

The
CORNISH PENNY

COULSON CADE

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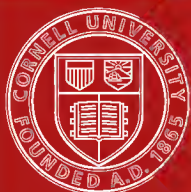
The Cornish penny; a novel.



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THE CORNISH PENNY

A NOVEL

BY

COULSON CADE

Author of "Dandelions," etc.



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PRELUDE

I

TOWARDS the close of the eighteenth century Henliston was a town of considerable social importance in the Duchy, and at the height of its prosperity. Ancient geographers describe it as "an old Court town." Henliston never deigned to cultivate an industry.

Mrs. Bowden, a nonagenarian with wits unimpaired, who had long since ceased to think of the unimportant Present, often lured Robin to her cottage by stories of the town's important Past. Her mother could "mind the time when Hill Street was that packed with carriage-folk that a body was feared to cross."

In those good old Georgian days, when the woods that sloped to the waters of Poltrean Pool were carpeted with bluebells, and the golden splendour of the gorse on the Outer Green was a wonder to behold, when the sycamores were in their most transparent and tenderest green and the poplars below the Devil's Rock seemed to be standing in a mist of greenish-yellow, came, from Launceston to Land's End, the quality to Henliston. The married man and his family took up their residence in a house in Church Street or Hill Street or Packet Street; the bachelor dismounted at the Rose or the White Hart, the Dolphin or the George and Dragon. On the last day of April at four o'clock in the afternoon my Lord Myall, the popular Master of the Ceremonies, to open the season, gave a dinner-party at his house just off Hill Street to a score or so of gentlemen, the *élite* of the Duchy. The town gave itself up to the series of revels that began on May Day and on Mid-

summer Day culminated in a masked ball in the Assembly Rooms. At the end of June a coach and four would draw up at a house in Church Street or Hill Street or Packet Street, and Sir John's lady and daughters would drive away escorted by Sir John on horseback—if the gout permitted. Happy in the knowledge that so eligible a suitor as Sir Robert Trepolpen demanded dearest Agnes in marriage at an early date, her ladyship would smile from time to time. Prue, the apple of her eye, was two years younger than Agnes, and far prettier; next year, perhaps . . . ? On his homeward journey, Sir John, too, would smile: an open smile when he thought of that noble trout he had drawn from the Pool, for instance: a smile more secret when he recalled certain other incidents of a pleasant two months. Occasionally a slight frown appeared on his cheerful face when he remembered the many golden guineas he had lost at the cards and dice, but it was quickly banished: always he told himself that Dame Fortune was fickle, and he would win next year. As for the bachelors, they rode away in merry bands from the Rose and the White Hart, the Dolphin and the George and Dragon: none of them considered his stay in Henliston was time wasted.

An unkind wit has written that Lord Myall's success as Master of the Ceremonies was due to his extreme unsuitability for the post; and there may be truth in the paradox. Many contradictory reasons have been handed down in the letters of men and women who professed to have been his intimate friends. We are inclined to think that he never had an intimate friend in his life, for John Penellis was more a habit than an intimate friend, a worthy man who never put quill to paper if he could possibly avoid it. Lord Myall himself was a contradiction: it is impossible to reconcile the Lord Myall of Westminster with the Lord Myall of Henliston. The handsome buck of noble family, his successor, reigned for one short season. The quality vowed that with the death of Lord Myall a change had come over the spirit of the scene: the new *régime* having failed to satisfy, they hastened away before May was out, and Henliston saw them gathered together no more.

Small towns, like mighty empires, have their day.

The dignified Assembly Rooms have been demolished, and a hideous Wesleyan chapel profanes the site. Most of the parlours of the old grey houses in Hill Street and Packet Street have been turned into shops, and the houses are inhabited by shopkeepers.

Church Street, a cul-de-sac, tucked away below the church, is still cobble-stoned and much the same as of yore, and to step into it is to step right out of modern life into a bygone century. But there are small outward changes that reflect great inner ones. For example, at No. 7, once the Henliston residence of my Lord St. Aille, there is a dressmaker's brass plate on the front door. There are white cards that bear the word APARTMENTS in black letters in some of the windows. Many windows display red cards that bear the words NOT AT HOME. Mrs. Trent's parlour window displays three red cards; one is almost enveloped in crape, just a written name is visible: Dick Trent was killed at the Marne.

Henliston has two main streets. Packet Street, beginning at the row of cottages that skirts the north wall of the churchyard, goes down a little hill, passing Church Street on the right, and goes up a little hill to the market-house, that was erected early in Anne's reign; then it crosses Hill Street, and after a gradual ascent of a quarter of a mile, finding itself out of the town, continues in a south-easterly direction as the Lizard road. Hill Street is the more important—the road into the world. It passes through Henliston like a swift river, never pausing in its straight-running course after it feels the downward slope by the old toll-house, gathering speed until it swerves sharply to the left below the Rose, where it sends off to the right a canal, a short avenue bordered by tall elms that leads to a two-storied house screened by a row of seven giant Lombardy poplars; beyond the toll-house it becomes the Truro road; and when it swerves below the Rose it no longer hastens, but slowly curves past little shops and houses of humble degree down to the foot of the hill to which it owes its name, where it merges into the Penzance road.

The third station and the terminus of a branch line from

Borne Junction is Henliston. It consists of a single platform and a granite building containing the usual offices that pertain to a small station; situated half a mile to the north of the town, it is approached by a long, straight road of fairly recent construction, the last turning to the left at the top of Hill Street. Thirty years or so ago when the line was first opened, it was an excitement to watch the trains come in. Several Henlistonians, adventurous spirits, travelled by train to Borne Junction, where they alighted and passed the day pleasantly in walks and talks until it was time for the train to take them back again. For nine days the railway was a novelty and regarded as dangerous, and those adventurous ones who had dared the journey to Borne Junction were looked on almost as heroes by their more timid fellows.

Henlistonians rarely have cause to travel by train. The station is so far out of the town that, nowadays, they almost forget it is there; but in the summer months they are reminded, when morning and evening they see the omnibus from the Rose lumbering up Hill Street or lumbering down. Occasionally arrivals by the train suffer themselves to be swallowed in the cavernous depths of the ponderous conveyance, and are disgorged at the Rose—in due time. They seldom sojourn at that most comfortable "hotel" for longer than a day or a night: usually on the morrow they pass on to the fishing-village or hotel on a headland that is their destination. Nearly all the folk who arrive by train seat themselves in the waiting motor-omnibus and are whirled away: to them Henliston means no more than *the station for the Lizard district*. Shade of Beau Myall!

"Oh, yes, it *is* rather a complicated journey . . . One gets out, at last, at a place called Henliston—such a sleepy old town that must be simply deadly in winter," they say by and by.

In summer-time, too, motor-cars, motor-bicycles and motor char-à-bancs, as they tear along that piece of the Penzance road that separates the small Inner Green from the larger Outer Green, churn the dust, causing it to rise in a yellow fog that chokes the pedestrian; they climb Hill Street at a slower pace, and nearly all stop at the Rose or the Dolphin for their

own as well as their passengers' liquid refreshment before they continue their screeching, petrol-scented way Lizardwards, up Hill Street and Packet Street.

During July, August and September, Henliston ceases to dream; no longer sleeps but drowzes. Strangers disturb the quiet of the streets. They lose themselves in the maze of courts and alleys behind the market-house, searching for the curio shops that they expect to find—that are not there. They poke about in the churchyard, peering at half-obliterated names and dates and epitaphs; they catechise the taciturn sexton, who answers them in monosyllables, for he has "no patience with prying curiosity-mongers," and will not show them what they would greatly like to see: a lichened tombstone, hidden by an over-hanging barberry, on which one may with difficulty decipher:

Here lies the body of

JOHN TRESIDDER Esqre

*All his youth he did love to tell
Of Bribe of Heaven and Threat of Hell
But ere he died he made repent
So we hope to Heaven his soul is sent.*

*His social life closed
on the 8th June, 1783,
in his 27th year.*

It can only be after tea, when the strangers have gone, that the townfolk may enjoy their bowls on the green. . . .

Henliston, that once welcomed visitors so eagerly, is now shy and a little resentful of them. In days long past its visitors, one and all dwellers in the Duchy, came for May and June, when the year was at its fairest. Now they mostly come in sultry August, "for the day," returning in the evening to the place they came from in the train they arrived by in the morning: they are strangers, and Henliston does not know them. The moneys they may care to proffer Henliston will suffer itself to take, so that when summer is over it may once more sleep

undisturbed until another summer, a dream-laden sleep that deepens with the years.

II

When Pitt resigned office in 1761, George III, by scattering favours broadcast among the members of the House of Commons, set about making a "Royal" party who would vote with the ministers chosen by himself. Among His Majesty's most staunch supporters was Sir Senton Myall, sixth baronet, who for his services was created a baron of the United Kingdom.

"I detest a pack of women about me," Lord Myall would often be heard to declare. Certainly he managed to enjoy life without their intrusions at his comfortable house in Westminster, tended by a staff of capable, middle-aged menservants. Among his intimates he went by the nickname of the Ram: nicknames were often bestowed perversely then, as now. At the age of five and thirty, in January of the year 1770, Lord Myall stated: "I am still a celibate; and a celibate I shall continue to remain"—or words to that effect. None doubted; though the ladies voted it was vastly droll, for a celibate of five and thirty in George the Third's reign was as rare a bird as the dodo of Mauritius.

Imagine, then, the flutter of excitement in social circles when in February month my Lord Myall became affianced to a beautiful young heiress! He purchased a house in Grosvenor Square, which was decorated and furnished to the expensive taste of Miss Maria Marsden, his *fiancée*: fathoms deep in love was my lord and in frantic haste, as only a man who had been all his life a stranger to women could be. In six weeks from the day he had first met his charmer, Lord Myall found himself installed in his new house with a staff of servants of both sexes about him, and married to a wife that made him the envied of all his friends and acquaintances. To the house in Grosvenor Square came all the wit and beauty of the town—for three months: Jealousy, the green-eyed, came too, at last, an uninvited guest who, catching my lord's eye, winked knowingly.

Doubtless my lord thought he had very good reason for one morning whisking off his bride in a chaise and four *en route* for his ancestral home, Myall Manor, far away in the Duchy of the West.

"How very odd to elope with one's own wife," was the cynical comment of the young Earl of Varlington, who, wearying of impecuniosity, shortly after married an heiress himself, and went to reside in the house in Grosvenor Square he had bought of Lord Myall: Lady Varlington was four and forty and plain-featured withal!

In her little hour in London town Lady Myall, who was *petite* and graceful, who darted swiftly to and fro among her guests, who instinctively wore gay colours to enhance her gipsy beauty, who innocently loved to bask in the sun of male admiration, was likened by a traveller to the humming-bird of tropical forests: an apt simile.

One can picture the girl-wife looking out of the window of the chaise, as they neared their journey's end, on the mist-covered Goonhilly Downs towards the close of what had been verily a wet November day that was mis-sorted among July's.

One can imagine the talk:

"It is all so cold and drear," with a shiver.

Her husband's quick reply: "It is not always so. . . . You will soon grow used to such days."

"Never! I vow. . . . But we shall not always live at Myall?"

"It is a well-built house; a safe retreat: you will be far removed from the temptations of town."

"I think Myall Manor will prove an odious place!" vehemently.

"We shall see, my little one; we shall see," as he attempts to fondle her.

Her sobbing: "Don't touch me! . . . Please! Oh, please . . ."

A humming-bird is happy in its own environment amid the bright flowers of a sunny climate. The poor little woman shut up in the lonely manor-house with an uxorious husband whom she could not love was like a wild bird caught and

caged; she could not live away from familiar sights and sounds, from the world she knew. Lady Myall pined for a year and a half; gave birth to lusty twins, boy and girl; and, having justified her existence, died.

The last word she uttered was "Rupert": her husband's name was Senton.

A year after the death of his wife Lord Myall was spending Christmas at Henliston with his boyhood's friend, John Penellis, at the latter's house in Church Street. It was a comfortable house in which to spend the festive season, as my lord knew full well: that was why he was there.

Mrs. Penellis, a pleasant-featured buxom dame, in her ten years of married life had presented her husband with seven fine sons—all living—and looked splendidly well of it. Her chief merits—in her guest's opinion—were that she knew how to make a giblet-pie with the best, and was aware that children are only of cursory interest to others than their parents.

As the men sat together late one night drinking punch the conversation turned on their respective progeny.

Said Mr. Penellis: "You're a lucky devil, Senton! . . . Next time my wife conceives I hope it will be a daughter: seven sons are enough for any man. . . . I wish the house was larger though. . . . What a fine position for a house—above the Devil's Rock! Pull down those two cottages and make the top of the rock a pleasure-garden: idea came to me t'other day when—"

Lord Myall broke in: "And a very good idea too, my friend, that bears thinking on! . . . Myall is a bit lonely in winter-time. Since my wife's death I have come to understand. . . . Supposing one of the twins took ill. Take a time to bring Dr. Tyacke out of Henliston. . . . I have thought of late that I am over-young to devote my remaining years to the study of the weather and the crops. . . . Somehow, since my elevation to the Lords, politics seem to have lost their flavour."

A few weeks later Lord Myall gave orders for the demolition of the cottages above the Devil's Rock, and the erection of a noble house of stone on the site they had occupied with its front facing Hill Street. He owned most of Henliston

and much land in the district—as his descendant does today. Already a very wealthy man was Lord Myall when he had presented himself as a suitor for the hand of Miss Maria Marsden, and that young lady's worldly-wise guardian had deemed him none the less eligible on that score. To the tearful ward who had elected to fall in love with a penniless adventurer, and who "hated money," her guardian, a zealous churchman who on occasions interpreted the scriptures literally, felt constrained to read a certain passage from St. Matthew's gospel: "*For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance. . . .*"

One can scarcely credit that the austere-looking portrait by Reynolds of Lord Myall painted shortly before his marriage in which he is shown with sallowish face, heavy jowl, thin-cut lips and cold blue eyes is that of the man who became the popular Master of the Ceremonies, a lesser Beau Nash, who for fourteen years held sway in Henliston and was known throughout the Duchy for his "*wit, tact, generosity, and all lovable qualities: a noble nobleman.*"

Lord Myall died in 1785 at the age of fifty; and his house in Henliston was inhabited by his heirs and successors until Philip, third baron Myall, sold it for a nominal sum to his brother-in-law, John Trevarthon, when that gentleman had gambled away the Trevarthon estates. John Trevarthon married Catherine Myall, and had one son by her, who in the course of years married and became the father of twins, Anthony and Cynthia.

Twins-begetting was a Myall trait.

III

Some months after the death of Anthony and Cynthia Trevarthon's father—he had died on their thirty-third birthday, oddly enough the anniversary of his wife's death: she had pre-deceased him by two years—Anthony was spending a rainy December morning in the library dipping at random into one of his favourite books, *The House of the Seven Gables*. In it he found an atmosphere that was congenial; the intimate

linking of the Present and the Past in the way of ancestry and descent appealed to him; the sentences yielded up some faint old-time fragrance which he had acknowledged long ago by flowers of lavender pressed here and there between the pages.

Anthony chuckled as he read a favourite passage describing Hepzibah's fowls:

"All of them (Chanticleer, his two wives and a solitary chicken) were pure specimens of a breed which had been transmitted down as an heirloom in the Pyncheon family, and were said, while in their prime, to have attained almost the size of turkeys, and, on the score of delicate flesh, to be fit for a prince's table. In proof of the authenticity of this legendary renown, Hepzibah could have exhibited the shell of a great egg, which an ostrich need hardly have been ashamed of. Be that as it might, the hens were now scarcely larger than pigeons, and had a queer, rusty, withered aspect, and a gouty kind of movement, and a sleepy and melancholy tone throughout all the variations of their clucking and cackling. It was evident that the race had degenerated, like many a noble race besides, in consequence of too strict a watchfulness to keep it pure. These feathered people had existed too long in their distinct variety; a fact of which the present representatives, judging by their lugubrious deportment, seemed to be aware. They kept themselves alive, unquestionably, and laid now and then an egg, and hatched a chicken, not for any pleasure of their own, but that the world might not absolutely lose what had once been so admirable a breed of fowls."

Looking up from the book he watched the rain lashing the window-panes. Leaning far back in his chair he mused:

Our race has degenerated; perhaps from "too strict a watchfulness to keep it pure." No, degenerated was too severe a word. Himself was not a degenerate, whatever he might be. Godfrey had said when last he was at the Poplars: "Don't want to marry, do you, Anthony? If you ever do you'll make a shy breeder, I'm thinking: Trevarthons have been that way for many generations—the Myalls too, for the matter of that. . . . Now I fancy I'm a throw-back, one of those 'baronet-Myalls who sired a dozen and more—by his wife. Wait till I

marry! There's spunk in your Cousin Godfrey." A coarse and clumsy-tongued boor was Godfrey—with no brains worth mentioning—yet he had his good points. . . . Did quality matter more than quantity? . . . The Trevarthons had been given to intermarrying; when they condescended to marry outside the family they had chosen mates from the oldest families in the Duchy; no elder son had ever made a *mésalliance*. They were proud. His great-grandfather, a supporter of the Stuarts, had felt insulted when offered a peerage. "An ancestor of mine was knighted on the field of battle. The Trevarthons are too ancient a family to use a title: good wine needs no bush," was the message he sent to "the German gentleman who styles himself King of England." . . . Cynthia *might* marry, though it seemed doubtful. But if she were to she would change her name. He, Anthony, was the last of the Trevarthons—as far as he knew. . . . They had all died out: sad, in a way. . . . He *might* marry; he was not anxious to do so. He was comparatively young. There was plenty of time. . . .

Anthony gave a little shrug as he drew himself up. Having read once more the description of the fowls, he turned over the pages until he arrived at what it amused him to call the Episode of the Egg:

"The second of Chanticleer's two wives, ever since Phoebe's arrival, had been in a state of heavy despondency, caused, as it afterwards appeared, by her inability to lay an egg. One day, however, by her self-important gait, the side-way turn of her head, and the cock of her eye, as she pried into one and another nook of the garden,—croaking to herself, all the while, with inexpressible complacency,—it was made evident that this identical hen, much as mankind undervalued her, carried something about her person, the worth of which was not to be estimated either in gold or precious stones. Shortly after, there was a prodigious cackling and gratulation of Chanticleer and all his family, including the wizened chicken, who appeared to understand the matter quite as well as did his sire, his mother, or his aunt. That afternoon Phoebe found a diminutive egg,—not in the regular nest—it was far too precious to be trusted there,—

but cunningly hidden under the currant-bushes on some dry stalks of last year's grass. Hepzibah, on learning the fact, took possession of the egg, and appropriated it to Clifford's breakfast, on account of a certain delicacy of flavour, for which, as she affirmed, these eggs had always been famous. Thus unscrupulously did the old gentlewoman sacrifice the continuance, perhaps, of an ancient feathered race, with no better end than to supply her brother with a dainty that hardly filled the bowl of a tea-spoon!"

Chanticleer in high dudgeon! One could imagine him stalking away on his long stilt-like legs, with the dignity of interminable descent in all his gestures—followed by the bereaved mother of the egg—after having failed to deliver himself of an harangue that might have proved as long as his own pedigree had he not been interrupted by the laughter of Phoebe, the stealer of the egg!

Anthony smiled as he pictured the humorous scene played in the old ruined garden of the Pyncheons against a background of tall poles up which the scarlet-flowering bean-vines clambered, to the humming of the plundering bees that flew in and out of the great yellow squash-blossoms. It flashed across his mind that himself in time might grow into a sort of Clifford. Would Cynthia grow into a Hepzibah? Only a week ago he might have thought that she would: yes, he had thought Cynthia was destined for spinsterhood. She had had her chance ten years ago when Jack Penrose was a constant visitor at the Poplars. Jack had wished to marry her; but she had frightened him away, at last: he was a silly fool who could not understand that a hard tongue may go with a soft heart. . . . It had come as a shock that Cynthia had strong maternal instincts, for he believed he had plumbed the depths of her. . . . A woman still might marry at three and thirty. The idea disquieted him, until he reflected that suitors for the hand of a plain woman of no particular charm were not plentiful. Cynthia was not beautiful, not even pretty; though he loved her with all brotherly love, he could not disguise from himself the truth of that. . . . As he gazed at her standing within the circle of lamplight holding the baby in her arms she had seemed transfigured be-

fore him: his plain sister Cynthia appeared to him as strangely beautiful, and she silenced him with her eyes that he had never seen so blue and brightly-shining. He had traversed a dark passage, so that when he entered the room his eyes were a little dazzled. Perhaps his imagination was too vivid. . . . The fact remained that never again would he be able to tease Cynthia in the old way. How often had he said: "My dear, you have the mind of a shrewd tradesman. There was a mistake made at our birth: you should have been a male; I, the female." His sister was after all just a woman, with a woman's feelings. . . . She had found the baby, and she meant to keep it—something in her attitude had told him that when he saw her standing there with it in her arms. Take the baby away, and Cynthia would be even more resentful than the Pyncheon-hen whose egg was stolen. . . . Very reluctantly had she consented to the appointment of Mrs. Jago as foster-mother; and only when she was forced to recognise the infant's requirements that she, as a maiden, could not supply. . . . For perhaps the hundredth time he wondered who was the baby's mother. Was she some astute woman of the town who had read Cynthia with her woman's eyes and, having read truly, decided that it was certain that her nameless child would be received with welcoming arms? . . . There were times when he felt a little lonely. It might be most amusing to have a small boy installed as an inmate of the house. It would give him the opportunity of testing his theory with regard to environment influencing, if not shaping, a child's character; though it was tiresome he was not acquainted with the child's ancestry: then, one might know the traits to look for and, if necessary, to combat. . . . Cynthia had made her decisions with regard to the quixotic affair before he had had barely time to consider. The happenings of that eventful night had been so unlooked-for, so unexpected, and he disliked the unexpected, for it disturbed the even tenor of his ways.

Anthony, closing the book, was arrested by the title on the cover. He rose, and crossing to the window stood looking out for several moments at the poplar-trees his grandfather had planted.

"A much more appropriate name for the house! I must consult with Cynthia," he said aloud.

In the far corner of the room the grandfather's clock emitted a wheezing sound as it prepared to strike the hour—just such a sound might one of the Pyncheon-fowls have made.

As he turned away from the window Anthony exclaimed: "Why not!", and went downstairs to luncheon as one inspired.

His spirits sensibly lowered as on entering the dining-room he heard the chink of coins, and perceived Godfrey Myall straddling the hearthrug with his back to the fire, his hands thrust deep in his breeches' pockets.

There was little in common between Anthony and Cynthia Trevarthon and their second cousin, Godfrey, Lord Myall, who was six years their junior. At the Poplars Anthony lived in his books and dreamed his dreams, while Cynthia kept house and interfered in the garden. Godfrey at Myall Manor lived the life of a country squire with great satisfaction to himself, knew the name of every pretty girl on the Lizard peninsula, and seldom rode to Henliston more often than once a month.

Anthony the student and Godfrey the sportsman were as the poles asunder. Godfrey admired Anthony's "cleverness"—and said so; he was certainly attracted to him. Anthony acknowledged—to himself—Godfrey's virility. The two might criticise one another and disagree, yet in some strange way each was necessary to the other.

As for Cynthia, her well-bred incivility occasionally exceeded the limit of delicate inattentions: she detested Godfrey.

To his sister Anthony confided that he dreaded the days when Godfrey rode to town; Godfrey's visit always put him out of temper for the rest of the day, he declared.

"Why does he not stop at the Rose instead of arriving here at five minutes to the luncheon-hour? . . . Godfrey soaks up one's vitality as a sponge water."

To which Cynthia would reply: "He comes because he likes you: if you do not care for his company you can surely tell him so! I would not allow *myself* to be upset or disturbed by a turnip-headed fool."

Godfrey might be at times a boor, but boor was not a synonym for fool. When his sister called their cousin a fool Anthony felt irritated; he almost wished that he could be convinced Godfrey *was* a fool; he could not decide on the right docket for Godfrey—it seemed unlikely that he ever would: he was no nearer solving his character than when Godfrey, as a boy, had arrived, an uninvited luncheon-guest, at the Poplars on the day he had first ridden on a pony to town. Sometimes Godfrey would say a surprising thing, a good thing, an original thing; a thing that a wise man might say. Anthony, acutely expectant, would sit awaiting the hoped-for *bon mot* or *mot juste*, the rare nugget that presently might be discovered among all that gravel of words, for Godfrey would talk, talk, talk throughout the meal. When Anthony joined in the conversation Godfrey appeared to be considering carefully his cousin's every sentence; while Anthony was speaking Godfrey would screw up his eyelids and gaze downwards, as if he were examining some insect through an imaginary microscope. Once he had observed: "Your words string together like beads on a rosary"—a surprising utterance for Godfrey. Godfrey never allowed himself to be influenced by any opinion or advice of Anthony's, even though he had asked for the opinion or advice: perhaps he found amusement in listening to Anthony. Apparently everything that Anthony said or did he regarded as wonderful. "I think if you could you would like to present me as a curio to a museum; and expect the public to stand awe-struck before such an unique specimen," Anthony had once startled his cousin by saying.

In a word, Godfrey was an insoluble enigma to Anthony and, therefore, provokingly interesting. If Godfrey were to discontinue his visits Anthony realised that he would miss them greatly; he welcomed his cousin politely, but not cordially, when that gentleman came to the Poplars. However exasperating Godfrey might prove Anthony could not bring himself to give him his *cong e*. After all, Godfrey seldom came more often than once a month.

"Hullo, Godfrey! If you are not careful, noble lord, you

will singe those breeches of yours, and possibly melt your spinal column. This is an unexpected pleasure . . . on such a wet day, too."

"He was only in town a week ago," said Cynthia bluntly, as she inspected a neat darn at one corner of the tablecloth.

Godfrey did not care whether Cynthia chose to be polite or rude; he always gave her the minimum of attention: in his opinion if a woman were not pretty and sufficiently young she should be silent-tongued when men were present.

Ignoring her remark Godfrey rushed towards Anthony in a way that suggested to that gentleman a bull charging across a field.

"What's all this I hear?" he bellowed.

"What do you hear?" returned Anthony politely, with a questioning glance at Cynthia who shook her head.

"Oh, Lord! As if he doesn't know what I mean," Godfrey apostrophised the room. "I heard the story at Myall this morning—that's why I'm here. I heard it again from Tyacke who drew up to tell me. It's all over the town."

"Have you noticed, my dear Godfrey, how some people are given to the keen consideration of other people's affairs? . . . I do not know what you have heard, but it seems to have excited you."

"About this baby. . . ."

Anthony braced himself.

"A baby, a very young baby, was deposited on our front doorstep a few nights ago; Cynthia almost stepped on it. I had already gone to my room. Cynthia, who was reading the newspaper, had not yet retired, and on hearing the bell—the servants, too, had gone to their rooms, it was past eleven o'clock—went to the door . . . to find the baby. The night was pitch-dark and—"

"Whose baby?"

"I wish I knew! I have made all possible inquiries without avail. . . . Cynthia has expressed a wish—she—we have decided to adopt the infant. At present it—a boy it is—is being nursed by Mrs. Jago at Trewoof, who has fortunately—un-

fortunately, I should say—been deprived by death of her own child. . . . An infant would be most upsetting in an ordered household. I have persuaded Cynthia to allow it to remain with Mrs. Jago until it begins to run about, is old enough to be interesting. There is much to be said for the French and Italian system which modern doctors disapprove of. I believe—”

“You don’t think that if you adopt this infant you will regret it? I mean, won’t all the wantons in the district—?”

“If women are wantons, Godfrey, it is men that make them so,” interrupted Cynthia pointedly.

Godfrey affected not to hear. Having returned to monopolise the fire he rattled the coins in his pockets.

“Well, it’s a pretty kettle of fish, I must say, Anthony.”

“There’s no must about it as far as *you* are concerned!”

This time Godfrey glared in Cynthia’s direction.

On finding Godfrey in the dining-room Anthony had decided to wait until his departure before he broached the question of a new name for the house to Cynthia, but observing the eager expression on his cousin’s face as they sat down to table he changed his mind; he could see that Godfrey would enter on a discussion of the baby’s adoption unless some other intriguing subject of conversation was immediately introduced! Anthony objected to the discussion of any sort of personal matter while a servant was present, and he knew by long experience that Godfrey did not. He addressed his sister hurriedly.

“I wonder why our grandfather named this house the Poplars?”

Cynthia, a little surprised and catching an eager note in his voice, asked:

“What is the matter, Anthony?”

“I think he might have named it House of the Seven Poplars.”

Anthony’s ruse was more successful than he had dared to hope. Godfrey with the look in his eye of a detective who had tracked down his first criminal exclaimed: “I know where you got that idea!”

"Really?" Anthony encouraged, a little wondering.

"A fellow called Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a book called *The House of the Seven Gables*. I have read it!"

Recently, for the first time in his life, Godfrey had taken to spending an occasional evening with the books in the well-stocked library at Myall. Of this Anthony was not aware.

"My dear Godfrey, you astonish me! I thought you never read anything but the *Western Morning News*. Always have you stated most explicitly that you have not read a book of any sort or kind since you left college. Reading books is waste of time, you have often said."

Godfrey had not his answer ready when Cynthia said quietly: "You do not purpose having House of the Seven Poplars painted on the front door, I hope, Anthony?"

"How absurd you are, my dear! I do not purpose having it painted anywhere . . . but I thought the longer name would look well on the note-paper."

"H'm; that means that you will have to go to the expense of a new die."

"But a few shillings," Anthony urged.

"Fancy you thinking of a name like that! You *are* an imaginative chap," from Godfrey, to whom the use of words had returned. He seemed perfectly genuine in his admiration; and his eyes held the "like to put you in a museum" look. "Such a notion would never have occurred to me," he added reflectively.

"I believe you, my lord," said Cynthia briskly; and turning to her brother: "I do not see the point of stamping House of the Seven Poplars on the note-paper when the house will be referred to in the future as the Poplars, just as it has been in the past."

Anthony had his way. He told his friends of the new name; he told the servants who told the tradesfolk.

Cynthia had been right: it was the *note-paper* that was changed.

For a few months Anthony persisted in his whim until he was convinced, at last, that the name of a house in Henliston—

such an one as he dwelt in—may not be changed. Once more he knew it as the Poplars.

Only the note-paper was still headed House of the Seven Poplars. The old die had been lost; and as Cynthia pointed out:

“It will mean having to go to the expense of *another* die, so let the silly name stay.”

IV

On a fine evening towards the end of June, 1914, Mr. Anthony Trevarthon, having finished reading an article in the *Spectator*, yawned, pushed back his chair, and stretching himself, rose. He descended to the lower room of the tower and, after gravely shaking a warning finger at a fat mouse that had run across the floor and was peeping out at him from a fold in a piece of sacking, passed out into the garden.

“A mouse and an ostrich when alarmed behave contrariwise,” said he whimsically, as he set off along a path to seek for Robin.

“Will it not be pleasant to take a walk in the quietening world? Let us saunter down Hill Street to the Outer Green. There will be ample time to pause at our plateau and smoke a pipe under the oak-tree’s spreading branches.”

“Very well, Uncle,” Robin answered, as he gave the last pint of water in the watering-pot to a languishing heliotrope. “The poor thing is quite exhausted with the heat. Why should it be called cherry-pie?”

Mr. Trevarthon stood toying with a red rosebud he had plucked from a tall standard.

“I have heard it said that the heliotrope’s delicious fragrance is not unlike—which reminds me: How are the murillos ripening? That gourmand, Nero, feasted on African flamingoes, brains of Samian peacocks and tongues of nightingales; his emissaries ravished the earth for rare-tasting foods. Think you did they set before their imperial master a tart of Morello cherries?”

“Their red is fast changing to a beautiful deep purple: we

should have our first tart within a fortnight. Nero may have tasted of a tart of Morello cherries, but I am quite sure he never tasted of a tart of Manaccan plums."

A smile, half-affectionate, half-tolerant, spread over Robin's face as he regarded his uncle who was mechanically pulling the rosebud's stem through his buttonhole. Mr. Trevarthon was in a brown study; his expression and attitude suggested that he was listening to sounds unheard by ordinary mortals. Robin recalled his aunt's constantly recurring admonition: "I wish, Anthony, you could be persuaded to give ear to the folk of this world instead of straining to listen to the talk of eerie folk elsewhere."

"Why do you smile, Robin?"

"You often smile to yourself, Uncle."

"Do I? . . . I wonder . . ."

"If we are going for our walk?"

"I had forgotten: I was thinking of other things. . . . *'We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.'*"

The horses of the omnibus had been stabled at the Rose. The motor vehicles had returned on their screeching way, and no longer was there a fog of dust on the Penzance road. The Inner Green was deserted save for two frolicking boys. Brown paths on the Outer Green spread out before them in a network that enmeshed the grey-green furze-brakes and the dark green patches of bracken, with here and there a tree or thorn-bush. It seemed that the hot day had exhausted the townsfolk, so that they had not the energy to stir out of the town: the two only passed a pair of lovers, linked arm-in-arm and laughing happily, before they reached a little plateau in the heart of the Green, where they sat down under an oak-tree.

"There was a time when your aunt strongly objected to my smoking a pipe in the house. I have never considered a pipe vulgar, unless it were of a vulgar shape," Mr. Trevarthon observed, as he produced a blackened briar and tobacco-pouch. "Yesterday I met the worthy vicar who, as you know, neither smokes, takes wine, nor—an immaculate nature has the vicar. He asked after my health, and I informed him I had been suf-

fering from a little trouble of the digestion. . . . Now I think he was wrong: *smoking* has not upset my digestive organs. He reproached me for smoking too much. I seem to remember that he suggested that I might abstain from smoking during next year's season of Lent, and by so doing derive spiritual and physical benefit—he is full of good but unpleasant suggestions. As I profess and call myself a pagan—which he knows full well—I fail to see why I should look forward to a forty days' penance. . . . He could not think how I could manage to consume an ounce a day! Robin, I gave him Lamb's famous answer to Parr: '*I toiled after it, sir, as some men toil after virtue.*' The vicar, who could never be accused by his worst enemy of being a student, left me hurriedly; he *may* have been offended?"

"You *cannot* offend the vicar," observed Robin sagely.

"I fear you are very right," agreed his uncle with a chuckle, watching the blue smoke-spirals ascend from the bowl of his pipe and disappear into air so still as to remind him of a tired bird that had folded its pinions and gone to sleep. "The most spiritual hour of the day is the hour before the sun sets," he resumed suddenly, after a long pause. "The hour when Henliston casts her spell. . . . If I were walking along Church Street now I should walk softly, for that is a street of memories; one conjures up shadows there at every step. At the moth-hour one never meets stray night-staying tourists in the older ways; their noisy chattering is not heard in Church Street where sounds seem muffled: that is part of the spell. . . . I have lived in Henliston all my life in the house that my father and grandfather lived and died in. Today when I hear the word Henliston mentioned I visualise something more than merely a town set on a hill. . . . I remember when it was a joy to ride across the Goonhilly Downs on summer days . . . to follow the white, white road. In those days Kynance was our own, unshared. . . . You will find, my dear nephew, when you have lived in Henliston for half a century that you will love the place as I do: then you will look up at the soaring aeroplanes and say with a scowl, 'I remember. . . .'"

"Perhaps," a trifle impatiently.

"To eighteen fifty-two is old. As one grows older one postpones the period of old age. When I was twenty I said: *When I am forty*; now I am fifty I say: *When I am eighty*. Truthfully I can say I feel very much as I did at thirty. I only realise I am fifty when I recall the enthusiasms of twenty."

"I love Henliston, too: to me there is no place like it, nor ever will be. But Henliston is not enough! Never having had robust health, you have adapted yourself to circumstances. Your nature is different to mine. I cannot look forward to a placid existence—to the passing of spring, summer, autumn, winter, in endless monotony—until the end."

"But, Robin, consider! You are handicapped . . . those dreadful attacks of asthma that come when least expected. How can you hope to carve out a—"

"Dr. Tyacke sounded me six weeks ago when I had that last attack: he said I was sound as a bell."

"But in time . . . the strain on the heart must tell. Then, those fumes of stramonium. . . ."

"We have talked like this before, Uncle, and it's such waste of time. You say that I am handicapped by asthma and that I must, therefore, make up my mind to lead an uneventful, stay-at-home life. I say asthma or no asthma I am going to *live*. Dr. Tyacke says that most likely I shall grow out of it when I am one and twenty—I assume that I shall."

"You have an adventurous imagination, I fear."

"I shall not be satisfied to be a somebody among the nobodies; I would rather be a nobody among the somebodies." Robin laughed.

Mr. Trevarthon looked pained. The boy, he knew, had spoken impulsively, but he might have remembered that himself was an important individual among the unimportant, or as Robin expressed it, a somebody among the nobodies: Mr. Trevarthon of the Poplars, a dreamer of a dream-town. . . .

"I suppose I *have* led a placid existence," a little wistfully.

"Uncle Anthony, I was not thinking of you. I meant to . . ." Robin broke in ruefully, as in a flash he realised that what he had said applied to his uncle.

Mr. Trevarthon shook his head and made a silencing gesture. Then he said:

"I am trying to be honest with myself; Robin. If my life has been uneventful, it has been, after all, a happy one. As a boy and as a young man I was delicate. My father never urged me to adopt a profession: I was his only son, and he could not bear me to be out of his sight. Perhaps I have overfathered you as my father did me! . . . Very soon I acquired the dream-habit. I will say to you, my dear nephew, what Charles Kingsley said to the sweet maid: '*Do noble things, not dream them all day long. . .*' It would please me to believe that Henliston's secret motto is 'Yesterday'; it is more likely to be 'Tomorrow'—I admit it. If, in my youth, I dreamt of going out into the world in quest of gay adventure I said to myself, 'I will start tomorrow.' So the habit of dreaming grew, and tomorrow was always the next day and, as time passed, the next week, the next month, the next year, until—well, never mind. . . . If you wish, later on, you may set out, Sir Nobody!"

"Meaning *tomorrow*?"

"No. On this occasion I mean it not in the sense of a vague postponement, but when your health allows, when you have been free of an attack for a whole six months."

Robin sighed as he gazed at Henliston bathed in soft yellow light, at the magical outlines of the church-tower and the market-house away on the world's rim.

"If I could only look into the future," he said.

"Never mind the future. Look at my dream-town!" Mr. Trevarthon exclaimed.

"I am looking. . . . It is very beautiful."

"Not so very long ago there was a word-picture in one of the weekly reviews, entitled 'HENLISTON: *An old-world town.*' The writer might have composed it while sitting under this very tree at eventide. It was not without merit: but how can one describe a beautiful woman, a stranger, whom one has never heard speak?"

"And the picture?" interestedly.

"At a first glance one gains an impression of many small

houses, some white, some grey—for though they are all built of stone, many of them have been whitewashed—that occupy the ledges of the rocks that in some far-off time seem to have been flung against the face of a precipitous cliff and become imbedded there, like pellets thrown at a bank of clay. If one has newly come from cities, centres of culture, looking up at the town from this point one may playfully inquire if in Henliston there is such an instrument as a baby-grand—not to mention an adult! On more careful scrutiny one may discover paths, and even roads, that zigzag in and out among little terraces of houses and clumps of pines and poplars; and one may come to the conclusion that, after all, it might be possible for a horse and cart to carry a baby-grand, if not a grand piano, to a house on the top-most terrace: what at first glance appeared as a precipitous cliff becomes revealed as a rocky headland that juts out into the lake that is the brown stretch of the Inner Green.” Mr. Trevarthon paused, and puffed at his pipe. “Does the description amuse you, Robin? ‘Centres of culture’ and that bit about pianos I will vouch for.”

“It is as if you were reading the article aloud! Do go on, please.”

“Henliston proper is above and behind the great square-shaped rock—known as the Devil’s Rock—that crowns the headland.”

“Of course he noticed the tower?” For Mr. Trevarthon’s eyes were looking unseeingly at the sunset sky, and Robin feared that his thoughts had gone a-wandering.

“I am trying to recall . . . ah! It was to the effect that at some distant epoch the devil either must have disliked the Duchy exceedingly, for one was continually finding rocks that he had hurled at it and that bear his name, or it may have been that the devil once was young, that the rocks were his marbles, the Duchy where he played them.”

“And then?”

“The top of the rock on its three precipitous sides is edged by high stone walls: one glimpses them with difficulty, for poplars interspersed with bushy firs seem fain to conceal from curious eyes that look upwards from the Greens. At the angle

made by two of the walls a round tower forms a corner-piece and is silhouetted deeply mauve against a saffron sky. . . .”

“Those were not *his* words, Uncle.”

A rare smile lit up Mr. Trevarthon's face: he appreciated the compliment implied.

“Maybe not,” he admitted modestly, “but I have not done him justice in one respect: for the moment the word eluded me: he called the tower a *bartizan*: a very choice word that, though not quite appropriate.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Almost hidden by high enclosing walls, and set back on the mainland, is a grey-roofed house, its upper windows just visible; behind the grey roof the tops of a line of very tall poplars point darkly; beyond, grey roofs ascend to the market-house, the grey roofs of the old Georgian houses that one passes on the right coming down Hill Street before one arrives at the ancient inn, the Rose. . . . Mr. Author is pleased to say that the house on the Devil's Rock occupies the best position in the town, that its grey roof blends with the other grey roofs, and is in the picture; but he feels vaguely disappointed: a mediæval castle would not seem out of place crowning the rock that crowns the headland. He blames the *bartizan* for suggesting the castle.”

“I wish you had shown me the article. I don't believe it is half as good as the one you have just composed.”

“I meant to show it to you: that was why I cut it out. . . . I certainly kept it.” A hopeful expression appeared on his face. “I wonder if I placed it in that hideous green vase that stands on the library mantelshelf.”

“You must not let Aunt Cynthia hear you call it hideous! She says it is a remarkably fine piece of Bristol glass, and of *considerable* value. Whenever I see it I wonder what a green *blancmange* would taste like.”

“I may have done so,” said Mr. Trevarthon, after a pause in which he may or may not have been considering the merits or demerits of the vase: “I often stuff cuttings down its green throat. Dear me, what a lot of dust that vase must have swallowed since I last sorted out its contents. I will not have

the library dusted so often and my papers and books upset!" Lowering his voice he confided: "Your aunt has presented me with a brand new duster that I may do my own dusting, but I cannot remember where I put it. Well, well. Whenever I find the room dusty, I will borrow an old duster from the good Selina."

"When we go home I will turn out the vase, and search about for the duster: I have been known to find misplaced articles before."

"You speak truly, O clever youth!"

They sat watching a gorgeous sunset of rose and gold. In the windows of the little grey houses below the Devil's Rock lights were appearing, one by one.

"There was a time," said Mr. Trevarthon, knocking out the dottle of his pipe, "when I secretly considered if it would not be possible for that valuable vase to meet with an accident; but as I could never decide on the best kind of accident, the vase remains whole. If it were to be removed now I should miss it: eventually, if I live long enough, I may even admire it."

"It is growing chilly," said Robin, with a little shiver, "and we shall be late for supper."

"My dear Robin, why did you not give the signal before? I hope the mist that is rising will not affect you adversely."

"Oh, no. I feel all right."

"My rosebud is drooping," observed Mr. Trevarthon, as they walked towards the town. "I wish I had not picked it: by tomorrow it would have become a beautiful red rose."

It was Mr. Trevarthon who caught a chill: he died before another sunset with the lines from the *Rubáiyát* of the Persian philosopher-poet on his lips:

*"Into this Universe, and Why not knowing
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing."*

v

The Poplars is an oblong, a two-storied house built of stone that the years have mellowed to a faintly yellowish hue that is

not displeasing: a yellow house that is mauve in the shadow. It is approached by an avenue of tall elms. Where the elms cease, stone walls begin; they circle out gradually on each side until they meet the stonework at the ends of the house, enclosing in their sweep a gravelled space where seven venerable Lombardy poplars of great height stand in a row like sentinels.

Curtainless windows stare at one oddly; old-fashioned window-screens of perforated metal protect the lower rooms from curious eyes.

Set in the immensely high stone door-frame is the front door of thick oak—led up to by one broad and shallow step—on which brightly gleaming is a huge brass knocker, a ring held in a satyr's mouth. In the centre of the door-frame, at top, a crouching stone griffin clutches the Myall coat of arms. On the right, behind the seventh poplar, one perceives another oak door with a similar knocker, but the door is very much wider; and this door on being opened reveals a passage with a door to the left leading to the kitchens, a door to the right leading to stables, and a door at the end of the passage. On a summer's day the latter stands open, and there before one is a framed water-colour of an old-world garden, gay with flowers.

The front of the Poplars gives one no indication as to the nature of its inhabitants: guessing seems vain.

"Looking out from any one of the lower windows at the front of the house one only sees the trunks of poplar-trees and curving walls of stone, so one never looks out," said Robin, in describing the Poplars to Dion Aylmer in after days. Yet the walls are not ugly, for they, too, are time-mellowed and beautifully embossed with cushions of brown moss, soft and velvety; the trunks of the poplar-trees hold beauty for those who value line, but one has to stand by the entrance-gate at the end of the avenue to view them adequately. One cannot appreciate the culminating beauty of a hollyhock's spire if one looks down at the lowest part of a hollyhock's stalk: a poplar, like a hollyhock, has to be viewed as a whole.

Only from one of the library windows on the upper storey can one obtain a glimpse of Hill Street: the middle poplar is not exactly in front of it. One may view, in ascending order,

the Rose with its large porch, lattice-windows and gabled roof; a grocer's shop; a shop with a bill, TO LET, pasted across the window; and that architectural monstrosity, the Wesleyan chapel.

On a week-day there is little to see, unless the season is summer. In winter there are comings and goings at the Rose; occasionally a customer enters the grocer's; on an average, one vehicle in ten minutes passes up or down the street. The shop that informs the town it is TO LET was once occupied; Robin, for three months, often wondered what had induced the London firm of "Dealers in Antiques" to open a branch at Henliston; he was glad when one morning he saw the shop was empty; he had disliked the appearance of the firm's hook-nosed, loose-lipped representative, and had many grave doubts as to the antiquity of the antiques.

On a Sunday morning, in the latter years of Mr. Trevarthon's life, when the still air in the walled garden behind the Poplars was sorely troubled with the ringing of bells, when the tower's upper room was no longer a retreat because its silence was besieged by Sunday sounds, when Miss Trevarthon had withdrawn to her boudoir to consult the latest *Carter's Seed Catalogue* which presently she would push aside to clear a space on the baize-covered table for her patience cards, when Selina or Amelia or Alice rustling with clean starched petticoats had sallied forth prayer-book in hand on her way to church, when Selina or Amelia or Alice—according to whose "Sunday in" it was—hummed a hymn as she pattered about the kitchen preparing dinner, when Mr. Trevarthon and Robin were feeling vaguely depressed—as may happen to anyone of a sensitive nature in England on the Day of Rest—Mr. Trevarthon would say:

"Let us watch the Dissenters assemble."

Never in Robin's memory had his uncle referred to the Wesleyans but as Dissenters, and the Wesleyan chapel as the Assembly Rooms.

Looking out of the library window Mr. Trevarthon might say musingly: "There is a God: though on Sundays one may be tempted to doubt"; or whimsically: "I should like to lec-

ture to an assorted collection of bishops and local preachers on the *Winning Ways of Lucretia Borgia*"; or some saying of Sheridan's would tickle his tongue: "*Puritanism is a cloak worn by some persons in this world who will be warm enough without one in the next*"; or satirically, with his eyes on some staunch Dissenter's frock-coat and silk hat: "The unwritten Eleventh Commandment is: Thou shalt not be found out. Religion, my dear Robin, is very much more than the mumbling of a creed."

Presently the disturbing bells would be no longer heard, and Mr. Trevarthon would repair to the tower "to write a little"—and to dream much; Robin to the garden to busy himself among the flowers.

Since his uncle's death Robin avoided the library on a Sunday; for if he entered there a lump would rise in his throat. On all the days in the week Robin missed his uncle, but most on Sundays.

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER I

THE sunshine streaming in at the window had summoned the fairies that dwelt in the yellow roses of the faded wall-paper, and the room was flooded with soft golden light. The mahogany panel at the foot of the bed glowed like red-hot embers, and enchanted Robin with the depth of its rich chestnut colour. How good it was to wake to a fine day once again! This was the twenty-ninth of July, and there had only been half a dozen really fine days since the beginning of the month; during the last week the sun had hidden himself, and he awoke to find the mahogany shining dully, as if some giant had but just breathed on its mirror-like surface. In his diary the weather and the state of his health were faithfully recorded under each day; for the past five weeks each day's record concluded with the sentence "No news from Newton." As he fixed his gaze on the engraving of Millais', *The Boyhood of Raleigh*, given to him on his fifteenth birthday—or, rather, the fifteenth anniversary of his arrival at the Poplars—by his uncle, he decided that he would write to Mr. John Newton, publisher, if he received no word from him by the end of next week. He had written a romance of brave knights and fair ladies of mediæval times—what other sort of story could he have written when he only knew life in a sleepy old country town? How men and women lived and loved out in the great world he only knew by hearsay: one wanted something more than that before one embarked on a novel of modern life. He flattered himself he knew as much about mediæval times as many another novelist, who like himself had only gained his knowledge from the writings of others. When he had last glanced over his manuscript it seemed crude, immature—all those disparaging adjectives that are used by a reviewer when he considers a book to be a bad book had seemed applicable; it showed the author's uncertainties and doubtings; and the

story seemed unconvincing. . . . When he told Dr. Tyacke that he had written a novel the doctor said: "How long is it? I met a novelist the other day who said that a publisher will not look at a book that is less than eighty thousand words. Are you sure you have submitted your novel to the right publisher? However good it may be, if you send it to a publisher who does not publish your sort of novel he will not accept it." How was he to know which was the *right* publisher? *Moonbeams* was only seventy thousand words, but surely ten thousand less could not matter. One came across more novels published by John Newton than by any other firm; everyone read novels published by John Newton. Perhaps the book was not as bad as he imagined. Oh, surely he had not been wrong in sending *Moonbeams* to Newton? If only he knew; if only the letter that he hoped for would come! He passed his days awaiting, yet dreading, the postman's ring. . . .

From Uncle Anthony he had caught the habit of dreaming. Nowadays he spent hours and hours dreaming, sitting in the greenhouse or in the tower gazing straight before him, unseeing. "*If you can dream and not make dreams your master,*" Rudyard Kipling had written. Dreams had been master of his uncle; would they be his master too? . . . These were days of facts, not fancies. Should he try and write a novel that had something to do with the war? He hated everything to do with the war, yet the war fascinated him in spite of himself. War-novels were selling like hot cakes; of those he had read the only one that appealed to him was Hugh Walpole's *Dark Forest*—there was nothing obvious or "cheap" about that: it was fine! But he could not hope to write a book like *The Dark Forest*: he had not the pencraft of Hugh Walpole. The public wanted to read about the Western front, not the Eastern—unless a Hugh Walpole chose to write about it. Himself knew less of Russia and the Russians than he did of France and the French, and that was little enough. . . . Yesterday he passed two strangers who were standing outside the Rose. One said: "After the war, broadly speaking, there will be two classes of men: the men who went and came back, and the men who stayed at home." He would have liked to have

heard the other's reply, but, slowly as he had walked, he was out of hearing. What of the men who were unable to go, the medically rejected?

The splendid scarlet of the geraniums arranged in a bronze bowl that stood on the table by the bedside attracted his gaze; he had cut them from one of the choicest plants in the greenhouse; the flowers he loved for their colour, and the velvety leaves for their faint warm scent. The early-morning breeze coming in at the open window had loosened some scarlet petals, so that they made curious moving reflections on the polished table, suggesting the ripples on a clear pool into which pebbles were being continually tossed. He was very proud of the ebony table of Indian workmanship with its cunningly designed border of inlaid ivory, and of the bronze bowl sculptured in far Japan with its irises and dragon-flies; both table and bowl had been presented to him by Cousin Godfrey the Christmas before last. Aunt Cynthia had given a series of little sniffs and pursed her lips when she had seen them unpacked, "H'm! You seem to be a prime favourite with Godfrey Myall, Robin," she remarked acidly. Though he had smiled at her provocatively he felt sad, for he had detected the quaver in her voice. . . . Aunt Cynthia had always disliked Cousin Godfrey; she resented his weekly visits; she regarded the presents that he made to him as a form of bribery: she feared that he would come to care more for Cousin Godfrey than for herself. He liked Cousin Godfrey; they were excellent friends, though they had little in common. Cousin Godfrey was always inviting him to "come out to Myall, and stay as long as you like." He seldom accepted the invitation, for he knew his aunt objected to his going—not that she had ever actually said so. When he went he seldom stayed longer than two days. He always enjoyed himself at Myall Manor; it was a fine old house with long winding passages and short unexpected flights of stairs; the library was his happy hunting-ground. Years ago, when he had expressed admiration for some rare and beautiful thing—the rooms at Myall were packed with rare and beautiful things—Cousin Godfrey would say: "Take it back with you, Robin, and welcome," which he had found embarrass-

sing. Nowadays, he admired silently. Cousin Godfrey had remembered most of the things he had admired in the past: one by one they arrived at the Poplars for his birthday or Christmas present. One could not return a gift; he had done his best: to Cousin Godfrey he had repeated Aunt Cynthia's frequent observation: "One day there will be a mistress at Myall Manor who will likely enough present an heir to her husband. Neither the future Lady Myall nor her son will be best pleased when they learn, as they must, that you have robbed them." Cousin Godfrey had looked grim for a moment and then laughed loudly, "That's a hard saying! May not a man do what he likes with his own chattels?" To him Cousin Godfrey was kindness and generosity personified, whatever he might be to his tenants. . . . The room was filled with Cousin Godfrey's presents. Some of them were not suitable for a bedroom; but Aunt Cynthia would not hear of them being placed in any other room: "They are sent to *you*, Robin. Please keep them in your own room." Long ago he had admired the ebony table and the bronze bowl in the bedroom he occupied when at Myall Manor.

The bronze bowl with its overhanging flowers and leaves, the glittering brass candlestick, the box of matches, the little round brass tray, the green tin and a fallen geranium-petal were all reflected in the ebony pool. The brass tray and the bronze bowl reflected each other, and were both reflected in the base of the brass candlestick.

"The man who chose such a harsh colour for that tin should be sent to fight the Germans," said Robin, as he sat up and stretched his arms.

He had always hated the tin, while he had grown to love its contents: the tin contained certain Indian herbs ground to a fine powder. Hiram's Asthma Cure stood out startlingly in black letters against a green background. It was absurd to use the word cure: there was no cure for asthma. He had tried a hundred so-called cures; but Hiram's was the only one that relieved him when he had an attack. Every night of his life he burnt a tiny pyramid of powder on the brass tray and inhaled its fumes before he settled himself for sleep; when an attack

was on, once every hour of the long days and the longer nights "Vesuvius erupted"—so Aunt Cynthia referred to the operation. The room and everything in it reeked of the fumes of Hiram's. In a day or two this particular tin would be empty, when he would give it to his aunt who already possessed some fifty green tins; she kept flower-seeds in them; she found them a "nice useful size;" towards the end of summer she would frequently ask: "Is that tin empty yet?" . . . He drew a deep breath, and gave a glad sigh when he found he had scarcely a trace of huskiness. Asthma had kept away for nearly a month: long enough to enable him to recover sufficient strength to fight the next attack. July and August were usually his bad months: the heat tried him. Extreme heat or cold, extreme depression or excitement, all extremes brought back the enemy. The special diet prescribed by Dr. Tyacke had not seemed to help him at all. There was nothing wrong with his digestion. Of course it would be an act of madness for an asthmatic to eat a cold pasty for supper—that he knew by experience. . . . It was seven o'clock. Already Aunt Cynthia was busy among the snapdragons underneath his window: he could hear the snip-snip of her scissors.

Remembering that it was Saturday and flower-morning, Robin sprang out of bed.

At nine o'clock on a Saturday morning Mrs. Rendall—a cheerful-faced woman of ample figure who, though her dress might suggest that she was on the very edge of her finances, was never so poor that she could not afford to indulge her weakness for peppermint-lozenges—would call at the Poplars, and carry away in a wide shallow basket four dozen bunches of flowers which she proffered for sale at two-pence a bunch outside the market-house. *Once* she had to call again at noon for another dozen or two. On every six bunches sold she was allowed two-pence-halfpenny.

Miss Trevarthon would not have dared to hint at selling flowers from her garden had her brother been alive. As a matter of fact, the idea had never entered her head until the beginning of last June, when one Saturday morning she had stopped before Carlyon's shop in Packet Street and gazed at

the flowers displayed in jam jars on the shelf behind the fruit. Later in the day she had broached her plan to Robin:

"There are many good flowers in the garden going to waste. I have been wondering if it might be possible to sell some of them. . . . One must study economy in these war-days."

"My dear Aunt Cynthia! Surely you—" Robin began, horrified at the suggestion.

"Well! And why not? I may remind you that the income-tax is five shillings in the pound—maybe it will rise to ten! . . . A few shillings will be useful towards the purchase of green tins: Hiram's is another thing that has gone up in price."

Robin knew that his aunt did not mean to hurt his feelings, but he was sensitive, and could never forget that he had no right to the name of Trevarthon. He suggested tactfully that folk would think it odd if Miss Trevarthon of the Poplars were to turn florist.

"You mean to say that it will set folk gossiping? My brother used to say that a gossip is one who puts two and two together and makes it five. If the gossips applied themselves to making their four shillings do the work of five, it would be more profitable than discussing the affairs of others. I have been called odd by the county—who have nothing to do but gossip—for longer than I care to remember. If you are considering the townfolk please do not disturb yourself; when they gossip they always wind up with 'Miss Trevarthon is a character . . . her cousin is Lord Myall.'"

Miss Trevarthon was a true prophet: the county was amused, and regarded her flower-selling as only another proof of her eccentricity: the townfolk reminded each other that Miss Trevarthon was cousin to Lord Myall.

Robin associated flower-mornings with green tins.

Presently, having returned from his cold bath, Robin stood hesitatingly regarding the rep cushion that padded the low window-seat. Once the cushion must have been a bright green, but summer suns had faded it to a greenish-yellow. The window-seat looked inviting, and he decided to indulge in a warm sun-bath, just for a moment or two.

A wasp, having tasted a Manaccan plum that was unripe,

whirred angrily in short zigzag flights; after hovering uncertainly about the honeysuckle-flowers the raider pillaged the stored sweetness of a salmon-pink horn.

"Better sweet flower than sour fruit," commented Robin sagely.

He regarded the honeysuckle as his own particular property. In springtime he had pleaded with his aunt for its life when that lady declared "The woodbine is strangling the plum-tree, and must be rooted up." He pointed out that the plum-tree was the largest of its kind in the district, and covered the whole wall of the house: it was not a tree that could be easily strangled; and, moreover, the honeysuckle with a curious considerateness had pushed its slender grey thread of trunk between the branches trained in parallel lines and the stone-work. Miss Trevarthon admitted that perhaps after all the "weed" might not be injuring the tree, and agreed that it should not be molested "for the present, at any rate."

Every morning and evening there was wafted in at Robin's window the honeysuckle's sweet-scented message of thanks.

The snip-snip of the scissors sounded farther away. Robin hoped that she had been sparing of the snapdragons; they were such bizarre flowers, like small gargoyles. Three years ago he had brought back some wild ones from Trewoof which he had planted in the Wild-flower garden near the tower; transplanting had agreed with them: today their flowers were almost as large as the cultivated ones. Peter mentioned them in his last letter: "*How is the toadflax you planted growing this year? Something about the shape of the face of the first German prisoner I ever set eyes on reminded me of a toadflax flower.*" Toadflax was a good name: their orange-and-lemon mouths rather reminded one of toads. He hated to call a flower by its botanical name: snapdragon was so much more intimate than *antirrhinum*.

Robin poked his head out of the window.

Miss Trevarthon was stooping over the patch of sweet-williams. On her arm she carried a small basket with a lid in which would be interned any stray slug, snail or caterpillar that she might find. Even as he watched, her hand dived into

the flowers to capture a large snail. She examined the frothing "gasteropod mollusc"—so had Uncle Anthony sometimes referred to a snail—with interest, and he heard her say: "H'm," as she popped it into her basket. Later, she would crush her captives one by one: a gruesome sight. He had often admired her instinct: she seemed to know exactly the lurking-places of the gnawing insects. In the middle of the path Senton, with his tail pointing at the sky like a telegraph-pole, was rubbing against a concave basket, that almost brimmed over with freshly-cut flowers, causing it to sway perilously. To upset or not to upset? His suspense was ended when, at last, a rose toppled over, and in falling spilt its red petals on the path like wine. The surprised kitten made an amazing pirouette, recovered himself, sniffed at the rose-petals and, sitting down a little distance away, regarded the basket with a pained expression. Kittens were amusing to watch. Senton, washing his face, espied him; paused paw in air, and gave a faint mew.

"What are you mewing for now, you foolish cat?"

Senton looked at his mistress, but vouchsafed no reply: he was not mewing to her!

The tabby kitten was a recent addition to the household. Selina had found him, mewing plaintively, with his four feet bunched together like the cat on the weather-vane of the Rose, on the granite ball that topped one of the stone gate-posts, where, presumably, he had been placed by some mischievous boy. Miss Trevarthon was not fond of cats—but no one ever remembered hearing her say that she was fond of anybody or anything. When the kitten was shown to her she said:

"Why did you bring it indoors? Put the creature back where you found it, that its owner may fetch it away!"

Selina protested warmly: "But, Miss Cynthia, I can't put'm back on that slippery ball where 'ee was trying to balance as if 'ee was a horse at the circus! . . . The poor little mite's starved for a drink o' milk."

"Then give the creature milk. Have you any idea to whom it belongs?"

"No, miss. . . . Look at the handsom' white chest of'm."

"I see you wish to keep it, Selina. You may—on condition it never comes beyond the kitchen-door."

"*Thank you, miss! . . .* What'll I call the poor little cat?"

The kitten was purring loudly in Selina's arms. Miss Trevarthon inspected it over the tops of her reading-glasses.

"H'm, I think it is a tom-cat: it has that sort of face."

"Do'ee think so, miss?" Selina laughed.

A hint of a smile stirred the corners of Miss Trevarthon's mouth as she said: "Call it Senton."

"But, Miss Cynthia! What a name for the cat, I declare!"

To Robin Miss Trevarthon confided that there was something about the shape of the kitten's face that recalled her great-great-grandfather's in the portrait that hung in the dining-room at Myall Manor. Robin marvelled: his aunt had not visited Myall for five and twenty years. She divined his thoughts.

"I have not visited Myall during Godfrey's reign, I know. I have a long memory, Robin, and I can see Senton Myall's face after all these years if I shut my eyes. Reynolds painted a lie: I am certain the first baron never looked like his portrait; for the portrait is of a strong-willed, ambitious-looking politician: if he were that he would have continued to serve his country in Parliament, instead of wasting his time as a dancing-master—and a male-nursemaid to twins!"

Robin was of the opinion that the kitten was of the gentler sex, but he held his peace: time would do the telling.

How resentful his aunt had been the other day when the vicar called, and in the course of conversation referred to her ancestor as the famous Beau Myall. "*Infamous,*" she snapped. The poor man did not understand.

"Senton, come out from there! . . . Drat the cat, if he has not broken off a petunia! Go and scratch in the manure-heap if you *must* scratch—ssh!"

"Good morning, Aunt Cynthia."

"Gracious! How you startled me, Robin."

The scissors, the pruning-implement, the bunch of keys and the other articles on her *châtelaine* rattled metallically as she rose from the petunias and came a step or two nearer. Seldom

had her eyes seemed so vividly blue as they looked up at him; they were the blue of the lobelia in the border. When her hair became quite white she would look wonderful, if her eyes did not fade; he did not think they would. She might live to be ever so old, but it would not occur to one to call her faded: there surely could never be anything dim or pale about Aunt Cynthia.

