Ralph and sit by them, and converse in his gentle voice on any subject which he thought would rouse them from their lethargy or distract them from any personal worry he suspected them of harbouring.

The last member of the crew, J. Anderson Medcombe, was at once the butt of the other members' jokes, and the trial which they had to bear. Medcombe was the assistant editor of a literary weekly. He was forty-five, a little bald, a little fat, and more than a little pompous in manner. He had a simple, round, good-natured face, with weak, flabby lips which he was continually poking with a finger as one might adjust a picture which had slipped on a wall, absentmindedly setting it straight. He was volubility incarnate, and physically restless, so that if he saw two of the men talking together he felt impelled always to go and join them. He would stand by them for a moment, listening to what they were saying while his finger busily adjusted his lips, then with a broad smile or a serious mien according to the subject under discussion, he would break in on their talk with a contributory flood of his own.

He affected to know—indeed, for all Ralph knew, he might well have known—all the prominent authors of the time, and had a wealth of anecdotage about them in which he, J. Anderson Medcombe, always played a central and advantageous part. Ralph guessed that the literary weekly for which he worked was not financially successful, and suspected that it employed this particular assistant editor with a view **to economy rather than** efficiency. And this impression of **J. Anderson Medcombe's**

failure in life was borne out by another circumstance, which at first had amused but finally bored the crew.

Medcombe was writing a novel. Ralph suspected that he had been writing but never completing novels ever since he had first felt the attraction of literature, and that what now made Medcombe an assistant editor of an obscure weekly instead of a professional novelist was not only a sharp want of the necessary gifts, and a phenomenal lack of perseverance, but such an appetite for applause that he could not wait until the task was completed but stood in need of continual reassurance that his work was good. This necessary sustenance he had evidently got for years from reading chapters of his work aloud to whoever could be induced to listen. The crew had proved a heaven-sent audience.

They listened patiently at first, even with admiration at the presence of this talent amongst them. But they grew tired of its interminability. The bolder spirits took to sneaking out when Medcombe, who had originally said, "Would you like to hear a chapter of my novel?" and now said, "Would you mind listening to my new chapter. I'd like your reaction and advice on a particularly difficult part," started to pull out a sheaf of loose, untidy papers from the brown dispatch-case he always carried. Finally, only Tom Shipley, far too gentle to hurt Medcombe's feelings, listened to the interminable saga, and even Shipley had to make an effort to look a little heavy-eyed and somnolent sometimes when the reading went on for too long.

Such were the crew amongst whom Ralph was working on that Saturday afternoon on which the Germans fired the docks. From his position by the hydrant he could watch each one of them at their special task, except George Whitlock and Mosie Greenbaum, who were on the roof, hidden by the swirling clouds of smoke. Albert Lang stood by the engine directing operations. Tom Shipley acted as his runner to the commanders of other crews, or when the occasion demanded it helped Ralph to wind up the unused hoses. And on the ladder, half-way up the front wall of the warehouse, clung J. Anderson Medcombe, his figure every now and then disappearing in whirling clouds of smoke, while manfully and with great persistence he directed a hose into one of the windows. Beside them two other crews worked, but Ralph **found that he took**

little interest in them. His whole attention was concentrated on his own bothers, on seeing that Medcombe, and Whitlock and Greenbaum on the roof, had an uninterrupted supply of water, and whenever he had to fling himself down on his face, or withdraw his attention from them for a moment, he leapt to his task afterwards with the alacrity of a guilty thing, and strained his eyes to try to pierce the gathering darkness to make sure that all was well with his crew.

Lang walked over to him at one moment, and watched him at work. "You're doing fine, Harriman. Keep it up," was all that he said, but Ralph felt himself grow hot with pride.

In the back of his mind all the time he was thinking of Elaine. He had no idea how far westwards this concentrated bombing extended. When they had come down here at four o'clock the West End had been untouched. But the sky seemed alive with planes, and judging by the destruction all about him the Germans had done here all the damage that they could. It was only half-past six. What had happened, he wondered, in the West End in the two and a half hours since he had left there.

Chelsea wasn't a very healthy place. It was too near Battersea Power Station, and there were all those bridges across the river which the Germans would be bound to try and destroy. He wished that she had agreed to go back to Canada. How vehemently she had refused, and how his heart had jumped with pride because she did! What loyalty, what a fine, independent spirit there was concentrated into her little body! He knew how often he irritated her, and he blamed himself for his clumsiness and awkwardnesses, for these it was that annoyed her. He had not been thought clumsy or awkward in the days before his marriage, but he had been spoilt, had had his own way too easily with women, and women of coarser fibre than Elaine. He supposed that his marriage would be accounted a failure if he were to tell any one the facts of it. But it was no failure to him. As long as he could live with Elaine, and still hope, it was no failure. It was not perfect, he knew. It would be perfect when she had learnt to love him as utterly as he loved her, when she gave herself to him with absolute trust, when her spirit and his were so closely united that words would often cease to be necessary in exchanging their thoughts. It would be perfect when that thing so dis-

tastefully called **the** physical side could express the abounding nature of their love, when he could worship before the temple of her body as he now worshipped her in his thoughts. He knew that there was a long way to go before that; and that Elaine, not he, needed to travel the road. But his patience and understanding were necessary while she made the journey, and these the great well of his love, he knew, could indefinitely supply.

The roof collapsed first. Mosie Greenbaum had been overcome by smoke, and had been let down by a cradle from the roof, his thin body sagging like a piece of limp sausage. George Whitlock had followed, and Medcombe had been called down from his task. The flames now shot up through the roof to the sky. The heat was intense, smoke and steam made the air bitter and almost unbreathable, and the roar of the flames, the hissing and cracking of the timbers, almost drowned out the noise of the planes and the guns. Lang's crew stood by their engine, weary and a little despondent that all their efforts seemed to have been for nothing. As the roof collapsed with a great roar, they glanced at each other as though to say, "Well, that's that." Their next move was uncertain, and they stood about feeling unhappy and lost until the word came through to Lang that his crew was to be relieved for an hour. They went to a spot a little way back from the fire, where some canteens had miraculously managed to get through.

They drank their tea in great noisy gulps, and began to eat the food, thickly cut pieces of bread and butter and kippers, with nervous energy that they mistook for appetite. But they were too weary and too excited, and had not the necessary patience. They left most of the food on their plates, lit pipes and cigarettes and began to talk of the experiences through which they had just passed.

Ralph himself kept silent. He did not feel weary, for his work had been less arduous than that of the others. He kept silent because he felt strangely happy, and he wanted to hug his joy to himself. He had the feeling that something had just occurred which was going to alter his whole life. He was silent because he kept turning his mind back over the events of the last few hours to discover the reason for this elation of spirit. He could not find in anything that had just happened reason

for joy, but the feeling persisted; **it was as though, while he** protested to his reason that the feeling was false, a genial imp kept nodding at him and winking, looking wise and giving the impression that it knew, and he would see, in time he would see; and Ralph could not help smiling to himself at this infantile deception, nor rid himself of the sensation of strange but happy content.

He looked about him at the faces of his companions, and thought what good fellows they were. England might fall, but the English spirit would not die until each separate container of it, each individual Englishman from the Albert Langs to the Mosie Greenbaums, had been individually exterminated. And it would take many a flaming night such as this to finish that job, more nights than history had still unspent, more pertinacity than the Germans had to back their fanatical eagerness to attain that end.

CHAPTER THIRTY

IT was just after midnight when Ralph let himself into the Cheyne Walk house. The hall was in darkness. He turned on the lights and saw a note addressed "Sir," in Nixon's neat copperplate, propped up on the marble table that stood in the hall. "Madam is out," reported Nixon, "and will not be in before 2 a.m. Would you kindly leave the door unlocked, sir?" As though a part of London were not at this minute burning down! As though burglars were a risk still to be guarded against!

Ralph, smiling at the domestic accent, added a postscript, "Elaine. Fm in. Will you lock the door?" and went up to the drawing-room. He mixed himself a stiff whisky and soda, then carried it up to the next floor, turned on his bath, tore off his top clothes, gulped some of the whisky, caught sight of his reflection in the glass, put down his tumbler and looked at himself wonderingly. His lips parted in a grin, and the flash of his teeth was such a contrast to his black, smoke-begrimed face that he had to laugh outright. He felt so cheerful that everything seemed to him a cause for amusement. He kept remind-

ing himself that he was behaving idiotically, but **the** feeling of geniality persisted and would not be gainsaid.

He lay in his bath and thought over the events of the day. The attack on London had begun; the beginning had been thorough, evidently this was the start of the real thing. He was not conscious of any ~~sens'e~~ of dismay, but rather one of relief that the nerve-racking pause of the last two months was over. When he had come away from the East End to-night the docks area had been a blazing inferno. The damage must be enormous, but that could be repaired. What seemed more irreplaceable were the human lives that had been lost. Yet, strangely enough, even these did not seem to matter. Many English lives would have to be lost in the next year or two, his own in all probability, and that would not, in the long run, matter. England had to go on. She was part of the forward surge, a strong current in that forward surge, that had carried mankind onwards in the last few centuries, and had made the good in the world preponderate over the bad. The price that she had had to pay in blood and tears had already been immense, but now a moment had come when greater energy than ever before was required to sustain that forward surge, and the lives that had been lost to-day, and the buildings that had crumbled, the streets that had been torn up—all that havoc and destruction and waste had been a payment on account. England was soundly built and would come through. He wished that he might have a son who would be English in the England that would emerge from this present struggle. How proud and confident a time it would be in which to live! What a heritage to have!

He got out of his bath, slipped on his pyjamas and dressing-gown, and went to his room. When he turned on the reading-lamp beside his bed, and saw how comfortable everything about him was, he felt uneasy, wondering to what harsher quarters Mosie Greenbaum and J. Anderson Medcombe had returned. They had fought as hard as, indeed harder than, he had to save English homes to-day. It seemed inequitable that, withdrawing from the field of battle for a brief rest, they should be less comfortable than he was. But they had comforts of a different kind. Mosie, at this moment, was probably being fussed over by Mrs. Greenbaum, being petted with hot drinks and foot-baths, and treated like a hero, as he undoubtedly deserved to be; and

Medcombe was probably having a cup of hot tea with a peg of whisky in the kitchen or his house and being listened to admiringly by the others as he gave a dramatic account of the new Fire of London. They were happy, and if their happiness came from other causes than hot baths and double spring mattresses, they were to be envied.

