

The Bit Between The Teeth

By

John Galsworthy

THE BIT BETWEEN THE TEETH

To know that your hand is against every one's is for some nature to experience a sense of moral release. Fleur felt no remorse when she left June's house. Reading condemnatory resentment in her little kinswoman's blue eyes she was glad that she had fooled her, despising June because that elderly idealist had not seen what she was after.

End it, forsooth! She would soon show them all that she was only just beginning. And she smiled to herself on the top of the bus which carried her back to Mayfair. But the smile died, squeezed out by spasms of anticipation and anxiety. Would she be able to manage Jon? She had taken the bit between her teeth, but could she make him take it too? She knew the truth and the real danger of delay he knew neither; therein lay all the difference in the world.

'Suppose I tell him,' she thought; 'wouldn't it really be safer?' This hideous luck had no right to spoil their love; he must see that! They could not let it! People always accepted an accomplished fact in time! From that piece of philosophy profound enough at her age she passed to another consideration less philosophic. If she persuaded Jon to a quick and secret marriage, and he found out afterward that she had known the truth. What then? Jon hated subterfuge. Again, then, would it not be better to tell him? But the memory of his mother's face kept intruding on that impulse. Fleur was afraid. His mother had power over him; more power perhaps than she herself. Who could tell? It was too great a risk. Deep sunk in these instinctive calculations she was carried on past Green Street as far as the Ritz Hotel. She got down there, and walked back on the Green Park side. The storm had washed every tree; they still dripped. Heavy drops fell on to her frills, and to avoid them she crossed over under the eaves of the Iseum Club. Chancing to look up she saw Monsieur Profond with a tall stout man in the bay window. Turning into Green Street she heard her name called, and saw "that prowler" coming up. He took off his hata glossy "bowler" such as she particularly detested.

"Good evenin'! Miss Forsyde. Isn't there a small thing I can do for you?"

"Yes, pass by on the other side."

"I say! Why do you dislike me?"

"Do I?"

"It looks like it."

"Well, then, because you make me feel life isn't worth living."

Monsieur Profond smiled.

"Look here, Miss Forsyde, don't worry. It'll be all right. Nothing lasts."

"Things do last," cried Fleur; "with me anyhow especially likes and dislikes."

"Well, that makes me a bit un'appy."

"I should have thought nothing could ever make you happy or unhappy."

"I don't like to annoy other people. I'm goin' on my yacht."

Fleur looked at him, startled.

"Where?"

"Small voyage to the South Seas or somewhere," said Monsieur Profond.

Fleur suffered relief and a sense of insult. Clearly he meant to convey that he was breaking with her mother. How dared he have anything to break, and yet how dared he break it?

"Goodnight, Miss Forsyde! Remember me to Mrs. Dartie. I'm not so bad really. Goodnight!" Fleur left him standing there with his hat raised. Stealing a look round, she saw him stroll immaculate and heavyback toward his Club.

'He can't even love with conviction,' she thought. 'What will Mother do?'

Her dreams that night were endless and uneasy; she rose heavy and unrested, and went at once to the study of Whitaker's Almanac. A Forsyte is instinctively aware that facts are the real crux of any situation. She might conquer Jon's prejudice, but without exact machinery to complete their desperate resolve, nothing would happen. From the invaluable tome she learned that they must each be twentyone; or some one's consent would be necessary, which of course was unobtainable; then she became lost in directions concerning licenses, certificates, notices, districts, coming finally to the word "perjury." But that was nonsense! Who would really mind their giving wrong ages in order to be married for love! She ate hardly any breakfast, and went back to Whitaker. The more she studied the less sure she became; till, idly turning the pages, she came to Scotland. People could be married there without any of this nonsense. She had only to go and stay there twentyone days, then Jon could come, and in front of two people they could declare themselves married. And what was more they would be! It was far the best way; and at once she ran over her schoolfellows. There was Mary Lambe who lived in Edinburgh and was "quite a sport!"

She had a brother too. She could stay with Mary Lambe, who with her brother would serve for witnesses. She well knew that some girls would think all this unnecessary, and that all she and Jon need do was to go away together for a weekend and then say to their people: "We are married by Nature, we must now be married by Law." But

Fleur was Forsyte enough to feel such a proceeding dubious, and to dread her father's face when he heard of it. Besides, she did not believe that Jon would do it; he had an opinion of her such as she could not bear to diminish. No! Mary Lambe was preferable, and it was just the time of year to go to Scotland. More at ease now she packed, avoided her aunt, and took a bus to Chiswick. She was too early, and went on to Kew Gardens. She found no peace among its flowerbeds, labelled trees, and broad green spaces, and having lunched off anchovypaste sandwiches and coffee, returned to Chiswick and rang June's bell. The Austrian admitted her to the "little mealroom." Now that she knew what she and Jon were up against, her longing for him had increased tenfold, as if he were a toy with sharp edges or dangerous paint such as they had tried to take from her as a child. If she could not have her way, and get Jon for good and all, she felt like dying of privation. By hook or crook she must and would get him! A round dim mirror of very old glass hung over the pink brick hearth. She stood looking at herself reflected in it, pale, and rather dark under the eyes; little shudders kept passing through her nerves. Then she heard the bell ring, and, stealing to the window, saw him standing on the doorstep smoothing his hair and lips, as if he too were trying to subdue the fluttering of his nerves.

She was sitting on one of the two rushseated chairs, with her back to the door, when he came in, and she said at once

"Sit down, Jon, I want to talk seriously."

Jon sat on the table by her side, and without looking at him she went on:

"If you don't want to lose me, we must get married."

Jon gasped.

"Why? Is there anything new?"

"No, but I felt it at Robin Hill, and among my people."

"But" stammered Jon, "at Robin Hill it was all smooth and they've said nothing to me."

"But they mean to stop us. Your mother's face was enough. And my father's."

"Have you seen him since?"

