

Old Jolyon Walks

By

John Galsworthy

Freeeditorial 

Old Jolyon Walks

I

Twofold impulse had made Jolyon say to his wife at breakfast "Let's go up to Lord's!"

"Wanted" something to abate the anxiety in which those two had lived during the sixty hours since Jon had brought Fleur down. "Wanted" too, that which might assuage the pangs of memory in one who knew he might lose them any day!

Fiftyeight years ago Jolyon had become an Eton boy, for old Jolyon's whim had been that he should be canonised at the greatest possible expense. Year after year he had gone to Lord's from Stanhope Gate with a father whose youth in the eighteenthcenturies had been passed without polish in the game of cricket. Old Jolyon would speak quite openly of swipes, full tosses, half and threequarter balls; and young Jolyon with the guileless snobbery of youth had trembled lest his sire should be overheard. Only in this supreme matter of cricket he had been nervous, for his father in Crimean whiskers then had ever impressed him as the beau ideal. Though never canonised himself, Old Jolyon's natural fastidiousness and balance had saved him from the errors of the vulgar. How delicious, after howling in a top hat and a sweltering heat, to go home with his father in a hansom cab, bathe, dress, and forth to the "Disunion" Club, to dine off white bait, cutlets, and a tart, and get two "swells," old and young, in lavender kid gloves to the opera or play. And on Sunday, when the match was over, and his top hat duly broken, down with his father in a special hansom to the "Crown and Sceptre," and the terrace above the river the golden sixties when the world was simple, dandies glamorous, Democracy not born, and the books of Whyte Melville coming thick and fast.

A generation later, with his own boy, Jolly, Harrow buttonholed with cornflowers by old Jolyon's whim his grandson had been canonised at a trifle less expense again Jolyon had experienced the heat and counterpassions of the day, and come back to the cool and the strawberry beds of Robin Hill, and billiards after dinner, his boy making the most heartbreaking flukes and trying to seem languid and grown up. Those two days each year he and his son had been alone together in the world, one on each side and Democracy just born!

And so, he had unearthed a grey top hat, borrowed a tiny bit of light blue ribbon from Irene, and gingerly, keeping cool, by car and train and taxi, had reached Lord's Ground. There, beside her in a lawn coloured frock with narrow black edges, he had watched the game, and felt the old thrill stir within him.

When Soames passed, the day was spoiled. Irene's face was distorted by compression of the lips. No good to go on sitting here with Soames or perhaps his daughter recurring in front of them, like decimals. And he said:

"Well, dear, if you've had enough let's go!"

That evening Jolyon felt exhausted. Not wanting her to see him thus, he waited till she had begun to play, and stole off to the little study. He opened the long window for air, and the door, that he might still hear her music drifting in; and, settled in his father's old armchair, closed his eyes, with his head against the worn brown leather. Like that passage of the Cesar Franck Sonatas had been his life with her, a divine third movement. And now this business of Jon's this bad business! Drifted to the edge of consciousness, he hardly knew if it were in sleep that he smelled the scent of a cigar, and seemed to see his father in the blackness before his closed eyes. That shape formed, went, and formed again; as if in the very chair where he himself was sitting, he saw his father, blackcoated, with knees crossed, glasses balanced between thumb and finger; saw the big white moustaches, and the deep eyes looking up below a dome of forehead and seeming to search his own, seeming to speak. "Are you facing it, Jo? It's for you to decide. She's only a woman!" Ah! how well he knew his father in that phrase; how all the Victorian Age came up with it! And his answer "No, I've funk'd it, funk'd hurting her and Jon and myself. I've got a heart; I've funk'd it." But the old eyes, so much older, so much younger than his own, kept at it; "It's your wife, your son; your past. Tackle it, my boy!" Was it a message from walking spirit; or but the instinct of his sire living on within him? And again came that scent of cigar smoke from the old saturated leather. Well! he would tackle it, write to Jon, and put the whole thing down in black and white! And suddenly he breathed with difficulty, with a sense of suffocation, as if his heart were swollen. He got up and went out into the air. The stars were very bright. He passed along the terrace round the corner of the house, till, through the window of the music room, he could see Irene at the piano, with lamplight falling on her powdery hair; withdrawn into herself she seemed, her dark eyes staring straight before her, her hands idle. Jolyon saw her raise those hands and clasp them over her breast. 'It's Jon, with her,' he thought; 'all Jon! I'm dying out of her it's natural!'

And, careful not to be seen, he stole back.

Next day, after a bad night, he sat down to his task. He wrote with difficulty and many erasures.

"MY DEAREST BOY,

"You are old enough to understand how very difficult it is for elders to give themselves away to their young. Especially when like your mother and myself, though I shall never

think of her as anything but young; their hearts are altogether set on him to whom they must confess. I cannot say we are conscious of having sinned exactly; people in real life very seldom are, I believe; but most persons would say we had, and at all events our conduct, righteous or not, has found us out. The truth is, my dear, we both have pasts, which it is now my task to make known to you, because they so grievously and deeply affect your future. Many, very many years ago, as far back indeed as 1883, when she was only twenty, your mother had the great and lasting misfortune to make an unhappy marriage, not with me, Jon. Without money of her own, and with only a stepmother closely related to Jezebel, she was very unhappy in her home life. It was Fleur's father that she married, my cousin Soames Forsyte. He had pursued her very tenaciously and to do him justice was deeply in love with her. Within a week she knew the fearful mistake she had made. It was not his fault; it was her error of judgment, her misfortune."

So far Jolyon had kept some semblance of irony, but now his subject carried him away.

"Jon, I want to explain to you if I can, and it's very hard; how it is that an unhappy marriage such as this can so easily come about. You will of course say: 'If she didn't really love him how could she ever have married him?' You would be right if it were not for one or two rather terrible considerations. From this initial mistake of hers all the subsequent trouble, sorrow, and tragedy have come, and so I must make it clear to you if I can. You see, Jon, in those days and even to this day indeed, I don't see, for all the talk of enlightenment, how it can well be otherwise; most girls are married ignorant of the sexual side of life. Even if they know what it means they have not experienced it. That's the crux. It is this actual lack of experience, whatever verbal knowledge they have, which makes all the difference and all the trouble. In a vast number of marriages, and your mother's was one, girls are not and cannot be certain whether they love the man they marry or not; they do not know until after that act of union which makes the reality of marriage. Now, in many, perhaps in most doubtful cases, this act cements and strengthens the attachment, but in other cases, and your mother's was one, it is a revelation of mistake, a destruction of such attraction as there was. There is nothing more tragic in a woman's life than such a revelation, growing daily, nightly clearer. Coarse-grained and unthinking people are apt to laugh at such a mistake, and say, 'What a fuss about nothing!' Narrow and self-righteous people, only capable of judging the lives of others by their own, are apt to condemn those who make this tragic error, to condemn them for life to the dungeons they have made for themselves. You know the expression: 'She has made her bed, she must lie on it!' It is a hard-mouthed saying, quite unworthy of a gentleman or lady in the best sense of those words; and I can use no stronger condemnation. I have not been what is called a moral man, but I wish to use no words to you, my dear, which will make you think lightly of ties or contracts into which you enter. Heaven forbid! But with the experience of a life behind me I do say that those who

