

Mother And Son

By

John Galsworthy

Mother And Son

I

To say that Jon Forsyte accompanied his mother to Spain unwillingly would scarcely have been adequate. He went as a wellnatured dog goes for a walk with its mistress, leaving a choice muttonbone on the lawn. He went looking back at it. Forsytes deprived of their muttonbones are wont to sulk. But Jon had little sulkiness in his composition. He adored his mother, and it was his first travel. Spain had become Italy by his simply saying: "I'd rather go to Spain, Mum; you've been to Italy so many times; I'd like it new to both of us."

The fellow was subtle besides being naive. He never forgot that he was going to shorten the proposed two months into six weeks, and must therefore show no sign of wishing to do so. For one with so enticing a muttonbone and so fixed an idea, he made a good enough travelling companion, indifferent to where or when he arrived, superior to food, and thoroughly appreciative of a country strange to the most travelled Englishman. Fleur's wisdom in refusing to write to him was profound, for he reached each new place entirely without hope or fever, and could concentrate immediate attention on the donkeys and tumbling bells, the priests, patios, beggars, children, crowing cocks, sombreros, cactushedges, old high white villages, goats, olivetrees, greening plains, singing birds in tiny cages, watersellers, sunsets, melons, mules, great churches, pictures, and swimming greybrown mountains of a fascinating land.

It was already hot, and they enjoyed an absence of their compatriots. Jon, who, so far as he knew, had no blood in him which was not English, was often innately unhappy in the presence of his own countrymen. He felt they had no nonsense about them, and took a more practical view of things than himself. He confided to his mother that he must be an unsociable beastit was jolly to be away from everybody who could talk about the things people did talk about. To which Irene had replied simply:

"Yes, Jon, I know."

In this isolation he had unparalleled opportunities of appreciating what few sons can apprehend, the wholeheartedness of a mother's love. Knowledge of something kept from her made him, no doubt, unduly sensitive; and a Southern people stimulated his admiration for her type of beauty, which he had been accustomed to hear called Spanish, but which he now perceived to be no such thing. Her beauty was neither English, French, Spanish, nor Italianit was special! He appreciated, too, as never before, his mother's subtlety of instinct. He could not tell, for instance, whether she had noticed his absorption in that Goya picture, "La Vendimia," or whether she knew that he had slipped back there after lunch and again next morning, to stand before it full half an hour, a second and third time. It was not Fleur, of course, but like enough to give him heartacheso dear to loversremembering her standing at the foot of his bed with her hand held above her head. To keep a postcard reproduction of this

picture in his pocket and slip it out to look at became for Jon one of those bad habits which soon or late disclose themselves to eyes sharpened by love, fear, or jealousy. And his mother's were sharpened by all three. In Granada he was fairly caught, sitting on a sunwarmed stone bench in a little battlemented garden on the Alhambra hill, whence he ought to have been looking at the view. His mother, he had thought, was examining the potted stocks between the polled acacias, when her voice said:

"Is that your favourite Goya, Jon?"

He checked, too late, a movement such as he might have made at school to conceal some surreptitious document, and answered: "Yes."

"It certainly is most charming; but I think I prefer the 'Quitasol' Your father would go crazy about Goya; I don't believe he saw them when he was in Spain in '92."

In '92 nine years before he had been born! What had been the previous existences of his father and his mother? If they had a right to share in his future, surely he had a right to share in their pasts. He looked up at her. But something in her face a look of life hardly lived, the mysterious impress of emotions, experience, and suffering seemed, with its incalculable depth, its purchased sanctity, to make curiosity impertinent. His mother must have had a wonderfully interesting life; she was so beautiful, and so so but he could not frame what he felt about her. He got up, and stood gazing down at the town, at the plain all green with crops, and the ring of mountains glamorous in sinking sunlight. Her life was like the past of this old Moorish city, full, deep, remote his own life as yet such a baby of a thing, hopelessly ignorant and innocent! They said that in those mountains to the West, which rose sheer from the blue-green plain, as if out of a sea, Phoenicians had dwelt a dark, strange, secret race, above the land! His mother's life was as unknown to him, as secret, as that Phoenician past was to the town down there, whose cocks crowed and whose children played and clamoured so gaily, day in, day out. He felt aggrieved that she should know all about him and he nothing about her except that she loved him and his father, and was beautiful. His callow ignorance he had not even had the advantage of the War, like nearly everybody else! made him small in his own eyes.

That night, from the balcony of his bedroom, he gazed down on the roof of the town as if inlaid with honeycomb of jet, ivory, and gold; and, long after, he lay awake, listening to the cry of the sentry as the hours struck, and forming in his head these lines:

"Voice in the night crying, down in the old sleeping

Spanish city darkened under her white stars!

"What says the voice its clear lingering anguish?

Just the watchman, telling his dateless tale of safety?

Just a roadman, flinging to the moon his song?

"No! 'Tis one deprived, whose lover's heart is weeping,

Just his cry: 'How long?'"

The word "deprived" seemed to him cold and unsatisfactory, but "bereaved" was too final, and no other word of two syllables shortlong came to him, which would enable him to keep "whose lover's heart is weeping." It was past two by the time he had finished it, and past three before he went to sleep, having said it over to himself at least twentyfour times. Next day he wrote it out and enclosed it in one of those letters to Fleur which he always finished before he went down, so as to have his mind free and companionable.

About noon that same day, on the tiled terrace of their hotel, he felt a sudden dull pain in the back of his head, a queer sensation in the eyes, and sickness. The sun had touched him too affectionately. The next three days were passed in semidarkness, and a dulled, aching indifference to all except the feel of ice on his forehead and his mother's smile. She never moved from his room, never relaxed her noiseless vigilance, which seemed to Jon angelic. But there were moments when he was extremely sorry for himself, and wished terribly that Fleur could see him. Several times he took a poignant imaginary leave of her and of the earth, tears oozing out of his eyes. He even prepared the message he would send to her by his motherwho would regret to her dying day that she had ever sought to separate themhis poor mother! He was not slow, however, in perceiving that he had now his excuse for going home.

Toward halfpast six each evening came a "gasgacha" of bellsa cascade of tumbling chimes, mounting from the city below and falling back chime on chime. After listening to them on the fourth day he said suddenly:

"I'd like to be back in England, Mum, the sun's too hot."

"Very well, darling. As soon as you're fit to travel" And at once he felt better, andmeaner.

They had been out five weeks when they turned toward home. Jon's head was restored to its pristine clarity, but he was confined to a hat lined by his mother with many layers of orange and green silk and he still walked from choice in the shade. As the long struggle of discretion between them drew to its close, he wondered more and more whether she could see his eagerness to get back to that which she had brought him away from. Condemned by Spanish Providence to spend a day in Madrid

between their trains, it was but natural to go again to the Prado. Jon was elaborately casual this time before his Goya girl. Now that he was going back to her, he could afford a lesser scrutiny. It was his mother who lingered before the picture, saying:

"The face and the figure of the girl are exquisite."

Jon heard her uneasily. Did she understand? But he felt once more that he was no match for her in selfcontrol and subtlety. She could, in some supersensitive way, of which he had not the secret, feel the pulse of his thoughts; she knew by instinct what he hoped and feared and wished. It made him terribly uncomfortable and guilty, having, beyond most boys, a conscience. He wished she would be frank with him, he almost hoped for an open struggle. But none came, and steadily, silently, they travelled north. Thus did he first learn how much better than men women play a waiting game. In Paris they had again to pause for a day. Jon was grieved because it lasted two, owing to certain matters in connection with a dressmaker; as if his mother, who looked beautiful in anything, had any need of dresses! The happiest moment of his travel was that when he stepped on to the Folkestone boat.

Standing by the bulwark rail, with her arm in his, she said

"I'm afraid you haven't enjoyed it much, Jon. But you've been very sweet to me."

Jon squeezed her arm.

"Oh I yes, I've enjoyed it awfullyexcept for my head lately."

And now that the end had come, he really had, feeling a sort of glamour over the past weeks a kind of painful pleasure, such as he had tried to screw into those lines about the voice in the night crying; a feeling such as he had known as a small boy listening avidly to Chopin, yet wanting to cry. And he wondered why it was that he couldn't say to her quite simply what she had said to him:

"You were very sweet to me." Oddone never could be nice and natural like that! He substituted the words: "I expect we shall be sick."

They were, and reached London somewhat attenuated, having been away six weeks and two days, without a single allusion to the subject which had hardly ever ceased to occupy their minds

II

.FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Deprived of his wife and son by the Spanish adventure, Jolyon found the solitude at Robin Hill intolerable. A philosopher when he has all that he wants is different from a philosopher when he has not. Accustomed, however, to the idea, if not to the reality of resignation, he would perhaps have faced it out but for his daughter June. He was a "lame duck" now, and on her conscience. Having achieved momentarily the rescue of an etcher in low circumstances, which she happened to have in hand, she appeared at Robin Hill a fortnight after Irene and Jon had gone. June was living now in a tiny house with a big studio at Chiswick. A Forsyte of the best period, so far as the lack of responsibility was concerned, she had overcome the difficulty of a reduced income in a manner satisfactory to herself and her father. The rent of the Gallery off Cork Street which he had bought for her and her increased income tax happening to balance, it had been quite simple she no longer paid him the rent. The Gallery might be expected now at any time, after eighteen years of barren usufruct, to pay its way, so that she was sure her father would not feel it. Through this device she still had twelve hundred a year, and by reducing what she ate, and, in place of two Belgians in a poor way, employing one Austrian in a poorer, practically the same surplus for the relief of genius. After three days at Robin Hill she carried her father back with her to Town. In those three days she had stumbled on the secret he had kept for two years, and had instantly decided to cure him. She knew, in fact, the very man. He had done wonders with. Paul Post that painter a little in advance of Futurism; and she was impatient with her father because his eyebrows would go up, and because he had heard of neither. Of course, if he hadn't "faith" he would never get well! It was absurd not to have faith in the man who had healed Paul Post so that he had only just relapsed, from having overworked, or overlived, himself again. The great thing about this healer was that he relied on Nature. He had made a special study of the symptoms of Nature when his patient failed in any natural symptom he supplied the poison which caused it and there you were! She was extremely hopeful. Her father had clearly not been living a natural life at Robin Hill, and she intended to provide the symptoms. He was she felt out of touch with the times, which was not natural; his heart wanted stimulating. In the little Chiswick house she and the Austrian a grateful soul, so devoted to June for rescuing her that she was in danger of decease from overwork stimulated Jolyon in all sorts of ways, preparing him for his cure. But they could not keep his eyebrows down; as, for example, when the Austrian woke him at eight o'clock just as he was going to sleep, or June took The Times away from him, because it was unnatural to read "that stuff" when he ought to be taking an interest in "life." He never failed, indeed, to be astonished at her resource, especially in the evenings. For his benefit, as she declared, though he suspected that she also got something out of it, she assembled the Age so far as it was satellite to genius; and with some solemnity it would move up and down the studio before him in the Foxtrot, and that more mental form of dancing the Onestep which so pulled against the music, that Jolyon's eyebrows would be almost lost in his hair from wonder at the

strain it must impose on the dancer's willpower. Aware that, hung on the line in the Water Colour Society, he was a back number to those with any pretension to be called artists, he would sit in the darkest corner he could find, and wonder about rhythm, on which so long ago he had been raised. And when June brought some girl or young man up to him, he would rise humbly to their level so far as that was possible, and think: 'Dear me! This is very dull for them!' Having his father's perennial sympathy with Youth, he used to get very tired from entering into their points of view. But it was all stimulating, and he never failed in admiration of his daughter's indomitable spirit. Even genius itself attended these gatherings now and then, with its nose on one side; and June always introduced it to her father. This, she felt, was exceptionally good for him, for genius was a natural symptom he had never hadfond as she was of him.