Fleur nodded. What mattered a few supplementary lies?

"But," said Jon eagerly, "I can't see how they can feel like that after all these years."

Fleur looked up at him.

"Perhaps you don't love me enough." "Not love you enough! Why!"

"Then make sure of me."

"Without telling them?"

"Not till after."

Jon was silent. How much older he looked than on that day, barely two months ago, when she first saw him quite two years older!

"It would hurt Mother awfully," he said.

Fleur drew her hand away.

"You've got to choose."

Jon slid off the table on to his knees.

"But why not tell them? They can't really stop us, Fleur!"

"They can! I tell you, they can."

"How?"

"We're utterly dependent by putting money pressure, and all sorts of other pressure. I'm not patient, Jon."

"But it's deceiving them."

Fleur got up.

"You can't really love me, or you wouldn't hesitate. 'He either fears his fate too much!'"

Lifting his hands to her waist, Jon forced her to sit down again. She hurried on:

"I've planned it all out. We've only to go to Scotland. When we're married they'll soon come round. People always come round to facts. Don't you see, Jon?"

"But to hurt them so awfully!"

So he would rather hurt her than those people of his! "All right, then; let me go!"

Jon got up and put his back against the door.

"I expect you're right," he said slowly; "but I want to think it over."

She could see that he was seething with feelings he wanted to express; but she did not mean to help him. She hated herself at this moment and almost hated him. Why

had she to do all the work to secure their love? It wasn't fair. And then she saw his eyes, adoring and distressed.

"Don't look like that! I only don't want to lose you, Jon."

"You can't lose me so long as you want me."

"Oh, yes, I can."

Jon put his hands on her shoulders.

"Fleur, do you know anything you haven't told me?"

It was the pointblank question she had dreaded. She looked straight at him, and answered: "No." She had burnt her boats; but what did it matter, if she got him? He would forgive her. And throwing her arms round his neck, she kissed him on the lips. She was winning! She felt it in the beating of his heart against her, in the closing of his eyes. "I want to make sure! I want to make sure!" she whispered. "Promise!"

Jon did not answer. His face had the stillness of extreme trouble. At last he said:

"It's like hitting them. I must think a little, Fleur. I really must."

Fleur slipped out of his arms.

"Oh! Very well!" And suddenly she burst into tears of disappointment, shame, and overstrain. Followed five minutes of acute misery. Jon's remorse and tenderness knew no bounds; but he did not promise. Despite her will to cry, "Very well, then, if you don't love me enough goodbye!" she dared not. From birth accustomed to her own way, this check from one so young, so tender, so devoted, baffled and surprised her. She wanted to push him away from her, to try what anger and coldness would do, and again she dared not. The knowledge that she was scheming to rush him blindfold into the irrevocable weakened everythingweakened the sincerity of pique, and the sincerity of passion; even her kisses had not the lure she wished for them. That stormy little meeting ended inconclusively.

"Will you some tea, gnadiges Fraulein?"

Pushing Jon from her, she cried out:

"Nono, thank you! I'm just going."

And before he could prevent her she was gone.

She went stealthily, mopping her gushed, stained cheeks, frightened, angry, very miserable. She had stirred Jon up so fearfully, yet nothing definite was promised or arranged! But the more uncertain and hazardous the future, the more "the will to have" worked its tentacles into the flesh of her heartlike some burrowing tick!

No one was at Green Street. Winifred had gone with Imogen to see a play which some said was allegorical, and others "very exciting, don't you know." It was because of what others said that Winifred and Imogen had gone. Fleur went on to Paddington. Through the carriage the air from the brickkilns of West Drayton and the late hayfields fanned her still gushed cheeks. Flowers had seemed to be had for the picking; now they were all thorned and prickled. But the golden flower within the crown of spikes seemed to her tenacious spirit all the fairer and more desirable.

THE FAT IN THE FIRE

On reaching home Fleur found an atmosphere so peculiar that it penetrated even the perplexed aura of her own private life. Her mother was inaccessibly entrenched in a brown study; her father contemplating fate in the vinery. Neither of them had a word to throw to a dog. 'Is it because of me?' thought Fleur. 'Or because of Profond?' To her mother she said:

"What's the matter with Father?"

Her mother answered with a shrug of her shoulders.

To her father:

"What's the matter with Mother?"

Her father answered:

"Matter? What should be the matter?" and gave her a sharp look.

"By the way," murmured Fleur, "Monsieur Profond is going a 'small' voyage on his yacht, to the South Seas."

Soames examined a branch on which no grapes were growing.

"This vine's a failure," he said. "I've had young Mont here. He asked me something about you."

"Oh! How do you like him, Father?"

"Hehe's a productlike all these young people."

"What were you at his age, dear?"

Soames smiled grimly.

"We went to work, and didn't play aboutflying and motoring, and making love."

"Didn't you ever make love?"

She avoided looking at him while she said that, but she saw him well enough. His pale face had reddened, his eyebrows, where darkness was still mingled with the grey, had come close together.

"I had no time or inclination to philander."

"Perhaps you had a grand passion."

Soames looked at her intently.

"Yes if you want to know and much good it did me." He moved away, along by the hotwater pipes. Fleur tiptoed silently after him.

"Tell me about it, Father!"

Soames became very still.

"What should you want to know about such things, at your age?"

"Is she alive?"

He nodded.

"And married?"

"Yes."

"It's Jon Forsyte's mother, isn't it? And she was your wife first."

It was said in a flash of intuition. Surely his opposition came from his anxiety that she should not know of that old wound to his pride. But she was startled. To see some one so old and calm wince as if struck, to hear so sharp a note of pain in his voice!

"Who told you that? If your aunt! I can't bear the affair talked of."

"But, darling," said Fleur, softly, "it's so long ago."

"Long ago or not, I...."

Fleur stood stroking his arm.