"I will be down in five minutes to give you a hand with the flowers."

"You look fresh enough, so I suppose you passed a restful night. . . . Something very severe will have to be done to Senton: he has worked havoc among the last lot of sweet-peas I sowed, and has just been damaging the petunias—under my very nose, if you please! You may help to tie up some bunches in the tower, but I will not have you bending over the beds: it is hurtful to your chest. Besides, you pick too many buds. . . . It is going to be a very hot day; I am glad: some of the zinnias are looking sadly. I shall not plant any next year unless the war is over, for I believe what the vicar said was true: all that gun-firing upsets the clouds. Zinnias come to nothing without plenty of sunshine and—" She pounced suddenly among the snapdragons. "Dear me, that is one of the biggest slugs I've seen this summer!" As she raised the lid of her basket she added: "The garden is infested with the slimy things. They tell me ducks like slugs. Now I wonder if it would pay to keep ducks so that they might eat the slugs?"

"They would do far more damage to the garden than the kitten. In time, one may train a kitten; one cannot train a duck: a duck has no sense."

"If you ask me, one cannot train a kitten! . . . Mrs. Jago makes a lot of money out of her ducks."

"There is a stream at Trewoof. Ducks need water," Robin reminded.

Miss Trevarthon seemed to be considering. "There is the rain-water tank," said she.

Robin knew that his aunt had not the slightest intention of keeping ducks. And, of course, she was perfectly well aware that the top of the tank was eight feet or so from the ground,

and, therefore, not to be reached easily by a duck. She loved to suggest some plan that would provoke his opposition, and when he was in the mood he humoured her by enlarging on the plan suggested: it was a harmless amusement.

"Ducks are not particularly keen on slug-hunting, I believe."

"H'm. Are you sure?"

"Slugs often crawl to positions that are out of the reach of ducks . . . as high as the top of the rain-water tank."

She gave him a quick glance.

"Ducks might be useful, all the same. If the manure of poultry is excellent for vegetables and flowers, why not that of ducks?"

"Why not?" echoed Robin, with a smile.

Miss Trevarthon perceived the smile, and knew that she was found out.

"Those Manaccans require sun, too," she said, changing the subject.

Robin ignored this saying.

"I think you look sweet in that hat, Aunt Cynthia."

The hat in question was Miss Trevarthon's summer hat; that is to say, it came out at about the same time as the hollyhocks' first flowers and was seen no more after the last sunflower had shed its petals, and like the sunflowers it was yellow. It was a hat of good quality; its straw was plaited at Livorno—Leghorn—and its shape might be described as Dolly Varden. In a box upstairs were three similar hats, only their shade was cream rather than yellow. Many years ago when Miss Trevarthon discovered them poked away in a dark corner of a milliner's shop—Miss Roach's in Hill Street—she had observed: "Dear me, how very old-fashioned, and consequently, I suppose, unsaleable." The more she disparaged the hats the more apologetic for their inclusion in her stock Miss Roach became. Presently Miss Trevarthon offered to purchase the four hats at a nominal price—which she named—and the offer was gratefully accepted. The first hat still being in an excellent state of preservation, Miss Trevarthon felt troubled at her extravagance when her eye chanced to fall on the box containing the other three: she would have to live to the age of

Methuselah if she were to wear them all out. Her hat lasted so well because it never suffered from pricks; Miss Trevarthon never used "dangerous hat-pins"; she kept her hat on her head with an elastic band that came under her chin, which she declared was much more serviceable than "any of your cherry-colour ribbons."

Miss Trevarthon's hats, the summer one and the winter one—a basin of beaver fur—were as familiar to Henlistonians as the market-house clock; the clock only told them the hour of day or night: the hats marked the seasons.

As a small boy Robin asked his aunt why she wore her hat so naked. That lady replied: "Fal-lals in a hat are a foolishness: they only collect dust."

"I look *sweet*, do I? What do you mean exactly? The other day you said a pretty girl might look bewitching if she were to wear a hat like mine, but that for me, your ancient aunt, such a hat was most unsuitable."

"Oh, Aunt Cynthia, how can you? I only said your hat had a juvenile tilt."

"Same thing! What is one to think? Male things are as fickle as—as chameleons. My hat is most comfortable and protects me from the sun. Fashions don't trouble me!"

"Why does the miller wear a white hat?" asked Robin facetiously.

"None of your nonsense! If you sit there much longer you'll be catching a cold. I heard the kitchen grandfather chime the quarter past seven."

"It is very warm here in the window-seat. I will be with you in five minutes," untying the cord of his dressing-gown.

"H'm. You would have been in the garden now if you had begun to dress when you first said that," said his aunt, with an air of finality.

CHAPTER II

HAVING descended the servants' staircase two steps at a time, Robin rushed through the kitchens and along the passage that led to the garden.

One could enter the garden by the flight of granite steps that led down from an oaken door strangely set in the wall of the breakfast-room; but the door was only opened when one of Miss Trevarthon's callers expressed a wish to see the garden, a rare occurrence.

"Did you ever in your life see such an absurdity?" Miss Trevarthon would often say as she scowled at the oaken door. "How long would the carpet last, I should like to know, if one came in and out that way! It is just the kind of foolishness one might expect to find in a house designed by a dancing-master. . . ." She would continue to abuse her ancestor for many minutes, especially if her cousin chanced to be present.

As Robin explained to Selina: "Aunt Cynthia decided long ago that she disapproved of the first Lord Myall, and she certainly dislikes the present one. She finds immense relief to her feelings in abusing poor old Senton when Cousin Godfrey is in the room, for she knows Cousin Godfrey is very proud of their great-great-grandfather. She would prefer to abuse Cousin Godfrey himself—why I don't quite know—but that she dare not do: she is rather afraid of him, though, of course, she would never own to it. Cousin Godfrey only grins: he knows her ways."

Towards the end of the passage Robin paused, though two more strides would have taken him into the sunlit garden. He lingered there anticipating the caress of the warm-scented air: if one felt a little shivery one more fully appreciated the sudden change of temperature. Even on the hottest summer day the air of the passage struck chilly.

At noontide on just such a day last year he had bathed in the stream that skirted Trewoof. Though the sun was scorching the stream was ice-cold with flood water, for it had rained heavily all the previous day and night. He had tired of trying to swim against the strong current. As he splashed in the

shallows he watched Peter clamber up the bank, scattering drops of water like handfuls of diamonds with his every movement. He admired Peter's splendid muscles; it had not occurred to him before that Peter's hair was a true fox-red when it was wet.

"Come out, Robin, now do. You've been in long enough," Peter had said, as he stood with arms folded, looking down.

Peter looked a veritable giant up there on the bank. But he did not heed Peter's advice, for he wished to feel thoroughly chilled before he emerged: the colder he felt, the more he would presently enjoy flinging himself down on the warm grass and basking in the sunshine. . . . That was the eventful day Peter decided to "join up." The stream at a little distance from their bathing-place lost itself in the waters of the Dober, the river that separated Trewoof land from the Outer Green. A band of urchins playing at soldiers were shouting "Tipperary" lustily as they marched along the path that edged the Outer Green. Peter, who was already dressed, climbed a little slope and parted the branches of a sycamore to watch them pass. Suddenly at the signal of their leader they changed their tune:

*"If you want to join the Army
Join the Duke's!
If you want to kill the Kaiser
Join the Duke's!"*

Peter stood peering through the branches after the boys must have long been out of sight. They were shouting "Tipperary" again; more and more faintly sounded that marching song.

"Damn the war!" cried Peter, as a released branch sprang into place.

He knew he looked surprised: it was seldom Peter expressed himself so forcefully. Peter helped him on with his coat. . . . He was thinking that the hair on Peter's head was fox-red and the hair on Peter's limbs was red-gold, and he kept saying to himself "red-gold and fox-red, fox-red and red-gold:" the words pleased him.

"Mother, Treza, and young Bert will have to manage as

best they can while I'm away. I shall join the D.C.L.I.," said Peter simply.

At last! It had always taken Peter a long time to make up his mind on matters even of minor importance. Suddenly he knew why his friend had been so reserved, so aloof, ever since the early spring—Peter had been making up his mind. Of course, he had guessed the nature of Peter's trouble, but feared to question: the world, his world, without Peter would be a desolation. It had been bad enough when Uncle Anthony died, but if Peter were to go—and not come back. . . . Now that Peter had announced his intention it seemed that no longer was there any warmth in the sunshine.

"I have to go home for lunch," he said with a shiver.

"But, Robin, Master Robin, you were going to spend the day with us!"

He had walked off without answering. All the way home his brain was busy with all possible compounds of red: fox-red, russet-red, Pompeian-red, rose-red . . . *blood-red*.

That night he had a severe attack of asthma.

"Why must you be always going to Trewoof? It is not seemly that you should make such a friend of young Jago. Bathing with him, too, without a stitch of clothing in that dirty water where the ducks swim—that is how you have brought on the asthma," quoth Aunt Cynthia.

He had felt too exhausted to tell her once more that the water was crystal clear, that the ducks never came so far down stream: one would not have known there were ducks on the farm if a white feather had not come floating past the bathing-place now and again. The attack of asthma was caused not so much by neglecting Peter's advice as by learning Peter's decision.

Aunt Cynthia showed her fondness for him by being jealous of every single soul for whom he had the slightest affection, Selina not excepted; it was very tedious.

Deciding that it was better to take no risks Robin passed out of the gloom into the sunshine.

To the time of Mr. Trevarthon's death the daffodils followed the snowdrops and crocuses in the grass under the fruit-

trees in that part of the garden that was called the orchard; each year the flowers came up in their accustomed places. Day after day, month after month, year after year, as one paced the garden's tiled paths one might see the same flowers spring up in their seasons in the same spot as they flourished before: where a plant had been set there it remained for all time. And yet there was no sameness: with each growing thing there was some small point of difference, so that to walk round the garden with an eye for the perennials was a journey of discovery.

The constant change amid fixity was part of the charm of the Poplars garden. As the garden aged it improved—in Mr. Trevarthon's opinion.

As fishing appealed to Izaak Walton so, one might say, gardening appealed to Anthony Trevarthon. First and foremost, the garden to him was a place of retreat, a private study; it struck rich cords of silence so that one might forget the outside world. He knew and loved each plant as a living thing; a plant, a flower was something more than a bit of form and colour. He was an Apollodorus, only raising his sceptre when the repose of the garden was threatened. Under his direction Bob Mabott and Robin were the gardeners. Often when Miss Trevarthon wished to replant or make some alteration she was forced to yield to her brother's opposition, for he was conservative, hating change.

He who made the garden had planted those flowers and herbs that "doe best perfume the air," which seemed to show that he was a scholarly gardener who had pondered his Bacon to good purpose: like the Elizabethan he allowed that fragrance was as important as beauty. So on a summer's day the garden was a fragrant place where the sweet scents of flowers were subservient to the aromatic scents of herbs, of marjoram and rosemary, lavender and rue.

In her brother's lifetime Miss Trevarthon, much against her will, was obliged to confine her genius for order to the house. Perverse woman! She was fonder of the garden she did not rule than of the house she did. She had ordered the house for so many years that there was little left to order. The garden's

disorder fascinated her, while she railed at it: always was she wishful to "rectify" this or that.

The more flowers, the better garden, was Miss Trevarthon's tenet: quantity rather than quality. She preferred flowers of the brightest hues. Plants that produced inconspicuous flowers or no flowers at all, were anathema. With her orderliness went a contrasting weakness for buying packets of flower-seeds with surprising names; one never knew what manner of showy folk the strangers might be; she sowed the seeds secretly, and invariably in the most unsuitable places: either they never came up, or else grew with such abounding vigour that they threatened to overrun the garden. This weakness greatly worried Mr. Trevarthon, but he was unsuccessful in breaking her of it.

For several months after her brother's death Miss Trevarthon kept the garden sacred to his memory; she declared that she had not the heart to make certain alterations that when her brother was its guardian she considered desirable, imperative.

In the first instance temptation came upon her unawares, accidentally, as it were: the devil is insidious and cunning. On a November day when the garden was enveloped in a mist Miss Trevarthon walked therein. She was thinking of the varieties of tulips alluringly set out in a catalogue that had been delivered by the postman that morning. A tall box that had taken at least a hundred years of careful pruning and trimming to shape into a wonderful spiral loomed out of the mist. Temptation came to her; and her pious resolutions were as if they had not been. "After all, it is a dingy thing that bears no flowers," she told herself, as she hurried off to the tower to fetch a spade. Like many thin women Miss Trevarthon was very strong; she dug deeply about the roots of the box, and in an amazingly short time the tree with a tearing sound fell across the path. Where the tree had stood she made a round bed to which she brought the snowdrop, crocus and daffodil bulbs from the orchard, and those of tulip, hyacinth, narcissus and Spanish iris that grew, here and there, in the garden. Robin protested in vain when he surprised his aunt in the

act of digging up a whole colony of wild hyacinths. She was adamant. "It will be much better to have all the bulbs together in one bed," said she. "We shall be able to watch the flowers following each other in rotation, which will be very pleasant: first there will be the snowdrops. . . ."

Robin, almost in tears, had taken his troubles to Selina: "Aunt Cynthia has uprooted the spiral box of whose shape Uncle Anthony was so proud! And, not content with that, she must needs make a large round bed there edged with hideous tiles, and is collecting bulbs from all over the garden to put in it."

The back of the house itself made the fourth wall that enclosed the garden. Early in the new year, while Robin was spending a few days at Myall, Miss Trevarthon, availing herself of his absence, had demolished the herbaceous border, for she reasoned: "In summer its height retards the ripening of the plums on the lower branches of the tree, and keeps out the daylight from the lower rooms of the house."

This was deemed by Robin a worse sacrilege than the uprooting of the box.

Soon after, he arrived on the scene too late to prevent the sweeping away of a row of box-bordered beds that held ancient rose-bushes. Here Miss Trevarthon made one long bed which she edged with tiles—she had bought a "job line"—making it companion and parallel to the bed on the other side of the path that was recently the herbaceous border.

"One has to watch Aunt Cynthia whenever she is in the garden: she takes an idea into her head, and in half an hour—it is marvellous the damage she can do in half an hour if she is left alone," said Robin to Selina.

Elsewhere in the garden Miss Trevarthon's taste obtuded itself in minor alterations. After much coaxing Robin had induced his aunt to confine her activities—more or less—to the long beds she had made peculiarly her own by planting low-growing, bright-hued flowers in orderly plots.

Robin remembered that it was but yesterday that all seemed wrong with the world. Neither letter nor parcel had come from Newton; no letter had come from Peter; it rained the

livelong day, as on many previous days. Henliston, except on a market-day, was a town of old men, women and children: One by one the young men had gone to the war. On a day of sunshine it was depressing to walk up Hill Street, but on a wet day the drabness of Hill Street was unbearable. The war permeated everybody and everything everywhere, and made life hideous! It was bad enough to be in it, but to be out of it was intolerable. "Life is so hideous that the only way of enduring it is to avoid it," Flaubert had once said in a letter. So he had shut himself up in the tower with Arthur Machen's *Hill of Dreams*, and *The Times*, getting up from his chair now and again to look out of the window in the hope that he might see a break in the clouds. The Outer Green was flooded in places, . . . Even the fall of Brody announced in the Petrograd *communiqué* failed to cheer him. As he stooped over the war-map and stuck a green-headed pin in the circled dot that stood for Brody he had wondered how long it would be before the Russians captured Kovel and Lemberg. . . . It seemed that this time the British *had* captured the Delville Wood. How long would it take them to reach Bapaume? When the much-talked-of Franco-British offensive had been launched on the first of the month the villages of Montauban, Mametz, Dompierre, Béquincourt and the rest of them were captured in a few hours. The promise of the first day had not been fulfilled: a few more villages—the sites of villages—had been occupied over many days, but at the present rate of progress it would take many, many months to reach and capture Bapaume; and when they did *would* the Germans withdraw their line to "positions already prepared?" He very much doubted, for the enemy's organisation had been proved over and over again. One could not help having a sneaking admiration for the thoroughness of the brutes. He knew progress must be slow: guns had to be brought up and new positions consolidated. Yet one could not help wondering whether the Germans would be quite so slow in advancing if the boot were on the other leg. . . . He was like a child at kindergarten with his pins and sheet of paper. . . . He could not settle down to read *The Hill of Dreams*. . . . A sentence in Peter's

last letter haunted him: "*We did not know how happy we were until the war came.*"

Even as yesterday compared to today, so the gloomy passage was to the sunlit garden.

Robin determined to forget the war until *The Times* arrived; he wished he had the strength of mind not to read the paper at all. Surely today he would hear from Peter, and perhaps from Newton. It was only natural that one should be interested in reading the news of the war, that one should be anxious as to the welfare of one's best friend, but it was absurd that one's thoughts should dwell on such a trifling matter as the acceptance or rejection of one's novel when men were killing men every minute of the day. . . . The novel had taken him eighteen months to write; good or bad, it was a thing of his own creating to which he had given of his best. No! The fate of his novel was not a *trifling matter*, for after all the importance of anything in this world is precisely the importance one attaches to it oneself.

Whenever Robin entered the garden he felt a little ache, for he missed the herbaceous border and the ancient rose-bushes. He wished he were a stranger viewing the garden for the first time: a stranger would see little amiss with it, and would be unaware that picturesque disorder had been dethroned.

It was clever of the wise old sun to have hidden for a spell: he knew that when he chose to reveal himself he would be the better appreciated.

Miss Trevarthon's beds were ablaze with flowers. The parti-coloured sweet-williams vied with the roses in the richness of their velvets. Gorgeous were the zinnias and in little need of pity; on careful scrutiny one here and there looked draggled and its colour had run, but as a whole they made a pageant. In just such fine colours had Robin's fancy decked the knights and ladies of his book; in buff, cinnamon, brick-red, vermilion, coral-pink, purple, maroon, bronze and gamboge-yellow. Princess Iolde, the heroine, might have worn a velvet gown of as soft a texture as the sweet-williams, of as rare a

red as that zinnia's pigeon-blood-ruby, for of dark complexion was she, with hair of raven-black.

The basket of flowers had disappeared from under his window; the fallen rose and its spilt petals had been "tidied up."

Along the red-tiled paths towards the tower went Robin. Often on his way he crushed underfoot the wild thyme that grew in the little tufts between the tiles and the pungent scent of it rose on the air.

As he came through the orchard and looked up at the tower's grey-slatted cupola he felt glad that the holly-tree showed no signs of dying. On the cupola's slightly-flattened top a bird had dropped a holly-berry which had taken root in the shallow covering of wind-dust and cast forth a shoot. Continually was Miss Trevarthon saying that the bird had been very careless to drop the berry just there; but she took comfort in the thought that the young tree must soon die for lack of soil. Robin was of opinion that the bird, having mistaken the cupola for a Christmas pudding, had shown a perspicacity unusual in a bird. The young tree seemed as if it wished to demonstrate how well a young tree might grow in the minimum of soil: it was now some eighteen months of age and persisted in thriving.

The tower's lower room contained gardening tools and various gardening accessories, a trestle-table, and a narrow stone staircase that hugged the wall by which one perilously approached the room above. Twilight reigned on the sunniest day, for the cobwebs of years densely covered the little window. The door had stood half-open for so long a time that no longer might it be shut: its hinges had rusted away.

Robin recalled the fine summer evening when Mr. Trevarthon plucked a spray of jasmine and ecstatically murmured: "Florets white as snow on jade-green stems so delicately proportioned, so primly chaste, calling to mind the ladies of Botticelli's limning. With each waft of perfume I listen to a stave of some sweet song sung in a boy's clear treble that steals faintly on the air, for I listen to a song sung long ago on a jasmine-scented night in Padua." Miss Trevarthon who,

arriving unexpectedly, had overheard her brother's tribute to the jasmine asked: "What ridiculous nonsense are you talking, Anthony?"

Almost to the cupola had the great jasmine climbed. Long trails of it hung over the lintel of the door so that on entering or leaving the tower one parted them as one parts a bead-curtain.

Now Miss Trevarthon had long cherished a dislike for the jasmine that straggled about the tower; in the previous autumn she had rooted it up and set in its stead a Virginia creeper that grew doubtfully: meanwhile the tower stood like a miserable naked thing, its yellow stone darkly mottled where the jasmine had most densely grown.

"The Virginia creeper does not seem sure whether to live or die," said Robin as he joined his aunt who was standing at the table busily tying up a bunch of flowers that he perceived at a glance would be one of Mrs. Rendall's "returns."

"So you *have* arrived! . . . H'm; you hope the plant will die. I cannot think why you dislike it so. I think it will grow: when it does it will look very much tidier than the jasmine did, and in autumn the red leaves will look cheerful and bright."

"Merry and bright."

"I said cheerful."

"I know."

"Mrs. Rendall only sold twenty-six bunches last Saturday. She should do better today: it is fine, and there will be more folk about."

"I hate fine market-days even more than I do wet ones—since the war. Though, as in pre-war days, the town is packed with farmers and their wives, there is none of the old bustle, no life and colour in the crowd. The few young men one sees—those who do not hide at home on the farms—annoy: in consequence of being exempted they are either brazenly self-satisfied, or else have a hang-dog air and slink about while wishing they had the power of becoming invisible when they chance to catch some appraising eye. . . . Cousin Godfrey was telling me that Uren at Bartinney has succeeded in keeping back not

only his son but the two farm-hands: all that there is to do at Bartinney can easily be done by himself and one man! It is disgusting that so many able-bodied men who are *not* indispensable should escape military service. Some of these tribunal-gentlemen scarcely seem to realise that England is at war: read the reports in *The Times!* Poor Mrs. Jago has to manage Trewoof as best she may with only Treza and Bert, aged sixteen, to help her. They have taken away the two hands; and before the war Peter found it difficult to run the place without employing more labour—I am not speaking of harvest-time. The whole system is unfair: men are left when they should be taken, and vice versa. . . . Peter need not have gone: he was exempted. It is evident that it does not pay to be patriotic.”

“Because Peter Jago has gone to the war you seem to think that every eligible man on the farms ought to go, too. What would happen to the crops I should like to know! . . . That youngest Jago is a well-grown lad. And Treza is as good as a man about the place: she’s as strong as a horse.”

“Yes, Treza is wonderful. Perhaps I have exaggerated. But if Peter has gone why should not others go? . . . I wonder what Uncle Anthony would think about it all if he were alive.”

“He would try not to think about it.”

“Still, I wish he were here.”

“Wishes won’t wash dishes, as the maids say.”

“I suppose Cousin Godfrey will ride in today.”

“*Indeed.* Did he tell you that that was his intention?”

“He said he hoped to. . . . We see him most Saturdays.”

“It is a pity that it never occurs to him to consult the convenience of his hostess. I remember when he used to favour us with his company once a month—that was before *you* were born. Once a week it pleases him to visit here nowadays—I cannot flatter myself that *I* am the attraction. Goodness knows why he comes so often for such a short stay: he arrives in time for luncheon and departs directly after. . . . Do you remember when he came and you were in bed with asthma? On that occasion he never spoke a word throughout

the meal; and before he had swallowed his last mouthful he rose from the table without as much as by your leave, and hastened away to your room."

"If I lived at Myall I should ride to Henliston *thrice* a week. Cousin Godfrey must feel dreadfully bored sometimes in that great house with only the servants. I know he does, although he will never admit it. He can see people in Henliston on a market-day; and it is very good for him to eat from a different-patterned plate. . . . I think he is becoming more and more silent, but that is because he lives alone."

"Whatever he may do or not do you always take his part, Robin. Godfrey Myall is perfection in your eyes. You always defend him." Miss Trevarthon sniffed.

"I do not take his part: I think it is not at all good for him to live such a lonely life, and I have told him so. To offer a reason as to why he likes to come here once a week is not to defend him. He is rather a big person to be defended by little me."

"H'm. He is as big as he is boorish."

"If when he comes he stays for so short a time it is because the habit of solitude has grown upon him, I suppose. . . . I do not think he is *perfection*, but he has many good qualities, Cousin Godfrey has always been very kind to me. His manner may be a little brusque, but what does that matter? Few men are of Uncle Anthony's fine calibre. . . . Don't you think Uncle Anthony spoilt you a little for the society of the average man? No one appreciated him more than Cousin Godfrey—you must admit that. Surely, therefore, there must be some fineness in Cousin Godfrey's nature that made him appreciate the fineness in another's—which you must also admit."

"Well, mind you don't follow in my lord's footsteps, that is all I have to say. I will admit that he does not seem to have corrupted you as yet."

"*Corrupted?* Aunt Cynthia, what do you mean? He may have been a little wild in his youth: he was—Uncle Anthony told me so—but I am sure he is all right now."

"Rather more than a little. . . . You are putting too many flowers in that bunch; use more veronica."

"None of these roses are any good: they are too fully blown."

"Nonsense! Roses are roses. They will go in with the rest; place them in the centre of the bunch where the other flowers will give support: they won't be noticed."

"Customers may not notice when they buy, but when they untie the bunch they will; and they won't buy again from Mrs. Rendall. She was complaining last week—"

"She did not complain to me!"

"That I can quite believe: you are not the sort of person to whom one would complain. . . . The weather was not so very bad last Saturday, and Mrs. Rendall only sold two dozen—I warned you that the bunches you made up were scanty."

"And I imagine you sympathised with all her complainings, and gave her sixpence to encourage her in the habit of sucking those nasty-smelling peppermints."

"I happened to meet her in the avenue. As she addressed me, I had to listen to what she had to say. . . . I gave her no sixpence."

"You're soft-hearted, Robin, always willing to listen to a tale of woe."

"That is better than being hard-hearted, I should say."

Miss Trevarthon pulled at a strand of bass with unnecessary violence.

"Why do you pretend to be hard-hearted, Aunt Cynthia? You are not a bit, really," Robin continued.

"Botheration! It is all tangled again," said that lady, tugging at the bass in seeming anger and avoiding her nephew's eye.

"Why do you?" persisted Robin.

"Why do I what? What nonsense are you talking? . . . You have not been burning much Hiram's lately as you have been so much better?"

"No."

She glanced up at the orderly line of tins on a shelf.

"The gum in the last bottle I bought is poor stuff: the label I stuck on that tin is peeling off. . . . I shall be saving the

seeds of the best-coloured snapdragons, and I must have more tins."

"*Brightest-coloured.*"

"Same thing, silly. . . . The tin you have in use is nearly empty?"

"Very nearly."

"I fail to see why Hiram's should go up in price: it is not food-stuff."

"You certainly cannot eat it, but it is a necessity to asthmatics, and it had to be brought all the way from America. You are always reminding me that Hiram's costs more than it used. I wish you would let me buy it out of my own money. I don't know what I am going to do with the income Uncle Anthony left me. One hundred and fifty pounds a year—and in a year I spent twenty!"

"What nonsense! Save your money. If you must spend, buy some of the next War Loan: I think it is a safe investment, and you get interest. There is no harm in my mentioning that Hiram's has gone up in price . . . *everything* has gone up. As it happens, I bought a dozen tins only a month ago, which ought to last you until the war is over. Hiram's can go up as much as it likes now."

"Aunt Cynthia, do you consider this selling of flowers to be worth while?"

"I can guess what you're after. If Mrs. Rendall sells four dozen bunches she brings me eight shillings less her commission; one shilling and eightpence is good pay: all she has to do is to stand in Hill Street for a couple of hours, passing her time agreeably by sucking peppermint-lozenges. I should think it is very much worth while. . . . Look at the price of butter!"

"The only occasion on which she sold the whole four dozen was when you were ill with neuralgia and I made up the bunches."

"Well, what she did once she may do again."

"Last week Mrs. Rendall's commission amounted to the sum of tenpence. Would you like to stand for *three* hours or so in Hill Street on a Saturday—for tenpence?"

"That is nothing to do with it—the woman is poor, and is glad to earn money."

"I am sure she would be most grateful if you were to allow her threepence instead of twopence-halfpenny on every six bunches that are sold."

"What next, I wonder!"

"Please think it over, like the dear kind soul you are."

"Threepence is a ruinous rate!"

"In these days it must take her all her time to make ends meet."

"H'm. I'll see. . . ."

"I knew you would."

"I said I'll see. I make no promise."

Senton, who had strolled in from the garden a quarter of an hour ago, becoming weary with watching a hole in the wall out of which came no mouse, uttered a plaintive mew and walked away disgusted.

Robin felt sorry that the kitten was disappointed: he, too, knew the weariness of waiting. Turning to Miss Trevarthon he surprised her by asking:

"Has it occurred to you, Aunt Cynthia, that, for a young man of twenty, I am leading a peculiarly futile existence?"

"What different existence can you lead with that chest of yours? . . . Your uncle was contented enough."

"I am not Uncle Anthony. . . . Chest, chest, chest: always *chest!* Our bodies should be wound up once a year to keep them going in perfect health until the next time of winding, like excellent clocks."

"Be thankful you are not deaf or dumb or blind," consolingly.

"I am just living from day to day—marking time. Nothing matters very much. . . ."

"What is the matter with you? Is that asthma coming on again?"

"I'm all right. . . . I wish I could make you understand." Robin gave a little shrug of despair.

"Nonsense. You want your breakfast. Go indoors and ask Selina for a glass of milk to stay your stomach."

"No, thank you."

"These flowers must be finished by nine. How many bunches have you there?"

"Eight."

"H'm, I have done two to your one."

"But I have tried to make mine look attractive, so that as they repose in Mrs. Rendall's basket the passers-by may be more readily tempted to purchase."

Miss Trevarthon sniffed.

CHAPTER III

IN summer Mr. Trevarthon, latterly, spent many happy hours in the upper room of the tower. He would sit reading by the open window and glance up now and again from his book to watch the small happenings on the Inner Green and the traffic on the Penzance road emerging, so it seemed, from a cloud of sun-gilded dust. Sounds as they rose became echoes and murmurs before they reached his ears. Sometimes, forgetting his book, he would sit there listening attentively, steeped in the warmth of the westering sun; soon, he knew, the half-sounds that timidly surged about the tower would make a frail melody and send his fancies wandering in a world of dreams. "*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter,*" he would whisper to himself.

He was sorry when with the coming of winter he was obliged to return to the library, for there was no fireplace in the tower room: acutely sensitive, it seemed to him that the atmosphere of the Poplars was charged with quick movement—even at night the slumbering house could not quite forget the brisk rule of its mistress.

In Mr. Trevarthon's day the only furniture the tower room contained was an old oak table and a massive chair of carved oak, a relic of Jacobean times, that according to tradition had been a cherished possession of the first Baron Myall—hence it came to be banished to the tower by Miss Trevarthon.

Soon after his uncle's death Robin had made the room his

own. Around the stone walls he draped a sombre-hued tapestry that he had discovered when rummaging in the lumber-room; on the oak-boarded floor he spread a Persian rug, sent from Myall Manor, whose pile was like velvet, whose colours centuries had faded to wonderful deep blues, buffs and crimsons; from Myall Manor, too, came the chest of oak ornamented with inlaid walnut and sycamore, in which he kept some of his favourite books. He tried the effect of a framed reproduction of Hobbema's *The Avenue, Middelharnis*, but it seemed out of place; moreover, it rested uncomfortably against the rounded wall. It was not until small garnishments had been gradually added that the room lost its austere and mediæval appearance.

Now, a pink and green war-map stuck with irregular lines of pins that lay on the floor near the window looked like some absurd table game invented for children. On the table stood a convolvulus-shaped vase tinted with palest amethyst and aquamarine, holding a great magnolia bloom that filled the air with sweet heavy perfume; Robin had plucked it before breakfast from the tree by the greenhouse. A deep brass ash-tray, a brown-paper parcel, a book with claret-coloured covers, a folded copy of *The Times* and a bronze inkstand all yielded supremacy to the lordly magnolia that in a ray of sunlight glowed like ivory. Stacked against one end of the oak chest were a dozen or more grey cardboard boxes of jig-saw puzzles whose pictures he had chosen from some old numbers of the *Connoisseur* and the *Studio* and sent to a lady at Chichester, who mounted and cut them out very cunningly and made a charge of only one shilling for a hundred pieces. From one of the hewn-oak rafters under the cupola's inverted bowl a bunch of dried herbs swung to and fro with every breath of air. On a sheet of parchment he had inscribed in old English lettering with illuminated capitals the verse-question that his uncle had so often asked, and pinned it to the tapestry, where having curled up scroll-fashion its writing might not be seen:

*"If there were dreams to sell,
Pleasant and sad as well,
And the crier rang his bell,
Which would you buy?"*

Robin sat at the table tapping the ash-tray with the ring he had taken from his finger, for he was idly toying with it when the market-house clock began to strike. One after another, eleven clear notes thrilled through the air; wonderfully sweet they came, like the chiming of a fairy-bell; after each great muffled sound followed the tiny clarion as gold tapped brass. Consulting his wristlet-watch he found it to be fast.

"Eleven o'clock. . . . After all, why should I trouble to alter it? What does it matter if my watch is two minutes fast or two minutes slow in Henliston?" he said aloud, as he re-buckled the strap.

With an impatient movement he pushed the brown paper parcel in front of him to the far side of the table, causing the claret-coloured book to fall to the floor and the ash-tray to collide with the inkstand: knowing what the parcel contained he could not bring himself to open it. Why should a publisher, of all people, use a red label, he wondered; an author who was expecting to hear from the publisher to whom he had submitted his first work would be only too well aware of the contents of the parcel he dreaded to receive, without that warning signal: it was in bad taste. . . .

He settled himself far back in the chair and closed his eyes. His hands hung listlessly over the arms of the chair.

The room was strangely silent now that the clock's loud boom no longer crashed against the tower, like breakers against a cliff. . . . The greater part of his book he had written in the library; but the middle and last chapters, which he thought were the best, he had written in the tower. Here, in a glow of enthusiasm, he made a rough draft of the concluding paragraphs of the last chapter on a day in May when the vase on the table was almost hidden by sprays of the wild rose it held; he had picked them in a woodland lane, for he had risen early and gone for a long walk before breakfast. It was the roses, so exquisitely pink, so fragrant, so unassuming, that inspired what he felt was the true ending of his book:

"There, stretched out on the dewy grass, as if having wearied of waiting for him she had gone to sleep, was the Princess Iolde. The wind had showered petals from the wild roses

about her. One lay on her open palm; of such a delicate pink it was, like the sky at dawn,

She had kept the tryst."

In his little room in the tower where no one ever disturbed him he had written his best. He was not sure that the room itself had not suggested the period of his story. In the first chapter he had described Ratmor, the wizard, weaving his spells high up in a turret of the duke's palace. . . . One day, long ago, when he and Uncle Anthony were passing through the kitchen, Selina addressed them in a torrent of words that, even for her, were unusually dialectical. Uncle Anthony, regarding her wonderingly, had said: "How awful is the power of words!" And when they arrived in the garden his uncle had used Coleridge's line as a text for a pleasant little sermon. . . . During the eighteen months in which he had been writing *Moonbeams* he often spent hours looking for the exact word to express his meaning, a word full of colour and rhythm and magic—the "right" word; if he did not find it he hoped he had always avoided the "wrong" word. On one occasion when he had been despairing of the right word it suddenly came to him—vermilion: it seemed to him the perfect word, for he was working on an alliteration in *v*. Of all the letters *v* seemed to him the most beautiful; he was constantly repeating to himself the line of Poe's: "*The viol, the violet, and the vine.*" Was not the curious, faintly exotic beauty of Pater's prose won by the grouping of cunningly-chosen words! He greatly admired Racine who, in his poetry, strung words in such a way that they shone like precious stones. Hard had he laboured, accepting and rejecting, arranging and re-arranging, writing and re-writing, sparing no pains in his endeavour to make sentence after sentence stride or lilt along to soundless music. The travail of the striving artist he had suffered in full measure. It had been curious that when he had been in the throes of an attack of asthma his best inspirations had come to him. In the silent watches of the night as he sat in bed propped up by pillows, gasping for breath, vivid rainbow-coloured visions appeared—how vague and colourless memory found them later when he put pen to paper! Yet, as he conned

over his manuscript soon after he sent off the typewritten copy to Newton he could not help thinking that, in spite of the vast difference between conception and portrayal, *Moonbeams* was far removed from failure. When he met Dr. Tyacke in the street and told him—what it appeared he guessed long ago—that for eighteen months he had been engaged in writing a book, the hard-headed doctor told him more of publishers and their ways than ever he had dreamed of. He left him, and went home wishing that he had studied the particular kinds of books the various publishers published, and that he had confided in Dr. Tyacke before he had sent off *Moonbeams* to Newton. Once more had he taken up the manuscript, and glancing over its pages distrustfully came to the conclusion that the characters were vaguely drawn, the scenes only fairly-well described; the style was stilted and awkward; there seemed a superfluity of statement, a haziness of expression, a paucity of idea; he had lost sight of the story in a maze of words: assuredly the book was a failure. After that he locked away the manuscript in a box in his bedroom and gave the key to Selina with the injunction that she was to forget where she might hide it until he heard his fate from Newton. . . .

For a few moments after Robin opened his eyes they were dazzled by the bright sunlight streaming in at the window, and then, as they grew accustomed, the various objects in the room seemed freshly coloured. The dark greens and browns of the tapestry had taken on more vivid hues, and the piping shepherds in its pastoral design seemed endowed with life as they leant against the trees; that pale nymph as she lay in the grass gazing up at her shepherd's sunbrowned form seemed newly attentive to his tune, languorous yet alert, expectant, for soon Pan's signal would shrill sweetly down the sylvan glades. He wondered why he had plucked the magnolia; the scent of it was almost overpowering. Was the forest air that caressed shepherds and couchant nymphs filled with the scent of the strange tall-growing lilies in the tapestry? . . . The blatant red label struck a discordant note in the room's colour-scheme; it was like a soldier in a monastery, a peace-time soldier with a red coat.

As he drew the parcel towards him it occurred to him that his book might have been returned so that he could make certain alterations suggested, perhaps, in Newton's letter within—perhaps! His trembling fingers fumbled eagerly with the knots. Why had he no knife, no scissors? He told himself that hurry was unnecessary, and that it would please Aunt Cynthia if he presented her with a "nice long piece of string:" she was often chiding the maids for cutting the strings of parcels and throwing them away. "String is valuable in these days," she would say.

On top of the manuscript was a short type-written letter signed by the great John Newton himself:

"I thank you for having submitted your MS. 'Moonbeams' for my consideration. It seems to me that a book of such a kind would not be likely to claim success.

If you should write a full-length novel dealing with present-day life I shall be pleased to read it."

The brown paper crackled as he slowly crumpled it into a ball.

No longer need to watch for the postman or to listen for his ring; no more would stray gleams of hope make the torture of his days more exquisite. He had heard from Newton and suspense was at an end; a great weight had been lifted and he was thankful for the relief. . . . Was *Moonbeams* so poor a thing as to be unsuitable for publication? Or had he sent it to be judged by the wrong publisher? He had no inclination to try his luck with any other publisher: now that his manuscript had been returned to him he had lost all interest in it. After all, was not the very desire to publish abnormal! It was as though a man should proffer his tears and his laughter, or offer to supply the dreams he had dreamt, upon the hire-system. Possibly, if he were to glance over the pages he had wrought with so much care they would seem fresh and strange, give him false hopes, and he would be tempted to send off *Moonbeams* on further travels. . . .

As he rose he kicked against the fallen book which was Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*.

"Symbolic," he said, as he picked it up.

Uncrumpling the ball of paper he tore the sheet into many strips, and the strips he tore into tiny pieces and tossed them out of the window. He rested his arms on the sill and watched the last handful flutter away; they fell slowly and softly on the still air like brown snowflakes, and disappeared among the branches of the pines and poplars.

The warm soothing scent of the pine-trees reached him from below. As he looked down on tree-tops and the grey-slated roofs of the little houses that seemed as though they had been dropped haphazard from a giant's hand, so that some found isolated lodgement on niches of rock while others clustered gregariously on rocky ledges, the echo of a high-pitched voice singing through the air caught his attention. A woman coming across the Inner Green was shouting to a neighbour in one of the cottages. Listening, he heard the deeper echo of the reply. Her lilac blouse made a patch of pure colour. She had been to the well and was carrying her filled pails. He watched the dimple of diffused light from the water in the nearest pail centring and scattering the sunlight with every sway until it was borne out of sight.

The landscape suggested a wonderful picture in water-colours; exquisite were its tints. Hills and vales that he knew so well seemed strangely unfamiliar as he picked them out; everything was newly washed in freshness. Of a vivid green were the grass-fields decorated with red-brown and dappled cows. Cornfields were shimmering with palest green shot with faintest blond. The little lakes in the Outer Green had shrunk in size; yesterday they were merely lakes where no lakes should be, and one shivered and felt vaguely depressed as one saw them under grey skies: today one welcomed them as pieces of water of the purest aquamarine on which one's eyes might rest from the hot glare. At the valley's end Poltrean Pool, burnished like a mirror, stretched away to the bar of sand that separated it from the sea. The distant hills above Porthruan were wrapped about with a diaphanous silvery veil and seemed to glimmer with life; where the sky of deepest azure met their tops at the edge of the shining horizon its colour was lost in pure light. The few fleecy clouds that there were seemed not

to move; they looked like pieces of cotton-wool stuck on a blue sheet. Shaped like an isosceles triangle was the Outer Green: the river Dober and the Porthruan road were the equal sides and the third side was the Penzance road. After drawing up at Poltrean Lodge, where alighted a woman with a basket almost as big as herself, the gaily-painted omnibus from Porthruan bringing folk to market crossed the bridge and came lumbering along the raised road that divided marsh from common; the horses' hoofs sent up little glittering clouds of fine crystals from the granite surface, for the Porthruan road dried quickly after rain and was white and hard when the Penzance road was liquid with grey mud. The red and blue omnibus and the yellow motor-car that was hastening towards it were the most vivid-coloured objects to be seen and, as if sensible of the fact, fittingly occupied the centre of the picture.

Under that blazing sun it was strange to see the Dober brimming as in winter. Always its waters were stained a pale brown by the tributaries that passed by tin-mines, but after heavy rains they became a deeper shade that was almost copper. Whatever its depth, until the river received the stream from Trewoof it flowed sluggishly, skirting the Outer Green; then it began to hurry and, at last, raced; it swirled splendidly under the bridge as though aware that its course was nearly run and was determined that man should recognise its power before that power was lost: for in a little while it would cease to be a river as its waters poured in a hundred purling rivulets over the marsh towards the reeds and the rushes that invaded the shallows of Poltrean Pool.

At the end of the Pool he could quite distinctly discern the bar of sand, a narrow streak of yellow in the distance. Very near in the clear light seemed Poltrean House on the crest of a wooded hill that sloped down to the water; set there like a square granite boulder it was a landmark that could be seen for miles. Nowadays, Mr. Penrose dwelt there alone. Though close upon ninety he was hale and hearty save for occasional twinges of gout, and took his daily walk unless the weather was too inclement. He told Dr. Tyacke that he had not the slightest intention of dying until the Germans were beaten

and the war was over; then his son and grandson would return, and he, knowing that his son was there to succeed him, would be willing to die—when his time came: it did not seem to occur to the old man that his son or grandson—or both—might never return. Dick Penrose had just been gazetted. . . . He had little in common with Dick who was essentially an outdoor man. Cousin Godfrey's tastes at eighteen might have been similar to Dick's. But Cousin Godfrey had a brain. No one could accuse Dick Penrose of having a brain. He was only two years older than Dick and yet when he talked with him it was like talking to a child. If to understand was to pardon, to suffer was to learn. By suffering, physical and mental—since he began to write *Moonbeams*—he found he had learnt things that were not to be learnt from books: suffering he knew, had made him older than his years. Would suffering be of any value if the sufferer had not a brain? . . . He hoped Dick, who had never had a day's illness in his life, would not be wounded, for he would chafe under suffering—and learn by it nothing at all. Aunt Cynthia used to sniff when she heard Dick's name mentioned: her favourite epithet for him was "brainless noodle." When she heard that he had applied for a commission she sniffed many times and said: "That lad does not know the meaning of danger . . . certain fools are made that way. Either he will be killed—and a memorial tablet to yet another Penrose will be put up in Porthruan Church—or he will win the V.C. For nine days after the war, if he wins it and lives, he will enjoy being a hero. After the war people and things will fall into their right perspective, and then Master Dick's women acquaintances will say: 'I really cannot invite that boring Penrose boy. He is so boastful, and his indoor manners are dreadfully bad. Of course he is a V.C., but so is many another. Heaven knows! we have heard enough of war; and now it is over we don't wish to be told the experiences of a brave, but extremely crude, young man.' He will very soon cease to be a wonder, Robin, and he won't like that! He will talk war for the rest of his life to any one of the Penrose servants who will listen to him. You mark my words! . . . *His mother was a babbler.*" Sometimes Aunt

Cynthia's sarcasm was so biting that it made him wince; unexpectedly and suddenly it would come like a blast of east wind on a warm day. Until a few weeks ago she had not a good word to say for any member of the Penrose family save Dick's father—and him she rarely mentioned. Even Dick's mother, who, after all, was only a Penrose by marriage and had died when her son was a toddler of three, was not spared. He remembered an occasion when Aunt Cynthia delivered herself of a tirade in which she criticised by no means kindly the Penroses and more especially the woman, who even though dead aroused her jealousy, ending with: "The minx deliberately set her cap at poor Jack." Uncle Anthony said with a flicker of a smile: "Well, my dear, Jack was in love with you and you scared—" But Aunt Cynthia broke in: "That will do, thank you, Anthony. Mary was an Elliot. We know that the Penroses of Poltrean *Castle* have your regard as one of the old families of the Duchy; but the Elliots—! Who were they? Mary's great-grandfather was a draper in Redruth—and that explains Mary." . . . He felt sorry that he was not at home on that afternoon three weeks ago when Dick's father had called at the Poplars, for he had always liked him when they met on rare occasions in the past. Unlike his son, Colonel Penrose *had* a brain. He would never have known the colonel had called if Selina had not secretly informed him of the fact: "When I told Miss Cynthia as how Colonel Penrose was downstairs she went on playing her patience-cards just as if she hadn't heard. She was surprised, I could see, Master Robin, for all her pretending. Then she looked up and said very quiet-like: 'Thank you, Selina.' What's the meaning of it all, I wonder? It's the first time he's crossed the threshold since I've been here—and that's seventeen years. Such a fine gentleman he looked in his karki and shiny leggings—such a handsome pair of legs on'm—and a star now, if you please, as well as a crown on his sleeve. When he was last home six months ago he was Major Penrose. I'm thinking he'll be a full-blown general next time he comes back." Selina seemed quite disappointed when he explained that there were several steps between lieutenant-colonel and general. . . . It was very

strange. Was it possible that after all these years Colonel Penrose was still in love with Aunt Cynthia? Surely not, for she was fifty-four. Yet, if not, why had he called at the Poplars? Aunt Cynthia had not mentioned her visitor to him, for reasons best known to herself, and he did not care to broach the matter: she would only accuse him of tattling with the servants. . . . For three weeks Aunt Cynthia had never spoken of any member of the Penrose family. When he informed her that Dick was gazetted all she said was: "Well, what of it?" and looked at him searchingly. She seemed a little softer, a little less sarcastic, than of yore. . . . He believed that she would increase Mrs. Rendall's rate of pay. Since Colonel Penrose had returned to Flanders he noticed that Aunt Cynthia ran her eyes over the names of the Killed in Action and the Roll of Honour and carefully read the column of epitomised news before she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the Court Circular and the Births, Marriages and Deaths in *The Times*; she used only to read the Court Circular and the Births, Marriages and Deaths, and ask him to tell her the news "if it were good." He did not know how to tell her that if the Colonel were killed Mr. Penrose would be advised by the War Office, and that Henliston would know of it long before the announcement appeared in the papers. . . . Yes, Aunt Cynthia had changed . . . one could not say in this or in that, for the change was indefinable.

Taking the cushion from the chair he placed it on the floor by the window, and kneeling on it filled and lit his pipe. Cloud upon cloud, the grey smoke rose, trembled on the air, became almost invisible and passed away at last.

It was surely sunshine such as this that Arthur Machen meant by Provençal? . . . Provence! A beautiful name for a beautiful province. One day he hoped to go there. But he doubted if even in fair Provence he could gaze on a fairer prospect than the one before him. What a sardonic contrast between that scene of green peacefulness and the bloody business that was going on all the time in Picardy. Picardy was a nice word, but not a beautiful one like Provence. "*J'aime mon village plus que ton village; j'aime ma Provence plus que*

ta province; j'aime la France plus que tout." It was odd how stray sayings that he had come across in books stuck in his memory. So many pages of his uncle's choosing had he learnt by heart, that subconsciously when reading he memorised lines or short passages that pleased him. But good as his well-trained memory was, it was a feeble thing compared with Uncle Anthony's: Uncle Anthony was almost word-perfect in many chapters of the Bible and scenes from Shakespeare. Was all that store of learning lost in death? . . . And Felix Gras, a Provençal, loved France more than Provence. The Cornish had only just begun—been compelled to realise that England was at war, and that, therefore, Cornwall was too. They were a slow-thinking obstinate race, shutting their eyes and closing their ears to the thing that was unaccustomed. They rejected all new ideas, not wishing to improve on the old ways. How often had he heard that expression: "We've always belonged to do'm that way." They kept themselves to themselves, aloof, detached, concerned only with their own interests. It was as though Cornwall were an island separated from the mainland by miles of water. Their blood was more purely English than that of the English themselves, for a Cornishman, even now, seldom took a wife from outside the Duchy . . . and yet the Cornish were unEnglish, foreign. In many respects they were akin to the Irish, but they lacked the quick Irish spirit: they might smoulder, but they would never flame. Because they were his own people that he understood, he loved them in spite of their faults; his heart went out to them while his brain criticised and disapproved. . . . He could not say, "I love England more than all." Once he had spent a day in Truro with Uncle Anthony, and that was the extent of his travels. He had never crossed the Tamar, had never set foot in England; he knew nothing of England: how could he love it? . . . The women bitterly resented their men being "dragged away to be killed." They obstinately refused to understand. As for the men they frankly said they were not "going for soldiers" if they could help it: inasmuch as they made no pretence of being patriotic they were honest. In Henliston streets one frequently heard such a speech as: "Dang this

conscriptioning! Why can't they leave us 'lone? We ain't harming nobody!" It would take nothing less than a force of grey-clad Germans burning and pillaging Cornish towns and villages to rouse the Cornish. . . . "For Duke and Duchy," he had kept on repeating to himself on the day that he set out to be attested; he would have liked to have uttered that cry aloud on the field of battle: it was much more real to him than "For King and Country." He had an absurd desire to shout "For Duke and Duchy" at the pale-faced clerk who filled in his papers. If he had done so, how that individual would have stared. Men were wanted for the army, and he had offered himself to the Military Authorities; but they only concerned themselves with a man's physical condition, and would not have been in the least interested in his quibble over words. King or Duke, Country or Duchy, they did not care. . . . Gladly would he have fought for the Duke, a boy a year or so older than himself, who in a recent photograph reproduced in an illustrated paper looked so appealing, as though he already felt the weight of the crown he would one day wear. . . .

If Cousin Godfrey were not expected to luncheon he would bicycle to the Goonhilly Downs, and leaving the machine at Mrs. Martin's white-washed cottage make his way to a little heathless space where a hundred tiny wild flowers patterned the grass; he and Uncle Anthony had discovered it in the heart of that wild nursery of heaths. *Erica vagans*, the Cornish heath, became a shrub on the Downs, and now, at the end of July, would be in full splendour. Sprawling in the sunshine he would listen to the mellow bass of the bees as they grew tipsy on the heather-scent, and lazily watch the blue and brown butterflies flirting as they fluttered about the masses of flowers that were sometimes pink and sometimes white; he would wish that he knew if the ants possessed intelligence as well as instinct as they hurried away with the crumbs from his sandwiches. In the drowsy afternoon he would open his pocket edition of Shelley, and ponder "The Sensitive Plant." Or he might ride to one of the coves and pass the day amphibiously. . . . It was an ideal day for cycling: the Lizard road would not have had time to dry. Tomorrow if the weather kept fine

the air would be dust-laden, and breathing it as he cycled would probably bring on an attack of asthma. Today was the day! . . . But he must be at home to entertain Cousin Godfrey, for that gentleman he knew full well would very much object to a *tête-à-tête* meal with Aunt Cynthia; Aunt Cynthia, on the contrary, being aware of her cousin's feeling, would enjoy herself hugely. Yet, now that he came to think of it, of late she had seemed more tolerant of her visitor: last Saturday she had been quite polite to him—for her.

After luncheon, when Cousin Godfrey had left the house, he would walk down to Trewoof to tell Mrs. Jago that he had heard from Peter: she would be glad to know he was well, if she did not know it already: Peter's letters to the Poplars and Trewoof respectively often arrived by the same post. To his mother Peter wrote pages of advice and instruction with regard to the management of the farm. Peter's letters to himself were human. He had not spared a thought for Peter since he had skimmed his letter: the red-labelled parcel from Newton engaged his exclusive consideration, and he had thrust the letter carelessly into his pocket: for three whole hours he had shamefully forgotten it while he had been engrossed in thinking of himself and his own affairs. Had the letter arrived yesterday he would have learnt its contents by heart in an hour: each sentence he would have repeated over and over again until he felt that he knew what was passing in Peter's mind when he pencilled it. Peter, whom he loved even as Jonathan loved David, was suffering all the discomfort of the trenches while he himself was regretting that he could not indulge in selfish pleasure. As if he could lie on the Downs without feeling miserable when thinking of his friend! As for bathing, he would never place his hands together as he stood on a rock preparatory to diving without remembering that it was Peter who had taught him to swim. Splendid Peter.

He was a failure both as a man and as an artist: he was unfit for the army, and had written a book that was unworthy of publication. His failure as an artist affected no one but himself: there was little room for art and artists in these strepitous days. But his failure as a man was a very different mat-

ter. The eyes of Henlistonians as they rested on him seemed to question like notes of interrogation. . . . He was unable to work at munitions or anything that required physical endurance; even as a clerk in a Government office he would be useless, for he was an utter fool at figures. Perhaps he only possessed an artistic temperament, and that Uncle Anthony used to say was a "fearful thing." Was he to dream life away as his uncle had done? Fate's finger-post seemed to be pointing in that direction. Half that morning he had wasted in dreaming. What was he but a dilettante with a *penchant* for beautiful words, words that were pale and dim and strange, or colourful and sonorous and magnificent? He had filled an exercise-book with classified columns of them! None of the words he knew satisfied. At the back of his mind was the vague hope that one day he might happen on a word that he would only have to sight to be sure that, at last, he had found the sesame that would admit him to a new dream-land of unsurmised loveliness. . . .

Less than a month ago he was in the grip of asthma. Would he always be pursued and overtaken by that grim fiend just when he had quite recovered from a previous attack and had begun to feel returning strength and a desire to enjoy life? Dr. Tyacke promised that asthma would leave him when he was one and twenty: "Every seven years there comes a change, Robin." But the doctor had said that before, seven years ago, when he was verging on fourteen; and a change did come—for the worse; attacks were more severe. His "birthday" was the fifteenth of December. Five months was a long time to wait—for *freedom*? He wished he knew the actual date of his birth, for he felt ashamed when his birthday came round: it seemed that everyone was mocking him with their "Many happy returns." . . . When he was a little boy Aunt Cynthia often said that she expected "great things" of him when he grew to be a man: she mentioned such ambitious words as General and Admiral and Prime Minister. That was before his first attack of asthma that followed on bronchitis. It was a long time before she would recognise his handicap; she would say to Dr. Tyacke that it was a poor sort of a doctor

who could not cure a child of asthma, and was thoroughly unpleasant and unreasonable until the doctor said he should give up his patient. Aunt Cynthia was very stubborn. Poor soul, it was small wonder if she had become bitter, for the child she had adopted had failed her, and the man she might have married had married someone else: it was small wonder that she despised dreamers, for she once must have had her dreams, until they were snatched away.

Two years ago he realised that unless he escaped from his environment while he was young he would probably never escape at all: asthma or no asthma, he must get away from Henliston with its drowsy atmosphere of soft dreaming, he told himself. With Uncle Anthony's death escape seemed to be cut off. It was evident that Aunt Cynthia, her past hopes for him forgotten, expected him to step into his uncle's shoes as master of the Poplars: since John Trevarthon made the Poplars his home a male descendant always dwelt there. One could not break with custom. If he left the house his aunt would be lonely with no one but the servants, for her manner prevented her few friends becoming intimate. By adoption he had been saved from the workhouse—or whatever the place was that babies left on doorsteps were sent to. He was treated as if he were the son of the house. The more he considered it the more convinced he became that to leave Aunt Cynthia would be selfish and ungrateful. . . . Soon came the interest and excitement of the early days of the war. When the enthusiasm somewhat subsided, and there was nothing novel in reading of Britain's unreadiness—and consequent misfortunes—and he had offered himself for enlistment in the D.C.L.I., he began to write *Moonbeams*, partly because he liked describing his fancies, and partly because he had nothing else to do, for his studies had ended with the death of his uncle and tutor. Then, a year ago, Peter had enlisted, and been drafted to Plymouth for training. After that he settled down to his writing, no longer regarding it as an exercise, but as a piece of serious work. He became a recluse in the library or in the tower. . . . Sometimes, as he sat planning a phrase, a key would turn and a door would open, and he found himself

standing on the threshold of a chamber whose secrets he half-dreaded, half-desired to discover, dazzled by the fierce light that shone from within; all aglow, he would fall back afraid. The door would shut. The blood would cease to course through his veins like fire, and he would lean back in his chair a little faint and exhausted, but filled with vague and restless longings and deeply conscious that it was unnatural for a young man of his years to lead such an austere existence. There were times when he was tempted to throw aside the pen, tear up the paper, and—asthma appeared. Very sobering and salutary was asthma! Yet, when he had completed and despatched *Moonbeams* to Newton he was unable to rejoice in his liberty: he missed the habit of writing, and remembered the satisfaction that compensated for steady toil. While he could not contemplate the idea of engaging on a new creative work until his first was accepted for publication he was possessed of an unhealthy horror of idleness, though he knew that the mind like the soil must have its fallow periods. He tried to interest himself in favourite books, but they had become dead things that told of dead adventures that no longer moved him. His craving for living adventures in which he might take an active part grew more and more insistent as the days passed. . . .

If Newton had accepted *Moonbeams*, encouraged, he would have happily busied himself with planning out a new book. Aunt Cynthia's ambition for him so long despaired of would have revived, and she would have urged him on to fresh endeavours by constantly mentioning the name of Thackeray or Carlyle or Dickens, having furbished her memory of those authors surreptitiously. As to Cousin Godfrey, when he heard that *Moonbeams* was to be published he would have been as proud as a dog with two tails, and have made those queer noises in his throat that was his way of showing jubilation. Selina would have shed tears of joy and said: "Didn't I say so, Master Robin! Now, didn't I tell 'ee not to fret!" And Peter! Peter who had listened spellbound while he read to him the early chapters, who believed in him . . . But what was the use of torturing himself with might-have-beens? . . . If only he had been as other boys he would have gone to a public

school and, afterwards, to Oxford. He would have taken up some profession. . . .

"The trouble is I am still young," he said aloud, as he rose from the cushion. "Perhaps if I were thirty instead of twenty I should have become reconciled to my lot, ceased to wish for the unattainable."

He sighed heavily, stretched himself, and moved restlessly about the room dolefully humming a tune he had learnt from Peter:

*"Life is very merry.
When you come to think it out
What a silly lot of fools we are!"*

*"Life is very merry.
When you . . ."*

Unfolding *The Times* he scanned the war news.

In the three days' fighting before Brody the Russians had taken twenty thousand prisoners—which meant that Russia had to feed them! He felt quite excited at the defeat of the Prussian guard at Contalmaison early in the month, but, somehow, today, he could not summon up a spark of enthusiasm at the success of the Russians. . . . Contalmaison was a word that caught his fancy: it suggested the name of a new kind of carnation. The Russians had not captured Kovel or Lemberg; the French had not taken Péronne. One always hoped for some thrilling news when one opened the paper—and was usually disappointed. When for days he had been expecting to read how some town had fallen and, at last, had given up hope, the desired event would happen a week hence—if it happened at all. Almost he wished he were a German in Germany, for then he could be sure his *Berliner Tageblatt* would contain thrills.

Remembering that he had carried off the paper before Aunt Cynthia had had a chance even to glance at the head-lines, he folded it up and put it in his pocket.

*"Life is very merry.
When you come to think it out."*

As he paused at the top of the stairs abstractedly tugging at the frayed edge of the tapestry, he recalled a saying of Rénan's: "Man is like the worker at Gobelins, who weaves on the wrong side a tapestry of which he does not see the design." What bearing would the writing of *Moonbeams* have on his life's design?

If only he could get away from Henliston . . . there and then . . . without plans . . . and lose himself in some great city. Yet, it was himself he wanted to get away from rather than Henliston. How tired he was of the person who went by the name of Robin! . . . Ugh! that odious red label.

Suddenly it occurred to him that it was absurd to be circling about the room like an animal in a cage when he might be out in the sunlit garden. For a moment he stood frowning at the rejected manuscript. It would be as well to keep away from the tower until he had arrived at a more philosophical state of mind, he decided, and with a shrug of his shoulders began to descend the stairs. On the third stair he paused and drew a deep breath. The earthy smell that rose to his nostrils was invigorating after the heavy magnolia-scented air of the room above.

As his eyes became accustomed to the subdued light he perceived Senton crouching near the hole in the wall.

"I thought you had tired of that game. Don't you find it rather dull? You should learn the other patience from Aunt Cynthia: Miss Milligan is much more amusing. . . . You don't seem pleased to see me?"

Senton cocked his ears.

"You have set your heart on mouse for luncheon? Well, I hope you won't be disappointed. Practice makes perfect, kitten. If you persevere you will become a first-class mouser—that is certain. If I persevere, it is not at all certain that I shall become a first-class writer. When you catch your mouse you know you have succeeded: when you have killed your mouse that is the end. When I have written a book it has to be accepted and published and, even then, if the public do not like it I have not succeeded. I would rather be you than me, kitten!"

Senton yawned and uttered the faintest of mews, but still kept his eyes glued to the hole.

"Why don't you go out and play? The garden contains all sorts of surprising things. . . . You are pretending that you are a cat when you are only a kitten, and I won't allow it. Ssh!"

Senton gave a little frightened leap and rushed out into the garden.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBIN was reluctant to move out of the shadow of the tower into the sunshine where flitting butterflies and humming bees were revelling among the flowers: his presence must strike a discordant note in the garden's harmony. He felt envious of Senton who, gazing up with a rapt expression at a pair of sulphur-yellow butterflies that were waltzing round and round a hollyhock's high spire, was beating time and thyme on the path with his tail and looking thoroughly in the picture. How good a glass of ice-cold water would be; but the pump was in the back-kitchen, and he would be sure to run into Selina: Selina would know that *Moonbeams* had been returned the moment she set eyes on him, and he was not in the mood to be sympathised with. Frau Karl Druschki roses on a tall standard he likened to driven snow; the sombre background of a dwarf cypress accentuated the purity of their whiteness. They shone with tantalising coldness. Then, remembering the thirst-quenching properties of Sweetwater grapes, he sauntered towards the path that led in the direction of the greenhouse. On his way he passed the rose-tree, and could not resist snatching a handful of petals from a full-blown rose and crushing them against his face. Selina wearing a sun-bonnet suddenly appeared a few yards away, where four paths met. She carried a light basket on her arm.