He felt disinclined for bed, weary though he was. A subconscious excitement still pulsed within him, and that strange feeling of content the reason for which he could not determine. He stood by his dressing-table and looked at the photograph of Elaine he had there in a silver frame. How lovely she was! How he longed for her to love him and to trust him! How wonderful it would be if he could go at this moment and tell her all the strange things that had been in his heart all day!

On a sudden impulse he went out of his room and along the corridor to hers. Her door was open. He pressed the electric switch and two little lamps that stood each side of her dressing-table sprang into light, and a cream-shaded table-lamp that stood by her bed. It was a long time since he had come into her room. He stood by the door, looking in at the room, his heart beating nervously, his gaze wandering from the glass-topped dressing-table on which a hand mirror, and crystal-backed hair-brushes, and a score of little crystal bottles caught and refracted the light, to the wide bed, with the brocaded head-board and the glass-topped table beside the bed on which there were books and a little writing-case, stamped with her initials, E. H. He saw a pair of fur-topped mules standing beside the bed, and a silk peignoir and a nightdress of orange silk folded beside the turn-down of the sheet. A faint, a very faint scent, of the kind that she always used, hung lightly in the air, reminding him of her presence so strongly that he could almost believe she had only just left the room.

A wave of the deepest tenderness for her swept over him. He fought against the image entering his mind, but it was persistent and gradually found place there; the image of her in the first few weeks or their honeymoon. He had not thought it possible then to contain so much happiness, but his happiness had been checked from overflowing by her remoteness. He had not been able to unlock her inner spirit; something there was proof against all his ardour and his love.

But his own rapture had been almost complete in spite of

that. His own love for her had grown, even though hers for him had not. He remembered her body, and he groaned aloud, all the content that he had known earlier in the evening now evaporated. He stumbled towards the bed and picked up the orange silk nightdress and held it against his face. There was silence in the room save for the rapid ticking of a little clock beside her bed. His thoughts seemed to stand still. He stood there with the nightdress clutched in his hands, listening. The guns had stopped firing. There was no sound to be heard.

CHAPTER THIRTY - ONE

IT was impossible to find a taxi when Richard and Elaine came out of the Dorchester at just before one in the morning. The whole of the eastern perimeter of the sky was alight, shading from a fairy pink just over the roof-tops to an orange tinge higher up, and reaching to a point just over their heads. The streets were as light, though as eerily light, as they are sometimes just before a heavy thunder-storm breaks in the later afternoon. An occasional gun fired, but the slender barrage had now almost completely died away, and a strange and threatening silence came from the east where the city burnt. Ambulances, police cars, and fire-engines were the only vehicles to be seen on the streets. These, disregarding all traffic lights, with bells clanging and sirens sounding, rushed through the streets, and were stared at by the crowds which still lingered on the pavements, some of them hesitating to go home and miss any excitement that might still offer, others with no means of getting out to the distant suburbs where their homes were. It was an orderly, good-natured crowd, distinctively English in the way in which it coalesced into separate little groups instead of into one large crowd. Each group had its own haranguer and commentator, usually a man smoking a pipe, wearing a mackintosh, and with an accent of the outer suburbs, whose comments on the situation were listened to with respectful silence. When he ceased speaking a general babble of voices broke out, anybody else's comments being as good as the next man's, and there not being enough silence to go round.

The appearance of these self-appointed commentators was of service to the English cause and an unsuspected hindrance to the enemy's plans, for some instinct for drama, or perhaps it was tradition, persuaded them to adopt the phlegmatic attitude, as though the burning down of London were not as shocking as the ignorance of the enemy in supposing that it would do them any good.

Elaine and Richard made their way through these throngs with some difficulty. They had talked all evening; it was pleasant now to be silent and to listen to the humble voice of England.

-Oo, 'Arry, jever see such a blaize? Thank God we got the kids out er Lunnon in time."

"——1 'ear they bombed London Bridge. A bloke was tellin' me——"

"——Coo, like fairyland, ain't it, Yda. Sy wot yer like, it's beautifool, sy what yer bleedin' like."

'Arfa mo' wi' that langwidge. There's a young lydy 'ere."

-Sorry, myte. Sorry, lydy."

-I 'ear they bombed the Bank stytion, and there was a train in there wiv 'undreds er people-

At this point a sage interrupted.

"Now, *oo told yer that, myte?"

Silence from the group round; horrible and squirming embarrassment, clearly visible in the orange light, on the part of the maker of the remark.

His voice dropped several degrees in making reply.

"Some bloke I met. Some bloke said his sister just come up by there in an embilence, and she'd telephoned 'er Ma to sy she was orl right. She told 'er Ma, and 'er Ma told 'im. I met 'im in a pub. 'E told me," said the voice weakly.

" 'E told yer, did 'e?" demanded the sage, contentedly aware that every one's eyes were fixed on him, and that the little man had already condemned himself by the too complex evidence he had brought forward to substantiate his story. " 'E told you? Feller yer met in a pub? Gor blimey—" he removed his pipe for emphasis and spat delicately in the roadway—"what'U we 'ear next? That Buckingham Palace 'as been tore up by the roots." Hearty laughter from the crowd greeted this quip. "You go on listening to what you 'ear in pubs, myte, and you'll

be 'earing an account of your own death and berriel tole yer, that's what you'll 'ear."

The sage removed his eye from the squirming figure he had been addressing and embraced his satellites in the short moral lecture that followed.

"Plying the dirty German gyne, that's what it is, spreddin' rumours like that. The 'Un expects us to panic. 'E won't understand what's gone wrong if he finds us just takin' orl this in our stride like. But if you give ear to orl yer hear, yer'll bloomin' well panic orl right. Me, I believe only the evidence er me eyes, and not that if it don't suit me convenience."

Thus the voice of one sage Richard and Elaine heard that night. Richard nudged Elaine. "Horatio Nelson," he said softly. Elaine laughed, but she looked back at the sage with a feeling of fondness as they pushed on through the crowds.

Beyond Hyde Park Corner there were no crowds, but ambulances and police cars still rushed through the quiet squares. They passed through Sloane Square, went down past the Chelsea Pensioners' Hospital towards Cheyne Walk. Elaine's arm was in Richard's. The sound of their footfalls alone broke the silence of this deserted street. They walked without speaking, each content with the other's nearness, but aware that their evening's talk had settled nothing.

"It is no good protesting that we love each other," Richard had said earlier in the evening, "if we are going to do nothing about it."

"But what can we do, Richard darling?"

"You can leave Ralph, divorce him, and marry me."

And when she made no answer to that, but looked down at her hands in a troubled way, he charged her that she did not love him. But she did, she knew that she did, and she could deny that with a fierceness that showed how much she did.

But that was no answer to their trouble.

Her trouble rather. What reason was there for this strange inconsistency, that made her want Richard so passionately, and yet now made her hesitate to do anything that would hurt Ralph? She knew that she had been hurting Ralph for two years; why, when this release was offered, did she shrink from what would be iust one more hurt, and the final one? Was it because she really loved Richard less than she thought? She indignantly denied the suggestion. He was dearer than he had

ever been to her. To spend the rest of her life with him would be happiness of the kind she had dreamed of since she had been a young girl. What was it then? She did not know. She only knew that she felt afraid, not of what was going on outside to-night, but of the future, of all the to-morrows that stretched away into the dim unknown future.

If only Uncle Silas or her father were here to help her, to make her feel sure of herself again. She might confess to them the fear that she felt, and from them get the comfort for which her young heart yearned. She was deeply ashamed of herself, both for what she had done to Richard and had subsequently done to Ralph, and she longed by some act of contrition to redeem herself. But nothing suggested itself to her. The quandary remained. Richard's scarred face assumed that bitter, hostile look she had noticed sometimes when he was in hospital,

"You told me once," said Richard, "that you despised Ralph. How could you go on living with him if you felt that?"

"We shared a house, that was all, Richard. But I think now I was wrong to do that. Somehow, life seemed meaningless. There seemed no reason to do anything, but to let things drift."

"And you want them still to go on drifting?"

"No, I don't, Richard. But I don't know what to do."

He was silent after that for a long time. When she said she did not know what to do, he remembered an hour earlier that evening when he had seen clearly what was ahead, his own death, and had accepted it. What devil in him made him torture her now in this way? Elaine had one path to follow, and he another. His was a short one, and at the end of it awaited the grim figure of the last enemy. There was no use in disguising it from himself; he envied Elaine, he was jealous of her life; he wanted to take something of it before he went. That was why, with a machine-like vindictiveness, he was urging her to leave Ralph. It was a strange love he had for Elaine, a love that desired to hurt, not one that longed to comfort.

He fought down his fear, struggling with it as with an enemy he could see, and when he had vanquished it he took her hand and smiled at her, and they began to talk of different things.

Elaine saw Ralph's note in the hall. He did not usually leave a note of that kind, merely marking "In" if he came in before her. She read it two or three times before she went

upstairs, wondering what had caused him to put a postscript to Nixon's note. When she reached her landing, she saw that a light was on in her room. She had a moment's fear that Ralph might be there, but then dismissed the thought as absurd, and mentally blaming a maid for having left the light burning ever since the bed had been turned down, she hastened along the carpeted passage to her door.

When she went in she saw him standing by her bed in his dressing-gown and pyjamas. He had picked up her nightdress a minute before and he was still holding it to his face. She heard him groan, and she stood appalled, not knowing what to do. He seemed not to have heard her. His back was towards her and he faced the head of the bed.

"Ralph," she said.

She saw his figure start. Without turning round, he dropped her nightdress. She could feel that he was afraid. Not more afraid than she was herself. A moment of silence passed; then he turned slowly, and looked at her with his deep dark eyes in which she saw an infinity of suffering. She had a longing suddenly to say something that would comfort him, but she could say nothing. She moved over to her dressing-table and knelt with one knee on the stool before it, and reached up her arms to unfasten the pearls she was wearing. She heard him move towards the door, and in one of the angles of her mirror she could see his face.