condemn the victims of these tragic mistakes, condemn them and hold out no hands to help them, are inhuman, or rather they would be if they had the understanding to know what they are doing. But they haven't! Let them go! They are as much anathema to me as I, no doubt, am to them. I have had to say all this, because I am going to put you into a position to judge your mother, and you are very young, without experience of what life is. To go on with the story. After three years of effort to subdue her shrinking I was going to say her loathing and it's not too strong a word, for shrinking soon becomes loathing under such circumstances three years of what to a sensitive, beautyloving nature like your mother's, Jon, was torment, she met a young man who fell in love with her. He was the architect of this very house that we live in now, he was building it for her and Fleur's father to live in, a new prison to hold her, in place of the one she inhabited with him in London. Perhaps that fact played some part in what came of it. But in any case she, too, fell in love with him. I know it's not necessary to explain to you that one does not precisely choose with whom one will fall in love. It comes. Very well! It came. I can imagine though she never said much to me about it the struggle that then took place in her, because, Jon, she was brought up strictly and was not light in her ideas not at all. However, this was an overwhelming feeling, and it came to pass that they loved in deed as well as in thought. Then came a fearful tragedy. I must tell you of it because if I don't you will never understand the real situation that you have now to face. The man whom she had married Soames Forsyte, the father of Fleur one night, at the height of her passion for this young man, forcibly reasserted his rights over her. The next day she met her lover and told him of it. Whether he committed suicide or whether he was accidentally run over in his distraction, we never knew; but so it was. Think of your mother as she was that evening when she heard of his death. I happened to see her. Your grandfather sent me to help her if I could. I only just saw her, before the door was shut against me by her husband. But I have never forgotten her face, I can see it now. I was not in love with her then, not for twelve years after, but I have never forgotten. My dear boy it is not easy to write like this. But you see, I must. Your mother is wrapped up in you, utterly, devotedly. I don't wish to write harshly of Soames Forsyte. I don't think harshly of him. I have long been sorry for him; perhaps I was sorry even then. As the world judges she was in error, he within his rights. He loved her in his way. She was his property. That is the view he holds of life of human feelings and hearts property. It's not his fault so was he born. To me it is a view that has always been abhorrent so was I born! Knowing you as I do, I feel it cannot be otherwise than abhorrent to you. Let me go on with the story. Your mother fled from his house that night; for twelve years she lived quietly alone without companionship of any sort, until in 1899 her husband you see, he was still her husband, for he did not attempt to divorce her, and she of course had no right to divorce him became conscious, it seems, of the want of children, and commenced a long attempt to induce her to go back to him and give him a child. I was her trustee then, under your Grandfather's Will, and I watched this going on. While watching, I became attached to her, devotedly attached. His pressure increased, till one day she

came to me here and practically put herself under my protection. Her husband, who was kept informed of all her movements, attempted to force us apart by bringing a divorce suit, or possibly he really meant it, I don't know; but anyway our names were publicly joined. That decided us, and we became united in fact. She was divorced, married me, and you were born. We have lived in perfect happiness, at least I have, and I believe your mother also. Soames, soon after the divorce, married Fleur's mother, and she was born. That is the story, Jon. I have told it you, because by the affection which we see you have formed for this man's daughter you are blindly moving toward what must utterly destroy your mother's happiness, if not your own. I don't wish to speak of myself, because at my age there's no use supposing I shall cumber the ground much longer, besides, what I should suffer would be mainly on her account, and on yours. But what I want you to realise is that feelings of horror and aversion such as those can never be buried or forgotten. They are alive in her today. Only yesterday at Lord's we happened to see Soames Forsyte. Her face, if you had seen it, would have convinced you. The idea that you should marry his daughter is a nightmare to her, Jon. I have nothing to say against Fleur save that she is his daughter. But your children, if you married her, would be the grandchildren of Soames, as much as of your mother, of a man who once owned your mother as a man might own a slave. Think what that would mean. By such a marriage you enter the camp which held your mother prisoner and wherein she ate her heart out. You are just on the threshold of life, you have only known this girl two months, and however deeply you think you love her, I appeal to you to break it off at once. Don't give your mother this rankling pain and humiliation during the rest of her life. Young though she will always seem to me, she is fiftyseven. Except for us two she has no one in the world. She will soon have only you. Pluck up your spirit, Jon, and break away. Don't put this cloud and barrier between you. Don't break her heart! Bless you, my dear boy, and again forgive me for all the pain this letter must bring you we tried to spare it you, but Spain it seems was no good.

"Ever your devoted father,

"JOLYON FORSYTE."

Having finished his confession, Jolyon sat with a thin cheek on his hand, rereading. There were things in it which hurt him so much, when he thought of Jon reading them, that he nearly tore the letter up. To speak of such things at all to a boy his own boy to speak of them in relation to his own wife and the boy's own mother, seemed dreadful to the reticence of his Forsyte soul. And yet without speaking of them how make Jon understand the reality, the deep cleavage, the ineffaceable scar? Without them, how justify this stiffing of the boy's love? He might just as well not write at all!

He folded the confession, and put it in his pocket. It was thank Heaven! Saturday; he had till Sunday evening to think it over; for even if posted now it could not reach Jon till

Monday. He felt a curious relief at this delay, and at the fact that, whether sent or not, it was written.

In the rose garden, which had taken the place of the old fernery, he could see Irene snipping and pruning, with a little basket on her arm. She was never idle, it seemed to him, and he envied her now that he himself was idle nearly all his time. He went down to her. She held up a stained glove and smiled. A piece of lace tied under her chin concealed her hair, and her oval face with its still dark brows looked very young.

"The greenfly are awful this year, and yet it's cold. You look tired, Jolyon."

Jolyon took the confession from his pocket. "I've been writing this. I think you ought to see it?"

"To Jon?" Her whole face had changed, in that instant, becoming almost haggard.

"Yes; the murder's out."

He gave it to her, and walked away among the roses. Presently, seeing that she had finished reading and was standing quite still with the sheets of the letter against her skirt, he came back to her.

"Well?"

"It's wonderfully put. I don't see how it could be put better. Thank you, dear."

"Is there anything you would like left out?"

She shook her head.

"No; he must know all, if he's to understand."

"That's what I thought, but I hate it!"

He had the feeling that he hated it more than sheto him sex was so much easier to mention between man and woman than between man and man; and she had always been more natural and frank, not deeply secretive like his Forsyte self.

"I wonder if he will understand, even now, Jolyon? He's so young; and he shrinks from the physical."

"He gets that shrinking from my father, he was as fastidious as a girl in all such matters. Would it be better to rewrite the whole thing, and just say you hated Soames?"

Irene shook her head.

"Hate's only a word. It conveys nothing. No, better as it is."

"Very well. It shall go tomorrow."

She raised her face to his, and in sight of the big house's many creepered windows, he kissed her.

II

.CONFESSION

Late that same afternoon, Jolyon had a nap in the old armchair. Face down on his knee was La Rotisserie de la Refine Pedauque, and just before he fell asleep he had been thinking: 'As a people shall we ever really like the French? Will they ever really like us!' He himself had always liked the French, feeling at home with their wit, their taste, their cooking. Irene and he had paid many visits to France before the War, when Jon had been at his private school. His romance with her had begun in Parishis last and most enduring romance. But the Frenchno Englishman could like them who could not see them in some sort with the detached aesthetic eye! And with that melancholy conclusion he had nodded off.

When he woke he saw Jon standing between him and the window. The boy had evidently come in from the garden and was waiting for him to wake. Jolyon smiled, still half asleep. How nice the chap looked sensitive, affectionate, straight! Then his heart gave a nasty jump; and a quaking sensation overcame him. Jon! That confession! He controlled himself with an effort. "Why, Jon, where did you spring from?"

Jon bent over and kissed his forehead.

Only then he noticed the look on the boy's face.

"I came home to tell you something, Dad."

With all his might Jolyon tried to get the better of the jumping, gurgling sensations within his chest.

"Well, sit down, old man. Have you seen your mother?"