"My goodness, Master Robin, if Miss Cynthia saw 'ee spoilin' of her Fraueldruskeys she's be in some frizz! She's that proud of 'em."

The petals fluttered to the ground.

"She's proud of their *size*. . . . You look warm."

"I'm that hot! . . . Master Robin! Out in this blazing sun without a hat! You'll be getting a sunstroke."

"Nonsense. Where are you going, my pretty maid?"

"Go 'long with 'ee! It's an old maid I'm likely to be if this war goes on. I've been picking white currants: I know you do dearly like to make your dessert of 'em."

"I would have helped you had I known. I was just going to the greenhouse to pick a bunch of grapes; currants will serve instead."

Robin raised the lid of the basket.

"You always liked picking things," said Selina musingly. "Do 'ee remember how we used to go to Polglaze to pick pine cones? That was before Miss Cynthia could trust 'ee out alone with me. You in your pram? . . . Some long time ago to be sure. . . . You was a pretty little boy then with golden curls." She wiped away a tear with the corner of her apron. Laughter and tears came easily to impulsive, generous, warm-hearted Selina.

"And now?" asked Robin, arranging on his head the silk handkerchief he had knotted at the corners. The handkerchief, red mottled with yellow, admirably suited his olive colouring and clearly-cut features, and intensified his foreign appearance.

"My! You do resemble one of those pirates in the picture in your bedroom. . . . You'm looking wisht, Master Robin: it's this heat coming so sudden—or is it that old asthma coming on again?"

"Oh, I'm quite all right. It's just the heat."

"I wonder how you'd look if your hair hadn't turned black. You used to be so handsome that folks stopped to look at 'ee when we went to walk. . . ."

Selina, reminiscent, scarcely noticed his bantering reply.

He very well remembered being taken for many a walk by Selina—one did not forget happiness. In those days the sun never hid behind a cloud, the birds were always singing, and there was faint laughter on the warm breeze. Selina could not

be made to realise that he was too young when he had been taken on those earlier outings in the pram for impressions to be retained definitely in his mind, but she had spoken of them so often and described them so vividly that sometimes he fancied he did remember. Himself sitting up in the pram eager and alert; Aunt Cynthia, very upright, wearing a prim bonnet and a mantle whose beads flashed in the sunshine with every step she took, walking in front, her blue eyes on the lookout for an escaped bull, a runaway horse and other possible dangers; Selina, leaning slightly over the pram-handle, her cheeks flushed like rosy apples and her kind brown eyes smiling, almost anticipating the sympathetic appreciation he called for as the latest-gathered wild flower joined the others on the rug. If he could not remember, he could imagine it all. Leaving the Penzance road they would enter Polglaze gates; where the public were forbidden Aunt Cynthia was allowed. Passing the poplars, whose tops seemed almost to touch the sky, and the iron chains that swung from granite post to granite post on either side of the drive, they would turn off along a narrow path that led to a wood of pines. While Aunt Cynthia kept guard by the pram Selina would search in the undergrowth of furze and bracken. "More, Lena! More!" he would cry in his insatiable greed, as he held out his hands for the cones. When a dozen or so had been collected Aunt Cynthia would say: "I think we have quite enough, Selina, thank you." Aunt Cynthia was very fond of him and very kind; she would pick wild flowers that she despised because they gave him pleasure. But she did not understand him—that he had always known. Pine-cones were merely toys that amused him, and too many toys were bad: enough to Aunt Cynthia meant moderation. Selina understood him from the very first. She knew that he liked the deep-blue rampions not so much for their colour as for their brush-like heads that were nice to feel. She knew that it took ever so many pine-cones to make a real blaze in the nursery grate, that there were cones and cones, and that a golden-brown cone with its tightly-closed scales was a prize. Selina loved wild flowers even as he loved them; she liked the resinous scent of pine-cones, and to watch them burn. It

mattered not to Selina if her hands were scratched and bleeding after a search for cones; had she not enjoyed the searching and the finding just as much as he enjoyed the receiving? . . . Old Miss Merton of Polglaze called at the Poplars every six months. Aunt Cynthia returned the call. They had been calling on each other ever since he could remember. The last time Miss Merton called she was wearing a badly-fitting toupee; she confided in Aunt Cynthia over the tea-cups that she was "getting bald just like a man."

"If we were gathering cones today I should hear the pine-trees whispering to each other that they recognised the girl who had grown into a woman and were glad to see her again, for they felt she was unchanged; but they could not be sure that the man was once the child they had known."

"Now whatever do 'ee mean by that?"

"I have grown old while you remain young."

"Well, my dear, I'm eight and thirty, but if you like to say I'm young I wouldn't contradict 'ee for the world," laughed Selina.

"You will die young if you live to be ninety."

"But 'tain't fitty, all this nonsense talk 'bout you being old." She placed a hand on his shoulder and scanned his face. "Something's troubling of 'ee."

Hesitating for a moment he blurted out: "My book has come back from the publisher. I don't want to talk about it."

"But *you* wrote it, and it's beautiful, and—"

"Peter Jago says something like that. I had a letter from him this morning."

"You said if it came back as how you was going to try some other publisher: I'd do that, Master Robin, if I was you. . . . and you can be going on writing another book. *That Newton must be mazed!*"

"Yes—so I did—of course. I'm blessed if that kitten hasn't caught it!"

"I wasn't looking. Why, if it isn't a butterfly! He's a clever little cat for his age."

Having successfully diverted Selina's attention, Robin questioned. "Have you heard from the gallant corporal lately?"

"Not since I told 'ee. I dreamt last night as how he'd come back from France, and we was married."

"That is a good omen. You know I am saving up my pennies to buy a wedding-present."

"I do wonder. . . . And how is Master Peter? Seems only yesterday he was breeched. Time flies and no mistake. 'Tis murder I call it, sending a boy like that to fight the Germans!"

"Peter is a year older than I am. He is a full-grown man."

"'Tis murder I call it," Selina repeated doggedly.

"Selina, I am afraid you are not patriotic."

"Patriotic indeed! I don't want never to hear that old word patriotic no more. No, you don't find *me* going round talking patriotics—I leave that to them as have no relations or friends at the war! You should just have heard the vicar carrying on in his sermon last Sunday about patriotism—not but what I like and respect the vicar, Master Robin. It's all very fine for him to stand up there in the pulpit and tell us what we ought to do! He's one as has never married and has no kith and kin—since his sister died—leastways I've never heard tell o' none. The vicar's over age, and anyhow, being a parson, *he* can't fight at the war. Talking on like that! And in the pew in front of me was Mrs. Nankervis dressed in her new mourning with the tears streaming down her face. I tried to comfort her as we walked down 'long together after church. 'The war'll soon be over,' I says, 'and there's no call for 'ee to fuss yourself. You've done your bit!' 'The war be over now so far as I'm concerned: I've lost my boy, Jim, as I dearly loved, the only one I had,' she says. Poor soul. Jim Nankervis was a handsome boy, too, and was walking out with Mary Anthony till they took'm away to fight."

"I am very sorry for Mrs. Nankervis, but when the vicar—"

"I do know what you be going to say, Master Robin," Selina laughed, with a tear in her eye for Mrs. Nankervis.

"Well, you have heard me say it before. You know how I feel. If we do not win the war, do you know what it will mean to us?"

"Oh, ess, I do know well enough. Lloyd George says as how *we are going to win the war*. But winning the war don't raise

the dead, now do it? A pretty fine place Henliston'll be if the war goes on much longer. There'll be no men left to come back. How'll all the young maids manage without young men for 'em?—that's what I want to know! . . . For me it's different. I've been keeping company with Jack Martin for close on seven years; you might say we was the same as married, in a sense, after knowing each other for so long. Still it ain't the same; for if we was married two years ago, as we nearly was, I'd have had a baby by now; perhaps, then, if anything happens to Jack I shouldn't take on so. I'd have my baby."

"When you are a little excited, your disregard for grammar is superb."

"Now you're teasing me 'gain 'bout my grammar. It'll have to stay as 'tis."

Impulsively Robin seized her arm.

"Let us sit down in the orchard. It is cooler under the trees. . . . I will read Peter's letter."

"But this is Saturday, Master Robin, and his lordship'll be coming to luncheon. Supposing the mistress was to find me wasting my time?"

"Just for a little while. I want to talk to you," he pleaded. Selina allowed herself to be persuaded.

The sunlight filtering through the leaves dappled Selina's face with flickering shadows as she stood tiptoe under a laden bough to test the ripeness of a plum whose red was almost purple.

"Not so ripe as it looks, eh?"

Robin lay down on the grass with a sigh of content.

"A bit hard. . . . This old tree be that precocious to be sure: every year 'tis same with'm. They're ripening nicely. . . . I reckon I'll find enough for a tart: they're better not too ripe for tart-making."

"Oh, bother the plums. Sit down, there's a dear."

"In a week or two they'll all be ripe and we shall have more than we can do with. . . . And what do Master Peter say about the war?"

"Peter says very little *about the war.*" Robin sat up and

felt in his pocket for the letter. "Lean back against the tree-trunk. . . . That's better: you look more comfortable now."

"I wonder why Jack don't write?" wondered Selina wistfully.

"Cheer up! You will hear from him in a day or two. Now listen."

"God bless you for your letter, Master Robin, that I do much appreciate as coming from you. I like your letters better than mother's which I ought not, I suppose. The noise of the guns is something awful and one of my ears has gone stone-deaf with it, which don't seem to make it any easier for me to think what to put in a letter. This is just to let you know that I am well. It is no good telling you I am happy because I am not happy. All the other chaps feel like I do which I know from odd words they say and looks I see on their faces sometimes when they think no one is looking at them. But of course we never let on to each other what we feel. Besides it would not be good for us as we have to keep strung up, I mean, keep our spirits up. I would give a lot to be back in Henliston again. Somehow when I come back I think the place will seem different now that I have seen Plymouth and London. I don't think I told you as how I saw Buckingham Palace. When the King is there they fly the flag just the same as they do at the Mount when the family is in residence. I can't help thinking it is finer weather in Cornwall than it is here. Nothing but grey skies and frequent rain. I am thankful you are not out here, Master Robin, though I know you would dearly like to be. I don't want no home leave. What's the good of a few days, for as soon as you get home you've got to think about returning. When I come back for good you will read to me some of the beautiful things you have wrote. It will be like old times. I shall be working on the farm (ploughing, likely) and then I shall hear you shout out my name, and I shall look around and see you coming across the field. Or maybe it will be dinner time and I shall come in to find you talking to Mother or Treza in the kitchen. You never could abide the parlour, could you, Master Robin? Nor

can I. Then perhaps you will stay on and if you are free from the old asthma we will swim in the stream before tea. Only it will have to be a hot day, for if the water be too cold it harms you, Master Robin, as you will remember last year. I wonder if this old war will be over by next summer? I do hope so for they want me badly at home, though Treza be a masterpiece for managing, Mother do say. I wish Treza would write, but like me she is no good for writing letters, so Mother only writes. I am glad to hear from you that Treza says young Bert is working well. Soon winter will be here. What must you think of my manners, Master Robin, when I have not yet thanked you for that parcel of nice food? It made me feel funny when I saw as how you had put in a packet of bull's-eyes, what you do know are my favourite sweets. Hungry as I was, I hardly liked to eat all those nice things, seeing they came from you. I shared that scrumptious cake with sugar on it with two chaps from Redruth. They thank you as I do. There was a great brute of a sergeant, but he was killed with shrapnel, so I won't say nothing about him now he is dead, poor chap. I do hope you are keeping well now and I hope very much indeed to hear that your book has got took. The publisher must see it is a beautiful book or he must be a blind fool. It is flat in these parts. No hills like Porthruan. Please don't criticise my writing, as I am not a good hand at it as you know. I shall look forward to receiving your next letter, Master Robin. Hoping you are well as it leaves me at present.

From your loving and faithful

Peter Jago.

P.S. I hope I have put in the commers right and stops and spelt accurately all the words in this letter."

A silence seemed to fall on the orchard when Robin finished reading. He pretended to be scrutinising the pencilled address on the envelope: his eyes were misty, and he dared not look at Selina. The strident sound of a grasshopper caused them both to start, and broke the spell.

"The poor lill fellow . . . poor lill fellow . . . out there in foreign parts," came from Selina between sobs.

"Peter is all right," Robin declared, with a brusqueness that

he hoped hid the state of his feelings. "You are not to mention the contents of this letter. If Peter knew I had read his letter to anyone he would never forgive me."

"I'll not mention it. As to his forgiveness, he'd forgive 'ee most things, for he's that fond of'ee. . . . The poor lill fellow might be killed with that shrapnel just the same as the sergeant 'ee was telling of! He don't say nothing about how the war's going—but nor do Jack."

"What can he say? The men in the trenches know much less about the war than we do."

"I'd disbolish war for ever and ever if I could do! I'm brae and thankful *you* can't go, my dear," vehemently.

"I wish I were with Peter in the trenches, Selina."

"You do make me mad! I've no patience wi'ee, Master Robin. You *can't* go, so there! Didn't you try to enlist when the war started?—and what did they say to'ee? And not content with that, didn't you go pestering them again? And on top of that you must needs go up only a month ago or so to be totally rejected—naturally enough, with that chest of yours, It's my belief that you—" she paused for breath.

"I had to go up last time for medical examination because I was rejected prior to August 1915."

"Master Robin, you're not thinking of being attested again, are'ee?" asked Selina anxiously, as she scanned his face.

"I cannot be *attested* again," he assured her with a smile.

"Well then, whatever old word 'tis. Bide here quiet and do your writing. You'll do more good by that than taking up the time of the military doctor all to no purpose; and 'ee with his hands full of work examining all those thousands and thousands of men."

"Lena, I've been thinking that—"

"That's right, my dear, go on doing of your thinking. I don't know much, but I do know as how you must do some lot of thinking before you can write."

"You misunderstand. . . . I have not had an attack of asthma for nearly a month. I have been ever so much better since I have gone in for those light dumb-bells, and my chest measurement has gained nearly half an inch. Oh, Lena, don't

you understand? I don't want to go and fight. I don't believe anyone does! I don't want to kill other young men who are probably much finer than I am in every way, and who don't want to kill any more than I do. But I feel I ought to go. I think of Peter who has been out there for months."

"Of course I do understand. I've known for days you've been feeling this way extra bad. But what's the use? Every night you have to burn this powder-stuff before you can sleep. Another attack may come on at any time—you've not been free from that old asthma for longer than three weeks together for years. Supposing they do take'ee—the first day's drill would kill'ee pretty near."

"Kill or cure."

"Such nonsense as you do talk, it do fairly drive me mad," getting up and smoothing her skirts.

"Don't be cross with me. All you say is true. . . . I am a weakling, I know, but I refuse to acknowledge it. When I am free of an attack, as I feel stronger, I tell myself that I am as fit as other young men who have— *Lenal!*"

She had picked up the basket, but, straightway, hearing her name, she put it down again.

Robin had called her name with just that *timbre* in his voice when he was a little boy and had fled to her to be consoled after his aunt had given him a scolding. So had he greeted her when he could no longer bear to be alone in his agony and she had answered his summons in the deep watches of the night,

His bedroom was in the servants' quarters, next to Selina's. It had been allocated to him as a child, so that when he might wake in the "lonely dark" and call out for her she could quickly go to him. The years passed, but he preferred to remain in the oddly-shaped room tucked away in a recess at the end of the corridor; he liked to wake on summer mornings and look out of the window on the garden below and the distant hills; the room was haunted by an air of older days, and he was fond of its very odour; each one of the wall-paper's yellow roses was an old friend; he knew the sensation of the worn and faded drugget under his naked feet.

Many hours of the nights had Selina passed in talking to

him or telling him stories, and, as he had grown older, reading to him from books of adventure. Childhood gave place to youth: he rang the bell instead of calling.

Pictures came and went in Selina's mind. She remembered the last time she had gone to Robin's room on a bitter-cold winter night. She had awakened with a start, and sat up in bed. "Master Robin wanted her," was the reason she gave herself for so suddenly awakening, and she hurriedly huddled on a few garments. Tapping at his door, and at his cry of "Lena!" she had found him sitting up in bed. For a moment she had paused in the doorway, half-awed by his beauty that fever had heightened, taking in the details revealed in the candlelight of sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, and a glinting lock of hair that had escaped from the blue-black tangle and overhung his brow.

"Oh, Lena! . . . Lena! . . . at last you have come. How I wanted you!"

"Why didn't'ee ring, my dear?" as she poured out a little pile of Hiram's and set light to it. "You do know I'm eager and willing for to come to'ee."

"The bell is not here . . . and I could not call," he gasped. Her eyes had swept the room.

"And why for not! If that maid, Alice—" she began.

"I told her to take the bell away yesterday—to take away temptation. It is not fair to be always disturbing you, Selina. I have been selfish too long. I must not depend on you so much. It was different when I was a child. I must learn to suffer patiently . . . for, after all, it is only for the few minutes that the spasm lasts . . . after that I am all right."

She held the little tray with the smoking powder and waited for his "There, I'm better now," before she said her say.

"What an idea to be sure! How do'ee dare to say such things? Didn't I bath'ee and dress'ee when you was no bigger than so high? Many's the teasing I've had from Jack. I couldn't show no more affection for my own babies when they do come than I do for you, Master Robin, Jack do say: I've never contradicted, for I do know 'tis true. . . . I can't tell how 'tis, but there be times when you're more to me than a

hundred Jacks. . . . You're seeming better already, my dear; you was lonesome, and now old Lena's come to keep you company and talk to'ee, you've got to hark to her gabble and forget how you'm feeling. . . . By and by, you'm going to throw off this old asthma for good and all. Didn't Dr. Tyacke tell'ee so when you was fourteen, and as it didn't go then didn't he say 'twas every seven year, and that you'd be cured when you was one and twenty? . . ."

Imperceptibly, as sentence after sentence in lilting Cornish passed her lips, peace had come to his spirit. In a little while, as she leant over him, stroking his hand, he felt physical relief: Selina was unaware that she was giving generous measure of her splendid vitality, and Robin only realised respite from suffering.

Nowadays, when Robin was in the throes of asthma, he would sit up in bed or in the wing-chair suffering in solitude throughout the weary night. He had refused to have the bell brought back; and when his agony was most intense he willed with all his might that Selina's rest should not be broken. Selina thought it strange that she slept "so sound when her boy was suffering the other side of the wall." She supposed that Robin, having grown to manhood, no longer needed her; and often sighed for her disturbed nights.

Selina's joy, then, was great as she heard Robin call her name: though there was a cry in the word like the saddest and sweetest wail of a violin, only sweet did it ring in her ears, for she had thought that cry she would never hear again. In a moment she was kneeling beside him. He wanted her and, instinctively, she took his hand and stroked it as she had done many and many a time when he was troubled or ill.

"What is it, my dear, 'en? Tell old Lena all about it," she urged.

Robin realised how much he owed to Selina in the past, but never until that moment had he realised how much she meant to him: a future in which she shared no part was impossible to imagine. As he met the glance of her soft brown eyes in which the tears had gathered he wondered if there were many such women in the world.

"Lena, how do you make your eyes look so velvety and kind, like a deer's? After all, I am not grown up . . . still a baby, you see."

He did not try to check the tears that began to trickle down his face: it did not seem worth while.

Drawing him into her arms, she pillowed his head on her broad bosom and rocked him as if, indeed, he were a baby.

"Tell old Lena all about it," she crooned.

"It is not easy to tell. . . . I am very, very unhappy, Lena. When I woke up this morning and saw the sun, I felt happy: I continued to feel happy until Bowden brought that parcel. It was natural that I should feel unhappy at the return of my book, but I sat in the tower and brooded . . . until, at last, I was in such a state of morbidity that I scarcely knew how to bear myself. Soon after war broke out I began to be unhappy, and I have been steadily growing unhappier. This beastly war permeates the very air! . . . As a child I used to be so terrified of a small bronze figure of Buddha that squats on a shelf in the library at Myall that nothing would induce me to stay in the room by myself; but often when I thought of the figure I felt I must once more look at it, and I used to open the door, peep at the hideous thing, and run away. The war affects me as the Buddha used to do: while I hate the war it fascinates me. Every day I study *The Times*. There can be no man in the British Isles who knows the positions of places on the war-map better than I. Hours and hours I have spent in the tower poring over it with the *communiqués* before me. When these offensives began on the Western and Eastern fronts I felt mildly thrilled as I advanced a red-headed pin to pierce a fresh little dot—a French village taken from the Germans the previous day—or a green-headed pin to a big dot—a Polish town captured from the Austrians. Now, at the present rate of progress, and balancing one thing against another, it seems to me that the war must go on for at least five years, and I regard the moving of the pins as a game I once enjoyed—a game that having begun I may as well go on with. . . . Before the war I used to love the flowers; now I care for them so little that I agreed with Aunt Cynthia the other night when

she suggested rooting up the flowers, that, after all, are only weeds, in my Wild garden, and planting vegetables in their stead. . . . As I was looking at the hollyhocks, whose scentless flowers begin to climb their spires at the beginning of summer, I thought that they were even more depressing than those almanacs whose strips one tears off daily; the earlier flowers that have become ugly withered things remain to remind one of the summer days that have passed, and even if one removed them the position of the newly-opened flowers tells the toll of days. Yet a few weeks before the war I stood before the hollyhocks and agreed with Uncle Anthony when he called them distinguished, refined and beautiful in their silken dresses of delicate pinks and yellows, and likened them to princesses who were standing in a line that the prince, whose coming they awaited, might make his choice."

"But you used to dearly love the hollyhocks; they was your favourites. Dear old-fashioned flowers, you did call 'em."

"Yes. . . . Aunt Cynthia and I used to have *one* thing in common: our love for flowers. Of course, we loved them in quite different ways. Now when she boasts about the size or colour of a rose, or tells me of the seeds she hopes to save, I find it very difficult to show the slightest interest. What do I care about the size of a Frau Karl Druschki—lately rechristened the Snow Queen, the vicar informs me!—or its wonderful whiteness? If I came out into the garden one morning and found the Druschkis changed from white to sky-blue I should not feel the least curious as to why they had done so; it might cross my mind that it had something to do with the war—that is the explanation of every surprising event. Then, this new fad of hers—selling flowers. I have tried to take an intelligent interest in the number of bunches Mrs. Rendall sells each Saturday. All the time I am making up the bunches I am painfully aware of the rettiness of it all—robbing the garden for the sake of a few pence! What must Uncle Anthony think of the sacrilege?"

"He's done with fretting, my dear."

"Nothing seems to matter—except knitting socks for soldiers, and contributing to Flag days. We don't have as many down

here as they do in London, thank God! Flag days irritate me so. They should not, I know. It is not that I grudge a shilling or half-crown—I don't know how to explain. . . . I cannot lead this aimless existence much longer. Something will have to be done about it, as Uncle Anthony would say. I do miss him, Lena, don't you? . . . You do not know how the visitors stare at me when they drive through the town. They wonder why I am not in khaki. I *look* all right when I am free of an attack, a trifle thin, perhaps, and so, very naturally, they—"

"I don't believe that they do stare at all. It's your imagination makes 'ee think they do. Supposing they *do* stare; what of that? *Strangers don't count!* Every soul in Henliston do know that you're delicate, and that you're rejected. Master Robin, why don't 'ee wear the armlet?"

"Because I want to keep it clean, so that after the war, when glass is cheap again, I can have it framed . . . that is *one* reason."

"What an idea, to be sure!"

"This war is getting on my nerves; you see, I have plenty of time to think about it. . . . *You* understand me, Lena—you always have done. Now that Uncle Anthony has gone there are only you and Peter; and Peter is in France. I wish Aunt Cynthia were not quite so—so practical. There was a mistake made when she was born; they gave her a female body and a male mind, not a very *broad* mind. It is wrong of me to criticise her, even to you, Lena. Sometimes she is so difficult that to prevent myself saying something rude I have to remind myself how good and kind she is to me. In her funny way she spoils me, really."

"I've got eyes and ears, my dear. I know your meaning. Miss Cynthia is different from the master. I've often thought as how his soul and her soul should have been t'other way about."

"Then, there is my book. On the morning I gave you the key of the box in my bedroom I had been looking through the manuscript. I found a hundred flaws, and it seemed that the work of months was wasted: there were whole pages that

seemed dull and lifeless, and much of the dialogue seemed worthless. I was bored with my own book: and a book that bores one must surely be a failure. . . . I locked up the manuscript in the box and gave the key to you, so that I could not look through it again until I learnt Newton's decision, for on another occasion I might see it in a more favourable light. There were moments during these last weeks when I remembered certain passages that pleased me, and I told myself that, after all, the book was not without merit. My heart beat quicker when I saw Bowden delivering letters in Hill Street: I hoped, while I dreaded, that he might have a letter for me from Newton. And so the days passed, until today. I knew in my heart of hearts that *Moonbeams* would be returned."

"But you'm going to send it off to another publisher."

"I am not, Selina; nor am I going to start on a new book. I shall write in time to come because I love writing. But first I must have some real experience. Uncle Anthony used to say that no one should attempt to write a novel until he is thirty: he was very wise. I am twenty years old, and I have been as far as Truro."

"But, Master Robin, have patience. By and by—"

"There is a Spanish proverb which says the Street of By and By leads to the Market-place of Never. I have always longed for adventure, but adventure has never come: instead, another attack of asthma. Peter, too, as a boy, longed for adventure, but felt that it was not for him, who would have to run the farm and look after his mother and brother and sister. All the adventures were for me, he declared! Men have gone in their thousands to the greatest adventure the world has ever known, and among them Peter. I stay behind and read of their doings . . . and dream of adventuring."

"This old war b'ain't your kind of adventure at all, at all. I can't picture'ee killing Germans. Bide quiet a bit longer, my handsom', and your turn'll come. I can't tell'ee how or when, but I've always known you'll have your full share of adventures. You'm a marvel with that head of yours packed full of cleverness."

"Adventures only come to the adventurous."

"You'm bound to draw adventures like a magnet do a needle. I reckon *I* ought to know something about'ee if any one do! You'm young yet. Ess, they'll come to'ee fast enough, or my name's not Selina Warren; and when they do come they won't be common adventures that belong to come to other folk—you mark my words! You've no cause to be envious of Master Peter, poor lamb. *Sometimes first winners be last losers*, as the boys say at marbles. Whatever's the time, 'en?" Selina looked at his wristlet-watch. "Goodness! It's just on twelve. And Mister Godfrey's expected for lunch. That maid, Alice, must think I'm lost! It's brae and lucky the mistress hasn't come along and found me wasting my time. Whatever would she say!"

As Robin sat up, she gave his shoulder a last little pat before she rose to her feet.

"You have *not* been wasting your time—you know that. I feel ever so much better. . . . Aunt Cynthia was always a little jealous of you where I was concerned "

Selina laughed good-naturedly. "Your aunt means well. You and me do understand her lill ways. She'd be very provoking to a stranger though, Alice was terrified of her for the first fortnight, until she got used to her habits."

"Uncle Anthony once said you were like old ale. I have only just realised what he meant."

"Well, I never! And what did the master say *he* was like?"

"Sherry."

"Now don't 'ee go thinking about things as you've no need to concern yourself about. Mind what I tell'ee!" admonishingly.

"Dear old Lena. I wish we were ten years younger. What splendid games of pirates and smugglers we used to play in the greenhouse and the tower."

"Ah me!" Selina exclaimed, and heaved a great sigh.

She was thinking that ten years ago Jack Martin meant no more to her than any of the other men.

CHAPTER V

AS Robin lay on his back under the plum-tree he wished that he could paint, so that he might depict a piece of turquoise-blue sky and the fleecy clouds that were soft white things resting, a summer skyscape would help to dispel the cheerlessness of a grey winter day. There must surely be artists who specialised in skyscape, as there were artists who did so in landscape and seascape, though he had not noticed a skyscape—a pure one, just a picture of sky—at the yearly exhibitions at the Newlyn Art Gallery.

“Turquoises are little round fragments of sky, and should only be found scattered over the snow on the tops of the highest mountains . . . hedge-sparrows’ eggs on a sheet of cotton-wool,” he said dreamily.

The samphire was in yellow bloom; of a dazzling whiteness was the sand; the pebbles were blue as the sky; and beyond, the sea was of a pale yellowish-green, a colour that reminded him of Sweetwater grapes. He had quickly undressed and, while waiting for Peter, was sunning himself on a serpentine rock that the sun had warmed. The song of the wavelets as they lapped against the base of the rock on its seaward side was soothing as the lullaby that Selina sang to him years ago. He likened Peter to an ivory statue of a young gladiator that had come to life, as he watched him race across the strand.

“Even your feet are strong, Peter: you run over the pebbles as if they were sand.”

Peter answered with a gay laugh and, having waded out until the water reached almost to his waist, raised his arms and dived.

As he stepped from the rock to the sand he gave a cry, and looked down wonderingly.

“I say! The sand crunches like salt, and it is as cold as ice. It is white, too, just like salt,” he shouted.

Peter treaded water.

“Of course it’s white—snow always is!”

"Of course . . . it is snow . . . I had forgotten," he said half-aloud, as he picked up a handful and crammed his mouth, for he was suddenly so thirsty that he felt he could drink, or eat, all the snow on the beach.

He awoke with a start; and looking at his watch was surprised to find that he had been asleep for nearly a quarter of an hour. For a few moments he lay quite still, blinking his eyes and trying to recall the pleasant dream that was fast fading from his mind.

Peter and he were on a beach. There was sunlight and colour. It was summer, for the samphire was in flower . . . and yet, there was snow . . . somewhere. That was all he could remember.

He was parched with thirst—which explained his dream. Sitting up, he looked about him on the grass, but Selina had carried off the basket of currants.

He no longer feared to face Selina, but if he went indoors for water he risked a meeting with Aunt Cynthia, who would be sure to ask him how many bunches he "surmised" Mrs. Rendall would have sold, for she would have been considering Mrs. Rendall's skill as a saleswoman all the morning, and her question would be intended as an opening to a conversation. Unless he were prepared to discuss the matter thoroughly—and he was not!—her temper might be ruffled, which would not be conducive to his own or Cousin Godfrey's comfort at luncheon. Grapes he was not very partial to, but they were most refreshing on a hot day. Very alluring was the thought of Mrs. Treglow's ice-creams flavoured with strawberry or vanilla, but the shop would be packed with country-folk, and its atmosphere would be stifling; besides, he hated going into the town on a fine market-day, when it was always crowded. "Peaches for epicures," Uncle Anthony used to say. And, like Uncle Anthony, he loved nothing better than a juicy peach when he was thirsty in summer-time. Before breakfast he had noticed one behind the net that was almost ripe, yet, somehow, a peach that was not really ripe he could not bring himself to pluck: a silly scruple, perhaps, but he associated fruit that was nearing ripeness with the daily list of second-lieutenants,

boys of eighteen, nineteen and twenty, that appeared in *The Times*—good fruit plucked before they had ripened.

“Grapes seem to be indicated,” was the summing-up.

The red tiles burned underfoot. He marvelled anew at the ingenuity of the gardener who had planted hedges of box and yew, and arranged paths and alleys in so illusive a fashion: a stranger might walk for a long time in the garden before he began to suspect that it measured square yards instead of an acre. Though the temptation came to him to linger, as he passed the magnolia-tree with its glossy leaves and great folded blossoms that seemed carved out of ivory, he hurried his steps, for the air, saturated with sensuous perfume, he found curiously disturbing. Once more he considered the unaccountable prompting that had caused him to pluck a magnolia and place it in the tower, in the very citadel of his asceticism, when only yesterday he had professed to his aunt that he did not care about a flower that yielded a rich and heavy scent.

“I have stepped into Africa,” he said, reaching down a pair of scissors that hung from a nail.

As he stood under the vine, he thought the hot moist atmosphere had never seemed so still, so alive. Having selected a bunch of grapes, he snipped it off and went slowly towards the door. Little wafts of scent from geranium and heliotrope greeted him on every side; the air was filled with silent whisperings and soft as a caress. In a sudden flash he glimpsed the dim shapes of half-formed fancies that surged through his mind; as they receded he momentarily retained one faint but distinct impression: *he had come to the greenhouse for a definite purpose*, that had nothing to do with grapes! and he must stay there until that purpose was accomplished. He paused.

“Now, I could have sworn—” he began, wrinkling his forehead.

But the impression had faded. For several seconds he regarded a crimson geranium with a look of bewilderment, and then, turning away from the door, went and sat down on the cane rocking-chair in the corner by the coleuses. Sweat was on his face and he could feel it trickling all over his body, but

he revelled in the heat. He longed to take off his clothes, so that he might feel the touch of the hot air on his bare skin and, when he was steeped in heat, lie down on the maidenhair fern that looked so invitingly green and cool. Later on, he decided, he would go indoors and cool down and, if there were time, have a bath before luncheon; if not, he would have one in the afternoon, before he started for Trewoof.

As a boy he had been forbidden by Aunt Cynthia to go into the greenhouse, but often he disobeyed, for the place fascinated him.

"Once you go in there you never know when to come away," she used to say. "How you care to spend hours in that stuffy atmosphere I can't think. It only makes you more susceptible to chills. You are becoming too fond of silly story-books. Play in the garden. You want hardening in the open air, for, goodness knows! you are as delicate as a hothouse plant."

She had never called story-books silly when Uncle Anthony was within hearing. . . .

It was for his own good that Aunt Cynthia had forbidden him to go into the greenhouse. But, looking back, it seemed that the things he liked best to do and the places he liked best to visit were, though not actually forbidden, displeasing to her. She hated to see him reading a book, or listening to a fairy-story of Uncle Anthony's. She raised difficulties whenever he was invited to Myall, or a message came from Mrs. Jago begging that he might be allowed to spend a day at Trewoof. It was a "foolish thing" to climb a tree; and she had severely scolded him for impertinence when, thinking to please her, he had suggested that climbing trees was hardening. Poor soul, she was bitterly disappointed that he had developed into such a weakling, and very jealous of the complete understanding that existed between himself and Uncle Anthony and Selina respectively; doubtless, her constant fault-findings were an outlet to the feelings she strove to conceal.

He must have been about ten when, one morning in the library, having finished his lessons, he discussed *Ivanhoe* with Uncle Anthony, who always explained satisfactorily in a few

words those passages in a book that he had not understood.

"And now, please, can I have another book?" he asked.

Uncle Anthony, having returned *Ivanhoe* to its place on the shelf, seemed to have forgotten him, as he slowly paced up and down the room with his hands behind his back.

"This should appeal to you," he said, at last. "It tells of hidden treasure and the passion of adventure. Stevenson has a pretty style. . . ."

Though anxious to dip into the book, whose title fired his imagination, he was obliged to listen to a discourse which his uncle brought to an end by declaring that style was as indefinable as charm and genius. After luncheon he had gone surreptitiously to the greenhouse where, having curled himself up on an old rug behind the big camellia pots, he first made the acquaintance of *Treasure Island*. He began by reading slowly and carefully as Uncle Anthony had bidden him, but almost immediately he found the words rushing him along, so that he had nearly finished the book when Selina summoned him to tea, for, reading entranced, he had not heard the bell.

"I guessed I'd fine'ee here, you rascal."

"Lena, Uncle Anthony has given me a splendid book all about the adventures of a boy called Jim Hawkins who lived at the Admiral Benbow Inn. . . ."

On their way to the house he had given her a hurried *résumé* of the story.

After he had read *Treasure Island* he had played at pirates instead of smugglers. Of an afternoon, when Aunt Cynthia was out of the way, he used to coax Selina to the greenhouse.

"It *must* be in the greenhouse, Lena: the climate there is right for pirates. I will be the pirate chief who hides the treasure that you have to find. Let's pretend that. . . ."

Wonderful adventures they had with a small tin that contained a few foreign coins: the treasure trove. Wonderful stories Selina interwove about their play.

Thrice he read *Treasure Island* from start to finish, lingering over the pages that pleased him most, before he reluctantly returned the book to Uncle Anthony with the request that he might be given another story by Robert Louis Stevenson. Keen

had been his disappointment on being told that it was a mistake to read two books by the same author, one after the other. Only after he had read in turn *The Pathfinder* by J. Fenimore Cooper and *Peter Simple* by Captain Marryat had Uncle Anthony reached down *Kidnapped* from the shelf. *Treasure Island* held first place in his affections.

He still passed many an hour in the greenhouse, especially on cheerless winter days. In the garden the crocus followed the snowdrop, and the dahlia followed the sunflower. But in the greenhouse it was always summer; the geraniums flowered all the year round, and the coleuses never wearied of displaying their variegated foliage. No longer any need to hide from Aunt Cynthia behind the camellia pots: that was one advantage in being grown-up. He did not feel grown-up: it gave him a little shock of surprise when anyone addressed him as "Mr. Trevarthon." He was too old to be scolded. Now, instead of finding fault, Aunt Cynthia criticised and offered suggestions:

"Do you think it is wise to sit there reading in the greenhouse? I am sure the plants detest tobacco-smoke. You are such a chilly mortal! Why not go to the library and set a match to the fire?"

She would not understand if he told her that the greenhouse brought back to him the happiest memories, that he found its atmosphere soothing, that when he had been there a very little while he felt younger. . . .

As he sat gently rocking to and fro, thinking of the various books he had read, two stood out like sign-posts: *Treasure Island* and *The Hill of Dreams*. The one pointed to Adventure, the other to Romance. When a boy, he had viewed the up-and-down road that led to Adventure; as a youth, he had paused at the winding lane that led to Romance. He longed to follow the road, but that was before he arrived at the lane: road and lane looked equally attractive. Yet, he reasoned, road and lane led in the same direction: Adventure and Romance were adjacent villages in the province of Life. It seemed fitting that he should have first read *Treasure Island* in the greenhouse, *The Hill of Dreams* in the tower.

A sheet of *The Times* wedged between two flower-pots

arrested his attention. He remembered he had placed it there yesterday afternoon when, hearing mews of distress, he hastened to the rescue of Senton, who had jumped into an empty watering-can and could not get out. As he unfolded the paper, "The Windmill Captured," in large type, caught his eye; he glanced down the column:

"While the operations at Pozières have been the chief event of the day, you must not suppose that there is no fighting on the rest of the line. There is fighting all the time, only, except in small details, it does not involve any change of position. At many points we and the enemy are so close that bombing is almost continuous, and often there are small brushes of hand-to-hand fighting.

"The artillery, also, never rests. All night the whole circuit of the sky is lit up with the flicker of shells and the flare of signal lights and star shells. All day, whenever you approach the front, you get among the guns at work."

"I wish I were a Special Correspondent at the front," he said aloud: "I wish I were at the front in any capacity."

Why could he not be sensible and put all thought of soldiering out of his mind? The other day he went into Tom Kitto's shop to buy tobacco. Kitto was airing his views on conscription to a customer, and said with a grin: "For the first time in my life I'm glad I'm a cripple: they can't compel me into karki, thank God!" Why could not he himself feel glad he was an asthmatic? Was he such an ardent patriot that he envied the men who had gone to the front? He must be honest: to the front to him meant *out of Henliston*. Could he only escape from Henliston by the khaki way? Two years ago Life had called to him, and though he longed to obey the call, he had chosen, quixotically? to remain a captive at the Poplars. But scarcely a day passed that he did not find his captivity irksome, even when he was most absorbed in writing his book, for he had no guarantee that when the book was completed it would be accepted for publication. If only he might go there and then . . . lose himself in the wilderness of a great city, like Lucian in *The Hill of Dreams* . . . just for a month or so. The change would do him a world of good. Having tasted

freedom, he would return much more contented. *Then*, he would begin a new book. He was stale; and until he had been away that he could not do. Life was calling him again, more insistently with every hour! "*Escape! Escape! Escape!*" All the morning he had a strange feeling that someone was watching him to see what he would do. No one could prevent his going if he chose to go. "Your uncle never went careering about the country. What next I wonder!" Aunt Cynthia would say if he were suddenly to inform her that he was off to London. She would raise all sorts of objections—as much from habit as anything—but she would not miss him if he went away for a few weeks. Nowadays they saw very little of each other. In summer she found plenty to do in the garden; and, at the moment, she was "training" Bob Mabott's sister. Yes, undoubtedly, she would raise every possible objection, but, in the end, she would consent to his going. Unless he were very much mistaken she would infinitely prefer that he should go to London for a month than to Myall for a week. Asthma would be almost certain to play some scurvy trick: an attack would start, very probably, on the very first night he slept in a strange place. But surely he would be quite well some part of the time he was away. If he were soon destined to have an attack, he might as well have it in London as in Henliston. London air was said to benefit certain kinds of asthma; why was his not the "climatic" kind? How sick and tired he was of the old familiar faces of Henlistonians! What a relief to see people hurrying purposefully on their way, instead of dawdling. . . .

Quickly, as was his wont, he made up his mind that he would go *at once*, and stay away a month. Of what use to discuss the matter with Aunt Cynthia over a number of days? Four years ago Aunt Cynthia had been invited by an old school-friend, since dead, to spend a few days near Falmouth. Oh, the talk about it and about, every day for a fortnight! No chewing of the cud for him. Besides, he was free of asthma and there was no time to waste. He would go tomorrow—no, tomorrow was Sunday, an inconvenient day. Well, he would go on Monday, or Tuesday at latest. He would announce his decision at luncheon. Cousin Godfrey would be his

ally. It was unnatural for a young man of spirit to be living the life of a hermit. He could not stagnate in a sleepy old country town without an occasional break.

*"Two N's,
Two O's,
An L and a D,
Put them together
And spell them to me."*

Very small indeed was he when Uncle Anthony asked him to do that. "*The merchants of London, they wear scarlet.*" With very picturesque accounts of London and its citizens had Uncle Anthony entertained him. In those far-off days he had taken everything literally. The time came when he was able to discern the difference between fact and fancy, whereby he suffered disillusionment: London merchants did not wear scarlet, nor were London streets paved with gold. Nevertheless, his idea of London had remained coloured by his childish beliefs. Long ago he made up his mind that if ever he left Henliston he would go to London. London had always been his Mecca. He had promised himself that he would go to London when he was twenty-one, when he was free from asthma. But why should he wait another five months or longer? Dr. Tyacke might be wrong again with his seven-years theory? Until that moment he had thought that asthma would leave him on his twenty-first birthday, which was absurd. And now he was going, going by train! There were no trains in Dick Whittington's day. Where would he stay when he arrived? And what would he do? He did not know, and he did not care. Hurrah for adventure! "This old war b'ain't your sort of adventure at all, at all,"—Selina had spoken truth. By the greatest stretch of imagination he could not see himself clad in khaki doing things with a gun. What *was* his sort of adventure? If he stayed in Henliston he would never have any. It was all very well for her to tell him to wait for things to happen—nothing ever did happen in Henliston! Nothing worth recounting might happen to him in London. What did he expect to happen? Why should anything out of the ordinary happen to him more than to anyone else who

went to London for a holiday? Surely no adventures had befallen those folk he had known who went to London and came back looking just the same as when they went away, only rather tired. Why, just the railway journey would be an adventure to him. . . . Londoners went to the seaside in August; but, even if there were fewer people, the streets would seem crowded. . . . He would see St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament and Tower Bridge. What fun it would be going for rides on motor-omnibuses and in tube-trains. Folks would guess he had come up from the country, when they saw him gazing in open-mouthed astonishment at the policemen controlling the traffic: provincials were always supposed to stare open-mouthed at city sights. He would ask the policeman in Cheapside to point out to him the house where John Gilpin had lived. He would go to theatres; never yet had he seen a play. Walking along Pall Mall he would try to imagine how it had looked when Nell Gwynn leaned over her garden wall to exchange badinage with Charles the Second. In the Strand he would see all sorts and conditions of men—and meet a Henlistonian? He would look at the shops in Regent Street and Bond Street. He was particularly anxious to observe the quaint antics of the penguins at the Zoological Gardens; there he would see a bird of paradise, a python and a tarantula. Most of all he would like to visit the British Museum; but that building was closed to the public for the duration of the war. The streets would be full of soldiers. Would he look very conspicuous in a tweed suit? For a moment he had forgotten the war. Perhaps there might be a Zeppelin raid: if there were he hoped he might see one brought down. He must visit the conservatories at Kew Gardens. Would the orchids come up to his expectation? One day he would go up the Thames to Richmond and Hampton Court—perhaps as far as Oxford. He would spend a day on Hampstead Heath, and at the Spaniards—what a jolly name for an inn!—ask the landlord to show him the relics of Dick Turpin. Oh, yes, there would be a thousand things to see!

The *élan* of his thoughts exhilarated him.

As he heard the market-house clock chime the half-hour he

popped the last three grapes, one after another, into his mouth and sprang to his feet. For a moment he stood leaning against the back of the chair to steady himself, for he was trembling with excitement. He was going away from Henliston, and it seemed too good to be true.

A bluebottle that had been droning against the glass near the door, taking a sudden unconsidered flight, became enmeshed in a spider's web, and, though it struggled frantically to get away, the skilful spider very soon bound wings to sides with silver silk; when the blue-bottle was changed to a silken thing the spider moved away, paused, turned about, stood still and, presumably, gloated. With the frail death-song of the fly sounding in his ears it crossed his mind that the little tragedy of the insect-world was an omen, that Henliston would not let him escape; and though he smiled at the fancy, he gave a shiver.

Only an hour ago standing in the shadow of the tower, in the garden but not of it, he thought how perfectly Senton by the hollyhocks fitted into the picture: he had envied the kitten. Now he, too, was at one with the garden. The flowers flashed bright signals of welcome. He feasted his eyes on the splendid yellow of a patch of marigolds: the colour delighted him when he was happy, though he could not bear it when he was not.

*"The world is so full of a number of things,
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings."*

Stevenson's lines expressed his mood. Since he made his decision his spirit had expanded, erected itself slowly, surely, even as the wild thyme between the tiles that he trod underfoot as he hastened towards the house. The tune that had been in his head all the morning once more asserted itself; but now he sang the words with a joyous lilt, beating time with a sprig of lemon-scented verbena as he came along the corridor.

*"Life is very merry.
When you come to think it out
What a silly lot of fools we are!"*

Selina was in his bedroom.

"I'm brae and glad to hear'ee singing once again, Master Robin. That daft publisher b'ain't of no consequence, nor

worth thinking about. I was feared that you'd still be worritin. . . ."

"What a silly lot of fools we are, aren't we, Lena?"

"We're all struck foolish some time or another; but we ain't all fools."

"Peter was often singing that ditty; do you remember?"

"Ess, I do. Sing all you can, my handsom'! This old house must feel all good in his walls to hear a bit of cheerful noise."

"Echoes of the past, eh? Beau Myall died in 1785: it takes more than a snatch of song to wake a house that has been asleep for over a hundred years."

"I'd have dearly loved to have been in service here in those old days. . . . I thought you might be wanting that key that you gave me to mind: it's there on the dressing-table."

"Thank you. Now run away, there's a dear. I must hurry if I'm to have a bath before lunch. If I'm late Aunt Cynthia will be cross, and I particularly want her to be in a good temper—until after lunch, at any rate."

"If I was you I'd use warm water, for the sweat be properly pouring off'ee. You've been stopping in that old greenhouse again?"

He nodded.

"Now do'ee be careful and not go catching chills. . . . I declare! You're looking that perky, as if you'd come into a fortune."

"I've . . . heard the call of Roon," he explained, unbuttoning his collar,

"Who's Roon, 'en?"

"Roon is the God of Going, if a certain Lord Dunsany who has written a book called *The Gods of Pegàna* may be believed."

"I've never heard'ee tell of Roon before," quoth Selina, as she left the room.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Robert Reginald Mabott left school he was taken on as "useful boy" at the Poplars. He had slow deft movements like a clumsy dog taught to do clever tricks. Miss Trevarthon and Selina taught him his house tricks; Mr. Trevarthon taught him his garden tricks; he had already been taught his stable tricks by his father, who was ostler at the Rose. All his tricks were useful ones. After watching Bob at work in the garden Mr. Trevarthon was wont to declare that there never was such a lad. Selina would scrutinise a newly-polished copper kettle or the mahogany shine on a pair of brown boots, and nod approval. Miss Trevarthon, from time to time, went into the stables, ostensibly to take a lump of sugar to the pony, and found nothing to disapprove of. Robin acknowledged the proficiency of Bob's tricks, but avoided Bob.

A fortnight ago, before he left to join the army, Bob made a rambling speech to Miss Trevarthon in which he assured her how deeply he regretted that he had arrived at the age when His Majesty required him; that he looked forward to resuming his duties at the Poplars after the war, D.V.; and begged that one of his sisters might be allowed to take his place while he was away. He recommended Rosamund, the younger, aged twenty. Miss Trevarthon, in reply, wished him well; was sure that he would be promoted to the rank of sergeant in the minimum of time, provided that he performed his army tricks as efficiently as the tricks he already knew and which she hoped he would not forget; and promised that when she came to consider the suitability of one of his sisters she would bear in mind the merits with which he credited Rosamund.

Robin, in discussion with his aunt, expressing his thoughts aloud, remarked that Rosamund had extremely refined features. Miss Trevarthon sniffed, but made no comment. She duly granted interviews to both sisters, and engaged Bessie, the elder, whose features might be called homely, on a fortnight's approbation.

"One day, I suppose, she will become Mrs. Pascoe. I cannot think how any man could have the pluck to propose to her, for she is unnecessarily plain, with a yellowish complexion and bulgy eyes coloured like plovers' eggs—rather like Bob's," wrote Robin to Peter, referring to Bessie.

Bessie lacked her brother's aptitude. When she had completed a task she would heave a great sigh and observe ingenuously: "Bob or Rose would ha' done it in quarter the time: *they'm* quick as needles."

Yet, at the end of the first week, Miss Trevarthon professed herself satisfied with Bessie's progress:

"I grant that the maid is slow, Robin, that her fingers seem all thumbs, but she's a plodder, and anxious to please. Considering that she's strange to the ways of the place she's not done so badly."

"Cousin Godfrey says that she can't tell the difference between a horse's head and a horse's tail: I heard him tell you so."

"He seems to be prejudiced against her, for reasons best known to himself."

It was of the Mabotts Lord Myall was thinking as he rode along the Lizard road, more especially of Bob, to whom he had given an extravagant tip of five one-pound notes. In return, that saucy young devil had played him false. It had been a severe shock when on his arrival at the Poplars last Saturday he found Bessie installed in her brother's place. The moral was, of course, never to pay for your goods until they have been delivered. He was not in the habit of scattering largesse, as any one of his tenants would bear witness. But, now and again, he wanted a thing, and did not grudge five, ten, twenty or even a hundred pounds, as long as he got it. He had paid five pounds; and he had not got what he wanted: he disliked being done. If he had been a poor man probably he would have shrugged his shoulders and told himself that it was no use crying over spilt milk; but he was very wealthy, and the loss of those five crisp one-pound notes rankled in his mind: he hated to lose even a sixpence. How dared the young devil make a promise that he had no intention of fulfilling. And,

having cast about in his mind, he came to the conclusion that no one but Bob would have dared. At the Poplars they all—Cynthia and the servants—thought that Bob was a paragon. It was unfortunate that Robin had come into the stables and overheard the tail-end of one of Bob's stories, for that particular story happened to be extra cayenne. Since that time Robin never mentioned Bob if he could help it. If ever there were an anointed one he was Robert Reginald Mabott—there was a smack of impudence about his very name. Bob knew all about a wench the moment he set eyes on her. Once he got going, he would tell you stories that put Boccaccio's in the shade; what he did not know about some things was not worth knowing. By the time he was thirty he would probably have gone to the other extreme and become a captain in the Salvation Army: young scorchers of Bob's class often got taken that way. It was droll, indeed, that Bob should have been employed at the Poplars of all places. It was clever of him never to have been found out by Cynthia. After all, Bob alone had made many a ride to Henliston well worth while: five minutes of his spicy talk in the stables was not only an antidote to the half-hour at table in Cynthia's company, but a refreshing stimulant. So large a sum as five pounds must have turned the lad's head; he should have given him five shillings, and then he would not have played such a scurvy trick. And yet . . . One thing was certain: Bob, who was as artful as a bag of monkeys, would get full value for his money. Good luck to him! He was a very hard case, but, nevertheless, a good lad at bottom. One only lives once, worse luck! and young blood is hot—or should be. He hoped the lad would not be maimed or killed; he did not think so: that sort of thing would not happen to Bob. Had it been Robin—well, he would be killed as soon as ever he got within the range of the German guns.

"Robin is safe at home, thanks be!" he said aloud.

Godfrey, Lord Myall, was the only child of his parents. His mother, a Bazane of Nancegollan, had died when he was two; and his father when he was eight and twenty. Of his mother, of course, he had no recollection. To the world his father had been a mild-mannered gentleman of ascetic tastes, a

monk in a manor, a Trappist monk: Godfrey never contradicted the world's judgment. Godfrey was now forty-eight years of age, and had given up dashing about the Lizard peninsula as heretofore: he no longer felt it imperative to learn the names of all the pretty girls who dwelt thereon: he found himself content to learn the names of those who came his way—and it was amazing the number who did. Once a week, instead of once a month, he rode to Henliston. Except for these changes, not so unimportant as they may seem, his habits had not altered since he formed them on leaving college. From time to time his agent and loyal subject, Mr. Pennington, feeling himself privileged by age and length of service, would shake a finger admonishingly at him, repeat the Myall motto, "*Ad astra virtus*," and urge marriage. On the last occasion, Lord Myall, who was fond of Mr. Pennington, listened deferentially to all that gentleman had to say, which was not a little, and came to the conclusion that he would prevent further discourses on the happiness of the marriage state. First, he mollified the old gentleman in the usual way by promising to try and reform; then, no longer like a naughty boy who had been found out, he said what *he* thought of marriage. The good Mr. Pennington's hair almost stood on end when he was informed that there was nothing like living with one woman to make a man old. Afterwards, in reporting the conversation to the wife of his bosom, the agent said: "My dear, we have lived together very happily for nearly forty years. I don't at all agree with his lordship. If anything, the pleasure of your companionship has kept me very much younger than I should have been without it. . . . How he flouted the idea of marriage! He 'wasn't having any'—those were his words. I fear I angered him. Yet, now that I come to think of it, he looked at me quite affectionately when he went away, and smiled . . . a queer smile, not at all his usual cheery one."

Among the local gentry Lord Myall was always referred to as Gay Goliath. Of his nickname he was perfectly well aware: he often chuckled over it. Sir James Bolitho, that liberal Liberal who owned a line of steamers, and who was suspected of having made a generous donation to party funds in 1912, the

year he was dubbed knight, had recently confided to Mr. Vernon Penhalligan that Lord Myall was "more peasant than peer." Mr. Penhalligan reported this to Lord Myall who gave a great laugh and said: "Scarcely in the best of taste to say that—to you, of all people. However, what can one expect? His great-grandfather was in Myall service. How resentful they are, these good folk, that I will not accept their invitations. Heaven knows I have to accept themselves as equals on the hunting-field—that's bad enough!"

Lord Myall's best friend was Mr. Penhalligan, a widower, whose estate was adjacent to his own. A Myall had married a Penhalligan three hundred years ago.

"Taking 'em as a whole they're a spunkless lot. The few old families that remain in the Henliston district have lost nearly all their money, and pass their days in keeping up appearances. And those others who have come, Bolitho and the rest of 'em, spend their time in devising 'improvements,' and in wasting good money on charities," was his lordship's summing-up of the local gentry.

Lord Myall understood his peasants—his tenants, which was more than could be said of the majority of landlords in the neighbourhood. He knew, to a shilling, the maximum rent he could demand of each one of them. He knew precisely the right little present to make a farmer's wife or child, and when to do so. If a mackerel might be caught his lordship never grudged a sprat. Often would he ride to a farm, where the farmer's wife was elderly, and invite himself to a meal at the common board without causing the slightest embarrassment. He was master of the difficult art of treating his people as equals without allowing them to presume. Behind his mask of joviality and hail-fellow-well-met was a fierce pride of race. The men on the estate knew that Lord Myall feared neither god nor devil, that he was a Jew for a bargain, was kind to their children; had a strong right arm and that he always got what he wanted: for these, and other reasons, they respected him. As for the women, they knew that the squire was the finest specimen of a man between the Lizard and Henliston, that he had blue eyes and a jolly laugh, that though their men-

folk liked him he frightened them, and there was no gainsaying him: for these, and very many other, reasons he was adored by all the women, young and old. Undoubtedly, his lordship had a way with him. On Myall lands the women curtsyed and the men touched their caps when the squire rode by.

Lord Myall would tell you proudly that his chief interest was money-making, but that he never allowed it to become an obsession: a certain amount, reduced since the war, he forced himself to spend in luxuries: for example, he patronised a tailor called Raleigh who tailored in Saville Row, London, instead of a man called Warren who made suits of clothes in Hill Street, Henliston, and fitted you quite decently at one-third of Raleigh's prices. One never saw Lord Myall's name on a subscription list: charities had been the expensive hobby of his lordship's father. But it was common knowledge that Lord Myall did not mind what he paid for a hunter: his legitimate hobby was horses.

Occupied by the past and future, Lord Myall's thoughts were recalled to the present by the driver of a passing carriage and pair, hired from the Rose, who touched his hat. His lordship perceived that the solitary occupant of the carriage was a complacent-looking individual who was wearing a ring in which a large diamond flashed in the sunlight, and obviously enjoying a very big cigar—a very good cigar, he decided, as a whiff of smoke came his way. "Who's the brown man on horse-back?" he heard him shout. Well, the profiteer, or whoever he was, would have his question answered by Short. Knowing that the fat man would be informed that the "brown man" was Lord Myall of Myall, a great landowner and one of the wealthiest men in the Duchy, he gave a little smile of satisfaction.

Having arrived at the first houses in Packet Street, he smoothed the creases from his waistcoat and pulled down the stem of the marigold in his buttonhole. On a market-day he found it exceedingly pleasurable to receive the deferential salutations of the folk on the pavements, especially when it was fine and the town was full.

Brown like bracken in late autumn was his hat cocked rak-

ishly; his coat of light tweed was gold-brown like corn that is ready for the reaper; his buckskin breeches called to mind the russet-brown sails of fishing-boats; one could not determine whether his boots were of a richer brown than his leggings or whether his leggings were of a richer brown than his boots, any more than one could determine between two equally ripe horse-chestnuts. His face and hands were brown, a copper-brown. A brown man on a bay horse, Lord Myall, as he rode down Packet Street on his hunter, Thricer, was a brave sight. With head held high, as if he owned the place—as a matter of fact he did, the greater part of it—he nodded to right and left, raised his whip in salute or flung a cheery greeting. The women admired the man, and the men admired the horse, a magnificent animal that combined extreme elegance of build with extraordinary strength of muscle.

Orange House was built early in George the Third's reign for Sir Michael Orange, sixth baronet, and last of his race. He dwelt therein for fifty years; and when he died at the ripe age of ninety-six, regretting that he would be unable to celebrate his centenary, the house was sold to a Dr. Tyacke; and, one after another, Dr. Tyackes have lived there ever since. Very dignified, very grave, is Orange House today; its bricks have mellowed to a rare rose-red, though they may scarcely be seen in summer-time, for they are hidden by the foliage of a wistaria, the wistaria Sir Michael planted. Set back from the pavement, proudly aloof, it seems to brood over the fate that must surely overtake it with the death of the present owner, the fate that had long since overtaken its contemporaries in Packet Street. Will it be given up to offices like the house opposite that once was Mistress Pryde's? or will its lowest rooms be distorted into shops and its upper ones degraded by the ill-bred familiarities of shop-keepers, even as its next-door neighbours? Will the herbaceous borders on either side of the path between the gate and the front door be swept away? the descendants of those flowers that made gay the garden all those years ago be rooted up? the tall cypress cut down? the garden walls be demolished? the wrought-iron gate with Sir Michael's crest and monogram be sold as scrap-iron?

Strangers admire Orange House as they pass. To Henlistonians it is just "Dr. Tyacke's": they are used to it.

When Orange House came into view Lord Myall saw the doctor standing in the gateway engaged in conversation with Benjamin Creighton.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, as he drew rein. "I was hoping to find you at home, Tyacke."

"I'll call the boy to take your horse round to the stables—Devils, these horse-flies!" With a well-aimed slap, the doctor squashed one on Thricer's flank.

"You still have a boy, then? At the Poplars young Mabott has been called up, and my cousin's taken on his sister."

"So Robin was telling me."

"You haven't been wanted down there? He seemed very well last Saturday."

"No, I exchanged a word or two with him in Kitto's shop a few days ago, and he seemed quite fit—for him. Well, I'll be back in a minute."

Having dismounted, Lord Myall addressed himself to Mr. Creighton. "How goes it? Still satisfied with your bargain?"

It should be explained that Benjamin Creighton, a shining light of the New English Art Club, on holiday in the Duchy, in the summer of 1913, while boating on the Relford River, spied a deserted, rose-smothered cottage in a wilderness of a garden delightfully situated near a half-forgotten quay at the end of a creek. He ascertained that the cottage was the property of Lord Myall, and wrote to his lordship's agent asking if it were for sale. Mr. Pennington replied curtly in the negative. But Creighton had set his heart on buying the cottage and was not to be thwarted. He presented himself at Myall Manor, and on being admitted after some difficulty—the butler had never in all his life seen a man so strangely apparelled—used every possible argument that suggested itself in efforts to induce Lord Myall to rescind his agent's refusal. Lord Myall, who at first found the artist's talk extremely diverting, grew tired at length and, in order to terminate the interview, named a fancy price for the cottage with its curtilage that no man save a madman or a millionaire would pay,

To his lordship's amazement and dismay Creighton accepted his terms without demur.

"Quite, thanks. Every summer you promise to come and inspect my alterations and, I hope, improvements, but you never do. One cannot call it a cottage now, of course. You should see my swinging signboard over the porch: a sprig of mint against a Reckitt's blue background. The hours I've spent digging up the roots of mint! Stuff's all over the garden. Thought at one time I would ask a farmer to send all his lambs to pasture in it. A silly ass who came down from town the other day asked if I coined much. Wish I did! Beastly war's ruining us poor artists."

"I promised I'd come if a young cousin of mine came to stay. He's a nice boy; I think you'd like him. But Myall don't seem to attract him, somehow. Perhaps I'll persuade him this summer. If I do, I'd like to take him over to your place, Mint. He's very interested in books and pictures and—"

"All suchlike nonsense," Creighton suggested solemnly.

"Well, one man's meat is another man's poison. . . . I expect you guessed that I never dreamt you would be willing to pay the price I asked for the cottage. Frankly, I didn't want you to have it, but having named a price I couldn't withdraw: I saw that you weren't going to give me a chance to do so. Lord! I thought I should never hear the last of it from Pennington. I, who refuse to sell house or land on the estate, had agreed to sell a cottage with a decent strip of ground to an absolute stranger! a furriner, as they say down here. We Cornish are shy of strangers: it is a long time before we accept them. You've managed to make yourself very popular with the villagers. Cigarette?"

"Thanks. I knew you did not wish to sell, but I was determined to buy. Having robbed each other, we can cry quits. I'm quite a harmless person. Your keepers never find me trespassing or poaching."

"You're welcome to go into the woods whenever you like."

"That's jolly decent of you. I say, that's a ripping horse."

"Yes, Thricer's all right. He never funks the highest gate, and is forever at the tail of the hounds."

"If you don't mind my saying so your get-up puts me in mind of an autumn landscape on a fine day. That marigold shines out like the sun . . . very daring, and a nice note of colour . . . quite a picture. Deliberate?"

"How do you mean?" with a tolerant smile.

"Why did you choose a marigold? I ask merely out of curiosity. Artists are very curious folk, in both meanings of the word."

"Oh, the confounded weed invaded the path: two of my gardeners have gone to the war; garden's going to rack and ruin. I pulled it up and picked the flower before I chucked away the root. I don't quite know why. I put the thing in my coat. . . . Robin likes yellow flowers."