"I've tried to forget," he said suddenly; "I don't wish to be reminded." And then, as if venting some long and secret irritation, he added: "In these days people don't understand. Grand passion, indeed! No one knows what it is."

"I do," said Fleur, almost in a whisper.

Soames, who had turned his back on her, spun round.

"What are you talking of a child like you!"

"Perhaps I've inherited it, Father."

"What?"

"For her son, you see."

He was pale as a sheet, and she knew that she was as bad. They stood staring at each other in the steamy heat, redolent of the mushy scent of earth, of potted geranium, and of vines coming along fast.

"This is crazy," said Soames at last, between dry lips.

Scarcely moving her own, she murmured:

"Don't be angry, Father. I can't help it."

But she could see he wasn't angry; only scared, deeply scared.

"I thought that foolishness," he stammered, "was all forgotten."

"Oh, no! It's ten times what it was."

Soames kicked at the hotwater pipe. The hapless movement touched her, who had no fear of her fathernone.

"Dearest!" she said. "What must be, must, you know."

"Must!" repeated Soames. "You don't know what you're talking of. Has that boy been told?"

The blood rushed into her cheeks.

"Not yet."

He had turned from her again, and, with one shoulder a little raised, stood staring fixedly at a joint in the pipes.

"It's most distasteful to me," he said suddenly; "nothing could be more so. Son of that fellow! It'sit'sperverse!"

She had noted, almost unconsciously, that he did not say "son of that woman," and again her intuition began working.

Did the ghost of that grand passion linger in some corner of his heart?

She slipped her hand under his arm.

"Jon's father is quite ill and old; I saw him."

"You?"

"Yes, I went there with Jon; I saw them both."

"Well, and what did they say to you?"

"Nothing. They were very polite."

"They would be." He resumed his contemplation of the pipejoint, and then said suddenly:

"I must think this over! I'll speak to you again tonight."

She knew this was final for the moment, and stole away, leaving him still looking at the pipejoint. She wandered into the fruitgarden, among the raspberry and currant bushes, without impetus to pick and eat. Two months ago she was lighthearted! Even two days ago lighthearted, before Prosper Profond told her. Now she felt tangled in a web of passions, vested rights, oppressions and revolts, the ties of love and hate. At this dark moment of discouragement there seemed, even to her holdfast nature, no way out. How deal with it how sway and bend things to her will, and get her heart's desire? And, suddenly, round the corner of the high box hedge, she came plump on her mother, walking swiftly, with an open letter in her hand. Her bosom was heaving, her eyes dilated, her cheeks flushed. Instantly Fleur thought: 'The yacht! Poor Mother!'

Annette gave her a wide startled look, and said:

"J'ai la migraine."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mother."

"Oh, yes! you and your father sorry!"

"But, Mother I am. I know what it feels like."

Annette's startled eyes grew wide, till the whites showed above them.

"Poor innocent!" she said.

Her mother so selfpossessed, and commonsensical to look and speak like this! It was all frightening! Her father, her mother, herself! And only two months back they had seemed to have everything they wanted in this world.

Annette crumpled the letter in her hand. Fleur knew that she must ignore the sight.

"Can't I do anything for your head, Mother?"

Annette shook that head and walked on, swaying her hips.

'It's cruel,' thought Fleur, 'and I was glad! That man! What do men come prowling for, disturbing everything! I suppose he's tired of her. What business has he to be tired of my mother? What business!' And at that thought, so natural and so peculiar, she uttered a little choked laugh.

She ought, of course, to be delighted, but what was there to be delighted at? Her father didn't really care! Her mother did, perhaps? She entered the orchard, and sat down under a cherrytree. A breeze sighed in the higher boughs; the sky seen through their green was very blue and very white in cloudthose heavy white clouds almost always present in river landscape. Bees, sheltering out of the wind, hummed softly, and over the lush grass fell the thick shade from those fruittrees planted by her father fiveandtwenty, years ago. Birds were almost silent, the cuckoos had ceased to sing, but woodpigeons were cooing. The breath and drone and cooing of high summer were not for long a sedative to her excited nerves. Crouched over her knees she began to scheme. Her father must be made to back her up. Why should he mind so long as she was happy? She had not lived for nearly nineteen years without knowing that her future was all he really cared about. She had, then, only to convince him that her future could not be happy without Jon. He thought it a mad fancy. How foolish the old were, thinking they could tell what the young felt! Had not he confessed that hewhen younghad loved with a grand passion? He ought to understand! 'He piles up his money for me,' she thought; 'but what's the use, if I'm not going to be happy?' Money, and all it bought, did not bring happiness. Love only brought that. The oxeyed daisies in this orchard, which gave it such a moony look sometimes, grew wild and happy, and had their hour. 'They oughtn't to have called me Fleur,' she mused, 'if they didn't mean me to have my hour, and be happy while it lasts.' Nothing real stood in the way, like poverty, or diseasesentiment only, a ghost from the unhappy past! Jon was right. They wouldn't let you live, these old people! They made mistakes, committed crimes, and wanted their children to go on paying! The breeze died away; midges began to bite. She got up, plucked a piece of honeysuckle, and went in.

It was hot that night. Both she and her mother had put on thin, pale low frocks. The dinner flowers were pale. Fleur was struck with the pale look of everything; her father's face, her mother's shoulders; the pale panelled walls, the pale grey velvety carpet, the lampshade, even the soup was pale. There was not one spot of colour in the room, not even wine in the pale glasses, for no one drank it. What was not pale was blackher father's clothes, the butler's clothes, her retriever stretched out exhausted in the window, the curtains black with a cream pattern. A moth came in, and that was pale. And silent was that halfmourning dinner in the heat.

Her father called her back as she was following her mother out.

She sat down beside him at the table, and, unpinning the pale honeysuckle, put it to her nose.

"I've been thinking," he said.

"Yes, dear?"