"No." The boy's flushed look gave place to pallor; he sat down on the arm of the old chair, as, in old days, Jolyon himself used to sit beside his own father, installed in its recesses. Right up to the time of the rupture in their relations he had been wont to perch there had he now reached such a moment with his own son? All his life he had hated scenes like poison, avoided rows, gone on his own way quietly and let others go on theirs. But now it seemed at the very end of things, he had a scene before him more painful than any he had avoided. He drew a visor down over his emotion, and waited for his son to speak.

"Father," said Jon slowly, "Fleur and I are engaged."

'Exactly!' thought Jolyon, breathing with difficulty.

"I know that you and Mother don't like the idea. Fleur says that Mother was engaged to her father before you married her. Of course I don't know what happened, but it must be ages ago. I'm devoted to her, Dad, and she says she is to me."

Jolyon uttered a queer sound, half laugh, half groan.

"You are nineteen, Jon, and I am seventytwo. How are we to understand each other in a matter like this, eh?"

"You love Mother, Dad; you must know what we feel. It isn't fair to us to let old things spoil our happiness, is it?"

Brought face to face with his confession, Jolyon resolved to do without it if by any means he could. He laid his hand on the boy's arm.

"Look, Jon! I might put you off with talk about your both being too young and not knowing your own minds, and all that, but you wouldn't listen, besides, it doesn't meet the caseYouth, unfortunately, cures itself. You talk lightly about 'old things like that,' knowing nothingas you say trulyof what happened. Now, have I ever given you reason to doubt my love for you, or my word?"

At a less anxious moment he might have been amused by the conflict his words arousedthe boy's eager clasp, to reassure him on these points, the dread on his face of what that reassurance would bring forth; but he could only feel grateful for the squeeze.

"Very well, you can believe what I tell you. If you don't give up this love affair, you will make Mother wretched to the end of her days. Believe me, my dear, the past, whatever it was, can't be buriedit can't indeed."

Jon got off the arm of the chair.

'The girl'thought Jolyon'there she goesstarting up before himlife itselfeager, pretty, loving!"

"I can't, Father; how can Ijust because you say that? Of course, I can't!"

"Jon, if you knew the story you would give this up without hesitation; you would have to! Can't you believe me?"

"How can you tell what I should think? Father, I love her better than anything in the world."

Jolyon's face twitched, and he said with painful slowness:

"Better than your mother, Jon?"

From the boy's face, and his clenched fists Jolyon realised the stress and struggle he was going through.

"I don't know," he burst out, "I don't know! But to give Fleur up for nothing for something I don't understand, for something that I don't believe can really matter half so much, will make me make me...."

"Make you feel us unjust, put a barrier yes. But that's better than going on with this."

"I can't. Fleur loves me, and I love her. You want me to trust you; why don't you trust me, Father? We wouldn't want to know anything we wouldn't let it make any difference. It'll only make us both love you and Mother all the more."

Jolyon put his hand into his breast pocket, but brought it out again empty, and sat, clucking his tongue against his teeth.

"Think what your mother's been to you, Jon! She has nothing but you; I shan't last much longer."

"Why not? It isn't fair to Why not?"

"Well," said Jolyon, rather coldly, "because the doctors tell me I shan't; that's all."

"Oh, Dad!" cried Jon, and burst into tears.

This downbreak of his son, whom he had not seen cry since he was ten, moved Jolyon terribly. He recognised to the full how fearfully soft the boy's heart was, how much he would suffer in this business, and in life generally. And he reached out his hand helplessly not wishing, indeed not daring to get up.

"Dear man," he said, "don't or you'll make me!"

Jon smothered down his paroxysm, and stood with face averted, very still.

'What now?' thought Jolyon. 'What can I say to move him?'

"By the way, don't speak of that to Mother," he said; "she has enough to frighten her with this affair of yours. I know how you feel. But, Jon, you know her and me well enough to be sure we wouldn't wish to spoil your happiness lightly. Why, my dear boy, we don't care for anything but your happiness at least, with me it's just yours and Mother's and with her just yours. It's all the future for you both that's at stake."

Jon turned. His face was deadly pale; his eyes, deep in his head, seemed to burn.

"What is it? What is it? Don't keep me like this!"

Jolyon, who knew that he was beaten, thrust his hand again into his breast pocket, and sat for a full minute, breathing with difficulty, his eyes closed. The thought passed through his mind: 'I've had a good long innings some pretty bitter moments this is the worst!' Then he brought his hand out with the letter, and said with a sort of fatigue: "Well, Jon, if you hadn't come today, I was going to send you this. I wanted to spare you I wanted to spare your mother and myself, but I see it's no good. Read it, and I think I'll go into the garden." He reached forward to get up.

Jon, who had taken the letter, said quickly, "No, I'll go"; and was gone.

Jolyon sank back in his chair. A bluebottle chose that moment to come buzzing round him with a sort of fury; the sound was homely, better than nothing.... Where had the boy gone to read his letter? The wretched letter the wretched story! A cruel business cruel to herto Soamesto those two childrento himself!... His heart thumped and pained him. Life its loves its work its beauty its aching, and its end! A good time; a fine time in spite of all; until you regretted that you had ever been born. Life it wore you down, yet did not make you want to die that was the cunning evil! Mistake to have a heart! Again the bluebottle came buzzing bringing in all the heat and hum and scent of summer yes, even the scent as of ripe fruits, dried grasses, sappy shrubs, and the vanilla breath of cows. And out there somewhere in the fragrance Jon would be reading that letter, turning and twisting its pages in his trouble, his bewilderment and trouble breaking his heart about it! The thought made Jolyon acutely miserable. Jon was such a tenderhearted chap, affectionate to his bones, and conscientious, too it was so unfair, so damned unfair! He remembered Irene saying to him once: "Never was any one born more loving and lovable than Jon." Poor little Jon! His world gone up the spout, all of a summer afternoon! Youth took things so hard! And stirred, tormented by that vision of Youth taking things hard, Jolyon got out of his chair, and went to the window. The boy was nowhere visible. And he passed out. If one could take any help to him now one must!

He traversed the shrubbery, glanced into the walled garden no Jon! Nor where the peaches and the apricots were beginning to swell and colour. He passed the Cupressus trees, dark and spiral, into the meadow. Where had the boy got to? Had he rushed down to the coppice his old hunting ground? Jolyon crossed the rows of hay. They would cock it on Monday and be carrying the day after, if rain held off. Often they had crossed this field together hand in hand, when Jon was a little chap. Dash it! The golden age was over by the time one was ten! He came to the pond, where flies and gnats were dancing over a bright reedy surface; and on into the coppice. It was cool there, fragrant of larches. Still no Jon! He called. No answer! On the log seat he sat down, nervous, anxious, forgetting

his own physical sensations. He had been wrong to let the boy get away with that letter; he ought to have kept him under his eye from the start! Greatly troubled, he got up to retrace his steps. At the farmbuildings he called again, and looked into the dark cowhouse. There in the cool, and the scent of vanilla and ammonia, away from flies, the three Alderneys were chewing the quiet cud; just milked, waiting for evening, to be turned out again into the lower field. One turned a lazy head, a lustrous eye; Jolyon could see the slobber on its grey lower lip. He saw everything with passionate clearness, in the agitation of his nerves all that in his time he had adored and tried to paint wonder of light and shade and colour. No wonder the legend put Christ into a manger what more devotional than the eyes and moonwhite horns of a chewing cow in the warm dusk! He called again. No answer! And he hurried away out of the coppice, past the pond, up the hill. Oddly ironical now he came to think of it if Jon had taken the gruel of his discovery down in the coppice where his mother and Bosinney in those old days had made the plunge of acknowledging their love. Where he himself, on the log seat the Sunday morning he came back from Paris, had realised to the full that Irene had become the world to him. That would have been the place for Irony to tear the veil from before the eyes of Irene's boy! But he was not here! Where had he got to? One must find the poor chap!