Certain as a man can be that she was his own daughter, he often wondered whence she got herselfher redgold hair, now greyed into a special colour; her direct, spirited face, so different from his own rather folded and subtilised countenance, her little lithe figure, when he and most of the Forsytes were tall. And he would dwell on the origin of species, and debate whether she might be Danish or Celtic. Celtic, he thought, from her pugnacity, and her taste in fillets and djibbahs. It was not too much to say that he preferred her to the Age with which she was surrounded, youthful though, for the greater part, it was. She took, however, too much interest in his teeth, for he still had some of those natural symptoms. Her dentist at once found "Staphylococcus aureus present in pure culture" (which might cause boils, of course), and wanted to take out all the teeth he had and supply him with two complete sets of unnatural symptoms. Jolyon's native tenacity was roused, and in the studio that evening he developed his objections. He had never had any boils, and his own teeth would last his time. Of courseJune admittedthey would last his time if he didn't have them out! But if he had more teeth he would have a better heart and his time would be longer. His recalcitranceshe saidwas a symptom of his whole attitude; he was taking it lying down. He ought to be fighting. When was he going to see the man who had cured Paul Post? Jolyon was very sorry, but the fact was he was not going to see him. June chafed. Pondridgeshe saidthe healer, was such a fine man, and he had such difficulty in making two ends meet, and getting his theories recognised. It was just such indifference and prejudice as her father manifested which was keeping him back. It would be so splendid for both of them!

"I perceive," said Jolyon, "that you are trying to kill two birds with one stone."

"To cure, you mean!" cried June.

"My dear, it's the same thing."

June protested. It was unfair to say that without a trial.

Jolyon thought he might not have the chance, of saying it after.

"Dad!" cried June, "you're hopeless."

"That," said Jolyon, "is a fact, but I wish to remain hopeless as long as possible. I shall let sleeping dogs lie, my child. They are quiet at present."

"That's not giving science a chance," cried June. "You've no idea how devoted Pondridge is. He puts his science before everything."

"Just," replied Jolyon, puffing the mild cigarette to which he was reduced, "as Mr. Paul Post puts his art, eh? Art for Art's sake Science for the sake of Science. I know those enthusiastic egomaniac gentry. They vivisect you without blinking. I'm enough of a Forsyte to give them the goby, June."

"Dad," said June, "if you only knew how oldfashioned that sounds! Nobody can afford to be halfhearted nowadays."

"I'm afraid," murmured Jolyon, with his smile, "that's the only natural symptom with which Mr. Pondridge need not supply me. We are born to be extreme or to be moderate, my dear; though, if you'll forgive my saying so, half the people nowadays who believe they're extreme are really very moderate. I'm getting on as well as I can expect, and I must leave it at that."

June was silent, having experienced in her time the inexorable character of her father's amiable obstinacy so far as his own freedom of action was concerned.

How he came to let her know why Irene had taken Jon to Spain puzzled Jolyon, for he had little confidence in her discretion. After she had brooded on the news, it brought a rather sharp discussion, during which he perceived to the full the fundamental opposition between her active temperament and his wife's passivity. He even gathered that a little soreness still remained from that generationold struggle between them over the body of Philip Bosinney, in which the passive had so signally triumphed over the active principle.

According to June, it was foolish and even cowardly to hide the past from Jon. Sheer opportunism, she called it.

"Which," Jolyon put in mildly, "is the working principle of real life, my dear."

"Oh!" cried June, "you don't really defend her for not telling Jon, Dad. If it were left to you, you would."

"I might, but simply because I know he must find out, which will be worse than if we told him."

"Then why don't you tell him? It's just sleeping dogs again."

"My dear," said Jolyon, "I wouldn't for the world go against Irene's instinct. He's her boy."

"Yours too," cried June.

"What is a man's instinct compared with a mother's?"

"Well, I think it's very weak of you."

"I dare say," said Jolyon, "I dare say."

And that was all she got from him; but the matter rankled in her brain. She could not bear sleeping dogs. And there stirred in her a tortuous impulse to push the matter toward decision. Jon ought to be told, so that either his feeling might be nipped in the bud, or, flowering in spite of the past, come to fruition. And she determined to see Fleur, and judge for herself. When June determined on anything, delicacy became a somewhat minor consideration. After all, she was Soames' cousin, and they were both interested in pictures. She would go and tell him that he ought to buy a Paul Post, or perhaps a piece of sculpture by Boris Strumolowski, and of course she would say nothing to her father. She went on the following Sunday, looking so determined that she had some difficulty in getting a cab at Reading station. The river country was lovely in those days of her own month, and June ached at its loveliness. She who had passed through this life without knowing what union was had a love of natural beauty which was almost madness. And when she came to that choice spot where Soames had pitched his tent, she dismissed her cab, because, business over, she wanted to revel in the bright water and the woods. She appeared at his front door, therefore, as a mere pedestrian, and sent in her card. It was in June's character to know that when her nerves were fluttering she was doing something worth while. If one's nerves did not flutter, she was taking the line of least resistance, and knew that nobleness was not obliging her. She was conducted to a drawingroom, which, though not in her style, showed every mark of fastidious elegance. Thinking, 'Too much tastetoo many knickknacks,' she saw in an old lacquerframed mirror the figure of a girl coming in from the verandah. Clothed in white, and holding some white roses in her hand, she had, reflected in that silverygrey pool of glass, a visionlike appearance, as if a pretty ghost had come out of the green garden.

"How do you do?" said June, turning round. "I'm a cousin of your father's."

"Oh, yes; I saw you in that confectioner's."

"With my young stepbrother. Is your father in?"

"He will be directly. He's only gone for a little walk."

June slightly narrowed her blue eyes, and lifted her decided chin.

"Your name's Fleur, isn't it? I've heard of you from Holly. What do you think of Jon?"

The girl lifted the roses in her hand, looked at them, and answered calmly:

"He's quite a nice boy."

"Not a bit like Holly or me, is he?"

"Not a bit."

'She's cool,' thought June.

And suddenly the girl said: "I wish you'd tell me why our families don't get on?"

Confronted with the question she had advised her father to answer, June was silent; whether because this girl was trying to get something out of her, or simply because what one would do theoretically is not always what one will do when it comes to the point.

"You know," said the girl, "the surest way to make people find out the worst is to keep them ignorant. My father's told me it was a quarrel about property. But I don't believe it; we've both got heaps. They wouldn't have been so bourgeois as all that."

June flushed. The word applied to her grandfather and father offended her.

"My grandfather," she said, "was very generous, and my father is, too; neither of them was in the least bourgeois."

"Well, what was it then?" repeated the girl: Conscious that this young Forsyte meant having what she wanted, June at once determined to prevent her, and to get something for herself instead.

"Why do you want to know?"

The girl smelled at her roses. "I only want to know because they won't tell me."

"Well, it was about property, but there's more than one kind."

"That makes it worse. Now I really must know."

June's small and resolute face quivered. She was wearing a round cap, and her hair had fluffed out under it. She looked quite young at that moment, rejuvenated by encounter.

"You know," she said, "I saw you drop your handkerchief. Is there anything between you and Jon? Because, if so, you'd better drop that too."

The girl grew paler, but she smiled.

"If there were, that isn't the way to make me."

At the gallantry of that reply, June held out her hand.

"I like you; but I don't like your father; I never have. We may as well be frank."

"Did you come down to tell him that?"

June laughed. "No; I came down to see you."

"How delightful of you."

This girl could fence.

"I'm two and a half times your age," said June, "but I quite sympathize. It's horrid not to have one's own way."

The girl smiled again. "I really think you might tell me."

How the child stuck to her point

"It's not my secret. But I'll see what I can do, because I think both you and Jon ought to be told. And now I'll say goodbye."

"Won't you wait and see Father?"

June shook her head. "How can I get over to the other side?"

"I'll row you across."

"Look!" said June impulsively, "next time you're in London, come and see me. This is where I live. I generally have young people in the evening. But I shouldn't tell your father that you're coming."

The girl nodded.

Watching her scull the skiff across, June thought: 'She's awfully pretty and well made. I never thought Soames would have a daughter as pretty as this. She and Jon would make a lovely couple.

The instinct to couple, starved within herself, was always at work in June. She stood watching Fleur row back; the girl took her hand off a scull to wave farewell, and June walked languidly on between the meadows and the river, with an ache in her heart. Youth to youth, like the dragonflies chasing each other, and love like the sun warming them through and through. Her youth! So long ago when Phil and she And since? Nothing no one had been quite what she had wanted. And so she had missed it all. But what a coil was round those two young things, if they really were in love, as Holly would have it as her father, and Irene, and Soames himself seemed to dread. What a coil, and what a barrier! And the itch for the future, the contempt, as it were, for what was overpast, which forms the active principle, moved in the heart of one

who ever believed that what one wanted was more important than what other people did not want. From the bank, awhile, in the warm summer stillness, she watched the waterlily plants and willow leaves, the fishes rising; sniffed the scent of grass and meadowsweet, wondering how she could force everybody to be happy. Jon and Fleur! Two little lame ducks charming callow yellow little ducks! A great pity! Surely something could be done! One must not take such situations lying down. She walked on, and reached a station, hot and cross.

That evening, faithful to the impulse toward direct action, which made many people avoid her, she said to her father:

"Dad, I've been down to see young Fleur. I think she's very attractive. It's no good hiding our heads under our wings, is it?"

The startled Jolyon set down his barleywater, and began crumbling his bread.

"It's what you appear to be doing," he said. "Do you realise whose daughter she is?"

"Can't the dead past bury its dead?"

Jolyon rose.

"Certain things can never be buried."

"I disagree," said June. "It's that which stands in the way of all happiness and progress. You don't understand the Age, Dad. It's got no use for outgrown things. Why do you think it matters so terribly that Jon should know about his mother? Who pays any attention to that sort of thing now? The marriage laws are just as they were when Soames and Irene couldn't get a divorce, and you had to come in. We've moved, and they haven't. So nobody cares. Marriage without a decent chance of relief is only a sort of slaveowning; people oughtn't to own each other. Everybody sees that now. If Irene broke such laws, what does it matter?"

"It's not for me to disagree there," said Jolyon; "but that's all quite beside the mark. This is a matter of human feeling."

"Of course it is," cried June, "the human feeling of those two young things."

"My dear," said Jolyon with gentle exasperation; "you're talking nonsense."

"I'm not. If they prove to be really fond of each other, why should they be made unhappy because of the past?"

"You haven't lived that past. I have through the feelings of my wife; through my own nerves and my imagination, as only one who is devoted can."

June, too, rose, and began to wander restlessly.

"If," she said suddenly, "she were the daughter of Philip Bosinney, I could understand you better. Irene loved him, she never loved Soames."

Jolyon uttered a deep sound the sort of noise an Italian peasant woman utters to her mule. His heart had begun beating furiously, but he paid no attention to it, quite carried away by his feelings.