He spoke quietly from the door.

"I'm terribly sorry if I frightened you. I was rather worried about you with this bad raid on. I looked in here to see if you had come in. Good-night, my dear."

She turned then and looked at him, and smiled a little sadly.

"Good-night, Ralph," she said.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

i

THE following morning Elaine sat at a desk at the Evacuation Reception Office in Chelsea. Three others of her colleagues were busy at desks in the same room. Before each of them stood

a queue of homeless from the East End. Elaine's duty, and that of the two others, was to enter their names, ages, occupations and former addresses on a form, then assign them according to families to the several blocks of empty flats in Chelsea which had been kept for this purpose. The work of extracting the necessary information, simple though it should have been, was made difficult and distracting to both questioners and questioned by a number of circumstances peculiar to the day and to the crowd.

There were several hundred people in the room, for in addition to those in the queues others sat on the floor around the walls. They were of every age and both sexes, and all of them had in the previous twenty-four hours been through one of the most terrifying experiences yet borne by mankind, heavy air bombardment on an overcrowded district. Many of those in this room had lost relatives, and all of them had lost their homes and almost their entire possessions. Tears were naturally flowing profusely, and adding to the sounds of audible grief that echoed in the crowded room were the shouts and cries of children at play, for the young were irrepressible, and cramped by a long night spent in shelters were stretching their limbs and relaxing their spirits in a variety of ingenious ways, all of them noisy.

The queues looked like the bodies of reptiles that had swallowed an indigestible meal. At points they were the width of only two people, at others the width of a whole family which might number seven or eight, and which retained its identity by insisting on standing hand in hand, ignoring the pleas or the commissionaires who were fussing about the scene to form them into lines two deep. As the particulars of each family were entered on the sheets, they were led off to waiting omnibuses to be escorted to their new and temporary homes.

After a time Elaine worked almost without looking up from the sheet on which she was entering the necessary particulars. But at one point the noise of an unseemly tussle occurring immediately in front of her desk caused her to glance up with a worried frown. In front of her stood an elderly workman of about sixty, wearing a neat but badly fitting blue suit, a cloth cap with a button on top, a paper collar, and a made-up tie. His thin face, healthily coloured in spite of his age, ended in a neat, white, short goatee beard. He wore silver-framed

spectacles, and altogether gave an impression of being clean and carefully brushed.

When Elaine looked up he was frowning down at a small boy aged about five who was tugging at his hand, urging him to do something which the old man was obstinately refusing to do. The small boy was the very picture of vitality. He had curly fair hair on a very well-shaped little head, a well-built body domed in a grey pullover sweater, grey flannel shorts, grey woollen stockings, and square-toed little black shoes.

"I tell yer, I gotter, Gan," he was saying, tugging at the old man's hand.

"'Old it arf a tick, carn't yer?" said the old man fiercely, shaking the small boy's hand, which, however, he did not let go.

"What's the matter?" asked Elaine, smiling at them.

They both turned and faced her, and without the slightest embarrassment, indeed both speaking at once, they explained the cause at issue between them.

"Dratted boy," groaned Gan, "we gets to the 'ead of this 'ere kwee, and 'e wants to go to the lav."

The small boy frowned at Elaine, too.

"I can't help it," he complained. "Bin standin' in this 'ere kwee arf a ower. It's come over me sudden like. 'Ere, Miss, you be talkin' to my granddad, and I'll be back in next to no time."

"Nah yer don't, Danny," said the old man, giving the small boy's hand an extra violent shake. "It 'ud be the larst I'd see of yer, it would."

"Miss, make 'im let me go," appealed Danny, "or I'll bloomin' well go and disgrace meself, that I will."

"'Old it, carn't yer?" growled the old man.

"I think you'd better let him go," smiled Elaine. "You come right back here, Danny. I'll keep your grandfather here until you return. Run along there. The last door on the right."

Grandfather released his hand, albeit with a terrible frown and a muttered imprecation, and final injunctions to Danny to "'op it back 'ere quick or I'll be arter yer," and Danny was away at a scamper.

"Name—er—Barnes/" volunteered the old man, keeping an anxious spectacled eye on the corner of the room into which Danny had disappeared. Barnes took off his cap and dabbed at his bald forehead with a carefully folded handkerchief he with-

drew from the breast pocket of his neat blue suit. "Gorblimey, Miss, I ain't 'arf worried. Me son and daughter-in-law, they was both killed larst night. Me son, 'e says to me, You get along, Dad, take Danny to the shelter. Ain't yer comin? I says. Nah, 'e says, we'll wait a bit and pack a few treasures. We'll be along, 'e says, in abaht an ower. 'E never come, Miss. Out I goes this morning along of where our 'ouse was. Gorblimey, an 'eap of ruins, as flat as yer 'and. And Danny wiv me, er course. I went to the p'lice. Cor lumme, they says, not much chance they're alive, Grandfather, they says. We ain't extricated the bodies yet, they says, but they ain't much chance. If we find anything we'll take it to the morchury, but you get along up west with that there nipper, they says, and 'ere we are. Where's that dratted boy? Ah, 'ere 'e is. 'Urry along, Danny. This lydy wants some pertiklers of us."

"But you must be frightfully worried about your son and his wife, aren't you?" asked Elaine. "How terrible for you! And to have the responsibility of this little boy, too."

Danny gazed at her out of solemn blue eyes. He was a very handsome little urchin, and so clean and pink and neat, even after a night such as he had just spent. When he's old, thought Elaine, he'll be just like his grandfather, spick and span right to the end.

She put down her pen and looked at Grandfather Barnes. "Would you like to leave Danny with me for a few days," she asked the old man, "while you"—she hesitated, trying to find the right words to cover the grisly operation, *^cwhile you attend to your family affairs? You can't drag him round everywhere with you, and he won't be very happy left by himself, I'll take him home with me and look after him; then, when you have everything cleared up and have found a new place to live, you can take him again. I live not far from here. I have no children, but I'm lucky enough to have servants to look after me. Danny will be well cared for."

The old man's blue eyes had hardened with suspicion, moderated in the process of reflection, and softened finally with gratitude as she had been talking. She had felt Danny's blue eyes fixed on her calculatingly; and when she had finished speaking she waited with some trepidation for their verdict. Danny looked up at Gan, and Gan looked down at Danny, and a silent consultation took place between them.

"Very kind of you, Miss, I'm sure. Danny's a fair 'andful. Djer think you can manage him?"

"I'm sure he'll be very good. I should love to have him," said Elaine.

"I've got 'is toofbrush, a bit er soap and a tow-ell 'ere in this bag," said Gan, "but 'e ain't got no more clothes."

"I'll fix him up," promised Elaine. "Look, here is my name and address. You come back this evening and see him, or tomorrow when you get through with what you have to do. Meanwhile, don't worry about him. I promise you that I'll look after him well."

"It's very nice of you, Miss—er—Mrs.—Mrs. 'Arriman," said Gan, peering at the slip of paper in his hand. "You be a good boy, Danny," admonished Gan, "and don't cause this lydy no trouble. I'll be back along and look at yer, and I'll tan yer 'ide if I 'ear you ain't been good."

Danny grinned at this threat, and admonished Gan in return. "Don't you go gettin' fussed, Gan, and tyke it easy like Mum always says. An' you come back. Don't you go leavin' me."

"Give us a kiss, Danny."

The two relics of the Barnes family kissed each other resoundingly, Gan Barnes resumed his cap with an air of purpose, said "Good-bye, Mks," and walked out of the hall. Danny came over and stood by Elaine's shoulder facing the queue with his lively eyes.

"We won't be Jong," said Elaine. "We'll go home to lunch soon."

2

When the door of the Cheyne Walk house closed behind Elaine and Danny that Sunday just before lunch, a quiver of the whole structure might have been apparent to the all-seeing eye which knows neither time nor space. The quiver would have been occasioned by Danny's impact upon the household and the staff.

Nixon, who allowed nothing to perturb the gravity of his visage or bearing, sustained the shock with fortitude. Danny's voice and accent must have cut him to the quick, for no ear is more sensitive than that of a well-trained servant's, but he

treated Danny with all the respect due to one who lived on a level with his master and mistress.

"What's 'e call me *Master* Danny for?" inquired the irrepressible young Barnes. Nixon, to him, was a figure of enormous dignity. "Why's 'e dressed like an undertaker?" asked Danny of Elaine, when Nixon's tail coat had swung out of the room at *one* stage during lunch.

Danny's table manners were perfect, though he wasted no time in disposing of any dish put before him. His neat clothes, his careful use of knife and spoon and fork, showed that he had had a good and loving mother, and Elaine's heart was wrung with pity for the little mite, sitting there with his curly head and light blue eyes, a table-napkin knotted round his neck by Nixon, who showed an unexpected aptitude in dealing with these matters.

Ralph, whom she had found in the library before lunch, had seemed delighted with the acquisition of Danny.

Elaine introduced them to one another, and Ralph bestirred himself to make Danny feel at home. But Danny was ahead of him.

"You 'er 'usband?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Ralph, smiling.

Danny weighed Ralph up with that solemn, judging look of his, then accepted him, just as he had accepted Elaine that morning.

"Wot's that yer drinkin'?" asked Danny, sitting down on a stool beside Ralph.

"It's sherry," explained Ralph. "Would you carry a glass over to my wife?"

"Don't spill it, Danny," cautioned Elaine.

Danny delivered it up, then rested an elbow on Elaine's knee and looked at her very closely.

"Yer pretty, ain't yer?" observed Danny, after a pause.

"Danny, I don't know. You're a very direct little boy, aren't you?"

"My Mum's pretty," observed Danny, ignoring the remark about himself. "It's funny about my Mum. Gan says . . ." He paused, and his bright blue eyes filled with tears. Then he let out a wail, put his arm before his eyes, and started to sob with great thoroughness. Ralph stood up, uncertain what to do, but Elaine, hastily putting down her glass, knelt down beside

Danny, put her arms around him, and pressed his fair little head to her shoulder.