"It's extremely painful for me to talk, but there's no help for it. I don't know if you understand how much you are to me I've never spoken of it, I didn't think it

necessary; butbut you're everything. Your mother" he paused, staring at his fingerbowl of Venetian glass.

"Yes?"

"I've only you to look to. I've never hadnever wanted anything else, since you were born."

"I know," Fleur murmured.

Soames moistened his lips.

"You may think this a matter I can smooth over and arrange for you. You're mistaken. I'm helpless."

Fleur did not speak.

"Quite apart from my own feelings," went on Soames with more resolution, "those two are not amenable to anything I can say. Theythey hate me, as people always hate those whom they have injured." "But heJon"

"He's their flesh and blood, her only child. Probably he means to her what you mean to me. It's a deadlock."

"No," cried Fleur, "no, Father!"

Soames leaned back, the image of pale patience, as if resolved on the betrayal of no emotion.

"Listen!" he said. "You're putting the feelings of two monthstwo monthsagainst the feelings of thirtyfive years! What chance do you think you have? Two monthsyour very first love affair, a matter of half a dozen meetings, a few walks and talks, a few kissesagainst, against what you can't imagine, what no one could who hasn't been through it. Come, be reasonable, Fleur! It's midsummer madness!"

Fleur tore the honeysuckle into little, slow bits.

"The madness is in letting the past spoil it all.

"What do we care about the past? It's our lives, not yours."

Soames raised his hand to his forehead, where suddenly she saw moisture shining.

"Whose child are you?" he said. "Whose child is he? The present is linked with the past, the future with both. There's no getting away from that."

She had never heard philosophy pass those lips before. Impressed even in her agitation, she leaned her elbows on the table, her chin on her hands.

"But, Father, consider it practically. We want each other. There's ever so much money, and nothing whatever in the way but sentiment. Let's bury the past, Father."

His answer was a sigh.

"Besides," said Fleur gently, "you can't prevent us."

"I don't suppose," said Soames, "that if left to myself I should try to prevent you; I must put up with things, I know, to keep your affection. But it's not I who control this matter. That's what I want you to realise before it's too late. If you go on thinking you can get your way and encourage this feeling, the blow will be much heavier when you find you can't."

"Oh!" cried Fleur, "help me, Father; you can help me, you know."

Soames made a startled movement of negation. "I?" he said bitterly. "Help? I am the impediment the just cause and impediment isn't that the jargon? You have my blood in your veins."

He rose.

"Well, the fat's in the fire. If you persist in your wilfulness you'll have yourself to blame. Come! Don't be foolish, my child my only child!"

Fleur laid her forehead against his shoulder.

All was in such turmoil within her. But no good to show it! No good at all! She broke away from him, and went out into the twilight, distraught, but unconvinced. All was indeterminate and vague within her, like the shapes and shadows in the garden, except her will to have. A poplar pierced up into the dark blue sky and touched a white star there. The dew wetted her shoes, and chilled her bare shoulders. She went down to the river bank, and stood gazing at a moonstreak on the darkening water. Suddenly she smelled tobacco smoke, and a white figure emerged as if created by the moon. It was young Mont in flannels, standing in his boat. She heard the tiny hiss of his cigarette extinguished in the water.

"Fleur," came his voice, "don't be hard on a poor devil! I've been waiting hours."

"For what?"

"Come in my boat!"

"Not I."

"Why not?"

"I'm not a water nymph."

"Haven't you any romance in you? Don't be modern, Fleur!"

He appeared on the path within a yard of her.

"Go away!"

"Fleur, I love you. Fleur!"

Fleur uttered a short laugh.

"Come again," she said, "when I haven't got my wish."

"What is your wish?"

"Ask another."

"Fleur," said Mont, and his voice sounded strange, "don't mock me! Even vivisected dogs are worth decent treatment before they're cut up for good."

Fleur shook her head; but her lips were trembling.

"Well, you shouldn't make me jump. Give me a cigarette."

Mont gave her one, lighted it, and another for himself.

"I don't want to talk rot," he said, "but please imagine all the rot that all the lovers that ever were have talked, and all my special rot thrown in."

"Thank you, I have imagined it. Goodnight!" They stood for a moment facing each other in the shadow of an acacia tree with very moonlit blossoms, and the smoke from their cigarettes mingled in the air between them.

"Also ran: 'Michael Mont'?" he said. Fleur turned abruptly toward the house. On the lawn she stopped to look back. Michael Mont was whirling his arms above him; she could see them dashing at his head; then waving at the moonlit blossoms of the acacia. His voice just reached her. "Jollyjolly!" Fleur shook herself. She couldn't help him, she had too much trouble of her own! On the verandah she stopped very suddenly again. Her mother was sitting in the drawingroom at her writing bureau, quite alone. There was nothing remarkable in the expression of her face except its utter immobility. But she looked desolate! Fleur went upstairs. At the door of her room she paused. She could hear her father walking up and down, up and down the picture gallery.

'Yes,' she thought, jolly! Oh, Jon!

DECISION

When Fleur left him Jon stared at the Austrian. She was a thin woman with a dark face and the concerned expression of one who has watched every little good that life once had slip from her, one by one. "No tea?" she said.

Susceptible to the disappointment in her voice, Jon murmured:

"No, really; thanks."

"A lil cupit ready. A lil cup and cigarette."

Fleur was gone! Hours of remorse and indecision lay before him! And with a heavy sense of disproportion he smiled, and said:

"Wellthank you!"

She brought in a little pot of tea with two little cups, and a silver box of cigarettes on a little tray.

"Sugar? Miss Forsyte has much sugarshe buy my sugar, my friend's sugar also. Miss Forsyte is a veree kind lady. I am happy to serve her. You her brother?"

"Yes," said Jon, beginning to puff the second cigarette of his life.

"Very young brother," said the Austrian, with a little anxious smile, which reminded him of the wag of a dog's tail.

"May I give you some?" he said. "And won't you sit down, please?"