"That shows how little you understand. Neither I nor Jon, if I know him, would mind a lovepast. It's the brutality of a union without love. This girl is the daughter of the man who once owned Jon's mother as a negro slave was owned. You can't lay that ghost; don't try to, June! It's asking us to see Jon joined to the flesh and blood of the man who possessed Jon's mother against her will. It's no good mincing words; I want it clear once for all. And now I mustn't talk any more, or I shall have to sit up with this all night." And, putting his hand over his heart, Jolyon turned his back on his daughter and stood looking at the river Thames.

June, who by nature never saw a hornet's nest until she had put her head into it, was seriously alarmed. She came and slipped her arm through his. Not convinced that he was right, and she herself wrong, because that was not natural to her, she was yet profoundly impressed by the obvious fact that the subject was very bad for him. She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder, and said nothing.

After taking her elderly cousin across, Fleur did not land at once, but pulled in among the reeds, into the sunshine. The peaceful beauty of the afternoon seduced for a little one not much given to the vague and poetic. In the field beyond the bank where her skiff lay up, a machine drawn by a grey horse was turning an early field of hay. She watched the grass cascading over and behind the light wheels with fascination it looked so cool and fresh. The click and swish blended with the rustle of the willows and the poplars, and the cooing of a woodpigeon, in a true river song. Alongside, in the deep green water, weeds, like yellow snakes, were writhing and nosing with the current; pied cattle on the farther side stood in the shade lazily swishing their tails. It was an afternoon to dream. And she took out Jon's letters not flowery effusions, but haunted in their recital of things seen and done by a longing very agreeable to her, and all ending "Your devoted J." Fleur was not sentimental, her desires were ever concrete and concentrated, but what poetry there was in the daughter of Soames and Annette had certainly in those weeks of waiting gathered round her memories of Jon. They all belonged to grass and blossom, flowers and running water. She enjoyed him in the scents absorbed by her crinkling nose. The stars could persuade her that she was standing beside him in the centre of the map of Spain; and of an early morning the dewy cobwebs, the hazy sparkle and promise of the day down in the garden, were Jon personified to her.

Two white swans came majestically by, while she was reading his letters, followed by their brood of six young swans in a line, with just so much water between each tail and head, a flotilla of grey destroyers. Fleur thrust her letters back, got out her sculls,

and pulled up to the landingstage. Crossing the lawn, she wondered whether she should tell her father of June's visit. If he learned of it from the butler, he might think it odd if she did not. It gave her, too, another chance to startle out of him the reason of the feud. She went, therefore, up the road to meet him.

Soames had gone to look at a patch of ground on which the Local Authorities were proposing to erect a Sanatorium for people with weak lungs. Faithful to his native individualism, he took no part in local affairs, content to pay the rates which were always going up. He could not, however, remain indifferent to this new and dangerous scheme. The site was not half a mile from his own house. He was quite of opinion that the country should stamp out tuberculosis; but this was not the place. It should be done farther away. He took, indeed, an attitude common to all true Forsytes, that disability of any sort in other people was not his affair, and the State should do its business without prejudicing in any way the natural advantages which he had acquired or inherited. Francie, the most freespirted Forsyte of his generation (except perhaps that fellow Jolyon) had once asked him in her malicious way: "Did you ever see the name Forsyte in a subscription list, Soames?" That was as it might be, but a Sanatorium would depreciate the neighbourhood, and he should certainly sign the petition which was being got up against it. Returning with this decision fresh within him, he saw Fleur coming.

She was showing him more affection of late, and the quiet time down here with her in this summer weather had been making him feel quite young; Annette was always running up to Town for one thing or another, so that he had Fleur to himself almost as much as he could wish. To be sure, young Mont had formed a habit of appearing on his motorcycle almost every other day. Thank goodness, the young fellow had shaved off his halftoothbrushes, and no longer looked like a mountebank! With a girl friend of Fleur's who was staying in the house, and a neighbouring youth or so, they made two couples after dinner, in the hall, to the music of the electric pianola, which performed Foxtrots unassisted, with a surprised shine on its expressive surface. Annette, even, now and then passed gracefully up and down in the arms of one or other of the young men. And Soames, coming to the drawingroom door, would lift his nose a little sideways, and watch them, waiting to catch a smile from Fleur; then move back to his chair by the drawingroom hearth, to peruse *The Times* or some other collector's price list. To his everanxious eyes Fleur showed no signs of remembering that caprice of hers.

When she reached him on the dusty road, he slipped his hand within her arm.

"Who, do you think, has been to see you, Dad? She couldn't wait! Guess!"

"I never guess," said Soames uneasily. "Who?"

"Your cousin, June Forsyte."

Quite unconsciously Soames gripped her arm. "What did she want?"

"I don't know. But it was rather breaking through the feud, wasn't it?"

"Feud? What feud?"

"The one that exists in your imagination, dear."

Soames dropped her arm. Was she mocking, or trying to draw him on?

"I suppose she wanted me to buy a picture," he said at last.

"I don't think so. Perhaps it was just family affection."

"She's only a first cousin once removed," muttered Soames.

"And the daughter of your enemy."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I beg your pardon, dear; I thought he was."

"Enemy!" repeated Soames. "It's ancient history. I don't know where you get your notions."

"From June Forsyte."

It had come to her as an inspiration that if he thought she knew, or were on the edge of knowledge, he would tell her.

Soames was startled, but she had underrated his caution and tenacity.

"If you know," he said coldly, "why do you plague me?"

Fleur saw that she had overreached herself.

"I don't want to plague you, darling. As you say, why want to know more? Why want to know anything of that 'small' mystery? Je m'en fiche, as Profond says?"

"That chap!" said Soames profoundly.

That chap, indeed, played a considerable, if invisible, part this summer for he had not turned up again. Ever since the Sunday when Fleur had drawn attention to him prowling on the lawn, Soames had thought of him a good deal, and always in connection with Annette, for no reason, except that she was looking handsomer than for some time past. His possessive instinct, subtle, less formal, more elastic since the War, kept all misgiving underground. As one looks on some American river, quiet and pleasant, knowing that an alligator perhaps is lying in the mud with his snout just raised and indistinguishable from a snag of wood so Soames looked on the river of his own existence, subconscious of Monsieur Profond, refusing to see more than

the suspicion of his snout. He had at this epoch in his life practically all he wanted, and was as nearly happy as his nature would permit. His senses were at rest; his affections found all the vent they needed in his daughter; his collection was well known, his money well invested; his health excellent, save for a touch of liver now and again; he had not yet begun to worry seriously about what would happen after death, inclining to think that nothing would happen. He resembled one of his own giltedged securities, and to knock the gilt off by seeing anything he could avoid seeing would be, he felt instinctively, perverse and retrogressive. Those two crumpled roseleaves, Fleur's caprice and Monsieur Profond's snout, would level away if he lay on them industriously.

That evening Chance, which visits the lives of even the bestinvested Forsytes, put a clue into Fleur's hands. Her father came down to dinner without a handkerchief, and had occasion to blow his nose.

"I'll get you one, dear," she had said, and ran upstairs. In the sachet where she sought for it an old sachet of very faded silk there were two compartments: one held handkerchiefs; the other was buttoned, and contained something flat and hard. By some childish impulse Fleur unbuttoned it. There was a frame and in it a photograph of herself as a little girl. She gazed at it, fascinated, as one is by one's own presentment. It slipped under her fidgeting thumb, and she saw that another photograph was behind. She pressed her own down further, and perceived a face, which she seemed to know, of a young woman, very goodlooking, in a very old style of evening dress. Slipping her own photograph up over it again, she took out a handkerchief and went down. Only on the stairs did she identify that face. Surely surely Jon's mother! The conviction came as a shock. And she stood still in a flurry of thought. Why, of course! Jon's father had married the woman her father had wanted to marry, had cheated him out of her, perhaps. Then, afraid of showing by her manner that she had lighted on his secret, she refused to think further, and, shaking out the silk handkerchief, entered the diningroom.

"I chose the softest, Father."

"H'm!" said Soames; "I only use those after a cold. Never mind!"

That evening passed for Fleur in putting two and two together; recalling the look on her father's face in the confectioner's shop a look strange and coldly intimate, a queer look. He must have loved that woman very much to have kept her photograph all this time, in spite of having lost her. Unsparing and matterofact, her mind darted to his relations with her own mother. Had he ever really loved her? She thought not. Jon was the son of the woman he had really loved. Surely, then, he ought not to mind his daughter loving him; it only wanted getting used to. And a sigh of sheer relief was caught in the folds of her nightgown slipping over her head.

III

.MEETINGS

Youth only recognises Age by fits and starts. Jon, for one, had never really seen his father's age till he came back from Spain. The face of the fourth Jolyon, worn by waiting, gave him quite a shock; it looked so wan and old. His father's mask had been forced awry by the emotion of the meeting, so that the boy suddenly realised how much he must have felt their absence. He summoned to his aid the thought: 'Well, I didn't want to go!' It was out of date for Youth to defer to Age. But Jon was by no means typically modern. His father had always been "so jolly" to him, and to feel that one meant to begin again at once the conduct which his father had suffered six weeks' loneliness to cure was not agreeable.

At the question, "Well, old man, how did the great Goya strike you?" his conscience pricked him badly. The great Goya only existed because he had created a face which resembled Fleur's.

On the night of their return, he went to bed full of compunction; but awoke full of anticipation. It was only the fifth of July, and no meeting was fixed with Fleur until the ninth. He was to have three days at home before going back to farm. Somehow he must contrive to see her!

In the lives of men an inexorable rhythm, caused by the need for trousers, not even the fondest parents can deny. On the second day, therefore, Jon went to Town, and having satisfied his conscience by ordering what was indispensable in Conduit Street, turned his face toward Piccadilly. Stratton Street, where her Club was, adjoined Devonshire House. It would be the merest chance that she should be at her Club. But he dawdled down Bond Street with a beating heart, noticing the superiority of all other young men to himself. They wore their clothes with such an air; they had assurance; they were old. He was suddenly overwhelmed by the conviction that Fleur must have forgotten him. Absorbed in his own feeling for her all these weeks, he had mislaid that possibility. The corners of his mouth drooped, his hands felt clammy. Fleur with the pick of youth at the beck of her smile! Fleur incomparable! It was an evil moment. Jon, however, had a great idea that one must be able to face anything. And he braced himself with that dour refection in front of a bricabrac shop. At this highwater mark of what was once the London season, there was nothing to mark it out from any other except a grey top hat or two, and the sun. Jon moved on, and turning the corner into Piccadilly, ran into Val Dartie moving toward the Iseum Club, to which he had just been elected.

"Hallo! young man! Where are you off to?"

Jon gushed. "I've just been to my tailor's."

Val looked him up and down. "That's good! I'm going in here to order some cigarettes; then come and have some lunch."

Jon thanked him. He might get news of her from Val!

The condition of England, that nightmare of its Press and Public men, was seen in different perspective within the tobacconist's which they now entered.

"Yes, sir; precisely the cigarette I used to supply your father with. Bless me! Mr. Montague Dartie was a customer here from let me see the year Melton won the Derby. One of my very best customers he was." A faint smile illumined the tobacconist's face. "Many's the tip he's given me, to be sure! I suppose he took a couple of hundred of these every week, year in, year out, and never changed his cigarette. Very affable gentleman, brought me a lot of custom. I was sorry he met with that accident. One misses an old customer like him."