"I can hardly believe it's accidental—with all those browns, too. By Jove! I'd like to paint you. Just like that, standing by the horse."

"Lord Myall wouldn't feel flattered when he saw the finished picture, my friend," observed Dr. Tyacke, who had returned with the boy. "The work of a Royal Academy artist is more in his line, as it is in mine."

"What is the Royal Academy?" asked Creighton vaguely.

"As if you didn't know! When we look at a picture that we are told is of a man and a horse we like to see something that undoubtedly resembles a man and a horse. A few weeks ago you showed me a landscape you had painted: if you hadn't assured me that it *was* a landscape I should have taken it for—for the result of a recent earthquake, a pretty severe earthquake."

"Was it as bad as all that? Isn't it extraordinary that my pictures sell? I never could stand being peppered, Doctor, and the pepper you use is red. Well, I must buzz off like a bee that is questing a blue flower. I want some stuff to drape a model, a very pretty model."

"What sort of stuff?" asked Lord Myall, with a twinkle in his eye that the artist missed.

"Oh, I don't mind what sort of stuff it is as long as it is of the right blue, the blue the Madonna wears, most beautiful of blues. I know I shan't find it. By way of a start I'll try the

draper with the funny name opposite the Dolphin. Good-bye, Lord Myall. I shall be happy to see you at Mint, with or without the young cousin, any time. Doctor, you are an uncultured person."

"Mad," said Lord Myall laconically. Fascinated, he stood watching as the artist, sometimes on the pavement, sometimes in the street, creating mild consternation among a group of gossips, causing surprise to the apathetic driver of a crawling horse, threaded his hurrying way.

"He's like a boy on roller-skates. He should not tear like that: his heart's weak. Nice chap, Creighton. I've met many artists, but he's the only one that can stand being chaffed about his pictures. As a rule these painter-chaps have no sense of humour; take themselves too seriously."

"I like him. Wish he were not so thin: he's like two yards of pump-water. Is it true that he never gets less than fifty guineas for a picture?"

"More, I am told. He's supposed to be a genius. The *Recogniser* had a long article on his work the other Sunday. Come and have a drink. You must want one badly. Devilish hot day."

"Thanks. Yes, the sun blazed down as we came along. Look at the great dark patches of sweat on Thricker's coat, and we took it quietly, too."

Having given detailed instructions to the boy, concluding with: "Now don't go giving him petrol to drink: a horse's insides are not like a motor-car's," Lord Myall turned to the doctor with: "Concerning that drink you suggested?"

"Beer?"

"You bet. None of your whiskey and soda for me. Jimmy Bolitho will tell you that I have plebeian tastes. Does he still call his rheumatics gout, and boast of the too-much port drunk by his ancestors?"

"My dear Myall, it pleases him and deceives no one."

"Well, here's luck," said his lordship presently, as sprawling on a couch in the doctor's study he held high a glass of amber ale. "I'll have to drink water at the Poplars. Cynthia says she's following the King's example. As if she'd ever fol-

low anyone's example! I'm a spendthrift compared with Cynthia; she's a regular miser."

"Your cousin is certainly a character."

"If she were less of a character and more of a woman it would simplify things considerably. . . . I want to talk to you about Robin. Do you realise that he's getting on for one and twenty?"

"Twenty years ago since I met you riding in from Myall, and we discussed the arrival of a baby at the Poplars! It was a nasty raw day in December, just before Christmas. The old man had only been dead a month, and I had already come to the conclusion that a country practice wasn't altogether a soft snap. How quickly time passes. . . . There are people who still think Robin is Anthony's son."

"That's utter nonsense! But the lad's got no common ancestry; I'm sure of that. I wonder . . ."

"I've often wondered. Do you know, Myall, I've seen a look sometimes on his face that sends me searching my memory. Somewhere I've seen that selfsame look on a woman's face. One day I shall place her."

"I hope you won't! What I mean is, I hope that his mother—his parents will never make themselves known: it would be very awkward and upsetting. I am very fond of Robin, perhaps because I can't reach him: he's far above me. I regard him as a son, a son who is not allowed to have much to do with his father. Cynthia also regards him, not as a son, but as her particular property—there's the rub. For Robin I would do anything; and the irony of it is that so far I have done nothing. Before war broke out I begged Cynthia to let me take him to Switzerland: he was slowly recovering after that long attack, and we thought the change and the mountain air might do him good. She raised all sorts of objections; said among other things that it would cost too much, though I proposed to pay all expenses. I never mentioned the trip to Robin. What was the use?"

"If only you could entice him to Myall and induce him to lead an open-air life; then, as he grows stronger, give him some light digging to do, some small trees to fell. He has never

had a chance shut up in that prison. I have often told Miss Trevarthon so; but she only says 'Rubbish!'

"I know. It is impossible to deal with Cynthia. She ruled Anthony; and she rules Robin. Robin's damned loyal to Cynthia. I think he likes me, and enjoys himself *when* he comes to Myall. Nowadays, he won't come, though I know he wants to. How about that asthma?"

"I am hoping that it will leave him when he has turned twenty-one. Asthma is a very thankless disease to treat. Robin is a difficult subject. He does not help me as much as he might. When he is well he seems to forget all about his recent sufferings, behaves as if he had never known a day's illness in his life. He spends a lot of his time in that confounded greenhouse, when he ought to be taking deep breaths on the top of Porthruan Hill. He takes the maddest risks without a thought of consequences; bathes in the stream at Trewoof and stays in too long, though I must admit he has not done so lately, nor has he eaten a cold pasty or a chunk of heavy-cake just before going to bed. For the last I don't know how long he has spent hours bending over a table while writing that novel of his—not exactly increasing his chest measurement. I can make no promise, but I have every hope that he will grow out of it. He has a splendid constitution."

"He should have! If he hadn't he would have been dead long ago."

"Asthma never kills."

"It's an unnatural life he's leading, Tyacke. In some ways he might be fifty instead of twenty. He wants waking up . . . but you can't rouse him . . . he won't respond. Introduce a subject he don't care to discuss and you suddenly feel that though he gives you 'Yes' and 'No' in the right places the real Robin has removed himself a thousand miles away; and you very soon dry up. His tastes are the same as Anthony's: he's always dreaming and poring over books. But Anthony never shirked: *he* would discuss any mortal subject. Dear old Anthony, he thought me such a fool, though he tried not to show it. I learnt a lot from Anthony. Of course Robin is young; and the young, as a rule, turn shy when certain subjects are

mentioned by their elders. Yet, somehow, I don't believe Robin was shy with Anthony as he is with me. Anthony was always so gentle; I suppose Robin is frightened by my rough ways. I've never met a man that I respected and admired so much as I did Anthony. I am certain he would have made his mark in the world; but he took to dreaming, and would not leave Henliston, where he was wasted. There was not a thing you could mention that he did not know something about: books were as alive to him as horses are to me. Unlike most students he was worldly-wise, yet I'll swear he died a vir—celibate. I thought a boy brought up by him would be a wonder, that when Robin grew up he would be a second Anthony—but *only as regards brains*. I thought the natural instincts of a normal boy would be kept in check by Anthony's monkish teachings. Well, it seems that Anthony's influence was far stronger than I imagined. I wasn't wrong about the brains. Robin's clever enough. But I'm going to do my best to prevent Robin becoming a second Anthony. It's astonishing that he don't seem to realise the possibilities of manhood! Lord! I couldn't have been much over fifteen when—"

"It does not necessarily follow that your needs at Robin's age are his needs. I should say that you matured early; and, being extremely vigorous, your animal instincts refused to be denied. You had a curious upbringing."

"I upbrought myself!"

"Exactly. You had rather more of the animal than the average youth, to put it bluntly. Perhaps Robin has less of the animal than the average youth. We are all made differently; and what to one is an absolute necessity to another can be done without. With Robin you must take into consideration that these frequent attacks of asthma are very exhausting, a drain on the energies. I should describe Robin as half a student, half a faun, a faun that has never known freedom; but once let him loose in the woods he may become all faun. In every young man there is the unknown quantity x ."

"Still, it's amazing to me. He has never shown the least sign: passes a pretty girl in the street without noticing. Yet he *is* of different stuff to Anthony."

"Would he be likely to notice a pretty girl when he is in your company? You are plenty old enough to be his father. I fancy there is a latent side to Robin that he himself hardly suspects."

"A-ah. You think so, too?"

"Naturally his strength is sapped. But, as I have said, he has a splendid constitution. If only he gets rid of this asthma there is no reason why he should not grow into a vigorous young man."

"*And if he does not get rid of it?*"

"Oh, don't meet trouble half-way."

"Asthma or no asthma, would it hurt him to marry?"

"*Marry!* You're joking."

"I'm *not* joking. I'd like him to marry Penhalligan's girl some time next year—I tell you this in confidence. She's finished her schooling, and is now at home with her father. Lucy is a fine, healthy young girl, pretty, and full of beans. I want to get her booked. She's not the sort of girl to be left long on the shelf. Penhalligan's nervous about Robin's health: he naturally don't want her to marry an invalid. If I can assure him—?"

"I cannot say anything more than I've said. There is no medical objection to his marrying; probably be very good for him. He's a bit young. I should, taking everything into consideration, be inclined to postpone the marriage for a year or two. Next year we shall see how he shapes. Of one thing you may be sure, it is very unlikely that asthma will appear in his children; it may turn up again in the third generation. Is Robin keen on the girl?"

"No, but he will be—he *must* be. He hasn't seen her since she wore short frocks. I've got to set traps. I shall make things all right for Robin: he'll have Myall when I'm gone. Penhalligan's lands join mine, and Lucy is his only child. A good match, eh? What d'you think?"

"If you are backing Robin there can be no question: a very desirable alliance, though it seems to me that you've got your work cut out to bring it about. I have not seen Lucy for years. As a youngster she had plenty of spirit. I should have thought

her fancy would run to a man with plenty of dash, and Robin—”

“I’ve set my mind on it.”

“Then there is no more to be said. I wish you the best of luck.”

“Yes, Lucy’s a girl of spirit . . . it won’t be easy. What time is that striking? Half past twelve. Am I in the way if I stay on here for a bit? I’m early for the Poplars: a little of Cynthia goes a long way and she’s always in evidence—thinks I’ll eat Robin if he’s alone with me for more than five minutes! . . . Like a woman, I’ve changed my mind. I’ll be going. One or two things I may as well do now as after lunch. Very much obliged to you, Tyacke, for sparing me so much of your time. Still, I don’t come worrying you often.”

“I wish you did. So many of my patients are—Well, it’s a blessed relief to talk to a man with brains. You and I are not as young as we were. . . . I sometimes feel myself out of touch with the rising generation.”

“I’m an unsociable beast, old boy. I can’t help it. You’re pulling my leg, though. I’ve got no brains. . . . I brought in a brown paper parcel—ah, there it is. A hundred to one you don’t guess what’s inside it?”

“Dried flowers of sorts? No; well, I give it up.”

“Peacocks’ feathers.”

“For Robin? They’re supposed to be unlucky.”

“They’re for Cynthia: not for decorative purposes—she hates things in vases. Months ago she asked me for the feathers that she might put them in her clothes-press to keep the moths away, but I’ve always forgotten. However, this time I’ve brought ’em, and she’ll accept without returning thanks. My ousin, Cynthia, has pretty little ways.”

“I never knew that peacocks’ feathers were an insectifuge.”

“Cynthia says they are better than pepper or Keating’s for keeping away the moth. I’ve never asked for Mrs. Tyacke. Very rude of me. She’s well?”

“I’ve never known her unwell. She’s still in London, working four days a week at that canteen at Woolwich. It’s very good for her: keeps her mind off the war.”

"Jolly fine of her, I think. Aren't you thankful you haven't got a grown-up son in these days?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I am; sometimes not."

"When's the war going to be over?"

"God knows!"

"And He won't tell. I must buzz off, as our friend remarked just now. I'm much obliged to you for what you've said. Not a word about my plans for Robin, mind."

CHAPTER VII

SCARCELY had Lord Myall invited himself to stay on "for a bit" at Orange House when it occurred to him that if he arrived at the Poplars some twenty minutes earlier than was his wont neither Robin openly nor Cynthia surreptitiously would be on the watch for him, and he might have a useful little talk with Bessie Mabott. He might ascertain why Rosamund had not been preferred. Was it because Cynthia was afraid of that damsel's good looks—just that? or had she been making enquiries on the q.t.? Or had Bob, after all, recommended his pretty sister—and overdone it? The previous Saturday no opportunity of speaking to the girl alone presented itself, for Robin was in close attendance from the moment of his arrival, and accompanied him to the stables: that Robin had never done in Bob's time. He was so annoyed at finding Bessie installed that he could only snarl at her: even if Robin had not been present he felt in no mood for catechising Bob's ugly sister: he wanted to wring Bob's neck. At luncheon he casually expressed the hope that the new girl was proving herself a great success in the house and garden, and Cynthia drily remarked: "She's shaping." Then he changed the subject of conversation, in case Cynthia might suspect him of collusion with Bob.

With a perfunctory "Be good!" to the doctor he mounted his horse and set off down Packet Street as fast as the crowded and sluggish traffic permitted, oblivious of all salutations, and mut-

tering fiery curses when drivers of vehicles seemed deliberately to impede his way. Hill Street is double as wide as Packet Street, and when he turned the market-house corner he put Thricker to the gallop and did not slow down until he reached the Rose. Lost in thought, he rode up the avenue of the Poplars at walking-pace.

What was the particular kind of look Tyacke had sometimes seen on Robin's face, a look that sent him searching his memory? Was it half-wistful, half-plaintive, only seen when he had an attack of asthma? That must be the look, for once having surprised one couldn't forget it: Tyacke rarely saw him when he was well. Very odd. . . . "Place her." For a moment, he had felt very disquieted by the doctor's words. Supposing . . . just supposing. Memory was a tricky thing; and it did not do to be cock-sure. The next time he met Tyacke he would casually say: "Should you ever have reason for thinking that you have discovered the identity of Robin's mother I hope you will first come to me." No, there was no need. They were old friends: the doctor would of course advise him—he would be bound to. . . . *By hook or by crook Bessie must be persuaded to relinquish her position in favour of Rosamund.* He had been chewing the cud the whole week, and he had never thought of anything so simple: in Bessie's appointment he had seen the death of his hopes—how utterly ridiculous. Anthony used to say that supervising turnips, by which he meant living an outdoor life, improved the body but impaired the brain: Anthony was right.

"I am becoming a slow thinker, thanks to the turnips," he chuckled.

The maid's fortnight was up, and she could tell Cynthia that she couldn't manage the work, make some plausible excuse for leaving. Cynthia would be obliged to take on Rosamund: there wasn't a boy to be got for love or money—the money Cynthia would offer. . . . When he bracketed Robin and Lucy Penhalligan together Tyacke thought he was joking. No wonder. It was very much to be doubted if Robin understood why exactly a girl was a girl; most certainly he had never kissed one. When he remembered his own hot youth

it seemed an amazing state of affairs. It was a pity that Robin had never cottoned to Bob, who would have delighted to open his eyes to a thing or two. Robin must be made to understand, brought down to earth. If Rosamund took Bessie's place surely . . . surely. Unless he were very much mistaken, Robin would be struck of a heap with her Puritan face and demure manner. At first he would worship at a distance; in a week or so he would be head over heels in love. Then, having served her turn, there would be no further use for her at the Poplars. The girl was merely a harmless little flirt, so there would be no complications. The affair would want skilful handling. . . . Undoubtedly, Miss Rosamund was the one to kindle the flame that would not be quenched until the lad married Lucy Penhalligan.

At the end of the avenue he dismounted.

"Step softly, boy. Softly now."

Thricer pricked up his ears and, as if he understood his master's words, footed the gravel almost noiselessly. Lord Myall's sweeping glance at the poplars John Trevarthon had planted expressed disapproval: it was a crack-brained idea to plant trees so near to a house that they kept the daylight out of the rooms, but, of course, a man who could gamble away his estates was mad. Anthony once had called them "the line of silent sentinels on guard." Each window gave him back stare for stare, as he paused for a moment between the sixth and seventh poplar. The house looked unusually yellow, and put him in mind of some baked thing, an underdone saffron-cake. The brass satyr on the front door glittered, and seemed to be grinning in the sunlight. There were no signs of life.

"Like a great tomb with a knocker to wake the dead on Judgment Day," he muttered. "No Robin, no Cynthia. Now I hope that wench is somewhere about."

Then as he looked down the passage he saw Bessie in the garden awkwardly trimming a bush of escallonia with a pair of shears. He watched her, thinking how ugly she was. How had she managed to fix young Pascoe?

As he passed the entrance to the kitchens he heard the mur-

mur of voices, and felt immensely relieved when he failed to detect Cynthia's sharp tones. Bessie's face was flushed with heat; all in a fluster, she seemed to be working against time. If she took it quietly she would be quicker. He gave a low whistle to attract her attention.

"It's all right: I'm earlier than usual. Always keep cool, Bessie, especially on a hot day. Are you beginning to get the hang of things?"

"I'm learning the mistress' ways, sir—my lord. . . . I know I'm slow. I hope I'll suit."

"Bless my soul! That's not the way to unsaddle a horse. Let be! Watch me! . . . No need to look scared, my girl: my bark is worse than my bite, and I didn't mean to frighten you. Now your brother—by the way, how is he enjoying himself in khaki?"

"He isn't enjoying himself 'xactly, sir, from what he writes."

"Ah, *he* won't be long before he settles down, I'm thinking. There, that's the way."

"I was never no use with horses. My sister be one—"

"Yes, I remember Bob mentioned the fact."

"As a little maid she was always in and out of the stables at the Rose. Father says—"

"As a little maid she was one for the horses; as a big maid she's one for the chaps, eh?"

There was something motherly in Bessie's smile as she proudly confessed: "She's got Bob's and my share of good looks, as well as her own: the chaps can't help noticing her."

"Let's see, her name is—?"

"Rosamund, sir."

"Of course. I thought *she* was to take Bob's place? Bob told me before he left that he was recommending her to Miss Trevarthon."

"He'd set his mind on her coming to the Poplars; and she was willing."

"Then why the devil didn't she?"

"She did, sir—my lord. She came first to see Miss Trevarthon, who told her that before she decided she would like to see me. And then I came."

"And then you came. Just so. Why do you think you were preferred to your sister?"

"I can't think."

"Do you think Miss Trevarthon had heard things about her?"

"She'm a good girl. There's nothing against her."

"Let sisterly love continue, by all means. Well, if that's the case why wasn't she taken?"

Bessie made no answer.

"Miss Trevarthon may have thought that Rosamund wasn't quite the cut," he suggested musingly. "Mind you, I don't know her reasons: she has never mentioned your sister's name to me."

"Appearances are deceptive, they say, sir."

"Good for you."

"Rose can do anything she sets her mind to."

"Yet she's content to stay at home doing nothing."

"One of us has to stay at home. All day long she's as busy as a bee. There's meals to be got, and a hundred odds and ends to be done: washing and cleaning and ironing and mending. Rose knits all father's and Bob's socks and vests. She can sew beautiful. There's plenty of work to do, sir, even in a lill cottage."

"A little bird whispered to me that she finds time to break hearts."

"The chaps won't give her no peace. I'd want her fast enough if I was a chap. Father and Bob and me—we've all spoilt her. You can't help spoiling her, she's got such taking ways; but spoiling don't harm her same as it does most folks. Now that she's grown up, it's natural that the chaps should come after her. She laughs at 'em and don't favour one more'n t'other. There's safety in numbers."

"All depends. . . ."

"There's nothing 'gainst our Rose! These old scandal-mongers with long tongues—"

"And ugly daughters," he prompted.

"That's just it, sir—my lord. They'm jealous."

"She ought soon to be making up her mind. Once a maid's turned twenty, Bessie—Good looks don't last forever."

"Rose don't want to marry."

"Tut, tut! All maids say that."

"Bob says with her soft ways Rose could marry a gentleman," she confided.

"Does he, indeed! And does Rose intend to marry a—gentleman?"

"She don't take no notice of Bob—not in that way. She don't want to marry 'tall."

"So Rose was very anxious to come to the Poplars?"

"She wasn't anxious: she'd rather stay at home. She only wanted to come for Bob's sake. He was afraid that if I came I wouldn't give satisfaction: he was certain Rose would."

"Ah, your brother's got a head-piece: there's not the slightest doubt about that."

"Bob's clever."

"Until recently you've been in service at Morden?"

"I was under-housemaid, sir. Mrs. Lanyon's economising: that's why I left. I do miss the children."

"What would you have done if you hadn't come here?"

"I was thinking of going to make munshons. I've got an aunt living in London."

"Munition-making is very hard work. And if your sister had come here instead of yourself?"

"Then I should have stayed at home to look after father."

"So Rose ain't keen to marry, eh?—not even a gentleman?"

"What are 'ee trying to find out 'zactly 'bout my sister with all these questionings?" she flashed.

"My good girl, I was simply asking questions about your sister and yourself out of kindly interest. I have taken a fancy to Bob. He's a good lad, and I'm interested in his sisters just because they're his sisters. I *may* be of help."

The flush on Bessie's cheeks died down. She looked half-perplexed, half-reassured.

"He said you'd been very generous, my lord," she admitted,

"A-ah! You are tokened to Dick Pascoe out at Cradock, eh?"

"I didn't know Bob had told you that, sir."

"How old are you, Bessie?"

"Twenty-two last birthday—March."

"As much as that! And as things are it will be many a long day before you're able to get married." He paused to light a cigarette in a leisurely manner so that she might have time to reflect on the truth of his statement.

"I'm 'fraid so, sir."

"And I can see you're very fond of him," he said, puffing out a cloud of smoke. "Yes, he'll never get advancement at Cradock, I'm thinking. Now let me consider. . . . *Supposing* he made up his mind that he was dissatisfied—I don't doubt he is!—and being anxious to better himself applies to me for a job. *Supposing* I happened to want just such a man, and offered him a good wage. There's a cottage . . . roses and honeysuckles climbing all over it . . . just suit you two to start with. What d'you say?"

"Do'ee really mean it, sir—my lord?"

"Mind you, he's got to apply to me through my agent, Mr. Pennington—before the harvest. I'm not offering him more money to leave Cradock. Understand? He's got to keep his mouth shut about this offer. Of course he may prefer to stay where he is."

"Oh, Dick'll be brae and glad when I tell him, and he'll be 'long to Mr. Pennington in a day or two. He be coming into town tomorrow."

"Are you definitely taken on till Bob returns? I seem to remember Mister Robin told me last week that—"

"I'm on a fortnight's trial, sir. I came last Monday week, so I'm expecting the mistress to tell me today whether I suit or no."

Lord Myall looked thoughtful. After all, if Bessie left there was no guarantee that Rosamund would take her place. Cynthia might take it into her head that she would not have Rosamund at any price, which was quite likely, for Cynthia always did the annoying thing.

"Ah. You're looking poorly, Bessie. This work is too much for you, I'm afraid."

"It's different to being nursemaid; but I'm strong enough. This dimsy light makes you look pale. I've been cutting those 'scallonia-bushes, and I'm a bit tired."

"If at any time Rose should change her mind about getting married she must let me know. A few extra pounds come in useful when you're setting up house. I hope she'll make a sensible choice—some young farmer, say."

"She'll thank you very much indeed, I'm sure, sir."

"Well, keep quiet about it, or all the maids at Myall will expect me to line their stockings."

"I won't tell no one but Rose."

"Look here, Bessie, I want you and your sister to do me a favour—to change places."

"How do'ee mean, sir?"

"Before you go today you might mention to Alice or the cook that you're not feeling too grand, and—"

"But there's nothing—"

"Don't interrupt. On Monday you will be too poorly to come to work. You do go home every night, don't you? Good. So on Monday Rose will come in your stead . . . until you're better. It may be a month before you're better. You'll have a quiet little talk with Rose when you get home, and I'm sure she will—"

"Rose'd never consent! *She couldn't!* She isn't *that* sort, so you're much mistaken. *That's* very different to harmless skylarking with chaps of her own age. Thinking you could bribe me to *that*, indeed!"

"Bessie, Bessie, where are your wits? Think a minute. Would I go to all this elaboration for myself? I pay a short visit at this house once a week. Mister Robin is generally with me all the time I'm here. You silly maid, *I'm* past all that sort of thing."

"I don't know so much about that. From all accounts—"

"That's enough, Bessie. *You mustn't judge every man by Dick Pascoe's standard.*"

"Then why do you want Rose to come?" she asked, avoiding his steady gaze.

"That does not concern you in the slightest. Ask no questions. I've got reasons, good reasons, honest reasons, only they would take too long to explain. All I ask is that your sister shall come here on Monday because you'll be feeling too poorly to come. Simple enough. I'm going to help you both to husbands, and when I ask you a small favour in return you—"

"Are you sure you mean no harm to Rose?"

"Good God! maid, haven't I said so? She'll come to no harm here."

"I don't understand."

"There's no need for you to. I could explain, but I really don't see why I should. Bessie, I hope there's no danger of Rose falling in love with Mister Robin? She's not engaged like you."

"Rose fall in love—and with Mister Robin!" Bessie laughed, "Why, it makes no matter if she did, as far as he is concerned. Mister Robin'll walk past her same as if she wasn't there. Rose won't fall in love: she don't feel deeply enough. I wish I was made that way: it's easier." Bessie smoothed her hair and sighed.

"When a chap has looks like Dick's, temptations are bound to be put in his way, especially now so many young men have gone to the war. He's just got a bit above himself: that's all."

"Did Bob tell 'ee that, too?"

"Don't you fuss yourself to no good purpose, because Master Dick has been a bit frisky of late; but if you must, don't let him see you're doing so. Always laugh. Tears have been known to turn the scales the wrong way for a maid often enough. Don't you take notice. Better he should do his frisking before marriage than after. He'll make none the worse husband: seasoned wood makes the best fire, Bessie, my girl. He won't stray far, nor for long. Though you're no beauty, there's something about you that a man likes; that, if he leaves, he comes back to. I've discovered a lot about you that I didn't suspect since we began our talk. You're the sort of maid that don't nag when she becomes a wife: you're tolerant. Once

you've married him he'll be quiet enough—*he'll have to if he comes to Myall!* You're the sort that's happy as long as she's got babies. They'll come along in due course, and pretty ones, too, but not too many, I hope. Then it's settled that Rose comes here on Monday?"

Bessie, with scarlet cheeks, tried to compose herself. "But—but what can she say is the matter with me?"

"Oh, talk it over with Rose."

"I do get bilious now and again," she reflected.

"Good. Then she can say that you've got jaundice, that you've turned as yellow as a guinea. Send for Dr. Tyacke tomorrow. He'll make it all right. I shall be seeing him by and by."

"But the mistress may not—"

"If Rose presents herself to Miss Trevarthon on Monday morning, and says that she'll come to do your work till you're recovered, I don't quite see how she can send her home again—damned if I do. Listen! . . . That's Mister Robin's voice. Rose comes on Monday, mind, or no wedding for you. . . . Well, Bessie, I'm glad to hear that Bob's not thinking of deserting. He should be a prime favourite with the drill-sergeant."

"How's that, sir—my lord?"

"Well, once the drill-sergeant finds out that in spite of his seeming-clumsiness Bob's a smart recruit, that he can form fours and—. Hullo, Robin, I was wondering where you were. That's a queer little song. How does it go?—'Life is very funny—'?"

"Life is very merry.

When you come to think it out

What a silly lot of fools we are!"

"That's true enough. You're full of oats this morning. Feel as if you'd never had a day's sickness in your life, eh?"

"And as if I were never going to have one."

"Touch wood!"

"The maids didn't hear you come. You *are* early today: there's a whole quarter of an hour to luncheon-time."

"Busy chattering, I expect. Yes, I am early: I went by my

watch, which suddenly went off at a gallop after breakfast—something wrong with the regulator—had it seen to—all right now.”

“Hot ride?”

“Devilish.”

“Why is he called Thricer? I always forget to ask. That *is* Thricer? Thricer and Sioux are as alike as two peas.”

“Robin, Robin! Now, I could tell which was which a mile away—on a dark night. Rather amusing. You see, the stallion that served—no, I’m thinking of something else—I’m getting mixed. Upon my word, I don’t know. I bought him up country. Never occurred to me to ask the reason of his name till some days after I’d got him home; and then I wasn’t curious enough to find out.”

“Why does a horse’s name interest me more than the horse?” questioned Robin impatiently. “Do you care two straws about the name of a horse? It’s the horse itself that matters.”

“Ah, you’re a reader and writer, and names naturally interest you more.”

“Has it struck you that—? But you’d like a wash?”

“Presently. There’s plenty of time. Where’s your Aunt Cynthia?”

“In the breakfast-room interviewing Mrs. Rendall.”

“Then I don’t think we want to go indoors just yet. I haven’t been into the garden for weeks.”

“Mrs. Rendall is back early, so I imagine she has sold out. Aunt Cynthia’s bunches were not quite so skimpy today. Crowds in town, I suppose?” Robin asked, as they walked along the passage.

“The streets are pretty full: last Saturday in the month. You were starting to ask me something?”

“Was I? Let me think. . . . Oh, yes. Has it occurred to you that I’m getting more and more like Uncle Anthony?—I don’t mean in looks.”

“Anthony’s was a good life wasted. We don’t want you to become a second Anthony.”

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“You have some of his little ways; but you’re not a bit like

him—inside. With all Anthony's quickness and the rest of it there was something sluggish. There's nothing sluggish about you. You're made of very different fibre, Robin."

"I wonder."

"I don't think you quite understand yourself?"

Robin shrugged his shoulders.

"I am quite sure I don't."

"So it's difficult to get at you. I wish you'd tell me—"

"I am glad that you think I only resemble him outwardly. Isn't the light dazzling? Let us sit on the bench under the walnut-tree."

"Like Anthony indeed! Why this morning you're simply bubbling over with life. I've never seen you so well. What's the matter? Has that book of yours been accepted by the publisher?"

"It has been refused. I heard from Newton this morning. I'm afraid it's a very bad book, so I don't blame him in the least. But I don't think that he's a nice man: he uses red labels."

"*The swine won't publish your book?*"

"No. He tied it up in a brown paper parcel, stuck on a red label, and sent it back," said Robin airily.

"But you don't seem to mind," Lord Myall looked at him perplexedly. "Or are you pretending that—"

"Bother the book! Cousin Godfrey, what made you choose a marigold? When you wear a flower in your coat it is usually a hothouse one."

"Nice colour, eh? Faded now." Lord Myall threw the flower away: it had served its purpose.

"Lobelia is your flower. Your eyes *are* a wonderful blue, very like Aunt Cynthia's," Robin said mischievously.

"You young imp. What shall I do to you? Tell your aunt her eyes are like mine, and see what *she* says."

"Myall eyes: Beau Myall had them. Why haven't I got eyes of lobelia-blue instead of mongrel-coloured ones?"

"That's a new variety."

"What can one call eyes that are a mixture of yellow and green and grey? Looks as if we are going to have a good crop

of walnuts this year? The nuts of Jupiter. In the Golden Age the gods fed on walnuts, and so their name was *Jovis glans*—the nuts, I mean, not the gods."

"Now that was very like Anthony. He was always bringing out scraps of information, just as if he had a book open before him and was reading aloud."

"Isn't it nice here in the shade looking at the flowers that seem to gain brightness in the sunshine? The sun is trying his best to burn through the leaves overhead."

He reached up, plucked one and crunched it in his hand, "Smell! Don't you love the scent?"

"You ought to be wearing a hat: you'll be catching a cold or a sun-stroke."

"Oh, I'm all right."

"The young leaves with their golden-green and golden-bronze remind me of a shot-silk blouse that Miss Merton used to wear years ago. . . . 'A dog and a wife and a walnut tree, the more they are beaten the better they be.' I wonder how one beats a tree?"

"Think you'll beat your wife?"

"That depends. If she were a bad wife, I might. Fancy me with a wife!"

"Why not? Marry while you're young, Robin."

"I shall not marry. I suppose I'm too tall for a page?"

"Page?"

"At your wedding."

"Ah, with me it's different. I've got something here that I came across at Myall: I thought you might like it, so—"

"Cousin Godfrey, you're always bringing me presents. You must not. I've told you so heaps of times."

"No one has ever stopped me doing anything that I wanted to do. You don't know what it is yet." He felt about in one of his pockets. "Got him! Here's a penny for you. Don't go spending it all at once and make a beast of yourself."

"A Cornish penny. Isn't it heavy? '*For the accommodation of the county . . . 1811.*' Between Trafalgar and Waterloo. I have never seen one before."

"A pilchard on one side and a tin-mine on the other, you see."

"The fish looks more like a pike than a pilchard. It was a token used by the miners?"

"I suppose so. Well, spend it or put it in your money-box."

"But it must be valuable. I ought not to accept it."

"Don't be silly, boy. You must not take any notice of what your aunt says. She don't like me, you know. . . . Have you had news of Peter Jago lately?"

"I had a letter from him this morning. The noise of the guns has made him deaf in one ear, but only temporarily, I hope. Poor old Peter. I thought of going to Trewoof this afternoon."

"How old is his sister, now?"

"Nineteen. If she were not there, I don't know what would happen to the place. Treza's a brick."

"Ever kissed her, Robin?"

"Kissed her? What a funny question. Of course I have kissed her, many a time."

"Lately?"

"No, certainly not. She's grown-up."

"All the more reason, I should say."

"But we used to play together. She's like my own sister."

"Yes, but still. . . ."

"Oh, please change the subject."

"What are you going to do about that book of yours?"

"Nothing."

"But you were so keen."

"It is not the slightest use my trying to write books, yet. I lack experience. I am awfully ignorant of the world and its ways. Very soon I really shall become like Uncle Anthony, *in every way*, unless I—. There's the bell! and you haven't washed."

"That's all nonsense about your taking after Anthony."

"Let's hurry. You know what Aunt Cynthia is. Cousin Godfrey, at luncheon I am going to make an announcement. Aunt Cynthia will be against me. Promise that you will take my part, help me to do what I want to do?"

"You bet I will," said Lord Myall with emphasis, throwing away his cigarette.

CHAPTER VIII

TO save time, Lord Myall washed his hands under the pump in the back kitchen, but, even so, Robin was fully alive to the fact that when they entered the dining-room, like naughty schoolboys bidden to the headmaster's study, six whole minutes had elapsed since the bell rang out its summons. However, it seemed that they were not to be rebuked for unpunctuality: Miss Trevarthon, standing by the window, was engrossed in studying a piece of paper on which he guessed were pencilled statistics relating to the sales of flowers; and by her expression he judged that she derived pleasure therefrom and was in high good humour.

"Wouldn't Aunt Cynthia make an excellent Chancellor of the Exchequer, Cousin Godfrey?"

Miss Trevarthon looked up. Very deliberately she folded the paper and thrust it into the velvet bag that hung from her belt. Without haste she took off her spectacles, polished them with a handkerchief, and put them into their case.

"There are few positions in the Cabinet that a woman with an average amount of intelligence would find herself unable to fill," she observed, as the case followed the paper into the bag.

"I think, after all, you would be even a greater success at the Foreign Office: 'scraps of paper' would receive every consideration at your hands."

"Robin, you get more and more facetious every day."

"Good morning, Cynthia," said Lord Myall politely.

Robin wondered if they had ever shaken hands: they never had in his presence.

"So you *have* come! Robin seemed to think that you might. Will you sit there."

"Did you see in yesterday's paper—?" Robin began,

"I hope you are not going to talk about the war, at any rate, until after luncheon," broke in his aunt severely, as she examined the edge of the carving-knife.

"I haven't the faintest wish to talk about the war."

"There are people who do say they don't feel hungry in summer. Summer or winter my appetite don't vary, thank God!" Lord Myall said piously. "As a matter of fact I think I eat more in summer."

"H'm. That's very interesting. Dear me. I'm afraid the beef is not as tender as it should be. Or is it the knife?"

"It can't be the knife, Miss Cynthia: I sharpened'en just now," declared Selina at her mistress' elbow.

"Then it must be the beef. I shall have to have a little talk with Killigrew. The tradesfolk are taking all kinds of liberties that they'd never have dared before the war."

But Robin perceived that Miss Trevarthon's grumble and frown were camouflage: her thoughts were still pleasantly dwelling on the number of Mrs. Rendall's sales, and in all her acid remarks he detected a sweetness that arose from satisfaction. Undoubtedly, Mrs. Rendall must have had a most successful morning to put his aunt in such an excellent temper. Cousin Godfrey's smile as he regarded the joint seemed unusually jolly. He himself was—well, he was going away, not to Myall for a few days, but to London for a month. He caught Selina's eye and they exchanged smiles. There seemed every prospect of a peaceful meal. He would wait until the fruit was on the table.

"I, at last, remembered to bring in a bunch of peacocks' feathers for you, Cynthia. What did I do with them, Robin?"

"I noticed a parcel on the shelf in the stables."

"Ah, that would be it."

"Gracious, Godfrey! You surely don't mean that you were so diverted by Bessie's talk that you forgot all about it? Now if Bob were here I could understand."

"Queer maid—Bessie. She don't look strong; and her complexion's unhealthy. Have you taken her on permanently?"

"Bessie came on a fortnight's approval. Her last place was a very different one from this."

"Rather."

"How do *you* know?"

"I *don't* know, but I'm quite sure of it. She's lucky to be at the Poplars."

"H'm. She has proved satisfactory, so I certainly intend to keep her. As for her complexion, it is a bit yellow, but that's the nature of it. She wants hardening."

"I'm glad to hear *you* find her satisfactory. I don't know where you'd find anyone else. There's not a boy to be got for love or money, and lots of the maids have left the town to go munition-making."

"I'm prepared to take your word for that. Please don't wait. I shall expect my extra grace as carver. Is the meat tough?"

"I don't find it so. Very nice," declared Lord Myall with gusto.

"Rather too well done, Selina. Amelia is always in a hurry to set it to cook: it's a fault of hers that I wish I could cure. She's been here for five years now, and when I complain she replies that she's not used to cooking meat on a spit. Perhaps in ten years' time she will."

"That's plenty for me, Aunt Cynthia."

"A healthy house-fly eats more than you, Robin. Take a leaf out of his lordship's book. You must build up your strength before you get another attack."

"I don't intend to have another attack."

"Oh, you will, all the same."

"What sort of a morning has Mrs. Rendall had?" asked Robin innocently.

"She sold all but three bunches."

"Jolly good!"

"You'll soon be paying a dividend," Lord Myall commented,

"So absurd to bring back three bunches. She might just as well have sold the lot while she was about it."

Robin made up his mind that *he* had not tied up the three that remained.

"I wonder how many Mrs. Rendall will sell next Saturday?" he said pensively.

"If she chose to stir herself I believe she could always return

with an empty basket. I'm afraid she's lazy: that is probably why she's so fat. Provided she sells at least two dozen bunches I've decided to allow her threepence instead of twopence-half-penny on every six—as from next Saturday. It may encourage her to make an effort."

"I'm sure it will," Robin agreed enthusiastically.

"Let us hope so. *Will you kindly pass the mustard, Godfrey?* But I do wish she wouldn't eat those horrid peppermints. The breakfast-room reeks of them."

"The poor soul probably suffers from indigestion: peppermint is supposed to be good, isn't it?"

"That's no excuse. If her digestion troubles her she should go and see Tyacke and ask him to prescribe. She doesn't take enough exercise."

"Medicine costs money."

"So do peppermints," snapped his aunt. "Sweets, too, have gone up in price. . . . H'm, not so tough as I feared."

"Then Killigrew escapes a scolding," said Lord Myall, holding the water-bottle to the light.

"No need to do that, Godfrey. The water is quite clear. If you honour us with your company, *after the war*, you shall have ale. I'm obliged for the feathers that at long last you've remembered to bring. We have a regular plague of moths. Only a few days ago I gave Alice a cashmere shawl that belonged to my grandmother. It was as full of holes as a piece of wire-netting. Don't put your trust in powder or pepper where moths are concerned."

"Great shame," said Lord Myall sympathetically.

"Why did her parents have her christened Alice, do you think?" asked Robin.

"Why has Bessie Mabott got a sister called Rosamund?" returned Miss Trevarthon. "The names they choose!"

"It sounds so ungrammatical," Robin pursued. "And yet *Alouse*—one simply can't call a girl *Alouse*."

"What foolish nonsense are you talking? Please don't laugh, Godfrey, it only encourages him."

"Do you think that when I am possessed of a wife I shall beat her? Cousin Godfrey seems to think—"

"Indeed!" Miss Trevarthon looked up from her plate to make sure that Selina had left the room. "What is all this about a wife? May I ask if his lordship is thinking of taking one?"

Robin realised that he had said an unfortunate thing, and sent a quick apologetic glance in Lord Myall's direction.

Lord Myall answered the question: "No, his lordship is not. When one understands that a love-match is generally a failure and a money-match always a mistake, marriage becomes too ticklish a business."

"That's an epigram," Robin pointed out delightedly. "Uncle Anthony would have loved to have heard you make it, and in just that tone."

"An *epigram* you call it. It struck me as merely a very cynical remark, and quite uncalled for. I fail to see that it has any bearing on wife-beating," said Miss Trevarthon.

"It was a pearl of great price. Yes, Uncle Anthony would have been pleased."

"A pearl cast before—a wasted pearl, as far as your aunt is concerned, Robin. I was not aware that I had said anything particularly clever."

"I know. When you say a clever thing you never are. I don't mean to say you are given to saying *stupid* things. The way you brought it out seemed to enhance its value. I think Uncle Anthony was wrong about you. . . ."

"How, Robin?"

"Oh, he—he thought you were—I can't explain," Robin stammered.

"I could," said his aunt shortly. "Your Uncle Anthony was perfectly right."

"It was *à propos* of the old adage, 'A dog and a wife and a walnut-tree,' Aunt Cynthia. We were sitting under the walnut-tree in the garden, you see, and—"

"You ought to be ashamed, Godfrey, of putting ideas in the boy's head."

"But Cousin Godfrey did not put any ideas in my head. He was only joking." Robin, for the moment, felt despairing. He

cudgelled his brains for something safe to say that would relieve the tension.

"You seem unusually down on me today, Cynthia," Lord Myall mildly protested, glass to lips.

Miss Trevarthon deigned neither to affirm nor deny; but the glance she shot caused him to ingurgitate, as if the water were beer or cider.

How Cynthia hated him, Lord Myall reflected, setting down the empty glass. Looking back, it seemed that she hated him from the moment she discovered that occasionally he said a thing that amused Anthony. But she used not to fear him; she did now, because she was firmly convinced that he was doing all in his power to alienate Robin, and she dreaded that he might succeed. It would be quite impossible to make her understand that he had a genuine affection for Robin: one could not reason with a jealous woman. He was quite aware that she had continually urged Anthony to discourage his visits to the Poplars. She would have found a pretext to put an end to his visits when Anthony died if she had been sure of Robin's support. Had she done so Robin would have felt bound to uphold her: the lad was confoundedly loyal. Luckily, she understood Robin even less than he did himself. She appreciated him not at all. . . . Sitting at table with Cynthia was like being shut up in a small room with an angry wasp that one longed to kill. Cynthia, the wasp. She might very well be a wasp in time to come if there was any truth in reincarnation. He had only to raise his head, tell her what he thought of her in a few well-chosen words, and, forgetting her fear of him, she would sting—bid him begone, and nevermore return. Her buzzing annoyed him intensely; and she knew it. She buzzed at everyone, but at him in quite a different way from the others. Since she was mistress of the Poplars he restrained himself from attack. Occasionally she provoked him to defence—to remonstrance; then, her angry buzzing ceased—for a little while. Her buzzing was a small thing compared to her silence. . . . Under his eyelids he could see that Robin, eating mechanically, was lost in thought. No help

from that quarter. Cynthia was thoroughly masticating: he could hear the even click of her false teeth. Why on earth didn't she have them attended to, instead of making that beastly row? *She* was not likely to get indigestion through bolting her food. Years ago, when he was a young man, he used to talk for the sake of talking in order to prevent Cynthia buzzing, though she was harmless then. As long as Anthony was alive she was merely a bumble-bee, stingless. Nowadays, he could not talk unless he had something to say—rather Irish, that. . . . The silence was becoming terrific. He couldn't bear it much longer. How did Cynthia manage it?

"My 'cynical remark' was meant for a joke, too. When I made it I forgot that you had never troubled to cultivate a sense of humour. Mind you, Cynthia, I think you are right: a sense of humour is often a danger to one who has it. I *ought* to hunt about for a wife. I shan't be always lusty. Still, there's plenty of time, for I'm on the right side of fifty. A man is in his prime when a woman's past bearing. Mother Nature is very unfair. Title dies with me if I have no son, Great pity that would be. Myall family one of the oldest in the Duchy."

Robin was looking at him reproachfully. Cynthia's face had become the colour of a beetroot, but she went on chewing. If she didn't speak he would have to smash something.

"H'm. It would indeed be a great pity you should remain a celibate to the end. Such a fine figure of a man as you are, too," she said witheringly, at last, without raising her head.

Lord Myall gulped, and muttered under his breath a sentence that ended with "modesty and old maids." After one of those awful silences he always said the wrong thing—and Cynthia always made him regret it. She knew perfectly well the effect she had on him. Most likely he had upset her for the rest of the meal. As long as she didn't lapse into silence again he did not mind.

"That's very pretty of you," he said banteringly.

Miss Trevarthon, a little surprised but pleased at her daring, was smiling grimly. She fancied some considerable time would

elapse before Godfrey Myall dared to mention the subject of marriage in her presence. The wicked wretch had no more intention of looking for a wife than he had of behaving like an ordinary Christian. He was a regular Henry the Eighth, only nothing like as respectable.

"You were born out of your period, Godfrey, which was centuries ago: one can picture you as a mediæval baron."

How the wasp would like to sting, thought Lord Myall, and how he would like to squash it! His knife and fork hovered over the plate; they descended: the fork pierced a potato, and the knife cut it exactly in half.

"Echoes of Anthony. You have a long memory, Cynthia. He had a dry way with him."

Miss Trevarthon glared. She turned to Robin with: "Pass your plate."

"No more, thanks."

"You want a tonic, Robin. . . . Godfrey?"

"If you please, since you are holding the carvers: up to a point, eating increases my appetite."

"H'm."

"I think Master Robin's too excited to eat. Some fancy or other has occurred to him, and he's thinking how best he can put it on paper. If you look at his eyes you seem to hear his brains clicking. A penny for what it's all about."

"I've got my penny already," said Robin slyly.

"Never seen him looking better; have you, Cynthia?"

"It won't last: it never does."

"A stranger would imagine from your tones that you are fondly hoping I shall have an attack tonight—if not sooner."

"Robin, how can you talk like that? But you'd better be careful: this heat may easily bring it on. If I were you I should keep away from the greenhouse; stay in the cool."

"Oh, cheer up, there's a dear."

"For we're a long time dead," added Lord Myall. "Life's very merry, and when you come to think about it we're a silly lot of fools—eh, Robin?"

"You'll learn the right order of the words if you persevere," Robin laughed. He proceeded to hum the refrain under his

breath: the atmosphere had become less strained, and he felt happier.

"Speak for yourself, please, Godfrey," said Miss Trevarthon disapprovingly.

Unseen by his aunt Robin signalled to Lord Myall with eyes and silently-moving lips.

Lord Myall looked at Robin blankly until he remembered the promise he had made as they came in from the garden. Understanding, he winked back knowingly. He would do his best to help the lad win Cynthia's consent to whatever 't might be, some trifle. Robin wished him to make himself agreeable to Cynthia, but not too agreeable, or she would smell a rat. Pity he had not got the tip sooner, for he had been rather overdoing things in the opposite direction. The request that Robin was to make had quite slipped his memory. What was this "announcement"—quaint way of putting it. It was up to him to throw the grain: at the moment dear Cynthia's feathers were rather ruffled.

"I wonder if the public prefer bunches of mixed flowers," said Robin musingly.

"Yes, Robin?" Miss Trevarthon encouraged.

"If I were buying flowers I should prefer one kind: roses or snapdragons or zinnias."

"That's a good idea," said his aunt brightly. "Don't you think that next week we might try the experiment. Two dozen of the mixed, and two dozen of the others."

"Certainly."

"A bunch of roses should fetch a penny more than a bunch of mixed flowers."

Miss Trevarthon enlarged on the subject, and when it was becoming exhausted, Robin, to Lord Myall's amusement, cunningly induced her to repeat all she had said about Mrs. Rendall and her habits.

The atmosphere was tranquil when Selina removed the joint.

"Why not make up some buttonholes? A rosebud and a scrap of maiden-hair fern for twopence," suggested Lord Myall.

"Would there be a sale for buttonholes?" questioned Miss Trevarthon hopefully.

"There would be no harm in trying."

"There would not," she agreed.

"All my nice flowers in the greenhouse," lamented Robin.

"Amelia is too heavy-handed, Selina: one can scarcely see junket for nutmeg. There is no cream today, Godfrey. Cream has become a luxury that I can only afford twice a week: we indulge on Sundays and Thursdays. I really think that we might make up six buttonholes next Saturday. If Mrs. Rendall does suffer with her digestion I wonder if she has tried drinking hot water with her meals, and taking a little bi-carbonate afterwards, enough to cover a sixpence. She is a very respectable woman, I grant, but I wish she could be persuaded to make up her mind to overcome that nasty peppermint habit. I really must speak to her about it. . . . You needn't put on that injured expression, Robin. Junket, I know, is not one of your favourite sweets; but it is very much better for you than suet-pudding. In this world we cannot always have the things we like."

"Let's hope we shall in the next," said Lord Myall, and seeing his cousin's frown added hastily: "if we deserve them."

The barometer of conversation registered sudden falls and gradual rises.

With the arrival of the gorgonzola Miss Trevarthon was moved to air her views on the merits and demerits of various kinds of cheese. Lord Myall suffered the monologue for several minutes; then he complained of the unpleasant perfume of certain cheeses: he abominated gorgonzola. Miss Trevarthon quite failed to see that the smell mattered if the flavour was agreeable. What began as a slow monologue developed into a lively altercation rather than an amiable discussion. Stilton, Miss Trevarthon declared, was extremely nice when it was green. Lord Myall maintained that Stilton was not fit to eat until it was thoroughly ripe.

"If you had examined one in an advanced stage under a microscope you would quickly change your opinion," said Miss Trevarthon with heat.

"No—for I have," returned Lord Myall. "I like Stilton when it's drunk with port, and walking," he insisted.

"Oh, cheese it, Cousin Godfrey," said Robin, hoping to create a diversion.

"A depraved taste you have, I fear. . . . *Cheese it, Robin?*"

"Slang. Sorry," was Robin's laconic apology.

Lord Myall, reminding himself that this was by no means the way to placate his cousin, substituted a soft answer for the angry retort that rose to his lips: "Anthony was of your way of thinking, I remember. I do like things with a tang I must confess: perhaps it's because I'm a heavy smoker."

"Anthony, too, was a heavy smoker."

I will cheese it, as Robin suggests, be magnanimous and let Cynthia have the last word, thought Lord Myall. She ought to be locked up for a month and given nothing to eat but ripe Stilton—with perhaps a piece of bread on alternate days. . . . She was at it again, but her buzzing sounded less irritable.

Even before the cheese gave place to fruit the barometer seemed likely to remain at "set fair." To Robin's intense relief, Lord Myall kept discreetly silent when he could not possibly agree with some statement made by Miss Trevarthon.

Robin sat watching the millions of dancing motes in a narrow shaft of sunlight that, having found its way between the poplars, fell on the portrait of Sidney Trevarthon.

"Hurrah! the sun's managed to get through the trees. You really ought to have them cut down, Cynthia: they keep out all the light."

"Cut down the poplars! What are you thinking of, Godfrey? Anthony must turn in his grave at the suggestion."

"They're much too close together—that Anthony himself admitted. Why not every other one? Take away three; and then there'd be four too many."

"My grandfather planted them. They will remain as long as I'm alive."

Miss Trevarthon set her lips.

"Unless there's a terrible gale and . . ." Lord Myall checked himself. "I quite understand. You have a sentiment for them. Very natural."

"I agree with you both," said Robin. "They *ought* to be

cut down; yet on the other hand, they 'belong.' One cannot imagine the Poplars without the poplars. . . . Sidney Trevarthton looks as if he were about to step out of his frame. Just look at him. One can see the sheen of his satin coat that usually looks tarnished and of a faded colour that's neither orange nor brown."

"A wonderful cut to that coat," criticised Lord Myall. "It's the colour of a ripe Manaccan plum now."

"Exactly," Robin agreed absent-mindedly.

He was thinking, as he had often done before, that his aunt bore an absurd resemblance to her Royalist ancestor. Hers was the same sturdy figure, the same round face and high colouring; but her eyes were not brown, but blue: Myall eyes.

"Yes, the sun lights him up wonderfully." Miss Trevarthton's glance strayed to the carved massive oak frame elaborately designed in swags of fruits and flowers. "I do wish I knew of something that would poison the worm in that frame. Anthony was of the opinion that it was carved by Grinling Gibbons himself; but my father thought that it was the work of one of the great man's pupils. In any case it must be of considerable value, and I hate to see it crumbling away. Every morning Alice has to sweep up the dust made by the insects in their burrowing."

"Yes, they're destructive little brutes. You might try the effect of an injection of prussic acid into each hole," said Robin, with a serious face.

"That ought to stop their capers," Lord Myall opined.

"But would it, Robin? I thought prussic acid was only used by people who commit suicide. Are you in earnest? If the war goes on for another ten years, and as far as I can see there is every likelihood, I may be glad to sell it. What with prices of the ordinary necessities going up by leaps and bounds—"

"You couldn't very well sell the frame without the picture: they go together."

"I mean I should sell the picture, frame and all—though there won't be much frame left soon."

"I'm inclined to prefer your early-morning suggestion. I

seem to see those ducks swimming about on the rain-water tank."

"What's that about ducks?" asked Lord Myall, pausing in the game he was playing on his plate with apple-pips.

"Nothing, Godfrey, nothing at all. It's just his nonsense," said Miss Trevarthon hastily. "I see in *The Times* that old pictures are fetching tremendous prices. A Peter Lely ought to be worth several hundred pounds. Who has the money to squander on such things nowadays, I can't think."

"Profiteers," said Lord Myall. "Fat men who smoke big cigars. Met one just now looking as if he was God Al— as if he owned the earth."

"I love old Sidney Trevarthon. Without those ridiculous moustaches and that lip-beard he would look rather like John Bull. His eyes are blazing at the idea of being sold to a profiteer as a ready-made ancestor. He's a little bit like you, Aunt Cynthia, you know; or rather, you're a little bit like him."

"I have always flattered myself that I take after the Trevarthons," said Miss Trevarthon pointedly. "But what I want to know is the name of the poison that kills the worm. Paraffin they seem to thrive on."

"I will try and find out for you," said Lord Myall amiably. "Pennington may know of something: he picks up bits of old furniture whenever he gets the chance."

"I hope he may. Please don't forget to ask him."

"You don't trust my memory, eh? Sorry I forgot those feathers so often. But I'll tell you what Pennington says the very next time I come in. Speaking of pictures reminds me that I saw that artist chap, Creighton, in town. He is a caution. That cottage by the river that he swindled me out of three years ago he's altered and added to until it's quite a decent-sized house. He's christened it Mint. Fixed up a signboard and painted a sprig of mint on it. Mad as a hatter."

"I understood that it was you who had swindled him. Why does he call it Mint? Some name that has to do with the river would have been more suitable. I don't see why he wants

to name it at all: everyone out there must know his name and where he lives."

"It seems that mint had over-run the garden. He does know how to rake in the shekels, though I imagine that it's easy come, easy go. Must cost him a pretty penny journeying up and down from London so often: rail-fares have gone up, you know. He's asked me several times to come and see his pictures. I don't understand pictures, so it's no use going along by myself. If your aunt, Robin, can make up her mind to spare you, you could spend a day or two at Myall, and we might go together and have a squint at 'em. You could do the talking while I'd be lost in silent admiration. The things he paints are supposed to be good: anyhow, they fetch good money. For the next few weeks you'd better stay here and ward off asthma. Myall in August is hot as—as it well can be. I know how the heat tries you. Henliston is like an ice-house compared to Myall. Later on when's it's cooler a change will do you good."

"How much does Mr. Creighton receive for a picture?" asked Miss Trevarthon.

"I suppose it depends on the size. Anything from fifty guineas upwards, I'm told."

"Goodness gracious!"

"Pays better than flower-selling, eh, Aunt Cynthia?"

"Well, how about it, Robin? Don't you think that a day or two's change in September, say, would be good for him, Cynthia?"

"From the way you ask one would think I keep him tied to my apron-strings. If Robin wishes to visit you at Myall he's quite at liberty to do so. It has nothing to do with me."

"I should very much like to meet Mr. Creighton. I should like to see his pictures and his house and his signboard and everything that is his. In any case, I cannot come to Myall before September because I think of—I've decided to—because I've heard the call of Roon. Please put the white currants out of my reach, or I shall eat the lot."

"It is bad to overload the stomach," stated Miss Trevarthon,

as she removed the dish. "What were you saying you heard?"

"The call of Roon," said Robin, in low tones.

"Who is the chap who called? and why did he? and what's his call got to do with your coming to Myall?"

"I don't think that it is quite respectful to call a god a chap, Cousin Godfrey."

Now that his opportunity had arrived Robin told himself that he was a coward. His heart was wildly beating and his hands were trembling as they arranged the currant-stems on his plate. He took a deep breath before he continued:

"Roon is the God of Going. I heard his call, and *I am going—to London.*"

"What nonsense *are* you talking now, Robin?" his aunt demanded.

"I want a change, to get right away from familiar sights and sounds. *Moonbeams* was returned from Newton this morning. I'm not surprised: it is a bad book. Perhaps I am egotistic. I believe I know how to write. But it's not the slightest use knowing how to write if one has nothing to write about. I've been shut up here all my life. One has to see things, feel things for oneself. One may learn a tremendous lot from books. Uncle Anthony's was book knowledge—but life has to be learnt first-hand. One may read so good a description of a place that one can almost visualise it; but that is a very different thing to seeing the place with one's own eyes. I intend to go to London for August, four short weeks. I purpose catching the morning train on Monday. When I return I shall be cured of my restlessness and the ache I have in my head through thinking too much; and be able to write of happenings in a real world."

"Are you serious?" asked Miss Trevarthon anxiously.

"Indeed I am," Robin assured her. His nervousness has left him.

Miss Trevarthon's eyes were twin blue flames as she turned on Lord Myall with: "Is this the outcome of your advice to Robin in the garden?"

Lord Myall shook his head impatiently.

"Cousin Godfrey gave me no advice in the garden. Until

this moment he had no more notion that I was going to London than you."

"But I don't understand. To hear you talk one would think—I've never heard such utter nonsense!"

"I'm not talking nonsense. I'm in deadly earnest. If you made some serious statement and I remarked that it was 'utter nonsense,' you'd have a fit. I'm tired of always being told that what I say is *nonsense!*"

"Please remember to whom you are speaking," said Miss Trevarthor severely.

"I am perfectly well aware that I have never spoken to you in that way before. It's your own fault that I do so now. There's nothing to make a fuss about. One would think that I was off to Central Africa, never to return, instead of merely to London for a month's holiday. You forget that I'm no longer a child."

"But you've made no preparations—" began Miss Trevarthor weakly; then, after a pause, in which she rallied her forces: "It *is* nonsense! Godfrey, there *must* be some conspiracy between you," she finished desperately.

Lord Myall frowned. He would never have believed that Cynthia could lose her head, under any circumstances. After all, she was but a woman: he had always regarded her as a neuter. Almost he felt sorry for her: she was so completely surprised and bewildered that Robin had for the first time in his life positively asserted himself. This second attack of hers was silly bluster: feeling that she was no longer top dog her instinct was to bark. Her first was genuine enough. If Robin had not come to the rescue in the nick of time, she would have taken his silence as proof of guilt and, careless of the consequences, ordered him to clear out, there and then; he had been like one struck dumb, unable to defend himself, for Robin had knocked the wind out of his sails for a minute or two with his precious announcement. Why had the lad suddenly made up his mind to go to London? Tyacke's unknown quantity x , by Jove! beginning to show itself. No wonder Master Robin was so perky with that card up his sleeve; and he had done his best to put Cynthia in good temper before he played it—and

he had aided and abetted him. All that bunkum about the flowers and Mrs. Rendall! This was the sort of unexpected cussedness that *would* happen now that he had taken the trouble to fix up things with Bessie. His plan for Robin must not be upset.

"Don't you talk nonsense, Cynthia. Robin is a second George Washington; and he's just told you I'm innocent of the charge. *Would I be likely to suggest that he should take a trip to London in August?* What's it all about, Robin, old boy? I think I can make a pretty shrewd guess though. You felt angry and disappointed that your book has come back, and you went away to your room or the tower to consider the matter. Am I right?"

"Yes," admitted Robin reluctantly.

"And while you sat there fretting you imagined that you heard the call of what's-his-name—you're choke full of fancies, you know—and you decided on the spur of the moment to go to London; and then your spirits went up, up, up. Now I suggest that there are several excellent reasons against your going. Do you care to hear them?"

"*'Et tu, Brute?'*—I have considered all the pros and cons: the pros win the day."

"August is your bad month, and you're certain to be laid up with asthma. Even if by a miracle you keep well, there'd be nothing much to see or do. London is dead in August, for everyone goes to the seaside. Incidentally, it's baking hot."

"But—" Robin began excitedly.

"It would be very unkind to leave your aunt all by herself for a whole month. I just don't see any sense in this notion of yours. Of course, it's no business of mine, but I should think it over quietly tomorrow morning if I were you. . . . Leave on Monday! You don't know a single soul in London, and you have no letters of introduction or—"

"I don't want letters of introduction. I want to be free, among strangers. Aunt Cynthia won't miss me. At this time of year she's as busy as she can be with all sorts of things. There's the garden. The fruit is ripening, and there will be jam to make—there's plenty of sugar. Bessie Mabott has a

heap of things to learn yet, I shall be back at the end of the month."

"Postpone your visit till later on. It would be dreadful for you to have a first-class attack of asthma in a hotel. Who would nurse you? You'd wish yourself back at the Poplars."

"If I'm to have an attack, I might as well have it in a hotel as anywhere else."

"Well if you're determined to go there's no more to be said; but it seems to me an extremely—"

"He'll have his pockets picked. London's full of thieves. There's all kinds of dangers, especially for an inexperienced boy. His Uncle Anthony was contented enough to stay here in safety," broke in Miss Trevarthon.

"Are you quite sure he was content? *'Nought is more sad than safety—life is best when every day brings danger for delight.'*"

"Oh, don't quote at me for mercy's sake! I cannot think what has come over you. If you feel you must have a change at once, perhaps Cousin Godfrey would have you at Myall for a week or so. You might return with him today. Bessie can drive you out."

"Excellent suggestion. Why not come back with me, Robin?"

"Aunt Cynthia, you have put your guest in a most embarrassing position. He made it quite clear that he couldn't do with me until September," said Robin ironically.

"I didn't mean—I only meant," stammered Lord Myall. "I am delighted to have you today or tomorrow or at any time."

Robin leaned back in his chair. He was puzzled. That Aunt Cynthia would object to his going to London he had fully expected; but Cousin Godfrey's opposition was a complete surprise. His only fear had been that when he announced his intention Cousin Godfrey would be unable to hide how pleased he felt. Cousin Godfrey for the last two years or so had never neglected an opportunity of hinting that he disapproved of the atmosphere of the Poplars for a young man. Recently he advised him to "break away." To go to London was not to break away apparently! It was too bad of Cousin Godfrey to

have failed him after he had promised to take his part. Even now, there must be some mistake: that Aunt Cynthia and Cousin Godfrey should suddenly become allies seemed incredible.