A gleam of sun had come, sharpening to his hurrying senses all the beauty of the afternoon, of the tall trees and lengthening shadows, of the blue, and the white clouds, the scent of the hay, and the cooing of the pigeons; and the flower shapes standing tall. He came to the rosery, and the beauty of the roses in that sudden sunlight seemed to him unearthly. "Rose, you Spaniard!" Wonderful three words! There she had stood by that bush of dark red roses; had stood to read and decide that Jon must know it all! He knew all now! Had she chosen wrong? He bent and sniffed a rose, its petals brushed his nose and trembling lips; nothing so soft as a rose leaf's velvet, except her neck Irene! On across the lawn he went, up the slope, to the oak tree. Its top alone was glistening, for the sudden sun was away over the house; the lower shade was thick, blessedly cool he was greatly overheated. He paused a minute with his hand on the rope of the swing Jolly, Holly Jon! The old swing! And suddenly, he felt horribly deadly ill. 'I've over done it!' he thought: 'by Jove! I've overdone it after all!' He staggered up toward the terrace, dragged himself up the steps, and fell against the wall of the house. He leaned there gasping, his face buried in the honeysuckle that he and she had taken such trouble with that it might sweeten the air which drifted in. Its fragrance mingled with awful pain. 'My love!' he thought; 'the boy!' And with a great effort he tottered in through the long window, and sank into old Jolyon's chair. The book was there, a pencil in it; he caught it up, scribbled a word on the open page.... His hand dropped.... So it was like this was it?...

There was a great wrench; and darkness....

III

IRENE

When Jon rushed away with the letter in his hand, he ran along the terrace and round the corner of the house, in fear and confusion. Leaning against the creepered wall he tore open the letter. It was longvery long! This added to his fear, and he began reading. When he came to the words: "It was Fleur's father that she married," everything seemed to spin before him. He was close to a window, and entering by it, he passed, through musicroom and hall, up to his bedroom. Dipping his face in cold water, he sat on his bed, and went on reading, dropping each finished page on the bed beside him. His father's writing was easy to readhe knew it so well, though he had never had a letter from him one quarter so long. He read with a dull feelingimagination only half at work. He best grasped, on that first reading, the pain his father must have had in writing such a letter. He let the last sheet fall, and in a sort of mental, moral helplessness began to read the first again. It all seemed to him disgustingdead and disgusting. Then, suddenly, a hot wave of horrified emotion tingled through him. He buried his face in his hands. His mother! Fleur's father! He took up the letter again, and read on mechanically. And again came the feeling that it was all dead and disgusting; his own love so different! This letter said his motherand her father! An awful letter!

Property! Could there be men who looked on women as their property? Faces seen in street and countryside came thronging up before himred, stockfish faces; hard, dull faces; prim, dry faces; violent faces; hundreds, thousands of them! How could he know what men who had such faces thought and did? He held his head in his hands and groaned. His mother! He caught up the letter and read on again: "horror and aversionalive in her today.... your children.... grandchildren.... of a man who once owned your mother as a man might own a slave...." He got up from his bed. This cruel shadowy past, lurking there to murder his love and Fleur's, was true, or his father could never have written it. 'Why didn't they tell me the first thing,' he thought, 'the day I first saw Fleur? They knew I'd seen her. They were afraid, andnowI'vegot it!' Overcome by misery too acute for thought or reason, he crept into a dusky corner of the room and sat down on the floor. He sat there, like some unhappy little animal. There was comfort in dusk, and the flooras if he were back in those days when he played his battles sprawling all over it. He sat there huddled, his hair ruffled, his hands clasped round his knees, for how long he did not know. He was wrenched from his blank wretchedness by the sound of the door opening from his mother's room. The blinds were down over the windows of his room, shut up in his absence, and from where he sat he could only hear a rustle, her footsteps crossing, till beyond the bed he saw her standing before his dressingtable. She had something in her hand. He hardly breathed, hoping she would not see him, and go away. He saw her touch things on the table as if they had some virtue in them, then face the windowgrey from head to foot like a ghost. The least turn of her head, and she must

see him! Her lips moved: "Oh! Jon!" She was speaking to herself; the tone of her voice troubled Jon's heart. He saw in her hand a little photograph. She held it toward the light, looking at it very small. He knew it one of himself as a tiny boy, which she always kept in her bag. His heart beat fast. And, suddenly as if she had heard it, she turned her eyes and saw him. At the gasp she gave, and the movement of her hands pressing the photograph against her breast, he said:

"Yes, it's me."

She moved over to the bed, and sat down on it, quite close to him, her hands still clasping her breast, her feet among the sheets of the letter which had slipped to the floor. She saw them, and her hands grasped the edge of the bed. She sat very upright, her dark eyes fixed on him. At last she spoke.

"Well, Jon, you know, I see."

"Yes."

"You've seen Father?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence, till she said:

"Oh! my darling!"

"It's all right." The emotions in him were so, violent and so mixed that he dared not move: resentment, despair, and yet a strange yearning for the comfort of her hand on his forehead.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

There was another long silence, then she got up. She stood a moment, very still, made a little movement with her hand, and said: "My darling boy, my most darling boy, don't think of me, think of yourself," and, passing round the foot of the bed, went back into her room.

Jon turned, curled into a sort of ball, as might a hedgehog into the corner made by the two walls.

He must have been twenty minutes there before a cry roused him. It came from the terrace below. He got up, scared. Again came the cry: "Jon!" His mother was calling! He

ran out and down the stairs, through the empty diningroom into the study. She was kneeling before the old armchair, and his father was lying back quite white, his head on his breast, one of his hands resting on an open book, with a pencil clutched in it more strangely still than anything he had ever seen. She looked round wildly, and said:

"Oh! Jonhe's deadhe's dead!"

Jon flung himself down, and reaching over the arm of the chair, where he had lately been sitting, put his lips to the forehead. Icy cold! How couldhow could Dad be dead, when only an hour ago! His mother's arms were round the knees; pressing her breast against them. "Whywhy wasn't I with him?" he heard her whisper. Then he saw the tottering word "Irene" pencilled on the open page, and broke down himself. It was his first sight of human death, and its unutterable stillness blotted from him all other emotion; all else, then, was but preliminary to this! All love and life, and joy, anxiety, and sorrow, all movement, light and beauty, but a beginning to this terrible white stillness. It made a dreadful mark on him; all seemed suddenly little, futile, short. He mastered himself at last, got up, and raised her.

"Mother! don't cryMother!"