Val smiled. His father's decease had closed an account which had been running longer, probably, than any other; and in a ring of smoke puffed out from that time-honoured cigarette he seemed to see again his father's face, dark, good-looking, moustachioed, a little puffy, in the only halo it had earned. His father had his fame here, anyway a man who smoked two hundred cigarettes a week, who could give tips, and run accounts for ever! To his tobacconist a hero! Even that was some distinction to inherit!

"I pay cash," he said; "how much?"

"To his son, sir, and cash ten and six. I shall never forget Mr. Montague Dartie. I've known him stand talkin' to me half an hour. We don't get many like him now, with everybody in such a hurry. The War was bad for manners, sir; it was bad for manners. You were in it, I see."

"No," said Val, tapping his knee, "I got this in the war before. Saved my life, I expect. Do you want any cigarettes, Jon?"

Rather ashamed, Jon murmured, "I don't smoke, you know," and saw the tobacconist's lips twisted, as if uncertain whether to say "Good God!" or "Now's your chance, sir!"

"That's right," said Val; "keep off it while you can. You'll want it when you take a knock. This is really the same tobacco, then?"

"Identical, sir; a little dearer, that's all. Wonderful staying power the British Empire, I always say."

"Send me down a hundred a week to this address, and invoice it monthly. Come on, Jon."

Jon entered the Iseeum with curiosity. Except to lunch now and then at the HotchPotch with his father, he had never been in a London Club. The Iseeum, comfortable and unpretentious, did not move, could not, so long as George Forsyte sat on its Committee, where his culinary acumen was almost the controlling force. The Club had made a stand against the newly rich, and it had taken all George Forsyte's prestige, and praise of him as a "good sportsman," to bring in Prosper Profond.

The two were lunching together when the halfbrothersinlaw entered the diningroom, and attracted by George's forefinger, sat down at their table, Val with his shrewd eyes and charming smile, Jon with solemn lips and an attractive shyness in his glance. There was an air of privilege around that corner table, as though past masters were eating there. Jon was fascinated by the hypnotic atmosphere. The waiter, lean in the chaps, pervaded with such freemasonical deference. He seemed to hang on George Forsyte's lips, to watch the gloat in his eye with a kind of sympathy, to follow the movements of the heavy clubmarked silver fondly. His liveried arm and confidential voice alarmed Jon, they came so secretly over his shoulder.

Except for George's "Your grandfather tipped me once; he was a deuced good judge of a cigar!" neither he nor the other past master took any notice of him, and he was grateful for this. The talk was all about the breeding, points, and prices of horses, and he listened to it vaguely at first, wondering how it was possible to retain so much knowledge in a head. He could not take his eyes off the dark past masterwhat he said was so deliberate and discouragingsuch heavy, queer, smiledout words. Jon was thinking of butterflies, when he heard him say:

"I want to see Mr. Soames Forsyde take an interest in 'orses."

"Old Soames! He's too dry a file!"

With all his might Jon tried not to grow red, while the dark past master went on.

"His daughter's an attractive small girl. Mr. Soames Forsyde is a bit oldfashioned. I want to see him have a pleasure some day." George Forsyte grinned.

"Don't you worry; he's not so miserable as he looks. He'll never show he's enjoying anythingthey might try and take it from him. Old Soames! Once bit, twice shy!"

"Well, Jon," said Val, hastily, "if you've finished, we'll go and have coffee."

"Who were those?" Jon asked, on the stairs. "I didn't quite"

"Old George Forsyte is a first cousin of your father's and of my Uncle Soames. He's always been here. The other chap, Profond, is a queer fish. I think he's hanging round Soames' wife, if you ask me!"

Jon looked at him, startled. "But that's awful," he said: "I meanfor Fleur."

"Don't suppose Fleur cares very much; she's very uptodate."

"Her mother!"

"You're very green, Jon."

Jon grew red. "Mothers," he stammered angrily, "are different."

"You're right," said Val suddenly; "but things aren't what they were when I was your age. There's a 'Tomorrow we die' feeling. That's what old George meant about my Uncle Soames. He doesn't mean to die tomorrow."

Jon said, quickly: "What's the matter between him and my father?"

"Stable secret, Jon. Take my advice, and bottle up. You'll do no good by knowing. Have a liqueur?"

Jon shook his head.

"I hate the way people keep things from one," he muttered, "and then sneer at one for being green."

"Well, you can ask Holly. If she won't tell you, you'll believe it's for your own good, I suppose."

Jon got up. "I must go now; thanks awfully for the lunch."

Val smiled up at him halfsorry, and yet amused. The boy looked so upset.

"All right! See you on Friday."

"I don't know," murmured Jon.

And he did not. This conspiracy of silence made him desperate. It was humiliating to be treated like a child! He retraced his moody steps to Stratton Street. But he would go to her Club now, and find out the worst! To his enquiry the reply was that Miss Forsyte was not in the Club. She might be in perhaps later. She was often in on Mondaythey could not say. Jon said he would call again, and, crossing into the Green Park, flung himself down under a tree. The sun was bright, and a breeze fluttered the leaves of the young limetree beneath which he lay; but his heart ached. Such darkness seemed gathered round his happiness. He heard Big Ben chime "Three" above the traffic. The sound moved something in him, and, taking out a piece of paper, he began to scribble on it with a pencil. He had jotted a stanza, and was searching the grass for another verse, when something hard touched his shoulder a green parasol. There above him stood Fleur!

"They told me you'd been, and were coming back. So I thought you might be out here; and you areit's rather wonderful!"

"Oh, Fleur! I thought you'd have forgotten me."

"When I told you that I shouldn't!"

Jon seized her arm.

"It's too much luck! Let's get away from this side." He almost dragged her on through that too thoughtfully regulated Park, to find some cover where they could sit and hold each other's hands.

"Hasn't anybody cut in?" he said, gazing round at her lashes, in suspense above her cheeks.

"There is a young idiot, but he doesn't count."

Jon felt a twitch of compassion for the young idiot.

"You know I've had sunstroke; I didn't tell you."

"Really! Was it interesting?"

"No. Mother was an angel. Has anything happened to you?"

"Nothing. Except that I think I've found out what's wrong between our families, Jon."

His heart began beating very fast.

"I believe my father wanted to marry your mother, and your father got her instead."

"Oh!"

"I came on a photo of her; it was in a frame behind a photo of me. Of course, if he was very fond of her, that would have made him pretty mad, wouldn't it?"

Jon thought for a minute. "Not if she loved my father best."

"But suppose they were engaged?"

"If we were engaged, and you found you loved somebody better, I might go cracked, but I shouldn't grudge it you."

"I should. You mustn't ever do that with me, Jon."

"My God! Not much!"

"I don't believe that he's ever really cared for my mother."

Jon was silent. Val's words the two past masters in the Club!

"You see, we don't know," went on Fleur; "it may have been a great shock. She may have behaved badly to him. People do."

"My mother wouldn't."

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. "I don't think we know much about our fathers and mothers. We just see them in the light of the way they treat us; but they've treated other people, you know, before we were born plenty, I expect. You see, they're both old. Look at your father, with three separate families!"

"Isn't there any place," cried Jon, "in all this beastly London where we can be alone?"

"Only a taxi."

"Let's get one, then."

When they were installed, Fleur asked suddenly: "Are you going back to Robin Hill? I should like to see where you live, Jon. I'm staying with my aunt for the night, but I could get back in time for dinner. I wouldn't come to the house, of course."

Jon gazed at her enraptured.

"Splendid! I can show it you from the copse, we shan't meet anybody. There's a train at four."

The god of property and his Forsytes great and small, leisured, official, commercial, or professional, like the working classes, still worked their seven hours a day, so that those two of the fourth generation travelled down to Robin Hill in an empty firstclass carriage, dusty and sunwarmed, of that too early train. They travelled in blissful silence, holding each other's hands.

At the station they saw no one except porters, and a villager or two unknown to Jon, and walked out up the lane, which smelled of dust and honeysuckle.

For Jon sure of her now, and without separation before him it was a miraculous dawdle, more wonderful than those on the Downs, or along the river Thames. It was love in a mist of those illumined pages of Life, where every word and smile, and every light touch they gave each other were as little gold and red and blue butterflies and flowers and birds scrolled in among the text a happy communing, without afterthought, which lasted thirtyseven minutes. They reached the coppice at the milking hour. Jon would not take her as far as the farmyard; only to where she could see the field leading up to the gardens, and the house beyond. They turned in among the larches, and suddenly, at the winding of the path, came on Irene, sitting on an old log seat.

There are various kinds of shocks: to the vertebrae; to the nerves; to moral sensibility; and, more potent and permanent, to personal dignity. This last was the

shock Jon received, coming thus on his mother. He became suddenly conscious that he was doing an indelicate thing. To have brought Fleur down openlyyes! But to sneak her in like this! Consumed with shame, he put on a front as brazen as his nature would permit.

Fleur was smiling, a little defiantly; his mother's startled face was changing quickly to the impersonal and gracious. It was she who uttered the first words:

"I'm very glad to see you. It was nice of Jon to think of bringing you down to us."

"We weren't coming to the house," Jon blurted out. "I just wanted Fleur to see where I lived."

His mother said quietly:

"Won't you come up and have tea?"

Feeling that he had but aggravated his breach of breeding, he heard Fleur answer:

"Thanks very much; I have to get back to dinner. I met Jon by accident, and we thought it would be rather jolly just to see his home."

How selfpossessed she was!

"Of course; but you must have tea. We'll send you down to the station. My husband will enjoy seeing you."

The expression of his mother's eyes, resting on him for a moment, cast Jon down level with the ground a true worm. Then she led on, and Fleur followed her. He felt like a child, trailing after those two, who were talking so easily about Spain and Wansdon, and the house up there beyond the trees and the grassy slope. He watched the fencing of their eyes, taking each other in the two beings he loved most in the world.

He could see his father sitting under the oak tree; and suffered in advance all the loss of caste he must go through in the eyes of that tranquil figure, with his knees crossed, thin, old, and elegant; already he could feel the faint irony which would come into his voice and smile.

"This is Fleur Forsyte, Jolyon; Jon brought her down to see the house. Let's have tea at once she has to catch a train. Jon, tell them, dear, and telephone to the Dragon for a car."

To leave her alone with them was strange, and yet, as no doubt his mother had foreseen, the least of evils at the moment; so he ran up into the house. Now he would not see Fleur alone again not for a minute, and they had arranged no further meeting! When he returned under cover of the maids and teapots, there was not a trace of

awkwardness beneath the tree; it was all within himself, but not the less for that. They were talking of the Gallery off Cork Street.

"We back numbers," his father was saying, "are awfully anxious to find out why we can't appreciate the new stuff; you and Jon must tell us."

"It's supposed to be satiric, isn't it?" said Fleur.

He saw his father's smile.

"Satiric? Oh! I think it's more than that. What do you say, Jon?"

"I don't know at all," stammered Jon. His father's face had a sudden grimness.

"The young are tired of us, our gods and our ideals. Off with their heads, they saysmash their idols! And let's get back tonothing! And, by Jove, they've done it! Jon's a poet. He'll be going in, too, and stamping on what's left of us. Property, beauty, sentimentall smoke. We mustn't own anything nowadays, not even our feelings. They stand in the way ofNothing."