The Austrian shook her head.

"Your father a very nice old manthe most nice old man I ever see. Miss Forsyte tell me all about him. Is he better?"

Her words fell on Jon like a reproach. "Oh Yes, I think he's all right."

"I like to see him again," said the Austrian, putting a hand on her heart; "he have veree kind heart."

"Yes," said Jon. And again her words seemed to him a reproach.

"He never give no trouble to no one, and smile so gentle."

"Yes, doesn't he?"

"He look at Miss Forsyte so funny sometimes. I tell him all my story; he so sympatisch. Your mothershe nice and well?"

"Yes, very."

"He have her photograph on his dressingtable. Veree beautiful"

Jon gulped down his tea. This woman, with her concerned face and her reminding words, was like the first and second murderers.

"Thank you," he said; "I must go now. Maymay I leave this with you?"

He put a tenshilling note on the tray with a doubting hand and gained the door. He heard the Austrian gasp, and hurried out. He had just time to catch his train, and all the way to Victoria looked at every face that passed, as lovers will, hoping against hope. On reaching Worthing he put his luggage into the local train, and set out across the Downs for Wansdon, trying to walk off his aching irresolution. So long as he went full bat, he could enjoy the beauty of those green slopes, stopping now and again to sprawl on the grass, admire the perfection of a wild rose or listen to a lark's song. But the war of motives within him was but postponed the longing for Fleur, and the hatred of deception. He came to the old chalkpit above Wansdon with his mind no more made up than when he started. To see both sides of a question vigorously was at once Jon's strength and weakness. He tramped in, just as the first dinnerbell rang. His things had already been brought up. He had a hurried bath and came down to find Holly alone Val had gone to Town and would not be back till the last train.

Since Val's advice to him to ask his sister what was the matter between the two families, so much had happened Fleur's disclosure in the Green Park, her visit to Robin Hill, today's meeting that there seemed nothing to ask. He talked of Spain, his sunstroke, Val's horses, their father's health. Holly startled him by saying that she thought their father not at all well. She had been twice to Robin Hill for the weekend. He had seemed fearfully languid, sometimes even in pain, but had always refused to talk about himself.

"He's awfully dear and unselfish don't you think, Jon?"

Feeling far from dear and unselfish himself, Jon answered: "Rather!"

"I think, he's been a simply perfect father, so long as I can remember."

"Yes," answered Jon, very subdued.

"He's never interfered, and he's always seemed to understand. I shall never forget his letting me go to South Africa in the Boer War when I was in love with Val."

"That was before he married Mother, wasn't it?" said Jon suddenly.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh! nothing. Only, wasn't she engaged to Fleur's father first?"

Holly put down the spoon she was using, and raised her eyes. Her stare was circumspect. What did the boy know? Enough to make it better to tell him? She could not decide. He looked strained and worried, altogether older, but that might be the sunstroke.

"There was something," she said. "Of course we were out there, and got no news of anything." She could not take the risk.

It was not her secret. Besides, she was in the dark about his feelings now. Before Spain she had made sure he was in love; but boys were boys; that was seven weeks ago, and all Spain between.

She saw that he knew she was putting him off, and added:

"Have you heard anything of Fleur?"

"Yes."

His face told her, then, more than the most elaborate explanations. So he had not forgotten!

She said very quietly: "Fleur is awfully attractive, Jon, but you know Val and I don't really like her very much."

"Why?"

"We think she's got rather a 'having' nature."

"'Having'? I don't know what you mean. Sheshe" he pushed his dessert plate away, got up, and went to the window.

Holly, too, got up, and put her arm round his waist.

"Don't be angry, Jon dear. We can't all see people in the same light, can we? You know, I believe each of us only has about one or two people who can see the best that's in us, and bring it out. For you I think it's your mother. I once saw her looking at a letter of yours; it was wonderful to see her face. I think she's the most beautiful woman I ever saw. Age doesn't seem to touch her."

Jon's face softened; then again became tense. Everybodyeverybody was against him and Fleur! It all strengthened the appeal of her words: "Make sure of me marry me, Jon!"

Here, where he had passed that wonderful week with her the tug of her enchantment, the ache in his heart increased with every minute that she was not there to make the room, the garden, the very air magical. Would he ever be able to live down here, not seeing her? And he closed up utterly, going early to bed. It would not make him

healthy, wealthy, and wise, but it closeted him with memory of Fleur in her fancy frock. He heard Val's arrival the Ford discharging cargo, then the stillness of the summer night stole back with only the bleating of very distant sheep, and a nightjar's harsh purring. He leaned far out. Cold moonwarm air the Downs like silver! Small wings, a stream bubbling, the rambler roses! God how empty all of it without her! In the Bible it was written: Thou shalt leave father and mother and cleave to Fleur!

Let him have pluck, and go and tell them! They couldn't stop him marrying her they wouldn't want to stop him when they knew how he felt. Yes! He would go! Bold and open Fleur was wrong!

The nightjar ceased, the sheep were silent; the only sound in the darkness was the bubbling of the stream. And Jon in his bed slept, freed from the worst of life's evils in decision.

TIMOTHY PROPHECIES

On the day of the cancelled meeting at the National Gallery began the second anniversary of the resurrection of England's pride and glory, more shortly, the top hat. "Lord's" that festival which the War had driven from the field raised its light and dark blue flags for the second time, displaying almost every feature of a glorious past. Here, in the luncheon interval, were all species of female and one species of male hat, protecting the multiple types of face associated with "the classes." The observing Forsyte might discern in the free or unconsidered seats a certain number of the squashed, but they hardly ventured on the grass; the old school or schools could still rejoice that the proletariat was not yet paying the necessary half-crown. Here was still a close borough, the only one left on a large scale for the papers were about to estimate the attendance at ten thousand. And the ten thousand, all animated by one hope, were asking each other one question: "Where are you lunching?" Something wonderfully uplifting and reassuring in that query and the sight of so many people like themselves voicing it! What reserve power in the British realm enough pigeons, lobsters, lamb, salmon mayonnaise, strawberries, and bottles of champagne to feed the lot! No miracle in prospect no case of seven loaves and a few fishes faith rested on surer foundations. Six thousand top hats, four thousand parasols would be doffed and furled, ten thousand mouths all speaking the same English would be filled. There was life in the old dog yet! Tradition! And again Tradition! How strong and how elastic! Wars might rage, taxation prey, Trades Unions take toll, and Europe perish of starvation; but the ten thousand would be fed; and, within their ring fence, stroll upon green turf, wear their top hats, and meet themselves. The heart was sound, the pulse still regular. Eton! Eton! Harroow!