Some hours later, when all was done that had to be, and his mother was lying down, he saw his father alone, on the bed, covered with a white sheet. He stood for a long time gazing at that face which had never looked angryalways whimsical, and kind. "To be kind and keep your end upthere's nothing else in it," he had once heard his father say. How wonderfully Dad had acted up to that philosophy! He understood now that his father had known for a long time past that this would come suddenlyknown, and not said a word. He gazed with an awed and passionate reverence. The loneliness of itjust to spare his mother and himself! His own trouble seemed small while he was looking at that face. The word scribbled on the page! The farewell word! Now his mother had no one but himself! He went up close to the dead facenot changed at all, and yet completely changed. He had heard his father say once that he did not believe in consciousness surviving death, or that if it did it might be just survival till the natural age limit of the body had been reachedthe natural term of its inherent vitality; so that if the body were broken by accident, excess, violent disease, consciousness might still persist till, in the course of Nature uninterfered with, it would naturally have faded out. It had struck him because he had never heard any one else suggest it. When the heart failed like thissurely it was not quite natural! Perhaps his father's consciousness was in the room with him. Above the bed hung a picture of his father's father. Perhaps his consciousness, too, was still alive; and his brother'shis halfbrother, who had died in the Transvaal. Were they all gathered round this bed? Jon kissed the forehead, and stole back to his own room. The door between it and his mother's was ajar; she had evidently been ineverything was

ready for him, even some biscuits and hot milk, and the letter no longer on the floor. He ate and drank, watching the last light fade. He did not try to see into the future just stared at the dark branches of the oak tree, level with his window, and felt as if life had stopped. Once in the night, turning in his heavy sleep, he was conscious of something white and still, beside his bed, and started up.

His mother's voice said:

"It's only I, Jon dear!" Her hand pressed his forehead gently back; her white figure disappeared.

Alone! He fell heavily asleep again, and dreamed he saw his mother's name crawling on his bed.

IV

SOAMES COGITATES

The announcement in The Times of his cousin Jolyon's death affected Soames quite simply. So that chap was gone! There had never been a time in their two lives when love had not been lost between them. That quickblooded sentiment hatred had run its course long since in Soames' heart, and he had refused to allow any recrudescence, but he considered this early decease a piece of poetic justice. For twenty years the fellow had enjoyed the reversion of his wife and house, and he was dead! The obituary notice, which appeared a little later, paid Jolyon too much attention. It spoke of that "diligent and agreeable painter whose work we have come to look on as typical of the best late Victorian watercolour art." Soames, who had almost mechanically preferred Mole, Morpin, and Caswell Baye, and had always sniffed quite audibly when he came to one of his cousin's on the line, turned The Times with a crackle.

He had to go up to Town that morning on Forsyte affairs, and was fully conscious of Gradman's glance sidelong over his spectacles. The old clerk had about him an aura of regretful congratulation. He smelled, as it were, of old days. One could almost hear him thinking: "Mr. Jolyon, yees just my age, and gone dear, dear! I dare say she feels it. She was a micelookin' woman. Flesh is flesh! They've given 'im a notice in the papers. Fancy!" His atmosphere in fact caused Soames to handle certain leases and conversions with exceptional swiftness.

"About that settlement on Miss Fleur, Mr. Soames?"

"I've thought better of that," answered Soames shortly.

"Ah! I'm glad of that. I thought you were a little hasty. The times do change."

How this death would affect Fleur had begun to trouble Soames. He was not certain that she knew of it she seldom looked at the paper, never at the births, marriages, and deaths.

He pressed matters on, and made his way to Green Street for lunch. Winifred was almost doleful. Jack Cardigan had broken a splashboard, so far as one could make out, and would not be "fit" for some time. She could not get used to the idea.

"Did Profond ever get off?" he said suddenly.

"He got off," replied Winifred, "but where I don't know."

Yes, there it was impossible to tell anything! Not that he wanted to know. Letters from Annette were coming from Dieppe, where she and her mother were staying.

"You saw that fellow's death, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Winifred. "I'm sorry for his children. He was very amiable." Soames uttered a rather queer sound. A suspicion of the old deep truth that men were judged in this world rather by what they were than by what they did crept and knocked resentfully at the back doors of his mind.

"I know there was a superstition to that effect," he muttered.

"One must do him justice now he's dead."

"I should like to have done him justice before," said Soames; "but I never had the chance. Have you got a 'Baronetage' here?"

"Yes; in that bottom row."

Soames took out a fat red book, and ran over the leaves.

"Mont Sir Lawrence, 9th Bt., cr. 1620, e. s. of Geoffrey, 8th Bt., and Lavinia, daur. of Sir Charles Muskham, Bt., of Muskham Hall, Shrops: marr. 1890 Emily, daur. of Conway Charwell, Esq., of Condaford Grange, co. Oxon; 1 son, heir Michael Conway, b. 1895, 2 daurs. Residence: Lippinghall Manor, Folwell, Bucks. Clubs: Snooks': Coffee House: Aeroplane. See Bidicott."

"H'm!" he said. "Did you ever know a publisher?"

"Uncle Timothy."

"Alive, I mean."

"Monty knew one at his Club. He brought him here to dinner once. Monty was always thinking of writing a book, you know, about how to make money on the turf. He tried to interest that man."

"Well?"

"He put him on to a horse for the Two Thousand. We didn't see him again. He was rather smart, if I remember."

"Did it win?"

"No; it ran last, I think. You know Monty really was quite clever in his way."

"Was he?" said Soames. "Can you see any connection between a sucking baronet and publishing?"

"People do all sorts of things nowadays," replied Winifred. "The great stunt seems not to be idleso different from our time. To do nothing was the thing then. But I suppose it'll come again."

"This young Mont that I'm speaking of is very sweet on Fleur. If it would put an end to that other affair I might encourage it."

"Has he got style?" asked Winifred.

"He's no beauty; pleasant enough, with some scattered brains. There's a good deal of land, I believe. He seems genuinely attached. But I don't know."

"No," murmured Winifred; "it'svery difficult. I always found it best to do nothing. It is such a bore about Jack; now we shan't get away till after Bank Holiday. Well, the people are always amusing, I shall go into the Park and watch them."

"If I were you," said Soames, "I should have a country cottage, and be out of the way of holidays and strikes when you want."

"The country bores me," answered Winifred, "and I found the railway strike quite exciting."

Winifred had always been noted for sangfroid.

Soames took his leave. All the way down to Reading he debated whether he should tell Fleur of that boy's father's death. It did not alter the situation except that he would be independent now, and only have his mother's opposition to encounter. He would come into a lot of money, no doubt, and perhaps the house the house built for Irene and himself the house whose architect had wrought his domestic ruin. His daughter mistress of that house! That would be poetic justice! Soames uttered a little mirthless laugh. He had designed that house to reestablish his failing union, meant it for the seat of his descendants, if he could have induced Irene to give him one! Her son and Fleur! Their children would be, in some sort, offspring of the union between himself and her!

The theatricality in that thought was repulsive to his sober sense. And yet it would be the easiest and wealthiest way out of the impasse, now that Jolyon was gone. The juncture of two Forsyte fortunes had a kind of conservative charm. And she Irene would be linked to him once more. Nonsense! Absurd! He put the notion from his head.

On arriving home he heard the click of billiard balls, and through the window saw young Mont sprawling over the table. Fleur, with her cue akimbo, was watching with a smile. How pretty she looked! No wonder that young fellow was out of his mind about her. A titleland! There was little enough in land, these days; perhaps less in a title. The old

Forsytes had always had a kind of contempt for titles, rather remote and artificial things not worth the money they cost, and having to do with the Court. They had all had that feeling in differing measure Soames remembered. Swithin, indeed, in his most expansive days had once attended a Levee. He had come away saying he shouldn't go again "all that small fry." It was suspected that he had looked too big in knee breeches. Soames remembered how his own mother had wished to be presented because of the fashionable nature of the performance, and how his father had put his foot down with unwonted decision. What did she want with that peacocking wasting time and money; there was nothing in it!

The instinct which had made and kept the English Commons the chief power in the State, a feeling that their own world was good enough and a little better than any other because it was their world, had kept the old Forsytes singularly free of "flummery," as Nicholas had been wont to call it when he had the gout. Soames' generation, more self-conscious and ironical, had been saved by a sense of Swithin in knee breeches. While the third and the fourth generation, as it seemed to him, laughed at everything.