Jon listened, bewildered, almost outraged by his father's words, behind which he felt a meaning that he could not reach. He didn't want to stamp on anything!

"Nothing's the god of today," continued Jolyon; "we're back where the Russians were sixty years ago, when they started Nihilism."

"No, Dad," cried Jon suddenly, "we only want to live, and we don't know how, because of the Pastthat's all!"

"By George!" said Jolyon, "that's profound, Jon. Is it your own? The Past! Old ownerships, old passions, and their aftermath. Let's have cigarettes."

Conscious that his mother had lifted her hand to her lips, quickly, as if to hush something, Jon handed the cigarettes. He lighted his father's and Fleur's, then one for himself. Had he taken the knock that Val had spoken of? The smoke was blue when he had not puffed, grey when he had; he liked the sensation in his nose, and the sense of equality it gave him. He was glad no one said: "So you've begun!" He felt less young.

Fleur looked at her watch, and rose. His mother went with her into the house. Jon stayed with his father, puffing at the cigarette.

"See her into the car, old man," said Jolyon; "and when she's gone, ask your mother to come back to me."

Jon went. He waited in the hall. He saw her into the car. There was no chance for any word; hardly for a pressure of the hand. He waited all that evening for something to

be said to him. Nothing was said. Nothing might have happened. He went up to bed, and in the mirror on his dressingtable met himself. He did not speak, nor did the image; but both looked as if they thought the more.

IV.

IN GREEN STREET

Uncertain whether the impression that Prosper Profond was dangerous should be traced to his attempt to give Val the Mayfly filly; to a remark of Fleur's: "He's like the hosts of Midianhe prowls and prowls around"; to his preposterous inquiry of Jack Cardigan: "What's the use of keepin' fit?" or, more simply, to the fact that he was a foreigner, or alien as it was now called. Certain, that Annette was looking particularly handsome, and that Soameshad sold him a Gauguin and then torn up the cheque, so that Monsieur Profond himself had said: "I didn't get that small picture I bought from Mr. Forsyde."

However suspiciously regarded, he still frequented Winifred's evergreen little house in Green Street, with a goodnatured obtuseness which no one mistook for naivete, a word hardly applicable to Monsieur Prosper Profond. Winifred still found him "amusing," and would write him little notes saying: "Come and have a 'jolly' with us"it was breath of life to her to keep up with the phrases of the day.

The mystery, with which all felt him to be surrounded, was due to his having done, seen, heard, and known everything, and found nothing in itwhich was unnatural. The English type of disillusionment was familiar enough to Winifred, who had always moved in fashionable circles. It gave a certain cachet or distinction, so that one got something out of it. But to see nothing in anything, not as a pose, but because there was nothing in anything, was not English; and that which was not English one could not help secretly feeling dangerous, if not precisely bad form. It was like having the mood which the War had left, seateddark, heavy, smiling, indifferentin your Empire chair; it was like listening to that mood talking through thick pink lips above a little diabolic beard. It was, as Jack Cardigan expressed itfor the English character at large"a bit too thick"for if nothing was really worth getting excited about, there were always games, and one could make it so! Even Winifred, ever a Forsyte at heart, felt that there was nothing to be had out of such a mood of disillusionment, so that it really ought not to be there. Monsieur Profond, in fact, made the mood too plain in a country which decently veiled such realities.

When Fleur, after her hurried return from Robin Hill, came down to dinner that evening, the mood was standing at the window of Winifred's little drawingroom, looking out into Green Street, with an air of seeing nothing in it. And Fleur gazed promptly into the fireplace with an air of seeing a fire which was not there.

Monsieur Profond came from the window. He was in full fig, with a white waistcoat and a white flower in his buttonhole.

"Well, Miss Forsyde," he said, "I'm awful pleased to see you. Mr. Forsyde well? I was sayin' today I want to see him have some pleasure. He worries."

"You think so?" said Fleur shortly.

"Worries," repeated Monsieur Profond, burring the r's.

Fleur spun round. "Shall I tell you," she said, "what would give him pleasure?" But the words, "To hear that you had cleared out," died at the expression on his face. All his fine white teeth were showing.

"I was hearin' at the Club today about his old trouble." Fleur opened her eyes. "What do you mean?"

Monsieur Profond moved his sleek head as if to minimize his statement.

"Before you were born," he said; "that small business."

Though conscious that he had cleverly diverted her from his own share in her father's worry, Fleur was unable to withstand a rush of nervous curiosity. "Tell me what you heard."

"Why!" murmured Monsieur Profond, "you know all that."

"I expect I do. But I should like to know that you haven't heard it all wrong."

"His first wife," murmured Monsieur Profond.

Choking back the words, "He was never married before," she said: "Well, what about her?"

"Mr. George Forsyde was tellin' me about your father's first wife marryin' his cousin Jolyon afterward. It was a small bit unpleasant, I should think. I saw their boynice boy!"

Fleur looked up. Monsieur Profond was swimming, heavily diabolical, before her. That the reason! With the most heroic effort of her life so far, she managed to arrest that swimming figure. She could not tell whether he had noticed. And just then Winifred came in.

"Oh! here you both are already; Imogen and I have had the most amusing afternoon at the Babies' bazaar."

"What babies?" said Fleur mechanically.

"The 'Save the Babies.' I got such a bargain, my dear. A piece of old Armenian work from before the Flood. I want your opinion on it, Prosper."

"Auntie," whispered Fleur suddenly.

At the tone in the girl's voice Winifred closed in on her.'

"What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

Monsieur Profond had withdrawn into the window, where he was practically out of hearing.

"Auntie, hehe told me that father has been married before. Is it true that he divorced her, and she married Jon Forsyte's father?"

Never in all the life of the mother of four little Darties had Winifred felt more seriously embarrassed. Her niece's face was so pale, her eyes so dark, her voice so whispery and strained.

"Your father didn't wish you to hear," she said, with all the aplomb she could muster. "These things will happen. I've often told him he ought to let you know."

"Oh!" said Fleur, and that was all, but it made Winifred pat her shoulder a firm little shoulder, nice and white! She never could help an appraising eye and touch in the matter of her niece, who would have to be married, of course though not to that boy Jon.

"We've forgotten all about it years and years ago," she said comfortably. "Come and have dinner!"

"No, Auntie. I don't feel very well. May I go upstairs?"

"My dear!" murmured Winifred, concerned, "you're not taking this to heart? Why, you haven't properly come out yet! That boy's a child!"

"What boy? I've only got a headache. But I can't stand that man tonight."

"Well, well," said Winifred, "go and lie down. I'll send you some bromide, and I shall talk to Prosper Profond. What business had he to gossip? Though I must say I think it's much better you should know."

Fleur smiled. "Yes," she said, and slipped from the room.

She went up with her head whirling, a dry sensation in her throat, a guttered frightened feeling in her breast. Never in her life as yet had she suffered from even momentary fear that she would not get what she had set her heart on. The sensations of the afternoon had been full and poignant, and this gruesome discovery coming on the top of them had really made her head ache. No wonder her father had hidden that photograph, so secretly behind her own ashamed of having kept it! But could he hate Jon's mother and yet keep her photograph? She pressed her hands over her forehead, trying to see things clearly. Had they told Jon had her visit to Robin Hill forced them to tell him? Everything now turned on that! She knew, they all knew, except perhaps Jon!

She walked up and down, biting her lip and thinking desperately hard. Jon loved his mother. If they had told him, what would he do? She could not tell. But if they had not told him, should she not get him for herself get married to him, before he knew? She searched her memories of Robin Hill. His mother's face so passive with its dark eyes and as if powdered hair, its reserve, its smile baffled her; and his father's kindly, sunken, ironic. Instinctively she felt they would shrink from telling Jon, even now, shrink from hurting him for of course it would hurt him awfully to know!

Her aunt must be made not to tell her father that she knew. So long as neither she herself nor Jon were supposed to know, there was still a chance freedom to cover one's tracks, and get what her heart was set on. But she was almost overwhelmed by her isolation. Every one's hand was against her every one's! It was as Jon had said and she just wanted to live and the past was in their way, a past they hadn't shared in, and didn't understand! Oh! What a shame! And suddenly she thought of June. Would she help them? For somehow June had left on her the impression that she would be sympathetic with their love, impatient of obstacle. Then, instinctively, she thought: 'I won't give anything away, though, even to her. I daren't. I mean to have Jon; against them all.'

Soup was brought up to her, and one of Winifred's pet headache cachets. She swallowed both. Then Winifred herself appeared. Fleur opened her campaign with the words:

"You know, Auntie, I do wish people wouldn't think I'm in love with that boy. Why, I've hardly seen him!"

Winifred, though experienced, was not "fine." She accepted the remark with considerable relief. Of course, it was not pleasant for the girl to hear of the family scandal, and she set herself to minimise the matter, a task for which she was eminently qualified, "raised" fashionably under a comfortable mother and a father whose nerves might not be shaken, and for many years the wife of Montague Dartie. Her description was a masterpiece of understatement. Fleur's father's first wife had been very foolish. There had been a young man who had got run over, and she had left Fleur's father. Then, years after, when it might all have come right again, she had taken up with their cousin Jolyon; and, of course, her father had been obliged to have a divorce. Nobody remembered anything of it now, except just the family. And, perhaps, it had all turned out for the best; her father had Fleur; and Jolyon and Irene had been quite happy, they said, and their boy was a nice boy. "Val having Holly, too, is a sort of plaster, don't you know?" With these soothing words, Winifred patted her niece's shoulder; thought: 'She's a nice, plump little thing!' and went back to Prosper Profond, who, in spite of his indiscretion, was very "amusing" this evening.

For some minutes after her aunt had gone Fleur remained under influence of bromide material and spiritual. But then reality came back. Her aunt had left out all

that mattered all the feeling, the hate, the love, the unforgivingness of passionate hearts. She, who knew so little of life, and had touched only the fringe of love, was yet aware by instinct that words have as little relation to fact and feeling as coin to the bread it buys. 'Poor Father!' she thought. 'Poor me! Poor Jon! But I don't care, I mean to have him!' From the window of her darkened room she saw "that man" issue from the door below and "prowl" away. If he and her mother how would that affect her chance? Surely it must make her father cling to her more closely, so that he would consent in the end to anything she wanted, or become reconciled the sooner to what she did without his knowledge.

She took some earth from the flowerbox in the window, and with all her might flung it after that disappearing figure. It fell short, but the action did her good.

And a little puff of air came up from Green Street, smelling of petrol, not sweet.

.PURELY FORSYTE AFFAIRS

Soames, coming up to the City, with the intention of calling in at Green Street at the end of his day and taking Fleur back home with him, suffered from rumination. Sleeping partner that he was, he seldom visited the City now, but he still had a room of his own at Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte's, and one special clerk and a half assigned to the management of purely Forsyte affairs. They were somewhat in flux just now an auspicious moment for the disposal of house property. And Soames was unloading the estates of his father and Uncle Roger, and to some extent of his Uncle Nicholas. His shrewd and matter-of-course probity in all money concerns had made him something of an autocrat in connection with these trusts. If Soames thought this or thought that, one had better save oneself the bother of thinking too. He guaranteed, as it were, irresponsibility to numerous Forsytes of the third and fourth generations. His fellow trustees, such as his cousins Roger or Nicholas, his cousins-in-law Tweetyman and Spender, or his sister Cicely's husband, all trusted him; he signed first, and where he signed first they signed after, and nobody was a penny the worse. Just now they were all a good many pennies the better, and Soames was beginning to see the close of certain trusts, except for distribution of the income from securities as gilt-edged as was compatible with the period.