Among the many Forsytes, present on a huntingground theirs, by personal prescriptive right, or proxy, was Soames with his wife and daughter. He had not been at either school, he took no interest in cricket, but he wanted Fleur to show her frock, and he wanted to wear his top hat parade it again in peace and plenty among his peers. He walked sedately with Fleur between him and Annette. No women equalled them, so far as he could see. They could walk, and hold themselves up; there was substance in their good looks; the modern woman had no build, no chest, no anything! He remembered suddenly with what intoxication of pride he had walked round with Irene in the first years of his first marriage. And how they used to lunch on the drag which his mother would make his father have, because it was so "chic" all drags and carriages in those days, not these lumbering great Stands! And how consistently Montague Dartie had drunk too much. He supposed that people drank too much still, but there was not the scope for it there used to be. He remembered George Forsyte whose brothers Roger and Eustace had been at Harrow and Eton towering up on the top of the drag waving a light blue flag with one hand and a dark blue flag with the other, and shouting "Etroow Harrton!" Just when everybody was silent, like the buffoon he had always been; and Eustace got up to the nine below, too dandified to wear any colour or take any notice. H'm! Old days, and Irene in grey silk shot with palest green. He looked, sideways, at Fleur's face. Rather

colourlessno light, no eagerness! That love affair was preying on her a bad business! He looked beyond, at his wife's face, rather more touched up than usual, a little disdainfulnot that she had any business to disdain, so far as he could see. She was taking Profond's defection with curious quietude; or was his "small" voyage just a blind? If so, he should refuse to see it! Having promenaded round the pitch and in front of the pavilion, they sought Winifred's table in the Bedouin Club tent. This Club a new "cock and hen" had been founded in the interests of travel, and of a gentleman with an old Scottish name, whose father had somewhat strangely been called Levi. Winifred had joined, not because she had travelled, but because instinct told her that a Club with such a name and such a founder was bound to go far; if one didn't join at once one might never have the chance. Its tent, with a text from the Koran on an orange ground, and a small green camel embroidered over the entrance, was the most striking on the ground. Outside it they found Jack Cardigan in a dark blue tie (he had once played for Harrow), batting with a Malacca cane to show how that fellow ought to have hit that ball. He piloted them in. Assembled in Winifred's corner were Imogen, Benedict with his young wife, Val Dartie without Holly, Maud and her husband, and, after Soames and his two were seated, one empty place.

"I'm expecting Prosper," said Winifred, "but he's so busy with his yacht."

Soames stole a glance. No movement in his wife's face! Whether that fellow were coming or not, she evidently knew all about it. It did not escape him that Fleur, too, looked at her mother. If Annette didn't respect his feelings, she might think of Fleur's! The conversation, very desultory, was syncopated by Jack Cardigan talking about "midoff." He cited all the "great midoffs" from the beginning of time, as if they had been a definite racial entity in the composition of the British people. Soames had finished his lobster, and was beginning on pigeonpie, when he heard the words, "I'm a small bit late, Mrs. Dartie," and saw that there was no longer any empty place. That fellow was sitting between Annette and Imogen. Soames ate steadily on, with an occasional word to Maud and Winifred. Conversation buzzed around him. He heard the voice of Profond say:

"I think you're mistaken, Mrs. Forsyde; I'll bet Miss Forsyde agrees with me."

"In what?" came Fleur's clear voice across the table.

"I was sayin', young gurls are much the same as they always werethere's very small difference."

"Do you know so much about them?"

That sharp reply caught the ears of all, and Soames moved uneasily on his thin green chair.

"Well, I don't know, I think they want their own small way, and I think they always did."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, but Prosper," Winifred interjected comfortably, "the girls in the street the girls who've been in munitions, the little flappers in the shops; their manners now really quite hit you in the eye."

At the word "hit" Jack Cardigan stopped his disquisition; and in the silence Monsieur Profond said:

"It was inside before, now it's outside; that's all."

"But their morals!" cried Imogen.

"Just as moral as they ever were, Mrs. Cardigan, but they've got more opportunity."

The saying, so cryptically cynical, received a little laugh from Imogen, a slight opening of Jack Cardigan's mouth, and a creak from Soames' chair.

Winifred said: "That's too bad, Prosper."

"What do you say, Mrs. Forsyde; don't you think human nature's always the same?"

Soames subdued a sudden longing to get up and kick the fellow. He heard his wife reply:

"Human nature is not the same in England as anywhere else." That was her confounded mockery!

"Well, I don't know much about this small country" "No, thank God!" thought Soames "but I should say the pot was boilin' under the lid everywhere. We all want pleasure, and we always did."

Damn the fellow! His cynicism was outrageous!

When lunch was over they broke up into couples for the digestive promenade. Too proud to notice, Soames knew perfectly that Annette and that fellow had gone prowling round together. Fleur was with Val; she had chosen him, no doubt, because he knew that boy. He himself had Winifred for partner. They walked in the bright, circling stream, a little flushed and sated, for some minutes, till Winifred sighed:

"I wish we were back forty years, old boy!"