"You'll be safer at Myall," said Miss Trevarthon.

"You consider Myall to be the lesser of two evils?"

"What now—I don't understand you."

"Let the subject drop, Aunt Cynthia, if you please. I am going to London, so I cannot accept Cousin Godfrey's prompted invitation."

A silence fell.

Noting Robin's flushed face, angry eyes, and look of determination, Lord Myall reconsidered his attitude. Robin meant what he said—there was no doubt about that. He had tried to dissuade him from his intention, and only succeeded in arousing his resentment. This would not do at all. If he had known that the boy was so set on going he would not have interfered: he thought it was a mere fancy, a balloon sent up to be shot at. . . . A trip to London—the very thing, if asthma did not attend him. Much might happen in a month. Yet Robin was but a boy, after all . . . London. . . . Robin might be green, but he was not a fool; and it would not take him long to find out how many beans make five. There would be dangers for a boy of Robin's looks, still . . . Presently he would have a word with Bessie about that other plan. She should stay on. If Robin came back quite such a boy as he went away Rosamund could still be called in.

"It's two o'clock: I thought it must be twenty to," said Robin, with a forced laugh, when the clock on the mantelpiece had chimed.

"I want a cigarette very badly, Cynthia. Supposing that Master Robin and I adjourn to the garden. Perhaps I *may*—" Lord Myall gave his cousin a significant glance.

"By all means," assented Miss Trevarthon eagerly. "I hope, Robin, that Cousin Godfrey will tell you some of the dangers that London is full of, that he could not very well mention in my presence."

"If he cares to do so I will give him my best attention," said Robin mockingly, looking at Lord Myall.

Lord Myall replied with a quick wink of the right eye as he rose from the table. At the door he paused.

"Of course if I can't persuade him to listen to reason he'll just have to go. If he goes he won't stay long: probably in less than a week he'll return with' roaring asthma."

"Do your best to dissuade him from going, Godfrey," answered Miss Trevarthon appealingly.

As he followed Lord Myall out of the room, Robin was smiling: the wink had reassured him.

END OF BOOK ONE

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER I

ROBIN leaned out of the window trailing a handkerchief until the train curved into a cutting, and the tall brown-clad figure on the platform was lost to view; then he sat down, and choosing at random the *Strand* from the heap of magazines and papers that Lord Myall had lavished on him, simulated an absorption in its contents. He dared not as much as glance at the splendid soldier at the other end of the compartment. "Don't seem to be an empty one. D'ye mind sharing one with the army?" Lord Myall had said in a loud voice, as the train drew up at Borne Junction, "The army" heard: for he looked up quickly from his paper with a smile playing about the corners of his lips. Covered with confusion, Robin replied brusquely: "Of course not" and fervently wished that he were wearing his armlet: such a question must have suggested that he was a shirker or a pro-German.

"Shame to waste even a couple of hours of such a jolly day in a train. Glad I'm not going all the way."

"Yes. . . . I am."

"Rotten luck. Anyway, you're well supplied with reading matter."

"If you care to—" began Robin timidly.

"I've got *Punch*, and am quite happy. Get a *Times* at Truro—unknown at Penzance. Thanks very much, all the same. . . . Ripping county this. My first visit. Delighted."

The soldier yawned, softly cursed himself for allowing the bridge-cards to keep him out of his bed until the early hours, yawned again, and shut his eyes.

Robin covertly examined this denizen of a world that was strange to him. He admired the perfectly-fitting suit of khaki, the twin creases on the "slacks," the twin touches of scarlet on the coat, the socks and tie of khaki silk, the brogues that

might have been carved out of mahogany. Was he on leave from the front? His face and hands were copper-coloured, and he looked in the pink of condition. He had come from Penzance; very likely he had been staying at the Mount. He must be getting out at Plymouth, for they would not reach Exeter until two: "a couple of hours," he had said. He seemed very young to be a captain on the staff.

"He guessed how I was feeling, and has done his best to set me at my ease," thought Robin, as he turned his head to look out of the window.

The train was passing through a district of disused tin-mines. Nature was doing her best to hide the ugliness that was man's handiwork: ivy almost covered the crumbling chimneys, and on the rubbish-mounds grew heather and furze and bracken. It was indeed a jolly day, a summer day with a hint of autumn in the air. Little white clouds edged with gold scudded across a sky of clear deep blue. Boys in a village street waved their arms and shouted. An old woman, her wizened face framed by a sun-bonnet, stood in a farmyard scattering handfuls of grain to hens of ochre and buff and umber, and a gay-plumaged cock. A hamlet of white cottages with grey slate roofs, a sea of quivering rushes, a child in a black frock playing with a puppy in a cottage-garden filled with roses, a bush of purple veronica on a high hedge besieged by bees, a deep valley with a yellow tin-stream, a patch of hemp-agrimony with plummy pink heads, appeared and disappeared in quick succession: it was like being whirled around a picture-gallery. Trees he likened to soldiers suddenly deprived of their officers: with the onrush of the invader they formed hurriedly into groups and seemed to engage in frenzied discussion as to their course of action; overtaken, they scattered and returned to their stations, as if not knowing what else to do. The telegraph wires sank gradually down, rose gradually up; untiringly, the poles performed their conjuring trick. . . .

"How far are we on? I've been asleep."

"We have just passed Redruth."

"Rouge?"

Robin smiled. "It is an odd name; I don't know its origin."

"Depend on it that Ruth either used rouge for her cheeks or henna for her hair. Have a cigarette?"

"No, thanks: I'm a pipe-smoker."

"I'm most awfully sleepy. Do you mind waking me up at Truro?"

At the edge of a wood two hatless girls were blackberrying. The taller one reminded him of Treza Jago. It seemed ages ago since that afternoon he went to Trewoof with Peter's letter in his pocket. . . . The whitewashed walls of the out-buildings gleamed in the golden sunlight as he came across the field. Nell, the collie, welcomed him with wagging tail: it was much too hot to bark. He found Treza with sleeves rolled up scrubbing the kitchen-table. Mrs. Jago, he learned, had gone to town—he had forgotten it was the last Saturday in the month—and Bert was planting broccoli in the field called Dinas. While Treza was making tea he sauntered out to the little wilderness of a garden hedged about with fuchsia-bushes, and sat down on the broken bench. The leaves of the nasturtiums that rioted over the long-untended beds gave out a strong peppery smell. Bees made a drowsy humming as they flew from flower to flower. All-conquering were the fierce nasturtiums: they flamed everywhere, and faded to white the sulphur wings of the butterflies. It was a relief to rest one's eyes on the blood-red fuchsia-bells that from out the dim recollections of babyhood he clearly remembered reaching up to touch. . . . The superb physical bloom of the day was at its proudest: every leaf and flower seemed to delight in the richly-sensuous sunshine. There was more than met the eye or reached the understanding. He strained his ears. . . . He scarcely ate a mouthful. "But do'ee try my saffern-cake, it's newly-baked," pleaded Treza. He assured her that he was not hungry. After tea, longing to return to the garden, he declared that it was stuffy in the kitchen and suggested they should go into the fresh air. Before a thin place in the hedge he paused to look at Henliston, and the hill out of which it grew as naturally as an ancient forest. A vapour of heat palpitated over the Outer Green. From among the trees near the stream sounded a low, clear, flute-like note. "What was that?" he asked

quietly. "I heard nothing," Treza replied, restlessly plucking the fuchsia-bells and scattering them on the ground. "There it is again!" Treza smiled as she looked down at the strewn flowers. "Your ears are sharper than mine. Some bird, likely. Was it that you was harking to all through tea?" He stood there listening intently. What could it be but a bird? . . . Henliston looked like some feline thing basking there on the plain. Treza, with a laugh, asked him if he were trying to see the time by the market-house clock. "No. I was wondering if Henliston will let me go," he explained. But he had only told a half-truth: he was wondering, too, if he wanted to go after all. "I think it will be good for you to go away," Treza observed, at length. She seemed to be considering. . . . The savage colours of the nasturtiums, the curious smell of their leaves, and the tremolo of insects, seen and unseen, seemed intensified. It was odd, but he did not know whether he was very happy or very unhappy sitting by Treza on the bench. Very soft and white were her arms, though her hands were red and roughened. As if she read his thoughts, she began to roll down a sleeve. "*Ever kissed her, Robin?*"—Cousin Godfrey's words recurred to him. . . . The pale wings of the butterflies made no sound as they chased each other over the flowers; the songs of the birds were hushed; in the still warmth the leaves were breathless. Elusive fancies, rapturous yet terrifying, hovered in his brain; he pressed his hand tightly against his forehead, but he could not banish them. . . . Treza's voice had rich deep tones; when she spoke she showed her little teeth, white as jasmine; her lips were coloured like the flowers of the pomegranate he had admired in the conservatory at Myall. All his life he had known Treza, yet it was as if he were seeing her for the first time. She was really beautiful—and he had always regarded her as just a rather plain, buxom girl with black eyes and sulky brows. He grew more and more aware of her as the moments passed, acutely attentive to her least movement. Again he heard the piercing flute-like note: sweeter it sounded, this time. He looked inquiringly at Treza, but she was gazing into the distance. . . . While nervously transferring his ring from one finger to

another it slipped from his trembling hands. As, simultaneously, they stooped to pick it up, his hand touched Treza's. He started back as if stung, hesitated, sprang to his feet, stammered out some excuses, and hurried away. Treza seemed not to have noticed anything unusual. "Please send me some picture-postcards from London," she shouted after him. . . . As he fled in mad panic along the winding path through the corn that was almost ripe he felt he would die of shame. Far away in the direction of Poltrean he heard once more the cry of the mysterious bird, very faint, the mocking echo of that last sweet note he heard in the garden. At last he reached the stile at the end of the field, clambered over, and leaned panting for a moment against a tree-trunk before he plunged into the wood of oaks that sloped down to the stream. The thorns of the brambles tore his hands and face, but he never paused in his headlong flight through the tangle of undergrowth. Breathless and exhausted, he flung himself down in the shade of the sycamores, and shut his eyes. His brain was in turmoil and his mixed feelings defied analysis. Gradually, as he lay listening to the music of the stream, the wild throbbing died away. He tried to understand what had happened. In the little garden before tea he had come under some strange spell, so that when tea was over he was obliged to return—that was one way of putting it. Definitely he had known he would hear that flute-like note, though when he actually heard it he was startled. Did it come from some bird with a parrot-like power of imitation that frequented the reeds of Poltrean Pool? or from the very pipes of Pan? Treza must be deaf that she had not heard. *Treza*. The fires that had been smouldering in his veins for long months had leaped to life at the touch of her hand, and for the time being he was no more able to control his thoughts and feelings than the man in the moon. Never before had he desired to take a girl in his arms and kiss her. No, he must be honest with himself, it was more than that—he desired to possess her utterly. It was disgusting! He had felt fierce and cruel; he wanted to drag Treza willy-nilly into the woods. Treza, of all women!—Peter's sister. He buried his head in his arms and groaned,

. . . "Yet, after all, no one is a penny the worse," he said presently, opening his eyes. Treza knew nothing of it all, As for himself—well, he had had an extraordinary adventure that he would never forget. Uncle Anthony would have said: "Human nature is complex, my dear Robin." Cousin Godfrey would say: "So you ran away from a girl!" He might have confided in Uncle Anthony, but he could not confide in Cousin Godfrey. Was it usual for a young man to feel all he had felt under similar conditions? He thought not: or those stories of love's young dream would never have been written. . . . A tiny scarlet flower that was new to him grew amid the sweet-smelling vernal grass in which the grasshoppers never ceased their chirping: he was surprised that he could be interested in anything so trivial. The grasshoppers veered by east and perched by west. His eyes, returning again and again, at last rested on the wild-flower in its emerald setting: it was such a tiny flower to flaunt so brave a scarlet: somehow it helped him to keep those other thoughts at bay. . . . He was wet with heat. The sun in its journey westwards had deprived him of shade. The stream looked cool and inviting; there was a passionate purity in its crystal clearness. He undressed in fevered haste, ran down the bank, waded out into deep water, and dived. After his swim, he stretched himself out at full length on the soft grass in the sunshine, and watched the cirri trailing across the blue. He was his own man again, thanks be! Love, he decided, must be a feeble thing compared to lust. It was horrible suddenly to become a stranger to oneself, to become possessed of a devil. Lust was, of course, just physical desire. Love, true love, was spiritual. One was considerate and tender to the girl one loved, that one married. Yet matrimony was ordained for the procreation of children: love for one's wife *must* be tinged with lust. What was the exact boundary between love and lust? It was all very bewildering. . . .

The captain suddenly woke up from a stertorous sleep, stretched himself lazily and lighted a cigarette. When Truro was reached a few minutes later he secured a copy of *The Times*.

"Do you know the Fal?" he asked, as the train steamed out of the station.

"I was only on it once," said Robin.

"Any good for fishing?"

"I don't know."

"Care to have a sheet of my Northcliffe? and presently we'll swop."

"No; thanks, I—"

"Prefer looking out o' window, eh?"

Robin flushed. "You see, everything is new to me," he faltered. "I have never been farther than Truro."

"I quite see. I suppose I'm what you might call a confirmed traveller, but there was a time when I used to wonder how anyone could possibly read in the train, in the day-time. Well, well."

Robin felt certain that himself would always look out of the window, even when he travelled on a familiar line. Now he was covering new ground, and beyond a bend or at the end of a cutting there was always a surprise awaiting him. One looked down into a valley; one shut one's eyes, and, opening them again in a few moments, one was confronted by a high hill or a stretch of level country. . . . What would Aunt Cynthia say if she knew he was travelling first-class! It was all for the best that she had not been on Henliston Station platform that morning: for she would certainly have read Cousin Godfrey a tremendous lecture on extravagance when he insisted on presenting him with a first-class return ticket. The ticket he had reluctantly accepted, but he had stoutly refused a bundle of notes—how could he do otherwise when in his pocket were the four five-pound notes that Aunt Cynthia had thrust into his hand at parting?—beside the others he had drawn from the bank? "I do so want to pay for everything out of my own pocket: please let me give you the money for the ticket. As for the notes, Aunt Cynthia gave me twenty pounds as I was coming away, which I mean to return to her when I come back." Cousin Godfrey frowned at his explanation and called him an independent young devil. . . . With the omnibus waiting at the door, to accept Aunt Cynthia's gift seemed the easier

course: if he had refused it he would have been obliged to state his reason, carefully choosing his words so that she might not be offended, and there was no time for that. Her rare generousities jarred by their unexpectedness: one was so accustomed to her meannesses. . . . Aunt Cynthia mystified one. After that unforgettable afternoon at Trewoof he had passed a night of agony that Hiram's was powerless to relieve. Neither tender look nor kind word had she to spare for him. "I shall go to London as soon as ever I am well enough," he gasped. She affected not to hear. He had declined breakfast, and Selina, who was coaxing him to drink coffee very hot and very strong that she had specially prepared, exclaimed indignantly, "Just like her!" when her mistress left the room. For five minutes or so, morning and evening, Aunt Cynthia gave him the dubious pleasure of her company. Every third visit or so she remarked: "When you are quite well you must spend a few weeks at Myall." If he contradicted her a heated discussion would have ensued, and he was too exhausted for that: he kept a stony silence. On one occasion he could not resist saying: "Better the influence of the wicked man you know than of the wicked men you wot not of." To which she made naïve reply: "Godfrey Myall is not wicked. He does not wish you to go to London." Cousin Godfrey was no longer wicked, because at a crisis he had sided, so she believed, with her. Poor Aunt Cynthia! If she only knew that Cousin Godfrey had been pretending that day at luncheon! . . . It was quite the worst attack he had ever had. For nearly a fortnight, night and day, he sat in a chair propped up with pillows. When he was able to come downstairs he spent the fine days in the garden in a wicker chair under the walnut-tree. In the afternoons Aunt Cynthia would bring her patience-cards and sit on the bench. He wished she would have retired to her room as usual: the flick of the cards irritated him. She had never troubled before to "keep him company" during his convalescence, and he could not help wondering if she were prompted by kindness or jealousy: to keep him company or to keep Selina away? As she shuffled her cards for the first game she would begin a jerky monologue about nothing in particular that would come to an

end not later than in the middle of game the second. Thereafter she would only break the silence by an occasional remark that concerned the game itself: "A black ten at last!" "All the aces must be at the bottom of the pack!" "If I could only clear a row. . . ." After her third and last game she would put her cards back in the box and study *The Times* until it was tea-time. One sultry afternoon, while he was waiting for the third game to end so that he might open the book he had closed on her arrival, he dropped off into one of those little sleeps that were the result of exhaustion. Aunt Cynthia was picking up the cards when he awoke. He shut his eyes again. Instead of the sounds for which he was listening, a silence fell. He counted a hundred slowly to himself, but the silence still endured. Half-opening one eye he saw Aunt Cynthia, who had been sitting bolt upright as usual, leaning back against the tree-trunk; her hands seemed to have been arrested in the act of picking up the cards; her spectacles were far down on her nose; she was lost in a day-dream. Was she thinking of himself? Yesterday when he informed her that he hoped to be in London in less than a week she had merely given an expressionless "H'm," and went on with her reading. Alice arrived with the tea-tray, and prevented him continuing the subject. Was she wondering what dangers would befall him in London? With a shock of surprise he perceived the tears trickling down her face; in a flash, they seemed to him as the first outward and visible sign of the inner and spiritual thaw that had set in after Colonel Penrose's call at the Poplars six weeks ago. Sometimes he had asked himself if he imagined the indefinable change in her. So the tears were for the colonel! Before he turned away his head she put aside the patience-board and began to search for something in her bag. He heard the rustling sound of thin paper: instinctively he was aware that the search was for a letter she had received from the front. When he woke up officially at the clatter of the tea-cups Aunt Cynthia was her own brisk self again: "I've been thinking, Robin, that this trip of yours to London may be all for the best," she said; and added, as she cut the cake: "Amelia must not be so extravagant with the currants." . . . Aunt Cynthia had ignored the

fact of his going away until yesterday, when she inquired if he had asked Bessie to order the omnibus to call for him on the morrow: he imagined that she was so angry with him for persisting in his intention that she did not trust herself to speak of it. After supper last night she advised him in hard, matter-of-fact tones "to go to bed early and have a long sleep." When he agreed she bade him a cold "Good-night," and offered her cheek as usual. He had been dreading that last good-night before his departure; and then it happened quite naturally: he supposed he expected what Uncle Anthony used to call moods and tenses. When he got to bed, after a little farewell talk with Selina, he could not sleep: he was not in the least excited—just extraordinarily wide-awake. The bed-clothes seemed to burn. Soon after the market-house and the grandfather's clock in the library struck eleven, Aunt Cynthia softly opened the door and entered the room. Obviously, from the way she moved, he was supposed to be asleep. Shading the lighted candle she was carrying, she approached the bed and stood looking down at him; many minutes must have passed before she stooped and kissed him, touched his hair ever so lightly, gave the faintest of sighs and left the room. When the door shut behind her he sprang out of bed intending to rush after and comfort her, tell her that there was nothing to worry about, that he would soon return. Half-way across the room he remembered that she had raised her mask because she believed that he was asleep: he could not undeceive her. . . . That morning, while waiting for the omnibus, Aunt Cynthia fidgetted about the breakfast-room: "I wish it would hurry up and come. There are fifty things that I have to attend to. I must keep an eye on Amelia with those Manaccans. What she did with the last lot I can't think. She'll never be a jam-maker." It was a great relief when they heard the sound of wheels. Aunt Cynthia permitted him to kiss her cheek, and bade him a casual good-bye, as if she expected him to return that evening. What was one to make of Aunt Cynthia? . . .

"Nice scenery about here. Ought to be some shooting. Where are we, anyway?" asked the captain.

"We—we are somewhere between Bodmin Road and Liskeard."

"Startled you? Sorry. . . . Why not try back to the engine for a change, and ease that crick in your neck?"

"I'd rather sit this side: I like to watch the trees rushing towards one."

"Yes, I suppose they do. I remember I used to think—Well, well. You'll soon be out of Cornwall now."

Like the carefully-tended drives through Myall before the war were the smooth white roads winding between the richly-wooded slopes. Farther westward the trees, exposed to the violence of winter gales, were gnarled and dwarfed. Here, sheltered from the wind, they grew straight and tall and splendid. Glossy ivy hid their trunks, and under their intermingling branches flourished those plants that love shade and moisture. Little streams that picked their way daintily among the mossy granite boulders were almost concealed by dipping harts'-tongue ferns of enormous sizes. Where the canopy of leaves was so dense as to cause a green gloom Robin pretended that he glimpsed goblins playing strange games: if goblins exist, they were to be found in these woods. Overnight the spiders had hung their silken nets and set traps to catch the dew: in each rare sunlit space rose a shimmering opal splendour from the dewdrops; if only the train ran noiselessly, he would hear their crystal music as they hung suspended in the air. Long aisles of magenta foxgloves pierced far away into the heart of the greenery; they came right down to the permanent way, so that he could see the speckled pattern inside their bells. Once again he wished that he might peep into one of the factories where the fairies fashion the dies that make the markings on flowers.

Liskeard. St. Germans. Saltash.

A thrill of excitement went through him as he looked down from the tremendous height of the Albert Bridge. At last he was out of the duchy. The shining estuary of the Tamar was like a lake of glass, and like toy ships were the ships at anchor; to the north stretched inlets that pierced the land. He felt vaguely disappointed: the scene, though perhaps more impres-

sive and more beautiful, was entirely different to the one he expected. He had pictured a majestic river, with brown moors on its Cornish and green woods on its Devonian side, that had still a mile or more to flow before its estuary was reached, a shapely river undeformed by tributaries instead of a sprawling one: a childish conception. He now remembered that, years ago, Uncle Anthony told him that a great ganglion—he had asked the meaning of ganglion—of waters broke up the land behind Plymouth Sound. Did imagination always lie about strange scenes? Somewhere at the back of his brain he had made a dream-map of a shapely London. . . .

At North Road the captain got out. Robin watched him stride along the platform until he was out of sight. He envied him exceedingly, for he seemed to have everything: perfect health, good looks, ease and assurance, perfect clothes of the only possible colour for a fit Englishman. What would he not give to be able to say "Pleasant journey" in just that way, and to be entitled to wear a khaki coat with red tabs and three pips and a khaki cap with a red band and a crown surmounted by a lion.

A whistle was blown, a green flag waved, and the engine that had been fretting and fuming like a horse impatient for a headlong rush, puffed forth its short, quick breaths and slowly started off, but, gathering speed with every second, was soon whirling its carriages along towards the elusive distance.

Now that he was by himself he could relax: since he entered the compartment at Borne Junction he had been acutely aware of his travelling-companion: his head was aching slightly from the strain of listening for the genial remark that he knew would find him tongue-tied. Never in his life had he felt so self-conscious and ill at ease. What a dull-witted fool the captain must have thought him. What possessed Cousin Godfrey to ask that awful question? . . . He would have liked to be one of the passengers pitching along the corridor on their way to the luncheon-car, not that he was particularly hungry, but eating in public would be a novelty. However, in less than a week he might grow very tired of eating in public. It was the single spies who troubled him: at present, strangers in battalions he

found amusing to watch. Aunt Cynthia insisted that he should take food with him to eat on the train. A sparrow ate more than he did, she declared, and it would be just sheer waste to pay for a meal to which he had not done justice and that would cost him five shillings at the very least, for one was obliged to drink any liquid but water and to tip the waiter. He reminded her that he was going to stay at Morley's which was not exactly the cheapest hotel in London, but she argued that that being the case, outside of it he must economise whenever and wherever possible. "There is just room in Master Robin's small bag for a packet of ham sandwiches, some fruit—apples don't squash—and a bottle of cold tea," he had overheard Aunt Cynthia say to Selina. It was past twelve; perhaps by one o'clock he would have developed an appetite: he had already developed a thirst. He reached down the bag from the rack. Instead of ham, he found cucumber sandwiches—not too many, for Selina, while pandering to his tastes, remembered that cucumber was indigestible; instead of apples, of which he was not very fond, were a bunch of grapes, some juicy Manaccans, a peach, and white currants carefully packed in a cardboard box padded with tissue-paper. "Dear, kind Lena." Tears rose to his eyes. Lena had known exactly the right quantity of sugar to add, and the tea was delicious: he guessed she had plunged the bottle into cold pump-water before she had placed it in the bag. The sandwiches looked most tempting. . . . Henliston lay drowsing in the noontide quiet. What was happening at the Poplars? He supposed Aunt Cynthia would be fluttering in from the garden every few minutes to test the condition of the boiling jam; how thankful Amelia would be when she was permitted to pour it into the jars—and how sorry Bessie. Today Selina's laugh would not be heard: from time to time she would steal away to her room to have a good cry. She would count the days to his return. Would Aunt Cynthia? After last night, he did not know: she might—secretly. He was glad that Cousin Godfrey would lunch at the Poplars as usual on market-days, while he was away. Cousin Godfrey and Aunt Cynthia! What would they talk about? . . .

Having eaten the sandwiches, the white currants and the peach, Robin returned the bag to the rack. Presently he fell asleep, and dreamed that he was an English general surrounded by a glittering staff in a French château.

The miles rushed past.

He awoke with a start, and rubbing his eyes, exclaimed: "What a waste of time!"

The landscape was calm and peaceful and still. Apple-green fields were decorated by fox-red cows indolently browsing; there were fields that were parti-coloured, and fields of all the greens in malachite; fields that were golden with waving corn, and yellow with stubble where the corn lay heaped in stooks. Fields of all shapes and sizes. All very far removed from war's alarms to the casual eye, yet in the porch of the distant church, almost hidden by trees, there hung the Roll of Honour, a list of the obscure but glorious names of the countryside who had answered the call to arms. Yes, the war was here too, horribly.

Dawlish.

At Dawlish did they still hold fairs

*"Where ginger-bread wives have a scanty sale,
And ginger-bread nuts are smallish,"*

as in Keats' day? Wonderfully red were the cliffs. He wanted to feel under his bare feet the wet foreshore that gleamed with opal tints. The last time he had bathed was a month ago at Trewoof. . . . Constantly vivid recollections of that amazing afternoon recurred, but now they no longer made him turn hot and cold: if he chose he could dismiss them with: "That was none of I." Soon the clear-cut details of those pictures that followed one on another in rapid succession would become blurred and faded; the order of the pictures would be forgotten. But frequently troublous dreams of Treza haunted him by night: he could not command his dreams.

This was his last glimpse of the sea.

Leaning out of the window he surveyed the people on the platform as, punctual to the appointed time, the train steamed into Exeter station. There were several families returning

from holidays: many of the parents were of the flustering variety, and had comical faces; the female of the species was more hideous than the male; the children had turned bright pink when turned out in the sun, like lobsters plunged in boiling water. The Tommies were for the most part yokels in khaki who had apparently strolled on to the platform to watch the proceedings: the arrival of a train was doubtless a pleasant interlude in the boredom of their leave. An infantry officer with bow-legs, who was talking to a wonderful young woman with very high heels and very short skirts, waxed indignant when he was respectfully requested by a battered-looking porter to make room for a trunk: the poor chap obviously had quite forgotten that he was in the middle of a railway-station platform. Away down the platform a man in loud tweeds with a bull-terrier straining on a leash seemed to be assuring a timid lady with a Pomeranian in her arms that his dog was a gentle-mannered animal: the terrier was telling the Pom exactly what he would like to do to all pampered lap-dogs that wear ribbon bows.

"In here, Goyle, if this gentleman will permit."

Two men, obviously master and servant, were standing at the door. Robin glanced from the face of the one to the face of the other, and collapsed into his corner.

"One looks like a god, the other like a devil," he said to himself.

The master entered. The servant handed in an attaché-case and a cushion, touched his hat, and disappeared.

Robin was suddenly aware of a fresh spicy smell: a sprig of sweet-bay lay on the heap of magazines beside him.

"I nearly missed the train through the slowness of that young post-office female," soliloquised the stranger, arranging the green cushion of soft leather at the back of his head.

"I think you dropped—this is yours."

"Thank you. . . . In my host's garden I paused between a fragrant bay-tree and a sheet of fire, a trellis covered with orange-red nasturtiums whose colour was a sheer delight. I stood hesitating: one cannot be too careful in the choice of a buttonhole. At length I decided in favour of a nasturtium, for

I remembered that a fortune-teller once said that it was my lucky flower. As I was about to pick one, I perceived an earwig deep down in the spur. I plucked a sprig of bay."

"I should have decided in favour of the bay: a nasturtium dies so soon," declared Robin.

"So certain, so emphatic."

The stranger's smile was inscrutable,

CHAPTER II

"**D**O you believe in fortune-tellers?" Robin inquired, and wondered at his daring.

"The professional fortune-teller is so often a charlatan. Some months ago an ancient Egyptian told my fortune. He was quite wonderful. To him my life was as an open book."

"Did he read your future truthfully, do you think?"

"I am afraid that he did."

"Was it so dreadful?"

"One's past is interwoven with one's future. Have you not heard that wise saying: 'The future comes not before to meet us, but streams up from behind, over our heads'?"

"No, I have not. It strikes one as being awfully true."

"Awful and true. Yes, he was most convincing, that ancient one. If I had shaken him his bones would have rattled. He was incredibly old with a skin like parchment and raspberry-coloured lips. It was fascinating to watch those claw-like hands with their parched finger-nails searching about in the little circle of desert sand."

"I should like to consult him."

"That would be difficult, but not, I believe, impossible. You see, he has but newly arrived among the gazelle-eyed houris in paradise, and it would be rather unkind to summon him back to earth for a consultation just yet. Perhaps when the glamour has worn off— Do you think, after a while, one will grow a little tired of the houris and paradise?"

"If one does there is nothing left to die for."

"True. . . . Your pipe has gone out. Try one of these cigarettes."

"Pink-coloured ones."

"The only kind I ever smoke, Russian. A light?"

"Thanks."

The stranger rearranged his cushion and, as if suddenly overcome with lassitude, sank back with half-closed eyes, a cigarette drooping from his lips.

"D. A." were the initials stamped upon the attaché-case of buff leather. What name had its owner assumed? Such beauty was too vivid, too dazzling, to be quite human. The features were perfectly chiselled; the face, curiously pale, had the velvety appearance of marble; the lips were shaped like a cupid's bow—Treza's were pale in comparison; the rippling hair was raven black, glossy and fine as silk. White skin, black hair, red lips. The cigarette struck a colour-note in a different and lower key that did not jar; it was not heard. Its smoke rose in a blue spiral . . . incense burning before some marble statue of Apollo in the green gloom of a wood; a god dressed in a conventional suit of flannel and smoking a cigarette, or, rather, keeping it alight, so that the uninhaled smoke rose in a continuous blue spiral. . . . Here he was frankly examining and admiring the stranger as one might examine some rare orchid. Was the stranger examining him? One could not tell; under the long dark lashes the grass-green eyes were hidden; the face was expressionless. Yes, he was extraordinarily beautiful, strangely attractive, significant. One would pick him out in a crowd.

"You don't look English," said the stranger musingly, without raising his eyelids. "I suppose you are Cornish."

"Then you *were*—" Robin broke off abruptly.

"Studying me?—was that what you were going to say?"

"We can cry quits."

They both laughed. It seemed to Robin that the stranger's eyes, now wide-open, offered him friendship, even intimacy.

"Until I heard you speak I wondered if you were the son of a Spanish father and a French mother. When you spoke

I was instantly aware that you were very English and very well brought up."

"As bad as that?"

"As good as that, in your case. My name is Dion Aylmer."

"Mine is Robin—Robin Trevarthon."

"Then you *are* Cornish. Robin is a charming name. Robin Hood, ragged robin, robin-redbreast, Robin Goodfellow. Dion is just—Dion, and suggests nothing at all."

"It is a strong-sounding name."

"And your birthday is in the winter?"

"Yes. But because I was born in December is not the reason that I am called Robin. The day before my arrival Uncle Anthony found a robin in the library. The windows had not been opened, and the door was shut: no one could explain how the bird got there."

"Cigarette to your taste?"

"I like it very much."

"There was a certain Spanish galleon of the great Armada wrecked on the wild Cornish coast. The captain, an ancestor of yours, narrowly escaped drowning— Won't you tell me the rest of the story?"

"That was Uncle Anthony's theory. I am unable to finish the story, which I should like to believe is true."

"On no less than three different occasions I have been prevented by unforeseen circumstances from taking the holiday that I planned in Cornwall. Fate intends apparently that I am never to visit your delectable duchy. Only the other day a friend invited me to stay with him, but I was obliged to decline. He has a cottage at the back of beyond, miles from a station. Do you happen to know his river of dreams that is called Relford? He raves about its beauties."

"Rather. It is quite near Henliston, where my home is."

"That was the name of the station."

"Is your friend an artist, by any chance?"

"He likes to think he is."

"Then his name must be Creighton!" said Robin triumphantly.

"I suppose I should observe 'Dear me, what a small world it is.' Charming fellow, Creighton, don't you think?"

"I have not met him, but I've heard a lot about him from my cousin. Did Mr. Creighton tell you why he calls his cottage Mint?"

"Yes. A quaint conceit."

"When I next stay at Myall, my cousin is going to take me to see his pictures."

"Myall. Myall? Ah, I remember—Gay Goliath. Creighton was amusing on the subject of a sporting peer who is disgustingly rich and inclined to be miserly. Perhaps if you go to stay in Myall village you know Lord Myall?"

"Lord Myall is my cousin," said Robin stiffly.

"How careful one should be. . . . But how could I guess? You must understand that Creighton has a great admiration and respect for your cousin."

"What can *he* know of him?"

"Was his description so inapplicable?"

"N-no. But Cousin Godfrey is not as rich as all that: he says he expects to end his days in the workhouse: the war has—"

"The rich man who owns that he is rich is a *rara avis*."

"And Mr. Creighton calls him Gay Goliath? What cheek!"

"I rather gathered that your cousin was nicknamed Gay Goliath long before Creighton met or even heard of him."

"I didn't know. . . . He *is* a Goliath in stature, but he has given up being gay."

"I *am* sorry to hear that. Is Lord Myall so old? And yet one has known old men that were gay."

"Forty-eight. He came as far as Borne Junction with me this morning. Just look at all these magazines the *miserly* man presented me with. I've been looking out of the window, and haven't looked at one."

"They are all quite unreadable, Robin. I have been acutely conscious of them ever since we left Exeter. May I call you Robin?"

"Of course you may."

"I was afraid you were angry with me."

"Rot. Nobody could be angry with you—if you didn't wish them to be."

"Summon the guard and ask him to remove them," Dion suggested.

"That would be rather a costly proceeding," Robin objected. "I know! I'll put them under the seat, out of sight."

"Ah! that was an inspiration. One can breathe again. If one *must* take magazines on a railway journey the only possible two are the *English Review* and the *Cornhill*: one to keep you awake, the other to soothe you to sleep. When I travel I take the Bible, the most entertaining book I know: unlike the good Catholics I confine myself to the Old Testament—What have you dropped?"

"My ring. It is always slipping off. It is loose on the little finger of my right hand, especially after an attack, and it won't go on the third finger of my left. One day I shall lose it. . . . I have it, thanks."

"You must take it to the jeweller's and have it adjusted. May one admire?"

"Certainly."

"How honoured this little round of malachite must feel. I don't think I have ever before seen malachite encircled by diamonds. It is a curious, old-fashioned setting. A woman's ring, I should say. The diamonds are of the first water. I am interested in precious stones."

"It is the malachite with all its shades of green that pleases me."

"Naturally. A faun would like green things. . . . I know a woman who always wears malachite to preserve her from lightning, contagion and witchcraft—so she says. Green happens to suit her. . . . A Latin inscription inside the band. '*Ad astra virtus.*' What a strange motto for a faun."

"That's the Myall motto. Cousin Godfrey gave me the ring. He is always giving me things."

"So. I wish someone were always giving me things! Your cousin is very fond of you. If he were an uncle one could

understand—but a cousin! Perhaps you are the heir presumptive? Is Trevarthon Lord Myall's family name?"

"No. The title dies unless he marries and has a son."

"This ring gives me furiously to wonder. Who is the lady? . . . La, la, la. Faun—that is what you are, of course—what *are* you doing in a railway-carriage?"

"Why am I a faun?"

"I cannot tell you *why*. All I know is that when you were a baby faun, before you had learned the ways of fauns, you strayed out of the woods and were caught. How you must have squealed when your wicked captor dressed you in warm garments and placed you in a cradle that was still warm. However, you soon grew tame; learned to speak English and forgot that you were not human. Hasn't your so-called mother ever accused you of being a changeling, or, more recently, a substitute?"

"I never knew my parents. An uncle and aunt brought me up."

"Your aunt, then?"

"My aunt certainly wishes I were different from what I am in very many respects. She often looks at me as a hen looks at the ducklings she has hatched. This is my first swim, and you should have seen her frenzy when I mentioned the pond, . . . Fancy! a few hours ago I had never been out of Cornwall. Aunt Cynthia can't think why I want to go to London when I can go to Myall."

"Ah! there you are. She feels that a city is no place for a faun. Are you staying long?"

"Exactly a month. At last I have broken the spell—escaped. A month ago I made up my mind on the Saturday to leave Henliston on the following Monday; but on the Sunday I was laid up with a severe attack of asthma. I'm still in the convalescent stage, weak as a kitten. Stuck up in a field I should serve as a scarecrow: my clothes fit where they touch, as Peter used to say: it's always like that after a bad attack in summer."

"Poor boy. I can see how the terrible disease has ravaged you. I suppose you've tried all these various cures?"

"Oh, all sorts. I stick to Hiram's, a powder to which you set light and inhale the fumes: it's the only one that gives me relief. But that's all passed, I'm all right again. And I've escaped! As a young man, Uncle Anthony tried, and failed; but I fancy he did not try very hard. Believe me, it is not easy for a Henlistonian to escape from Henliston: Henliston casts her spell: she is not quite real, a dream-town. Perhaps she has only allowed me to escape because she knows that I must return: I am a prisoner on parole. Oh, I suppose you think I'm talking awful nonsense. I told Uncle Anthony only the evening before he died that I wanted to get away, to live in a living world instead of a sleeping town. That evening I was definite, and he was obliged to take me seriously. But he was very clever: he said that I might go when I had been free of asthma for six consecutive months. He knew that that was hardly likely to happen: he also knew that I optimistically believed that the attack from which I was suffering was the last I should ever have. I was younger and even more foolish than I am now. I fear I shall never get rid of the beastly thing. You see, Uncle Anthony wanted me to stay in Henliston. I could not go away without his permission: I loved him too well for that. We were pals, he and I. Besides, I could never forget that—all that he had done for me. It was so long ago since he was young and had wished to escape that he could not understand my discontent. When he died—that was in June of 1914—I felt it was my duty to stay with Aunt Cynthia. Last July Peter, who's my foster-brother and greatest friend, joined the army. I was very glad, of course. But when he was gone I was terribly lonely. Then there was nothing left but the book I was writing. If I could write books and get them published I thought I could be quite content never to budge from the Poplars. If I had hours of joy while writing *Moonbeams* I also had days of suffering when I forgot all my vocabulary and couldn't construct a sentence—worse than asthma, in a way. When I began to write it I was young; I was old when I had finished. Do you know what I mean? In years I am only twenty, but years don't make age, do they?"

"You are, at the same time, very young and very old. And *Moonbeams?*"

"While I was writing it I managed to suppress my restlessness. Well, at last, I finished the book, and a month ago it was returned by the publisher to whom I had offered it. I don't blame him, for it is a bad book. The very day the manuscript came back I decided I must leave Henliston for a space. I could not bear my prison any longer. How could I hope to write until I had lived among real people in a real world? Publishers don't like fantastical romances, I see that now. Dr. Tyacke says I shall probably outgrow asthma when I'm one and twenty. Sometimes I think I shall; sometimes I think I shall not. If I don't, I must give up all thoughts of living in the world. But I do intend to take a month's holiday every year, or I shall become merely a dreamer like Uncle Anthony. . . . Don't you think that having tasted freedom, proved that I *can* leave Henliston when I wish, I shall return more contented? But here am I rattling away, and boring you. Why, didn't you stop me?"

"You do not bore me, Robin. Quite the contrary. I am very, very interested. A month's complete change will make a new man of you. You are suffering from the fret of youth: the remedy is pleasant and absurdly simple. Will you be staying with friends in London?"

"No. Cousin Godfrey delivered an ultimatum: if I did not stay at Morley's Hotel he swore he would form an alliance with Aunt Cynthia and do his best to prevent my going. It does not matter to me where I stay, as long as I am on my own; so I agreed. Do you know Morley's, Mr. Aylmer? It is in Trafalgar Square."

"An extremely respectable hotel where some of my respectable country friends stay when they come to town. Please drop the 'Mr.', Robin, if you don't mind. It is a prefix that separates me from you. I refuse to be considered middle-aged. I would rather you called me Dion."

"I have not considered the number of your years. It is difficult to guess. You vary so: you can look young, middle-

aged, or even old, as you choose. When you smile like that you seem about my own age. Different expressions chase each other so rapidly over your face . . . and your eyes change. But when you make your face a blank you look ageless, like a god. I mean, a god looks about six-and-twenty forever and ever."

"Amen," chanted Dion. "You speak as one who has seen the gods in the woodland's secret places."

"I knew you would laugh at me."

"Now you've become self-conscious. What a pity. *Laugh*, you say! I'm as solemn as an owl. Do go on. It is so rarely that one hears exactly how one appears to another."

Robin shook his head.

"I whisper it, Robin, I am seven and thirty. Your look of extreme surprise is flattering. Yes, all my acquaintances and all my friends think that I am at least ten years younger. Like Mr. Keith, a character in a delightful novel that has not yet been given to the world, I am well preserved by means of a complicated system of life, the details of which are not fit for publication. . . . Why are so many sons of parsons pagans?"

"Your father is—"

"Is, or was, a country vicar. If he is still alive, he is nearly seventy. I seldom mention my father, not because he has some reason to be ashamed of me, but because I have reason to be ashamed of him, as Beau Nash did not say to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. He was a hard, unforgiving man, Robin, and I do not honour him, so my days may not be long upon the land. When I was sixteen I left home, never to return. If only my mother had lived—she died when I was twelve—I might have been at twenty what you are, instead of— La, la, la. One should never remember, much less mention, anything that is unpleasant in one's past."

"But can't you find out whether your father is alive or dead?"

"Quite easily. But as far as I am concerned he has been dead twenty-one years. Why do I confide in you?"

"I was just wondering how I came to tell you so much of

my own affairs. It is very queer. You are an absolute stranger, yet I feel I have known you all my life."

"Yes, one should not confide in an absolute stranger, should one? It is not done: it is not English. The truth is, Robin, that we are not strangers to each other, you and I. We are of the same clan, and, at once, we knew each other. A word, a look, a gesture. Do you know the Italian word *simpatico*? Between likes there is a secret freemasonry, and only those who are of the clan know the password. Is it not so? Once I was like you. May you never become like me."

A tortured look stole over his face, and for the first time Robin noticed the network of fine lines under his eyes.

"You are so young, so fresh," Dion continued after a pause, "Pray to whatever gods there be that you may never know the weariness of pleasures that become a toil . . . the maladies of the soul. Don't look so serious. I am only melancholy after a visit to a country-house: it is always like that. How sun-tanned you are: an escaped prisoner generally looks pale."

"Oh, the last fortnight I have spent in the garden."

"The soft garden touches still cling. I seem to picture your home: a stately house set in a fair garden, a garden that is not too proud nor too humble, filled with sweet scents and the humming of innumerable bees; a place of currants and beans and roses. Do you know the scent of black currant-bushes on a hot summer noon?"

"Rather. A jolly scent. Uncle Anthony loved it, too. In summer, after rain, he would sit under the walnut-tree and mention each scent as it was wafted past: 'mignonette, thyme, rose—very faint, a hint of lavender.' He could identify each one, whereas I smelt them all together."

"I seem to like your Uncle Anthony."

"He had a wonderful brain. If instead of dreaming his life away at the Poplars he had gone into the world I am certain he would have made his mark."

"Had he done so, you would be a very different Robin. He tutored you, I gather?"

"Yes, he gave me a sound classical education."

"And more than that. Far more than that! . . . Your

uncle understood values: to him the realities of the world were shadows—am I not right?"

"I am glad he died before the war."

"I suppose I am dense, but there is one thing, Robin, that is by no means clear to me. You have told me so much that I want to know more. Lord Myall is your cousin, you say?"

"Lord Myall and Aunt Cynthia are second cousins. Catherine Myall, Cousin Godfrey's great-aunt, married John Trevarthon, who was Aunt Cynthia's and Uncle Anthony's grandfather. Uncle Anthony and Aunt Cynthia were twins."

"My poor brain positively reels. Even now, I don't see how you come in?"

Robin flushed crimson.

"I—I was adopted by my uncle and aunt. I am no relation. I have always called Lord Myall 'Cousin Godfrey.'"

"Ah, now I understand. . . . La, la, la. I am so thirsty for tea."

"One can get tea on the train."

"One can get liquid that they call tea. I will wait until I get to Paradise. Perhaps I had better explain that that is my home."

"*I thought so.*"

"Paradise House, Paradise Place."

"What a ripping address. It surely is not in London?"

"Chelsea, a part of London that is like no other part. It has the atmosphere of a country town."

"I have read of it. Mr. Pepys—"

"The immortal prattler must often have strolled down Paradise Place. I have an Italian greyhound called Pepys. . . . So asthma is the trouble. I have heard that they welcome asthmatics in the army."

"They did not welcome me!"

"Little did you think before the war that asthma would be the means of saving your life."

"Oh, it does not follow that everyone that goes to the war is killed."

"I quite agree. Had you joined the khaki throng, my dear Robin, you would never have left England, but you would

most certainly have died—if not on the drill-ground, in hospital, of sheer exhaustion and depression while awaiting your discharge. I could tell you stories. I knew a dear patriotic fellow, sensitive, highly-strung, who joined as a private, and died on the third day with a set grin on his face; he died of heartbreak, having done his best to show intelligent appreciation of the jokes of his companions. It is true that he had a weak heart.”

“But if he had a weak heart he ought never to have been accepted.”

“I have also heard that they welcome those who have weak hearts in the army. No, my Robin, you would never have met death by a German bullet, but you may by a German bomb: Trafalgar Square is in the very centre of London.”

“I want to see a Zeppelin raid.”

“You probably will. . . . Could you believe in me as a doctor?”

“Are you a doctor?”

“If you care to place yourself in my hands I promise that you will return to Cornwall cured of asthma.”

Robin, who was loading his pipe, looked up. Dion was bending forward; he was faintly smiling and his eyes gleamed palely.

As he met Dion's gaze Robin's fingers faltered, became still. A feeling of numbness came over him. The green eyes were searching his own, and beyond, forcing the barriers of his inmost thoughts. He could not evade their expressionless gaze that robbed him of all resistance. How did a bird feel when fascinated by a snake? Suddenly, a wild panic seized him. He wanted to rush out into the corridor. But he could not stir. . . . Panic passed, and he felt dreadfully tired and sleepy. Dion's face became indistinct. He was only conscious of those gleaming eyes that now were colourless; they were like twin Röntgen rays. . . .

“Think it over, Robin. You have plenty of time between this and Paddington. Why, what is the matter with you?” Dion was asking, in tender tones.

Robin rubbed his eyes. Dion was lighting a cigarette.

"I think I must have tried to faint . . . such a funny feeling. That last attack has left me absurdly weak. I fancied—I don't quite know what I fancied. Your eyes. . . . I couldn't see your face any longer . . . only your eyes. I likened myself to a bird under snake-spell. There is nothing the least snake-like about your eyes: they can be grave or gay—or just expressionless. And then, I did not seem to be frightened any more. I think I should have gone to sleep if you hadn't spoken. As it is, I feel I have just woke up."

"Have they green eyes? I forget. I detest snakes, nasty squirming creatures. And I protest against the comparison. I am the most harmless person I have ever met, and quite the laziest. One does meet oneself? I never offered you a cigarette. You said you approved of the brand; or were you just polite?"

"May I have another presently? I have filled my pipe."

"I have been selfish, making you talk: to me you are as the dew on a sun-tired garden. You must rest."

"But I'm quite all right again. Will you really cure me of asthma?"

"We will speak of that later on. I am going to read the Proverbs of Solomon, and you are—do you know *The Golden Journey to Samarkand?*"

"No. I like the title."

"James Elroy Flecker is a genuine poet who tells that '*beauty lives though lilies die.*'" Dion opened the case beside him and drew out a slender book with blue covers. "He will appeal to you, I think."

"It looks most fascinating. . . . '*Men are unwise and curiously planned.*'"

"*Hélas!*—which, by the way, is to be my epitaph, in inverted commas. But you must not dip. Begin with 'Prologue'; and when you have read to the end, read the preface, *if* you wish to learn the author's attitude towards the art of Poetry. What do you think of this for a camouflaged Bible?"

"It looks like a volume of poems."

"I hoped you'd say that. Rather nice leather, don't you think? It took me a long time to choose the colour. No one

would guess that a book with orange covers was a Bible. I once travelled with an archdeacon who nearly died of shock when I held it out to him and asked how he would interpret a certain verse. It is quite a mistake to think that archdeacons are arch."

"Just now I was not sure whether you were joking or not when you said that you always took a Bible on your travels. You might be easily taken for a most frivolous person. You are frightfully serious, really."

"The wisdom of youth!" Dion exclaimed, as he pressed out an invisible crease on the black ribbon that marked his place.

"You did mean what you said?—that you will cure me of asthma?"

Dion made no answer: already immersed in Solomon's profundities, apparently he had not heard. In a moment he seemed to have forgotten Robin's very existence: he had become detached, utterly aloof, and looked more like a god than ever.

It would be sacrilege to speak to Dion while he looked like that, Robin decided. This poet, Flecker, must be good or Dion would not have praised him. But however delightful the poems might be, he infinitely preferred talking to the fascinating Dion whose voice was music and whose manner was a pageant. How could one concentrate one's attention on a poem when one's head was in a whirl? Dion affected one like champagne. . . . Perhaps Dion himself was a poet. Or was he a doctor—he had not denied that he was. He might be a doctor who wrote poetry in his spare time. Unmistakably he was an artist—but in what? He was famous probably; if not, he would very soon become so: behind those eyes lurked strength and power. If he undertook to release him from asthma he would succeed: one felt that it was not in his nature to fail. If there were a man who could perform what seemed impossible the man was Dion Aylmer. . . . Now that his eyes had become accustomed to Dion's strange beauty and were no longer dazzled, he could appreciate the perfect taste of Dion's apparel. How could he have dismissed that flannel suit as merely conventional: an ordinary flannel suit is always grey, like a cat in the twilight. Dion's was fawn-coloured. Cousin

Godfrey could find no fault with it. Gloves and soft collar were several shades paler; the bow, powdered with tiniest of white spots, was of olive-green, the same colour as the socks; the shoes were of buckskin. No flower could have graced the buttonhole like the sprig of bay. "I paused between a fragrant bay-tree and a sheet of fire, a trellis covered with orange-red nasturtiums." Was that speech of Dion's an allegory? . . . "*Silken Samarcand*"—Keats spelled the word with a c. He would not read at random, but begin with "Prologue," as Dion had bidden. "*Tales, marvellous tales of ships and stars and isles where good men rest, where nevermore the rose of sunset pales.*" . . . "*In dim glades sleeping.*" . . . "*Indian carpets dark as wine.*" . . . Beauty lured him on.

"*Where the fleet of stars is anchored, and the young star-captains glow,*" he murmured under his breath softly, closing the book, sad that he had come to the end so soon. His attention had been captured and held by a book of poems: half an hour or so ago he had not thought it possible. Was James Elroy Flecker Dion's nom de plume? There were lines that were Dionesque. "*Men are unwise and curiously planned,*" was one. He would not read the preface: prefaces were always dull, as Dion implied. It was enough that the poems were beautiful. . . . His watch had stopped: he must have forgotten to wind it. How many miles to London? Would Dion never finish reading? He gazed out of the window at the sun-swept fields. The shadows of the hedges were lengthening. A man was walking in a field where the thistles were waist-high. Safflower was a word that he had used in *Moonbeams*: Princess Iolde had worn a safflower-dyed silk robe. The safflower was a thistle-like plant, and the dried petals of the flowers yielded a red dye. Flecker's poems had set his brain aflame. Rich words and exquisite imageries came thronging for his selection. Old dreams returned, decked in new colours . . . romance and high adventure, palm-green shores of wine-dark seas, masses of swaying colour. . . .

"You may keep *The Golden Journey* since it pleases you."

"May I? It is good of you. How do you know it pleases me?"

"I glanced at your face."

"But why should I rob you?"

"I have another copy at home. May one ask if you expect to have a wildly hilarious time all by yourself in London?"

"No. I shall have to go very quietly. I never dared to confess it, even to Lena, she's my old nurse, a dear, but I'm dreadfully afraid of being ill while I'm at the hotel. Ordinary things to which you are so accustomed that you scarcely notice will be sights to me. There is so much I want to see: Westminster Abbey, the Zoo,—oh, lots of places and things."

"I do not see you at Morley's Hotel that is in Trafalgar Square. No, I do not, try as I will. La, la, la. I have a thirst, Robin. I repeat it, I have a thirst. The Ancient Mariner's was a vague longing in comparison. Must it be a tepid drink that should be cold, or *tea*?"

"In my bag I have some Manaccan plums and a bunch of grapes. Would you care—?"

"A few grapes would be most refreshing."

Robin reached down the bag, opened it, and proffered the cardboard-box.

"What tempting-looking plums with the nice name. One plum and six grapes will save my life. Thank you, Robin."

"Eat the plum first: it is rather sharp-tasting. Manaccans are not really dessert plums; they make the most scrumptious tarts and jam."

"Now where have I seen this chap's brother? What a glorious colour: rich golden-brown shot with red." Dion held the plum as if it were a valuable jewel. "I'm afraid I must take off my glove: if it were stained with juice I couldn't meet Goyle's reproachful look. My glover, by special request, sends in his bill quarterly. I used to feel alternately ashamed and proud when it came as a New Year card—and that was three years ago. I try not to be extravagant; I do indeed; I've been trying not to be extravagant all my life, with conspicuous failure. My tragedy is that I live like a prince, and my income is precarious. It is wonderful how I manage . . . quite, quite wonderful. I *must* have gloves, now, lots of gloves. Goyle, my man, is given money—sometimes—wherewith to pay my

most pressing bills. In a word, he does his best in little ways to economise; incidentally he hates my glover—I have never discovered why—and insists on checking his bill. There is, then, some reason for taking off my right glove: I am not in the least left-handed. Much ado about nothing, you think? It is my way of preparing you for a slight shock, Robin. Three years ago I met with an accident, and lost the third and little finger of my right hand; ever since I have kept my hands covered. Folks think that wearing gloves, when I ought not to wear them, is an eccentricity of mine: I foster the idea. The corresponding fingers of my right glove are cunningly padded, you perceive."

"I am awfully sorry, and yet I'm glad. Don't think me a brute, but you wanted something like that to—well, you seem more human."

"Useful things, gloves, as any experienced burglar will tell you," Dion observed, ruefully surveying his mutilated hand.

If Robin expected to see slender white hands with tapering fingers he was sadly disillusioned. Dion's hands were certainly white, but inclined to plumpness, and the fingers were short rather than long, with spatulate nails closely trimmed. The hands themselves were a shock: they were those of a capable business man. He sought an excuse for their incongruity. . . . Had he not read somewhere or other that the best artists have that kind of hands?

"I like the sharp flavour. Ah, I remember: they grow these kind of plums in Brittany. Man—how do you say?"

"Manaccan. Manaccan's a village. You pass through it on the way to Myall. It is curious that you should have come across Manaccan plums in Brittany. Long ago, so the story goes, a French sailor's body was washed ashore in one of the creeks of the Relford River, and was buried in the churchyard at Manaccan. When spring came round a shoot was found creeping up through his grave. It grew with rather ghastly exuberance to a fruiting tree. This tree was the carnivorous parent of the race of Manaccan plums. I daresay the sailor was a Breton."

"How very interesting."

"The plum is peculiar to the Lizard peninsula. It will grow in Henliston, but not in Penzance, only twelve miles away. We have a tree that covers one side of the house; it must have been planted when the garden was laid out."

"A map of Cornwall that has not Manaccan marked thereon is not worth glancing at."

"Are you a poet? Did you write *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*?"

"I wish I did. Poor Flecker died last year of consumption. He was only thirty-one; but those whom the gods love die young."

"Are you a poet?"

"Some men say that I am."

"But are you?" Robin insisted.

"I am a hybrid, a prose-poet. Fate brought us together. It is odd that you are the author of *Moonbeams* when I am the author of *Moonflowers* which is all about the beautiful foolishness of things, for I join Voltaire in thanking God that he gave us folly. It took me three years to write. Over three thousand copies have been sold, and the publisher considers the book a success. I consider it a failure: how it happened I cannot think, but I split no less than two infinitives, a heinous crime."

"I must get a copy. Are you writing another book?"

"I have to plead guilty. But this time it is a novel."

"Have you nearly finished it?"

"Alas! I've only just begun the sixth chapter. I'm painfully slow, and consequently rather despised and rejected of a brilliant novelist-friend, who turns out more than a hundred thousand words in three months—and then nearly dies of utter exhaustion. Sometimes I work for a whole morning and complete a sentence. At my present rate of progress the book may be completed in another three years. I *do* so want to finish it before my brilliant novelist-friend dies so that he may peruse a novel by a contemporary writer that is quietly instead of screamingly brilliant."

"One cannot rattle off good stuff. Remember Flaubert's 'Today I have worked sixteen hours and have at last finished

my page.' No one disputes the calibre of Flaubert's brilliancy."

"Flaubert is better than brilliant: he is Flaubert. You consoling person. And to think you have read Flaubert—in the original?"

"Oh, yes."

"Splendid. Translation is always a treason, and, as a Ming author observes, can at its best be only the reverse side of a brocade: all the threads are there, but not the subtlety of colour or design. Are there any more at home in Henliston like you? But concerning this little trouble of yours, asthma. Have you considered my proposal?"

"It does not need consideration."

"Then you agree to stay with me in Chelsea for a month?"

"*Stay with you in Chelsea?*"

"You could not imagine that I could treat you at Morley's Hotel?"

"But Cousin Godfrey has booked my room, and I promised—"

"Ah, once more the kind Cousin Godfrey. But how could he know that you were to meet me? I'm quite sure he would urge you to go and stay in Whitechapel if he thought there were a ghost of a chance of your being cured. Your room can be cancelled: we'll telephone from Paradise. It is imperative that you should stay under my roof. I'm sorry the idea is so repellent."

"You know it is anything but that. I should love to stay with you. It is horrid to mention money, but, for all I know to the contrary, you may be an asthma specialist, and I may not be able to afford your fees. If I stayed at an hotel and came to see you, say, once a week, it would be a very different thing to staying in your house for a month."

"You're too delicious," laughed Dion. "What a priceless notion. What shall we say?—a thousand guineas?—too high?"

"Well, you have your writing to do. You cannot waste your time curing the ills of a chance acquaintance. At any rate, the acquaintance should at least pay you. *Will you cure*

mê? Do you really mean it? But you would not trifle. To me it is a very serious matter."

"Robin, please lend an attentive ear. I did not say I *think* I can cure you of that which is supposed to be incurable. *Never again will you be troubled with asthma.*" Very deliberately, Dion dried his hands on a fawn silk handkerchief, drew on his gloves and buttoned them, before he continued: "I am not a doctor, that is to say, not a medical man. You may call me a wizard, for I shall cure you by magic, not by medicine. It will be good to return to Henliston hale and hearty, eh? You will be kind, and hide a little sardonic smile when that doctor of yours in a few months time pats you on the back and announces that his surmise was correct, that you seem to have outgrown the disease. He will give advice that it will not harm you to take; he will caution you to be careful, oh, yes, very careful, for in spite of appearances you may not be out of the wood. La, la, la. Let him take the credit. I have no doubt that he is a worthy soul, and his cures they are not many. You scarcely paid me a compliment in imagining that I was the type of doctor who would steal another's patient. Ah, professional etiquette never occurred to you. No one does something, that is worth anything, for nothing in this material world, and the wizard demands his fee even as the doctor. The manner of my payment will be the pleasure of your company. As you might quite easily be the original of the hero in my novel, can you wonder that I am determined to have you as my guest? There! I have made my confession. Do not imagine that I shall always be observing you through a quizzing-glass, that I shall be eternally analysing, dissecting, testing. Not at all. I simply wish to steep myself in your atmosphere, to catch, at last, a fleeting glimpse of your aura—what would be your colour? At Paradise I promise you that you will spend a happy month. My house is the rallying point of painters, poets, writers,—artists who have arrived, or who will arrive. I have no time to waste on young men or women with artistic temperaments who imagine they are artists. You, of course, will arrive. I have a flair. The people who live in Chelsea are not artists as is generally reported. You look sur-

prised. I reckoned up the other day that there are a round half-dozen artists living in Chelsea, three of whom are painters. In our streets you will see young men—not many, for like the moths they prefer the dark—poorly disguised as Apaches; they lead strange lives, and are always pallid and look consumptive: poor devils, they must have something seriously wrong with them or they'd be disguised as soldiers. You will see the female of this species—there are rather more than twelve females to every male—who dress in skirts with alarming stripes and queer little coats and queerer hats. These young men and not—necessarily—young women are all worshippers at the shrine of one Augustus John. None of them understands that he cannot be imitated. When John dies I cannot think what will happen to them all. I wonder if he'll die a radiant blue?"

"Who is Augustus John?"

"So much for fame! If you were to ask that question in Chelsea something dreadful would happen to you. John and the New English Art Club are the antithesis of Poynter and the Royal Academy. The devotees of the N.E.A.C. will ask you what is the R.A., if you happen to mention that institution. Members of the Great British Public who pay their annual visit to the Academy have been heard to refer to the N.E.A.C. exhibitors as 'those freaks.' One dismisses the Academy, Robin; one discusses the New English. Yes, one takes the New English very seriously. It is all quite amusing. Occasionally there is a work of art to be seen in Burlington House. With my own two eyes I have seen a work of art at the New English. But I am only confusing you. You ask about John. He has genius. I have with great difficulty passed on, having stood before one of his marvellous drawings for a quarter of an hour. Yet, I tell you in confidence, that I have stood before a portrait of John's that gave me furiously to wonder exactly how much the artist despised the public; and I have turned away in a mood to welcome one of Poynter's masterpieces of a pretty doll with a pink sash and clean white frock that looks like an enlargement of a picture on a chocolate-box."

"I am appallingly ignorant."

"Are you? No. You know all about the things that matter; I know all about the things that don't matter. Once I—but that was so long ago that I have almost forgotten."

"I do hope that you are right—that, one day, I shall arrive. You mean, as a writer? Oh, there are so many things that I know nothing of. . . . I am going to be cured of asthma, stay a whole month with you at Paradise House, Paradise Place, and I'm going to see myself in print. It is all too good to be true. Though you poke fun at the art students, there must be all sorts of real characters in Chelsea. I am looking forward to listening to your famous friends: I shall be seen and not heard."

"They are mostly *infamous*, I'm afraid, but many of them are charming; and all are interesting. The greater the man the easier it is to talk with him. It is always easy to talk with anyone who is not a fool. I hate fools, and tolerate them badly. We are all fools in one way or another, I suppose. Still, there are fools and fools. It is the foolish fools who exasperate me. Yes, Chelsea is a pleasant place. I've lived there quite successfully for close on three years."