However, there was no harm in the young fellow's being heir to a title and estate a thing one couldn't help. He entered quietly, as Mont missed his shot. He noted the young man's eyes, fixed on Fleur bending over in her turn; and the adoration in them almost touched him.

She paused with the cue poised on the bridge of her slim hand, and shook her crop of short dark chestnut hair.

"I shall never do it."

"Nothing venture."

"All right." The cue struck, the ball rolled. "There!"

"Bad luck! Never mind!"

Then they saw him, and Soames said:

"I'll mark for you."

He sat down on the raised seat beneath the marker, trim and tired, furtively studying those two young faces. When the game was over Mont came up to him.

"I've started in, sir. Rum game, business, isn't it? I suppose you saw a lot of human nature as a solicitor."

"I did."

"Shall I tell you what I've noticed: People are quite on the wrong tack in offering less than they can afford to give; they ought to offer more, and work backward."

Soames raised his eyebrows.

"Suppose the more is accepted?"

"That doesn't matter a little bit," said Mont; "it's much more paying to abate a price than to increase it. For instance, say we offer an author good terms he naturally takes them. Then we go into it, find we can't publish at a decent profit and tell him so. He's got confidence in us because we've been generous to him, and he comes down like a lamb, and bears us no malice. But if we offer him poor terms at the start, he doesn't take them, so we have to advance them to get him, and he thinks us damned screws into the bargain."

"Try buying pictures on that system," said Soames; "an offer accepted is a contract haven't you learned that?"

Young Mont turned his head to where Fleur was standing in the window.

"No," he said, "I wish I had. Then there's another thing. Always let a man off a bargain if he wants to be let off."

"As advertisement?" said Soames dryly.

"Of course it is; but I meant on principle."

"Does your firm work on those lines?"

"Not yet," said Mont, "but it'll come."

"And they will go."

"No, really, sir. I'm making any number of observations, and they all confirm my theory. Human nature is consistently underrated in business, people do themselves out of an awful lot of pleasure and profit by that. Of course, you must be perfectly genuine and open, but that's easy if you feel it. The more human and generous you are the better chance you've got in business."

Soames rose.

"Are you a partner?"

"Not for six months, yet."

"The rest of the firm had better make haste and retire."

Mont laughed.

"You'll see," he said. "There's going to be a big change. The possessive principle has got its shutters up."

"What?" said Soames.

"The house is to let! Goodbye, sir; I'm off now."

Soames watched his daughter give her hand, saw her wince at the squeeze it received, and distinctly heard the young man's sigh as he passed out. Then she came from the window, trailing her finger along the mahogany edge of the billiardtable. Watching her, Soames knew that she was going to ask him something. Her finger felt round the last pocket, and she looked up.

"Have you done anything to stop Jon writing to me, Father?"

Soames shook his head.

"You haven't seen, then?" he said. "His father died just a week ago today."

"Oh!"

In her startled, frowning face he saw the instant struggle to apprehend what this would mean.

"Poor Jon! Why didn't you tell me, Father?"

"I never know!" said Soames slowly; "you don't confide in me."

"I would, if you'd help me, dear."

"Perhaps I shall."

Fleur clasped her hands. "Oh! darlingwhen one wants a thing fearfully, one doesn't think of other people. Don't be angry with me."

Soames put out his hand, as if pushing away an aspersion.

"I'm cogitating," he said. What on earth had made him use a word like that! "Has young Mont been bothering you again?"

Fleur smiled. "Oh! Michael! He's always bothering; but he's such a good sort I don't mind him."

"Well," said Soames, "I'm tired; I shall go and have a nap before dinner."

He went up to his picture gallery, lay down on the couch there, and closed his eyes. A terrible responsibility this girl of his whose mother was! what was she? A terrible responsibility! Help her how could he help her? He could not alter the fact that he was her father. Or that Irene! What was it young Mont had said some nonsense about the possessive instinct shutters up To let? Silly!

The sultry air, charged with a scent of meadowsweet, of river and roses, closed on his senses, drowsing them.

V.

THE FIXED IDEA

"The fixed idea," which has outrun more constables than any other form of human disorder, has never more speed and stamina than when it takes the avid guise of love. To hedges and ditches, and doors, to humans without ideas fixed or otherwise, to perambulators and the contents sucking their fixed ideas, even to the other sufferers from this fast malady the fixed idea of love pays no attention. It runs with eyes turned inward to its own light, oblivious of all other stars. Those with the fixed ideas that human happiness depends on their art, on vivisectioning dogs, on hating foreigners, on paying supertax, on remaining Ministers, on making wheels go round, on preventing their neighbours from being divorced, on conscientious objection, Greek roots, Church dogma, paradox and superiority to everybody else, with other forms of egomania all are unstable compared with him or her whose fixed idea is the possession of some her or him. And though Fleur, those chilly summer days, pursued the scattered life of a little Forsyte whose frocks are paid for, and whose business is pleasure, she was as Winifred would have said in the latest fashion of speech "honest to God" indifferent to it all. She wished and wished for the moon, which sailed in cold skies above the river or the Green Park when she went to Town. She even kept Jon's letters, covered with pink silk, on her heart, than which in days when corsets were so low, sentiment so despised, and chests so out of fashion, there could, perhaps, have been no greater proof of the fixity of her idea.

After hearing of his father's death, she wrote to Jon, and received his answer three days later on her return from a river picnic. It was his first letter since their meeting at June's. She opened it with misgiving, and read it with dismay.

"Since I saw you I've heard everything about the past. I won't tell it you I think you knew when we met at June's. She says you did. If you did, Fleur, you ought to have told me. I expect you only heard your father's side of it. I have heard my mother's. It's dreadful. Now that she's so sad I can't do anything to hurt her more. Of course, I long for you all day, but I don't believe now that we shall ever come together there's something too strong pulling us apart."

So! Her deception had found her out. But Jon she felt had forgiven that. It was what he said of his mother which caused the guttering in her heart and the weak sensation in her legs.

Her first impulse was to reply her second, not to reply. These impulses were constantly renewed in the days which followed, while desperation grew within her. She was not her father's child for nothing. The tenacity which had at once made and undone Soames was

her backbone, too, frilled and embroidered by French grace and quickness. Instinctively she conjugated the verb "to have" always with the pronoun "I." She concealed, however, all signs of her growing desperation, and pursued such river pleasures as the winds and rain of a disagreeable July permitted, as if she had no care in the world; nor did any "sucking baronet" ever neglect the business of a publisher more consistently than her attendant spirit, Michael Mont.

To Soames she was a puzzle. He was almost deceived by this careless gaiety. Almost because he did not fail to mark her eyes often fixed on nothing, and the film of light shining from her bedroom window late at night. What was she thinking and brooding over into small hours when she ought to have been asleep? But he dared not ask what was in her mind; and, since that one little talk in the billiardroom, she said nothing to him.