"Never mind, Danny boy," she said softly. "Never mind."

Danny turned a wet cheek against hers, but could not control the sobs which wrenched his young body.

"Come on upstairs," said Elaine. "I've got something wonderful to show you, and we'll have a wash before lunch."

She stood up. Danny pressed the knuckles of one hand into his eye, and thrust the other into Elaine's hand. Still sobbing, he marched out of the room and upstairs with her. Nixon, who was putting the last touches to the table in the dining-room, and Ralph, left alone with his glass of sherry in the library, heard the sobs die away upstairs. Ten minutes later Danny and Elaine walked downstairs together, hand-in-hand, for lunch. Danny was in good appetite. He ate steadily, said little, and while his jaws moved rhythmically kept his blue eyes fastened on the wonder that was Nixon.

3

It was to this new state of affairs that Richard was introduced when he called at Cheyne Walk at six o'clock that evening, and was informed by a grave-faced Nixon taking his cap and placing it on a table, "that Madam was upstairs bathing Master Danny."

"Good God, Nixon, doing what?"

"Bathing a young gentleman who has come to stay with us. An evacuee," explained Nixon.

"Great Scott! What's the correct procedure? Do I go upstairs and watch the operation, or is Mrs. Harriman coming down?"

"Mrs. Harriman asked me to say, sir, that she would be pleased if you would go upstairs and meet Master Danny. You'll find him a very surprising young gentleman, sir. Very surprising," concluded Nixon, allowing a brief indulgent smile to flit across his features.

Richard found Elaine on her knees beside the bath in which was submerged the small pink frame of the young gentleman in question. Richard interrupted a serious discussion: "What made fings float?" Elaine had tried an explanation based on physical laws but she had abandoned it for lack of supporting

evidence, called for by the keen Danny, who had then **in turn** offered his own theory. "I think it's 'cos the water don't like 'em and tries to push 'em out. See?"

He pressed down the soap, and chuckled delightedly when it slipped from under his flat hand, and proved his theory by bobbing up a few inches away.

Elaine looked up smilingly with Danny to greet Richard, who was standing in the door.

"Richard, this is Danny Barnes who has come to stay with us for a bit. Danny, this is Flying Officer Danby."

"Well," said Richard, coming in and sitting on the edge of the bath, "how are you, Danny?"

But Danny's face had gone enormously solemn. He gazed at Richard with wide-open eyes, and could not be induced to talk. Even when Elaine stood him out of the tub and was drying him, he kept turning his head and looking at Richard but uttering nothing. At the end of a long day it was too much. He had had Nixon put away in the back of his mind to think over when he got to bed, and all the other surprising things this house offered for thought, particularly Mrs. 'Arriman. But here was a pilot, with wings on his tunic, and scars on his face, and his hand in a glove, who had come in and sat on the edge of his bath and said hallo to him. Danny couldn't talk. He was too busy, absorbed in the familiar process known to him as "finking."

CHAPTER THIRTY - THREE

i

WHILE the darkness outside increased, the inward light glowed and grew brighter, pressing back the shadows that had seemed to Elaine to be closing in on her. The complexity of her life remained unsolved, but she now felt, in September and October of that wonderful year, able to stand off and regard it dispassionately. It was a discomfort of life, as the nightly raids and the constant and familiar presence of death had become. It would have been nice if it could have been solved, just as it

would have been nice if there had been peace instead of war. But there was no urgency to solve it. The war now had neither time nor future as distinguishing features; it was a state or existence, a protracted suspense, which it seemed possible might continue indefinitely. Its shadow was ominous, but that shadow at least had the blessed quality of overwhelming with its dark indeterminateness the date beyond it, when, released from this universal suspense, which excused so many things, people would be required to solve their problems, make decisions about the future, and get on with their lives.

Meanwhile it was blessedly happy to drift and to enjoy all the emotions she felt, without troubling to sort out which or them she had a right to enjoy, and which were merely temporary, or which ought to be avoided.

The presence of Danny in the house added greatly to the inner glow that pressed back the outside darkness. Danny had been meant to stay only a few days until his grandfather had completed the sad details to which he had to attend, and had found new quarters and a new job. Grandfather Barnes had established the fact of his son's and daughter-in-law's death, and he had been transferred to a factory outside London. He had come to tell Elaine this, and she had begged him to leave Danny with her while the war lasted, and the old man had consented. The alternative would have been to leave him all day with the woman who owned the lodgings where he had taken a room. He could see the advantages Danny had here, and Danny made no secret of his desire to stay. So Grandfather Barnes had consented, and it was settled that whenever he felt like coming up to London on a Sunday Danny would be at his disposal for walks, and the Cheyne Walk house for food and rest.

Furious was the affection that had grown up between Danny and Elaine in that first week. Danny cried whenever he thought of his mother, and Elaine comforted him, and he clung to her and would hardly rest if she were out of his sight. By the end of the week she had persuaded him to call her Elaine, and without asking for permission he was calling Ralph by his Christian name, and both the Harrimans were smiling indulgently at this liberty and thinking it pleasant, both as a mark of Danny's esteem and as a relief from his eternal and ineffectual struggle with the aspirate.

Elaine began to correct his speech, tactfully and gently at first, then laughingly as it became a game between them.

"Don't say, ken I tyke this, Elyne? Say can I take it?"

"Whoy?" asked Danny.

"Because that's the way nice people talk. It sounds prettier. Now try it, Danny."

"Ken—Curn—oh, dash it—Cam I tek, no, tayke it, Elyne?"

"Elaine, darling."

"Elaine, darling," said Danny, grinning.

"Yes, my sweet, you may."

She loved the brave, straight little look of him, and had a longing to clutch him and press him to her whenever he was with her. He was amenable to correction. He had a charming, unspoilt little character and never sulked. His sense of humour was vivid, and their discussions over such serious matters as pronunciation and the right and the wrong aspect of various things usually ended in laughter, with friendship unimpaired, but with the lesson learnt.

She derived enormous happiness from fitting him out with a wardrobe of clothes. She noticed that on the streets and in the shops people looked at them, and she was proud to be with him and hoped that he might be taken for her son. Danny, in short, provided her with a joyous and complete happiness. She did not think of the future when Grandfather Barnes, or some legendary aunts and uncles who lived in Lancashire, might reclaim him. That prospect, too, was mercifully blotted out by the shadows of the war stretching interminably ahead, and meanwhile she rejoiced in the glow that the constant presence of the little boy gave her.

In the midst of the prevailing gloom, too, she felt a sense of excitement arising from an entirely different and unsuspected source. Ever since the night of the big raid when she had found Ralph in her room, clutching her nightdress, she had felt that the solution to her uncertainty about continuing to live with him was at hand. She was certain that she did not love him, and she had been almost as certain that he did not love her, and that their continuing to live together had been merely a matter of convenience that suited them both, and continued through a lack of any specific cause or quarrel over which they could part. Ralph's attitude that night had revealed something that she had never suspected before, that he wished

for their reunion, that he had not, as she had thought, been seeking solace elsewhere, but wanted her to be his wife now as he had wanted her to be when he had asked her to marry him.

The very thought of that was abhorrent to her, the more so now that she and Richard had come together again. She thought that would try the tension of their relationship too far, if he were now to become like a dumb yearning beast, as he had appeared to her that night. The justification for their parting was there, if for no other reason than to save the continual harrowing of his feelings. During the night following the raid, she had made up her mind to speak to him on this point, but Danny's arrival the next day had made her postpone the awkward moment.

Then a strange thing happened. As Danny settled down in the house, her feelings about Ralph imperceptibly changed. Danny was the cause of it. Danny liked Ralph, and Ralph liked Danny. There was a sense of being males together which both enjoyed, and which Ralph made much of, to Danny's intense amusement. "We men think," he would say to Elaine, referring to an opinion which he and Danny held; or, after lunch on Sunday, "Danny and I will join you in the drawing-room, my dear. We have our port to drink."

Ralph told Danny long stories, and carried him shoulder-high up to his room for a rest or to go to bed. He took him for walks into the Park and along the Serpentine, and told him all about the birds and the ducks that live there. He knew all the different regiments the soldiers belonged to, and he could tell Danny fascinating stories of famous battles they had fought. Danny, his face solemn in thought, would walk along with Ralph, drinking in what the great man said, with his small fist stuck into Ralph's large one, looking very smart and small man-about-town in the powder-blue coat and blue felt hat and leggings Elaine had bought for him.

Elaine found herself waiting impatiently for the hour to arrive when Ralph usually got home at night, and being restless when anything delayed him. She wanted him always to come before Danny was put to sleep. Her excuse to herself was that Danny would be disappointed if he could not say good-night to Ralph, and perhaps hear a story. But when she had to turn out Danny's light without Ralph coming, and walk down the passage to her own room, she was fully conscious that she was

disappointed herself. When Ralph was there they usually went along to the library where Nixon would have put the tray of drinks, and sitting down before the fire Elaine would talk without that sense of restraint and undertone of impatience she had always felt and often betrayed in talking to Ralph in the old days; would talk of what they had done that day, of the clever things Danny had said, of his reaction to some new surprising development, of his periods of solemn "finking" and the astounding conclusions he often uttered at the closure of these sessions of silent thought.

On these nights, as October drew on, and they sat in front of the fire before dinner, the shadows of war would have closed in over them, for the raiders were now arriving by seven o'clock every evening with monotonous regularity. The sirens would have wailed their grief-stricken cries into the empty, grey streets, and in the darkening skies overhead the uneven battle would be joined. The roar and whine of planes could be heard in the library even above the mutter and the barking of the guns, and often the crescendo scream of a bomb hurtling down through the air, and the dull shudder as it found its mark on some part of London. In the beginning they had taken Danny down to the shelter they had fixed up in the basement, and had gathered there with all their staff. But the nightly visitation was now too regular, and lasted till daybreak. They had given that up, and now tried, as most of London did, to ignore the outrageous clamour.

Ralph was out several nights a week with his fire-fighting crew, and did not return till just before breakfast each morning. Elaine was on duty at her A.R.P. station two nights each week. It was only occasionally that they were alone together at Cheyne Walk. When they were, Elaine no longer found the time tedious. She even felt it a deprivation if that time were interrupted or shortened in any way.