"Rossetti and Carlyle—"

"There are as good people living and to be born as any that are dead. I often pass along Cheyne Walk, therefore have I seen Rossetti's house; but I am much more interested in the house a few doors away with the ancient wistaria where lives—I forget his name—the loyal Jacobite who drives in a carriage with a spanking pair of piebalds. He dresses his men-servants in kilts; they may daily be seen exercising two beautiful collies, one the usual brown, the other snow-white. I have never had occasion to walk in Cheyne Row, so I have not seen Carlyle's house. People come from miles away to visit it. Carlyle, I am told, was a tiresome old gentleman who wrote at great length; and I am not fond of writers who write at great length, even when they are amusing: I have never been told that Carlyle wrote amusing books. How could he when he was Scotch? England would be a delightful place if the Scotch would live in Scotland. I dislike the Scotch language and the Scotch nature. It is a curious fact, nevertheless, that

one of my best friends hails from Aberdeen. An hour spent in his society I find as beneficial as the cure at Marienbad—I mean, Bath.”

“But Stevenson, Barrie—you do put things in a new way! What do you mean by an amusing book? A history can hardly be amusing.”

“That is not quite easy. I use the word amusing in the French sense; the opposite to boring, shall we say. A book that bores one for two consecutive pages is not amusing: the writer of such an one is no artist, and consequently the book is not worth reading. Recently I read a book, a most learned book, on the manners and customs of the mosquito: it amused me from start to finish. You must not take me too literally, Robin: one has to exaggerate to get one’s effect.”

“I see what you mean. . . . That board says ‘London: 20 miles.’ How the time has flown since Exeter.”

“London stretches out like an octopus, and soon its hideous tentacles, whose growth has only been checked by the war, will enfold us. You will look about you as we drive presently through its grey streets and ask if this ugliness is London. There is beauty in London; but to one who views it for the first time it is always ugly. Gradually it reveals itself. You will see. Robino mio, we will go to the Abbey, and stand reverently by the stone that covers the ashes of Henry Irving; to the Zoo, and hold carnations through the bars of the sunbirds’ cages; to Madame Tussaud’s, and see Voltaire in wax; to Kew, and shiver in the heat at the orchidness of the orchids, admire the lavender-blue water-lilies, and pluck a wild cyclamen if it is not too early. We will visit a duke and theatres and slums and a typical suburb. Yes, we will be happy, you and I; and you shall teach me many things. And, at night, when you are fast asleep, I shall be weaving spells so that you may become stronger than the strong. Here is this sprig of bay, a pledge from me to you.”

CHAPTER III

“**H**AVE you any luggage in the van, Robin?” questioned Dion.

“No. I have only a bag and this shiny thing. What will your man think when he sees my shabby portmanteau? I suppose I ought to be ashamed of it. Please excuse. Had I known I was to stay with you I would have treated myself to a brand new bag.”

“Please don’t apologise. What need? It holds what is put into it: no brand new bag could do more. You should be proud of it as an antique.”

“It belonged to Uncle Anthony, who bought it years and years ago.”

“Ah, there’s the good Higgins with the car. If I tell you that Paddington is the nicest station in London it may give you furiously to wonder what the others are like. I think I must take you to Liverpool Street on a rainy morning when those who occupy room in offices are arriving for another day of dreary toil: one of the most exhilarating sights I know.”

Almost before the train stopped Goyle appeared and, brushing away a porter, flung open the door.

“Goyle, this gentleman is coming home with me. Just those two bags. Out you get, Robin.”

As he met Goyle’s quick glance Robin suppressed a shudder with difficulty. Goyle’s face was not merely ugly: it was positively hideous. He could not understand how a person like Dion could bear to have anyone about him who looked like an ogre.

“What a crowd. It is as if a box of halma-men were being tumbled out,” Robin observed, as they made their way across the platform. “I *should* feel lost if I were on my own. And what a huge station.”

“In these days I ought to feel heartily sorry for the traveller who has no car waiting for him when he arrives at a big terminus. They tell me it is possible to wait more than an hour for a taxi if one secures a decrepit porter. The war is

spoiling all the little things of life: for it is the little things that make life worth living."

"I have thought that myself," Robin admitted reluctantly.

"And having thought, you told yourself that you were wicked and selfish, that the little things you missed were not worth naming compared with the big things that have been given up by the brave lads at the front. Am I right? La, la, la. '*Once more into the breach*,'—for probably the last time! The numerous arrivals have thoroughly disorganised the spirit world, I understand; great difficulty in finding accommodation for them."

"I do hope it will end soon. It is terrible to think that men are being killed every minute of the day."

"Daily we survey the casualty list quite calmly; before the war we were horrified when we read of a train-accident in which ten people were killed. Perhaps they are the fortunate, the ones who fall. Who can say? We cannot estimate the value of human life, for we don't know the value of human death. I am inclined to think that the lowest state There is infinitely preferable to the best Here."

"Anyway, it is better to be killed than maimed."

"Quite comfy?"

"Oh, very much so. This is luxury. Lovely soft padding. Do you know this is the first time I've ever been in a private car? Cousin Godfrey talked of buying one before the war. I wish he had."

"The first time, eh? Wonderful, wonderful. Again I envy you—Ah, at last. Everything all right, Goyle? Tell Higgins to skirt the Park when he has crossed the Serpentine; come out at the Albert Gate and home by Sloane Street and Chelsea Bridge Road." Turning to Robin, Dion explained: "The short cut is through South Kensington, and we are not fond of South Kensington. Besides, it is a lovely afternoon."

"How smoothly it goes," said Robin, as they glided up the little hill and out of the station into the sunlight.

"Would that my life ran as smoothly as my car," sighed Dion.

"Why are you so sad every now and again?—feigned or real?"

"Alas, not feigned. In asking the question you brave the danger of finding out."

"La la, la."

"You come in most timely."

They both laughed.

"So Goyle's appearance you find rather alarming?"

"Oh, your eyes miss nothing. You must admit that he is a little—"

"I do, I do. More than a little."

"It is almost too much to have seen you and him for the first time on the same day."

"Ever since he arrived at man's estate I have sorrowed that he can only be my servant. Such an admirable foil. Imagine the sensation Goyle and I would cause if we attended a party together. Some years ago I was walking along one of Dublin's main streets and he, then a boy of thirteen, ran along beside me begging for a copper. I was in a hurry, but when I looked down at him I immediately stopped. Half-starved he was, if possible, even uglier than he is today; his nose was not as flat, but his cheek-bones were scarcely covered; his hair had not been cut for months and put one in mind of a Fiji warrior's on which the curling-tongs had just done its work. I asked him his name. 'Tis Pat Boyle, sur,' he replied. I accused him of having uttered a terminological inexactitude. He seemed surprised, not to say hurt, and, testing the sixpence I had given him with his teeth, politely asked what his name might be. It was Gar Goyle, I told him, and that he had better not forget thenceforward, for he was leaving for England with me that night, and servants in my employ always answered to their names. He was quite pleased about it. There seemed no good reason why I should not annex him: his mother, a virago, spent her time in producing babies; and his father, an ex-prize fighter, in consuming alcoholic liquor. You may boast, Robin, that you have met a man who succeeded in teaching an Irishman English so thoroughly that his nationality would not be

suspected. Goyle was an excellent pupil: he has a keen ear, and is a born mimic."

"If he were goggle-eyed he would be rather like a bulldog. Has he ever gone back to see his people?"

"When he had been with me a year or so I asked him if he would not like to take a holiday and look once more on his father and his mother and his fourteen brothers, and, perhaps yet another, which would make fifteen—unless the record was broken, and the latest arrival was a girl. In effect, Goyle, having shaken off the Dublin dirt from his bare feet, quoth like the raven: 'Nevermore.' He seemed to feel he was wasted on his family. I cannot help thinking that he is the pick of the brood: 'the ugly duckling, the best little bird of all,' you know. Goyle's hobby is boxing—Am I boring you?"

"Rather not!"

"I discovered that he had inherited the taste from his father, and had him instructed in the noble art. Every day he has a friendly spar with one or other of the servants. Occasionally I put on the gloves myself. I encourage it. You will see how fit they all look. Flaccid servants are intolerable. The butler at the house where I've been staying has three chins and a paunch like one of those City men who lunch at Sweeting's: he'll make a horrible corpse. Yes, I believe that if Goyle were to take up boxing as a profession he'd become a leading heavy-weight in a very little while, and win applause from the multitude—and fat purses, which are better than applause. Even were he no good with his fists he would be bound to knock out his man: no opponent could bear up for three rounds if Goyle looked him straight in the eye before the fight. I know a member of a notoriously-plain family who declares that his face won him the D.S.O.: a trenchful of Germans held up their arms like one man when they saw his face. Goyle, out there would win the V.C. Undoubtedly he could better himself in the ring as I've often pointed out to him. The silly fellow suffers from gratitude. I tell him he has nothing to be grateful for; that I carried him off because his good looks happened to appeal to me."

"Why shouldn't he be grateful? You rescued him from

dire poverty and I bet you've been jolly good to him ever since."

Dion gave a little shrug and drooped his cigarette to an angle of thirty degrees.

"It must be twelve years ago since he and I became acquainted. Much water has passed under many bridges since then," he said, and his expression became set, as though he were gazing at past scenes through the rising smoke, scenes not altogether happy, but scenes that he faced again in memory and never flinched from, any more than his eyes from the rising smoke. He had, as before, in a moment become utterly detached, aloof. Robin felt that he was forgotten.

"*Memoirs of Dion Aylmer* would be very publishable, after my death," said Dion at length. "Twelve years! How time flies. La, la, la."

"Goyle would come into them?"

"Oh, yes, he would most certainly come into them. I honestly believe that I am still a hero to my valet. I love my Goyle. I'll tell you a strange thing about him: when you get to know him you will cease to see his ugliness. You said he reminded you of a bulldog: you will find him as gentle. By the way, Robin, the excellent Goyle plays a part, quite a minor part, in your cure."

"Goyle does? How?" asked Robin excitedly.

"Wait and see."

"You are a most tantalising person. I am awfully eager to know, Mr. Wizard, how my cure is to be accomplished. Does Goyle stir the cauldron while you, in a black robe patterned with stars and mystic signs, mutter incantations?—or is it only witches who have cauldrons?"

"I stir the cauldron; Goyle . . . obeys instructions—This is Hyde Park, as you have probably guessed; its scenery must strike you as rather sham, I'm afraid. And that is the Serpentine, whose waters I have never heard are any worse for having flowed under William Whiteley's emporium."

"Look at the crowds of boys bathing!"

"Dirty gamins who have flung aside their rags. Clothed with the sun they are revealed as exquisite creatures of wild rose and

old ivory commingled. If only they would forget to shout in Cockney, be dumb! The true colour of life, Robin, is the colour of the young body in the sunlight. On that side is Kensington Gardens, sacred to children and dogs. It is the pleasantest oasis in London. Occasionally I wander through the trees to the Round Pond and watch small boys and old boys sail toy boats, and when I tire of that I go and listen to Peter Pan playing his silent tune. You have no idea how beautifully daffodils and crocuses grow in the grass of a London park."

"But don't they get picked and stepped on with so many people passing?"

"Wherever flowers grow in a park there only may walk the park-keepers. It is a case of 'Look but not touch.'"

"I have seen more men in khaki since we left Paddington than I've seen in Henliston since war was declared—There's a man belonging to a Scotch regiment. Doesn't he look fine? The blue ribbons at the tops of his stockings flutter like butterflies."

"London Scottish," said Dion laconically. "Once I possessed a rather nice tweed suit of the same colour as his kilt—That erection that suggests a church-spire on the spree is the Albert Memorial; and the monstrous caricature of the Colosseum is the Albert Hall. And, from the sublime to the ridiculous, those two gentlemen with the badly-put-on puttees and slouch hats are typical Australians. Hard cases, by the look of them. They came over probably with the first contingent, for they had nothing to lose, except their lives, and everything to gain: of such stuff were the mercenaries of the Middle Ages. I have never visited a British Colony. From all accounts South Africa and Australia are impossible. Beautiful scenery, you say. That is true. Having mentioned the scenery, you've said about all. Johannesburg I have heard described as whirls of dust and paraffin tins. Terrible people live in Johannesburg. But have you ever met a man who was born and brought up in Sydney? India might be interesting. It has a past, and a decent class of white man lives there. 'The idea of the British Empire leaves me quite cold, and the only feeling that our

Colonies inspire in me is a determination never to visit them.' Have you read Max Beerbohm's delightful essays? Well, you have a treat in store. He is so whimsical. 'If this or that race threw off our yoke, I should feel less vexation than if one comma were misplaced in the printing of this essay.' Needless to say, he wrote that years and years ago. It is my ambition to be drawn by Max. His caricatures are as clever as his writings. Robin, you are doing your best not to look shocked."

"The Colonies have answered splendidly to the call," Robin protested warmly.

"I believe you read the newspapers."

"*The Times*."

"I hoped at the worst it was the *Morning Post*. But *The Times*!"

"Is there so much difference?"

"Men say that there is. Never having read either I cannot express an opinion. I am bound to confess that I have heard astonishing things about *The Times*; that it expresses all those opinions that it ought not to express, and the only health in it is in Mr. Sandow's advertisements. Don't you know that 'journalism is unreadable and literature is unread'? Poor Wilde, he was no worse than many another. At the time, they made such a stir about it! forgetting the Old Testament they behaved as if a new sin had been discovered. An artist in attitudes, it amused him to play the part of scapegoat—anyway, for as long as the trial lasted. I wonder if he appreciates the art of Jacob Epstein?"

"But—" Robin began, rather horrified.

"A lot of goats certainly butted in. Wilde was so nearly a genius. You have read his *House of Pomegranates*?"

"I have not read any of his writings. Uncle Anthony said—"

"I thought he was broad-minded. *A House of Pomegranates* is very beautiful, very precious: it is a classic—That skinny-looking man is a Member of Parliament. It will be bad for his pocket when the war is over. He is riding in the Row. That track bordered by chairs is the famous Row. The tubby chap on the white horse is Hector Ross, barrow-knight, the company inflator; he is one of the few Englishmen who live in

Park Lane; he gives large sums to charities, and will soon get a peerage; the reason he is in town has nothing to do with his wife."

"You really are, you know," laughed Robin.

"What am I?"

"An idealist who pretends to be a cynic and iconoclast."

"You will certainly arrive! By the way, to which publisher did you send *Moonbeams*?"

"Newton."

"But you couldn't write down to Newton's standard to save your life. One cannot be too careful in the choice of a publisher. First choose your publisher, then write your book. Did you bring the manuscript with you?"

"No. And if I had I wouldn't show it to you: it's hopeless."

"Still, I should have enjoyed the privilege of reading your 'fantastical romance.' Later you must give me a *résumé*—We roll along Knightsbridge. The bridge, if it ever existed, is gone, and the knight, if he lived, died long, long ago. Does not the blend of colours in that shop-window rejoice your heart? Most of our window-dressers of good shops make the same mistake: they cram the window with stuff that is quite well-arranged in an unimaginative way to make an effective colour-scheme, so that the eye of the passer-by is attracted; but if one stops and separates one thing from another, so to speak, one seldom sees an article that a woman of taste would desire, for their colour-scheme windows are dressed for women—by men: any rubbish is put in provided it is of the right colour. One passes on. The way to dress a window is to put a very few but exquisite and intensely-desirable things in it: the eye is attracted and held, and the longer it is held the more likely a purchase will be made. I have long wished to dress a window. In fact, I should have confided my wish to the manager of a shop off Bond Street, who would I am sure be sympathetic, were it not that the only possible chair, over which I want to drape an opera-cloak of purple silk slashed with apricot, annoyingly reposes in South Kensington Museum. I know the curator would raise objections. Such a beautiful stately chair of carved walnut that centuries ago held a cardinal or some

high dignitary in one of the cathedrals of Spain, Toledo, I think. There are some quite enterable shops here in Sloane Street."

"Cousin Godfrey gets his boots from Sloane Street. I forget the name of the firm."

"We have just passed the shop on our left. I get mine there, too. One may get one's boots at Peter Napp's. In August the street, annoyed at being neglected and tired with hotness, is by no means at the top of its form."

"*Neglected?* with all these people, and the motors and omnibuses rushing along? It is all one gay hurry—That was a narrow squeak. I keep on thinking we are going to collide. Your driver is awfully expert at judging distances."

"All these men and women having done their day's work are on their way home to Battersea and the district whose name I make a point of forgetting that lies beyond a public-house most suitably named World's End. Sloane Street stares at them stonily. She reserves her charming smile for patricians who come shopping between half-past ten and one, and lunch and tea. Perhaps she is at her very best on a spring morning. It must have been on an April morning this year that I made the discovery. The shower was over, and the street was filled with golden haze; the sun silvered the pavements and turned the grey-brown roadway pink with pleasure. All the women seemed young, even the dowagers. Errand-boys whistled gaily as they polished brass or glass. The lines of ribbon on the khaki chest of a giddy old general put me in mind of the rainbow and made me feel quite hopeful; he came puffing out of that florist's carrying a huge bouquet of white lilac which he bestowed on a rosy young thing in the waiting car. The shop-girls and customers could hardly turn for plumes of lilac, and daffadowndillies: humming a tune from *Véronique* I went in and chose a gardenia; you, I imagine, would have bought a bunch of violets for a buttonhole: violets would have been as right for you as a gardenia was for me. If I were a maid I would rather be selling flowers in a flower-shop than tapping the keys of a typewriter in an office all day long. Oh, the fragrance of the place, as if one were in one of the lanes in

heaven. The shops, gay with new spring goods, were no more gay than the tall grey houses with their curtains all a-swaying and a-fluttering, their gleaming windows, their window-boxes of brilliant tulips or golden daffodils. The opening leaf-buds in the gardens were of a greenness, green. Sloane Street on a spring morning when the sun shines, I think."

"I am glad there are lanes in your heaven, as there are in mine. I find it difficult to imagine that these houses ever look gay: they look stern, severe."

"That's because they are well-bred and you are a stranger. When they know you. . . . Robin, tell me things."

"I have nothing to tell that can possibly be of any interest to you. My life has been made up of trifles—and attacks of asthma."

"Look at the cut of that man's trousers: Saki would say they were made in Southwark rather than in anger. How would you improve men's fashions if you were king, a real king with notions?"

"That requires thinking about. Dr. Tyacke saw a play in London years ago, called *If I Were King*."

"With George Alexander as François Villon. They tell me that since he played that part he has never acted."

"Dr. Tyacke said his acting—"

But Dion did not wait to hear what a country doctor thought of the "acting" of Sir George Alexander, Kt.: he was acting himself—as showman.

"Yonder is the King's Road, one of the unending thoroughfares of London, to be avoided whenever possible. When I drive along it I close my eyes."

"Hurray! There's a Roumanian flag, the first I've seen."

"Quite pretty with its blue, yellow and red: one is so tired of the variations of red, white and blue."

"Isn't it splendid that Roumania has come in on our side? 'Success in all directions,' says their *communiqué*. The Roumanians will capture all those mountain passes and, linking up with the Russians, invade Transylvania. How will Austria like that! She will soon be suing for peace."

"You seriously think that?"

"Don't you?"

"In Berlin there is a certain unattractive-looking building of red brick, whose inmates for years have been, and are still, working out every sort and kind of problem of the game of war. Day and night they labour unceasingly. Every one of the workers is keenly interested: the solving of war-problems is rather their hobby than their task. Morning, noon and night for years and years they have thought of nothing but war. You may be quite sure that the solution of the Roumanian problem is—"

"You talk as if the game of war was like the game of chess. It is not. In war you do not start with the same number of pieces as your adversary, nor have they the same fighting value; nor, most important, are you sure that your adversary will not suddenly produce more pieces and place them on the board—in the fighting line. In chess, a piece taken is out of it for good; in war, a piece may be replaced by another, or even two or three others. Germany will be check-mated."

"In London there is a building called the War Office. Before the war, red-nosed comedians poked fun at the doings of the inmates. La, la, la. Do you know the difference between a concert run by amateurs and one run by professionals?"

"I don't quite see—"

"You will in time. Speaking of concerts, have you noticed that 'Rule Britannia' is carefully left out of the programme nowadays? In the first few months of the war I heard it sung at about twenty different shows. London was quite amusing in the early days of the war."

"We all admit that the Germans are wonderful organisers, but you do not mean—?"

"Of course not. What made you think so? Keep lookin' out o' window, Robin. All sorts of funny things to be seen."

"And we haven't got a gun."

"There's a funny thing just passing. He's a second-lieutenant in the Guards. By the look of him, an Etonian. Apart from the gold braid on his cap, the sword that he carries and will never use, the slitless coat and the hideous knickerbockers, you may recognise a Guardsman by his haughty mien. We pass

a shop on our left where I often pause. There are parrots and cats and kittens and dogs and puppies and pigeons and canaries and mules—birds, I mean—and new-laid eggs for sale.”

“I was wondering how long you would go on without taking breath.”

“Nasty idea mating a canary with a finch and upsetting God’s intentions. Yet they’ve not appointed a Commission: no one seems to care. And what a hullabaloo they make when a Limehouse Chinaman, however charming, runs off with a fresh young housemaid. But if an Indian rajahlet marries a Mayfair girl the *Tatler* and *Sketch* have their photographs on the first page. It is a topsy-turvy world in which we live and have our being. There’s the shop! They’ve got a new cockatoo. What *was* I going to say? I know it was something about the Guards. Perhaps it’s as well that I have forgotten. That’s their quarters. Looks like a barracks, and I suppose that is exactly what it is meant to look like. At home I have a quaint old print showing the beaux and belles in the Rotunda. Behind those railways is what once was Ranelagh Gardens.”

“So have we. Framed in mahogany it hangs over Uncle Anthony’s bedroom mantelpiece.”

“How interesting. I wonder if it is the same as mine. What is the date of yours?”

“I forget.”

“We are nearly there. You shall have the nicest cup of tea you ever tasted—Behold, Chelsea Bridge. One leans over in winter to feed the seagulls, but one never crosses.”

“Why?”

“Because on the other side is No Man’s Land. The Thames was discovered by Whistler and is popular with suicides. Robin, I’m ashamed of myself, indeed I am. The trouble is that when I am in a mosquito mood, as a friend of mine calls it, I must go on stinging. I hope I have not spoiled your first glimpse of London town by my barrage of caustic comments that I was not justified in uttering, though they are true. One should never lie, even when one has a supremely good memory. The most provoking and tedious and harmful people that I ever knew went about speaking the truth and pluming themselves on

always doing so. One cannot be too discreet in telling the truth. I long for the simple mind that sees good in everyone and everything. May you never become a shade more worldly-wise than this moment finds you. But concerning the mood that is responsible for my disquisition: it will vanish with tea."

"I don't want it to vanish: I like it."

"Are *you* telling the truth, or just being polite?"

"The truth, and nothing but the truth."

"That is Battersea Park across the river. It is like Sloane Street, at its best in the spring. You, who live in the country, have no idea how we rejoice when the green leaves appear on our smoke-blackened trees. Don't you like those lazily-moving barges?"

From the wide Embankment the car swerved to the right into a narrow, old-world street where each house stood in a green content, and stopped at an apple-green door in a wall of time-mellowed brick over-hung by trails of jasmine.

"How quiet it is," said Robin, as he stood on the pavement and surveyed the street. "All the houses are dreaming, just as they do in Henliston. One might be in the upper end of Church Street. Am I really in London?"

"When Paradise Place was built Chelsea was still a village. Welcome to Paradise House, Robin."

Robin faced about. The green door was wide open, and beyond a cobble path flanked by herbaceous borders he saw a low Georgian house dreaming in the sunshine of late afternoon, its bricks almost hidden by roses and creepers. A mulberry and an apple-tree respectively, on either side of the path, shaded a tiny lawn. The branches of the lichened apple-tree were laden with fruit.

"Disappointed?" asked Dion laconically, drawing Robin on to the lawn where the mulberry featured in order that Goyle and the tall, flaxen-haired man in solemn black, who presumably had been stationed at the garden-door to await his master's arrival, might go forward with the luggage.

"Rather not!" exclaimed Robin enthusiastically. "Your house is charming. I like the casement-windows with their leaded panes."

"Ah, I had those put in. I got the house by the greatest stroke of luck. Excuse me for a moment while I say a word to Higgins."

A thrush was hunting for ripe mulberries; he darted from branch to branch in feverish haste. Dion was speaking to the chauffeur in low, earnest tones; his voice sounded as from far away. A white cat peeped out from among the flowers, and, seeing a stranger, gave an undecided miaou, blinked watery-blue eyes and disappeared. Only a faint rustle made by the thrush among the leaves of the mulberry broke the silence. The noise and bustle of Paddington seemed days away.

"It hardly seems possible that less than half an hour ago we were in that noisy station," said Robin, when Dion returned. "It is very peaceful here."

The silence that had been broken by the departing car now seemed more intense. The thrush had flown away.

"You could not have leaned out of a bedroom window at Morley's Hotel *that is in Trafalgar Square* and picked roses and apples," Dion observed. "That is your room ambushed in roses."

"I didn't know you were a Londoner when I asked if you knew Morley's."

"Everyone knows Morley's. But please don't call me a Londoner. I am a citizen of the world. London, Paris, Berlin, it's all the same to me. The sole reason I have for making my home here is that my English is so much better than my French and German: it is tiresome to be at a loss for a word. Shall we drink our tea under the mulberry and watch the brown sparrows, or among the hibiscuses and watch the glittering sunbirds?"

"Oh, may it be among the hibiscuses? What is an hibiscus?—something like an oleander? I wondered this afternoon when I was reading *The Golden Journey*. Flecker describes the edge of a canal as 'hibiscus-shaded'."

"The hibiscus is I believe a native of South America. All the daring flowers come from Brazil or Peru. Its blooms are trumpet-shaped and of a splendid scarlet; at least, mine are,

though I am told there are pink varieties and yellow. . . . Have you ever tried your hand at poetry?"

"I have tried my hand at verses from time to time, but one couldn't call it poetry. Perhaps one day I will write a poem entitled *My Golden Journey to Paddington.*"

"A robin would be more truly placed among sparrows than sunbirds. But since you have chosen, let us wend our way—Robin."

CHAPTER IV

THEY entered a square hall whose walls and ceiling were panelled with pine. Spread on the stone floor velvety Persian rugs, whose arabesques of mauve and puce were merged in a depth of warm colour by the mellowing sunshine of late afternoon, silenced their steps.

"Tea in the Court," said Dion shortly to the flaxen-haired one, who relieved them of their hats and sticks.

"I do like the pine panelling and the staircase of pine. How exquisitely those banisters are carved."

"By Grinling Gibbons—so they say."

"Rather different from the nasty staircases of deal they put up nowadays—before the war, I mean."

Dion pulled aside a curtain of purple silk that concealed a door in the panelling which opened on a passage that seemed to be cut through a solid block of mother-of-pearl, and was softly lit by electric light shining through thin shades of alabaster.

"Rather pretty effect, don't you think?"

"Oh, it's beautiful!" Robin exclaimed. "Twilight in fairyland must be like this, palest green shot with palest pink."

"The colours of romance."

"What ages it must have taken to inlay all these tiny squares, said Robin, his fingers on the wall. "How cool it feels."

"Only a month or so: small army of skilled workmen, you know."

"When I go home I shall never set eyes on Aunt Cynthia's card-case without being reminded of this passage. By Jove, the cost—" Robin checked himself. "Beastly rude of me."

"It *did* cost rather a lot," Dion admitted ruefully. "But what would you have? It was necessary to make a fitting approach to—to what lies beyond."

"Beyond?"

"The Court of the Sunbirds," said Dion, flinging wide the narrow door that was a masterpiece of the lapidary's art with its squares, circles and diamonds of mother-of-pearl inlaid in an elaborate design. "It's my own creation, and I confess I am proud of it."

"You have every right to be! But this is glorious. You never prepared me, and it takes one's breath. One might expect to come on such a place in a sultan's palace, but not in—"

"A sedate-looking Georgian house in Chelsea," Dion prompted. "La, la, la. I'm much afraid you will find the conservatories at Kew somewhat tame in comparison. I think I was not wrong in choosing teak rather than oak for the wood-work?"

But Robin, lost in wonder and admiration, did not reply.

A ring of tropical trees and creepers that bore flowers of gorgeous hues almost hid the glass walls. In the centre of the marble floor, dazzling in its whiteness, growing in pots of Chinese porcelain arranged in a circle, were the hibiscuses. To and fro, between the trees and that island of green and scarlet that rose out of a white sea the sunbirds darted quick as arrows or hung like suspended jewels above the flowers. The transparent quality of the glass dome that seemed to be cast in one piece was such that it appeared scarcely visible. One's eyes felt rested by looking up at the sky's soft blue.

"See how they plunge their beaks deep into the flower-cups to drink the honey."

"Is sunbird another name for humming-bird?"

"Oh, no. A sunbird is much larger. Sunbirds are to Africa what the humming-bird is to South America. These little

fellows arrived from Natal just after war was declared. At least, most of them, for some first saw the light in Chelsea. They can't breed sunbirds at the Zoo: the young birds are fed by their parents on insects. The Zoo aviaries are too crowded, and if there are any insects the supply is limited."

"But the ones that came from Natal, didn't they hate being shut up here when they first arrived?"

"I don't think so. If they did they soon settled down, and began building nests as if they were back again in their Natalian forests. They line them with cobwebs that Kasim collects in the wine-cellar. Some time we must scatter some scraps of bright silks; they will decorate the outside of their nests."

"So that a nest seems but another bright flower amongst the foliage?"

"I suppose, that is the idea."

"What a beauty! That one up there, that looks as if he had been painted with liquid sapphire. How clever of him to hover in front of a yellow flower just as we are looking: such a perfect background."

"Pearls or sapphires, sapphires or pearls?"

"Your favourite stones? You can't make up your mind which you like the better?"

"I cannot make up my mind."

"Pearls are so perishable, and they fade. Of the two, I prefer sapphires. Aunt Cynthia has some rather choice ones, but she never wears them. All jewels are 'gewgaws,' and she will only wear the same plain little brooch of jet from January to December."

"She's almost certain to wear them."

"Certain? I don't understand?"

"Of course not. How could you? My thoughts run away with me sometimes. At the ball—I was thinking of the ball—to celebrate your coming of age."

"There will be no ball for me. Incidentally, I have never learned to dance."

"He is a queer faun who cannot dance. I'll show you my faun. Come along. Our sapphire bird has flown away. I don't think I appreciated until now the superb yellow of the

flowers on that creeper whose name eludes me. How pleased God must have been when he made the first yellow flower."

"More so than when he made the first lobelia? Like you with your pearls and sapphires, I can never quite make up my mind between yellow flowers and blue."

"I sympathise, for that is my own state."

"Rousseau said that humanity sighs for blue flowers. But one never has a chance to tire of them. There must be flowers that are pure blue besides gentians, larkspurs and lobelias, though I cannot think of any for the moment. Anyway, there are so few blue ones, so many yellow, that it is not a fair question to ask oneself which one prefers. I adore yellow flowers when I am happy."

"Gold is the colour of bliss, and gold is yellow. . . . Are you smiling at the memory of a June day when, book under arm, you hied to a meadow that was golden with buttercups, where you dreamed and never read a line?"

"I was smiling at the memory of Amelia's cheese-cakes, obsolete delicacies since Aunt Cynthia seriously embarked on her economy campaign. Take me away from these lemon-yellow flowers."

"The poor Robin and his cheese-cakes. Come away! I am glad you haven't said how hot it is: if you felt the heat you would have by now. It's an odd thing that those who come here never do."

"What am I to infer?"

"You have missed the chance of paying a compliment."

"On your psychological powers. I was drinking in all these unfamiliar scents and they've gone to my head. At home I spend hours in the greenhouse, and earn both Dr. Tyacke's and Aunt Cynthia's disapproval."

"*So I should think.* You are not to enter that door without my permission, my friend—if my magic is to render you good service. Please give me your promise."

"Of course," said Robin readily, a little startled by Dion's sudden change of manner.

"Often many days go by and the Court of the Sunbirds knows me not: for Kasim alone the joy of the darting sunbirds

and the warm perfume of the flowers. As a rule, when I purpose staying any length of time I put on a silk suit—and very little else. Will you let me provide you with a thin coat instead of your coat and waistcoat?”

Dion clapped his hands, and immediately faint jingling sounds were heard; now they were approaching, now receding, but always growing louder.

“Whatever is it? a shy ghost?” Robin asked.

Behind the branches of the hibiscuses there was a quick flutter of yellow, and he perceived an opening between the pots that he had thought made a solid phalanx. A comely brown-skinned boy ran towards them, and salaamed before his master. He wore a loose silk tunic coloured like yellow crocuses that was girdled by a gold silk cord; of scarlet silk was the turban, ornamented by a large topaz that shone like sherry in sunlight, on his left wrist were thin gold bangles; high above the elbow a broad gold bracelet in which gleamed rubies or garnets clasped his right arm, as if to draw attention to its shapeliness; the nails of his toes and exquisitely-shaped hands were stained a bright pink; between his white teeth he held the stem of the hibiscus he had snatched at. He might have stepped out of the pages of some Eastern tale.

“Well, you rascal. Have you been getting into mischief while I’ve been away? You come from the fountain—not over-feeding the fishes, I hope?”

Kasim shook his head.

“Bring my coat, and a guest-coat to fit this gentleman,” Dion continued.

As they doffed their coats and waistcoats Kasim, hand on hip, stole searching glances at Robin. When he stepped forward to take his coat Robin looked swiftly away; he felt vaguely uncomfortable, for the impudent brown eyes seemed to be asking some intimate question. Even while Kasim waited on Dion, Robin was aware that the boy was keenly observing him.

“Tea by the fountain, Kasim.”

Kasim salaamed once more. When he raised his head his expression was that of one who has solved a puzzle. As he turned away, his white teeth met in a sharp click, and the flower

that he had been twirling, severed from its stem, fell to the floor.

"Come along. He will bring them to us." Dion linked his arm in Robin's. "A saucy young rascal is Master Kasim."

"Perhaps, after all, he was only considering the size of my coat," said Robin, thinking aloud.

"Bless you, he knew that almost before he saw you: he's as quick as a needle. I expect he was summing you up in that half-bold, half-shy way of his."

"May one ask where you found him?"

"In Paris. He's of Arab parentage. I came across him—but it's a long story."

"Goyle in Dublin, Kasim in Paris—and I suppose that flax-haired man hails from Christiania?"

"You're not even warm. But you'd never guess. Costello is a Spaniard, and hails from Seville where the oranges grow: he gets his colouring from his mother, who is English."

"Have you *any* English servants? Would one class Goyle as English?"

"Heavens! if he could hear you! Goyle may speak English, but he is Irish, through and through. Let me consider. Van Reen, my chef, is a Dutchman. I feel rather anxious about him. Some day I'm afraid he'll go off with a bang. One might call him a double Dutchman, he's so fat. They tell me he eats next to nothing. I suppose he is fat just because he's a cook."

"Does he box with Goyle?"

"No, Van Reen is the exception. Nothing will induce him to take any form of exercise; and, as I only set eyes on him once a week, I don't insist; besides, one cannot treat a person of Van Reen's culinary powers with anything but the profoundest respect. I must hear your verdict on his cheese-cakes, Robin. . . . My houseman and parlour-man are Swiss, brothers who love each other. As it happens, none of my servants is English."

"And all are neutrals! for Ireland is a sort of neutral country. I forget Kasim. Are the Arabs on our side?"

"Neutrals. By Jove! so they are, every man jack. It never

occurred to me; but then, I'm always forgetting there's a war on. It is lucky that King George will not require their services. In any case, they are doing work of the greatest national importance by looking after Dion Aylmer, a person of international importance."

Dion stood aside to allow Robin to precede him along the narrow white path that spiralled like a watch spring between the pots.

"What a pity that such a gorgeous flower has no scent," said Robin, as he stopped to examine a full-blown hibiscus.

"What a pity the sunbirds have no song. But I couldn't fill the place with canaries. What would you have? Shall we remove all this? We might let in the English climate; and introduce blossoming May and lilac and sober-plumaged song-birds, though I'm afraid larks would die, for they could not soar."

"I wouldn't have a thing altered."

"Most tropical flowers have no scent, but there are many here, as gorgeous as the hibiscus, that have. That is the stephanotis, up there at the base of the dome."

"It is not a gorgeous scarlet."

"It's a gorgeous white. Wait until you observe it closely. But if it is colour you require as well as scent, I can oblige you."

"Oh, it is all perfect. The air is laden with a hundred scents. Who cares if sunbirds sing or no!—they are jewels that shine. . . . I hear the fountain quite distinctly now."

"In most moods I prefer water-music, whether of sea or river, brook or fountain, to the best grand piano with Pachmann performing—and chattering."

When, presently, they emerged on a circular space they seemed to have been walking for a long time in a wood of hibiscuses.

"Well, if that's a faun, and *I* am a faun, we vary considerably," said Robin, hastening to the fountain.

The round basin was of pale green marble in which fish of golden-red with feathery tails and fins played hide-and-seek among the stalks of water-lilies whose outer petals were

flushed and whose hearts were pink. On its broad brim stood a faun, sculptured in silver, of some two feet in height, one hoof lightly rested on a Madonna lily, true to nature's scale, from whose centre three frail streams of crystal rose high into the air and broke in a shower of water-drops. The faun's head and shoulders gleamed in the light of the westering sun; the black eyes shone darkly.

"Wicked-looking little creature, isn't he?"

"He's simply longing to crush the lily. I don't think I quite like him," said Robin slowly.

"He was greatly admired when exhibited in Paris."

"I know very little about sculpture; but it seems to me an exquisite piece of work."

"By Maquin. You'll meet him some time."

"I've heard of him, of course. Only the other day I read an article on his work in the *Studio*."

Dion sat down on the fountain's rim and dipped the tip of his gloved finger into the water. The fish left their game, and were soon tumbling over each other excitedly in their hopes of food.

"Goats at pasture among blue lilies," he murmured.

It sounded like a quotation, but Robin made no comment: the line was probably from an author whose work he did not, but ought to, know.

Arranged about the fountain were four enormous teak-wood divans heaped with silk cushions whose colours were in the same key, so that blue seen against green or yellow or purple was a cause of delight; the cushions were of all colours save red. Here and there in small tubs of teak-wood banded with burnished copper grew bushes that bore, simultaneously, flowers of white, pale mauve and mauve that verged on purple; their rich perfume seemed a blend of orange-blossom and hyacinth. Each of the three little Moorish tables held opal-tinted bowls filled with crystallised petals of violet and rose. Robin was wondering what might be contained in an ebony box that with other articles reposed on a large brass tray of Persian workmanship set on a low stand before one of the divans when

again he caught the flutter of yellow behind the hibiscuses, and Kasim appeared bearing coats of tussore silk.

"The fish are in good condition, Kasim." Dion rose to his feet. "Put down those coats, and be off with you. Don't forget to bring the chrysanthemums."

Kasim hastily salaamed and departed.

"Does he always do that?" asked Robin, accepting Dion's help. "This coat might have been made for me."

"Yes, he salaams when he comes and when he goes. Robin, you're looking tired. Stretch yourself out on this divan."

"Thank you, but I don't feel the least bit tired."

"All the same, it won't hurt you to rest. You're a convalescent, remember. That's right. Do as your new doctor tells you. Ah, you treat the cushions too tenderly. Let me stuff this plump one at your back . . . and this one so. How bright colours suit you. I'll swear there is Spanish blood in your veins."

"I suppose I shall never know—" Robin checked himself.

"Never know what?" asked Dion softly.

"Oh, nothing. Later on, I expect I shall tell you all about it—not that there's much to tell. For one day I have bored you quite enough with my affairs."

"Did I not tell you that the hero of the novel I am writing is uncommonly like yourself and . . ." Dion's voice trailed into silence, but Robin was alive to the subtle compliment implied.

"What is the name of this delicious little bush? Does Kasim amuse himself by painting its white flowers?"

"It's a native of Brazil and its name is *franciscea*. My friend in Natal who sent me the sunbirds tells me that they have it in gardens there. His gardener calls it 'yesterday, today and tomorrow.' When the flowers come out they are of that deep shade of mauve; they are much paler on the second day, and on the third day they are white. . . . I used to flash a longing glance at Beauty leaning from her window, and hurry on my way. Though she smiled at me invitingly, I would not dally. Her smile was not enough. *I wanted Her*. It was

necessary to build and furnish a home that would make for her a fitting setting. I was the least of men, a condition that had to be changed, so I hurried on my way. The little money that I earned so hardly was barely enough to feed and clothe myself, and . . ." Dion broke off. Seated cross-legged on the divan he was rearranging the articles on the brass tray. "In those days," he continued, in the same sad tones, "I grudged the happy hour I spent among flowers in parks and pictures in Art Galleries . . . music heard from the gallery of concert-hall or theatre. How could I ever hope to write in the future, when in the present I had no time to read?"

"But they were *happy* hours, you say."

"Did I? The adjective crept in. Presently, Robin, you will ask yourself if it is good for a man to surround himself with beauty, so much beauty. For one man, yes; for another, no. For me?" He lightly raised his shoulders. "In the past I have known the hell of this world's ugliness. There have been chapters in my life quite as depressing as any you can cite in a Russian novel. . . . To surround oneself with beauty is to be as a god—so I said. But I forgot that the gods are jealous. A god is master of beauty. Beauty can become mistress of man—and a vampire of a mistress. La, la, la. Every pleasure has its price. *'Men are unwise and curiously planned.'*"

"You are cryptic, but I have a glimmering of your meaning."

"Shall I relinquish? This Court of the Sunbirds, my house with its many treasures, all that I value? I cannot! After continual transplantations I found myself in rich soil and at last, left undisturbed, I have spread out roots."

"Why should you give it up? This is your perfect setting. I cannot picture you in any other."

"If there are times when I

*'Would that I had a little cot
Beside a little hill.
In some romantic English spot
Where summer's not so very hot
And winter not too chill!'*

I am faced with a Corot in the house or the silver faun yonder, and I know that it is too late. I have grown complex, and

the simple life is not for me. . . . I who have been plunged so deep in ugliness have well-earned the reward of beauty! It is strange that beauty too intimately pursued can change to ugliness. Very jealous are the gods; and so they have decreed that man may possess Beauty but may never become her master. I am—" Dion broke off abruptly. With a quick turn of his head he directed a piercing glance at Robin. "A curious effect you have on me. Here am I justifying my existence—not to you, but to myself. . . . There is nothing left for me but to die beautifully. What is life for if it does not teach one how to die? But I grow dolorous."

"I don't quite understand all you have said, but it's tremendously interesting."

"You are perhaps unacquainted with the philosophy contained in *The Kasidah of Haji Abdû El-Yezdi*? I will quote just one verse:

'Do what thy Manhood bids thee do; from
None but self expect applause;
He noblest lives and noblest dies who makes
And keeps his self-made laws.'

That is not advice for a weak man, Robin; and it is my advice to you."

"But *I'm* not strong."

"Physically, no, at the moment. You have not discovered yourself: later . . ."

Kasim, who had placed a brazier filled with glowing charcoal on a low tripod within Dion's reach a few moments before, now arrived with a small curiously-shaped kettle of shining copper, a pot of tawny chrysanthemums, and a bottle whose seals suggested that it contained a liquid infinitely more costly than water, though it was as colourless.

"Only water. *But* water from a Welsh mountain spring," Dion went on as, having broken the seals, he poured the contents of the bottle into the kettle. "With Luwuh in the middle of the eighth century we have the first apostle of tea. In his celebrated work, *The Chaking*—the Holy Scripture of Tea—he formulates the code of tea. He dwells on the much-discussed question of the choice of water. According to him,

water from a mountain spring is the best. I should not be at all surprised to hear that you have not read Okakura-Kakuzo?"

Robin, wondering whether it was the name of a writer or a book, replied very humbly that he had not.

"I have only met one person that has," said Dion drily. "So often the best books are of a retiring nature. The excellent Okakura-Kakuzo, whom I am constantly quoting, tells us that the fifteenth century saw Japan—"

"Yes? Oh, please go on."

"I was only waiting for you to add 'our faithful ally.' Poor Robin, he's entirely at a loss to understand my attitude with regard to the war: I haven't got one. To resume, as George Robey would say: In the fifteenth century Japan ennobled the drinking of tea into a religion of æstheticism—Teaism. Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life. Those who cannot feel the littleness of great things in themselves are apt to overlook the greatness of little things in others. The average Westerner, in his sleek complacency, will see in the ceremony of tea but another instance of the thousand and one oddities which to him constitute the quaintness and childishness of the East. Even Van Reen, artist though he be, persists in that attitude, so your waking cup tomorrow will be filled with ordinary China tea made ordinarily. Tea is a work of art and needs a master to bring out its noblest qualities. There is no single recipe for making the perfect tea, as there are no rules for producing a Titian. Each preparation of the leaves has its individuality . . . its hereditary memories to recall . . . its own method of telling a story. The truly beautiful must always be in it. Lichililai, a Sung poet, has sadly remarked that there were three most deplorable things in the world: 'the spoiling of fine youths through false education, the degradation of fine paintings through vulgar admiration, and the utter waste of fine tea through incomplete manipulation' . . ."

Dion continued his dissertation until the kettle on the brazier

began to sing, when he broke off in the middle of a sentence and drew towards him the ebony box.

"I've been dying to know what that box contains," said Robin.

"Tea, Robin, tea. And of a quality! I hold by old Luwuh, and so in the letter I sent to China I said: *'the leaves must have creases like the leathern boot of Tartar horsemen, curl like the dewlap of a mighty bullock, unfold like a mist rising out of a ravine, gleam like a lake touched by a zephyr, and be wet and soft like fine earth newly swept by rain.'*"

"The man to whom you wrote can be no ordinary tea-merchant."

"He is not: I know him well. . . . Kasim, it is time!"

At his master's signal Kasim, who was smiling at the fish or his reflection in the water, vanished among the hibiscuses.

"He's gone to heat the tea-pot, *not* with boiling water," Dion explained. "The singing kettle is like a cicada pouring forth its woes to departing summer, don't you think?"

While Dion was making tea Kasim, stationed by the brass tray at attention, gravely watched the proceedings. It seemed to Robin who, feeling the tension, lay taut on his cushions not daring to speak, that a hush came over the place. The tiny porcelain cups into which the amber liquid was poured were handleless and saucerless; coloured like the shell of a duck's egg they were, and almost as fragile.

"A-a-h," said Dion with a long sigh of satisfaction, as he sniffed the steam ecstatically.

Kasim relaxed and was all smiles. The fountain seemed to play with renewed energy.

"What do I do?" asked Robin, glancing from the cup on the table to the pot of chrysanthemums Kasim was proffering.

"Pluck two petals from a full-blown flower without bruising, and let them float on the tea."

"It is early for chrysanthemums."

"We defy nature: they come in relays all the year round."

"Always the same sort?"

"Oh, certainly. That is the only chrysanthemum one may use for such a purpose: its flavour is peculiarly delicate."

"Delicious. A little bitter, perhaps," Robin declared, when his tea was cool enough to sip. "I should imagine the taste would grow upon one."

"The delicate bitterness reminded Wangyucheng of the after-taste of a good counsel. 'Tea has not the arrogance of wine, the self-consciousness of coffee, nor the simpering innocence of cocoa.' During your stay you must read Okakura-Kakuzo. I insist on it as part of your cure."

"I want to read him very much."

The minutes passed. Dion, still cross-legged with a hand on each knee, was lost in reverie. His attitude put Robin in mind of the squatting Chinaman on a bracket in the breakfast-room that Aunt Cynthia in her youth bought at a bazaar. The "ornament" once had a movable head that nodded when one touched it, but since one of the rivets had come out the head lolled drunkenly over one shoulder. . . . That old Lu-something-or-other was a poet: "creases like the leathern boot of Tartar horsemen." How did Dion remember all those difficult names? Okakusa-Kakuzo—or was it Okakuro-Karkuzo?

"I have found," said Dion at last, "that in a hot bath one's brain becomes clear, so that the Gordian knot of tangled thoughts is cut."

"This is the next best thing."

"It is true that, lying here by the fountain, I have planned out some of the most difficult—chapters of my novel."

"You did not find your attention distracted?"

"Ah, to you the Court of the Sunbirds is a novelty. But speaking of a bath, I think we might remove the dust of travel presently. Unless you wish, we will not don hard-boiled shirts and—"

"I have not brought dress-clothes. As a matter of fact, I don't possess any. Tomorrow I must visit the tailor."

"Unless you have a man of your own I'll trot you along to Raleigh, tailor of tailors, whose Christian name I forget: it is not Walter. You haven't met Walter, yet."

"How strange. He is Cousin Godfrey's tailor, and it was to him I was going."

"Ah, his lordship knows the value of cut."

"That he does."

"I've been on holiday, Robin, but tomorrow work begins. I do my writing before breakfast, which I always take in my room. After breakfast I write letters and talk to people on the 'phone, and arrive downstairs about eleven. Can you manage to—"

"Please don't worry about me, I can amuse myself. I don't want to be a drag on you, but of course I shall love to be with you when I'm not in the way."

"We must plan out our days at the beginning of each week, in so far as is feasible. Tonight we will not be too late in going to bed: you are tired and a long sleep will be good for you, and I want to return to my novel in the morning feeling fresh. We may each have another cup of the divine essence. Kasim, you are wool-gathering! You may be ornamental, my peach-faced boy, but you are supposed to be useful."

"Thank you. . . . I say! I forgot all about Morley's."

"We will ring up the hotel when we go into the house. I have an appetite, and shall enjoy my dinner. And you?"

"I have to go steady with food for a day or two."

"It won't harm you however much you eat, for after dinner you shall have a liqueur which is most palatable and a powerful digestive. I might add 'purple,' to continue the alliteration."

"I have only tasted benedictine which Cousin Godfrey always drinks."

"Old D.O.M., I'll warrant. The stuff that is sold since the monks handed over has had no chance to mellow and is unholy, in two senses of the word."

CHAPTER V

L YING back luxuriously on the silk cushions of the divan he was smoking a Russian cigarette and thinking how perfect a background the vivid green leaves and the brilliant scarlet flowers made for Dion's head. Suddenly his ears missed the musical plash of the falling water and heard instead

a quick succession of sounds, like shots fired from a toy pistol, that smote the stillness. Even as he drew himself up he knew that he was listening to the clatter of tiny hoofs on marble. Dion, gazing before him with a fixed stare, was smoking imperturbably: which was odd, for he sat facing the fountain. Summoning all his courage he turned his head. It was small wonder that the fountain had ceased to play, for the silver lily, from whose hollowed pistil and stamens rushed the ascending sprays, had been crushed by the hoof that, but a moment ago, rested so lightly upon it. Balancing itself on the fountain's rim, so that its head was nearly on a level with his own, the faun was looking at him sideways with its slanting eyes. Slowly it raised an arm and pointed; sprang nimbly to the floor; paused; moved away a few paces; paused and beckoned. There was no need for it to speak, if speak it could: the agate eyes were eloquent: they invited yet dared him to follow to some secret place where he would see strange doings. The little creature was perfectly proportioned from its low forehead to its delicately-shaped hoofs; its silver body gleamed and quivered. One admired, while one shuddered. And the finger beckoned. One was, at last, only conscious of tiny eyes and tiny finger beckoning. He did not want to follow, but, if the creature beckoned and looked at him like that, he must. His heart thumped and his mouth was dry, so that he could utter no word. Why did not Dion come to the rescue? With an immense effort he withdrew his own from those eyes that now were mocking. Dion was leaning forward gazing at him with a queer, steadfast look. There was something faun-like about the shape of Dion's eyes that, until then, had not struck him. A wild clatter of hoofs, a soft touch on his cheek. . . .

The frightened cry that rose to Robin's lips was stifled as he opened his eyes and understood that he had been dreaming. When he remembered that he was at Paradise House instead of at the Poplars he became very wide-awake. For the first time he had slept on a spring mattress. Having raised himself and fallen back it occurred to him that if a tennis-ball has

feelings it must derive a good deal of pleasure from bouncing. When one fell back in a feather-bed one seemed to go on falling for several seconds after one lay motionless: the feathers seemed to envelop one. Last night he tested the springs many times, until, telling himself that he was like a child with a new toy, he had snuggled down comfortably, preparatory to a long, long "think." Not even a short think did he have, for he went to sleep the moment his head touched the pillow. Dion had assured him that he would have no need to burn Hiram's before retiring—had, in fact, forbidden him to do so. And he had done as he was told. At home, he would not have laid himself down, let alone have attempted to sleep, when he was only just recovering from a severe attack, without having inhaled the pungent fumes. Dion had, indeed, worked a miracle. Even as Dion prophesied, he had slept the whole night through without his usual troubled waking at dawn. He felt fit as a fiddle, as the saying went. When he was a very small boy Uncle Anthony had suggested a reason why fiddles rather than banjos or trombones were credited with fitness; at the time the reason satisfied him, but what the reason was he unsuccessfully searched his memory to discover. Seldom was he visited by nightmare, if nightmare it could be called at—what time was it? The heavy silk curtains of turquoise-blue embroidered in gold with dragons and strange devices were closely drawn, but in the faint light he managed to read his watch. It was twenty-six minutes past eight. At half-past, Kasim would bring him a cup of "ordinary China tea made ordinarily." Dion had appeared distinctly anxious as to his answer, and had seemed pleased when he said at random he preferred China tea to Indian: he had not the pluck to say he did not know one from the other. Was there such a vast difference as Dion's intonation seemed to imply? . . . He was impatient to get up and renew experiments with the elaborate system of taps and buttons that caused the water to do all sorts of interesting things in the blue-tiled bathroom adjoining, but he supposed he must stay where he was until the promised tea arrived. With a yawn he gave himself up to the enjoyment of

a bed that made one fancy oneself comfortably suspended in air, and the soft caress of silk sheets: if he were a cat he would have purred his pleasure.

As he lay with hands clasped behind his head, listening for Kasim's knock, Robin reviewed the happenings of the day before, a day cut in twain as it were by a sprig of bay that he held out stammeringly to a stranger. Yesterday's earlier happenings, between his waking at the Poplars and seeing Dion and Goyle on Exeter platform, had become in a little space shadowy as those of yester-year. He attached extraordinary importance to the farewells at the Poplars, the ride in the lumbering omnibus up Hill Street, the meeting with Cousin Godfrey and their short journey to Borne Junction, even when he looked out at the red cliffs of Dawlish: long before he reached Paddington those happenings had become ordinary, supremely unimportant. His outlook had altered. All his values had undergone a change. How impressed he had been by that spick and span staff-captain whom Dion would most likely have summed-up as a prosaic young man with rather a *gauche* manner who was fortunate in his tailor. Yet he felt awkward in the presence of that young man and had been *gauche* himself, whereas with Dion he felt at ease almost at once. . . . Adventure had come to him within a few hours of leaving home. How surprised they would be when they heard that instead of staying at Morley's Hotel he was at Chelsea as the guest of a magnificent person called Dion Aylmer who had promised to cure him of asthma: all except Lena, for almost her last words at parting were: "Adventures are coming to 'ee at last, and they won't be no common adventures." Lena was positively clairvoyant where he was concerned. Suddenly he remembered what she said a few days previously when she met him coming in from the garden: "Master Robin, in less than a week you'll be making friends with a handsome man you've never set eyes on." He asked her how she knew, and she looked at him in a puzzled way. "I'm sure I dunno: the fancy just come to me, like. But it's true all the same." All sorts of questions he plied her with concerning the handsome stranger, but all she could tell him was: "He means well by 'ee." He

had added a postscript to Aunt Cynthia's letter whose envelope glimmered palely on the mantelshelf: "*Please tell Selina that her prophecy has come true already!*" Aunt Cynthia might or might not confide in Lena that he had not gone to Morley's Hotel. Telephones were most useful things. . . . His creepy dream was scarcely to be wondered at, for as he sat sipping the "divine essence" and listening to Dion his glance kept returning to the silver faun. At a first glance he could only admire that perfect little figure, but when he came to examine more closely the head with the horns appearing through the wild tangle of hair, the pointed ears and slanting eyes, he gave an involuntary shudder, though he still admired. It was the eyes. They were twin agates, chosen perhaps from thousands, set most cunningly, that seemed filled with an intelligence that was horrible. If ever eyes were windows of a soul—but a faun was not supposed to have a soul. The soft touch that awakened him might be accounted for by the unaccustomed silk sheet brushing against his cheek as he made a sudden movement. . . . There surely could be few men as fascinating as Dion in London, great city though it was. If one were in his company day after day for years one would never tire, for he had as many facets as the sea had colours. Yes, he was changeable even as the colours of the sea. The Dion of the motor, of tea, and of dinner, was not one Dion, but three Dions; and yet he was always the same Dion. Perhaps he least liked the Dion who at times provoked and irritated by the outrageous things he said and his calculated silences. When one had almost reached the boiling point Dion would add the cold water of a winning smile and some happy remark. One could only indulge that mood when one could read one's companion like an open book, and that was what he was to Dion. . . . What manner of book was *Moonflowers*, "all about the beautiful foolishness of things"? What a lot one must have to write about when one had visited most of the interesting places in Europe, as Dion appeared to have done; moreover, he seemed to know almost everybody and quite a lot about everything. . . . Though he was always talking of his poverty, Dion must be fabulously rich. The Court of the Sunbirds, for example,

must have cost a fortune, and another to collect the plants for it. What a poor thing was the greenhouse at home in comparison, the conservatories at Myall. There was one sunbird with green plumage; it was coloured like malachite. . . . Delicious stuff was the amaranth liqueur with the unpronounceable name whose principal ingredient was carrot-juice though one could not detect carrot in the compound of flavours. Dion suggested that lasiandra-petals lent it colour and velvety quality. It was jolly decent of that noted French epicure to present Dion with several bottles for a Christmas present, for, with the recent death of the old man who made it, the secret of the proportions of the ingredients and the method of mixing them was lost. The two glasses of that nectar on top of champagne had fairly put the lid on, as Cousin Godfrey would say: he knew perfectly what he was doing, but his eyes insisted on shutting while he was being shown the Corots, and he was obliged to confess that he was sleepy. In his room, when he began to undress, he became extraordinarily wide-awake and, despairing of sleep, sat down and wrote to Aunt Cynthia. Nevertheless, sleep came to him as soon as he lay down even as Dion prophesied. . . . What new delights would be revealed today? . . .

The door suddenly opened, and Kasim balancing a tray with one hand high above his head entered the room. He lowered his arm with a lightning movement, and safely deposited the tray on a chair.

"By Jove, that was clever. I made sure he'd drop it," said Robin, under his breath. Was that the way servants in France always carried a small tray? It was a French custom for servants to enter a room without knocking, for Dr. Tyacke, who spent an exciting fortnight in Paris in his young days, told him how surprised he was when on the first morning—but that was an instance of a woman servant.

Kasim, having dexterously flung back the curtains, had turned and was gravely salaaming.

"Good-morning," said Robin perfunctorily. It was like finding oneself in the heart of a turquoise, he thought, as he admired the walls and ceiling for a moment before sitting up.

Here was tea in a cup with a handle, saucer, spoon, and tea's usual accessories. The pure tea that Dion brewed was an acquired taste, like medlars or camomile-tea, and he feared his host had thought him not sufficiently appreciative. So pleased was he with the shape of the Georgian silver basin, the little gem of a milk-jug that bore the date 1732, and the procession of white figures round the black Wedgwood cup, that he did not notice the primrose-coloured note addressed to himself in pencilled writing to which Kasim with a pointing finger drew his attention.

"Is there any answer?" he inquired, as he quarried with the tongs among the sparkling sugar-knobs.

Why could he not say "No" like any ordinary boy instead of shaking his head in that ridiculous fashion? Robin asked himself. Just because the boy was not an ordinary boy, he supposed.

This was a very different Kasim to the gay Kasim of the Court of the Sunbirds. Today he was wearing turban and coat and trousers of darkest blue. No jewel shone from his turban. The coat with bag-sleeves buttoned about him so tightly that it seemed that he must have been poured into it. Baggy trousers gathered in above the ankles hid the shapely legs that yesterday their owner had never neglected opportunity wantonly to display. His bare feet were thrust into heelless slippers of olive-green leather that were pointed like a gondola. Only the tinkling bangles at his wrist and the pink carnation behind one ear suggested that other Kasim. And the change was not confined to apparel. There was a concentrated intentness in his slightest action, as if he were forcing himself to play the hard part of a well-trained servant. Gone was the kittenish manner, the mischievous gleam in the great dark eyes that had looked too old for so young a face.

Curious to hear Kasim's voice, Robin asked: "How are the sunbirds this morning? I suppose you have visited them?"

Kasim's face was expressionless, as he salaamed and with tray on high left the room.

Perhaps the boy had been too talkative and Dion insisted that he should not speak either to him or to his guest, Robin

guessed. It flashed across his mind that Kasim was like Bob Mabott; but as the one was as handsome as the other was plain, where did the resemblance come in? In a turn of the head, a gesture? No, it was something indefinable that he felt intuitively, and his intuition was rarely at fault. He disliked Bob exceedingly. Did he dislike Kasim? He was not sure; but he was sure that Kasim disliked him. Why? Because he had not responded: yesterday in the Court he had turned away. Could Kasim tell stories like those that Bob amused Cousin Godfrey with? The idea was absurd: Kasim was a mere child, not more than thirteen or so.

"Queer boy; very queer," said Robin, and unfolded the note.

The paper bore no embossed address or crest. Instead, a capering faun with pipes to lips was printed in black. So minute was the figure that at first he thought it was an ink-stain.

"I am glad you feel refreshed after an unbroken sleep: it is proved that I was right in advising you to discontinue burning that powder.

In three hours I have added about four hundred words to my chapter, which is almost a record for one sitting. I agree with Flaubert that 'the literary man's is a dog's life,' but I am not at all sure that there is none other worth living.

Goyle has orders to attend you in ten minutes. Let him have his will of you that you may in a small way assist me. His medicine may seem unpleasant today, but I shall be rather surprised if you do not enjoy taking it before today week—when it will be stronger with new ingredients. The dose will be slightly increased each day. I promised to cure you by magic, not by medicine. One cannot use one, of course, without the other; but in your case medicine plays a very minor part.

When I left you last night I took myself to task. It was most kind and tactful of you to plead sleepiness when really you had recovered from your tiredness, and were wide awake and interested in my Corots, but it was very rude and selfish of me to take so prompt advantage of your hint of bed. Please

forgive me for not stifling my many yawns. The shortest of train-journeys, even in the most pleasant company, tires me more than any amusement. Life would be endurable, Robin, were it not for its amusements. I am not serious about amusements, but I am in my apologies.

I have several letters to write and various odds and ends to attend to, which, having done, I shall discuss cheese-cakes with van Reen.

Make a good breakfast. Ask Costello for anything you want. On a fine morning like this you might not find a better place to smoke your after-breakfast pipe than under the apple-tree. Expect me downstairs about eleven.

D. A."

"Goyle! In a few minutes! Shut up in a room with the terrifying Goyle! Does Dion mean medicine out of a bottle? Somehow—"

Having carefully read the passage, he strongly suspected a *double entendre*. Was Goyle coming to give him a lesson in boxing?—horrible idea! It would be amusing to learn to box, but not with Goyle for teacher. Still, he would take his physic with a good grace in whatever form, and smile into the gargoyle face as he took it. . . . Dion's was most fascinating writing. At a first glance it seemed impossible to read without a magnifying-glass, so tiny it was, so close together the lines; but when one came to look into it one discovered that each letter was carefully formed, each word was perfectly clear. What must a page of his manuscript look like? Suffixes were not scamped by a flourish, even the tempting "ly." . . . If Dion had not succeeded in stifling his yawns that occurred between each course he tried most carefully to hide them. It was greatly to his credit that throughout dinner he was an attentive and altogether delightful host when his thoughts obviously were busy with the characters of his novel; while being most entertaining he was probably framing many a sentence included, after polishing, in the four hundred words written that morning. When writing *Moonbeams* he himself at supper had often yawned with almost a feeling of sickness when

he thought of the difficulties that were to be overcome on the morrow. It was not the train-journey as much as the fear the artist knows before creating that was the cause of Dion's yawns. It was small wonder that Dion, tired out with doing two things at once, imagining that he was politely feigning sleepiness, was past resisting the immediate sleep that he yearned for. He must disabuse Dion's mind. It was himself who was rude. And Dion was taking such trouble in showing his Corots. . . . How on earth did Dion know that he had burnt no Hiram's and slept right through the night? That was magic, if you like! . . .