In this taciturn condition of affairs it chanced that Winifred invited them to lunch and to go afterward to "a most amusing little play, 'The Beggar's Opera'" and would they bring a man to make four? Soames, whose attitude toward theatres was to go to nothing, accepted, because Fleur's attitude was to go to everything. They motored up, taking Michael Mont, who, being in his seventh heaven, was found by Winifred "very amusing." "The Beggar's Opera" puzzled Soames. The people were very unpleasant, the whole thing very cynical. Winifred was "intrigued" by the dresses. The music, too, did not displease her. At the Opera, the night before, she had arrived too early for the Russian Ballet, and found the stage occupied by singers, for a whole hour pale or apoplectic from terror lest by some dreadful inadvertence they might drop into a tune. Michael Mont was enraptured with the whole thing. And all three wondered what Fleur was thinking of it. But Fleur was not thinking of it. Her fixed idea stood on the stage and sang with Polly Peachum, mimed with Filch, danced with Jenny Diver, postured with Lucy Lockit, kissed, trolled, and cuddled with Macheath. Her lips might smile, her hands applaud, but the comic old masterpiece made no more impression on her than if it had been pathetic, like a modern "Revue." When they embarked in the car to return, she ached because Jon was not sitting next her instead of Michael Mont. When, at some jolt, the young man's arm touched hers as if by accident, she only thought: 'If that were Jon's arm!' When his cheerful voice, tempered by her proximity, murmured above the sound of the car's progress, she smiled and answered, thinking: 'If that were Jon's voice!' and when once he said, "Fleur, you look a perfect angel in that dress!" she answered, "Oh, do you like it?" thinking, 'If only Jon could see it!'

During this drive she took a resolution. She would go to Robin Hill and see him alone; she would take the car, without word beforehand to him or to her father. It was nine days since his letter, and she could wait no longer. On Monday she would go! The decision made her well disposed toward young Mont. With something to look forward to she could afford to tolerate and respond. He might stay to dinner; propose to her as

usual; dance with her, press her hand, sighdo what he liked. He was only a nuisance when he interfered with her fixed idea. She was even sorry for him so far as it was possible to be sorry for anybody but herself just now. At dinner he seemed to talk more wildly than usual about what he called "the death of the close borough"she paid little attention, but her father seemed paying a good deal, with the smile on his face which meant opposition, if not anger.

"The younger generation doesn't think as you do, sir; does it, Fleur?"

Fleur shrugged her shoulderthe younger generation was just Jon, and she did not know what he was thinking.

"Young people will think as I do when they're my age, Mr. Mont. Human nature doesn't change."

"I admit that, sir; but the forms of thought change with the times. The pursuit of selfinterest is a form of thought that's going out."

"Indeed! To mind one's own business is not a form of thought, Mr. Mont, it's an instinct."

Yes, when Jon was the business!

"But what is one's business, sir? That's the point. Everybody's business is going to be one's business. Isn't it, Fleur?"

Fleur only smiled.

"If not," added young Mont, "there'll be blood."

"People have talked like that from time immemorial"

"But you'll admit, sir, that the sense of property is dying out?"

"I should say increasing among those who have none."

"Well, look at me! I'm heir to an entailed estate. I don't want the thing; I'd cut the entail tomorrow."

"You're not married, and you don't know what you're talking about."

Fleur saw the young man's eyes turn rather piteously upon her.

"Do you really mean that marriage?" he began.

"Society is built on marriage," came from between her father's close lips; "marriage and its consequences. Do you want to do away with it?"

Young Mont made a distracted gesture. Silence brooded over the dinner table, covered with spoons bearing the Forsyte cresta pheasant proper under the electric light in an alabaster globe. And outside, the river evening darkened, charged with heavy moisture and sweet scents.

'Monday,' thought Fleur; 'Monday!'

VI

.DESPERATE

The weeks which followed the death of his father were sad and empty to the only Jolyon Forsyte left. The necessary forms and ceremoniesthe reading of the Will, valuation of the estate, distribution of the legacieswere enacted over the head, as it were, of one not yet of age. Jolyon was cremated. By his special wish no one attended that ceremony, or wore black for him. The succession of his property, controlled to some extent by old Jolyon's Will, left his widow in possession of Robin Hill, with two thousand five hundred pounds a year for life. Apart from this the two Wills worked together in some complicated way to insure that each of Jolyon's three children should have an equal share in their grandfather's and father's property in the future as in the present, save only that Jon, by virtue of his sex, would have control of his capital when he was twentyone, while June and Holly would only have the spirit of theirs, in order that their children might have the body after them. If they had no children, it would all come to Jon if he outlived them; and since June was fifty, and Holly nearly forty, it was considered in Lincoln's Inn Fields that but for the cruelty of income tax, young Jon would be as warm a man as his grandfather when he died. All this was nothing to Jon, and little enough to his mother. It was June who did everything needful for one who had left his affairs in perfect order. When she had gone, and those two were alone again in the

great house, alone with death drawing them together, and love driving them apart, Jon passed very painful days secretly disgusted and disappointed with himself. His mother would look at him with such a patient sadness which yet had in it an instinctive pride, as if she were reserving her defence. If she smiled he was angry that his answering smile should be so grudging and unnatural. He did not judge or condemn her; that was all too remote indeed, the idea of doing so had never come to him. No! he was grudging and unnatural because he couldn't have what he wanted because of her. There was one alleviation much to do in connection with his father's career, which could not be safely entrusted to June, though she had offered to undertake it. Both Jon and his mother had felt that if she took his portfolios, unexhibited drawings and unfinished matter, away with her, the work would encounter such icy blasts from Paul Post and other frequenters of her studio, that it would soon be frozen out even of her warm heart. On its old-fashioned plane and of its kind the work was good, and they could not bear the thought of its subjection to ridicule. A one-man exhibition of his work was the least testimony they could pay to one they had loved; and on preparation for this they spent many hours together. Jon came to have a curiously increased respect for his father. The quiet tenacity with which he had converted a mediocre talent into something really individual was disclosed by these researches. There was a great mass of work with a rare continuity of growth in depth and reach of vision. Nothing

certainly went very deep, or reached very high but such as the work was, it was thorough, conscientious, and complete. And, remembering his father's utter absence of "side" or selfassertion, the chaffing humility with which he had always spoken of his own efforts, ever calling himself "an amateur," Jon could not help feeling that he had never really known his father. To take himself seriously, yet never that he did so, seemed to have been his ruling principle. There was something in this which appealed to the boy, and made him heartily endorse his mother's comment: "He had true refinement; he couldn't help thinking of others, whatever he did. And when he took a resolution which went counter, he did it with the minimum of defiance not like the Age, is it? Twice in his life he had to go against everything; and yet it never made him bitter." Jon saw tears running down her face, which she at once turned away from him. She was so quiet about her loss that sometimes he had thought she didn't feel it much. Now, as he looked at her, he felt how far he fell short of the reserve power and dignity in both his father and his mother. And, stealing up to her, he put his arm round her waist. She kissed him swiftly, but with a sort of passion, and went out of the room.

The studio, where they had been sorting and labelling, had once been Holly's schoolroom, devoted to her silkworms, dried lavender, music, and other forms of instruction. Now, at the end of July, despite its northern and eastern aspects, a warm and slumberous air came in between the longfaded lilac linen curtains. To redeem a little the departed glory, as of a field that is golden and gone, clinging to a room which its master has left, Irene had placed on the paintstained table a bowl of red roses. This, and Jolyon's favourite cat, who still clung to the deserted habitat, were the pleasant

spots in that dishevelled, sad workroom. Jon, at the north window, sniffing air mysteriously scented with warm strawberries, heard a car drive up. The lawyers again about some nonsense! Why did that scent so make one ache? And where did it come from there were no strawberry beds on this side of the house. Instinctively he took a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket, and wrote down some broken words. A warmth began spreading in his chest; he rubbed the palms of his hands together. Presently he had jotted this:

"If I could make a little song
A little song to soothe my heart!
I'd make it all of little things
The splash of water, rub of wings,
The puffing off of dandies crown,
The hiss of raindrop spilling down,
The purr of cat, the trill of bird,
And ev'ry whispering I've heard
From willy wind in leaves and grass,
And all the distant drones that pass.
A song as tender and as light
As flower, or butterfly in flight;
And when I saw it opening, I'd let it fly and sing!"