Such was the change which had come over her as the war slowly moved into the winter of 194[^]-

Meanwhile, Richard had passed his medical board at the end of September and had returned to his own squadron. He was at a station somewhere down the Thames Estuary. The strength

of the squadron had been greatly depleted by the Battle of Britain. It was now being reorganised, and the more experienced pilots such as Nick and Richard were being used as night-fighters, or interceptors. Radio-location was then in its infancy, and night-fighting planes had not been developed as they were to be developed in the following year. The planes that Nick and Richard and the others used on their intercepting duties were merely ordinary Boulton-Pauls armed with cannons. There was little instruction or information they could get from the ground once they were airborne, save the general direction from which the enemy was coming in, and his apparent strength. After that they were left to their own devices. It was like feeling about in a large dark room for a pin that had been dropped on the floor. It was nerve-racking, sliding about in a black sky groping thus for an invisible enemy.

Whenever he had leave, even if it was only overnight, he came up to London. It was a relief to get away from his squadron station, and to be with Elaine; at least it superimposed on the nervous strain that seemed inseparable from flying for him now, a strain of another order altogether.

The conviction that he would be killed had taken so firm a hold of him that he was often surprised in reckoning up the days that he had been back with the squadron, that he still continued to fly and to fight. He had regained a certain confidence in himself and his machine that had agonisingly seemed to elude him when he had started to fly again, and this, made apparent sometimes in the air, or when, after a ticklish half-hour on patrol, he made a perfect landing, gave him an occasional lightening of spirits; and between these two extremes of feeling, the bitter certainty of final dissolution and the cheerful ebullience proper to his age when he had done something well, he swung uneasily.

This uncertainty of mood was reflected in his behaviour when he was with Elaine. He had formed the resolution on that night of the first great raid that if his own life were to be brief, hers should not be made unhappy on that account. He was quite certain that, without realising it, she was in love with Ralph; he was equally certain that in protesting she loved him, Richard, she was merely being loyal to something in the past that had meant much to her. It was clear to him what should be his course of conduct, to be happy with her in friendship

and not to make her unhappy by taking advantage of that sense of loyalty in her.

But the shadows of the war which Elaine felt as a protection against the troublesome, glaring clarity of the future, he felt as the shadows of death, and his youth and his love for her and his agonised reaction against the threat of extinction, urged him sometimes to break the bonds of restraint which he had put on himself.

Then he made love to her ardently, and though she resisted slightly, he swept her resistance aside; and because the future was far off, and she felt herself protected by the shadows of the present, she yielded to him, and the hours they spent together when this mood was upon them were golden and happy. The sadness for both of them came after. It came to Richard as a spectre, reminding him how frail his fine purpose had been. It came to Elaine as a sense of failure, seeing Danny, bright-eyed and cheerful and strong in life and innocence next morning, seeing Ralph, his face pale and lined with a night's work among the mounting pile of rubble, come home to bath and change and to snatch a hasty breakfast, before going out to the office.

But these moments of compunction were forgotten when Richard kissed her again. She did not know how much she had hungered for his love. She felt herself dissolve in an ecstasy that had been beyond imagining when she was gathered into his arms.

And one night she felt that whatever she had done had been justified. Jie had been obviously highly nervous all evening. They had been dining in a restaurant off Piccadilly. They had walked up to Hyde Park Corner, silent because of the guns, and aware of their isolation on the empty street. At Hyde Park Corner they had found one of the "death or glory boys" sitting fast asleep in the cab of his taxi. They had woken him and he had agreed to drive them back to Cheyne Walk, and to return Richard to his hotel afterwards.

The cab clattered through the empty streets, occasionally honking its horn to sustain a pretence that traffic might suddenly manifest out of an empty side-street, and to enable the old driver to pretend that there weren't bombs falling out of the night sky, that the streets were busy as they had always been with Londoners getting about.

In the darkness of the cab Richard, instead of putting his arm around Elaine, sat silently tensed in the corner.

"What's the matter, darling? Are you unhappy about something?" asked Elaine.

Suddenly Richard swayed forward and buried his head in her lap. She thought that she felt him sob, and she bent over him, putting her arms about his head.

"What is it, darling? Tell me, please."

He spoke, but she could not hear what he said. She exerted her strength and pulled his head up against her shoulder, and ran her hand through his hair.

"Now tell me, Richard. I am terribly worried about you."

She felt him shudder, then he sat up and laughed harshly, a laugh that was completely unlike Richard's.

"Shall I tell you?" he said. "Why not? It won't be the only secret we share. I'm afraid I'm a coward. Isn't it frightful? I'm actually afraid. I can't face flying any more. I can hardly climb into the cockpit, I'm in such a bloody tremble, and my fingers feel all stiff and awkward. I can't press the right buttons. I took off this morning like a winged partridge. My heart was in my mouth until I got down again in case I should see a Hun. I wake up at nights in a cold sweat about it. Isn't it frightful? Why wasn't I killed in France, instead of surviving all that just to disgrace myself over here?"

He ran his hands through his hair, and in the light cast by the searchlights she could see him stretch out his hands and clench them and unclench them as though surprised that the muscles still obeyed.

With a swift movement she caught his outstretched hands in hers, and kissed his cheek. Then she slipped her arm around his shoulder and pulled his head down against her breast again.

"Richard, you're not afraid. What nonsense! You're only tired. You've been doing too much flying. What you want is a long leave instead of these overnight breaks, and you should get away from London. It's no rest to come up and spend a night amongst all these bombs and guns."

"The M.O. said I was to be off for ten days on Saturday," said Richard quietly. "But I'm going to spend it in London. I can't be away from you."

"Richard, you must. You really must. You ought to go home, or to the seaside somewhere."

"The seaside. In November. By myself. Not bloody likely."

"But you must, Richard, otherwise you'll break down."

He was silent for a moment. Then he seized her hand and began speaking rapidly, as though he had rehearsed before what he was going to say, and wanted to get it said quickly.

"Come with me, Elaine. Then I'll go. Come with me. It will be our last chance, I know. Give it to me this once, and never again. Forget Ralph, forget even your little Danny. Come away with me, darling, just for those few days, and I promise you that I'll then be all right."

It was she who was now silent, staring out of the window of the cab at the buildings huddled in darkness or occasionally lit up by the powerful searchlights. She did not know why she thought of it at this moment, but she was back at Acadia, and was standing in Uncle Silas's room. "You do what your heart says, girly, not what other folks tell you. That's the only way to be happy and to make other people happy in the long run."

That was what the old man had said to her when she told him that night that she was being sent to England, and she had confessed that she loved Richard. A picture of herself and Richard as they were then floated into her mind. How young and innocent they had both been, seen in memory's eye against the green and brown background of Acadia! The old buildings of London were slipping past them now as the taxicab made its rattling way along the streets of Chelsea. This was another world, but they were the same, still Richard and Elaine, and still she loved him as she had done since that first day they had spent together at Morland's Lake. His happiness meant more to her than anything in the world. She knew, though she said only "Oh, Richard," and leant over and kissed him, **that** she would go.

3

Elaine sat in her room with her bags packed, her hat and **fur** on, idly polishing her nails and talking to Danny, who was busy investigating each bag. Having seen which he could lift and which he couldn't, he was now lying flat on his stomach looking **at** the labels left there by European hotels in the days before **the war**. Elaine was **telling him** what it **had been like in the**

Mediterranean, about the blue sky and the green sea with shades of red and purple in it, and the swarthy people, **and** the little donkeys that carry loads; all details very gratifying to the inquisitive mind of Danny. Her maid came in to say that there was a call for her on the telephone.

"Now keep quiet while I'm talking, Danny, won't you? If it's Uncle Richard, you may say hallo to him."

She moved over to the telephone which was on the table beside her bed and said "Hallo."

It was Nick who answered, not Richard. Suddenly her heart seemed to stop beating. She had been standing when she took off the receiver, but now she felt herself grow suddenly faint and she sank to the edge of her bed. Without thinking what she was doing, while she spoke she reached up with her disengaged hand and took off her hat and placed it on the bed as though she would no longer need it. Yet this was before Nick, who was in trouble at the other end of the line, had told her the purpose of his call. But when he began to speak his voice betrayed him.

"Elaine, it's Nick. I've got something to tell you, Elaine, something I want to speak to you about. I'm coming up to Town. I'll come to Cheyne Walk right away."

"It's about Richard, isn't it, Nick? He's been killed!"

She noticed how calm her voice was, though her heart had begun to beat tumultuously. She watched Danny still lying on his stomach peering at the labels, and talking quietly to himself.

Nick at the other end of the wire was audibly in a state of agony.

"I won't say anything now, Elaine. I'll be up in less than an hour. Wait there for me."

"But he is killed, isn't he, Nick?" she insisted.

She heard his voice grate. Why is he so angry? she wondered.

"Please, Elaine, why won't you wait until I come and speak to you?" Then as she started to talk again in that curiously calm voice, he interrupted her impatiently.

"Yes, Elaine. Over the Channel this morning before breakfast. It was the last flight he had to make before his leave, and they got him. They got him," Nick repeated savagely.

Then Elaine spoke again.

"Don't come up, Nick. Not to-day, at least. Leave me, **I'd rather be alone. Come up to-morrow, can you? I want to be**

by myself to-day, Nick. You do understand, don't you, dear Nick?"

Without waiting for his reply she put down the receiver. Then she went over and picked up Danny from the floor. She rang for her maid, and asked her to ask Nixon if he would take Master Danny for a walk in the Park. She told the maid that she would not be going away after all, but not to bother to unpack her bags until six o'clock that evening. She said that she would not require either lunch or tea, but wished to be left undisturbed until that time. Then she kissed Danny, and told him to be a good boy, and stood at her door for a moment watching his small legs twinkle down the passage as he went hand-in-hand with the maid to Nixon's quarters. Not till then did she lock her door and walk unsteadily towards her bed, and there fling herself down and burst into sobbing that seemed to wrench her whole body. Richard had gone. She was left alone in the shadows, and suddenly she felt afraid of all the terrors that stalked in the world.