Knuckles gave a brisk double tap on the door.

Robin shuddered. Pulling himself together he managed a hearty: "Come in!"

Goyle was wearing shorts, a sweater and tennis-shoes, and carried a pair of Indian clubs in each hand. He looked most formidable, and his eyes seemed everywhere at once; he was like a hungry ogre in quest of whomsoever he might devour.

"So it's clubs. I imagined you were going to instruct me in the noble art."

"Ah, later on, perhaps. We'll see how you shape," returned Goyle cheerfully. "But these aren't bad things to make a start with. If you are ready, sir—?"

"Yes, certainly," said Robin, springing out of bed. "Do I perform as I am?" he questioned nervously.

"Please take off your jacket."

"Right-o. . . . I'm afraid my muscles are not quite as developed as yours."

"They never will be, sir," said Goyle emphatically. Perhaps Robin looked rather abashed, for Goyle added in kindly tones: "You are of a much lighter build. Do you mind undoing that cord for a moment? I like to know the material I am to work on."

Robin complied, and tried not to appear self-conscious under Goyle's keen scrutiny. "What's the verdict?" he asked, when Goyle, having prodded and pinched him, stepping back a few paces, stood regarding him with head on one side, looking every inch the pugilist he was.

"You have nearly as pretty a figure as the master himself, but your chest looks starved. When I've done with you in a month's time you'll be proud of yourself. Yes, tie them up again, sir."

"I am sure I shall," said Robin, whose spirits began to rise.

Having picked up the clubs Goyle drew himself up to his full height.

What a soldier he would make, thought Robin. Why was he not in the army? There could be nothing wrong with him, and he was twenty-five years of age. If he hadn't seen Ireland since he was thirteen—

"Take one of these in each hand, and stand just here. The room is rather small."

"Since *you* came in," Robin flashed.

Goyle gave a horrible leer that was intended for the broadest of smiles. He surveyed himself, so to say, ruminatively. "There are times when I wish I was a bantam," he confessed. "The master says—" He broke off abruptly. "The first exercise is this."

"Damn! I've dropped it. How clumsy I am. I do hope I'm not going to be an unsatisfactory pupil."

"They're slippery as eels until you get used to them. But you soon will, sir," Goyle encouraged.

When Robin's wrists felt as if they were breaking, Goyle consulted his wristlet-watch and said: "Time's up! You're very warm. You mustn't catch a chill, sir, so jump into bed while I draw your bath water."

"Thank you," Robin panted, and did as he was told.

It had all been so different to what he expected. With fear and trembling he stood doing his best not to flinch from the touch of those great fingers. It was rather an ordeal. He would never have believed that he could become accustomed to Goyle's proximity in so short a time; and when he did, he had quite enjoyed himself. Evidently Goyle believed in doing with all his might whatever his hand found to do. He swept one along on the tide of his enthusiasm.

"Bath is ready, sir," said Goyle, emerging from clouds of

steam. "Stay in the hot water for about three minutes, and then turn on the cold until the warm becomes tepid. When you are beginning to feel the chill, stand under the cold shower. Rub yourself vigorously with the rough towel. I'm glad to see you've recovered your breath, sir."

"I'll do exactly as you say. I am recovering from asthma: that is why I was so puffy."

"So the master told me. It must be a terrible thing to have. But don't you worry, sir, for the master says it won't trouble you again. Trust the master."

"I do."

"The water is just the right temperature."

"Then I'll go in at once." Robin flung aside the coverings and sat dangling his feet over the edge of the bed.

"I do envy you your muscles," he continued, with a glance at the swelling biceps under the white sweater.

"My arms are a trifle over-developed, I'm afraid," Goyle grudgingly admitted. "All the muscles should be developed equally, sir. Your chest muscles are under-developed. That we'll remedy."

Standing over him, Goyle seemed bigger than ever, a veritable giant. Apart from his arms, he appeared to have a good general development, though one could scarcely tell unless one saw him stripped. The muscles of his legs that were as hairy as a gorilla's were only the muscles that a man of his size should have.

"Thanks for all the trouble you have taken. I hope I'll do better tomorrow."

"It has been a pleasure, sir, not a trouble. Five minutes longer tomorrow. . . . Soon we'll try Swedish drill. By and by—" He paused. "I believe you'll be nimble with the gloves," he said, with the air of one who has suddenly come to a pleasing decision.

"And it is the gloves that you care for most?"

Goyle screwed up his blue eyes and gave a leer that Robin found much less horrible than the first. "Hop in quick, sir," he said.

The door closed softly behind him.

Really, Goyle seemed an awfully good fellow, and it was tragic that nature had treated his face so badly. For so big a man he had an extraordinarily small voice. Sentence followed sentence with a rush; but certain intonations in a rare leisured one were reminiscent of Dion's. There could be nothing wrong with him, and he ought to be in the army instead of dancing attendance on a civilian—though that individual might be of "international importance." What exactly did Dion mean by so describing himself?

Resisting the temptation to stay in the hot water longer than the prescribed time, Robin, when the second-hand of his watch had completed its third circle, turned on the cold tap. While standing under the cold shower he began to sing, and did not stop until he was in a glow from the towel's application, when he realised he had chanced on a hymn: it was fitting that one should sing a hymn while one was bathing, but "The Saints of God" was not exactly joyful. "All People that on Earth Do Dwell" was the only one he could think of that seemed suitable to the time and place and the state of his feelings, but that particular hymn, unfortunately, did not appeal to him. He hummed a scale, hoping a tune would suggest itself, for sing he must. "Songs of Araby" was the result. In the bedroom, he paused when he reached the end, with a shirt half-on, half-off.

*"To cheat thee of a sigh
Or charm thee to a tear."*

He felt, as he shot his arm into the sleeve, that he had held the sustained high note most creditably for an asthmatic.

Dion insisted that he should breakfast at half-past nine, though he suggested an hour earlier. "Tomorrow you will not awake till close on eight-thirty. But on subsequent mornings you may breakfast at six if it pleases you. A long night's sleep, I think," his host had said. As it still wanted a quarter of an hour to breakfast-time he perched himself on the window-sill. Was it a tang of salt on the gentle rose-scented breeze that came in at the wide-flung casement? He had not realised that the Thames was tidal at Chelsea and beyond. What was that group of huge chimneys in the distance that belched forth

smoke? There were chimneys everywhere, and all the houses looked smoke-soiled. The little gardens of Paradise Place made an oasis in a desert of houses. There was a glimpse of the river and the wilted green of Battersea between the plane-trees; a steamer flashed by. Best worth looking at was the garden below where flickering insects were happy in the gay herbaceous borders. The white cat he saw yesterday lay stretched out on the grass; one could not imagine such an ethereal-looking creature catching mice. The bright colours of the dwarf nasturtiums would delight Aunt Cynthia. Never had he seen delphiniums so tall, so rich a blue. Sparrows chirping in the apple-tree regarded him with their bold bright eyes and did not mind his nearness in the least. The apples, of a variety he did not know, were a pale butter-yellow with streaks of rosy-red, and looked most luscious. There was a beauty within reach: he must ask permission to pick.

Robin sat there dreaming until a gong sounded from one of the houses across the way.

It was consoling to feel that he was not the only late breakfaster in Chelsea on this lovely morning. It was good to feel hungry, and to know that food awaited him downstairs. He must not forget to post Aunt Cynthia's letter. It looked incongruous there on the mantelshelf resting against the single ornament, a vase of fragile china, shaped like a Greek urn and tinted like old ivory, that held a trailing spray with a lemon-yellow flower plucked from the creeper he had so much admired in the Court of the Sunbirds: when he went down to dinner last evening the vase was empty. Who but Dion could have designed such a room? It was, at once, simple and elaborate, daring and severe, and looked even more attractive lit by the sun than by electricity, for now colours were revealed in their real values. Dion must have visualised a chamber for a worldly anchorite to wake up in on a fine summer morning. Walls and ceiling were painted the blue of a turquoise. Neither pictures nor draperies hung on the walls: they were not missed. The buff carpet into which one's feet sank, as into a moss-invaded lawn, was dotted with distorted blue roses rising out of black scroll-like leaves, and had a black border outlined in

blue that resembled the key pattern: he guessed it came from China before Dion told him. The table with writing materials, the large press and the chairs were of red lacquer; the table, the panels of the press and the backs of the chairs were inlaid with jade, mother-of-pearl, lapis-lazuli and many stones whose names he did not know, in a pattern of peacocks proudly stalking among flowers that could only have flourished in an opium dream. Of red lacquer was the massive stand and frame that held a full-length mirror: in it one seemed so insignificant. The bed, that came from a rajah's palace, was of ebony inlaid with ivory in a chaste design, and its black silk coverlet was embroidered with great blue poppies that, here and there, spilt their petals. Of ebony was the slender fluted pillar in the far corner on which stood an ivory Hermes. One of the Gloire de Dijon roses nodding in the breeze cast a dancing shadow on the wall by the window: compared with its shadow the rose was a heavy, material thing. Could that airy phantom be the rose's soul? . . . How did Dion know that red furniture liked a blue background? Mephistopheles surveying the blue walls of heaven, or hibiscuses against a blue sky? Doubtless the hibiscuses inspired him. Aunt Cynthia's expression would be worth watching when she read: "*Tonight I am sleeping in an ebony bed that was once a rajah's. In my bedroom the furniture is red like sealing-wax and the walls are of turquoise-blue.*"

He sniffed the yellow flower which he found was scentless. Putting the letter in his pocket, he tied a knot in his handkerchief to remind himself.

The pine staircase was a joy to descend. The front door stood wide open and the purple silk curtain stirred as if inviting him to peep into the fairy twilight of the passage beyond. Crossing the hall he was checked for an instant by the vision of a green door set in a hedge of starry jasmine at the end of a cobble-path beset with flowers and leaves that quivered in the fresh morning air. Seen from the street it was merely an apple-green door in a wall, a door that obviously opened on a small garden in front of the house: seen from the house it was a door in a hedge that might lead anywhere: for plane-trees

and greenery in the gardens on the other side of the street hid the houses. Imagination awoke, as yesterday when he glimpsed that long aisle of foxgloves in the goblin wood near Bodmin Road. A brown butterfly was hovering about the latch as if seeking admission to that secret garden . . . a long-neglected garden with aisles of giant foxgloves through a tangle of undergrowth . . . trees, oaks and elms, that hid an ancient house from the world without. There would be a lake where she swam on summer days . . . and on warm moonlit nights, to the songs of the nightingales that waited for her coming. Strong and impetuous, the lover . . . not handsome . . . rather like Goyle, but not so ugly. . . . *The Green Door* was not a bad title. Had it been used before? . . .

Robin was recalled from his eager exploration of the imaginary garden on the far side of the green door by the striking of a clock. Reluctantly he turned and moved slowly towards the dining-room.

"Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning," Robin returned, hiding a frown, as he sat down to table.

"Will you take Quaker Oats, sir?"

"If you please."

When he hoped that Kasim or the Swiss parlour-man would be in attendance he had forgotten that Costello was butler. At dinner he kept asking himself the question: "Why do I resent that man's presence?" Yet Costello's manners were irreproachable and his waiting perfect. . . . Dion was an ideal host with his delicate attentions: the flower on the bedroom mantelshelf, the cheese-cakes. And now *The Times* lay on his plate. He was much too self-conscious alone with Costello to study the news: when Costello stationed himself behind his chair he would pretend to be absorbed in the agony column. . . .

With the sight of the delicious-looking ham on the sideboard Robin recovered his forgotten appetite.

Sidney Trevarthon might have breakfasted in a room like this at Boskenna. How ripping that Cavalier looked in the ray of sunshine on that eventful day at luncheon; he did not

seem to mind in the least that his frame was worm-eaten. "All beautiful things belong to the same age," Dion declared, when he asked if he thought the cloisonné dragon was quite happy in a Jacobean room. "One may introduce an article of one period into a room of another: but the article in its new environment must never offend the eye, while it should arrest one's attention. I suppose you would prefer a bunch of damask roses?" He could not make up his mind. The glittering dragon with its red and gold body and coil on coil of silver tail certainly fulfilled Dion's conditions.

Crouching behind a low crescent of blood-red orchids it seemed to watch them balefully all through dinner. Now, instead of the dragon, there was a bowl of sea-green glass, that might have graced a Cæsar's table, filled with sweet peas, the old-fashioned purple ones. The china was old enough to have trembled on its dresser at the rumbling of the death-carts during the Great Plague. He was using a seal-topped spoon, very like the two in a cabinet in the drawing-room at home that had been handed down from Sidney Trevarthon as having known the lips of the Merry Monarch. The cushion and the arm-rests of the high-backed chair of elegant proportions on which he was sitting were of faded crimson edged with a fringe of tarnished gold. Though the square of fine linen spread before him was not old, it was bordered with old lace of great width. His feet were resting on the worn foot-rail of an oak-table scarred by long usage; the elaborately-carved bulbs of the legs were as large as footballs. Behind him a small fire of logs burned on the hearth in front of an iron slab that bore the royal coat of arms and the date 1673: Dion casually mentioned that the fire was lit three years ago. Above the fireplace hung an equestrian portrait of Charles I: the painted armour had not been impervious to the thrust of a Cromwellian pike. Ceiling and walls were oak-panelled. From the centre of the ceiling hung a huge brass candelabrum. In the wide window-seat that was fitted with a cushion of crimson velvet Pepys, the Italian greyhound, lay curled up. Through the open casement between the branches of the mulberry he could see heads of

sunflowers and tops of hollyhocks. Veritably, he might be in a Jacobean manor-house.

Ham was rejected in favour of devilled kidneys.

Though hunger was assuaged and he longed to leave the table, he forced himself to eat a piece of toast with marmalade in a leisurely manner: if Costello were to give him breakfast in solitary state every day for a month the sooner he conquered his aversion for him the better. Yet it was not exactly aversion. Being waited on by Costello was embarrassing: it was like being waited on by a social equal. The man was surely not a gentleman by birth if his father kept a wine-shop. He suspected him of being his intellectual superior. One could imagine him standing aloof to overlook the farther, for last night he fancied he detected something verging on contempt in those pale grey eyes—not for his master or his master's guest but for himself, Costello, who was ignoring those talents he possessed by performing menial tasks—extremely well. Dion said Costello had been in his service for some years, was a very good fellow and, as far as he knew, was quite content to do his duty in that state of life into which it had pleased the gods to call him. He must have looked puzzled, for Dion confided: "One might say he is interpretive rather than creative"—a cryptic remark that left him more puzzled than ever. Every human being was a mystery, and the life of a butler was just as impenetrable and inexhaustible as—as a Prime Minister in war-time. "Don't speak of armies; but discuss generals if you like: like Walter Pater, the uniqueness of the individual is what interests me," he remembered Dion saying. Dion's servants were certainly unique. But for the presence of Costello what an enjoyable meal his first breakfast at Paradise House might have been. He would have liked to have read *The Times* as he ate, and glanced about the room and out of the window as fancy prompted. Now that the meal was over he wanted to linger for a little while, if only to enjoy the air that heated by the fire was cooled by the breeze and delicately scented by the sweet-peas. The mulberry kept out the sun almost as efficaciously as the poplars did at home. He preferred the room at night when the candles overhead were lit, and the

fire was reflected in the oak panelling and the face of the clock in the corner that could chime out twelve Jacobite airs. It was good to sit with Dion cosily drinking wine out of glasses with the Stuart rose engraved upon them. Already he was looking forward to dinner-time. Costello lost much of his significance when Dion was present, though one was acutely conscious of him . . . the pale grey eyes, the thin nose, the rather sinister expression . . . conscious of powers in leash.

Putting down the napkin he pushed back his chair.

"Do you care to take *The Times*, sir? You will find other morning papers on a table under the apple-tree."

"Oh, thanks."

Thrusting the paper under his arm and his hands in his pockets Robin feigned intense interest in the model of a silver galleon that reposed on an oak coffer before he nonchalantly sauntered out of the room.

The white cat, temporarily recovered from its stupor, was eating grass, and seemed to experience great difficulty in masticating—just like any ordinary cat. It often cast furtive glances upward, as if expecting the immediate onslaught of some valiant sparrow that might be hidden among the overhanging branches of the walnut-tree in the next-door garden.

"Puss, puss. What ails thee, wretched wight?"

With a grass-blade sticking out of its mouth like a toothpick, puss glided across the lawn, and among the shadows of the herbaceous border palely loitered.

Having scanned windows that revealed no one, Robin imagined a silvery ripple of far-away laughter had floated to him from some passing Ariel.

It was a blessed relief to be sitting on a chair that was not of creaking wicker and did not wobble with one's every movement. The garden-chairs at home were terrors, but Aunt Cynthia refused to buy new ones till after the war and prices became normal. He had wished to make her a present of two Indian grass ones, but she would not hear of it. Oh, when would the war end? And *when* it did would the word normal become obsolete? One could not drag Dion's long-armed garden-chairs of teak about with a crooked finger: it would not

be easy to do so with two hands—not that one would wish to, for under the apple-tree was an ideal place. A chair with back and seat of latticed leather thongs would be a novelty to Henliston. What jolly brown cushions of soft leather. What they must have cost! One of them would be just the thing for a rather special wedding-present. *Cost.* He was as bad as Aunt Cynthia, who reduced all things to their money-value. Dion hit off very neatly a member of the Stock Exchange: “He is one of those fellows who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. . . .”

Invitingly set out on the table by his side, so that the name could be seen at a glance, were the principal morning papers and several weekly ones. But before he looked at the pictures in the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News* he must read *The Times*. Though he went through the agony column from beginning to end at breakfast, he had not taken in the meaning of a single line. While filling his pipe he read the topmost ones.

“SIDNEY.—*Back again. Longing to see you soon. Write old address, Swallow-street.—Ruth.*”

Who was Sidney? Who was Ruth? Why had she come back? Was she head over heels in love with Sidney? Had Sidney known the torment of weary weeks of waiting for his sweetheart’s message? . . . A black retriever, lamed in the right hind leg was lost: ten shillings seemed a small reward to offer for the finding of a dog one loved. . . . BIRTHS. Most of these newly-born infants would become the grandparents or great-grandparents of soldiers that would fight in the next war, a hundred years hence. Until the world became too hot for human beings to live on it there would always be wars, whatever unwise men might say; and the horrors of the present war would be child’s play to the improved horrors of future wars. Theresa Constant had given birth to a son. Constant—rather a nice name. Now for the news. . . . “BATTLES OF THE SOMME. Progress in Two Months.” One knew from those headings that there was no news from the Western front, nothing exciting in yesterday’s *communiqués*. “Surren-

der of Bavarians"—in smaller type, doubtless very rightly. Ah, here it was, as he expected, a column and a half entitled "FRUITS OF SOMME BATTLE." Retired regulars at clubs might wish it were longer. What was to happen in the next two months was what one wanted to know! "The Pope's Attitude to the War." Did the cardinals allow the old gentleman to have one? If they did, it could not be anti-enemy when Austria and South Germany were solidly Catholic. "THE ROUMANIAN ADVANCE, 20 miles into Hungary." That one could enjoy reading! It was to be hoped that the invading general had adopted the motto, "*Veni, vidi, vici*," and would live up to it. . . . Dion had seemed greatly impressed with German thoroughness. Why did not our Secret Service men blow up that unattractive-looking building of red brick in Berlin!

As he stopped half-way through the leader on the invasion of Transylvania Robin felt disquieted when he remembered that the war must be won on the Western front. Impatiently, he tossed aside the paper.

All this spectacular business would not help much; it would not weaken the enemy line that stretched from Switzerland to the sea. Germany possessed unlimited reserves, whatever optimists might say. The invaders would be held up in a day, or two—likely enough they would have to withdraw from the territory they had gained. But he was on holiday, and would do his best to ignore the war: it should not be very difficult under Dion's roof. War-news! He had read it every day for two years too long already. . . . Houses and their gardens had character, just like men. A house dominated its garden; and the garden of the Poplars and the garden of Paradise House were not exceptions to the rule. One felt, when Uncle Anthony was alive, that the character of the Poplars had changed very little since it was formed by Beau Myall: Uncle Anthony stood for the old, but at his death Aunt Cynthia, who stood for the new, imposed her will: in two short years the character of house and garden had suffered a sad change. Paradise House reflected the strong personality of Dion Aylmer. Ghosts of past dwellers might ascend or descend the pine staircase, but in the rooms the air of extreme modernity would re-

pel them. In the garden they would linger under the mulberry or apple-tree, not daring to approach the door that never in their day knew bright apple-green, not caring to pass between herbaceous borders where many of the old-time flowers had been "improved" almost out of recognition. . . . The single hollyhocks by the tower were anæmic and undersized things compared with these magnificent double ones, the size of whose rich apricot, rose, and deep crimson rosettes suggested the cut and drilled bouquets carried by ladies in the days of crinolines. Dion's borders were deceptive. Yesterday, in a sweeping glance, he only noticed the flowers that one expected in a herbaceous border, and that each variety was the very best of its kind. Now, here and there, he observed strange flowers that looked un-English; foreign or not, they thrived in English soil, and gave a distinctive character to the borders. . . . He had no idea that so many different kinds of trees grew in London gardens: in fact, grimy grass and a few parched annuals that only survived because they were hardy was what he anticipated. In Paradise Place were most of the trees one would find in a country garden. Beyond the far wall a yew, perverted by pious care, grew in a pyramid large enough to hold a parlour, and an ancient laburnum spread a hundred branches that in springtime must be worth one's coming miles to view, judging by the number of seed-pods. A bushy but shapely holly laden with green berries shared the garden on his other side with a walnut that promised a fine crop of nuts. "A dog and a wife and a walnut-tree. . . ." Just before the London train steamed in at Borne Junction, while making sure that he had not lost his ticket, he discovered the Cornish penny that Cousin Godfrey gave him that day in the garden. "Ah, I didn't know the surprise you were about to spring when I presented you with that! Mind you get full value when you spend it," Cousin Godfrey said laughingly. Dion's pet hobbies were Corots and coins, English coins. He must find out if there were a Cornish penny in the collection: if not, Dion might like one. Cousin Godfrey would grin when he told him he was cured of asthma and had paid the doctor's fee with the penny.

Robin, opening the *Graphie*, discovered that he was in no

mood for picture-papers. He wished it were eleven o'clock. The air was still now, and leaning back he tried to blow smoke-rings with an entire lack of success. Bob Mabott had offered to teach him the trick, but he haughtily declined: give Bob an inch and he would take an ell. How was it done? And even as he despaired a perfect circle floated on the air.

"A beauty!"

Ariel again! He sat up in time to see a thin flash of silver lose itself in the grass.

CHAPTER VI

"I AM so sorry to disturb you, but one of my knitting-needles has dropped into your garden."

"Not at all," said Robin, springing to his feet. "I saw where it fell."

Before he stooped to pick up the needle he caught a glimpse, high up in the walnut-tree, of a slender brown leg and a neat brown shoe.

"I'm coming down," Ariel announced.

There was a great protest of twigs and leaves.

"It must be rather nice up there."

"Now I've dropped *Elizabeth!* My father would rag me if he were here. He says women are always dropping things.—Poggles, you *are* a coward. That's right, run indoors and tell your mistress all about it. He's a Pekingese and his name is Peter, Mr. Aylmer, but I always call him Poggles because he's a 'pampered pound of peevish fluff that goggles.' I like setters and pointers and fox-terriers—real dogs." The scrambling began again. "Oh, what a bother skirts are!"

"I hope Elizabeth is not hurt?"

"*Elizabeth and Her German Garden:* it's a book. . . . Such a twisty branch. These London trees want scrubbing. . . . At last."

For a few seconds, Robin, curbing eager curiosity, stood polishing on his sleeve the knitting-needle that required no polishing. When he raised his eyes he saw a girl, dressed in

a jumper of sage-green linen and a tweed skirt that was coloured like the cliffs when the heather is in bloom, poised on the lowest overhanging branch with her back against the smooth trunk. She was straight as a poplar, lissom as a leopard. Her fingers were busy with the loosened pins of tortoise-shell in her rebellious hair of golden-brown. The sunlight dappled her oval face with flickering leaf-shadows and glinted on the ends of the steel knitting-needles that protruded from the ball of worsted in the pocket of her skirt. Her face was faintly sunburnt, but her neck that was like a column was white as privet. Thick brown lashes shaded soft brown eyes that reminded him of Selina's. Such little hands and feet she had, and little ears—like shells. Hygeia, rather than Venus. Of the woods, rather than of drawing-rooms: one could picture her as a young captain of Amazons, clad in skins and carrying bow and quiver. There was something about her that seemed oddly familiar. Under his breath he repeated the lines that headed the third chapter of *Moonbeams*:

*"Have I not seen you? Yes, but where and when?
Ah, I remember: I was dreaming then."*

But it did not occur to him until some hours later that in Chapter III Prince Raoul's first meeting with the Princess Iolde was described.

"You have Ariel's voice and laugh, but you are not Ariel."

"I am certainly not Ariel," she agreed. "But I wish I could sing like Ariel: I, like Trilby, have no ear, but, unlike her, I have no singing voice."

"Is that Svengali's opinion?"

"Music-masters despair of me—Bother my hair! I don't believe it will ever get used to being up."

"Trilby had beautiful feet," said Robin reflectively.

"Have you read *Elizabeth*?"

He shook his head regretfully.

"But you simply must! Elizabeth is such a dear. She's an Englishwoman married to a German who's not in the least Prussian; though when I tell you she calls him the Man of Wrath you might think that he is. *He* wouldn't take pleasure

in mutilating Belgian children. They are devoted to each other. The book was written long before the war. Perhaps by now the flowers in Elizabeth's jolly garden have given place to vegetables. . . . There are three delicious babies: the April baby, the May baby, and the June baby. She doesn't seem to mind that they are all girls. Don't you think it's a nice idea to refer to one's babies in that way? I wonder what she would have done if one of them had happened to have been born in March. March baby—March hare. I adore babies, don't you, Mr. Aylmer?" On her face was a sweet, half-solemn look. And then she laughed. "But you wouldn't: you're a man."

"I've never had anything to do with them—Miss Ariel," Robin confessed. "What makes you think my name is Aylmer?"

"Because you are so like your brother. Can you keep a secret?"

"Try me."

"My aunt has quite lost her heart to Mr. Ayl—your brother. It was love at first sight—on her side. She saw him inspecting the apple-tree—ripping crop, Beauty of Bath?—when she looked out of one of the upstairs windows on the day she went over the house. I don't blame her. He *is* handsome. Is he writing another book?"

"Yes, a novel."

"It should be a most original one—written by him. I have read the first three essays in *Moonflowers*. They are charming and awfully clever. Generally cleverness is so boring. I loved *The Sickness of the Cyclamens*, though it took me right out of my depth. I asked my aunt to explain, but she couldn't—or wouldn't: she kept on repeating 'It's *very* modern'—just like the vicar at home when he returned a book called *Sinister Street* that my father lent him because it was about Oxford. *Moonflowers* has mysteriously disappeared, so I have not been able to finish it. Yesterday my aunt was cracking it up to a woman who came to tea, but she changed the subject when I entered the room. Do *you* understand every single line of it?"

"I am not Mr. Aylmer's brother, I'm sorry to say, and I haven't read *Moonflowers*—yet."

"Then you're his cousin," conclusively.

"Why not his son?"

"He isn't old enough to have a son of your age. What glorious flowers you have in your garden. Here we only have a few measly marigolds. This tree ought to be in a park. Those delphiniums are priceless. Your white Persian is a beauty, only he's so languid. He's making faces at me. . . . I don't think he's quite well—oh, the poor thing is going to be sick."

"I *am* so sorry."

"It's not your fault. Leave him alone; he'll be better presently."

At this point, the cat obligingly withdrew out of sight, to Robin's great relief.

"I have to apologise," she continued, shy for the first time. "You see, I've wanted to climb this tree ever since we moved in three weeks ago—it's just made for climbing—but what with one thing and another I could never find an opportunity. But this morning I made up my mind to brave my aunt's disapproval, if I am discovered, and stole away when she seemed safely launched in correspondence. I collected *Elizabeth* and my knitting, and climbed right to the top. I felt I ought not to stay when I saw those chairs; but it was so jolly up there among the rustling leaves with the fascinating *Elizabeth*. And then *you* appeared, and I kept hoping you'd go. I mean, I didn't want you to see me. And then, just when I felt I had been there hours and was wondering if I could get down undetected, you blew such a splendid ring, and I was so pleased that your perseverance was rewarded that I couldn't help exclaiming—and you heard me and looked up and—I dropped a knitting-needle. You do understand? I didn't climb up there to pry. I won't climb up again."

"I *hope* you will."

"Why?"

"Oh, I—I—You used to live in the country?"

"I'm only staying here on a visit, a long visit. I've been

helping my aunt move from Cadogan Square. It has been such fun arranging furniture and things. All the carpets had to have chunks taken out which was rather a bore."

"I am on a visit too, and only arrived yesterday."

"In a week or so I'm going to help at a canteen. My principal reason for coming to town was to do war-work. Daddy didn't want me to come a bit. I love the theatres and the shops, but I shouldn't care to live in London: it's all so shut in. Do you live in the country?"

"I do."

"I wish I were a man, and could go and fight!"

"So do I," Robin said quietly, fervently wishing he was wearing his armet. "At least, I do and I don't."

"Something prevents you?—Oh, I shouldn't have asked. Forgive my impertinence."

"Are you going to present me with a white feather?" he asked dejectedly.

"You are not a coward." The brown eyes regarded him keenly. "I'm quite sure you are not. Never, never, never would I present any man with a white feather. It is such a horrid thing to do, even if the feather were deserved. How can one be sure? There must be many brave men who, for various reasons, cannot go and fight."

"It was beastly of me to have asked such a question. I can't think why I did. . . . The army won't have me because of my chest: I get asthma rather badly."

"Poor you. I am so sorry. It must be rotten."

"I don't believe you have ever had a day's illness."

"When I was little I had measles. But here am I talking away to a strange young man as if I'd known him all my life. My aunt would say it is *most* irregular, and that I really must remember that I'm grown-up. Listen!—She's calling. I must fly—like Ariel. We are going shopping. My knitting-needle, please."

"When shall I—? You will steal away again tomorrow morning?"

"I couldn't possibly promise."

"Then I shall keep the needle."

"Oh, that's mean. What will my nice soldier do without socks? . . . Well I'll try—I'd better jump to save time."

"My name is Trevarthon—Robin Trevarthon. Won't you tell me yours?"

"O-h-h. *Is it?* How very odd. I shall not tell you my name." The brown eyes looked mischievous. "Give my love to Lord Myall when you write—There's Mr. Aylmer come to look for you. Good-bye."

"How on earth do you—?" Robin began excitedly.

A ripple of laughter soft and sweet descended to him by way of answer. Ariel waved a hand and disappeared. It was a shock to discover that the branch from which she had leapt could look so empty.

"She *must* come again to recover this," Robin told himself, and carefully placed the knitting-needle inside his pocket-book.

"I'm afraid I've frightened the dryad away. Walter, my friend, abate your transports or I shall measure my length."

Dion was making a slow progress towards the apple-tree in spite of the white cat that in an access of affection almost succeeded in tripping him up at every step.

"She was going indoors, in any case," said Robin abruptly; and surprised by a provoking blush, hoped, as he pretended the urgent need of a pocket-handkerchief, that it would escape notice. "Why do you call him Walter?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Can't you guess? I thought you worshipped Pater." Dion seated himself, and motioned Robin to the other chair. "Don't you remember the white Angora cat with a face like a flower that became quite delicately human in its valetudinarianism?"

"I thought this cat was a Persian."

"Perhaps he is. I like to think he's an Angora. Is there any difference between the two? He isn't the kind I should have chosen—I have a *penchant* for Royal Siamese—but he strayed into Paradise when he was a kitten and refused to be cast forth into outer darkness. What is the matter with you this morning, Walter? Why do you look so pensive? . . . The grizzled old colonel recently died, and Goyle informed me that the new occupier of the house next door is a middle-aged lady. I once caught a glimpse of her, and was unable to decide

whether she were a divorced duchess or an old maid who passed pleasant half-hours playing Beethoven quite correctly. It seems that she is the former, and was granted custody of the child: one infers that the duke was guilty of misconduct, a very original thing for a duke to be guilty of. She is very charming, the daughter of the duchess?"

"Oh, yes . . . very," said Robin absently.

"What complicated problem is racking your brains?"

Robin hesitated. His thoughts were occupied with the girl of the walnut-tree, but somehow he did not wish to discuss her with Dion. Intending to give an evasive answer he met Dion's eyes—and changed his mind.

"I can't think who she is. I told her my name, but she wouldn't tell me hers. She seems to know who I am, for she asked me to give her love to Cousin Godfrey when I write—I know! Yes, I'm sure of it. She is Lucy Penhalligan. Her father is a great friend and neighbour of Cousin Godfrey's. He *has* a widowed sister living in London, but I have never met her, and I forget her name. Fancy meeting Lucy here!"

"But how comes it, Robin, that you do not know the daughter of the kind Cousin Godfrey's great friend? We have time to enjoy a cigarette. The car will not be here for ten minutes."

"No, I won't have one now, thanks. My visits to Myall have been few and at long intervals. When I have been staying at Myall, Lucy has either been at school or staying with friends. For ages Aunt Cynthia has not been on visiting terms with the Penhalligans; she has some grievance or other: the Penhalligans are Cousin Godfrey's friends, you see. So the only opportunity I had of meeting Lucy was at Myall. I have seen Mr. Penhalligan several times in Henliston, but Lucy was never once with him. It must be about ten years since I saw her last . . . we played hide-and-seek in the shrubbery at Myall. . . . She had a governess then, a Frenchwoman, who could not understand why the plural of gooseberry was not geeseberries. Lucy in Chelsea, living next door! I thought there was something about her oddly familiar. She didn't recognise me. You will not feel flattered when I tell you that she took me for

your brother; and, when I regretfully denied the relationship, she insisted that I was your cousin."

"I *do* feel flattered. . . . Social life is very different in the country. In town, life would be unendurable if one knew one's neighbours, so I cannot, therefore, call on the honourable aunt of Miss Penhalligan. You, of course, are entirely free to do as you please."

"Oh, there would be no fun in it if—"

"If it were brought down to the level of convention. I heartily agree with you. Do you think the young woman will hasten to advise her aunt of your proximity?"

"I don't know . . . possibly."

"But not probably. Yes, it is a strange coincidence that you should find your old playmate living next door. La, la, la. The pleasant little romance I weaved about my neighbour is shattered. I suppose she is not a dowager-duchess?"

"I'm afraid not," said Robin, smiling. "Her late husband was a barrister, if I remember rightly."

Dion looked up from stroking Walter's fur the wrong way with a gloved hand.

"You are a very different Robin this morning. We have made a good beginning."

"Rather. I feel awfully fit. Though I obeyed your instructions, much to my surprise, I slept the whole night through."

"Then you doubted my powers?" Dion looked hurt.

"I didn't doubt, exactly . . ."

"But, very naturally, you were a trifle sceptical. I shall not fail you, Robin. And how did you like the medicine?"

"Before I had finished taking the dose I began to like the taste. Isn't Goyle terrific in shorts and sweaters? I did my best to win his approval."

"Treat him kindly. Look at his face as you would at an ordinary man's, and he'll become your slave."

"Is Kasim vowed to silence?"

"Kasim? My dear Robin, the poor boy is as dumb as a drummerless drum—did I not tell you? Very sad story; very sad. . . . You haven't congratulated me on my literary out-

put. Four hundred words in three hours! selected and arranged with the greatest care. I expect you to be interested, even as an intelligent model in the picture that is being painted."

"You know I am interested. Four hundred words is a jolly good measure for fine work at one sitting."

Robin longed to ask questions concerning Kasim, but something in Dion's manner forbade.

"I am very keen to read *Moonflowers*," he declared.

"That is nice of you. I hope you will not be disappointed. You have been studying *The Times*, I see. Costello always goes through the daily papers, and marks the paragraphs and articles that are likely to interest me."

"That is a job that would please him, I imagine."

"Why?" asked Dion quickly.

"Oh, he looks too clever to be merely a butler."

"A good butler often looks like that. Let me see the pretty pictures in that paper by your hand."

"This one?"

"Thanks."

"How *do* you manage to get *Simplicissimus*—is that how one pronounces the word? I never noticed it until now."

"My newsagent is good enough to obtain a copy for me every week. He has a friend in Amsterdam—or is it Rotterdam?—who is not necessarily a rotter because he reads a German paper. *Simplicissimus* helps me to find additional humour in *Punch*. I am not sure you would appreciate some of the illustrations. Do you read German?"

"No, I don't. I would like to look through it, if only to get an idea of the German sense of humour."

"Here is our latest gallant ally, the King of Roumania, in a charming family group—it is a bit late in the day. Ah, von Hindenburg, the new German generalissimo. I have been told that von Hindenburg plays an excellent game of chess, you may be interested to learn. And this fat lady in the other corner who looks like a cook in disguise? Why, of course, she's Lady Dippy. I heard she was lending Chilscot as an officers' hospital, so I suppose that is why she figures, though I really do not see why she should. The Countess of Dippen-

ham, as no doubt you know, is one of the richest women in England, and has as many country houses as the Kaiser has castles: when I give a half-crown to some war-charity my photograph does not appear in the papers: it is more generous of me to give one of my few half-crowns than for the countess one of her many houses. I've met the lady on several occasions. She has a curious effect on me: makes me talk like a Socialist—without, I trust, a Socialist's accent. . . . What's this? *La, la, la*. How very diverting. Silly old hen, she deserves it."

"What?"

Dion blew a cloud of smoke at Walter, much to the animal's disgust.

"I would have given a sapphire to have seen her face when she missed it," he murmured dreamily. "It is not good to read what they say about the affair in this rag. There is certain to be a stately paragraph in—Thank you, Robin, how clever of you. . . . Yes, here we are: a short paragraph occupying the position that the lady's rank and riches demand. 'Daring Theft of the Dippenham Sapphires.' *Violà!*"

Robin looked expectant.

Having skimmed, rather than read, the paragraph, Dion, putting down the paper, continued: "Lady Dippy, as she is disrespectfully called, is devoted to the theatre. I do not believe her devotion would stand the test of sitting on a campstool, if she could find one large enough and strong enough, in a pit queue from eleven in the morning—but, then, nor would mine. On a first night she is always to be seen in the third row of stalls, dressed with the execrable taste that is peculiar to many of our most aristocratic families—she is a daughter of the late Lord Arran, you may remember—and wearing vast quantities of jewellery. Diamonds become as glass on her ladyship. Last night Willowby Bone began his season at the Pall Mall with a new play, *Yang-tse-Kiang*, or some such name. Accompanied by her daughter—who is so plain and devoid of charm that it is extraordinary, even with the lure of a splendid dowry, Lord Mittenden should have braved the marriage—the countess sat in her accustomed place. Besides two strings of pearls she was wearing a necklace of sapphires, the famous

Dippenham sapphires. Usually on these occasions her neck is enveloped in, what appears to be at a casual glance, a jewelled muffler: she must be making a giant effort to restrain her flamboyancy for the duration of the war. The play has three acts—or is it four? No matter. When the curtain rose for the last act the countess is convinced she was wearing the sapphires. During Willowby's speech at the end of the show she discovered she was not; and, doubtless, paled from magenta to mauve, for she never has the decency to use powder. Query, what became of the necklace?"

"It must have come unfastened, and the person sitting on her other side picked it up before she missed it. Or someone sitting behind her unfastened it and—Is the necklace light or heavy?"

"Needless to say, we are not told who was sitting on her other side or behind her." Dion was consulting the paragraph. "The management would know the name of every individual in the stalls on a first night: seats are allotted to regular patrons and—"

"Then it should be fairly simple to find the thief. Have the police a clue?"

"Scotland Yard is investigating. There is no mention of a clue. I fancy when we are informed the police have a clue it means that they have not, and vice versa. This gives the barest details. I am inclined to think the necklace became unfastened, and sank smoothly and imperceptibly between the lady's corsage and her undermost garment."

"Surely that possibility would have occurred to her?"

"Of course. But she might easily have overlooked it. I once heard a man say at a St. James's Club: 'Her chest was nearly as colossal as Lady Dippy's.' I am anxious to see if the play, which, by the way, is called *Yang Yen Yu*, finds favour with the erudite Saunterby. Saunterby, Robin, is the super-critic. Let us see: '*An excursion into the region of fantastic, polyphonic, polychromatic Orientalism.*' I begin to be interested. '*It is, in fact, everything by turns and nothing long—a kaleidoscopic series of scenes now romantic, now realistic, now Futurist or Vorticist, but always beautiful, with action passing*

from the sentimental to the droll and from the droll to the grim, and yet with the unity of a familiar tale, the old Arabian Nights' Tale of the Forty Thieves. . . . There is perpetual gyrating and posturing and madcap dancing. It is a rich beauty-show, an audacious décolletage in both black and white, a gorgeous heap of coloured stuffs. It seems to aim at reproducing even the very smells of the East. Altogether an overwhelming entertainment. . . . But the best thing is the fun, full-blooded, fruity, almost Rabelaisian fun. . . . There are spiral costumes, conchoidal costumes, elliptical costumes, costumes that seem to realise the wildest dreams of our most recent artistic decadents—a really amazing wardrobe. The house was delighted with it all last night. . . . Beyond all cavil the thing is an immense success! Have those excerpts fired your imagination? I shall never be surprised to hear that the writer has been sentenced to a knighthood without the option of a fine."

"He has a wonderful vocabulary. What is the meaning of conchoidal?" asked Robin, on the track of new words.

"Isn't *concha* the Latin for a shell?"

"Of course. I ought to have known. A costume resembling a shell. . . ."

"Shall we inspect the gorgeous heap of coloured stuffs?"

"I should love to! Does it seem incredible to you that I have not been inside a theatre?"

"Nothing is incredible to me. Yes, I think *Yang Yen Yu* at the Pall Mall will be an excellent lead off. We'll go tonight. By the way, there are some rather interesting men and women coming in tomorrow night for coffee and a talk. Ben Creighton is in town for a day or two, and will be here; I 'phoned to his studio, on chance, and found him there."

"That will be jolly. I've heard such a lot about him and his pictures," said Robin politely.

"Forget that he called your cousin Gay Goliath: remember that he genuinely appreciates him. Creighton is one of those people you either like very much or cordially detest. If it should so happen that you are mutually attracted I shall be glad: you may find a few hours in his society from time to time a tonic when you return to Henliston. He is interested in all

the arts, which is unusual in a painter—or a musician. Just so much as you show interest in his painting, so much will he show interest in your writing. He has his little faults, but, then, so have you and I.”

“But he won’t want to bother himself with an ignoramus, a youngster of no importance.”

“My dear Robin, you are an artist. If he hadn’t published a line, Meredith would still have been an artist.”

“About the theatre, you must please let me pay my share,” said Robin, after a short silence only broken by the near humming of insects and the distant sounds of traffic.

“So you were not thinking of the books you would write far away by your serpent-haunted Cornish sea?”

“Really, I wish to pay.”

“La, la, la. I am rather proud of my delphiniums. That low-growing scarlet flower half-hidden by the lupin near the end of the border is a delphinium, too. It is a native of California, and does not grow higher than a couple of feet.”

“I was wondering what sort of flower it was before you came, but I was too lazy to go and see. . . . Have you seen the Dippenham sapphires?”

“Why do you—?” Dion, coming out of a day-dream, shot a searching glance at Robin. “I believe you are hoping that there will be another theft at the theatre tonight! I have often cast longing glances at the sapphires. Such valuable stones.”

“What is the necklace like?”

“A series of linked gold circles about the size of a shilling, with a superb sapphire set in the centre of each. To my taste, the beauty of the sapphires is not enhanced in their old-fashioned setting. It is an undistinguished piece of work, and suited the countess more than any necklace I have ever seen her wearing. Now if the thief had relieved her ladyship of some of her strings of pearls it would have been a pious act.”

“Why?”

“Prevent further sacrilege.”

“You do dislike her.”

“I loathe the sight of her! . . . Perhaps it is unjust to despise her for being the gross and stupid woman that she is, for

how could she be otherwise when her father was gross and her mother was stupid. I resent the fact that such a woman with an income much too large for her should cultivate the habit of thrift, to put it delicately. I hate mean people, Robin. But, there again, her father was a Scotchman. What a lot heredity has to answer for."

"She sounds horrid. . . . Only yesterday we were discussing sapphires and pearls."

"So we were. The coming event must have cast its shadow on our sensitive minds. Poor Lady Dippy, or, I should say, rich Lady Dippy. I can imagine the scene she made. It would have been kind to ignore the loss. Fancy grudging a few sapphires! But rich people are nearly always selfish."

"What do you think the thief will do with the necklace?"

"I believe the thing to do is to break it up, and sell the stones one at a time."

"But wouldn't they be recognised?"

"He might dispose of them in a foreign land, if he succeeded in smuggling them out of the country. La, la, la. I can't help hoping he gets away with the spoil: daring deserves reward. The gods help those who help themselves, and those who help themselves save the gods a deal of trouble. The sapphires may save him from bankruptcy or enable his young sons to go to Eton. Or he may invest the proceeds and become an honest man. Half the world, my dear Robin, hasn't the foggiest notion how the other half lives," Dion'drawled. "If ever I—"

A boy's voice smote the silence.

"What is it?"

Dion's look of absolute contentment had, in a moment, given place to one of extreme annoyance. The half-closed eyes were now wide-open and staring at the green door. "Only a boy selling lavender," he snapped; and softly added: "I'd like to wring his neck."

*"Will you buy—my sweet lavender;
Sixteen bunches—for a pen-ny?"*

The shrill treble voice seemed to fill the whole world.

"Will you buy—"

"It is rather melancholy," Robin commented.

"I was hoping the damned stuff had all been sold," said Dion sadly, suddenly relaxing. "Three years have I lived in Chelsea, but this is the first year that I have heard the dolorous song so distinctly—so near. At the end of July an ancient crone wheezed out the tune a long way off. I heard a woman singing it in August the day before I went away, and I was glad I was going, for I told myself I should hear no more vendors of lavender this year. And now, today, on the first of September, the song begins outside my very door. . . . As though the singer had been awaiting my return. It brings the inexorable message of death . . . that summer is passing, that I and all things are hastening to the end."

They sat silent until the sad sweet song sounded faintly in the distance, as an echo of itself.

"What is to be, is to be," Dion sighed.

"*'For heaven's sake, let us sit upon the ground, and tell sad stories of the death of kings,'*" Robin recited in melancholy tones, hoping to banish the dark thoughts whose shadows were reflected on Dion's face.

"Congratulations: one seldom hears an accurate quotation. La, la, la. I take a fortune-teller as seriously as a young miss. Call me a blithering ass, Robin! Lavender is the only thing which is sold beautifully nowadays. It is sold to a song: every other ware is sold either to a shout or in silence. Ah, there's the car. Come along! We visit Mr. Raleigh in Savile Row. I want him to make you a red waistcoat: all robins wear red waistcoats. Will you humour my whim? Don't look doubtful. Because there's a war on you do not care to wear a red waistcoat? Well, I think that's silly: it does not add to the misery of nations like a band of crape. One cannot hurry over a visit to one's tailor. Afterwards we will have a British lunch at Simpson's. I must tell Goyle to procure tickets for tonight: that will give him quite a lot of trouble, for they are probably all sold. What monkeyish faces pansies have. One often seems to catch a resemblance in a pansy. That blue and yellow one is not unlike the musical Mr. Balfour, don't you think?"

CHAPTER VII

"THIS is the music-room. How does it strike you, Robin?" said Dion. "I hope to heaven that the piano is as a piano should be. The tuner came a fortnight ago, while I was away. I mistrust these war-time tuners."

"I don't quite know. Bizarre—is that the right word? It suggests a church . . . of a new religion."

"A church of a new religion—I must remember that. You don't altogether approve of the room?"

"Indeed I do! There is something—I cannot take it in quickly. A Henlistonian is bewildered by the unusual, you know. What ducky little squares, like a halma-board."

"The black ones are ebony, the white ones holly," said Dion abstractedly.

"And the walls?"

"Coromandel—I must try that instrument." Having run his fingers up and down the keys with his gloved left hand, Dion gave a sigh of relief. "Seems all right. Boris Ivanovitch is a very critical gentleman with regard to a piano, or a woman."

"A wonderful touch you have—and with a glove on."

Dion smiled.

"What must it be like without a glove! It is ten to nine, so I just have time to attend to a small, but urgent, matter before they begin to arrive. Can you amuse yourself with this book?—you do read French? Henri de Régnier is one of my favourites. I am sure you will appreciate the eloquence of his style."

"At some other time I should like to read it: I simply couldn't concentrate my attention for two consecutive lines in this distracting room."

"Right-o. Continue the taking-in process. I shall be back in a few minutes."

Left alone, Robin curled himself up on one of the immense buckskin-covered chesterfields that seemed to be placed haphazard about the room,

All the rooms he had entered at Paradise House were deliberate, but each in its own special way provoked one's admiration. This room seemed to defy one's admiration—though defiance might be its own special way of compelling it. In most of the other rooms there were defiant colours: here there were blacks and whites and soft warm shades of brown and yellow. The floor was a chequer of black and white; on it were strewn skins of polar-bear and seal. As the coat of a civet-cat was the striped black and white of the coromandel-wood with which the walls were panelled. Massive candle-sticks of ebony were arranged to form a crescent across the room. Their great steadily-burning candles made an arc of light from the door to the piano. Against the wall, under a palm whose leaves swept the ceiling, a marble bust of Chopin looked coldly at the room. The brilliance of the ochres and reds of a chestnut branch in a tall black vase was subdued in the dusk of a far corner, and a drapery of rich purple became a thing of puce. Heavy brass trays, a yard in diameter, reposed on a solid-looking ebony stands a third of a yard high; they shone fiercely in the light and glowered in the shadow. Rightly, the *pièce de résistance* was the grand piano of golden satin-wood that, reflecting the flames of the apple-wood fire, seemed to quiver for a musician's touch. . . . One was obliged to admit that it was all in excellent taste. There were blacks and whites in stripes and squares and patches, defined and undefined. There were contrasts of light and shadow. The brown chesterfields crouched like great beasts at bay; one heard the brass trays' silent screams of anger. . . . Dion understood cumulative effect. What did it all mean? The atmosphere of the room was charged with defiance; yes, that was it, defiance was in the atmosphere. . . .

Dion entered with the first of his guests.

"Trevarthon says this room suggests a church of a new religion. Rather good, I think," said Dion laughingly.

"Many a true word spoken in earnest," observed his friend, "But why a *new* religion?"

"Creighton, this is Trevarthon, a cousin of your neighbour, Lord Myall."

"Finding you here, I imagine you are the cousin who is interested in books and pictures?"

"I am very interested, but I'm afraid I know nothing about pictures, and very little about books," said Robin, shaking hands.

"Trevarthon, unlike yourself, is the soul of modesty, Ben," said Dion. "He is spending September with me. This is his first visit to London. Before long you will see his name in big letters not at the top of John Newton's list. Now you know all about him."

Dion moved away to welcome a new arrival, and Creighton sat down by Robin on the chesterfield.

"You are a very privileged person: to my knowledge Dion has never invited anyone to stay at Paradise House for more than three days. He won't even put *me* up when I come to town for a couple of nights. Evidently you are a person in whom he is profoundly interested."

"You are laughing at me."

"I laugh at everybody and everything," said Creighton chuckling. "It's a humorous world. . . . My suit alarms you? don't let me alarm you: I say just whatever I want to say: sit by me long enough and you'll get used to it. There was a time when I couldn't afford to, but now I give utterance to my thoughts: other people conceal them."

Robin decided that he liked the painter who so closely resembled the engraving of Frans Hals' *Laughing Cavalier* that hung in his room at home. Creighton's face was thinner, but the faint mischievous smile was the one he had often studied of the *Laughing Cavalier*, who does not really laugh at all.

"I don't think you will alarm me. I confess I was looking at your suit: those blue checks are quite the largest I have seen. It is a lovely tweed, like golden sand."

"Are you concealing your thoughts? Dion said my suit was an extremely plucky attempt in war-time. He meant that he hated it."

"Your suit suits you," said Robin, with an air of finality that occurred to him as a rather good but unintentional mimicry of Aunt Cynthia.

"When are you coming to stay with your cousin? He promised to bring you over to my little place."

"I may spend a few days at Myall in October, when I should like to see your pictures."

"They are well worth seeing—the pictures presented to me by other artists. Of my own—I have painted a signboard that I'm proud of; it creaks beautifully when there's a strong wind blowing. Do you live by the sea, or inland?"

"Henliston."

"Oh, as near as that. Queer how one gets ideas: I imagined you lived at the other end of the county, Bude or St. Austell. Your know old Tyacke, the doctor, then? Priceless old house he lives in."

"I know him too well—in his professional capacity."

"Rotten luck. I've got a groggy heart."

"Asthma has been my trouble."

"Prevents your going to the war," consolingly.

"I think I would rather be without it, and go to the war."

"There are possible and impossible madresses. War is an impossible madness."

"I quite agree with you. But when these Prussian beasts—"

"Has it occurred to you that Prussianism is not peculiar to Prussians? But if Dion, who, I have observed, has the faculty of listening to six conversations at once, hears me talking war he'll look pained. I can't bear it when Dion looks pained."

"Have you seen my cousin lately?"

"About a month ago. He reminded me of a landscape on a clear autumn day, and my fingers itched for a brush. He's a great man, your cousin. I don't mean on account of his position and wealth. I shall never forget the first interview I had with him. Lord! he put me through my paces. Do you know my house by sight? It rejoices in the name of Mint, nowadays."

"I haven't passed that way since you came there to live. My cousin tells me it is improved out of recognition."

"Once it was a cottage; now it is a house with a studio cunningly hidden. I have done my best not to make it look like an importation from Golders Green. For what you may, or

may not, consider to be improvements I have used old stones and slates. Do you care to see some snapshots of it? A kodak fiend claimed my hospitality last week."

Creighton produced letters and papers from many voluminous pockets, and at length discovered an envelope that contained several photographs of Mint taken from different aspects, and peeps of local scenery.

"Mint looks most fascinating. The cottage has become absorbed in the house. I like the name you have chosen."

"About that aromatic plant I could a tale unfold. The path up to the porch is bordered with it instead of the eternal lobelias or sea-pinks; it enhances the gorgeous colours of the snapdragons. I have a *penchant* for snapdragons; they take such great gulps of sunshine: when I watch a bee fumble its way into one of their dangerous mouths I think of an ogre's castle in a fairy-tale, and sigh with relief when the bee reappears."

"Don't you find the mint spreads?"

"Not much! I keep a careful watch."

"Why, here's a photo of the Myall oak!"

"What are you showing him, Ben?"

Dion, on his way from one group to another, paused beside them.

"Look, Mr. Aylmer—Dion. This is the famous oak with Myall in the distance."

"Please don't report me to your cousin," Creighton pleaded. "My friend, of course, was trespassing. As you know, the wall skirts the road opposite Mint . . . in that wall is a weak place . . . about twenty yards inside the wall stands the oak."

Robin laughed.

"I'll not say a word. It's a ripping photo. The tree will not live much longer. It is hollow on this side. You can see."

"Ah, yes. Pity. Fine old tree. Is it true that a Royalist ancestor of Lord Myall's hung a score of dour Cromwellians from its branches?"

"So the story goes. The oak is supposed to be haunted, you know. Poachers do not poach within a mile of it."

"May I?" Dion held out his hand. "You can see the tree from your place, I suppose, Ben?"

"Oh, easily. It stands by its lonesome in a dell, and is head and shoulders above the surrounding trees."

"Really, these photographs are very well taken. By whom?"

"De Lappele."

"Ah, that explains. Mint is charming. Why didn't you tell me? Pretty glimpse of river. Very damp in winter? If I go to the country next year it will be to Mint."

"I'll believe you are coming when I see you on Henliston platform, my friend."

"Robin, he is always harsh with me. If I'm alive, Ben, I'll come to you next year for as long as you'll have me."

"Swear it!"

"I swear."

"Bear witness, Trevarthon."

"And I'll invite myself to stay at the manor and persuade Cousin Godfrey to beg the pleasure of your company," said Robin delightedly. "You might not think it, Mr. Creighton, but he's dreadfully shy of strangers."

"I should not have thought he was shy," said Creighton, with a wink at Dion that Robin did not see.

"He wouldn't mind if I were there to help him do the honours. It is a dear old house, and you'd both love it."

"I'm sure we should," Dion agreed, frowning at Creighton.

"I'm not in love with noblemen as a breed, but I was captivated by Lord Myall from the start. He is a sport, and no manner of fool, like so many of 'em. I'd give something for his vitality, though he's an older man than I by at least fifteen years. He is a sort of uncrowned king down there, Dion. His people think no end of him—even the few that curse him. He's not very popular with the local parvenus, I believe, but they don't matter, anyway. 'God bless the squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations'—I don't believe you will find it anywhere else in the country. It is wonderful in A.D. 1916. I wouldn't wear a red tie in Myall village for worlds. There's no heir to the squireship, and it's a damned pity. I'm afraid his lordship is not of the marrying kind. Now these peers that cumber the earth and lead virtuous—perhaps—mar-

ried lives breed like rattlesnakes. If there were more Lord Myalls, the country would be more to my taste.'

"And in that happy state would you cease to be a follower of the iconoclastic G.B.S.?" Dion asked.

"I don't follow anyone. Shaw is one of the few men who can think clearly, and who does not suffer from—"

"Patriotics," suggested Dion.

"He is a disciple of Truth."

"Here, Ben, take these photographs. Boris is fidgetting. He has to go on to an orgy in Mayfair. Did you ever see a back as expressive?"

Dion crossed the room to a short, thick-set man in evening dress who was standing with his back to the room apparently lost in admiration of the purple drapery.

"You might think Boris is admiring the tint of that Veronese drapery. He is not," said Creighton confidentially. "He is entirely unaware that it cannot be equalled for texture and flow. I doubt if he even knows it's there: he's either composing or thinking of some woman. Boris the Terrible. *Il a une technique merveilleuse pour séduire une femme*. He has only to play and the nymphs follow—how can they help it? I am his slave when he's at the piano, and for as long as the spell of his music lasts. At other times I can't bear the sight of him. At eight and twenty a man has no right to have a stomach like that. He eats too much."

"Is he very famous?"

"Boris Ivanovitch is one of the world's best pianists. I give him third place. Dion has said some magic words to make him smile. I was afraid he was in one of his school-boy tempers. Ah, he is going to play. Good, good, good. Wish I could play instead of paint."

"What curious eyes he has."

"Slavonic."

Ivan sat down at the piano, struck a chord, waited for silence, scowled at the fire that dared to crackle, and with "I play for you" in a husky voice to Dion, began.

"Debussy—*Les Collines d'Anacapri*," whispered Creighton,

"Boris is the one man who can interpret Debussy's music."

It was astonishing that such short thick fingers could be so agile. Robin stole a glance at the audience. The musician's rendering of the piece had set a rapt expression on most of the faces. Everyone had suddenly become detached. The *intelligentia* seemed to regard Debussy's music as they did Augustus John's paintings. This was very different stuff from Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, selections of which Aunt Cynthia occasionally played in the drawing-room on a summer evening. Very different, too, was the prim upright piano of walnut with the faded silk behind the fretwork to this splendid grand of golden satin-wood. The piano at home had not been tuned for years, and each note emitted a rasping sound. Aunt Cynthia protested when he suggested the services of a tuner might be beneficial: "Nobody plays on the instrument but me, and if I find no fault with it . . ." Ivanovitch's face was alive now: it was as inexpressive as putty when he was not playing. His expert fingers were weaving bright flowers of melody into a tapestry. . . .

"Boris is in good form tonight," said Creighton, amid the applause. "Look! his pale green eyes are fixed on Dion's face. 'If you wish it I will play again, for I find I'm in the mood,' they are saying. If he would always talk with his eyes! He is fond of Dion, as much as he can be fond of anyone. The creature has no heart, of course: he's a satyr."

"*Nocturne*," Ivanovitch announced.

After a preliminary flourish, he performed a short piece that recalled to Robin the perfume of magnolias on a summer evening and filled him with an unutterable sadness.

"A very warm night," Creighton observed.

"We are rather near the fire."

"The room is cosy. Out of doors it might be November. I was referring to the piece that has just been played. It's his own composition. Typically Russian, don't you think? I was so keenly aware of the immoralities among the shadows that I could not enjoy the brilliant moonlight. But I have an evil mind. How did it strike you?"

"It made me feel sad."

"Sad . . . sad. It is all a question of age and experience. . . ."

The musician, who had crossed to Dion, silenced the applause by returning to the piano.

As he listened to the translucent melody with its delicate shades of colour and quivering atmosphere Robin was transported. But a moment ago, it seemed, he had left Treza among the nasturtiums in the little garden at Trewoof. He was fleeing in mad panic along the path through the yellowing corn. Very faintly from far away he heard once more the cry of the mysterious bird: a mocking echo of the last sweet flute-like note that thrilled him in the garden. . . . It was a day in early June, and he, a boy of fifteen, was with Peter in the wood by the stream. The laburnum in the courtyard at Trewoof had never been so yellow, the trees were of the tenderest greens, the cuckoo was calling, calling, and he was stirred to the depths by the beauty of the world. They found a lark with a broken leg, and he pierced it to the heart with a thorn from a young acacia. On a rude altar of stones, collected with much labour, they kindled a fire and offered up a sacrifice. Peter fed the fire with dry oak-twigs and green leaves of oak until the body was consumed, while he chanted a hymn: "O great god Pan, accept this offering. . . ." Peter thought it was wrong. He explained to him that Christian ceremonies were unimproved forms of Pagan customs, but Peter was still a little unhappy. That day he longed to cast away his clothes and run wild among the trees; had he been by himself he would have, but Peter was with him: Peter would not have understood.

Lost in a reverie, Robin did not notice the cessation of the music nor the short silence that ensued. He was roused by the murmurs of pleasure that heralded a storm of applause.

"A masterpiece—exquisitely rendered—beautiful," jerked out Creighton ecstatically. "His later work is not a patch on it. Debussy must appeal to a painter, for he is not only the colourman making up his pigments, but the artist combining them."

"What is the name of the piece?"

Creighton gave him a startled look. "I thought everyone—*L'Après-midi d'un Faune* it is called."

"Curious," said Robin in an undertone.

"Subtle rather than curious," the artist corrected. "A subtlety of device with a purity of style."

Robin was content to be misunderstood.

"Do you know Mallarmé's poem?" Creighton asked, after a pause.

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

Costello stood before them with a tray. Creighton chose champagne, and Robin followed suit.

"That man of Aylmer's has a clever face," Creighton observed, when Costello had passed on.

"So I think. His father is Spanish and his mother is English. His home is in Seville. I hope to visit Spain one day. The very name of Seville evokes perfume and colour. One thinks of carnations and oranges, Moorish courts, deserted save for the basking lizards, and narrow winding streets."