He was still muttering it over to himself at the window, when he heard his name called, and, turning round, saw Fleur. At that amazing apparition, he made at first no movement and no sound, while her clear vivid glance ravished his heart. Then he went forward to the table, saying, "How nice of you to come!" and saw her flinch as if he had thrown something at her.

"I asked for you," she said, "and they showed me up here. But I can go away again."

Jon clutched the paintstained table. Her face and figure in its frilly frock photographed itself with such startling vividness upon his eyes, that if she had sunk through the floor he must still have seen her.

"I know I told you a lie, Jon. But I told it out of love."

"Yes, oh! yes! That's nothing!"

"I didn't answer your letter. What was the use there wasn't anything to answer. I wanted to see you instead." She held out both her hands, and Jon grasped them across the table. He tried to say something, but all his attention was given to trying not to hurt her hands. His own felt so hard and hers so soft. She said almost defiantly:

"That old story was it so very dreadful?"

"Yes." In his voice, too, there was a note of defiance.

She dragged her hands away. "I didn't think in these days boys were tied to their mothers' apron strings."

Jon's chin went up as if he had been struck.

"Oh! I didn't mean it, Jon. What a horrible thing to say!" Swiftly she came close to him. "Jon, dear; I didn't mean it."

"All right."

She had put her two hands on his shoulder, and her forehead down on them; the brim of her hat touched his neck, and he felt it quivering. But, in a sort of paralysis, he made no response. She let go of his shoulder and drew away.

"Well, I'll go, if you don't want me. But I never thought you'd have given me up."

"I haven't," cried Jon, coming suddenly to life. "I can't. I'll try again."

Her eyes gleamed, she swayed toward him. "Jon I love you! Don't give me up! If you do, I don't know what I feel so desperate. What does it matter all that past compared with this?"

She clung to him. He kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. But while he kissed her he saw, the sheets of that letter fallen down on the floor of his bedroom his father's white dead face his mother kneeling before it. Fleur's whispered, "Make her! Promise! Oh! Jon, try!" seemed childish in his ear. He felt curiously old.

"I promise!" he muttered. "Only, you don't understand."

"She wants to spoil our lives, just because"

"Yes, of what?"

Again that challenge in his voice, and she did not answer. Her arms tightened round him, and he returned her kisses; but even while he yielded, the poison worked in him, the poison of the letter. Fleur did not know, she did not understand she misjudged his mother; she came from the enemy's camp! So lovely, and he loved her so yet, even in her embrace, he could not help the memory of Holly's words: "I think she has a 'having' nature," and his mother's "My darling boy, don't think of me think of yourself!"

When she was gone like a passionate dream, leaving her image on his eyes, her kisses on his lips, such an ache in his heart, Jon leaned in the window, listening to the car bearing her away. Still the scent as of warm strawberries, still the little summer sounds that should make his song; still all the promise of youth and happiness in sighing, floating, fluttering July and his heart torn; yearning strong in him; hope high in him yet with its eyes cast down, as if ashamed. The miserable task before him! If Fleur was desperate, so was he watching the poplars swaying, the white clouds passing, the sunlight on the grass.

He waited till evening, till after their almost silent dinner, till his mother had played to him and still he waited, feeling that she knew what he was waiting to say. She kissed him and went upstairs, and still he lingered, watching the moonlight and the moths, and that unreality of colouring which steals along and stains a summer night. And he would have given anything to be back again in the past barely three months back; or away forward, years, in the future. The present with this dark cruelty of a decision, one way or the other, seemed impossible. He realised now so much more keenly what his mother felt than he had at first; as if the story in that letter had been a poisonous germ producing a kind of fever of partisanship, so that he really felt there were two camps, his mother's and his Fleur's and her father's. It might be a dead thing, that old tragic ownership and enmity, but dead things were poisonous till time had cleaned them away. Even his love felt tainted, less illusioned, more of the earth, and with a treacherous lurking doubt lest Fleur, like her father, might want to own; not articulate, just a stealing haunt, horribly unworthy, which crept in and about the ardour of his memories, touched with its tarnishing breath the vividness and grace of that charmed face and figure a doubt, not real enough to convince him of its presence, just real enough to deflower a perfect faith. And perfect faith, to Jon, not yet twenty, was essential. He still had Youth's eagerness to give with both hands, to take with neither to give lovingly to one who had his own impulsive generosity. Surely she had! He got up from the windowseat and roamed in the big grey ghostly room, whose walls were hung with silvered canvas. This house his father said in that deathbed letter had been built for his mother to live in with Fleur's father! He put out his hand in the halfdark, as if to grasp the shadowy hand of the dead. He clenched, trying to feel the thin vanished fingers of his father; to squeeze them, and reassure him that he was on his father's side. Tears, prisoned within him, made his eyes feel dry and hot. He went back to the window. It was warmer, not so eerie, more comforting outside, where the moon hung golden, three days off full; the freedom of the night was comforting. If only Fleur and he had met on some desert island without a part and Nature for their house! Jon had still his high regard for desert islands, where breadfruit grew, and the water was blue above the coral. The night was deep, was free there was enticement in it; a lure, a promise, a refuge from entanglement, and love! Milk-sop tied to his mother's...! His cheeks burned. He shut the window, drew curtains over it, switched off the lighted sconce, and went upstairs.

The door of his room was open, the light turned up; his mother, still in her evening gown, was standing at the window. She turned and said:

"Sit down, Jon; let's talk." She sat down on the windowseat, Jon on his bed. She had her profile turned to him, and the beauty and grace of her figure, the delicate line of the brow, the nose, the neck, the strange and as it were remote refinement of her, moved him. His mother never belonged to her surroundings. She came into them from

somewheras it were! What was she going to say to him, who had in his heart such things to say to her?

"I know Fleur came today. I'm not surprised." It was as though she had added: "She is her father's daughter!" And Jon's heart hardened. Irene went on quietly:

"I have Father's letter. I picked it up that night and kept it. Would you like it back, dear?"

Jon shook his head.

"I had read it, of course, before he gave it to you. It didn't quite do justice to my criminality."

"Mother!" burst from Jon's lips.

"He put it very sweetly, but I know that in marrying Fleur's father without love I did a dreadful thing. An unhappy marriage, Jon, can play such havoc with other lives besides one's own. You are fearfully young, my darling, and fearfully loving. Do you think you can possibly be happy with this girl?"

Staring at her dark eyes, darker now from pain, Jon answered

"Yes; oh! yes if you could be."

Irene smiled.

"Admiration of beauty and longing for possession are not love. If yours were another case like mine, Jon where the deepest things are stifled; the flesh joined, and the spirit at war!"

"Why should it, Mother? You think she must be like her father, but she's not. I've seen him."

Again the smile came on Irene's lips, and in Jon something wavered; there was such irony and experience in that smile.

"You are a giver, Jon; she is a taker."

That unworthy doubt, that haunting uncertainty again! He said with vehemence:

"She isn't she isn't. It's only because I can't bear to make you unhappy, Mother, now that Father" He thrust his fists against his forehead.

Irene got up.

"I told you that night, dear, not to mind me. I meant it. Think of yourself and your own happiness! I can stand what's left I've brought it on myself."

Again the word "Mother!" burst from Jon's lips.

She came over to him and put her hands over his.

"Do you feel your head, darling?"

Jon shook it. What he felt was in his chest a sort of tearing asunder of the tissue there, by the two loves.

"I shall always love you the same, Jon, whatever you do. You won't lose anything." She smoothed his hair gently, and walked away.

He heard the door shut; and, rolling over on the bed, lay, stifling his breath, with an awful heldup feeling within him.