CHAPTER THIRTY - FOUR

i

IT seemed to Elaine sometimes that Richard had not finally let her go, that he stood in the shadows just out of this world, looking back to her, as though he were reluctant to go onwards into the everlasting mists. She felt troubled by this image which frequently recurred to her. She had the impression that he was waiting for her, that he expected her to come and that she would be failing him if she didn't.

She saw that the way to join him would be to take her own life, but from that prospect she shuddered and turned away, and the vision of Richard faded, and she was aware only of the awful loneliness about her, and the grey, subdued, unhappy tints of life stretching ahead. Then she would see his face and figure again, half-shrouded in the mists, but always, just as he seemed about to give her some signal, these mists swirled up and momentarily blotted out the sight of him.

With an immense sadness in her heart, she calculated her
p (West Land)

past. Life had treated her with bitter unfairness, she thought. The beginning had been so happy and had promised so well. Yet suddenly, as though the string of a carefully tied parcel had been snipped by scissors, it had all come apart, and everything she had treasured had fallen in a jumble on the floor, the most precious things gone for ever. Why had she been treated like that? Everybody had loved her when she was a child, and she had loved everybody and everything in life. Why, after being indulgent and kind for years, should Fate suddenly show a savage and vindictive aspect?

Was it because she had been wicked? Wicked to love Richard? If Fate were as strict and impartial in its judgment as that, then let it do its worst, and she would accept the consequences. Whatever might be the right or the wrong of what she had done, that thing had been the expression of their love. She was glad that Richard had been happy for those moments at least, and she was glad to have the memory of them to turn over in her mind. They had been like children together. When one knew the wrong that there was in the world, the savage ill-doing and the vindictive crimes, their love for each other, though it had had to be secretive, and had had to deceive, was by comparison an innocent and pure thing.

It had been brief, and was now ended. At twenty-three, she had nothing to look forward to, and only a brief moment of happiness to mourn. She thought sometimes that she would take Danny and go out to Acadia to live. But the past, with all its brightness, obtruded. She could not bear the thought of living sadly where once all her joy had been. But the thought of London was equally intolerable. These grey winter days,, these long cold nights of distress with the never-ending procession from life to death. How long could she stand it? Perhaps she might be killed herself. It was frightening to think of the moment when that would happen, but the peace beyond beckoned. There, she thought, all the misery would fade, and the wild agitations of unhappiness she had known in these last few years. It would be like floating quietly on a still stream, untroubled and at peace.

After a week or two she returned to her A.R.P. post, and throughout the early months of 1941 she never missed a duty, and often took over the duties of others. She had ceased to see any of her friends. The Harrimans neither went out nor enter-

tained in their own home. But circles of friendship had been so broken up by the war that this was hardly noticed except by a few intimate friends such as Sir Bernard Purvis. He had often been a visitor at Cheyne Walk, and lest he should wonder why he was no longer invited, Ralph explained to him that Elaine had lost several of her young Canadian -friends in recent air battles, and this, together with overworking at her A.R.P. centre, had left her feeling too unhappy and unwell to have any visitors. He was trying to get Elaine away for a holiday.

But he had not suggested this to Elaine. She had told him of Richard's death on the evening following Nick's telephone call. It did not need the white strained expression of her face, nor his knowledge of their past, to tell him what this meant to her. After the momentary shock that every one feels on hearing of the death of a young warrior, there came a sudden irrepressible surge of elation that a barrier between him and Elaine had been removed. He was conscious of this and noted it with horror, but the feeling had occurred and could not be denied.

Then, schooled in patience where his love for her was concerned, he set himself to wait for her recovery from this grief. He knew that it would take time. He hoped that it would be complete. Yet, even if the memory of this boy were always to stand as a wall between them, he would not resent that, if only Elaine would give herself to him at last, if only he might have that reward for his patient years of waiting.

He watched her closely as the weeks went on. He saw that she grew increasingly pale, that little shadows appeared under her clear eyes, that she kept silent for longer intervals; and often he noticed, seeing her smooth white arm resting on the arm of a chair, that her fist was clenched tightly, as though only by a physical effort she was preventing herself from breaking down.

It was only by the exercise of his will that he stopped himself from going over and kneeling by her, putting his arm about her and comforting her in the bitterness of her grief.

2

In April and May the enemy made two final raids on London before withdrawing the greater part of the Luftwaffe for operations against Russia. These raids were strongly delivered,

and the attack was concentrated mainly on the West End of London and the south bank of the river.

On the first of these nights, a Wednesday, Ralph was on duty, and Elaine was sitting by herself in the library at Cheyne Walk. The barrage outside was so intense that it had set dancing the few ornaments that stood on tables about the room. The anti-aircraft defences of London had been greatly strengthened during the winter, and to-night they seemed to be united in a triumphant outcry against the marauders, as though at last they were meeting them *on* equal terms. Recognising the signs of a big raid, Elaine was on the point of going upstairs to get Danny, and of bringing him and his mattress down to the library, and the greater security of the ground floor. She had just risen to do this when the telephone rang. She moved over to Ralph's desk to answer it, her heart beating furiously and her legs shaking. Ever since Richard's death she had never heard the telephone ring suddenly like this, in a room where she was sitting alone, without feeling this abrupt, strangling fear. She lifted the receiver, but at first could hardly bring herself to answer. Was it about Ralph? Had something happened to him?

Then she said "Hallo," but in such a small quiet voice, hardly above a whisper, that the speaker at the other end became impatient. As Nick had been, she remembered.

"Hallo, nallo. Is that Mrs. Harriman's house?"

"Yes. Mrs. Harriman speaking."

"Oh." The voice became more polite, but was still very efficient and businesslike. "So sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Harriman. This is Post D. We have to call out reserves. The raid is heavy. Can you come and help us? We need an extra driver."

So great was Elaine's relief that she almost shouted down the 'phone.

"Yes, yes. I'll be along in fifteen minutes. Sorry to have been so stupid."

She put back the receiver, relief flooding over her in a great wave so that she could feel the blood tingling painfully in her finger-tips and her toes. Then she rang for her maid.

"I've got to go out on duty, Kathleen. Bring Master Danny down here, will you, and sleep with him in the library. I don't suppose Mr. Harriman or I will be back before early morning.

If we do come in we won't disturb you. I'll leave a note for him in the hall, so he will know."

"Oh, Madam, it's a dreadful night to have to go out."

"It's just as bad a night to stay in, Kathleen. You'll be all right, won't you? You're not afraid? That's a good girl. I hope Danny doesn't wake up. If he does, put on a gramophone record. He loves that; and get some hot Ovaltine in a thermos from the kitchen before you bring him down. Then if he does wake up you can have a picnic."

A picnic with music had been tried before as a means of diverting Danny's attention from the winter nights' hideous activities, and had proved efficacious.

Casimir Court, a large block of flats near the river, received a direct hit about one-thirty that morning, and a large number of A.R.P. rescue workers and fire-fighting crews were sent to the scene.

This was the heaviest raid London had had, and as Elaine drove her truck from King's Road down to Casimir Court, the air overhead seemed filled with the drone of planes. The searchlights weaved backwards and forwards, sometimes pausing and clustering in cones to light up some particular patch of the sky, which was clear except for a little light cloud. The last quarter of an orange moon glowed down serenely on the scene.

The anti-aircraft barrage was intense. New guns were being used, and when they emptied their load into the sky's void it was as though a giant goods train had jumped the rails and was hurtling, all its couplings banging, across the sky. The clamour was so vast and all-embracing that it was frightening in itself. It seemed impossible with the air so full of flying metal that anyone out on the streets to-night could escape injury.

Flames from burning buildings lit up the sky. White smoke with an underbelly of faint pink, the innocent colour of early dawn, hung over Qielsea. To the racket of the guns were added the other sounds which previous raids had made familiar but no less awe-inspiring: the hiss of water from a hundred hoses, the crackling or burning timber, the clanging of ambulance bells, the shouts of men.

The bomb, going through in a slanting direction, **had torn off the eastern** end of Casimir Court, dissolving with the blast

of its explosion the roof and all the walls, leaving only the steel girders standing out against the night sky, so that it gave the impression that it was a building just going up, instead of being one that had just come down. Under the mass of masonry and rubble at the base were the dead and injured, inextricably mixed. A.R.P. rescue men, their steel helmets shining in the eerie light, were already at work when Elaine's team arrived, burrowing through the rubble to rescue those who were still alive.

All those who lived in the western end of the building had been evacuated from their flats, piled into lorries and ambulances and driven off to shelters elsewhere. Those too gravely injured to be moved without examination were being examined while on their stretchers by doctors and nurses in a large shop opposite.

Elaine sat in the cab of her truck watching the scene with wide eyes. Her heart beat with such slow, heavy thuds that the steering-wheel of the truck, on which her arm rested, seemed to shake with each beat. Her duty was to wait by her truck, ready to assist her crew if needed, to take messages back to headquarters or transport the injured if either of these needs arose. Her truck was drawn up along the kerb just in front of one of the entrances to Casimir Court, which still remained standing. All the lights in the building had gone out when the bomb hit it, and men were going in and out of the entrance by torch-light. Elaine had watched the last remnants of the flats' inhabitants come through this entrance *in* their night clothes, with overcoats or dressing-gowns thrown over them, clutching children, or bags, or some small valuables, and escorted by the A.R.P. workers. As they came out into the lights of the street, she could see their faces white with terror and shocked surprise.

Suddenly a dull explosion seemed to occur in the building. She looked back through the window of her cab and saw a single broad finger of fire shoot up through the roof, stand poised there for a moment, then drop down as though crouched for a spring. She heard men behind her shouting, and saw that police were clearing everyone away from the opposite side of the street. One of them ran up to her cab.

"Move your truck over to the other side, Miss. The west end's caught fire. The engines will be coming in here."

She started her motor, and turned the truck slowly over to

the far side, coming to rest against the kerb. Then she opened the door and jumped down on to the pavement. She was uncertain whether to go and tell her leader that she had been moved to the other side of the street, or to wait here in case she had to move the truck again.