Passing the more feverish parts of the City toward the most perfect backwater in London, he ruminated. Money was extraordinarily tight; and morality extraordinarily loose! The War had done it. Banks were not lending; people breaking contracts all over the place. There was a feeling in the air and a look on faces that he did not like. The country seemed in for a spell of gambling and bankruptcies. There was satisfaction in the thought that neither he nor his trusts had an investment which could be affected by anything less maniacal than national repudiation or a levy on capital. If Soames had faith, it was in what he called "English common sense" or the power to have things, if not one way then another. He might like his father James before him say he didn't know what things were coming to, but he never in his heart believed they were. If it rested with him, they wouldn't, after all, he was only an Englishman like any other, so quietly tenacious of what he had that he knew he would never really part with it without something more or less equivalent in exchange. His mind was essentially equilibristic in material matters, and his way of putting the national situation difficult to refute in a world composed of human beings. Take his own case, for example! He was well off. Did that do anybody harm? He did not eat ten meals a day; he ate no more than, perhaps not so much as, a poor man. He spent no money on vice; breathed no more air, used no more water to speak of than the mechanic or the porter. He certainly had pretty things about him, but they had given employment in the making, and somebody must use them. He bought pictures, but Art must be encouraged. He was, in fact, an accidental channel through which money flowed, employing labour. What was there objectionable in that? In his charge money was in quicker and more useful flux than it would be in charge of the

State and a lot of slowly moneysucking officials. And as to what he saved each year it was just as much in flux as what he didn't save, going into Water Board or Council Stocks, or something sound and useful. The State paid him no salary for being trustee of his own or other people's money he did all that for nothing. Therein lay the whole case against nationalisation owners of private property were unpaid, and yet had every incentive to quicken up the flux. Under nationalisation just the opposite! In a country smarting from officialism he felt that he had a strong case.

It particularly annoyed him, entering that backwater of perfect peace, to think that a lot of unscrupulous Trusts and Combinations had been cornering the market in goods of all kinds, and keeping prices at an artificial height. Such abusers of the individualistic system were the ruffians who caused all the trouble, and it was some satisfaction to see them getting into a stew at last lest the whole thing might come down with a run and land them in the soup.

The offices of Cuthcott, Kingson and Forsyte occupied the ground and first floors of a house on the righthand side; and, ascending to his room, Soames thought: 'Time we had a coat of paint.'

His old clerk Gradman was seated, where he always was, at a huge bureau with countless pigeonholes. Half the clerk stood beside him, with a broker's note recording investment of the proceeds from sale of the Bryanston Square house, in Roger Forsyte's estate. Soames took it, and said:

"Vancouver City Stock. H'm. It's down today!"

With a sort of grating ingratiation old Gradman answered him:

"Yees; but everything's down, Mr. Soames." And half the clerk withdrew.

Soames skewered the document on to a number of other papers and hung up his hat.

"I want to look at my Will and Marriage Settlement, Gradman."

Old Gradman, moving to the limit of his swivel chair, drew out two drafts from the bottom lefthand drawer. Recovering his body, he raised his grizzlehaired face, very red from stooping.

"Copies, Sir."

Soames took them. It struck him suddenly how like Gradman was to the stout brindled yard dog they had been wont to keep on his chain at The Shelter, till one day Fleur had come and insisted it should be let loose, so that it had at once bitten the cook and been destroyed. If you let Gradman off his chain, would he bite the cook?

Checking this frivolous fancy, Soames unfolded his Marriage Settlement. He had not looked at it for over eighteen years, not since he remade his Will when his father died

and Fleur was born. He wanted to see whether the words "during coverture" were in. Yes, they were odd expression, when you thought of it, and derived perhaps from horsebreeding! Interest on fifteen thousand pounds (which he paid her without deducting income tax) so long as she remained his wife, and afterward during widowhood "dum casta" old-fashioned and rather pointed words, put in to insure the conduct of Fleur's mother. His Will made it up to an annuity of a thousand under the same conditions. All right! He returned the copies to Gradman, who took them without looking up, swung the chair, restored the papers to their drawer, and went on casting up.

"Gradman! I don't like the condition of the country; there are a lot of people about without any common sense. I want to find a way by which I can safeguard Miss Fleur against anything which might arise."

Gradman wrote the figure "2" on his blottingpaper.

"Yees," he said; "there's a nahsty spirit."

"The ordinary restraint against anticipation doesn't meet the case."

"Nao," said Gradman.

"Suppose those Labour fellows come in, or worse! It's these people with fixed ideas who are the danger. Look at Ireland!"

"Ah!" said Gradman.

"Suppose I were to make a settlement on her at once with myself as beneficiary for life, they couldn't take anything but the interest from me, unless of course they alter the law."

Gradman moved his head and smiled.

"Ah!" he said, "they wouldn't do thaat!"

"I don't know," muttered Soames; "I don't trust them."

"It'll take two years, sir, to be valid against death duties."

Soames sniffed. Two years! He was only sixtyfive!

"That's not the point. Draw a form of settlement that passes all my property to Miss Fleur's children in equal shares, with antecedent lifeinterests first to myself and then to her without power of anticipation, and add a clause that in the event of anything happening to divert her lifeinterest, that interest passes to the trustees, to apply for her benefit, in their absolute discretion."

Gradman grated: "Rather extreme at your age, sir; you lose control."

"That's my business," said Soames sharply.

Gradman wrote on a piece of paper: "Lifeinterestanticipationdivert interestabsolute discretion...." and said:

"What trustees? There's young Mr. Kingson; he's a nice steady young fellow."

"Yes, he might do for one. I must have three. There isn't a Forsyte now who appeals to me."

"Not young Mr. Nicholas? He's at the Bar. We've given 'im briefs."

"He'll never set the Thames on fire," said Soames.

A smile oozed out on Gradman's face, greasy from countless muttonchops, the smile of a man who sits all day.

"You can't expect it, at his age, Mr. Soames."

"Why? What is he? Forty?"

"Yees, quite a young fellow."

"Well, put him in; but I want somebody who'll take a personal interest. There's no one that I can see."

"What about Mr. Valerius, now he's come home?"

"Val Dartie? With that father?"

"Weell," murmured Gradman, "he's been dead seven yearsthe Statute runs against him."

"No," said Soames. "I don't like the connection." He rose. Gradman said suddenly:

"If they were makin' a levy on capital, they could come on the trustees, sir. So there you'd be just the same. I'd think it over, if I were you."

"That's true," said Soames. "I will. What have you done about that dilapidation notice in Vere Street?"

"I 'aven't served it yet. The party's very old. She won't want to go out at her age."

"I don't know. This spirit of unrest touches every one."

"Still, I'm lookin' at things broadly, sir. She's eightyone."

"Better serve it," said Soames, "and see what she says. Oh! and Mr. Timothy? Is everything in order in case of"

"I've got the inventory of his estate all ready; had the furniture and pictures valued so that we know what reserves to put on. I shall be sorry when he goes, though. Dear me! It is a time since I first saw Mr. Timothy!"

"We can't live for ever," said Soames, taking down his hat.

"Nao," said Gradman; "but it'll be a pity the last of the old family! Shall I take up the matter of that nuisance in Old Compton Street? Those organs they're nasty things."

"Do. I must call for Miss Fleur and catch the four o'clock. Goodday, Gradman."

"Goodday, Mr. Soames. I hope Miss Fleur"

"Well enough, but gads about too much."

"Yees," grated Gradman; "she's young."

Soames went out, musing: "Old Gradman! If he were younger I'd put him in the trust. There's nobody I can depend on to take a real interest."

Leaving the bilious and mathematical exactitude, the preposterous peace of that backwater, he thought suddenly: 'During coverture! Why can't they exclude fellows like Profond, instead of a lot of hardworking Germans?' and was surprised at the depth of uneasiness which could provoke so unpatriotic a thought. But there it was! One never got a moment of real peace. There was always something at the back of everything! And he made his way toward Green Street.

Two hours later by his watch, Thomas Gradman, stirring in his swivel chair, closed the last drawer of his bureau, and putting into his waistcoat pocket a bunch of keys so fat that they gave him a protuberance on the liver side, brushed his old top hat round with his sleeve, took his umbrella, and descended. Thick, short, and buttoned closely into his old frock coat, he walked toward Covent Garden market. He never missed that daily promenade to the Tube for Highgate, and seldom some critical transaction on the way in connection with vegetables and fruit. Generations might be born, and hats might change, wars be fought, and Forsytes fade away, but Thomas Gradman, faithful and grey, would take his daily walk and buy his daily vegetable. Times were not what they were, and his son had lost a leg, and they never gave him those nice little plaited baskets to carry the stuff in now, and these Tubes were convenient things still he mustn't complain; his health was good considering his time of life, and after fiftyfour years in the Law he was getting a round eight hundred a year and a little worried of late, because it was mostly collector's commission on the rents, and with all this conversion of Forsyte property going on, it looked like drying up, and the price of living still so high; but it was no good worrying "The good God made us all" as he was in the habit of saying; still, house property in London he didn't know what Mr. Roger or Mr. James would say if they could see it being sold like this seemed to show a lack of faith; but Mr. Soames he worried. Life and lives in being and twentyone

years after beyond that you couldn't go; still, he kept his health wonderfully and Miss Fleur was a pretty little thing she was; she'd marry; but lots of people had no children now a days she had had his first child at twenty-two; and Mr. Jolyon, married while he was at Cambridge, had his child the same year gracious Peter! That was back in '69, a long time before old Mr. Jolyon fine judge of property had taken his Will away from Mr. James dear, yes! Those were the days when they were buyin' property right and left, and none of this khaki and fallin' over one another to get out of things; and cucumbers at two pence; and a melon the old melons, that made your mouth water! Fifty years since he went into Mr. James' office, and Mr. James had said to him: "Now, Gradman, you're only a shaver you pay attention, and you'll make your five hundred a year before you've done." And he had, and feared God, and served the Forsytes, and kept a vegetable diet at night. And, buying a copy of John Bull not that he approved of it, an extravagant affair he entered the Tube elevator with his mere brown paper parcel, and was borne down into the bowels of the earth.

VI

.SOAMES' PRIVATE LIFE

On his way to Green Street it occurred to Soames that he ought to go into Dumetrius' in Suffolk Street about the possibility of the Bolderby Old Crome. Almost worth while to have fought the war to have the Bolderby Old Crome, as it were, in flux! Old Bolderby had died, his son and grandson had been killed a cousin was coming into the estate, who meant to sell it, some said because of the condition of England, others said because he had asthma.

If Dumetrius once got hold of it the price would become prohibitive; it was necessary for Soames to find out whether Dumetrius had got it, before he tried to get it himself. He therefore confined himself to discussing with Dumetrius whether Monticellis would come again now that it was the fashion for a picture to be anything except a picture; and the future of Johns, with a sideslip into Buxton Knights. It was only when leaving that he added: "So they're not selling the Bolderby Old Crome, after all?" In sheer pride of racial superiority, as he had calculated would be the case, Dumetrius replied:

"Oh! I shall get it, Mr. Forsyte, sir!"