Before the eyes of her spirit an interminable procession of her own "Lord's" frocks was passing, paid for with the money of her father, to save a recurrent crisis. "It's been very amusing, after all. Sometimes I even wish Monty was back. What do you think of people nowadays, Soames?"

"Precious little style. The thing began to go to pieces with bicycles and motorcars; the War has finished it."

"I wonder what's coming?" said Winifred in a voice dreamy from pigeonpie. "I'm not at all sure we shan't go back to crinolines and peggtops. Look at that dress!"

Soames shook his head.

"There's money, but no faith in things. We don't lay by for the future. These youngstersit's all a short life and a merry one with them."

"There's a hat!" said Winifred. "I don't knowwhen you come to think of the people killed and all that in the War, it's rather wonderful, I think. There's no other countryProsper says the rest are all bankrupt, except America; and of course her men always took their style in dress from us."

"Is that chap," said Soames, "really going to the South Seas?"

"Oh! one never knows where Prosper's going!"

"He's a sign of the times," muttered Soames, "if you like."

Winifred's hand gripped his arm.

"Don't turn your head," she said in a low voice, "but look to your right in the front row of the Stand."

Soames looked as best he could under that limitation. A man in a grey top hat, greybearded, with thin brown, folded cheeks, and a certain elegance of posture, sat there with a woman in a lawn coloured frock, whose dark eyes were fixed on himself. Soames looked quickly at his feet. How funnily feet moved, one after the other like that! Winifred's voice said in his ear:

"Jolyon looks very ill; but he always had style. She doesn't changeexcept her hair."

"Why did you tell Fleur about that business?"

"I didn't; she picked it up. I always knew she would."

"Well, it's a mess. She's set her heart upon their boy."

"The little wretch," murmured Winifred. "She tried to take me in about that. What shall you do, Soames?"

"Be guided by events."

They moved on, silent, in the almost solid crowd.

"Really," said Winifred suddenly; "it almost seems like Fate. Only that's so oldfashioned. Look! there are George and Eustace!"

George Forsyte's lofty bulk had halted before them.

"Hallo, Soames!" he said. "Just met Profond and your wife. You'll catch 'em if you put on pace. Did you ever go to see old Timothy?"

Soames nodded, and the streams forced them apart.

"I always liked old George," said Winifred. "He's so droll."

"I never did," said Soames. "Where's your seat? I shall go to mine. Fleur may be back there."

Having seen Winifred to her seat, he regained his own, conscious of small, white, distant figures running, the click of the bat, the cheers and countercheers. No Fleur, and no Annette! You could expect nothing of women nowadays! They had the vote. They were "emancipated," and much good it was doing them! So Winifred would go back, would she, and put up with Dartie all over again? To have the past once more to be sitting here as he had sat in '83 and '84, before he was certain that his marriage with Irene had gone all wrong, before her antagonism had become so glaring that with the best will in the world he could not overlook it. The sight of her with that fellow had brought all memory back. Even now he could not understand why she had been so impracticable. She could love other men; she had it in her! To himself, the one person she ought to have loved, she had chosen to refuse her heart. It seemed to him, fantastically, as he looked back, that all this modern relaxation of marriage though its forms and laws were the same as when he married her that all this modern looseness had come out of her revolt; it seemed to him, fantastically, that she had started it, till all decent ownership of anything had gone, or was on the point of going. All came from her! And now a pretty state of things! Homes! How could you have them without mutual ownership? Not that he had ever had a real home! But had that been his fault? He had done his best. And his rewards were those two sitting in that Stand, and this affair of Fleur's!

And overcome by loneliness he thought: 'Shan't wait any longer! They must find their own way back to the hotel if they mean to come!' Hailing a cab outside the ground, he said:

"Drive me to the Bayswater Road." His old aunts had never failed him. To them he had meant an everwelcome visitor. Though they were gone, there, still, was Timothy!

Smither was standing in the open doorway.

"Mr. Soames! I was just taking the air. Cook will be so pleased."

"How is Mr. Timothy?"

"Not himself at all these last few days, sir; he's been talking a great deal. Only this morning he was saying: 'My brother James, he's getting old.' His mind wanders, Mr. Soames, and then he will talk of them. He troubles about their investments. The other day he said: 'There's my brother Jolyon won't look at Consols'he seemed quite down about it. Come in, Mr. Soames, come in! It's such a pleasant change!"

"Well," said Soames, "just for a few minutes."

"No," murmured Smither in the hall, where the air had the singular freshness of the outside day, "we haven't been very satisfied with him, not all this week. He's always been one to leave a titbit to the end; but ever since Monday he's been eating it first. If you notice a dog, Mr. Soames, at its dinner, it eats the meat first. We've always thought it such a good sign of Mr. Timothy at his age to leave it to the last, but now he seems to have lost all his selfcontrol; and, of course, it makes him leave the rest. The doctor doesn't make anything of it, but"Smither shook her head"he seems to think he's got to eat it first, in case he shouldn't get to it. That and his talking makes us anxious."

"Has he said anything important?"

"I shouldn't like to say that, Mr. Soames; but he's turned against his Will. He gets quite pettishand after having had it out every morning for years, it does seem funny. He said the other day: 'They want my money.' It gave me such a turn, because, as I said to him, nobody wants his money, I'm sure. And it does seem a pity he should be thinking about money at his time of life. I took my courage in my 'ands. 'You know, Mr. Timothy,' I said, 'my dear mistress'that's Miss Forsyte, Mr. Soames, Miss Ann that trained me'she never thought about money,' I said, 'it was all character with her.' He looked at me, I can't tell you how funny, and he said quite dry: 'Nobody wants my character.' Think of his saying a thing like that! But sometimes he'll say something as sharp and sensible as anything."

Soames, who had been staring at an old print by the hatrack, thinking, 'That's got value!' murmured: "I'll go up and see him, Smither."

"Cook's with him," answered Smither above her corsets; "she will be pleased to see you."