The fire-engines which had been at the other end of the building came rumbling along the street and drew up opposite the new fire. She watched the crew running out the noses. She wondered if Ralph were among any of the half-dozen crews that she saw. She wished that she could speak to him for a moment. She felt very much afraid, more afraid than she had ever felt in her life before. If only the noise would stop for a minute! She felt that she would scream and run away unless someone came and spoke to her, or she was told to do something, or the guns stopped firing and she could have a quiet moment just to catch her breath and take a grip on herself.

She heard a bomber swoop down towards the roof-tops, the growl of the engines rising to a shriek as it lost height. She looked up but could see nothing, and she leant trembling against the wing of her truck again. Then she heard the lighter note of a fighter's engine in pursuit, and the sudden, frightening noise of cannon firing overhead. She could hear the air being torn as the bomber banked and started to climb again, and the shrill whine as the fighter turned to follow it. She heard the noise of their motors grow fainter as they fled away, but after a few seconds the air shook again as they wheeled once more overhead. The engines of the heavy bomber were now making a curious moaning noise, a sound such as a great animal in its death agony might make. She heard the dull successive thuds as the cannon of the fighter fired again, and looking up she saw a small orange light flare in the sky, and waver there for a second, beautifully and gracefully. Then, as though it were drawn in an arc across the sky, the bomber plunged westwards towards the earth, the light increasing until it was the size of a full yellow moon when it hangs low on the horizon. The guns beamed to fall silent for a moment, as though they paused to congratulate themselves on their work, and with a shrill-drawn scream the bomber hurtled to the earth.

Elaine buried her face in her trembling hands. It seemed to her that everything had suddenly grown very quiet. **She**

thought that *in* this vast silence she could hear the heart of London beating, a dull, measured, heavy thudding beat that shook the earth on which she was standing. She looked up at the face of the burning building, then at the lurid sky beyond it. A mist seemed to swim before her eyes. She longed to turn and run away, but her legs would not carry her. Again she felt that impulse to scream out, but though her lips opened not a sound came. She put a hand up to her throat and felt a pulse that throbbed there violently.

She found that she was thinking of Richard. She could see him again in that familiar attitude in which she had seen him so often since he was killed, half turned away from her as though reluctant to leave her, half shrouded in mists that seemed to swirl about his feet. But on his face now she thought that she could see a half-bitter smile. Was it because she was afraid? Because he knew that she was afraid?

All at once she heard a child crying. It was a soft little whimper such as a young baby makes when it has got over the worst of its grief and is sobbing itself quietly to sleep. She looked about to see where it came from. The street was empty save for the A.R.P. and fire crews, and drivers such as herself standing by their ambulances and trucks.

The whimper came again, so sad and despairing that she walked into the middle of the street to look up at the buildings behind her, thinking that it must come from there. Again she heard it. This time the place from which it came was plain; from the second floor of the block of flats burning behind her. She ran across the street and seized the arm of a fireman at the foot of a ladder by the entrance.

"There's a baby in there. Somebody had left their baby. Can't you hear it crying?"

The man looked at her. "There's no one left in there," he said. "They were all cleared out long ago."

"But can't you hear it?" she persisted wildly. "Listen, it's crying."

He stood and listened for a second, then shook his head. "There ain't nothing there, Miss. You must be imaginin' it. If there was, you couldn't hear it, not with all this racket goin' on. I guess you're a bit upset, like. Whyn't you go and get a cup of tea and take a bit of a rest, eh? C'mon, shall I take you over?"

He had put his hand on her arm, but she shook it free impatiently.

"You fool, can't you hear it?" she said to him fiercely. "You'd leave the baby there to burn to death, would you?"

He looked at her in shocked surprise, but she turned and ran towards the entrance.

"Hey, you, come back here," he called after her; and when she didn't stop he ran after her.

A man stood on guard at the entrance to the fiat. She tried to push past him and go into the hallway, which was lurid now with flames, but he caught at her arm.

"Jest a minute, jest a minute. Now where do you think you're going? No one's allowed in the building now. Here, stand clear," he ordered, and pulled her into the roadway. There was a resounding crash from inside the building, and the flames seen through the door jumped up greedily like dogs begging at a table. The man to whom she had first spoken had come panting up.

"Dunno what's wrong with this lady," he said to the other. "She says she heard a baby crying in here, and give me a bit of her tongue for not going in after it."

The other man laughed grimly.

"Nobody left in here," he said. "We checked 'em all out."

He turned to Elaine.

"So that's what you were running in after," he said. "It would have cost you your life. That crash just now was the floor coming down. You got a uniform on, too. You ought to know better than to do that. Yes, you ought."

He still held Elaine's arm tightly, and now she was silent. She put both hands up to her face and began to draw dry convulsive breaths.

"I expect you're dead beat, Miss. Been doing too much of this work." He let go her arm and patted her comfortingly on the back.

The moment he released his hold, she turned quickly, ducked aside and ran for the entrance. But he jumped as quickly and seized her by both arms and pulled her back. Then, without further word, he picked her up in his arms and carried her across the street to the shop where the doctors were working.

They put her down on one of the stretchers that were placed

against the wall. She was crying now, her whole body wrenched with sobs, but hers were not the only cries in that room, and the sound of her weeping was lost in the tramp of rescue men coming and going, the crying of the wounded and the lost, the noise of the guns, and the explosions that came from the night outside where the bombs still fell on the city.

A nurse bent over her, and then a doctor came up, felt her wrist and her forehead, then rolled back her sleeve and gave her an injection of morphia. The mists that had been in her mind for the last hour thickened, and the sad whimper that she had heard died away as though at last the troubled little soul had fallen asleep.

But an unutterable sadness weighed upon her, and lying there in that dimly-lit room she wept silently and forlornly.

It was thus that Ralph saw her half an hour later. They had found that she was driving one of the trucks, and had established her identity. Her leader, who knew Ralph, and had known that he was working at this fire, had gone to find him and told him what had happened.

Ralph knelt down beside the stretcher. Her eyes were closed but she still sobbed quietly, and tears were rolling down her cheeks.

He took her hand in his, kneeling on both knees beside the stretcher, which lay on the ground. As he did so, she opened her eyes and looked at him silently and questioningly for a moment. Then the hand that he was holding gripped his fiercely. She tried to sit up but he pressed her back. Her free arm came up and gripped him by the shoulder, and he felt himself pulled down to her.

"Oh, Ralph, Ralph darling," she said, "take me home and don't leave me again."

The doctor was standing behind him.

"Can you get off for a bit and take her back?" he asked. "She's had a pretty nasty shock."

Ralph turned from where he was kneeling and looked up at him. The doctor thought he looked very cheerful for a man whose wife was in this bad way.

"I'll look after her all right," said Ralph.

He slipped one arm under her shoulder, and the other under her knees, and, lifting her thus, got to his feet. His steel helmet

had fallen on the floor. The doctor bent down and picked it up, then placed it on top of Ralph's head.

"Are you sure you can manage by yourself?" he asked.

Ralph's smile of confidence left the matter in no doubt whatsoever, but he thanked the doctor.

"We'll be all right," he said. "Everything's splendid."

With his oilskins glistening from the water which had poured round him that night, and with his steel helmet at a drunken angle on his head, just as the doctor had placed it there, he moved with Elaine in his arms towards the door. They held it open for him, pulling back the heavy black curtain which shaded the light from the street.

He beamed his thanks at them, and went into the darkness outside. When she heard the guns again and saw the search-lights, Elaine gave a little shudder and clung to him more fiercely. And Ralph knew the first of many moments of pure ecstasy as he bent forward and kissed her forehead to comfort and reassure her.

He heard her give a little sigh, and his heart thrilled, for he knew it was the sigh of one who has escaped a danger and feels safe at last from pursuit.

CHAPTER THIRTY - FIVE

ON a Sunday afternoon in the following December, Elaine and Danny, well wrapped up against the keen wind, were coming back from a walk they had taken along the sea-shore. Their path led up a lane, sheltered on both sides by tall briar hedges, which ran from the sea towards the cottage in which they were living on Ralph's estate in Hampshire. They were accompanied by a new acquisition, a black and white cocker spaniel, which Ralph had given Danny for his birthday in June. The spaniel was named Taviot, which was Danny's conception and brief pronunciation of Elaine's family name.

The puppy was nine months old, the equivalent in dog age of Danny's seven years. On a walk such as this they shared many tendencies including those of running ahead, of being suddenly distracted by something, of standing very still and

considering, and then rushing back to consult Elaine, or to impress her with their presence. Danny and Taviot frequently tripped over one another, and were often hostile to one another. But at heart they were such devoted friends that they could confidently rely on one another's affection, and had not to be perpetually demanding evidence or protestations of it.

Elaine, walking slowly up the lane, with her hands deep in the pockets of her coat, watched the small pair ahead of her, thinking how happy and healthy they both looked. Danny had been living with them now for fifteen months, yet she felt as though he had been hers from the moment that he had been born. During that summer, when she had been ill, Ralph had gone up to Lancashire and had interviewed the uncles and aunts. They had seemed to be fully preoccupied with broods of their own; they had never seen Danny, and had seemed relieved rather than reluctant at the suggestion that he should be adopted by the Harrimans. The necessary papers had been drawn up legally, and Danny now bore the name of Daniel MacTaviot Harriman. Pie still called Ralph by his Christian name, but he now called Elaine "Mummy." She had not persuaded him to do that, but when she had told him that she was to be his mother from now on, and would he mind that, he had said, "Oh, then I can call you my mummy." That was the aspect of it that had seemed to gratify him most. He was as pleased as though he had been given an unexpected gift.

The evening was grey with the mists sweeping in from the sea, and the sun was shining redly through the clouds over the rising land on her left. They had been out since three o'clock. Elaine's cheeks felt cold and stiff with the wind, but she felt pleasantly warm with the exercise and ravenously hungry for the good tea she knew Kathleen would have ready for them on their return. It was always lovely coming back at this hour of a winter afternoon; to go into the little drawing-room of the cottage, and to see there the low table with its white cloth crowded with china and silver, set close to the fire; and to know then that there was a happy hour and a half with Danny before Kathleen came to carry him off to his bath.