The flutter of his eyelid fortified Soames in a resolution to write direct to the new Bolderby, suggesting that the only dignified way of dealing with an Old Crome was to avoid dealers. He therefore said, "Well, good-day!" and went, leaving Dumetrius the wiser.

At Green Street he found that Fleur was out and would be all the evening; she was staying one more night in London. He cabbed on dejectedly, and caught his train.

He reached his house about six o'clock. The air was heavy, midges biting, thunder about. Taking his letters he went up to his dressingroom to cleanse himself of London.

An uninteresting post. A receipt, a bill for purchases on behalf of Fleur. A circular about an exhibition of etchings. A letter beginning:

"SIR,

"I feel it my duty..."

That would be an appeal or something unpleasant. He looked at once for the signature. There was none! Incredulously he turned the page over and examined each corner. Not being a public man, Soames had never yet had an anonymous letter, and his first impulse was to tear it up, as a dangerous thing; his second to read it, as a thing still more dangerous.

"SIR,

"I feel it my duty to inform you that having no interest in the matter your lady is carrying on with a foreigner"

Reaching that word Soames stopped mechanically and examined the postmark. So far as he could pierce the impenetrable disguise in which the Post Office had wrapped it, there was something with a "sea" at the end and a "t" in it. Chelsea? No! Battersea? Perhaps! He read on.

"These foreigners are all the same. Sack the lot. This one meets your lady twice a week. I know it of my own knowledge and to see an Englishman put on goes against the grain. You watch it and see if what I say isn't true. I shouldn't meddle if it wasn't a dirty foreigner that's in it.

"Yours obedient."

The sensation with which Soames dropped the letter was similar to that he would have had entering his bedroom and finding it full of blackbeetles. The meanness of anonymity gave a shuddering obscenity to the moment. And the worst of it was that this shadow had been at the back of his mind ever since the Sunday evening when Fleur had pointed down at Prosper Profond strolling on the lawn, and said: "Prowling cat!" Had he not in connection therewith, this very day, perused his Will and Marriage Settlement? And now this anonymous ruffian, with nothing to gain, apparently, save the venting of his spite against foreigners, had wrenched it out of the obscurity in which he had hoped and wished it would remain. To have such knowledge forced on him, at his time of life, about Fleur's mother! He picked the letter up from the carpet, tore it across, and then, when it hung together by just the fold at the back, stopped tearing, and reread it. He was taking at that moment one of the decisive resolutions of his life. He would not be forced into another scandal. No! However he decided to deal with this matter and it required the most farsighted and careful consideration he would do nothing that might injure Fleur. That resolution taken, his mind answered the helm again, and he made his ablutions. His hands trembled as he dried them. Scandal he would not have, but something must be done to stop this sort of thing! He went into his wife's room and stood looking around him. The idea of searching for anything which would incriminate, and entitle him to hold a menace over her, did not even come to him. There would be nothing she was much too practical. The idea of having her watched had been dismissed before it came too well he remembered his previous experience of that. No! He had nothing but this torn up letter from some anonymous ruffian, whose impudent intrusion into his private life he so violently resented. It was repugnant to him to make use of it, but he might have to. What a mercy Fleur was not at home tonight! A tap on the door broke up his painful cogitations.

"Mr. Michael Mont, sir, is in the drawingroom. Will you see him?"

"No," said Soames; "yes. I'll come down."

Anything that would take his mind off for a few minutes!

Michael Mont in flannels stood on the verandah smoking a cigarette. He threw it away as Soames came up, and ran his hand through his hair.

Soames' feeling toward this young man was singular. He was no doubt a rackety, irresponsible young fellow according to old standards, yet somehow likeable, with his extraordinarily cheerful way of blurting out his opinions.

"Come in," he said; "have you had tea?"

Mont came in.

"I thought Fleur would have been back, sir; but I'm glad she isn't. The fact is, I'm fearfully gone on her; so fearfully gone that I thought you'd better know. It's oldfashioned, of course, coming to fathers first, but I thought you'd forgive that. I went to my own Dad, and he says if I settle down he'll see me through. He rather cottons to the idea, in fact. I told him about your Goya."

"Oh!" said Soames, inexpressibly dry. "He rather cottons?"

"Yes, sir; do you?"

Soames smiled faintly.

"You see," resumed Mont, twiddling his straw hat, while his hair, ears, eyebrows, all seemed to stand up from excitement, "when you've been through the War you can't help being in a hurry."

"To get married; and unmarried afterward," said Soames slowly.

"Not from Fleur, sir. Imagine, if you were me!"

Soames cleared his throat. That way of putting it was forcible enough.

"Fleur's too young," he said.

"Oh! no, sir. We're awfully old nowadays. My Dad seems to me a perfect babe; his thinking apparatus hasn't turned a hair. But he's a Baronight, of course; that keeps him back."

"Baronight," repeated Soames; "what may that be?"

"Bart, sir. I shall be a Bart some day. But I shall live it down, you know."

"Go away and live this down," said Soames.

Young Mont said imploringly: "Oh! no, sir. I simply must hang around, or I shouldn't have a dog's chance. You'll let Fleur do what she likes, I suppose, anyway. Madame passes me."

"Indeed!" said Soames frigidly.

"You don't really bar me, do you?" and the young man looked so doleful that Soames smiled.

"You may think you're very old," he said; "but you strike me as extremely young. To rattle ahead of everything is not a proof of maturity."

"All right, sir; I give you our age. But to show you I mean business I've got a job."

"Glad to hear it."

"Joined a publisher; my governor is putting up the stakes."

Soames put his hand over his mouth he had so very nearly said: "God help the publisher!" His grey eyes scrutinised the agitated young man.

"I don't dislike you, Mr. Mont, but Fleur is everything to me: Everything do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I know; but so she is to me."

"That's as may be. I'm glad you've told me, however. And now I think there's nothing more to be said."

"I know it rests with her, sir."

"It will rest with her a long time, I hope."

"You aren't cheering," said Mont suddenly.

"No," said Soames, "my experience of life has not made me anxious to couple people in a hurry. Goodnight, Mr. Mont. I shan't tell Fleur what you've said."

"Oh!" murmured Mont blankly; "I really could knock my brains out for want of her. She knows that perfectly well."

"I dare say." And Soames held out his hand. A distracted squeeze, a heavy sigh, and soon after sounds from the young man's motorcycle called up visions of flying dust and broken bones.

'The younger generation!' he thought heavily, and went out on to the lawn. The gardeners had been mowing, and there was still the smell of freshcut grass the thundery air kept all scents close to earth. The sky was of a purplish hue the poplars

black. Two or three boats passed on the river, scuttling, as it were, for shelter before the storm. 'Three days' fine weather,' thought Soames, 'and then a storm!' Where was Annette? With that chap, for all he knew she was a young woman! Impressed with the queer charity of that thought, he entered the summerhouse and sat down. The fact was and he admitted it Fleur was so much to him that his wife was very little very little; French had never been much more than a mistress, and he was getting indifferent to that side of things! It was odd how, with all this ingrained care for moderation and secure investment, Soames ever put his emotional eggs into one basket. First Irene now Fleur. He was dimly conscious of it, sitting there, conscious of its odd dangerousness. It had brought him to wreck and scandal once, but now now it should save him! He cared so much for Fleur that he would have no further scandal. If only he could get at that anonymous letterwriter, he would teach him not to meddle and stir up mud at the bottom of water which he wished should remain stagnant!... A distant flash, a low rumble, and large drops of rain spattered on the thatch above him. He remained indifferent, tracing a pattern with his finger on the dusty surface of a little rustic table. Fleur's future! 'I want fair sailing for her,' he thought. 'Nothing else matters at my time of life.' A lonely business life! What you had you never could keep to yourself! As you warned one off, you let another in. One could make sure of nothing! He reached up and pulled a red rambler rose from a cluster which blocked the window. Flowers grew and dropped Nature was a queer thing! The thunder rumbled and crashed, travelling east along a river, the paling flashes flicked his eyes; the poplar tops showed sharp and dense against the sky, a heavy shower rustled and rattled and veiled in the little house wherein he sat, indifferent, thinking.

When the storm was over, he left his retreat and went down the wet path to the river bank.

Two swans had come, sheltering in among the reeds. He knew the birds well, and stood watching the dignity in the curve of those white necks and formidable snakelike heads. 'Not dignified what I have to do!' he thought. And yet it must be tackled, lest worse befell. Annette must be back by now from wherever she had gone, for it was nearly dinnertime, and as the moment for seeing her approached, the difficulty of knowing what to say and how to say it had increased. A new and scaring thought occurred to him. Suppose she wanted her liberty to marry this fellow! Well, if she did, she couldn't have it. He had not married her for that. The image of Prosper Profond dawdled before him reassuringly. Not a marrying man! No, no! Anger replaced that momentary scare. 'He had better not come my way,' he thought. The mongrel represented! But what did Prosper Profond represent? Nothing that mattered surely. And yet something real enough in the world unmorality let off its chain, disillusionment on the prow! That expression Annette had caught from him: "Je m'en fiche!" A fatalistic chap! A continental cosmopolitan product of the age! If there were condemnation more complete, Soames felt that he did not know it.

The swans had turned their heads, and were looking past him into some distance of their own. One of them uttered a little hiss, wagged its tail, turned as if answering to

a rudder, and swam away. The other followed. Their white bodies, their stately necks, passed out of his sight, and he went toward the house.

Annette was in the drawingroom, dressed for dinner, and he thought as he went upstairs 'Handsome is as handsome does.' Handsome! Except for remarks about the curtains in the drawingroom, and the storm, there was practically no conversation during a meal distinguished by exactitude of quantity and perfection of quality. Soames drank nothing. He followed her into the drawingroom afterward, and found her smoking a cigarette on the sofa between the two French windows. She was leaning back, almost upright, in a low black frock, with her knees crossed and her blue eyes halfclosed; greyblue smoke issued from her red, rather full lips, a fillet bound her chestnut hair, she wore the thinnest silk stockings, and shoes with very high heels showing off her instep. A fine piece in any room! Soames, who held that torn letter in a hand thrust deep into the sidepocket of his dinnerjacket, said:

"I'm going to shut the window; the damp's lifting in."

He did so, and stood looking at a David Cox adorning the creampanelled wall close by.

What was she thinking of? He had never understood a woman in his lifeexcept Fleurand Fleur not always! His heart beat fast. But if he meant to do it, now was the moment. Turning from the David Cox, he took out the torn letter.

"I've had this."

Her eyes widened, stared at him, and hardened.

Soames handed her the letter.

"It's torn, but you can read it." And he turned back to the David Coxa seapiece, of good tonebut without movement enough. 'I wonder what that chap's doing at this moment?' he thought. 'I'll astonish him yet.' Out of the corner of his eye he saw Annette holding the letter rigidly; her eyes moved from side to side under her darkened lashes and frowning darkened eyes. She dropped the letter, gave a little shiver, smiled, and said:

"Dirrty!"

"I quite agree," said Soames; "degrading. Is it true?"

A tooth fastened on her red lower lip. "And what if it were?"

She was brazen!

"Is that all you have to say?"