He mounted slowly, with the thought: 'Shan't care to live to be that age.'

On the second floor, he paused, and tapped. The door was opened, and he saw the round homely face of a woman about sixty.

"Mr. Soames!" she said: "Why! Mr. Soames!"

Soames nodded. "All right, Cook!" and entered.

Timothy was propped up in bed, with his hands joined before his chest, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling, where a fly was standing upside down. Soames stood at the foot of the bed, facing him.

"Uncle Timothy," he said, raising his voice. "Uncle Timothy!"

Timothy's eyes left the fly, and levelled themselves on his visitor. Soames could see his pale tongue passing over his darkish lips.

"Uncle Timothy," he said again, "is there anything I can do for you? Is there anything you'd like to say?"

"Ha!" said Timothy.

"I've come to look you up and see that everything's all right."

Timothy nodded. He seemed trying to get used to the apparition before him.

"Have you got everything you want?"

"No," said Timothy.

"Can I get you anything?"

"No," said Timothy.

"I'm Soames, you know; your nephew, Soames Forsyte. Your brother James' son."

Timothy nodded.

"I shall be delighted to do anything I can for you."

Timothy beckoned. Soames went close to him:

"You" said Timothy in a voice which seemed to have outlived tone, "you tell them all from me you tell them all" and his finger tapped on Soames' arm, "to hold on hold on Consols are goin' up," and he nodded thrice.

"All right!" said Soames; "I will."

"Yes," said Timothy, and, fixing his eyes again on the ceiling, he added: "That fly!"

Strangely moved, Soames looked at the Cook's pleasant fattish face, all little puckers from staring at fires.

"That'll do him a world of good, sir," she said.

A mutter came from Timothy, but he was clearly speaking to himself, and Soames went out with the cook.

"I wish I could make you a pink cream, Mr. Soames, like in old days; you did so relish them. Goodbye, sir; it has been a pleasure."

"Take care of him, Cook, he is old."

And, shaking her crumpled hand, he went downstairs. Smither was still taking the air in the doorway.

"What do you think of him, Mr. Soames?"

"H'm!" Soames murmured: "He's lost touch."

"Yes," said Smither, "I was afraid you'd think that coming fresh out of the world to see him like."

"Smither," said Soames, "we're all indebted to you."

"Oh, no, Mr. Soames, don't say that! It's a pleasure he's such a wonderful man."

"Well, goodbye!" said Soames, and got into his taxi.

'Going up!' he thought; 'going up!'

Reaching the hotel at Knightsbridge he went to their sittingroom, and rang for tea. Neither of them were in. And again that sense of loneliness came over him. These hotels. What monstrous great places they were now! He could remember when there was nothing bigger than Long's or Brown's, Morley's or the Tavistock, and the heads that were shaken over the Langham and the Grand. Hotels and Clubs Clubs and Hotels; no end to them now! And Soames, who had just been watching at Lord's a miracle of tradition and continuity, fell into reverie over the changes in that London where he had been born five and sixty years before. Whether Consols were going up or not, London had become a terrific property. No such property in the world, unless it were New York! There was a lot of hysteria in the papers nowadays; but any one who, like himself, could remember London sixty years ago, and see it now, realised the fecundity and elasticity of wealth. They had only to keep their heads, and go at it steadily. Why! he remembered cobblestones, and stinking straw on the floor of your cab. And old Timothy what could he not have told them, if he had kept his memory! Things were unsettled, people in a funk or in a hurry, but here were London and the Thames, and out there the British Empire, and the ends of the earth. "Consols are goin' up!" He should n't be a bit surprised. It was the breed that counted. And all that was bulldogged in Soames stared for a moment out of his grey eyes, till diverted by the print of a Victorian picture on the walls. The hotel had bought three dozen of that little lot! The old hunting or "Rake's Progress" prints in the old inns were worth looking at but this sentimental stuff well, Victorianism had gone! "Tell them to hold on!" old Timothy had said. But to what were they to hold on in this modern welter of the "democratic principle"? Why, even privacy was threatened! And at the thought

that privacy might perish, Soames pushed back his teacup and went to the window. Fancy owning no more of Nature than the crowd out there owned of the flowers and trees and waters of Hyde Park! No, no! Private possession underlay everything worth having. The world had slipped its sanity a bit, as dogs now and again at full moon slipped theirs and went off for a night's rabbiting; but the world, like the dog, knew where its bread was buttered and its bed warm, and would come back sure enough to the only home worth having to private ownership. The world was in its second childhood for the moment, like old Timothy eating its titbit first!

He heard a sound behind him, and saw that his wife and daughter had come in.

"So you're back!" he said.

Fleur did not answer; she stood for a moment looking at him and her mother, then passed into her bedroom. Annette poured herself out a cup of tea.

"I am going to Paris, to my mother, Soames."

"Oh! To your mother?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"I do not know."

"And when are you going?"

"On Monday."

Was she really going to her mother? Odd, how indifferent he felt! Odd, how clearly she had perceived the indifference he would feel so long as there was no scandal. And suddenly between her and himself he saw distinctly the face he had seen that afternoon Irene's.

"Will you want money?"

"Thank you; I have enough."

"Very well. Let us know when you are coming back."

Annette put down the cake she was fingering, and, looking up through darkened lashes, said:

"Shall I give Maman any message?"

"My regards."

Annette stretched herself, her hands on her waist, and said in French:

"What luck that you have never loved me, Soames!" Then rising, she too left the room. Soames was glad she had spoken it in French it seemed to require no dealing with. Again that other facepale, dark-eyed, beautiful still! And there stirred far down within him the ghost of warmth, as from sparks lingering beneath a mound of flaky ash. And Fleur infatuated with her boy! Queer chance! Yet, was there such a thing as chance? A man went down a street, a brick fell on his head. Ah! that was chance, no doubt. But this! "Inherited," his girl had said. Sheshe was "holding on"!