After she had watched him eat his supper sitting up in bed, and had told him a story and put him down for the night, she would go to her own room and change into a house dress, and come down to have her dinner before the fire. The evenings

passed quietly and peacefully. At nine o'clock the news, between nine-thirty and ten Ralph's telephone call from London, by eleven o'clock bed, and the long peaceful nights of dreamless sleep until morning.

She felt that she could never sleep enough again. For two months, after that night in April, she had been "in a nursing home outside London. Unless Ralph were there, sitting by her bed and talking to her, she could not fall asleep. His work prevented him being there every night, and when she was alone, when she lay there with her memories, those nights were agony. Sometimes they had given her an injection to help her, but even then she always emerged from the drugged sleep before morning, and an hour or two spent in the heavy accusing darkness alone before dawn were as bad as the hours earlier in the night had been before they had given her the drug.

It was Ralph who had finally persuaded her to give up the injections. He had taken a week off from the office, and had sat with her every evening, talking to her, until at last she had fallen asleep. After that week she had needed the help no more. It was a month later before sleep had come naturally and easily to her. Now after six months spent by the sea, with only Danny and Kathleen, her maid, and an old cook for company, she looked forward to bed at night and longed for the healing, blessed sleep which came to her as soon as she turned out the light.

Danny and Taviot came running back.

"Look, Mummy."

"Oh, darling, what is it?"

"Taviot found it. In the hedge."

At mention of his name, Taviot made agonised motions with his short stump of a tail.

"Oh, Danny, it's an old glove. Whose can it be? I do believe it's an airman's glove."

She turned back the gauntlet, and saw written inside in purple faded ink, a regimental number and a name, "P-O Drewholm, 76 Squadron."

"Yes, it is, Danny. Look, here's his name. He must have dropped it from his plane. It's been here a long time, probably ever since the days last winter when the British used to meet the Germans here when they came in over the coast. Look, we'll take it home with us, and we'll ask Ralph to see if he can

find the owner, and then we'll send the glove back to him with Taviot's compliments. Won't he be pleased?"

Danny and Taviot confirmed that he would, then ran up the lane in search of further treasure, and Elaine walked on behind them, thrusting the glove into her pocket. Her hand closing over it gave her the sensation that she was holding P-O Drewholm's hand. An impression of what he might have been like sprang into her mind: blue-eyed, smiling, with his short crisp hair, a fancy scarf knotted round his throat, walking with a little swagger, and speaking that incomprehensible R.A.F. slang. If P-O Drewholm's glove, blown by the wind, lay *in* that hedge, his body very likely now lay deep beneath the ground. The eyes were still, the teasing tongue no longer kept up its brief off-hand patter. In the squadron mess they had probably forgotten him, no one remaining who had known him.

For Drewholm's name was no doubt obscure in the annals of war. He was simply one of the few who had gone up into the English blue on one of those hard, bitter, sunlit days, and had fallen like a plummet from the sky.

Fallen on English earth, or close by into the sea that is England's, and into a dusty, green English hedge, had fallen symbolically this gauntlet, flung down from the sky, to nestle there until the battle was over, and then to be retrieved on a winter's afternoon by a little English boy and his dog.

"Fear no more the heat of the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages;
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney sweepers, come to dust."

Well, that was the way of it. Every one had their own private interests and affairs—Drewholm, no doubt, had a mother, wife or sweetheart, to whom the news of his death would have been utter blackness and despair—but one interest and loyalty seemed to prevail over all others, that which was owned to England. She thought of Doug Smith and of Richard, of Ralph, and of Danny's dead parents, and of Mrs. Bates, the keeper of the gates at the entrance to the park, each of whom

had been, or was, under this compulsion of loyalty. She thought of her own contribution, and felt a quick rush of guilt and shame. What she had done had been pitifully small compared with what Ralph had done, and what Richard and P-O Drewholm had done, paying with their lives. Even under the light burden she had had to bear, she had broken down.

But there was Danny running ahead up the lane. She had rescued him from life in the East End of London. She could surround him with loving care, give him a good education, make him worthy of the English heritage which had been enriched by the sacrifice of young lives such as that of the boy who had once worn thig glove. She felt love swelling in her heart for this grey and misty land, a longing to be steadily true to it, for ever and ever.

Nevertheless, she longed increasingly for Canada. Three years had passed since she had seen Andrew and Elspeth. Nothing that they had written had shown it, but reading between the lines of their letters she knew that they had not been able to understand her unwillingness to come home on a visit.

Acadia must be lonely, now that younger people no longer went there. At least not regularly, and in no such youthful spirit as had filled them in the days long ago. Elspeth wrote of young men coming*out in uniform. There was no conscription in Canada for service abroad, and volunteers were so numerous that they had to wait impatiently until their turn came. They received the news at last with rejoicing, and went as happy as bridegrooms, after paying farewell visits all round. None of them who had known Elaine missed coming to Acadia.

From these, when they arrived in England, and from letters from Alberta, she knew that the course of life's stream, moving steadily onwards, obliterated loved and remembered faces and things there as it did here where the historic and dramatic pace seemed so much more rapid. The Professor had had to resign from the University; he was Emeritus, and kept a kindly and interested eye on his former department, and a suspicious one on the antics of the provincial government whose destinies were still being guided by the Blackstone enthusiastic. But these interests were engaged only from a chair in the garden of the Little Brown House, or from Andrew's library at Acadia, to which, as advancing illness gripped him

and he knew that he was drawing near to death, Don Bryden came more and more frequently.

The deaths of so many young men affected him profoundly just because his own progress to the same last appointment was needlessly slow and protracted.

But apart from this nostalgia, and the recurrent tidings that yet another bright figure of her old life had gone the way of Richard, Elaine had never known such happiness as she knew now. The love for Ralph which had sprung up in her heart dazzled and exhilarated her, and made every moment of the day ecstatic with some bright and fresh experience. She did not resent the years that had been wasted. she knew that she had not been ready for such overwhelming and absorbing love until now. She was grateful for what was, and humbly happy for what she knew was to come, for the child who was to be born, the child that would be hers and Ralph's, whose lonely whimper it might have been she had heard on the night of the fire.

They had reached the top of the lane, passed through a wicket gate, and were crossing the pasturage that led to the cottage garden. Elaine looked back and saw the leading ships of a convoy of merchantmen approaching from the open sea. Heavily laden, the ships were low in the water, and they made slow, labouring progress along the coast while she and Danny watched them.

Danny wanted to know where they came from, and Elaine guessed wildly, and probably inaccurately, from Canada; which was enough to set Danny's imagination aflame, for Canada had become for him the source of all legend, and Acadia a sort of paradise to which he would make his way one day.

Walking along the shore on another day, Elaine had told Ralph of that, and an idea which had been in her mind for a long time suddenly found words.

"When the war is over, Ralph, can we take Danny and go back to Canada to live? It would be such a wonderful world for him to be brought up in. Would it be a wrench for you, leaving England?"

Ralph had paused a moment before replying, looking out at the sea he had known since childhood, and back at the woodland and the fields, stretching upwards from the shore. Then he smiled at her, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oddly enough, I wouldn't mind. Once I couldn't have borne to leave it, but now it doesn't seem to matter. England is safe, or will be safe, when we have finished with this war. Leaving then will be rather like coming down from the ramparts, our turn of duty being done. You remember what it was like in the old walled cities? When the enemy approached, every one left the fields outside the city where they had been working, and came in the gates. Then the men went up to man the walls until the siege was over, and when the enemy were driven back they came out into the fields again and took up their peaceful pursuits.

"If we go out to Canada, when all this is over, it will be like going out into the fields again. It will be good to be at peace. It will be damned good to have you and Danny with me, and never to worry or be apprehensive about the future again."

Putting her arm through his, she walked on. They were happy talking of where they would live, and what they would do.

When Danny and Elaine reached home on this afternoon in December, Kathleen met them at the door smiling as befits the bearer of good news.

"Mr. Harriman telephoned, Madam. He said that he was catching the four-forty-five from London and would be here at seven-fifteen."

Danny jumped up and down with joy, and Taviot barked because the humans were fussing and all talking together, and his young master was displaying loud-voiced pleasure.

"Can I stay up and see him, Mummy? Oh, please let me."

"You can stay awake and say good-night to him, Danny, but you must have your bath and get undressed, and be all ready for bed."

Danny was an astute young person. He did not argue against this judgment, but cast down his eyes and brooded, while he was taking off his hat and coat and gloves, and came to the conclusion that with tactful management and cunning questions he could spin out the process of saying good-night to a quite reasonable and satisfactory extent, enough at least to include a story. Whereupon he cheered up immensely, and tackled his tea with excellent appetite.

Prayers were said so that not even a precious moment should be wasted. "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," prayed Danny with great fervour, his still damp head pressed into Elaine's lap. And when that was done a special and all-embracing petition which Elaine had taught him, but to which Danny, whose heart was large and encompassed many things, daily added amendments, as he daily altered the emphasis and the stresses.

"Please, God," prayed Danny, "keep our soldiers and sailors and airmen safe this night. Keep the ships safe," he amended, remembering the convoy they had just seen, and casting a bright eye up to Elaine that she might duly note this addition. "Please, God," he continued, "take me to Canada. I want to live there and have a pony, like Mummy had. God bless Ralph and Mummy 'n Granfather 'n Taviot 'n Kathleen 'n make me a good boy. Amen."

He jumped to his feet just as they heard the car stop at the gate. He listened as he heard Ralph walking up the path.

"Here he is," yelled Danny ecstatically, running out into the passage, and looking over the edge of the banisters to the lighted hall below. "Lift me up, Mummy. Oh, lift me up, please."

Elaine gathered him up in her arms, leaning with him over the rail of the stairs. She could smell the sweet soapy smell of his head, and feel his firm little chest resting against her arm. They leaned forward, the two of them, excitedly, as Ralph walked in the door.

"Ralph," called Danny, laughing. "Here we are, here we are."

"Ralph," called Elaine.

He looked up and saw them smiling down at him from the stairs, and his own smile flew up to them, and happiness and content with each other flowed like a current between these three hearts.

THE END