"No."

"Well, speak out!"

"What is the good of talking?"

Soames said icily: "So you admit it?"

"I admit nothing. You are a fool to ask. A man like you should not ask. It is dangerous."

Soames made a tour of the room, to subdue his rising anger.

"Do you remember," he said, halting in front of her, "what you were when I married you? Working at accounts in a restaurant."

"Do you remember that I was not half your age?"

Soames broke off the hard encounter of their eyes, and went back to the David Cox.

"I am not going to bandy words. I require you to give up this friendship. I think of the matter entirely as it affects Fleur."

"Ah!Fleur!"

"Yes," said Soames stubbornly; "Fleur. She is your child as well as mine."

"It is kind to admit that!"

"Are you going to do what I say?"

"I refuse to tell you."

"Then I must make you."

Annette smiled.

"No, Soames," she said. "You are helpless. Do not say things that you will regret."

Anger swelled the veins on his forehead. He opened his mouth to vent that emotion, and could not. Annette went on:

"There shall be no more such letters, I promise you. That is enough."

Soames writhed. He had a sense of being treated like a child by this woman who had deserved he did not know what.

"When two people have married, and lived like us, Soames, they had better be quiet about each other. There are things one does not drag up into the light for people to

laugh at. You will be quiet, then; not for my sake for your own. You are getting old; I am not, yet. You have made me very practical"

Soames, who had passed through all the sensations of being choked, repeated dully:

"I require you to give up this friendship."

"And if I do not?"

"Then I will cut you out of my Will."

Somehow it did not seem to meet the case. Annette laughed.

"You will live a long time, Soames."

"You are a bad woman," said Soames suddenly.

Annette shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not think so. Living with you has killed things in me, it is true; but I am not a bad woman. I am sensible that is all. And so will you be when you have thought it over."

"I shall see this man," said Soames sullenly, "and warn him off."

"Mon cher, you are funny. You do not want me, you have as much of me as you want; and you wish the rest of me to be dead. I admit nothing, but I am not going to be dead, Soames, at my age; so you had better be quiet, I tell you. I myself will make no scandal; none. Now, I am not saying any more, whatever you do."

She reached out, took a French novel off a little table, and opened it. Soames watched her, silenced by the tumult of his feelings. The thought of that man was almost making him want her, and this was a revelation of their relationship, startling to one little given to introspective philosophy. Without saying another word he went out and up to the picture gallery. This came of marrying a Frenchwoman! And yet, without her there would have been no Fleur! She had served her purpose.

'She's right,' he thought; 'I can do nothing. I don't even know that there's anything in it.' The instinct of self-preservation warned him to batten down his hatches, to smother the fire with want of air. Unless one believed there was something in a thing, there wasn't.

That night he went into her room. She received him in the most matter-of-fact way, as if there had been no scene between them. And he returned to his own room with a curious sense of peace. If one didn't choose to see, one needn't. And he did not choose in future he did not choose. There was nothing to be gained by it nothing! Opening the drawer he took from the sachet a handkerchief, and the framed

photograph of Fleur. When he had looked at it a little he slipped it down, and there was that other one that old one of Irene. An owl hooted while he stood in his window gazing at it. The owl hooted, the red climbing roses seemed to deepen in colour, there came a scent of lime blossom. God! That had been a different thing! Passion Memory! Dust!

VII.

JUNE TAKES A HAND

One who was a sculptor, a Slav, a sometime resident in New York, an egoist, and impecunious, was to be found of an evening in June Forsyte's studio on the bank of the Thames at Chiswick. On the evening of July 6, Boris Strumolowski several of whose works were on show there because they were as yet too advanced to be on show anywhere else had begun well, with that aloof and rather Christlike silence which admirably suited his youthful, round, broad cheekboned countenance framed in bright hair banged like a girl's. June had known him three weeks, and he still seemed to her the principal embodiment of genius, and hope of the future; a sort of Star of the East which had strayed into an unappreciative West. Until that evening he had conversationally confined himself to recording his impressions of the United States, whose dust he had just shaken from off his feet a country, in his opinion, so barbarous in every way that he had sold practically nothing there, and become an object of suspicion to the police; a country, as he said, without a race of its own, without liberty, equality, or fraternity, without principles, traditions, taste, without in a word a soul. He had left it for his own good, and come to the only other country where he could live well. June had dwelt unhappily on him in her lonely moments, standing before his creations frightening, but powerful and symbolic once they had been explained! That he, haloed by bright hair like an early Italian painting, and absorbed in his genius to the exclusion of all else the only sign of course by which real genius could be told should still be a "lame duck" agitated her warm heart almost to the exclusion of Paul Post. And she had begun to take steps to clear her Gallery, in order to fill it with Strumolowski masterpieces. She had at once encountered trouble. Paul Post had kicked; Vospovitch had stung. With all the emphasis of a genius which she did not as yet deny them, they had demanded another six weeks at least of her Gallery. The American stream, still flowing in, would soon be flowing out. The American stream was their right, their only hope, their salvation since nobody in this "beastly" country cared for Art. June had yielded to the demonstration. After all Boris would not mind their having the full benefit of an American stream, which he himself so violently despised.

This evening she had put that to Boris with nobody else present, except Hannah Hobday, the mediaeval black and whitist, and Jimmy Portugal, editor of the NeoArtist. She had put it to him with that sudden confidence which continual contact with the neoartistic world had never been able to dry up in her warm and generous nature. He had not broken his Christlike silence, however, for more than two minutes before she began to move her blue eyes from side to side, as a cat moves its tail. This she said was characteristic of England, the most selfish country in the world; the country which sucked the blood of other countries; destroyed the brains and hearts of Irishmen, Hindus, Egyptians, Boers, and Burmese, all the best races in the world; bullying, hypocritical England! This was what he had expected, coming to, such a country, where the climate was all fog, and the people all tradesmen perfectly blind

to Art, and sunk in profiteering and the grossest materialism. Conscious that Hannah Hobdey was murmuring, "Hear, hear!" and Jimmy Portugal sniggering, June grew crimson, and suddenly rapped out:

"Then why did you ever come? We didn't ask you."

The remark was so singularly at variance with all she had led him to expect from her, that Strumolowski stretched out his hand and took a cigarette.

"England never wants an idealist," he said.

But in June something primitively English was thoroughly upset; old Jolyon's sense of justice had risen, as it were, from bed. "You come and sponge on us," she said, "and then abuse us. If you think that's playing the game, I don't."

She now discovered that which others had discovered before her the thickness of hide beneath which the sensibility of genius is sometimes veiled. Strumolowski's young and ingenuous face became the incarnation of a sneer.

"Sponge, one does not sponge, one takes what is owing a tenth part of what is owing. You will repent to say that, Miss Forsyte."

"Oh, no," said June, "I shan't."

"Ah! We know very well, we artists you take us to get what you can out of us. I want nothing from you" and he blew out a cloud of June's smoke.

Decision rose in an icy puff from the turmoil of insulted shame within her. "Very well, then, you can take your things away."

And, almost in the same moment, she thought: 'Poor boy! He's only got a garret, and probably not a taxi fare. In front of these people, too; it's positively disgusting!'

Young Strumolowski shook his head violently; his hair, thick, smooth, close as a golden plate, did not fall off.

"I can live on nothing," he said shrilly; "I have often had to for the sake of my Art. It is you bourgeois who force us to spend money."

The words hit June like a pebble, in the ribs. After all she had done for Art, all her identification with its troubles and lame ducks. She was struggling for adequate words when the door was opened, and her Austrian murmured:

"A young lady, gnadiges Fraulein."

"Where?"

"In the little mealroom."

With a glance at Boris Strumolowski, at Hannah Hobdey, at Jimmy Portugal, June said nothing, and went out, devoid of equanimity. Entering the "little mealroom," she perceived the young lady to be Fleur looking very pretty, if pale. At this disenchanted moment a little lame duck of her own breed was welcome to June, so homoeopathic by instinct.

The girl must have come, of course, because of Jon; or, if not, at least to get something out of her. And June felt just then that to assist somebody was the only bearable thing.

"So you've remembered to come," she said.

"Yes. What a jolly little duck of a house! But please don't let me bother you, if you've got people."

"Not at all," said June. "I want to let them stew in their own juice for a bit. Have you come about Jon?"

"You said you thought we ought to be told. Well, I've found out."

"Oh!" said June blankly. "Not nice, is it?"

They were standing one on each side of the little bare table at which June took her meals. A vase on it was full of Iceland poppies; the girl raised her hand and touched them with a gloved finger. To her newfangled dress, frilly about the hips and tight below the knees, June took a sudden liking a charming colour, flaxblue.

'She makes a picture,' thought June. Her little room, with its whitewashed walls, its floor and hearth of old pink brick, its black paint, and latticed window athwart which the last of the sunlight was shining, had never looked so charming, set off by this young figure, with the creamy, slightly frowning face. She remembered with sudden vividness how nice she herself had looked in those old days when her heart was set on Philip Bosinney, that dead lover, who had broken from her to destroy for ever Irene's allegiance to this girl's father. Did Fleur know of that, too?

"Well," she said, "what are you going to do?"

It was some seconds before Fleur answered.

"I don't want Jon to suffer. I must see him once more to put an end to it."

"You're going to put an end to it!"

"What else is there to do?"

The girl seemed to June, suddenly, intolerably spiritless.

"I suppose you're right," she muttered. "I know my father thinks so; but I should never have done it myself. I can't take things lying down."

How poised and watchful that girl looked; how unemotional her voice sounded!

"People will assume that I'm in love."

"Well, aren't you?"

Fleur shrugged her shoulders. 'I might have known it,' thought June; 'she's Soames' daughterfish! And yethe!'

"What do you want me to do then?" she said with a sort of disgust.

"Could I see Jon here tomorrow on his way down to Holly's? He'd come if you sent him a line tonight. And perhaps afterward you'd let them know quietly at Robin Hill that it's all over, and that they needn't tell Jon about his mother."

"All right!" said June abruptly. "I'll write now, and you can post it. Halfpast two tomorrow. I shan't be in, myself."

She sat down at the tiny bureau which filled one corner. When she looked round with the finished note Fleur was still touching the poppies with her gloved finger.

June licked a stamp. "Well, here it is. If you're not in love, of course, there's no more to be said. Jon's lucky."

Fleur took the note. "Thanks awfully!"

'Coldblooded little baggage!' thought June. Jon, son of her father, to love, and not to be loved by the daughter of Soames! It was humiliating!

"Is that all?"

Fleur nodded; her frills shook and trembled as she swayed toward the door.

"Goodbye!"

"Goodbye!... Little piece of fashion!" muttered June, closing the door. "That family!" And she marched back toward her studio. Boris Strumolowski had regained his Christlike silence and Jimmy Portugal was damning everybody, except the group in whose behalf he ran the NeoArtist. Among the condemned were Eric Cobbley, and several other "lameduck" genii who at one time or another had held first place in the repertoire of June's aid and adoration. She experienced a sense of futility and disgust, and went to the window to let the riverwind blow those squeaky words away.

But when at length Jimmy Portugal had finished, and gone with Hannah Hobdey, she sat down and mothered young Strumolowski for half an hour, promising him a

month, at least, of the American stream; so that he went away with his halo in perfect order. 'In spite of all,' June thought, 'Boris is wonderful.'