"You have to turn aside to look for them: they are hidden behind the veil of bustling modern life. Visit Seville in spring-time. Spring in England is as tepid as a village-fair: spring in Andalusia is as gloriously mad as carnival. I shall never forget the Moorish garden of the Alcazar with its roses and orange-blossom. There was no need to drink champagne there!" Creighton sipped his wine thoughtfully. "Our host is rather like champagne. Have you published anything? Do you write poetry or prose?"

"I have written a romance that Newton has declined to publish."

"But, my dear boy, what possessed you to submit it to him? Unless I am very much mistaken, you are no more Newton than I am Royal Academy. All Newton's authors have had their venom extracted by the mellowing years. He likes them staid and established. Newton publishes Mary Maddison. That rather stout lady in the scarlet, emerald and tangerine is Mrs. Maddison. If you want to take a short cut to success—I don't advise you to—drop romances and write a slender volume of poems. If you can manage a sensuous atmosphere you will have no difficulty in getting it published. If it 'went' Miss Dodo would ask you to tea, especially if she saw your Shelley-like por-

trait in the *Tatler*: she has a *penchant* for poets, and has not a handsome one in her collection."

Robin did not dare to confess his ignorance by asking who Miss Dodo was. Evidently Creighton regarded her as a person of some importance. "Has she asked *you* to tea?" he inquired, hoping he had scored a bull's-eye.

"She has; and I declined. I also declined to paint her portrait: her type doesn't happen to appeal to me. Joking aside, if your novel is not accepted, don't despair. A month here with Dion should broaden your views: a month in his society would be invaluable to any young writer—and many old ones. You'll go home and write a stunner! I suppose you've read all the best modern writers?"

"My literary education has been sadly neglected," Robin said apologetically. "I have read very few modern writers."

"You must; you really must. One has either to set the fashion or follow it. If you are capable of the former—well, Miss Dodo will ask you to dinner. But a word of advice. Though you set the fashion, keep a watchful eye on what other writers are doing. Why do you think I have left my beloved Mint? To see the pictures of a certain Belgian artist who has a studio not 'ar away. I admire his work enormously, and it has taught me something. And I hate him generously. Boy, you mustn't repeat."

"Of course not. I think what you say is very sound, but—"

"Very worldly, eh? Each man his own method. Sometimes I wonder if it is worth while." Creighton was gazing earnestly at the fire. "That Belgian's best he called *Flammes Bleues*," he said meditatively.

"Do tell me who some of these people are."

"Lights and shining lights. No one but the Bird could gather together such an assortment and survive. That individual with the pinched face, by the third candle, is Barry Gilpin. He is like the end of an imperfect night. Everyone knows his name. I have met people who have read his books; they criticise, but never admire them. But a full length novel every six months, or less, what can one expect? He may be summed up as a man who lacks a philosophy of life, a journalist with a frozen soul,

His books are like himself, colourless; and will not last much longer than the time he takes to write them. Now the man who is talking to him is the genuine thing. Each page of his books bears the hall-mark of genius. Durning is his name. If he has a fault, it is that he is more enchanted with the dung-hill than with the beauty of the yellow marrow-flowers that grow upon it. He writes what the public calls an 'unhealthy novel'. . . . See the ugly fellow with glasses? He draws very prettily and has a nice sense of colour. He is as English as they make them, and his name is Rudolph Schultz. Why should he appear ugly when viewed full-face, and beautiful when seen in profile? A charming fellow with a handsome wife—*handsome*, not pretty. I wonder if she's here." Creighton craned his neck; and Robin noticed he received many respectful salutes. "Don't see her. The gentleman with Abraham's beard is Dr. Archibaldson, the famous psychiatrist, who has just written a Freud-like book on imaginary perversions. So small a man ought not to have so long a name: it's like a sparrow trying to look dignified with a large straw. That beaming chap over there, also venomously bearded, is an M.A. of Cambridge: he wastes his time writing lyrics for musical comedies. I believe he earns nearly as much as I do."

"Who is the lady with the glorious red hair? She might have stepped out of a picture."

"Or a fashion-plate. One always sees one really beautiful woman here. She is always someone one has never seen or heard of before. . . . Her dress is of the blue known as watchet—good old English word. Aylmer calls one of his essays 'Watchet.' It is about a blue topaz, forget-me-nots and a bishop's blue eyes: the whole thing is like the scent of mignonne, if you take me. . . . Wonderful knowledge of precious stones Aylmer has. Of course you've read his *Moonflowers?*"

"Not yet."

Dion was sharing a near chesterfield with Dr. Archibaldson. They were discussing heredity, and scraps of their conversation drifted to Robin's ears:

"That is absurd. An ancestor of mine was a highwayman,

but his descendants, as far as is known, have been honest men . . . latent in me, for all I know."

Robin did not catch the doctor's reply.

"Can you see me, a peaceful citizen, going about with a pistol on dark nights and holding up motor-cars returning from the theatres? Where does heredity come in?" Dion asked.

Robin remembered that yesterday morning Dion had said "What a lot heredity has to answer for," when they were talking about Lady Dippenham. At that moment their glances met. Dion seemed to look right through him. His eyes narrowed a little, as he continued:

"Of course I exaggerate when I say that my ancestor was a highwayman: as a small boy he was accused of . . ."

The rest of the sentence was lost, but Robin felt positive that for his benefit Dion had endeavoured to joke away the highwayman. Why did he trouble?

"Pearls and sapphires are Mr. Aylmer's favourites. Did you read about the theft of Lady Dippenham's sapphire necklace? I wonder if the police are on the track of it?"

"The paragraph in this evening's paper gave no fresh news. Unless I am much mistaken, Lady Dippenham's sapphires have gone the way of the Duchess of Leinster's emeralds and that American woman's—I always forget her name—pearls. About every three months or so during the last two or three years one hears of the theft of a valuable piece of jewellery at a reception or ball or concert. This Raffles of real life is a connoisseur."

"Now that I come to think about it, I remember having seen various robberies reported from time to time. Do you think one man has done it all? He must be frightfully clever."

"Yes, I think it is the work of one man, not a gang: one recognises the style, so to speak."

"Mr. Aylmer was telling me some of the extraordinary adventures that have happened to the Dippenham sapphires since they came into the family. We went last night to the scene of the outrage, as the papers say. *Yang Yen Yu* is a gorgeous spectacle."

"A cross between a musical comedy and a pantomime, I understand."

"I am no judge: it was my first visit to a theatre. I only know that the colour and music went to my head like wine. I enjoyed every minute of it. Do you go often to the theatre?"

"Not since Granville Barker has given up."

"Who is that big man who looks like a farmer?"

"A person of no importance. His pictures are as old-fashioned as drawing-rooms. . . . Isn't the Bird's head perfectly proportioned?—Dion's, I mean."

"Why do you call him the Bird?"

"The Bird of Paradise House. He is also nicknamed Boothby and The Goat. Boothby, because he's rather like Dr. Nikola, of course. I am quite sure Dion has not shown you Fly's cartoon in the *Eclectic*. If you screw up your eyes you will see that, though Dion's features verge on the perfect, they have only to be exaggerated and distorted a little, and you have a very good goat. Fly has drawn him immaculately dressed in morning clothes, nasturtium in his buttonhole, gloves, stick, and all the rest of it—and with a silk hat on his goat's head."

"What a shame. There may be the *faintest*—"

"It really is quite clever. Dion was furious."

Dion was one of a little group of men near the piano.

"I don't agree with you, Aylmer. Genius is a curse, not a blessing, to its owner," rang out, like an order to charge, from the handsome Guardsman.

Silence suddenly fell on the rest of the room.

A jovial-looking clergyman, who stood complacently stroking his lower chin, took up the ball: "Genius. What is genius? Define your terms."

"Sir, the good Okakura-Kakuzo reminds us that definition is always limitation. One of the—"

"Dion, you're everlastingly quoting Okakura. I don't believe there is such a person. All these wise sayings are in his wonderful book. Has anyone here ever seen this book? If so, will he please hold up his hand," Creighton challenged.

No one held up his hand.

"It doesn't seem to be widely read," drawled the Guardsman.

"Bird, I'm afraid you're a beastly fraud. You are Oka—what's-his-name. Own up now!"

"I think I am right in saying that the *Book of Tea* was published in New York, so it is not surprising that no one here has read it," said Dion, faintly smiling.

"Produce the book!" demanded Creighton.

"It is in my study, and I refuse to leave my guests."

"Could you send for it?" Creighton persisted, amid the laughter. "I'll pin you down."

"Goyle is the only person I allow in my study. It so happens that he is out."

"Which means that there is no such book."

"Certainly not," said Dion imperturbably.

"But—" Creighton began.

"Shut up, Creighton, there's a good chap. The Bird is Okaruso, all right. I want to hear the definition of genius before I go."

"That handsome captain of Guards has a large permanent income, but just misses being fascinating," muttered Creighton. "He isn't of the type that drawls, and he's too big a man to shout. The army hasn't improved him: his drawl is more pronounced than it used to be, and his shout is louder. His mother is deaf; the drawl he brought from Oxford."

"He has a clever face," said Robin.

"Fitzadam's secret is the secret of all Celtic art, but exactly what that secret is no man can truthfully say. To look at him, you wouldn't think he was one of the Irish mystics. He is a poet, and prose *aquarelliste*. I read his *Green Isles*, and enjoyed it immensely, though I haven't the least idea what it was all about. Distinctly it is a work of art. They are all talking and no one is listening."

"I want to hear what Mrs. Maddison is saying," said Dion, restoring order.

"Genius," lisped a large woman dressed in patches of vivid colour like a cockatoo, "comes into this world to learn, not to teach, and that is what the commonplace mind cannot grasp."

"Surely, dear, I've seen that somewhere?—is it George

Moore?" a thin woman standing behind her softly inquired. But her words were heard by everyone.

"Great minds sometimes think alike," the large woman retorted.

"What is genius?" Dion asked Durning. "You ought to know."

"Genius is a thing which is a law unto itself,"

There were nods and exclamations of approval.

"One of the attributes of genius," stated Dion solemnly, "is the infinite capacity—"

"No, no!" "That won't do!" "We're a bit past that!" Protests fell thick and fast.

"You might let me finish," Dion said reproachfully. "I had no intention of saying what you think I was going to say."

"Let him get it off his chest. After all, he is our host," Creighton appealed.

"One of the attributes of genius is the infinite capacity for—overcoming the opposition of mediocrities."

"The bird always pounces on the juicy worm," drawled the Guardsman enviously, when the laughter subsided. "Dion, will you never understand that being brilliant is the privilege of youth. I say, I hate to go, but I just must."

"When's your leave up?"

"Day after tomorrow," gloomily.

"Staying with your people?"

"Rather not. They don't know I'm back. Mater's in the country, and I can't stick the dad, *tête-à-tête*. Reformed rakes make most inquisitive fathers."

"I had better not pursue my questioning."

"Oh, I'm putting up at an hotel within easy reach of the arrows of the cupid in Piccadilly Circus. No one will think of looking for me there. One's right on the spot, so to speak."

"Easy hunting, eh? Fitz, I'm sorry. Subtle odours are lost in the market-place. One cannot be too selective, even when one is on short leave."

"*Honi soit*, old thing."

"He's staying at the temporary home of the temporary wives of the temporary officers," Creighton observed, with a chuckle.

Robin was no wiser for the information.

Fitzadam left amid a salvo of "Good-lucks."

The conversation became general. Robin wondered what Dion was saying so earnestly to a young man with curly fair hair, of about his own age. Dion was quite the most distinguished-looking man in the room. He was the only one in evening-dress, now that Ivanovitch had gone. . . . The tobacco-smoke rose in clouds, like incense, and the candle-flames, seen through the haze, were pale and faint. It was strange to see women smoking. How daintily the woman with the red hair held her cigarette. . . .

And then Dion, with one of his sudden movements, crossed the room, and stood looking down at him.

"Quite happy?" he asked.

"Yes, thanks. Mr. Creighton has been awfully kind: he has been telling me—"

"I know. Creighton's thumb-nail sketches are inimitable."

"He's a joy with his Whos, Whys and Whats," Creighton declared. "I hope you haven't come to carry him off."

"I want him to know Dick Seymour."

"Trevarthon has not read *Moonflowers*. Don't you think something ought to be done about it?"

"You haven't read Okakura-Kakuzo," Dion flashed. "Something *ought* to be done about it."

"One to you, Bird. Perhaps it would be wise for me to bestir myself and do the polite to my *confrères*."

At ten minutes to two, Rolliston, a loquacious young Member of Parliament, had left. Only Creighton, the first of Dion's guests to arrive, lingered on. He crouched over the fire, and stirred it every few minutes with the poker he was holding.

The old French clock on the mantelpiece struck two. A swinging cupid was the pendulum. Robin, who was longing for bed, wondered if the artist would never go. To and fro, to and fro. . . . How pleased the cupid must be when they forgot to wind the clock. Creighton was continuing the political discussion that was interrupted by Rolliston's departure.

"Don't you believe it! Winston will be leader of the Tories in a year or two, if he lives. He is one of those"

Robin did not care in the least what Creighton thought of Winston Churchill: he wanted to go to sleep. His companions, interested in their talk would not notice if he closed his eyes. . . .

"He may; but I should have thought he is too young and inexperienced. A charming boy . . . and the same little alert turn of the head when something you say rather startles him. His hands are exactly the same shape as Squire Myall's. I always notice people's hands—gloveless hands. Gay Goliath was—"

"Not so loud," Dion cautioned.

At Creighton's last words Robin was wide-awake, but he did not open his eyes lest they should think he had heard.

"It's quite safe: he's sound as a top," Creighton said in lower tones. "The last Saturday, as usual?"

"There are five Saturdays in this month. Our festival is the fourth, the 23rd—and don't make a mistake."

"I shall be with you . . . quite fresh . . . an adept. . . ."

"No. . . . One of them is a little devil with green eyes, a skin like velvet and . . . winks her legs . . . dances like Salome herself."

"And the other men?"

"Boris Ivanovitch and Cecil Lane."

"Thought Lane was in France?"

"He's had his left hand crushed, so they've found a job for him at the War Office."

"I wish Boris were not so—greasy."

"He's all right . . . perhaps you are piqued? . . . Besides, he chooses the music for our hidden musicians: without him . . . fierce Russian passions . . . the last time. One never knows."

"Nonsense! Your liver is out of order, or you're tired. The 23rd, then at the usual time. Last month you surpassed yourself. Did you tell Kasim to upset the wine, or was it an acci-

dent? Anyway it was most effective . . . you couldn't see her for rose-leaves. Did you notice when she raised . . . ?"

Robin stirred uncomfortably.

"You'll have to keep *him* under lock and key on the 23rd I'm off. I won't disturb his dreams. Do see what you can do about a man. Try your best to get someone who is *not* over military age—but you know."

"I'll do my best. But it seems that the servant you want must be a second Costello."

CHAPTER VIII

FRIDAY, 29th September.

Chelsea, enveloped in silver haze, had a sad and gentle beauty. Until next spring the plane-trees would hold on to their fruits like misers, but their leaves, still green or only a little tarnished, fell in a whispering shower; where the bark had peeled their sooty trunks were mottled with palest yellow. Robin thought that Hill Street at its widest, between the market-house and the Rose, would be greatly improved by planting a line of planes down the middle; but even if he offered to bear the cost, the town council would not give their sanction: tree-planting in Henliston would be an innovation. He glanced up at the clock on the square tower of the old church about which pigeons were circling: it was twenty minutes to eleven. . . . If he hurried back he would have time to conclude the long-postponed letter to Peter that he had almost finished. During the month he must have sent him at least a dozen picture-postcards; though he knew that Peter would have preferred one letter of average length. However, this letter was already one of the longest he had ever written, and when Peter received it he would forget the casual postcards. He had occasionally sent the shortest of notes to Aunt Cynthia and to Cousin Godfrey. It had been so difficult to find time for letter-writing: the days, and often nights, had been so filled. He could relate his doings to Aunt Cynthia and Cousin Godfrey when he returned home; but Peter was in

France. As the weeks flew by he came to regard writing to Peter as a task: at home it was always a pleasure. It had been a task indeed: the things that he now regarded as ordinary became extraordinary when he tried to explain or describe them to Peter: in composing that letter he had been amazed in discovering how limited was his outlook of a month ago. . . . This was his last walk along the Embankment. "I shall see you into the car at the green door that will keep green my memories of you: station-farewells are most trying affairs," Dion had said. Tomorrow evening he would be rolling down Hill Street in the omnibus. . . . A week—four days ago, it seemed impossible he would regard with relief his leaving Paradise House: yes, he must admit it had come to that. Four days ago, when he suggested he should leave on the 30th, Dion strongly protested: "Don't speak of going; it makes me sad. You must stay for another fortnight, at least." And Dion certainly meant what he said. But the next day Dion was *distract*, preoccupied. The complete repose that filled the house vanished imperceptibly, and gave place to a superficial calm. The rooms did not seem quite the same; rooms at the Poplars became like that when spring-cleaning was imminent. Yet, outwardly, nothing was changed. . . . On Thursday, yesterday, morning he made up his mind that he would leave on the 30th. He was dreadfully hurt when Dion said shortly: "Very well," and showed it, or Dion, mechanically polite, would not have added: "Stay a few days longer?" . . . Last night they had gone to a party in Cheyne Walk. Dion scarcely spoke the whole evening; his face wore a haunted look, and he glanced round nervously whenever anyone entered the room. Their short walk home was a silent one. At the top of the staircase Dion laid a hand on his shoulder. Minutes seemed to pass before he said: "I have lost my resilience. Yesterday and today I have been a dull companion; but by tomorrow, your last day, I shall have shaken off this depression, Robin. I am deeply sorry you are going on the 30th, but—for your own sake—I am glad. You have noticed the change: the reason of it you must very soon learn. I only hope—But not now. Good-night." The spring had gone from Dion's step, he noticed. . . . He sat on his bed for a

long time trying to understand. A flock of elusive thoughts hovered about his mind just near enough to cast their shadows before they scattered and flew away. Those few words of Dion's had made him almost happy: he had been so afraid that Dion was bored with him. But it was hours before he fell asleep: he felt keenly apprehensive for Dion, and the dark seemed to stir with fluttering issues. . . . After breakfast he could bear no longer the atmosphere of mystery that he was now hurrying back to. Kasim had no flower behind his ear when he brought in morning tea—a trifle, of course, but he had never appeared before without a flower. Goyle was even more subdued than on the previous day; he looked anxious, showed no pleasure in putting on the gloves, and was obviously immensely glad when the time was up. Costello was away on a fortnight's holiday—one could not imagine how he would spend it!—and the Swiss brothers were to the fore; they, too, looked worried. All the servants did their best to pretend there was nothing wrong. He suspected many comings and goings. As he passed the door that led to Dion's study he heard faint sounds that were unusual. What was it all about? If only he could be of use to Dion in his troubles: once a mouse helped a lion. It was no small matter that created such a disturbance. Had Dion committed some great crime? But that was an absurd and disloyal thought. "I have lost my resilience." In three short days Dion had become quite a different person: his nerves were all to pieces, and he started at the slightest sound. . . . He had not dared to ask for the explanation that last night Dion seemed to promise. Jokingly he had said to Goyle: "What's the matter? Got a pain?" Goyle shook his head mournfully, but did not answer. It was fervently to be hoped that Dion had solved his problem, and when he came downstairs at eleven o'clock he would be once again his sparkling self. . . . Was Dion distracted by financial affairs?—he had not thought of that. It was highly probable, for he did not know the value of money: often he had seen him give a pound note to a beggar. Naturally, therefore, Dion was depressed, and his depression affected the members of his household. . . . Dion had thoroughly spoilt him, treated him roy-

ally. Yes, even in the last three days. Dion had not flagged in providing him with entertainment of the best. The Abbey, the Tower, the National Gallery, the theatres, the Zoo—he had seen everything. The day at the Zoo was a specially happy one. They had given nasturtiums to the sunbirds, and grain to the gorgeous pheasants from China and the East. They had been fascinated by the sorrowful eyes of the giraffe—Mary Magdalene eyes, Dion called them—and the fixed stare of the crocodiles; amused at the comical penguins; had admired, while they deplored, the bright scarlet and azure bottom of the hideous baboon; and fled from the smell of the cat-house. He still thrilled at the memory of a night in Limehouse when, in awful clothes, Dion had taken him into opium dens. A few nights ago he had seen a Zeppelin. He had lunched with a marquis, supped with a socialist, and been present at a committee-meeting where a duke's daughter expressed her opinions in impressionist language. He had met most of the people worth meeting, and a good many notorious individuals who were not. There had been disappointments. The handsome actor seen from the stalls was anything but handsome in his dressing-room. Though he had enjoyed two days at Oxford that city had not come up to expectations: "City of dreaming spires" was a pretty fancy: he could not forget the indescribably dreary approach from the station. . . . Wherever they went Dion towered: without saying a word, he made himself felt: men listened when he spoke. September 1916. He would always remember the month that atoned for all the dreary months since Uncle Anthony's death: when he was old he would be able to boast of having passed a month on end of splendid happiness. Asthma had not interrupted his enjoyment. Dion pronounced him as cured: he was content to take his word for it, and give him the credit of the cure. "Do not concern yourself with the Hows and Whys: is it not enough that you are cured?"—Dion was crisp and to the point when he chose. If it were not for Dion he would not have met Charles Mappin, publisher of *Moonflowers*. Even now he could scarcely believe that *Moonbeams* was to be published in January. Mappin was so matter-of-fact: "I like your book. I will publish it after

the Christmas rush, when it will receive proper attention. You will get some interesting notices, but you will, in all probability, be disappointed with the sales. There are a few minor alterations I should like you to make." Mappin, who was always surrounded by a crowd, seemed the loneliest of men. Dion said he was most lovable, and that if he were unloved it was his own fault. Mappin only cared about the books he published: they were his children. . . . If he had not come to Paradise House years might have passed before he met Lucy. He ought to be sorry; but he was glad. It was just as well Lucy had left London, for if they had met a few more times he must have told her of his love. She always addressed him as "Mr. Trevarthon," not knowing how she wounded. Little did she dream that he was nameless. At first, when he received her letter, he was furious. He cursed her father for being so careless as to break his ribs: with these expert horsemen familiarity with their horses bred contempt. She was never out of his thoughts. He kept away from the walnut-tree side of the garden. The curious thing was that he did not feel despondent: Dion said that it would all come right before long. . . . That day at Trewoof he must have been mad. There was a vast difference between love and lust. Lucy was like a flower . . . or a beautiful fern: there was a cool fragrance about her. . . . The haze was dispersing before the sun. It would be a fine day. When Dion asked him how he would like to spend his last day he had replied: "If it is fine let us spend the day at Kew." They were to start at half-past eleven. At Hammer-smith they would pick up Dick Seymour and Jack Merrilees, two young artists with whom he had become good friends. Dick Seymour was one of Dion's discoveries, and his pictures created a furore when he exhibited them at a one-man show in Bond Street, last June. It would be pleasant to eat lunch under a tree by the lake, at a point where they could see Syon House and its lion. Dick burned to bribe one of the servants to tie a red, white and blue band round the lion's tail: it was such an aggressive tail, he declared. Dion was afraid that poor Dick was consumptive. . . . Kew was delightful with its mixture of the strange and the familiar; one was always making

fresh discoveries. This would be his third visit. The orchids never lost their fascination, nor did the pitcher-plants, the tropical creepers—Dion had most of them in the Court—the lavender-blue water-lilies from Australia, and the *Victoria Regia*, whose leaves were like overturned umbrellas of some Eastern potentate. He loved the strange ducks that looked as if they were painted, the frisking squirrels, the great Scots pines with their reddish-brown trunks, the varied foliage, the crane that pecked a path through the crowd, the crimson-crested bird that one met daintily picking his way among the wild flowers. In *The Green Door* he made his hero approach the scarlet Chinese pagoda by the avenue of Irish yews: it was a happy idea to have placed the scene of Chapter I in Kew Gardens. . . . At Kew one might listen to voices so distant that words could not be heard. Dick Seymour had made a clever sketch of the broad grass walk near the lake: a woman's bright red frock seen on the horizon stained the blue-green atmosphere. They were to take tea on the Terrace at Richmond, with an unlimited supply of those rarefied cheese-cakes, Maids of Honour.

A bugle sounded from Battersea Park as Robin emerged from the tunnel at the end of Albert Bridge. He leant against the parapet of the Embankment and gazed across the river.

Troops were being drilled on every open space. War, war, war. One was reminded of it at every turn. Dion had shown him, again and again, that Truth can only be reached through the comprehension of opposites. He was able to view the war now with the eyes of an unprejudiced neutral. It was the most gigantic bit of folly the world had ever known—there was no more to say. If only men were not petty, and could see things in the big way! If only every single soldier would throw down his arms and refuse to fight! But every single soldier would not; and if a single one did, he would be court-martialled and shot. For how long would the world see red? . . . The sun was quite hot. It would be glorious at Kew. Autumn was written in yellow Chinese characters on the Battersea chestnuts. It must have been a dreary prospect before the Park was made, when there was nothing but

marsh and a few straggling poplars. Somewhere on the shore over there, Colonel Blood hid in the rushes hoping he might shoot Charles II as he bathed. Autumn was a sad time. Why could it not be always June? Dion would not have it that Autumn was sad: "Youth, even as spring, is in a mighty hurry to be doing; and the perfection, the thing done, is already dead and dry. Youth looks but a little way ahead: it is an eternity from now until next spring. Middle-age knows how quickly the months will pass; knows, too, being harvest-ripe itself, that in the stillness of completion lies the promise of the new life that is to come. To me autumn is glorious, brilliant, defiant, but not melancholy." Something like that he had said last night: it was the only time he roused himself. Dion was right. However much you might dislike or disapprove of some of the things he said, one was obliged to admit their truth. Dion himself was brilliant and defiant, but he was tender as well. One could not be an artist if one possessed no tenderness. Who was more tender than Christ, the Master Artist! . . .

As he turned into Paradise Place, the fallen leaves, red and yellow, brown and golden, whirled about him in a sudden gust. The sweet, pungent scent of leaf-bonfires was on the air. At No. 5, blue smoke was filtering through the lilacs in thin wisps, and he caught a glimpse of a gardener busy among drifts of leaves that were coloured like sunsets. "*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness! . . . Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?*" His footsteps lagged as he neared the green door. It was ten to eleven. Would Dion be downstairs? and would his black mood have passed?

The gay sunflowers and hollyhocks had made way for Michaelmas-daisies and golden-rod, but, here and there, a clump of tight little pompon-dahlias of scarlet, orange, and fiery-red struck notes of defiant colour in the borders. The air was no longer bee-loud. Bare of fruit was the apple-tree and almost denuded of leaves. There were a few wan roses under Robin's window.

Pepys came down the path in that shy way of his. Robin, stooping to pat him, was startled by the sudden noise of a

casement being flung wide-open. He knew without looking up that it was the window of the Corot room underneath his bedroom. Kasim was the only one of the servants who would dare to open a window so carelessly; but Kasim had a velvet touch. Visitors were shown into the Corot room when they called before eleven o'clock, and elected to wait until Dion was disengaged. It must be Dick Seymour: he *would* come all the way to Chelsea, when it had been arranged that he and Merrilees were to be picked up at Hammersmith bridge, a distance of a couple of hundred yards from the studio they shared.

He stood up, and saw Lord Myall. But, having flung open the window, why had he not shouted "Robin" at the top of his voice?

"Cousin Godfrey! What brings you here?"

"Well, are you pleased to see me? Will you come in, or shall I come out?—I'll come out. This room gets on my nerves."

"Aunt Cynthia is quite well? There is nothing wrong at home? I shall never forgive myself if—"

"Oh, Cynthia's all right."

"What's the matter with the room? It is most chastely furnished. All those pictures are Corots."

Lord Myall stepped back a pace, and surveyed the walls.

"*Corots* are they. Half-baked looking things," he said scornfully.

"Oh, they're exquisite."

"Valuable?"

"Oh, rather."

"Are they his own?—Aylmer's?"

"Of course."

"There's an air of opulence about the place. Strange—But let's get out."

"You know I am going back tomorrow?" Robin asked, when Lord Myall joined him under the mulberry.

"Yes. I looked in on Cynthia yesterday morning on my way to the station, and she told me you were returning on Saturday."

"I can see by your face there is something the matter. What is it? You haven't come all this way—"

"I came because I—I came on impulse. The fancy took me. You're looking jolly well, and are half as big again as when you left Henliston. How've you managed it?"

"Yes, I'm top-hole, thanks to Dion—and Goyle. I'll be happy to give you ten minutes with the gloves when I return. Didn't know I'd become a pugilist, did you? Dion is the most wonderful man. I really believe he has cured me of asthma."

"You told us very little in your scrappy letters. This chap, Dion Aylmer, seems an odd sort of cuss. When you wrote that you were staying with a man whose acquaintance you made in a railway-carriage, Cynthia wanted me to fetch you away post-haste. It *was* taking a bit of a risk, you know."

"Dion's tailor is Raleigh, and his shoemaker is Napp," said Robin, with a smile. "Aunt Cynthia wrote me screeds in her pinched Spencerian hand during the first week of my stay. But I told her Dion was not a cannibal, and that I was extremely comfortable at Paradise House, where I intended to remain until the end of the month. Lately, her letters have been as short as mine to her. You have no idea how difficult it has been to find time for letter-writing. It seemed so quaint at first to receive a letter from Aunt Cynthia. Do you know 'House of the Seven Poplars' is on the note-paper? She crosses out the first four words. House of the Seven Poplars is so—you know what I mean. For ages I have wanted to have a new die made, but she won't hear of it. 'It was a whim of my brother's,' she says tenderly. Uncle Anthony had very sensible garden 'whims,' but *they* have not been respected. . . . There is an odd restraint about her last two letters. She does not refer to Mrs. Rendall, so I fear sales have been bad."

"Your aunt has given up flower-selling. She came to the conclusion that you were right, that it was a little undignified. Ah, Robin, when you return you will find a change has come

over the spirit of the scene. Your aunt talks of making a trip to London when you've returned."

"Whatever for?"

"To do a little shopping! She's getting giddy in her old age. But about this fellow, Aylmer. I can't find fault with his taste when he goes to my own tailor and shoemaker. He has treated you well?"

"I've had the time of my life! I've met Charles Mappin, and Creighton, and—I've heaps to tell you."

"Ha. Where's Aylmer?"

"Writing in his study: he writes until eleven every morning. I told you he is an author. He will be down in a minute or two. I know he'll be awfully pleased to see you."

"Think so? What sort of accent has that fellow who let me in? Uncommonly like German. There was a boy at school who—"

"Swiss. He's a German-Swiss. One can't get a Swiss-Swiss, you know."

"What's he want a Swiss-anything for? What's the matter with an Englishman?"

"Does it matter so long as he is a good servant? He is that—and so is his brother. Has Aunt Cynthia missed me? I hope she won't welcome me with a scolding because I've been staying with Dion. I'm longing to see Lena again. Dion seems to have picked up his servants in the course of his travels. You need not look like that, Cousin Godfrey. Dion is not a German spy. He is a genuine cosmopolitan, very annoyed that so many of his friends—English, German, French, Austrian, Russian—are swallowed up by the war that he abominates. He has friends in every capital of Europe. People matter more than places. His only reason for making his home in England is that he speaks English better than he speaks any other language; 'it is tiresome to be at a loss for a word'—Has Aunt Cynthia missed me?"

"Now would she be likely to say so? As a matter of fact, she has missed you, and will be thankful to have you back safe and sound; though she's very nervous."

"*Nervous.* Aunt Cynthia! Pray what about?"

"Well, she wants to get married to Jack Penrose, *if you give your consent!* She hasn't let on, of course, but I've put two and two together. I've lunched with her every Saturday, as usual. She talked about you, mostly. There's sugar in the vinegar these days. You won't know her."

"I'm not surprised. I thought there was something brewing before I left."

"Rum go, ain't it? Jack hankered after her years ago. He ought to know better at his age. He ought to marry some fresh young thing. Queer taste! It's beyond my understanding."

"I don't believe you came to London just to tell me Aunt Cynthia is going to marry Colonel Penrose. There *is* something you're keeping back. Out with it!"

"You're very quick, Robin. Yes, I've got some news, bad news, that I'm afraid you'll take hardly. Cynthia only heard it on Thursday evening from Treza. She knew it would upset you, so she didn't— Let's pace up and down."

"Peter? Peter's not wounded?"

"No—he's not wounded."

"Cousin Godfrey, he's not—?"

Lord Myall nodded.

"There may be a mistake."

"No. Letter from his pal to Mrs. Jago. . . . The poor lad was blown to bits."

"My letter—upstairs—unfinished," Robin whispered. "So you came to tell me. It was kind of you to—"

"No—I didn't. I only heard about it from Cynthia when I called to say I was off to London, and wouldn't be able to lunch with her next Saturday."

"I see. You came just—just for a trip."

"I had to get it over, Robin. Once I had made up my mind I was too impatient to wait, even another two days. Besides, it isn't easy to get hold of you at the Poplars with Cynthia nosing about."

"I don't understand," said Robin wearily. "But it does not matter."

"*But it does matter.* I ought to have told you first. Now

your head will be full of other things, and you won't take in what I say."

"I wonder why I'm not overcome with grief? Perhaps, subconsciously, I have been expecting to hear of Peter's death. I don't know. But I do know that he was waiting, hoping for the letter that I put off writing until too late. This month in London has altered me tremendously. Doubts have crossed my mind that Peter would not completely satisfy me when we met again. . . . The past I regard as a long, uneventful dream. *You* don't seem quite real, Cousin Godfrey: you come from the past. Aunt Cynthia, Peter, Bob Mabott—I don't think he'll be blown to bits!—the Penroses, all the people I knew a month ago have become dream-folk. All except Lena, who's as vivid as if I had parted from her a few moments ago. One would have thought Aunt Cynthia would be vivid, too; but she's not. . . . Put a young plant in a forcing-house for a month under the care of a cunning gardener. You must see the change in me. I cannot explain what has happened, because I don't know. I see things as Dion sees them. He is awfully critical, you know. Dion's brain rules his heart, Creighton says Dion has no heart. That's absurd, of course. If I lived with him long enough I—I am not master of my feelings like Dion, or I could not care for a girl more than anyone or anything in life."

"*A girl?* What sort of girl?"

"I thought *that* would surprise you! The situation is an impossible one And yet you might easily— Have you seen Mr. Penhalligan lately? How long is Lucy staying with him?"

"*You're not struck on Lucy?* You young devil! Of course, I understand. Paradise Place. Same street. She—"

"Her aunt lives next door."

"I've been to see Penhalligan almost every day since his accident. Most times I've talked to Lucy. It's very odd that she never mentioned your name!"

"There's nothing to look so cheerful about. I'm miserable about it. I have to keep on reminding myself that Dion said it will all come right."

"What the hell does *he* know about it?"

"Don't be cross. . . . You had some other news for me? I will try to give you my best attention. Are you going to get married, too?"

"Have you told him"—with a wave of his hand towards the house—"how you came to the Poplars?"

"That's what I've been wanting to know all my life."

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

"I told him the little I have to tell. Why shouldn't I? Dion is my friend."

"I *knew it!* Did he cross-question you much?"

"I forget. I don't think so. He was interested. Cousin Godfrey, what *are* you driving at?"

"Your *friend*, as you call him, has been trying to blackmail me to the tune of five thousand pounds," rapped out Lord Myall.

"That is sheer nonsense. I don't follow you at all. What has my coming to the Poplars to do with it? Dion, a black-mailer! Really, Cousin Godfrey, you—"

"Supposing," began Lord Myall timidly, "I happen to have known your mother. Supposing your friend, Dion, knows that I knew her, and—"

"Are you trying to tell me that my mother was one of the many women you have betrayed?" asked Robin quietly. "I always thought I was illegitimate," he added bitterly.

"Robin! Your mother was my wife."

"You, my father! . . . My mother's parents forced you to marry her?"

"Her mother was dead; but her father did his level best to prevent my marrying her."

"You can't—you don't mean that I am—?"

"God! what an opinion you have of me. I deserve it. Rest easy. You were born a year after the marriage."

"Then why in the name of fortune—? You are telling the truth, Cousin Godfrey?"

"Yes, I'm telling the truth. You'd better let me get it off my chest. I'll tell you the story from start to finish."

"She was the daughter of some farm-labourer, I suppose, and you are ashamed of her."

"You've got it wrong. I loved your mother—I love her still; and always shall. Women come and go. It's the woman who matters."

"I'm sorry."

"Twenty-two years ago I happened to be riding in the Falmouth district on a scorching summer's afternoon. I passed a cottage garden where a girl in a sun-bonnet was picking beans. On hearing horses' hoofs she looked round, and I thought what a pretty face and neat figure she had. In those days I was a hot young devil, and always on the lookout for a petticoat. I pulled up, and asked her if she could oblige me with a drink of water—I'd just had beer at the inn, but that was the first excuse for stopping that occurred to me. 'Certainly,' she said, and to my great surprise I discovered that she was a lady. As she held up the glass her bonnet slipped back, and I was so struck of a heap that I upset most of the water over me. She wasn't merely a pretty girl as I had thought, but a stunning beauty: a magnificent young gipsy with great eyes, dark as night, that searched your very soul. In her black bodice she'd pinned a red bean-flower, and it looked just right there. There was breeding in every line of her. She'd the smallest feet and hands I've ever seen. . . . She filled the glass again. Though I longed to stay and talk to her, I gulped down the water, and rode away with my heart beating like blazes against my ribs. Remembering the Grevilles' place was only a mile away, I set off at a gallop. After tea I took Sidney Greville aside, and questioned him. He knew all about Maria—that was your mother's name. Her father, Henry Marlow, was the only son of a Berkshire squire. After a brilliant career at Oxford, he was reading for the bar when his father died, and he decided that politics, after all, was his vocation—he was chopping and changing all his life. He contested his father's seat in the Tory interest; and won. For about three months he was very keen; made some dazzling speeches, and the eyes of the House were on him. However, politics was much too slow a game. He got mixed

up in a wild-cat scheme—a diamond-mine that didn't exist—and dropped several thousands. Tried to get it back by gambling on the Stock Exchange. Before he was thirty-five he ran through three fortunes. Henry was a fool, but a brilliant one. With the usual half-crown and a penknife he landed in Australia. In less than five years he returned a comparatively wealthy man. He bought back the family place in Berks—for double its value—and went in for breeding race-horses. Of course, being Henry, he came a cropper. He had made friends with a Spaniard, Don Something-or-other, who took him to Spain, and gave him a job on his estate near Seville. Henry turned Catholic. The Don was killed in a duel or a quarrel, no one knows which, and Henry married the sister. Maria was born. Henry, having played ducks and drakes with his wife's fortune, sighed for England. His wife refused to leave Spain. Henry left her there; and bolted with the baby. I believe he always cared for Maria in his queer way. He deposited the baby with an aunt of his who lived at Chester. Henry appeared from time to time, bringing lavish presents for his daughter; he never stayed more than twenty-four hours, and returned to God knows where. Maria was five when her aunt received a letter from Henry saying that he was returning to Australia. Years passed, and they thought he must be dead; for he never wrote. And then, a year before I met Maria, a letter dictated by Henry from an address in London arrived in Chester to say he was dying. The old lady was too infirm to accompany her, so Maria set off on her own. She found her father, very ill with pneumonia, at some cheap lodgings off Holborn. However, he got better. The doctor declared that his patient had wrecked a magnificent constitution, and that if he wished to prolong what, in any case, would be a short life he must live in the South of France. Henry's income was rather less than a hundred: Cornwall was the alternative. Maria could not decide whether her duty lay towards her father or her aunt; but the old lady conveniently solved the difficulty by dying. Out of a small annuity she had managed to save a little sum for Maria, which would bring in less than fifty pounds a

year. . . . When I first set eyes on your mother she was twenty years of age. She seldom stirred outside her garden. Soon after they had settled into their cottage, the old man—not so old for that matter, only sixty—had a stroke, and, when he got better, couldn't move without assistance. . . . I stayed a week at Poltair with the Grevilles: my father wouldn't have said, 'Stay by all means: a week among civilised people will be extremely beneficial,' had he known the true purpose of my visit! When I first asked Maria to marry me, she refused: she admitted she cared for me; but she would not leave her father. Henry objected to me strongly: we were antipathic—antipathetic. But I think he would have objected to any man who came after his daughter. He was selfishly jealous of every moment she spent away from him. He was always peevish—but then the poor devil was ill. My own father was just as difficult: 'marrying out of the county'—'a Myall does not look for a wife in a cottage'—all the rest of it. I was supposed to help Pennington run the estate, and do all the things my father shirked. I only had my allowance. If I married without his consent, he said he would cut off every penny—he meant it, too, miserable old stick. Well, between her father and mine, I had a hell of a time. Maria would only see me once a week, as my visits—she wouldn't meet me on the sly—worked old Henry up to such a pitch that she feared he might have another stroke. He did—and recovered. After that Maria refused to see me at all. Bless her! what a will she had. Months passed like years. I was thinking of doing something desperate when Henry had another stroke, and died. Though Maria was free, it was an awful job to get her to marry me. Talk of Myall pride, it was nothing to hers! She insisted that my father must receive and treat her befittingly—which was out of the question. I pegged away; and at last she gave in. We were married one morning at Plymouth by the registrar, and in the evening I was back at Myall; for I didn't dare stay away for longer than a day. The old man came to my room every night or early morning to make sure I was sleeping at home. That ring you are wearing was your mother's engagement

ring: malachite was her favourite stone—so she declared; but I suspect she was thinking of my pocket. . . . She stayed on at the cottage, and I rode over whenever I could get away. My acting must be pretty good, for my father never found out. I led him to believe that I had put Maria out of my thoughts, and that I was leading my old life of gallivanting after the girls. . . . Your mother and I were very happy in spite of our troubles. You were born in just under a year, and your mother, who never had a day's illness in her life, was getting along splendidly. God knows what exactly happened. I took a place for her near Plymouth as soon as her state was likely to be noticed by the villagers. The Grevilles, who knew the story, were very good to her. If my visits to her had been noticed, and, though I was careful, no doubt they were, the villagers were vastly respectful to a friend of Mrs. Greville's. Mr. and Mrs. Greville have been dead now several years; Jane married, and went to live in Italy, and Sidney is in the Indian army. Jane, Sidney, and Penhalligan—I vowed them all to secrecy."

"Mr. Penhalligan knows?"

"Yes."

"Does Lucy?"

"Certainly not. But, let me see; where was I?"

"My mother was—"

"Oh, yes. She had a good doctor, and an excellent nurse, but something went wrong. When I went to see her for the second time after you were born, a fortnight afterwards, the nurse was afraid she'd caught a chill. I stayed in Plymouth for the night, as I could see the doctor was nervous about her. Complications. She died the next day. There was I with a baby on my hands. What was I to do? You have to bear in mind that I was an impulsive young fool. I had always had the greatest affection and respect for Anthony Trevarthon. Many's the time it was on the tip of my tongue to confide in him. If I hadn't been afraid of Cynthia finding me out, I should have done so. Cynthia always hated me; nothing would have pleased her better than to make mischief between my father and me. Now I knew exactly the sort

of chap I was. I didn't want my son to be like me. I didn't want him to know what I was like, and he must have if he lived with me. Mind you, Robin, I worshipped your mother, and was true to her from the day she handed me that glass of water to the day she died. Without her, I knew I should fall into the old ways. Hot blood must boil over, or God only knows what would happen. . . . I suppose it was about the maddest thing I've done. It was taking an awful risk. If Anthony, a week or two before, hadn't been talking to me about the joys of having children about, I should never have done it. The last time I prayed was when I set you down on the doorstep of the Poplars—God! how I prayed! . . . Robin, don't look at me like that. After all, you have had as happy a life at the Poplars as you would at Myall—while Anthony lived, anyway. Forgive me, boy, if you can. I swear I did it for the best."

"Don't look so distressed. There is nothing to forgive—nothing. You honestly believed you were acting for the best. But why have you kept silent all these years?"

"My father, as you know, had the temper of a fiend. It was several days after your mother died before I returned to Myall. There was the devil to pay! My father alternately swore and quoted passages from the Bible. Beside myself with grief, I didn't care what might happen. I told him I had been away to bury my wife, and not misbehaving myself, as he imagined. Already he was angry, but when I told him that he flew into a violent rage. He'd had a weak heart for years, and that scene did the trick. Two days after I took you to the Poplars he died. If he had died two days earlier, I should have published my marriage and brought you to Myall. It seemed to me that in taking you to the Poplars I had burnt my boats. Penhalligan cursed me up hill and down dale when I told him what I had done. . . . I never dreamt that Cynthia would be the one to welcome you. I thought Anthony would insist on adopting you. Already Mrs. Jago had charge of you, and Anthony and Cynthia were full of plans for your future. Dear old Anthony, he was so lonely—didn't even keep a dog! I did him—and Cynthia, too—a

good turn by bringing you. I thought I would wait and see how things shaped. Time went on, and I found it increasingly difficult to own up. While Anthony was alive it would have been cruel: you were a son to him. He really came to forget that he wasn't your father. It seemed wiser to keep silence. Besides, I dreaded what Cynthia might say and do. I dreaded being a laughing-stock. And then, when Anthony died, I did not know how you would take it. . . . You must admit that you have not suffered in any way from my foolish conduct."

"It did not occur to you that during all these years I have regarded myself as the son of some loose woman?"

"Good God! I never thought of that. You never told me so. Perhaps I ought to have guessed. . . . I have never quite understood your way of looking at things."

"Well, I am glad I am who I am."

"You mean that you're glad you're my son? or do you mean that you're glad your birth-certificate is open to inspection?"

"Do you possess a picture of my mother?"

"Only a photograph. It looks very old-fashioned, and doesn't do her justice."

"I must see it."

"It is yours. . . . Do you mind very much?"

"What? Oh, you mean—?"

"Are you sorry that I am your father?"

"Of course not, Cousin Godfrey. I've always been fond of you."

"*Cousin Godfrey.* Couldn't you call me Godfrey without the 'Cousin'?"

"If you wish it. Now I do not know why you suddenly decided to tell me all this?"

"Penhalligan's always on at me, but I've always answered that the time is not ripe. My confession was to be one of your wedding-presents. Tyacke gave me a fright the other day when we were talking about you: he said that sometimes your expression sends him searching his memory. I happen to know that his father was called in for a consultation during Henry's last illness, and that Tyacke, then a keen young medi-

cal student, accompanied him—and raved to me about Maria's beauty a few days after. I've felt nervous since Tyacke said that. But it was the anonymous letter I received last Monday morning that clinched matters. It was short, and to the point—here it is, type-written, you see."

Robin read:

"You doubtless have excellent reasons for not acknowledging your son, who is known as Robin Trevarthon. The facts of the case are known to the writer. The sum of five thousand pounds will prevent disclosure. On the night of Tuesday, 26th inst., a trusted messenger will receive the sum (£3,000 in £5 Bank of England notes, and the balance in £1 Treasury notes) from you personally. At 11 p.m. he will await you under the Myall oak. You must come unaccompanied. Do not attempt to capture or trick the messenger."

"It gave me a shock, I can tell you," Lord Myall resumed. "I decided to keep the appointment—if only to find out who was the sender. The postmark on the envelope I couldn't make out—not that that would have been anything to go by. I was the first to arrive—so I thought, until a man sprang down from a branch. We rolled over. He was the first on his feet. When I stood up I found myself looking at the barrel of a revolver. 'I trust the notes are in that bag, Lord Myall?' the fellow said politely. I said: 'Yes,' though, of course, the bag was full of waste-paper. I stooped, as if to pick it up. He was thrown off his guard, and I tackled him low. I managed to wrench away his gun. He was slippery as an eel. I couldn't get a hold on him. He glided away like a snake. It was hopeless to follow among the undergrowth. I fired several shots after him, but I'm afraid I missed."

"Did you see his face?"

"I only saw his eyes through a black cloth. He was a tall chap of, I should say, about thirty. My impression is that he was wearing a well-made suit of good navy or black serge. He spoke like a gentleman. . . . The more I considered the matter, the more I felt convinced that this scoundrel, Dion Aylmer, was at the bottom of it. You don't—"

"Dion's not a scoundrel."

"You don't meet a young man in a train and take him to stay with you for a month—Cynthia was right. He had a very good reason for—"

"Of course he had. I told you that he is writing a novel, and that I—"

"That's all tosh! Well, I remembered that you'd met Creighton here. I thought that I'd have a talk with him; and the next morning I called. He was in his garden with several people who are staying with him, including Lord Witherstone. He was most friendly. I told him I'd heard from you, and all that, and asked a few leading questions concerning Aylmer. He said he was here the previous Saturday, and gave Aylmer an A-1 character; everything he said seemed straight and above-board. Creighton's quite a good chap. Though he is a painter, he is received at decent houses, and he seems to know what's what. Presently I went indoors for a drink. As we entered the hall, the butler, who was coming along the passage, saw me, stopped dead, scratched his head as if he'd forgotten something, and turned back. The butler was a tall man, Robin, and, though I didn't see his eyes properly, I felt certain that he was the man I'd met under the oak the night before. I said jokingly to Creighton that his butler would look well in the Guards. And then to my surprise I learnt the butler was Aylmer's own man! a Spaniard. Creighton was short-staffed, and Aylmer had lent him for a fortnight. I didn't stay long after that bit of news. Aylmer is the fellow I've got to deal with—not his servant."

"*Costello!* But it's impossible. I can't—I won't believe it, I'm going to ask Dion!"

CHAPTER IX

ROBIN dashed into the house and up the staircase. For a few seconds he stood hesitating before the door that led to Dion's apartments, his fingers fidgetting with a fold of the damask curtain. But this was no time for

ceremony. He found himself in a long corridor. On the left were several doors; and on the right he looked through a Moorish window on the glass dome of the Court of the Sun-birds. The length of the corridor surprised him, until he remembered that parallel with Paradise Place was a slum, Brook Street, in which Dion owned two houses backing on Paradise House. He had thrown the Brook Street houses into one, and connected it by this corridor. The Court occupied the ground between. In the Brook Street house were the servants' quarters. "It is most convenient. The noisy comings and goings of the butcher, the baker, and the candle-stick-maker do not intrude, as in the other houses in Paradise Place," Dion had pointed out. Early in the month he promised to show Robin over his own and the servants' quarters; but whenever Robin reminded him he found a reason for postponement: when it was clear that Dion regretted the promise, Robin pretended to forget that it had been made.

Outside the first door Robin listened, but heard no sound within. The second door was ajar, and he heard Dion speaking in low tones. With a light rap, he entered.

It was a square room with terra-cotta distempered walls on which hung a few old prints in black frames. On the floor was a finely-woven cocoanut matting. A large bookcase with a full complement of books occupied one wall. There were two cabinets, not unlike the ones he had noticed in Messrs. Parker's office when he went for Aunt Cynthia to pay the fire insurance; a small safe, a type-writer on a small table, and a table-desk. He had pictured Dion's study as something quite different. The room could not be anything else, because Dion said he had a fine old print of Charles II in his study: and there it hung above the mantelpiece.

Dion, clad in a gold silk robe that, doubtless was his idea of the perfect dressing-gown, was sitting near the desk. Goyle, his face buried in his hands, was crouching before him.

As Robin entered, Dion made a slight gesture as if to say: "Wait there. I'll attend to you presently," but did not pause in what he was saying to Goyle:

"It was bound to come, my friend, as I have often told you.

Really, you must not give way like this. Be brave and of good courage. Now you know what I require of you. I leave Kasim in your charge. Make him unlearn those things that he ought not to have learnt, in as far as is possible. Do with him as I have suggested. . . . There is no more to say. We understand each other without words. Costello has received my warning, and will act accordingly. The others scatter themselves."

"But you, master! What is to become of you? Why will you not escape while there is time? Meyer will shelter you—and there are others. Let me—"

"Don't worry on my account. I shall be quite safe. Do as I bid you. I have already spoken to Kasim. I don't think you will find him troublesome."

Dion stood up.

"But, master—" Goyle began piteously, and then broke into a terrible sobbing.

"The time has come when we must part. Au revoir, my faithful friend. We shall meet again—I promise you that."

Goyle murmured something that was unintelligible, and shuffled to his feet as one who is blind.

"You are not going to disobey after all these years," Dion said confidently, releasing the hands that he had grasped.

Goyle moved away a pace, though he kept his eyes on his master's face. He lingered, waiting for a last word; but Dion was studying the features of Charles II, and appeared to have forgotten him. Goyle drew himself up, and walked slowly towards the door. It was then that he saw Robin, and gave a violent start. Words hovered about his lips, but he did not utter them. Shaking his head dismally, he left the room.

"The good Charles was an 'unconscionable time a-dying.' It was an inartistic end for an artist. Death should be a short affair," Dion said, turning smilingly to Robin.

"I didn't come here to hear about Charles the Second!" Robin burst out.

"Of course not. . . . Goyle was a little upset. He doesn't like change. I am sorry you happened to be a witness to his lapse. If you hadn't come, I should have sent to ask you to

join me in the Court below, where I have an urgent appointment with myself. Will you accompany me?"

"Don't joke! I'm deadly serious. I want to know—"

"So you shall. La, la, la. Come along. If we go down the front stairs we may run into Lord Myall, and that would spoil things."

They went along the corridor, descended a twisting staircase in the servants' quarters, and presently arrived at a door.

"This is—used to be—Kasim's private entrance. That case by the wall contains honey. How would you like to be a sunbird and sip honey all day long?" asked Dion, with his hand on the door-handle.

If Dion were guilty, he knew he would try and find excuses for him. When one was with Dion one forgot everything but his charm. Dion's black mood had passed: that was the important thing.

A sunbird glittered through the air, and disappeared amid the greenery. Most of the creepers had finished flowering, and the last hibiscus-buds were opening. There was only the scent of freshly-watered earth. Even in the Court of the Sunbirds it was autumn.

The faun gleamed in the sunlight, and the fountain was in full play. Yellowing leaves of water-lilies rocked gently on the water. The space about the fountain was strewn with yellow roses. There was only one divan. Over its cushions had been thrown a covering of purple silk bordered with a heavy gold fringe.

"The scene is set. . . . Sad the francisceas are over. I'm afraid they have taken away the other divans, but there is room for us both on the one that remains."

"I'll sit on the fountain's rim," said Robin, picking his way among the roses.

Dion sank down on the cushions. Robin thought he looked paler than usual, but that might be in contrast with the single scarlet flower just above his head.

"And so you are angry with me?"

"Dion, you didn't send that letter to Cousin Godfrey?"

Costello must have overheard me talking to you, and his cunning brain helped him to—”

“Lord Myall is very fond of his money,” said Dion meditatively. “Do not blame Costello, who only obeyed my instructions. Robin, because I am very fond of you, I have never found it harder to speak the truth.”

“Dion! How could you?”

“I am going to tell you a story, a rather amazing one it will seem to you. To me it seems ordinary enough, but then it is *my* story. I beg you to listen. You are one of the few who understand, and, therefore, you will pardon.”

Dion reached out his hand and picked up the smallest decanter Robin had ever seen. It was of exquisitely-cut glass, oval-shaped, with a long thin neck. He took out the little stopper and emptied the contents into a spiral-stemmed glass that might have belonged to the King of the Fairies. The liquid was colourless. Robin imagined it was some sort of liqueur. For the first time he noticed that Dion was not wearing gloves; his hands looked absurdly white for a man’s.

“There is only one glass,” Dion observed, as he put back the decanter on the table, “but if there were I should ask you to fill it at the fountain. . . . Life has been very hot; and it has made me thirsty.”

Robin sighed with relief when Dion, without sipping its contents, set the fragile glass safely beside the decanter.

“What is it?”

“I don’t quite know; but it’s not gin—I must hurry, for there’s little time.” In the train, you may remember, I told you that I left home when I was sixteen: my father disowned me because I had been expelled from my public school—he was an un-Christian clergyman. I was always short of money, and a certain boy who was too opulent was careless with his keys. Two golden sovereigns! I considered my conduct; and was forced to admit that I had been guilty of a petty theft. In the future, I determined, I would not be a petty thief, but a robber on a grand scale. No one cared about me, and I was homeless. Having made up my mind, I put my hand to the plough; and I did not look back. Never in my life,

Robin, have I robbed a poor man or a poor woman. I have been a Robin Hood, taking only from the rich. I have never given to a charity; but I have helped the poor. On the first three years of my—my apprenticeship I prefer not to dwell. Today I may boast that I am one of the cleverest robbers in Europe. Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Petersburg—I have made myself feared by the wealthy in many cities. Unsuspecting, they have asked me to their houses, and told me of their fears. It was hard, sometimes, not to laugh. Always—since those first three years—I have lived befittingly. But I have never had money enough. I developed, rather than curbed, my extravagant tastes. Why not? I have not robbed for the sake of robbing, but to pay the most pressing of my creditors. Since I settled in Chelsea my robberies, perforce, have been more frequent, more daring, and for bigger stakes. You know how I live. If I want a thing I have it, without thinking of the price. Your grand robber is least likely to be detected against a luxurious background. The clear, clean touch, imagination in directed play—I have known exhilarating moments. . . . Scotland Yard, by the purest accident, discovered that four seats in the stalls, purchased by Lady Edwina Rockingham for the first night of *Yang Yen Yu*, after passing through many hands, came into Costello's. I heard that over the 'phone this morning: I have a friend at the Yard who—"

"Do you mean that Costello stole the Dippenham sapphires?"

"Certainly not. He has never developed his sense of touch. Why do you think I always wear gloves?"

"You stole them?"

"I removed the sapphires from the fat neck of Lady Dippy. You don't seem to quite understand. A thief is one who steals the slender purse of some person in an omnibus. I never ride in omnibuses, nor do I steal. I *rob*."

Not far away, a tired hand began to play the Intermezzo from "*Cavalleria Rusticana*."

"Sugary but plaintive, don't you think? It drowns the fountain's music."

"Dion, don't you realise that the police may be here at any moment?"

"Not for at least half an hour, I am reliably informed. But what you want to know is how I could be so mean as to attempt to mulct Lord Myall of five thousand pounds—a very reasonable amount, I consider. A week ago I found that it was absolutely imperative that I should have a fairly-large amount of ready cash at my disposal. I don't know how the idea of Lord Myall's riches occurred to me: it was an inspiration. From what you had told me I felt certain that he was your father. It is astonishing that you, who are so quick-brained, never suspected. It is so obvious. But you have a curiously-unsuspicious mind. As he is so fond of you, I imagined he would gladly pay any amount if he might prevent your knowing that you are his natural son; but it appears that he most loves his money-bags."

"I am not his natural son: he married my mother."

"Married your mother! Then why all this foolery? But no matter. I am glad, Robin, very glad. You have nothing to reproach me with. Even had your father given to Costello the sum I asked—and you must admit he could easily have spared it—I should not have let him off: I was determined, believing that you were his illegitimate son, that he should settle a handsome sum on you. Thanks to me, you have found a father. I have cured you of asthma. You paid my fee in advance, you remember, with a Cornish penny. Tell Lord Myall you received good value for it. You will be wrong if, on thinking the matter over when you return, you attribute your improved state of health to the Chelsea air and Goyle's administrations."

"I am grateful to you, Dion. I cannot say how grateful. You have given me a glorious time. Thanks to you, *Moonbeams* will be published, and—"

"It may seem I have done a lot for you; but you have done far more for me. I have to thank you for the happiest month of my life. You are a young man who understands his soul—who has a soul to understand. Suffering has matured you. . . . I am deeply grieved about last Saturday. I thought if you

vindicated your manhood you would gain strength and courage. The faun in you is in subjection. It makes me ashamed when I think of that night. I wonder how it would have been if you were not oceans deep in love with that sweet girl who lived next door?—I told you it would all come right. For you, it must be a woman, not women. Marry while you are young. I have never given that advice to a young man before. If a tarnishing breath swept over your mind's mirror, it vanished too quickly to leave a film. Yes, I almost splashed with mud the white rose of an ideal. For the average man, there is nothing like a little time-honoured bestiality for restoring the circulation, keeping one sane. There are things that no one tells. Forget that night—the little you saw and heard before you left us. . . . Damn that instrument! I wish it would stop. It is the one that always comes on Friday mornings. . . . A robber is as honest a man as a Chancellor of the Exchequer. . . . I could easily get away, Robin. But that means, at the best, beginning all over again. I can't do it, boy. For too long I have lived soft; I can't take up the hard life again. . . . I am sorry we shall not spend the day at Kew—I've sent a wire to those dear fellows. Will you, for the sake of the happy times we have spent together, do me a great favour? *Je n'ai pas mis tout mon génie dans ma vie*: I have written *Moonflowers*. My novel is of finer stuff, but alas! it is not finished. This morning I sent it off with copious notes on the chapters which have yet to be written. You will find it at the Poplars on your return. When you have written your third novel, I want you to finish mine. Only you can do it. Somehow or other I believe I have captured what you captured in *Moonbeams*. 'By Robin Trevarthon and Another.' Distribute half the royalties you receive among poor people—deserving poor."

"If you really think I can—? . . . I ought to despise you; but I can't. You are so different to other men. Ordinary laws don't seem to apply. I *must* help you to escape. Only say the word, and I'll make Cousin Godfrey hide you at Myall?"

Having gone through its repertoire, the street-organ had

been wheeled farther away. Once more it was playing the "Intermezzo"—this time, at a furious pace.

"You are very generous, Robin. Thank you, I have made my plans."

Dion picked up the glass, drained its contents, and flung the dainty thing against the fountain's rim. It broke in a hundred tiny fragments.

"Now what made me do that? I should have given it to you as a souvenir. . . . No, not in the least like gin: *quite* flavourless."

"What was it? *You haven't taken poison?*"

"Life is a tedious preparation for something we call death. I am afire with curiosity—watching myself, so to say. Robin, stay with me for a little while, and when—and then run upstairs, pack your bag, collect Lord Myall, and leave the house. Would you mind shaking hands very much?"

Robin flung himself down by the side of the divan.

"Dion, dear Dion. What *can* I do to help you?"

"You cannot help me, boy. It was the only way—you must see Martin Harvey when you have an opportunity. Even as that wizened one prophesied, so has it come to pass. . . . La, la, la. No need for tears. I tell you what I told Goyle: we shall meet again, but in a better place than that silly old heaven of golden streets. . . . Handle the events of life in a royal spirit. Don't expect to find in a man what is not there. Shrimps have the souls of shrimps. . . . Spend well the wealth of youth. I picture you and that sweet maid living at the Poplars, rather than at Myall. May the Blue Bird build under the eaves. Though what you'll do with old Cynthia, I can't think. Give my best respects to your beloved Selina. She said I meant well by you. She is a great soul, your Lena. Her mistress, I fear, is only a prawn. . . . *Robin, don't go away!*"

"I am here. I am not going away."

"That is good, very good. Later, of course, you will . . . yes, later."

Dion suddenly drew himself very upright on the divan. A flush burned on either cheek. Never had he looked so

young, so handsome. He raised his fingers in whimsical blessing.

"Bless you, Robin. '*Ad astra virtus*'—remember your motto." And then a flash of his old cynicism returned: "As the son of Lord Myall, you ought to get a soft job on the staff. The army will get you—thanks to me. I never thought of that, or I— La, la, la. What is to be, is to be. . . . Robin, I trust I am not going to emulate the Merry Monarch."

But, even as he spoke, the light died out of his eyes, the colour faded from his cheeks.

"The comedy is finished," he whispered, and fell back against the back of the divan.

Robin, shaken with sobs, had buried his head in the purple silk. He did not hear Dion's last words. Suddenly, a spell seemed to be broken. Outside the organ was grinding out "Tipperary."

"Yes, I am strong enough to be accepted now. I shall join the ranks of the D. C. L. I. The German swine; they killed old Peter," he said in a strained voice, clenching his fists.

He raised his head, saw Dion's face, and uttered a cry.

END OF BOOK TWO

